

# SIMPLY POLITICAL



**SPECIAL ELECTION**  
**ISSUE**





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by Steff Danielle Thomas ||



|| PHOTOS: WIKI COMMONS ||

**T**he White House has stood on the same block of Pennsylvania Avenue since the Adams administration in 1800. For more than two centuries, the white sandstone extior has stood tall as a symbol for authority and the path to peace.

Only once did the walls of protection fail. In 1814 British troops retaliating against the United States set the mansion on fire. But three years later the White House was restored. A literal symbol of a country rising from the ashes.

Well over halfway through President Barack Obama's last term and as Flannery O'Connor best put it the title of her 1965 novel, everything that rises must converge.

Was it only seven years ago that the first African-American president took his place behind the Resolute desk in the Oval Office? The 2008 election marked a new era of diversity and sparked renewed pride in the American Dream.

"We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense," President Obama said in his 2009 inaugural address. "And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken. You cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you."

But with the rise of internal discrimination and the threat of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2016—that pride seems to be wearing thin.

On November 8, thousands of Americans will file into their designated election stations to exercise their 26th amendment right and cast their vote for who may become Obama's successor.

With the election still a little more than five months away, Obama and his cabinet must tie up loose ends before passing the torch to the next administration.

The last few months of a presidential term mark a peak



# "ANYBODY WHO IS RUNNING KNOWS THAT YOUR FIRST TERM IS WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO GET DONE 90 PERCENT OF WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO GET DONE, SECOND TERMS ARE TO BE SURVIVED, AND THE FIRST 100 DAYS IS WHEN YOU ARE GOING TO ACCOMPLISH MOST OF IT, SO YOU HAVE TO BE READY." – TED KAUFMAN, NYT

of vulnerability within the federal government and critics of the Obama administration are already predicting an tumultuous transition.

One critic, Karl Rove, said President Obama will depart with only unsolved domestic problems and empty promises still hanging in the air.

"Regardless of what items Mr. Obama checks off, he will leave to his successor a staggering array of domestic problems, some he ignored and many he made worse," Rove wrote in an April 2015 Op-ed for the Wall Street Journal.

Mr. Rove, once deputy chief of staff to former President George W. Bush, is not the first or the last to criticize the Obama administration for its decisions on foreign policy, economics, healthcare or a slew of other hot ticket items

In many ways, Obama himself has come to terms with the probability that many of the campaign guarantees that won him two terms in office would not come to fruition the inauguration of a new leader.

Many of the 2016 candidates from the onset of the election season have contributed "advice" to the president on what they would have done differently to combat terrorism and immigration issues.

The response from the leader of the free world can be summed up as simply experience versus impression.

"Even if somebody from a different party succeeded me, one of the things you find is when you're in this job, you think about it differently than when you're just running for the job," Obama said in a press conference last December. He made clear the difference between running a country and making an appeal to voters.

"You are in fact at the center of what happens around the world... your credibility and America's ability to influence events depends on taking seriously what other countries care about," he said.

One of the biggest question marks for the end of his term is the fate of U.S. troops in the Middle East, and the conflict prevention effort still in its prime.

In many ways, the President has exercised a non-interventionist campaign; one the presumptive Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton has largely supported. The presumptive GOP nominee Donald Trump, however, called it a weakness in light of recent attacks claimed by sympathizers of ISIS.

"Look, we're led by a man that either is not tough, not smart, or he's got something else in mind," Donald Trump said in a



June 13 interview with Fox News. “People cannot, they cannot believe that President Obama is acting the way he acts and can’t even mention the words ‘radical Islamic terrorism’.”

Donald Trump instead has advocated for a temporary ban on Muslim visitors until the threat can be contained. In an early 2016 editorial for the Washington Post, Jennifer Rabin quoted a former George H. W. Bush administration director, who seemed to agree with the GOP nominee on Obama’s lack of action.

“A vacuum was created not by our replacing the Assad regime, but by our hesitancy to do more than offer pronouncements,” said Dennis Ross, now a Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “Unless the U.S. does more now to fill this vacuum, the situation will spin further out of control.”

While it’s true that the President has been accused of passivity by some, that isn’t the opinion of every critic. In April, President Obama made the announcement that he

would deploy more than 200 more troops to the Middle East. In response, some have even gone as far as to say Obama may leave office with the risk of a war still hanging in the air.

