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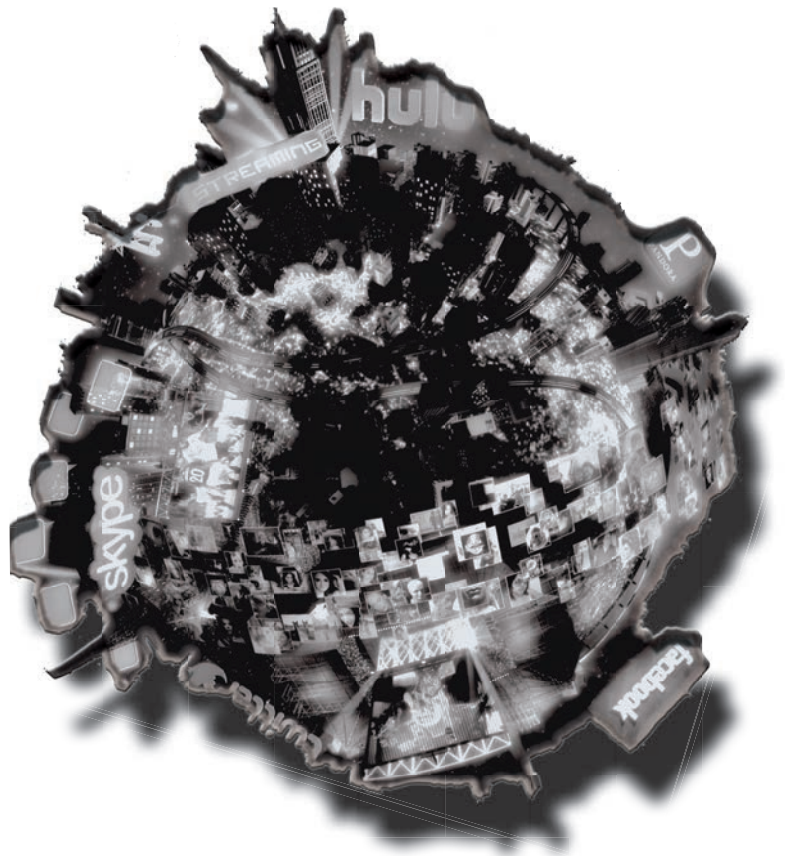
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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

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The Beauty of Reflection

By Darci McFerran

With every New Year celebration comes with it the reflection of ones actions, habits, and behaviors. Launching an annual round of resolutions that can often seem more for the sake of tradition than an actual commitment to personal change. Generally a harmless indiscretion that goes unnoted year after year, for me this year was different. As I the clock struck midnight - I stood alone in the street crying, an all too common scene in my life recently. My "Ex" had stopped by my new apartment uninvited and most certainly unwelcomed, demanding my company as the midnight hour continued to inch closer moment by moment.

One mistake, the last of 2016, which would make the first week of 2017 an extremely lonely one was to walk inside and leave my phone setting in a chair on the porch. As I deftly tried to maneuver my way around a large man that was demanding my attention, I forgot that it was lying there unguarded. As I shut the door, I instantly knew what was about to happen and I quickly turned again to open the door... only moments too late. My "Ex" was already walking down the stairs with my cell phone which he would soon be scouring for evidence of my new life and individuals he could torture in addition to me. Of course, anyone found guilty of befriending me in his absence was a target and now vulnerable to his drunken tirades too.

Much to my surprise, although lonely, living without a cell phone was easier than I had thought it might be. The absence of this modern technological staple, afforded me plenty of time for self-reflection. I think often of that moment after the scene with my "Ex", as the clock struck midnight and I stood alone in the street crying. I listened to waves of celebratory chanting from clubs up and down the streets wondering if I would ever again be one of those voices. Lost in the revelry and banter that is enjoyed amongst loved ones and friends, far away from feeling lost and defeated by the choices of last year.

We take for granted the little things that seem so mundane until they are no longer accessible to us. Until we can't partake of those simple pleasures and we are forced into situations and scenes that seem foreign to the world we have always known. But therein lies the beauty of reflection. As I look back now, I feel small and petty for allowing something so small to consume me so entirely. I was free of him at midnight, a symbol of what I want for the coming year. Perhaps I was without some minor material possessions but I was alive, healthy, and standing on my own two feet. Everything that I would need to rebuild my life and find people to bring with me as I raise my voice along with theirs to celebrate 2018 and make resolutions that might soon be forgotten.

"Personal Bill of Rights":

1. The right to be treated with respect
2. The right not to take responsibility for anyone else's problems or bad behavior
3. The right to get angry
4. The right to say no
5. The right to make mistakes
6. The right to your own feelings, opinions and convictions
7. The right to change your mind or decide on a different course of action
8. The right to negotiate for change
9. The right to ask for emotional support or help
10. The right to protest unfair treatment or criticism



Campus Tours

By Terrance Turner

If you spend time on campus long enough, you'll notice crowds of what appear to be high school (and sometimes even elementary school) students being led around the campus by UHD students. In some cases, mostly during summer, the tours are done by UHD "Gator Guides" — part of the "Gator Crew" that was introduced in 2014. By and large, however, those semester tours are provided by the Office of Admissions and conducted by UHD Ambassadors. On Wednesdays and Fridays, either at 10 am or 1 pm, the "Group Tours" begin. They consist of a 30-minute presentation by an admissions counselor and then a 45-minute walking tour of the campus, given by the Ambassadors.

Richard Blackwell, the Customer Service Coordinator in the Office of Admissions, explained in an interview that Fridays are reserved for high school students. Wednesdays are open to elementary and middle schoolers. (This explains the curious sightings of young children in the hallways on certain days.) Blackwell says that the tour is mostly confined to One Main Building, although the Shea and Commerce buildings are also explored by request. The One Main Building sites covered by the tour include the "40,000 Windows" Café (on the 5th floor), the library, the Food Court, and the MetroRail stops that some schools (like HCC) arrive at when they take the rail to UHD.

The location of the campus is a major asset. Blackwell cites data saying that students tend to gravitate toward institutions that they can see, adding that for many of the student tourists, UH-Downtown may be the only one that they physically navigate. Thus, those in campus tours can play a significant role in where students end up, and the gravity of that is not lost on Blackwell: "I believe that we're in the life-changing business," he declares.

Applications to be an Ambassador are accepted year-round, Blackwell says, although he notes that he doesn't anticipate having to fill any open spots in the near future. A modest stipend is included with the position, but he stresses that the greatest benefits of the job may not be as tangible. He wants to have workers who are not only great people but great employees, ready to enter the workforce when graduation arrives.



Walk2Vote

By Joshua Burgman

On October 26 students, faculty and staff gathered on the front lawn of the Shea Street building to participate in what has become a tradition at UHD, Walk2Vote. This year's guest list consisted of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and first Daughter Ashley Turner, a number of local celebrities (such as rappers Trae the Truth and Bun B), and DJ's CoCo Dominguez, Akens, and Rocko Steady.

Since 2012, UHD's Student Government Association (SGA) has hosted Walk2Vote in an effort to encourage students to vote. In that time the non-partisan event has become a national movement to turn-out the college vote. According to one of Walk2Vote's co-founders, John Locke, "multiple universities across the country organized Walk2Vote campaigns, including the universities of Indiana, Iowa and Houston."

At this year's event, attendees were treated to a step show and were given the opportunity to interact with local media and radio stations like WB 39, ABC13, NBC, 97.9 the Box and others. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee also spoke. The highlight of the event, other than walking to the polls, was the mayor's daughter. Ashley Turner gave a passionate speech to students and guest about the urgent need to vote and urged them all to walk to the polls to cast their ballots. Not to be outdone, Mayor Turner also spoke about how important it was for students to make sure their voices are heard.

After also addressing the crowd, Rappers Trae the Truth and Bun B led a parade of hundreds of students to the polls to cast their votes. The long line of voters was escorted to the polls by a mariachi band and was saluted by the public as they walked through the streets.

The fact that Walk2Vote has become something of a national phenomenon, with the #Walk2Vote trending on twitter and being responsible for nationwide student turn-out, is a testament to the event's importance — and it all began here at UHD.



SGA Budget

By Kierra Green

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You know that saying, “money doesn’t grow on trees?” Well once a college student starts paying for college out of pocket, that phrase becomes an everyday motto. Every student has the right to know where their hard-earned money is going before they give their university any payments. Where did your money go last year? Well, you may be surprised to learn portion of your tuition is being contributed to the Student Government Association. It makes no sense to invest money if you aren’t even educated on the investment’s purpose, so what exactly are you paying for when it comes to the SGA?

First off you should know what SGA is; SGA conducts as model politicians, every action they take is for the greater good of the student population. The responsibility of any government is to be the voice of the unheard, meaning any concerns regarding the treatment of a student can be directed to them. Positions of the SGA Executive Board are elected by the student body and elections are held every year. SGA is also similar to an actual government because scandal hovers their quarters.

There have been conspiracy speculations on how SGA handles the money that it is given. These accusations are based on members and leaders of SGA. When your appointed can not answer a question clearly, it makes you wonder if their integrity is solid. In a general meeting hosted by SGA, there were blemishes on the records of this year’s budget; although the budget is visible to students, it was inaccurate. Faculty and students, including myself, left the general meeting more confused than they came in. I sat down in an interview with the treasurer of SGA and ironed out any confusion. Now that I am aware of the inner workings I think I can clarify the secret accusations that lurk.

Specific stipends are given to the executive board, and these wages stem from the annual budget that SGA receives. This budget can differ each year because it is based on the university’s population, SGA automatically gets a piece of your tuition, so more students equals higher pay. According to Mghia, treasurer of SGA, “the annual budget is over \$60,000 and stipends are given to certain positions, especially the executive board, the speaker and chief of justice.” After stipends are allocated, the money is distributed among student organizations.

Now the overall question is, why does a student have to pay out of pocket for something that does not effectively benefit them? If a student has no interest in anything SGA offers, why bother pay? For a student who has never set foot inside the student lounge or is graduating without having been a part of an organization, they have every right to believe an unknown amount of money was wasted. From this writer’s perspective, I don’t know how I feel about paying for someone else’s well-being, but we are talking about a government, paying for a lifestyle that is not your own is just the unruly reality. What’s your take on our university’s Student Government? In the long run, have you felt SGA is helping



Presidential Pick for UHD

By Kara Moore

2016 was the year UHD saw the passing of the torch from President Flores, to interim President Olivas, to newly chosen President Juan Munoz, Ph.D. This Mexican American and Purple Heart recipient has three degrees: a BA in psychology, an MA in Mexican American Studies, and a doctorate in Philosophy. Before receiving his doctorate, he had worked as a high school teacher, a professor at California Community College, and an adjunct faculty member at Pacific Oakes and Whittier Colleges.

Armed with his current knowledge, Munoz holds several positions at Texas Tech, including Senior Vice President for Institutional Diversity Equity. He is also Community Engagement and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education & Student Affairs. Among his stated goals concerning UHD was growing the funding and reducing the costs of students through the utilization of that funding. It would appear he’d be rather good at this, considering he recently received a grant called “Student Services Support TRiO Grant” totaling 1.2 million dollars to be awarded from 2015-2020.

With ties to the legislature through his previous position on the Board of Directors for the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, he possesses the necessary attributes to do what needs to be done at UHD and rumored to be a favorite among faculty for the position of President.

The charming and handsome new president expressed a deep interest in UHD as a minority and low-income serving university that featured students of diverse ages and races. He stated during his first introduction to the university, during the presidential search, that when speaking to faculty at UHD he was told over and over again how hard-working and inspiring the students at UHD truly are. He promised to do his best to tackle the issues facing the institution, and was seemingly honest in all of his answers when questions were posed to him during the interview. I asked him about expanding and modernizing degrees at UHD and he stated that he’d need more information to make a determination on what is best for UHD, and I could appreciate that he didn’t make me or anyone else false promises.

Welcome President Munoz,

Dateline looks forward to working with you and hopefully seeing the University grow under your leadership!

Open Admissions

By Terrance Turner

Another year require another reminder: your presence at UHD is determined by your ability to keep up your grades. UHD used to be an open admissions college; Open admissions is a college admissions process in which the only criteria for entrance is a high school diploma or GED. Until three years ago, UHD was the only public university that held such a system, according to a Feb. 2012 article from the Houston Chronicle. However, by that time the system was being reconsidered. Within twelve days, the UH Main newspaper The Daily Cougar reported that UHD was ending the process. The changes, it said, would be effective in fall 2013.

Under current standards, incoming first-year students must meet the Texas Uniform Admissions Policy and additional requirements. Those who graduate in the top 25% of their class are automatically admitted. Those in the 26-50% group must have a SAT reading/writing/math total of 930, a GPA of at least 2.5, or an ACT score of 18. (If they took the SATs before March 2016, only reading and math are counted, and the score must be at least 850.) Those ranking below that must have the 930 SAT and 2.5 GPA. Home-schooled or GED students have the same requirements, minus the GPA.

Quoted in the Daily Cougar article, Vice President of Advancement and University Relations Johanna Wolfe said that the change would be in the best interest of students and would up the school's graduation rate. "By admitting students who are ready to do college-level work, UHD will increase the number of students graduating annually," she said. In an article for the Houston Chronicle, published in September of 2016, Interim President Michael Olivas defended the change: "Three years ago, we made the responsible choice to implement admission requirements and accept college-ready students. Our students are now getting better grades, taking and completing more classes, and staying in school. They are also accumulating less student debt."