The President has tried to defend his position and in response to the attacks on Orlando in June, presumptive Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton defended the president’s attempt to isolate and disarm the Islamic State for the most part, but said it needed to be updated.

Donald Trump, however, had a different response.

“If we do not get tough and smart real fast, we are not going to have a country anymore,” Trump said in a statement. “Because our leaders are weak, I said this was going to happen -- and it is only going to get worse. I am trying to save lives and prevent the next terrorist attack. We can’t afford to be politically correct anymore.”

Despite arguments over the administration’s strategy on terrorism and national security – the days are ticking away and the President will do all he can to cement his legacy.



This includes remaining optimistic that his successor will honor commitments made in his administration.

Following behind President Obama, thousands of people in his cabinet will also leave their posts in January. At the end of last year, Congress passed legislation aiming to make that transition easier, as it takes months to approve more than 4,000 potential appointees.

The Obama administration began holding meetings on the transition in early May, according to senior officials. Staff members from the campaigns of Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton were all in attendance. With only 72 days in between the election and inauguration, there is little time to waste.

It is not clear at this time how bumpy or smooth the transition between presidents will be – but some have labeled this election as one of the wackiest and most difficult to predict. But one expert says a smooth transition is vital and will define the next administration.

“Anybody who is running knows that your first term is when you’re going to get done 90 percent of what you’re going to get done – second terms are to be survived – and the first 100 days is when you are going to accomplish most of it, so you have to be ready,” Ted Kaufman told the New York Times in April.

It is, however, interesting to note that at the beginning of June, President Obama openly endorsed Clinton as his potential successor. It is not suprising that he would choose to support a fellow Democrat, as she would be most likely to continue programs created under his watch.

“Great nations can handle a lot at once,” Obama said in a December 2015 news conference.

But as the election gets closer, the validity of that statement will be tested – as will our president’s ability to handle the convergence of questions, criticisms and policy decisions from all sides in the last days of his term.





# A DIFFERENT KIND OF SHIFT

|| SEALS: POTUS & SCOTUS WEBSITS ||

With questions left unanswered and opinions left unwritten, the empty seat was clothed in black silk bunting to signify the loud silence felt by the remaining members of the Court.

Just over four months ago one of the most outspoken members of the Supreme Court passed away. Justice Antonin Scalia was a renowned leader of democracy and advocate for the rule of law.

After his death, President Obama released a statement calling the Justice “a larger-than-life presence on the bench -- a brilliant legal mind with an energetic style, incisive wit, and colorful opinions.”

Scalia served on the court for 30 years. According to the record, he was in the majority opinion about 75 percent of the time, and often influenced others on the court. With that kind of impact, one would think his death would have received more attention – and one would be wrong.