The interim president wrote the piece in response to an August report by the nonprofit research group "Third Way." Its data set highlighted UHD's 13% graduation rate, noting that at the average public institution, students have less than a 50-50 shot (48.3%) of graduating. It further claimed that only 80 of 535 public four-year institutions were graduating more than two-thirds of their first-time, full-time students annually. Those that weren't were labeled "dropout factories."

President Olivas objected to the term. "Labels such as these are pejorative to the hard-working students here – and these are among the hardest-working students I've met. Our alums are police chiefs, lawyers, business leaders, doctors, and teachers," he wrote.

Will 2017 see an increase in graduation rates? Time will tell.

O'Kane Gallery Presents: Ammar Alobaidi A Tale of the City

Exhibition February 9 to March 25, 2017
Opening Reception: February 9th, 6 to 8 pm
Closing Reception: March 25th, 2 to 4 pm

The O'Kane Gallery at the University of Houston-Downtown is honored to present a solo exhibition of paintings and sculptures by Ammar Alobaidi. Alobaidi was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1969, but recently came to the United States as a refugee. Before arriving in America, he first had fled to Jordan. It is in Jordan that he studied with Mohr Aldeen, and in 2007 began exhibiting art at venues such as the Muhtaraf Alrimal Gallery, The Royal Cultural Center, and Zara Gallery, among other places. Through his work, Alobaidi desires to counteract the loss and sorrow of displacement.

Making art for Alobaidi is an act of joyful outreach on an inspiring scale. Small canvases cannot typically contain his exultant vision. His is a language of abstraction and brilliant color on the one hand, then of rhythmic, graphic, black and white patterns on the other. Texture is implied with areas of checkerboard, dots, or wavy lines, while compositions are constructed with the careful precision of an engineer. The human figure is often suggested, but each character is joined together in harmonic continuity as one form overlies another in a manner reminiscent of later Picasso or Matisse. Visual bonds between men and women stand as a visual allegory for societal reunification. Before a world disfigured by wars and what the artist calls the "horrors" that lead the human being towards his lowest instincts of individual and collective destruction, Alobaidi seeks to reveal the strength of love, solidarity, and the exchanges of generosity that can spontaneously happen.



Bachata Breakdown

By Kara Moore



The Student Government Association is a collection of elected and appointed students who aim to handle student issues at an administrative level and create an environment conducive to happy and high-achieving academics. Unfortunately, despite its high status, scandal can still ensue. During the week leading up to Walk to Vote, SGA representatives were out in the third-floor hallway recruiting voters and getting pledge cards. On one of these days, Shay Hopper and Reymundo Reyes were at the table together. Shay Hopper, at the time, was applying for the position of “Director of Student Engagement” within SGA. Reymundo Reyes is a public defender active in SGA.

According to anonymous sources within SGA, there was a disagreement between Reyes and Hopper. Reyes put on bachata — a genre of dance music originating in the Dominican Republic — during the tabling and Hopper allegedly told him something along the lines of “Don’t play that Mexican music.” This moment led to a discussion about SGA being sensitive and open to others’ cultures. Shortly after, the decision to appoint Shay Hopper to her desired position was put to a vote, and she was not appointed. The vote counts were: one abstained, three voted yes, and four said no.

That’s where the situation truly exploded on the popular GroupMe app. SGA has a GroupMe chat specifically for them, and in screenshots obtained from an anonymous source, Shay Hopper is seen saying, “Hello all. I would like to let you know that I am no longer a part of SGA and have enjoyed my time with you all. I have been lied on and accused of something I did not do and even apologized for. Thanks again for all your support”. Her claim that she did not tell Mr. Reyes to “turn off that Mexican music” differs from the word of our sources, who said she admitted to doing so when questioned before putting Hopper’s appointment to a vote.

It was her message that unleashed a firestorm of back and forth between members of SGA. Former SGA President John Locke said “SGA is so backwards right now. It is ridiculous,” to which Representative Nghia Nguyen responded “Thanks @John Locke for the “useful” statement.” Opinions were expressed, stating Hopper is “one of the good ones” and calling for a revote pending an internal affairs investigation. Representative Esperanza Martinez said, “We pride ourselves on being a DIVERSE institution, but do we really know what that means??” Representative Peter Akinola stated shortly after, “I would also like to mention that not all of us are Spanish speakers. So if we choose to listen to music we understand, that is in no way unprofessional.”

Finally, current SGA Vice President Hatziri Rancano intersected with a short letter to everyone: “Dear SGA excellence leadership team, I just want to persuade you to learn to forgive yourself and others. We are not perfect. Perfection doesn’t exist. Let’s learn from our mistakes and keep moving forward. I challenge you that for every negative thing you find in a person, look for five positive things that same person has done. This will help us overcome the negative environment. You and only you have the power to take the lesson to build you or destroy you. I believe in my team; you are my motivation to keep going. Please, don’t give in yet. Si Se Puede !!!”

Considering that UHD is a diverse university where — according to Fall 2016 enrollment numbers — 46% of students are Hispanic-identifying, it seems that telling someone to turn off “that Mexican music” would be rather insensitive if that is what happened. The “she said, he said”

of who said what and what actually happened is tough to follow, but one good thing did come out of the discord. Representative Faryal Gul worked with Rep. Jessica Palencia and Rep. Evelyn Garcia to recently pass a bill requiring cultural sensitivity training for SGA members. The training will be run by Dr. Hudson, out of the Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The first training will take place this month, January 2017.



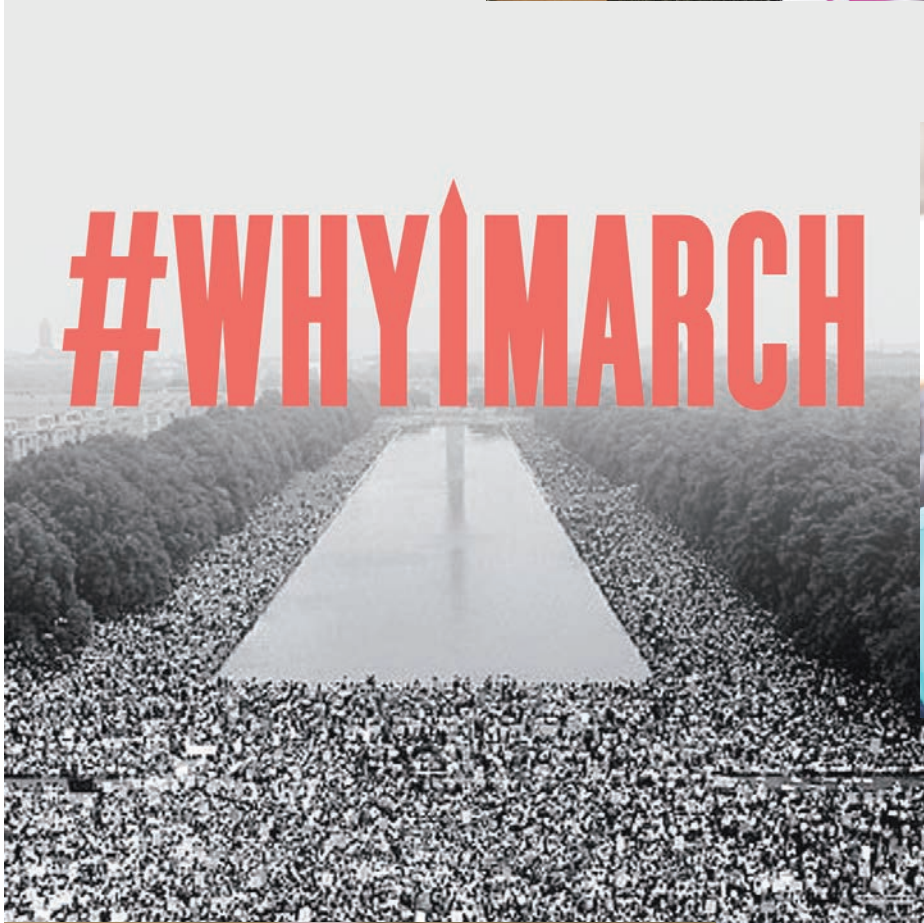


HEAR OUR VOICE



WOMEN'S MARCH

- ON WASHINGTON -



Shooting shocks West University Residents

By Philip Feldwisch

In 2016, Gun Violence Archive (a non-profit that tracks gun violence) tallied a total of 385 reported and verified mass shootings. A mass shooting, put simply, is when an incident of gun violence involves multiple victims. Sometimes it is domestic violence, sometimes it is a disgruntled employee, sometimes it only affects a couple people and in the case of the Pulse Shooting, it affected nearly 100. In Houston, one incident of gun violence stands out for me, and that is the West University shooting.

For many in the enclave city of West University, Monday, September 26, was far from routine. If residents were not awakened by gunshots, they were awakened by the sound of sirens and helicopters overhead. What many did not know at first was that a shooter was targeting random people as they left for work. I spoke with one witness and got a harrowing detail of how the day unfolded.

"I normally wake up around 6:30 am to get to my 8:30 am class. However, around 6:00 am, I heard helicopters flying overhead," an anonymous friend told me in an interview. "After about five minutes of hearing the same sound, I went outside to investigate. From my backyard, I could see a helicopter hovering over my neighborhood. I knew something was up; I just was not sure what was going on," my friend told me. "About halfway through my morning routine, my mom was yelling my name, which is highly unusual. That's when I found out about the shooting."

Having a dad in the fire department made the events very frightening. "A bunch of the firefighters had gone to Skeeter's for breakfast, which is the plaza adjacent to the apartment complex where the shooting was taking place. They were able to administer first-aid and help some people get away from the area and dealt with some of the wounded. It was scary since I wasn't sure if it was a Houston or West U jurisdiction."

Her morning routine was disrupted since most of the streets adjacent to and perpendicular to Wesleyan were closed off. "I basically had to take a different route to school. It was scary for me since West U is a quiet little city where nothing of this magnitude happens." She was able to get to school quicker since most of the area where she lives was blocked off. "Basically, once I got past the barricade, which was near US 59 feeder and the West U area, I was able to easily get to campus."

"Most of the reports that come through are from reported gas leaks or elderly people having a hard time getting around. When there is something of this magnitude, you really worry since you don't know if the training and preparation will pay off." Having friends that live near the complex worried her. "You just don't know if they will come home that night," she told me.

At approximately 6:30 am, West U Police received a call about an active shooter near Academy and Law. Upon arriving at 6:35, officers observed a man firing a weapon at random vehicles for no apparent reason. At about 6:40, West U Fire Department personnel were on the scene at 4000 Law Street to provide first-aid. The adjacent Randall's parking lot was used as a staging area to treat the wounded victims.

Mayor Susan Sample applauded the efforts of first responders, saying that city personnel assessed the situation, provided medical assistance, and neutralized the situation. "While the event is unfortunate, it demonstrates the cooperation West U Police and EMS have with our neighbors and mutual aid agreements. West U police and Fire/EMS were able to arrive first and address the situation," Mayor Sample said in an interview to the Examiner Newspaper. Once Houston Police arrived, incident command was turned over to HPD.

HPD officers exchanged gunfire with the suspected shooter, and ultimately killed the shooter, identified as Nathan DeSai. Upon further examination, it was determined that a .45 caliber handgun was used to shoot at people. Officers also found a long gun and ammunition in DeSai's car, Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said in an interview with the Houston Chronicle. Police were also interviewing friends and business associates as well as conducting a search of his home. DeSai was formerly an attorney with McDaniel and DeSai, LLP, located on IH 10 in the Memorial area. It is not known why the firm ceased operations about seven months ago. It was later reported DeSai was wearing military clothes and a Nazi emblem during the shooting. Nine people were injured during the shooting, but all victims are expected to make a full recovery.



Jennifer Molleda and Alan Wakim embrace following a mass shooting in southwest Houston on Sept. 26, 2016. Wakim was driving in the area when two bullets struck his windshield, narrowly missing his head. Police say a gunman fired multiple shots near a strip mall along Wesleyan Street and Bissonnet Street. Several people were injured.

-image courtesy of Chron.com

How to Detect Fake News

By Kara Moore

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The proliferation of fake news was so relevant during the 2016 election that Facebook came under fire. After removing human aspects of Facebook news filtering and switching to algorithm generated reports, Facebook's news sidebar showed a trending story that Megyn Kelly was kicked from Fox News for supporting Hillary Clinton. The only problem? None of it was true. It was supposed to be an anomaly, a one-time fluke. But when an audit was done by the Washington Post of Facebook's news stories from Aug. 31 – Sept. 22, they found that five that trended were indisputably fake, and three were highly inaccurate. It's clear that fake news is not an anomaly, it is a reality in a webspace where you can say and do whatever you want without repercussions. It's a fact of our current spread of information. So, how do you determine real news from the fake news? Well, here are some tips.