Despite a few articles in the days following the tragic

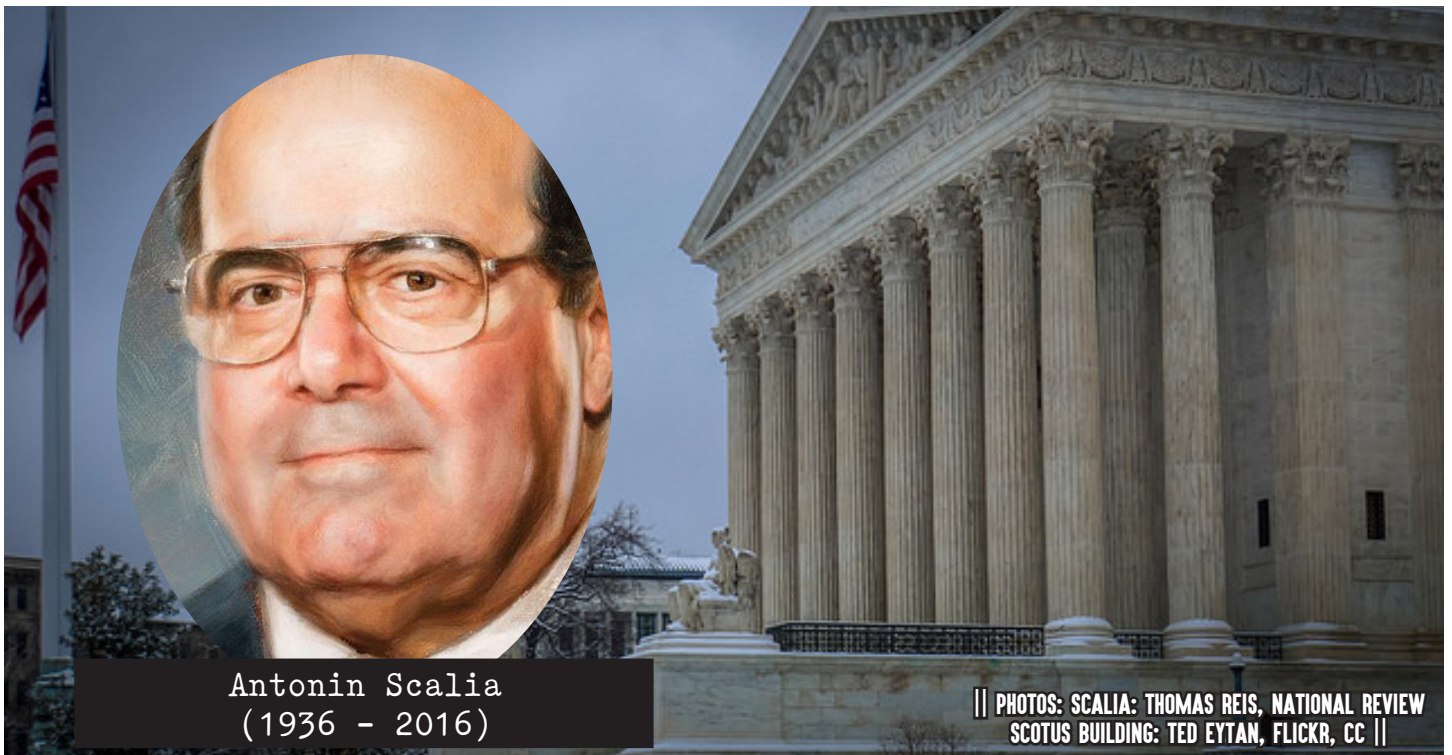
announcement, eyes turned instead to who would eventually replace the enigmatic Italian-American on the bench and what impact that would have on future decisions.

The job of appointing a justice to the Supreme Court is one of the most significant presidential duties, as Justices have the ability to serve on the court until they choose to retire or are impeached.

Because of the life term, Supreme Court justices are in their position long past their appointees. In 2016, it is even more influential as the vacancy runs parallel to the presidential election.

In the same statement following Scalia’s passing, President Obama made a pledge to fulfill his duty to nominate to the Supreme Court someone to fill the empty space.

“These are responsibilities that I take seriously, as should everyone... they’re bigger than any one party... they are about our



Antonin Scalia  
(1936 - 2016)

|| PHOTOS: SCALIA: THOMAS REIS, NATIONAL REVIEW  
SCOTUS BUILDING: TED EYTAN, FLICKR, CC ||



democracy,” Obama said. “They’re about the institution to which Justice Scalia dedicated his professional life, and making sure it continues to function as the beacon of justice that our Founders envisioned.”

The President made attempts to fulfill that promise when in March he nominated Merrick B. Garland, an appellate judge for the D.C. circuit.

While on the surface his choice doesn’t seem all that suspicious. The judicial community has long held Garland in high esteems—yet the process has been delayed.

Rarely does a Supreme Court seat become open in an election year – and when it has in the past, the effects on the presidential election were minimal according to Eric Segall, a law professor at Georgia State University.

More than one-third of all presidents in the United States found themselves in the same predicament, according to judicial record. The same record shows that from John Adams to Richard Nixon, 21 Supreme Court Justices have been appointed during presidential election years.

The significance in 2016, however, is the current makeup of the court. During his tenure thus far, Obama has nominated two justices to the court—one in 2009 and one in 2010. Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, both members of the Democratic



Party replaced former Republican Justices David Souter and John Paul Stevens.

For the first time, the ideology of the court was closer to bipartisanship than ever before – with five Republicans and four Democrats, Segall said.

Of course, the decision of who will succeed Scalia ultimately comes down to the Senate’s willingness to accept the president’s nominee – and Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has put a damper on the festivities. McConnell’s spokesperson Don Stewart issued a statement in March announcing the Senate’s reluctance to accept a nominee until the next administration was sworn in.