- 1. Look for websites you recognize, but be aware of the domain: The example of this given by NPR is that abcnews.com is probably trustworthy, as it is a common source of news, but watch out for something like abcnews.com.co. The .co domain or any other strange domain should get your attention.*
- 2. Pay attention to how the story is written: A good news story has quotes from multiple reliable sources, especially when dealing with controversial or hot-button issues. Reputable journalists often also reach out those they are railing against, reaching out to a Senator or President for comment when the story concerns them. Fake news is less likely to do so. Also look for spelling and grammar mistakes, as news stories from trusted sites often have copy editors who take care of those issues. The ranting of a single individual writing a blog post won't have the same fine-toothed comb taken to them.*
- 3. Look at the comments: Sometimes fake news sites will post the article with a misleading or entirely different headline from the actual content. Check the comments to see if people call out the article for being false or inaccurate.*
- 4. Check the "About" page: The about page of a regular publication will discuss its location, staff, history, and mission. A fake news site might have a sensationalized mission statement with no mention of location or staff, or it might acknowledge that it's not a real site.*
- 5. Watch out for satire: The Onion is the most commonly known parody news site, but that doesn't mean others aren't out there. Remember that sometimes when you see a ridiculous headline, it's supposed to be ridiculous, because it is a joke.*
- 6. Check your biases: If the article confirms your already held beliefs, double check the information it's supposedly providing. Algorithms online are supposed to show you content you're interested in, so it's common that the stories you see will only reinforce your currently held beliefs. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.*

Finally, Snopes keeps a list of fake news sites. If you ever need to check if a website is fake, try there. It's an easy way to know what sites you can't ever trust.

What is life?

by Jason J. Rivas

What is life?

A simple question

With no simple answer

Life is you

Life is watching the night sky become day,

Caressing a loved one while in their climax,

Lying with eyes wide shut as you fantasize about jumping into the throes of danger.

Aimfully searching for an unknown fate

Losing oneself to an abstract muse

While absorbing each day as it were

What is life?

Life is the struggle with acceptance

The clash with your hubris

As you fight to survive

While facing your fears

Sometimes being defeated

But always getting up

To fight again.

What is life?

It is the curves of a woman

The bounce in her eyes

That captivating smile

Her wonder

And the feeling she gives

After every joyful tear

A love that lasts, endlessly, for its time

What is life?

Life is death

The acceptance of mortality:

Fearfully or fearlessly facing it

While in search of meaning after death

Knowing full well

This will all end, one day

For regardless of what you believe

Life does not exist without death

For this paradox is what we all have in common

Here, there, and everywhere

What is life?

Life is enjoying the moment —

Any moment,

And every minute,

Till your last breath.

That is life to me.

What is life to you?



GUERRILLA JOURNALISM

By Chelsea Chance

America starts off the year with a President Elect who recently called CNN fake news at his first press conference, refusing to answer any of the reporters' questions. CNN, while considered to be left leaning, is still a respected news organization and as a member of the press, the journalist in question was entitled to ask questions. It bodes the question, will journalists have to go farther and push harder to get facts in the coming years?

When one thinks of a journalist, they envision someone trying to "get the story." Many TV show plots have used this motivation to put characters in dangerous predicaments: undercover investigations going wrong, tape recorders being discovered, or the character breaking and entering to get a look at those classified files. The question is, how much does this relate to real life? Will a reporter get "the scoop" by any means necessary? And should false IDs, hidden recorders, and lock picking skills be added to the investigative journalist's toolbox? Considering that the source of some of the most revealing stories of this election season is a self-described "guerrilla journalist," maybe the journalistic stereotype isn't that far off.

James O'Keefe recently heralded Project Veritas, which sent undercover reporters to record videos of Democratic operatives describing dirty tricks such as inciting violence at Trump rallies, discussing how to get away with voter fraud, and anything that could further incriminate the Clinton campaign. Additionally, the hacked emails released by WikiLeaks in hopes to expose duplicity in Hillary Clinton's campaign show once more that the dynamics of guerilla journalism are taking shots at the highest levels of politics today. But how else is one supposed to get the hard hitting truth? Reporting with a camera crew, good lighting, and a sit-down interview? Paul Farhi of the Washington Post says O'Keefe's use of concealed cameras "are generally discouraged as a violation of trust between source and reporter." But how likely is it that anyone would be brutally honest if they knew their comments would be broadcast? The practices of O'Keefe and WikiLeaks seem inevitable, even if they make us uneasy.

The idea behind guerilla journalism is that anyone can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others. New media technology, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, in addition to the increasing prevalence of cellular telephones, have made guerilla journalism more accessible to people worldwide. This also makes it more and more difficult to determine if a story is accurate, staged, or edited. Extensive investigation may have to accompany any submitted news for these reasons.

Many professional journalists believe that only a trained reporter can handle the harsh truths and ethics involved in discovering the story. Due to the availability of technology, citizens often can report breaking news more quickly than traditional media reporters. The primary concern is that just anyone could claim that guerilla journalism is unregulated, too subjective, amateur, and haphazard in quality and coverage. To better regulate the mass amount of information that can be obtained from guerilla or citizen journalism, perhaps taking the information as fact is jumping the gun. Yet, with the constant criticism of the media by the President elect, can information be gained without tough journalism? And even if it is, will people bother to believe "fact" anymore, when the proliferation of fake news is so relevant? Only time will tell.

The Year of Beyoncé

By Christopher Joseph

2016 has been defined by a number of people as "the worst year of the decade." With the fallout from the recent presidential results to the loss of many outstanding and beloved figures in entertainment, it seems that 2016 has brought nothing but sadness and chaos. However, despite the chaos that surrounded 2016, it was also a defining year for Houston's own Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. Beyoncé had set a global standard by being Billboard's top female R&B/hip-hop act of 2016, and proving time and time again that she remains the Queen. Beyoncé made us all get into formation this year and told 2016 to, "Put some respect on my name."

On February 6th, Beyoncé released the critically acclaimed hit "Formation" without any announcements or any promotions. The release of the song was a secret to everyone, similar to her 2013 surprise self-titled album, Beyoncé. "Formation" was met with rave reviews. Britt Julious, a reviewer from Pitchfork.com, said, "for Beyoncé (and her listeners, too), the unapologetic embracing of oneself and the power one can harness when making a name, livelihood, and legacy can't ever be ignored or taken for granted." A day after the release of "Formation," Beyoncé performed the song during the most televised event in America: the Super Bowl 50 halftime show. Although met with glowing praise for her performance, many have voiced their criticisms over her song, calling it anti-police, and saying that the halftime show was not an appropriate place to promote political statements such as her stance on the Black Lives Matter movement. Tomi Lahren, the host of the conservative talk show Tomi for TheBlaze, was one of the loudest who didn't like Beyoncé's performance.

"First it was "hands up, don't shoot," then it was burning down buildings and looting drug stores all the way to Oscars So White, and now even the Super Bowl halftime show has become a way to politicize and advance the notion that black lives matter more." Said Tomi Lahren on Tomi.

Despite the feedback of some, Beyoncé continued to dazzle many others. During the 2016 BET Awards, rapper Kendrick Lamar opened the award show with a surprise guest appearance of Queen B herself. Making a splash, Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar stunned the crowd as they performed "Freedom" off of Beyoncé's Lemonade album. The reign of Beyoncé shutting down award shows didn't stop with the BET Awards.

On August 29th, Beyoncé demolished the Video Music Awards by giving us a 16-minute long performance of several tracks from her album. Beyoncé was the most nominated artist of the night and left with the most wins, nominated for a total of 11 categories and winning 8 of those. With a total of 24 awards, Queen B's success at the VMAS made her the most-awarded artist at the VMAS — dethroning the Queen of Pop, Madonna, and her 20 wins.

The dominance of Beyoncé didn't stop there, as she appeared at the 50th anniversary of the Country Music Awards singing alongside the infamous outcasts of country music, The Dixie Chicks performing the more southern appropriate song "Daddy Lessons." Beyoncé faced backlash after her appearance at the CMA Awards, with many claiming that she doesn't belong. As one Twitter user said, "This did not belong at the CMAs. Beyoncé stands for nothing good, what a horrible choice." However, Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines took to Twitter on Nov. 3 to respond to the backlash by tweeting, "We were in Bey's world not the CMA world ;)" and "it's ok. I used them to fulfill my dream of singing with Bey. (On their dime)."

Beyoncé wasn't the only one to make waves last year. Her sister, Solange, who is also a singer, released an album this year as well as her older sister. "A Seat at the Table" became Solange's first number-one album on the Billboard 200. The album was met with glowing praises from many music critics, landing Solange her first Grammy nomination for Best R&B Performance. Beyoncé's year was nothing but spectacular, and has started to bleed over into the New Year. Like her sister Solange, Beyoncé is also nominated for a Grammy, well, nominated for nine Grammys. If Beyoncé manages to win in eight of the nine categories she has been nominated in, she will become the highest winning female artist in Grammy History. 2016 was definitely a wild ride from start to finish, but I believe it is safe to say that this was the year of the Queen B: Beyoncé. 2017 has to be on its toes, for I believe Beyoncé isn't done showing us what the Queen can do.



Negative Body Image Leads to Children Dieting Younger

By Karen Reyes

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2016 was a year in body positivity. Lane Bryant dropped the body diverse campaign called “This Body”, Aerie dropped a body positive campaign geared towards body types of both men and women called #AerieMan, and Ashley Graham became the first plus sized model to grace the cover of Sports Illustrated. Still, nowadays we see commercial after commercial advertising the “miracle pill” or the “ultimate diet plan” — a way to finally drain those few extra pounds. We see celebrities advertising diet plans or “cleansing teas” knowing a younger audience is watching them. Today, media plays a significant role in children’s lives. Children are drawn to follow their idol’s every footstep. As adults, we are conscious of the risks that come if we decide to embark on diet programs like those being advertised. We can recognize the symptoms if our bodies are not reacting well. But can a child recognize the symptoms at such young age? And if they do will they listen to their body? Or will they ignore the signs just to achieve that “perfect” body?

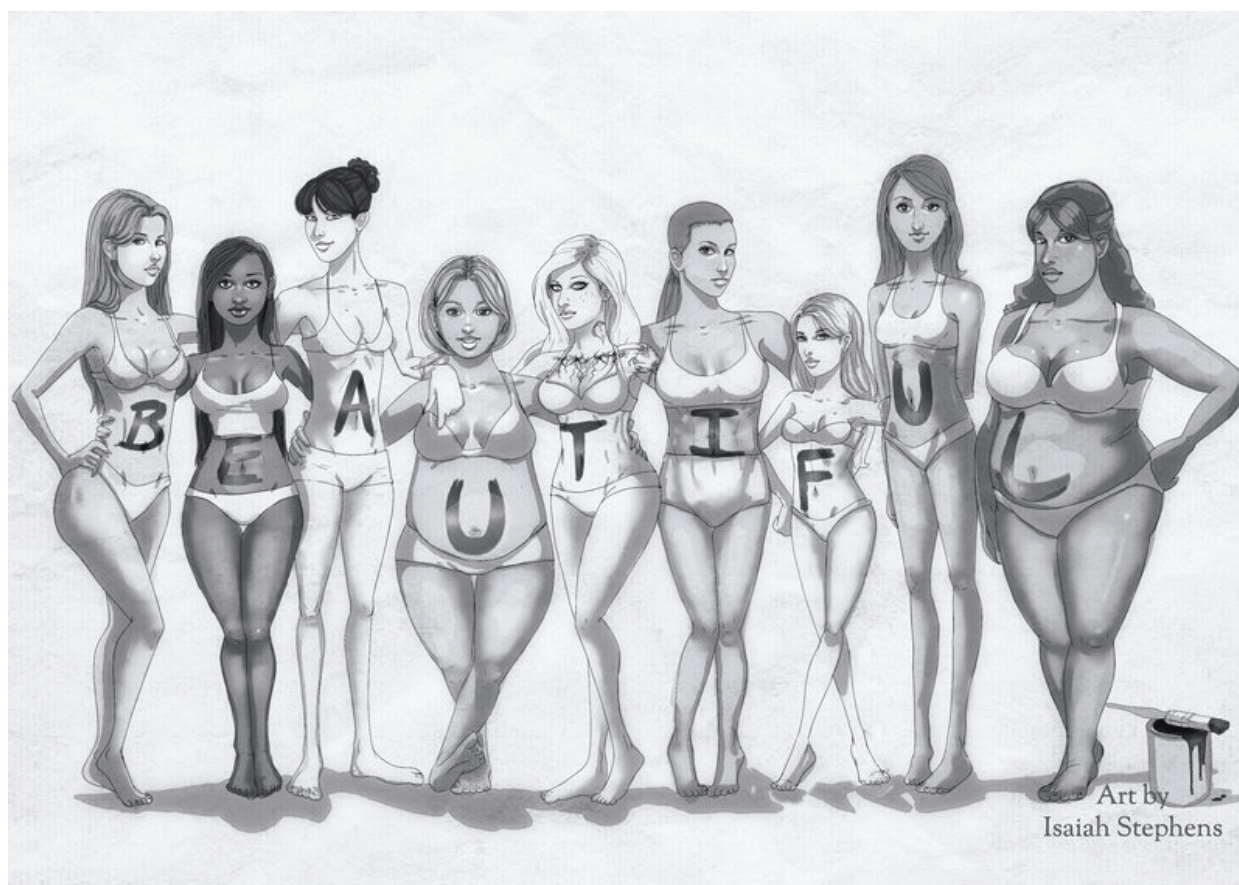
But what cause for a child to have such mindset a very young age? The answer is still media. Monkey see monkey do, right? Children are embarking on diet programs influenced by watching their idols. A study conducted by Common Sense Media found that “more than half of girls and one-third of boys ages six to eight want thinner bodies.” These are surprising results. With media that constantly remind children to fit a certain weight standard, it is impossible not to say children are psychologically harmed, eventually leading to body shaming.