Halfway through the last year of his second term, some have



vs.



|| PHOTOS: DONKEYHOTHEY, FLICKR, CC ||

# "THE SENATE HAS THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO WAIT BUT IT POLITICIZES EVEN MORE THE NOMINATION PROCESS. THE ONLY PRO IS FOR THOSE FOLKS WHO DON'T WANT TO SEE A LIBERAL MAJORITY ON THE COURT." – ERIC SEGALL, GSU

argued that President Obama's decisions have less of an impact and thus, the next president should make the decision. Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) said as a lame duck, or someone nearing the end of his or her tenure, Obama should relinquish the choice of who succeeds Justice Scalia to the next president. New Hampshire GOP Chairwoman Jennifer Horn agreed.

"Republicans have repeatedly stated that the American people deserve a voice in the process of selecting the next Supreme Court Justice, and I wholeheartedly agree," Horn said in a statement criticizing Garland's nomination and implying that allowing Obama to proceed with his nomination would break nearly 80 years of tradition. "It's simply not time to break with decades of bipartisan practice."

However, experts have said it is more a matter of circumstance than tradition. In this case, it is a matter of the Senate holding up the process to push their agenda, according to Segall.

"The Senate has the constitutional right to wait but it politicizes even more the nomination process," Segall said. "The only pro is for those folks who don't want to see a liberal majority on the Court."

While Garland has in many cases been considered a "centrist," judge, the Republicans may worry that adding another liberal to the Court could end in a change of opinion regarding abortion, gun rights and Citizens United.

If Garland were to be confirmed, the Court would for the first time have a liberal majority.

The blueprint of the Court is significant, but leaving the court without a tie-breaking vote could be even more disastrous. An

even split or "per curiam" ruling sets no nationwide precedent and leaves the lower-court ruling as the final decision in the case, according to Cristian Farias of the Washington Post.

In the few months without Scalia – the Court has had a difficult time finding a clear majority. The swing vote, usually administered by Justice Anthony Kennedy, is no longer an option.

Scalia's death no doubt left eight others to figure out what to do in his absence. Without a ninth justice, there are really only two choices the court has in the last days of the term to find consensus or a majority on cases still on the docket. They can automatically accept the lower courts decision or delay a case until the Court resumes in the fall.

Chief Justice John Roberts admitted that decisions would take longer due to the ideological changes, but said it would bring them closer together.

"We kind of have to have a commitment as a group," Roberts said to a conference of lawyers and judges at the beginning of June. "I think we spend a fair amount of time – maybe a little more than others in the past – talking about things."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the first to acknowledge the negative effect the vacancy left on the court, yet the Supreme Court session is likely to wrap up within the next week with the seat still unfilled.

But the Court has been adamant that when they return in October – all nine spots need to be filled in order to fulfill their judicial duty.



# THEY **HAVE** THE **POWER**



Roberts



Kennedy



Thomas



Ginsburg



Breyer



Alito



Sotomayor



Kagan



~~Scalia~~

|| PHOTOS: NEW YORK TIMES ||



# AMERICANS HAD THEIR CHANCE & THEY BLEW IT

**|| STEFF DANIELLE THOMAS ||**  
Editor in Chief

**T**here is absolutely no contest that the leader of the free world should be chosen by the people, for the people. Yet so many voters fail to step up to the plate and use their constitutional right until it is too late.

Primary numbers have risen slightly during this election but still not nearly as much as they did in 2008, according to data released by the PEW Research Center on June 15.

Voters seem to be more likely to show up to the polls before November only when a little entertainment or antagonism is involved – as has been true of this election.

The 2008 election was different. An undeniable pivotal moment in the history of American elections, especially in the beginning with the first African American candidate and the potential first woman. Of course, once Clinton dropped out the first time – President Obama rose even more in popularity.

A rise in voter turnout during that election eight years ago makes sense – but what would attract more voters this time around?

Hillary Clinton once again trying her luck and doing okay is significant, but not in the same way it would have been eight years ago. I think the true reason why some people who would have waited until November to vote are finally standing up is because of the peculiarity of those running for office and the increased use of digital and social media.

What does that mean? Not only do we have two stand out

candidates on the ballot, we have two candidates using the internet and cell phone apps to constantly slam one another for not only their political beliefs, but also their private lives.