Body shaming is when the person criticizes their own appearance through a comparison to someone else. In today’s society, it has become a norm to judge parts of our bodies because the media forces the public to want and change and mold into the slimmer, smaller, tan body type. It comes to no surprise that children create a negative image about their bodies at a young age with social media being in their hands at all hours of the day and diet programs more than happy to open their doors to them. For example, Weight Watchers accepts children from the age of ten and up. Often programs like this could lead to dangerous and drastic weight loss and unhealthy eating habits that could potentially damage their mental health.

Today, as the saying goes, “kids are getting older younger.” Looking at the study from before, it states that “80% percent of 10-year-old girls had been on a diet”. Now, I won’t discard the fact that in some urgent situations, such as obesity, preventive measures need to be taken. It is a necessity to arrange a healthy diet plan for the child to improve his or her health. However, even in these situations, we must be careful in how we explain to the child of sudden changes to their lives for it can also lead to negative body image issues.

Such as the situation with writer Matthew Diaz. “I’d never considered my body a ‘problem’ until I heard how doctors talk about it,” he wrote on Ravishly, a health and wellness website. He remembered his first visit to the doctor at the age of 10 years old. He recalled how “my pediatrician voiced her concerns about my weight to my mother[...] she talked about me the way I imagine oncologists give a serious diagnosis — as though telling my mother her son was fat was akin to a death sentence,” he wrote. It was at this time that Diaz began to look at himself differently. It was at this moment that he asked “if something was wrong with me.” It was a question that Diaz still asks to this day. It is evident that putting a child under a strict diet regime without explaining the reasons can come with long-term consequences that can be difficult to solve. Communication is a vital key to stopping negative body image.

A child must enter a diet plan if only the weight is threatening their life, but not for the purpose to mold our bodies to certain ideal standards that are impossible to reach. Nevertheless, during both situations, parents must be the sole support for children. Teaching them that embarking on a healthy diet is not that because themselves are a problem but because it is an opportunity to a healthy life. Reminding them that their bodies will shelter them for life. They must learn to treat their bodies with kindness and love. No matter what society tries to force us into thinking what is the “real” definition of a perfect body, we must see our bodies as beautiful no matter how imperfect they are. Hopefully the continuation of body positive movements in 2017 will see a downturn in children hating their bodies before they even understand them.



In North Dakota, there was a vicious standoff between the construction of the North Dakota pipeline and the Standing Rock Sioux tribe who were protesting the construction, saying it would destroy their sacred land and probably their water supply.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is a project that would have expanded approximately 1,172 miles, from North Dakota down south to Illinois. This Project was expected to carry nearly half a million barrels of crude oil a day, enough oil to make 743.3 million gallons of gasoline per day. The arrival of modern horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing had made the Dakota Access Pipeline one of the largest oil developments in the U.S.

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe made it their mission to halt the progression of this \$3.8 billion dollar pipeline because it would have tore through a massive chunk of the tribe's sacred land — which the tribe had lost in a series of treaties forced upon the Standing Rock Sioux people over 150 years ago. In addition to digging up the sacred land — which includes burial grounds — the Sioux tribe were also protesting the fact that the pipeline is being built under the Missouri River, which is one mile away from this tribe's reservation. This was a crucial concern for the Sioux tribe, because if something were to happen to the pipeline and oil were to leak into the river, it could have potentially damaged the water supply for this reservation of 8,000, and maybe even more.

Although was mostly a peaceful protest, things weren't easy for the Sioux tribe. Some protesters, including children, claimed that during the protests they were attacked by dogs and pepper sprayed by private security and state law enforcement. In turn, the North Dakota police department claimed that four of their men and two of their dogs were attacked by the protesters. Morton County Sheriff, Kyle Kirchmeier said in a Sept. 3 statement: "Individuals crossed onto private property and attacked private security officers with wooden posts and flag poles."

As a growing number of protesters came to the aid of the Sioux tribe, North Dakota's Homeland Security Director, Greg Wilz ordered the removal of state-owned trailers and water tanks from the encampment on Aug. 22 because of alleged disorderly conduct. With many tribal members from all over of the nation filling the campsite, the loss of their drinking water supply was a huge blow to the protesters and sent local officials looking for an alternative source of water. "Based on the scenario down there, we don't believe that equipment is secure," said Wilz in the Bismarck Tribune.

Many active protestors petitioned that President Barack Obama calls for a halt on the pipeline until it has undergone a full review. President Obama commented on the issue in a November 2nd interview with the news site Now This: "This can be resolved in a way that I think is properly attentive to the traditions of the First Americans. I think right now the Army Corps is examining whether there are steps to reroute this pipeline in a way," he said. This didn't deter the actions of the protesters in the slightest; they also traveled to the headquarters of the Democratic presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton. The Clinton campaign had remained silent on the pipeline issue, until October 27, when Clinton's campaign released a statement on the ongoing protest — not standing on either side of the issue, staying completely neutral.

However, Senator & former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders had chosen the opposite approach of the Clinton campaign by standing with the Sioux tribe and protesters against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Sanders penned an open letter to Obama also issuing that he halt the progression of the pipeline and take a stand on this matter. "It is deeply distressing to me that the federal government is putting the profits of the oil industry ahead of the treaty and sovereign rights of Native American communities. Mr. President, you took a bold and principled stand against the Keystone pipeline – I ask you to take a similar stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline," Sanders wrote.

Even with some support of political figures, the protesters were still facing lots of trouble. Many of the protesters had been arrested and faced extreme hostility from the police and private security. On November 3rd, the Huffington Post reported that 141 people were taken into custody. According to witnesses, some were shot with rubber bullets. Shailene Woodley ("Divergent," "The Fault in Our Stars") is one of the many celebrities who was arrested during the protesting.

The battle ended on Sunday, Dec. 4 when it was announced that the Dakota Access Pipeline will be rerouted so as to not go under Lake Oahe. It is already $\frac{3}{4}$ complete so it will still exist, just in a different direction. Protestors are now looking toward the Bayou Bridge Louisiana Pipeline being constructed by the same company. The plan is to connected the Bayou Bridge to the Dakota Access in order to facilitate fuel from Texas refineries to elsewhere in the country. Protestors state that it would run through the Atchafalaya Basic, the largest natural swamp in the United States, and contaminate water and other natural areas if the pipeline were to leak. The battle doesn't stop for these "Water Protectors" until there is a guarantee of preservation and clean water for all people on "Mother Earth".



Military veterans, most of whom are native American, confront police guarding a bridge near Oceti Sakowin Camp on the edge of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation on Nov. 30, 2016, outside Cannon Ball, North Dakota.

*Credit:
Scott Olson / Getty Images*

The Electoral College Project

By Terrance Turner

In light of last week's election, many Americans are questioning their faith in their country and its democratic process. One of the more hotly debated aspects of that system is the Electoral College. As defined by The New York Times, "The Electoral College is a group of people that elects the president and the vice president of the United States. (The word 'college' in this case simply refers to an organized body of people engaged in a common task.)" Why does this system exist? As the National Archives and Records Administration's website explains, "The founding fathers established it in the Constitution as a compromise between election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens."

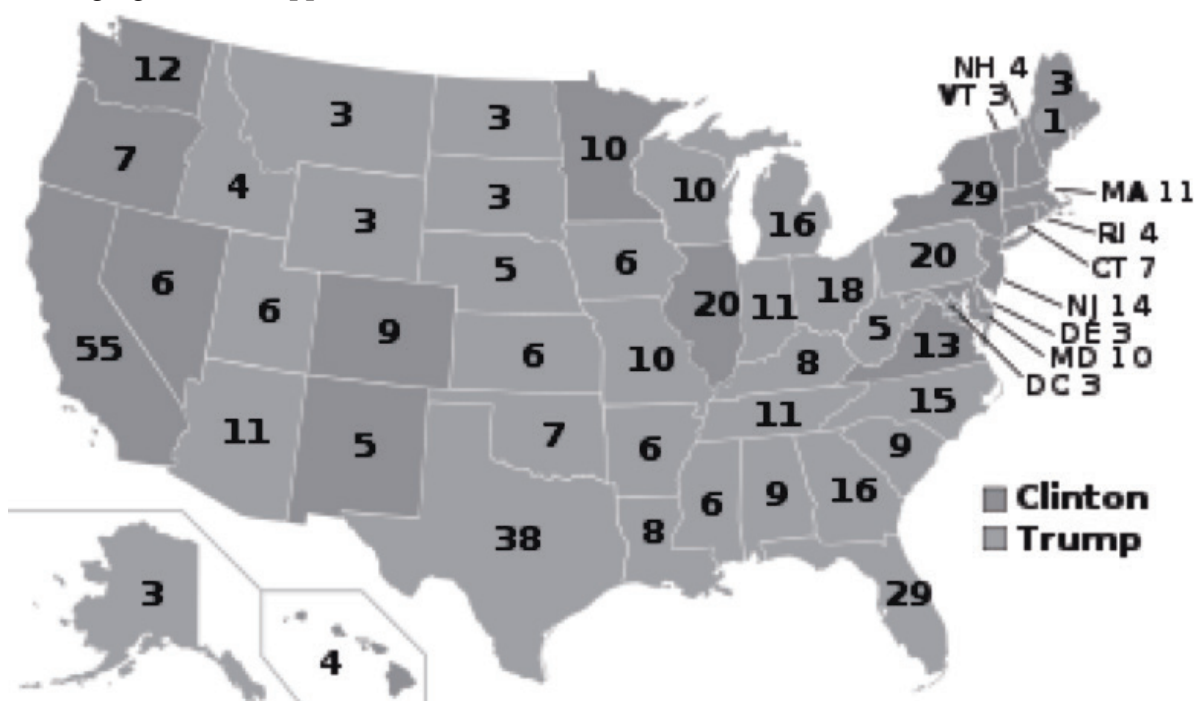
The American people do not elect a president directly. Instead, they vote for each candidate's "electors," a group of individuals who get the final say. Each state receives a number of electors equal to the number of its representatives in Congress. For example, Texas, which has two reps in the Senate and 36 in the House, gets 38 electors. The District of Columbia, which has no real representatives, has three electoral votes.

Each state, except for Maine and Nebraska, has a "winner-take-all" system. If a presidential candidate wins the popular vote in a state, he or she gets all that state's electors. Currently, there are 538 electors in total (symbolizing 100 Senators, 435 House representatives, and D.C.'s three votes), so a candidate needs a majority of 270 electors to win. There have been at least five occasions when a candidate that has won the popular vote has lost the election: 1824, 1876, 1888, the infamous 2000 debacle, and now 2016 — in which Hillary Clinton's lead has now exceeded one million. Chris Walker, from the millennial media site Mic.com, wrote on Nov. 17th: "Clinton won 62,825,754 votes as of this writing (believe it or not, ballots are still being counted). Trump, by comparison, won around 61,486,735 votes, a difference that favors the former secretary of state by more than 1.3 million votes." As the political magazine the Nation points out, this is the largest popular vote total in history for a losing candidate. But her opponent has 306 electoral votes to her 232, making him President-Elect.

If this system seems confusing and undemocratic to you — or if you think it should be changed — you're not alone. Clinton herself called for its abolition in 2000; the President-Elect himself called the system a "disaster for democracy" in 2012 and maintained the position in an interview with "60 Minutes" last week. (He tweeted two days later that the system was "genius.") 63% of Americans wanted it gone when Gallup polled them in 2013, and a consensus is growing.

"The Electoral College is a democratically indefensible anachronism that dilutes minority votes while disproportionately amplifying whites' votes," wrote Slate's Mark Joseph Stern on Nov. 10th. He's not wrong. A data analysis by BuzzFeed News found that in 2012, every white registered voter had the influence of 1.05 registered voters in the Electoral College. For blacks, the impact was 0.91 voters. For Hispanics, it was 0.87; Asians, 0.58. Therefore, white voters carry twice the impact of Asian ones under the electoral system. This issue is bigger than red, blue, Republican or Democrat. As The Nation's John Nichols put it, "This is about democracy itself. When the winner of an election does not take office, and when the loser does, we have evidence of a system that is structurally rigged. Those who favor a rigged system can defend it—and make empty arguments about small states versus big states that neglect the fact that many of the country's smallest states (Delaware, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont) backed the popular-vote winner. But those who favor democracy ought to join their voices in support of reform."

But how? Sen. Barbara Boxer has proposed a constitutional amendment to get rid of the Electoral College, but that requires approval from $\frac{3}{4}$ of the states. An easier option would be the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC). The agreement reforms the College by having states pledge all of their electors to the winner of the national popular vote. According to the project's website NationalPopularVote.com, ten states and the District of Columbia are on board. (For the record, the list includes Rhode Island, Vermont, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Washington, New Jersey, Illinois, New York, and California.) This consensus accounts for 165 electoral votes, 61% of the 270 needed for the compact to become official. The website allows you to send a message to your local and state representatives via email, encouraging them to support the NPVIC.



Electoral map courtesy of Wikipedia.

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