Donald Trump has often gone too far with his “crooked Hillary” campaign and Hillary Clinton’s consistent snapchat criticism of the businessman is getting a little tired. These two are supposed to be making their case for becoming the next leader of the free world -- and they’re not making such a great example.

In fact, Webster’s Dictionary vaguely defines a leader as a person who has commanding authority or influence. In the same dictionary, the term influence is defined as essentially the power to cause change without directly forcing it to happen.

Thankfully, the presidential conventions will not take place until the end of July. This will give voters a little more time to make a decision. There is still one ancient, yet eager, Senator from Vermont who has promised to hang on until the very end after all.

Clinton and Trump have two different personalities that do not by any means fit into the parties they claim to belong.

As most know, Trump has switched parties probably more than most change their socks. While that is most likely a bit of an overstatement, it is difficult to fully trust his intentions.

Please don’t take that as a sly attempt at raising the bar for Clinton. Her foreign policy decisions in the past and scandalous use of a private email server has placed her



loyalty in question as well.

Honestly, there are still far too many people in the country who lack the knowledge of how the political process works. Two different elections decide the fate of a presidential or congressional candidate.

Votes during primaries and caucuses will determine who scores enough delegates to clench the nomination. The general election in November will then determine who has enough support to officially move in the White House.

But everyone knows the ultimate decision comes down to which candidate the Electoral College deems is worthy of the proverbial spot. With that said, it is more than obvious that the primary election is where the electorate's voice is heard – however that doesn't seem to be important for most voters.

Some almost write these elections off as the calm before the storm, or almost a “test run” as Bustle called it in an article last August. The article spelled it out perfectly—the primaries are “mini-races” that give the parties a good read on who their best shot is to mobilize voters in the general election.

Now, the 2016 election has been an outlier from the start, and because each party can only have one official candidate represent them in the November general election, the last days of the primaries are sometimes uneventful as the nominees are often chosen already.

But if the voters at the beginning would have taken more

advantage of their position, maybe the current election would be a little different.

Americans are lazy – it is a stereotype that has hung over the nation for decades. While this isn't always the case, when it comes to elections and politics, it often rings true. The electorate has no problem voicing their opinion on Twitter or Facebook, but voters will more than likely always make the general election a higher priority. Why? Probably because the part of weeding through the candidates and their platforms has already been done.

Choosing between two people is no doubt easier than a mixture of experienced politicians and political connoisseurs. But being lazy in the short-term only brings bigger problems in the future – including leaders that may not be fit for the position.

So maybe the fault isn't fully on the dirty politicians or a confusing election system that seems to always go in the opposite direction of the popular vote. Maybe the citizens share some of the blame because they refused to take an hour out of their busy day to vote when it really mattered.

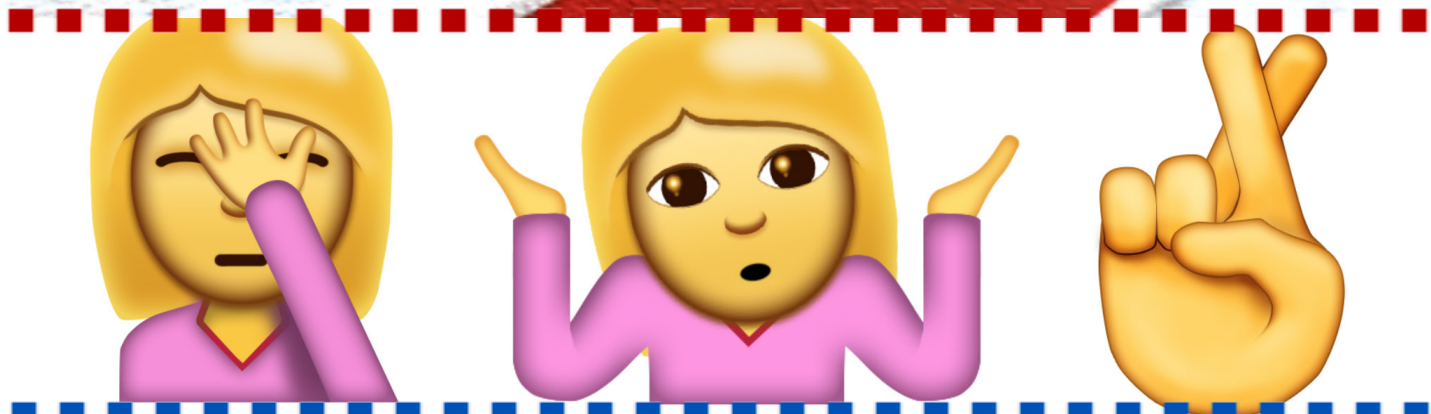
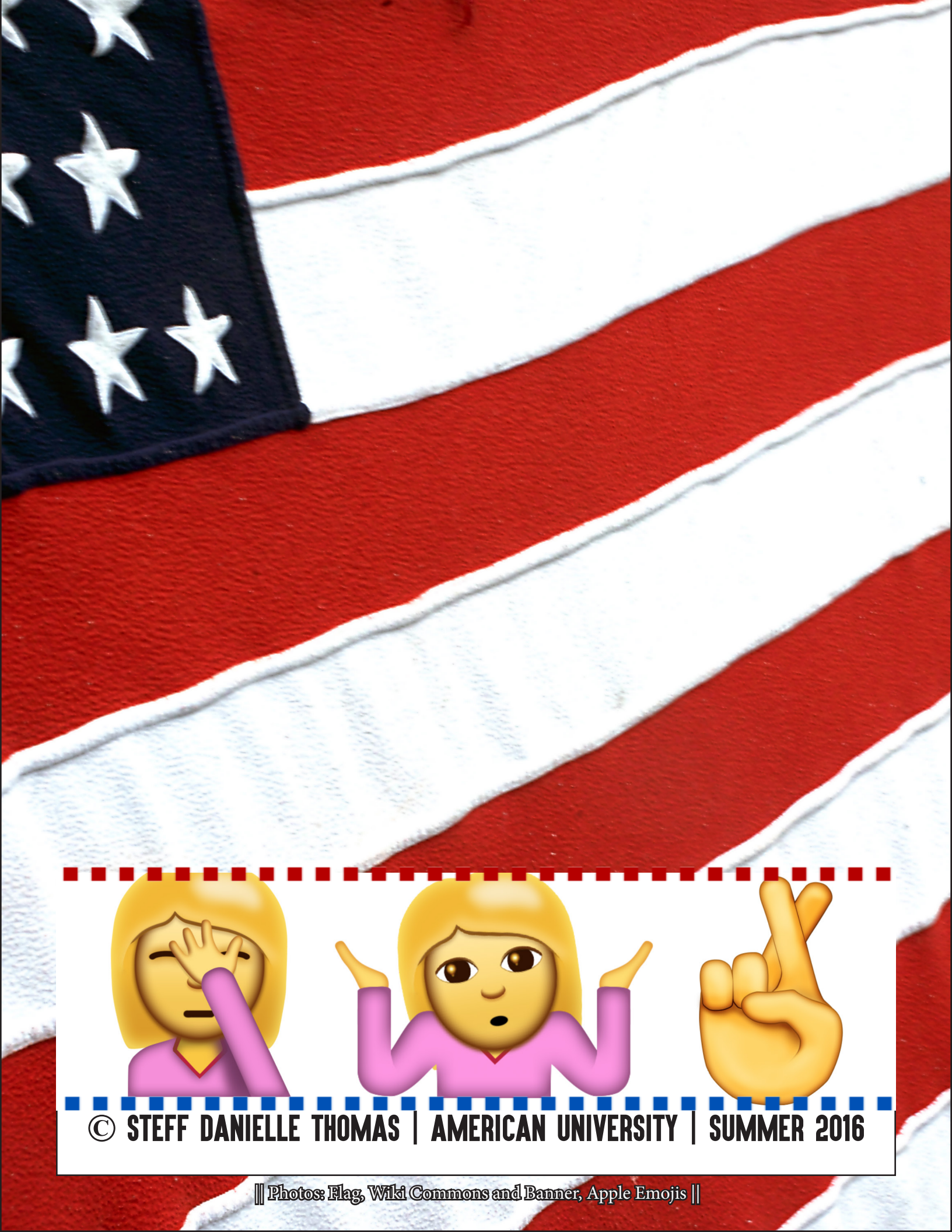
So in January when the next administration takes office, I am already dreading the complaints about the man or woman who moves into the Oval Office.

America, you had the chance to pick someone who could actually make America great and move us closer together – and you blew it.

Maybe that's just my opinion.



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