

# THE AMERICAN QUESTION

## Sound Design Notes

### General Thoughts

- There are a few moments in the interviews where Guy says, “*mhmm*,” “*yeah*,” “*huh*,” general one word phrases off camera that don’t contribute to the material. If these can be mitigated or eliminated, that would be terrific.
- I want to really bring the environments to life, especially within the experiential scenes, like the gym. Let’s lean into that.
- With all b-roll, let’s design the environments they exist in where it makes sense. I think this can bring the world more vividly to life.

### Itemized Notes

1:00:07 - 1:00:23:18: As each logo hits, let’s have an ambient FX that brings them in and out. This should be subtle.

1:00:25:00: When we move from the stars, there should be a delineating *whoosh*, something that also feels subtle.

1:00:25:26 - 01:02:01:07: Through the remainder of the animated portions of this sequence, I’m open to creative ideas that might bring some of these images to life. Leaning into the various cultures, war, and such, I believe there might be some things we can do — so long as they don’t feel distracting to the material.

One way to approach this — we could utilize ancient sounds of battle and conflict in the first half, evolving that into more modern sounds of protest around 01:01:48, when we zoom into the modern United States. This could grow into a swell that moves us right into the title sequence, perhaps peaking at the title card?

1:02:08:09: For this entire title sequence, if there is a way to streamline the audio of the presidents to sound more consistent, that would be helpful. For example, this clip with Jimmy Carter, I would like to mitigate the buzz.

1:02:13:00 - 01:02:20:00: Planes and bombs and soldiers in the water FX, build this out vividly.

1:02:21:11 - 01:02:24:18: Ambient FX emphasizing the logo, should be a call back to the opening logos.

1:02:27:21 - 01:03:48:13: Where it makes sense through the remainder of the title sequence, bring the b-roll visuals to life through effects. Protests, fires, assembly lines, crowds, etc. Underneath everything, a rising bass drone should culminate into silence at “directed by.” This should help ratchet up tension and foreboding.

As Reagan speaks, suck all the air out of his dialogue progressively from the beginning to end of the statement, slamming into deafening silence from the FX and conclusion of the music when we get to “directed by.”

01:03:56:07 - 01:04:03:12: Packing noises FX from the images

01:04:08 - 01:04:18:14: Working noises, mouse scroll/click, computer typing, writing, etc. FX

01:04:23:15 - 01:04:29:03: Busy city noises FX, we shot this in COVID, so pretending it's busy.

01:04:29:10 - 1:05:06:08: Open to creative ideas that may bring these photo sequences to life.

01:05:06:08 - 01:05:16:01: Busy city noises FX

01:05:20:19 - 01:04:39:16: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:05:39:22 - 01:05:54:00: Working noises, mouse scroll/click, computer typing, writing, packing, suitcase rolling, door shutting, etc. FX

01:05:54:01 - 01:06:03:02: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:06:03:03 - 01:06:30:14: Busy city noises FX. Let's try to make the car/road noise consistent, accelerating and decelerating, coming to a parked position by 01:06:30:14

01:06:30:14: Make a consistent car noise, so the repetition is less obvious.

01:06:37:19 - 01:06:46: Zoom in whoosh and plane taking off FX

01:06:46:10 - 01:06:54:01: Cold wind FX, this is all frigid winter. America is in a Narnia-like deep freeze for the entire first half of the film. Yes, I am Aslan — but we're not including that ;)

01:06:54:13 - 01:07:02:15: Interior basketball court FX, exterior cold wind FX

01:07:00 - 01:07:48: Clearly, there's not much consistency in the intercutting of dialogue here. How can we use room tones or ambient textures to even it out?

01:07:07:18 - 01:07:16:06: Three step progression, first cold wind, flag flapping FX. We're still in the urban city throughout this sequence.

01:07:49:00 - 01:08:00:18: Part two, cold wind FX, rising higher than in the previous sequence.

01:08:04:01 - 01:08:10:02: Part three, cold wind FX reaches its peak.

01:08:27:00 - 01:08:45:15: Factory noises, assembly line FX — industrial parts

01:08:45:16 - 01:09:01:06: Cold wind FX returns, but as we go interior, it hollows out — revealing the empty spaces of the abandoned interiors

01:09:04:05 - 01:09:59:00: Emulate the varied environments displayed in the b-roll, emphasizing the disparities in sound textures for Rural Americans vs Urban Americans.

01:10:22:21 - 01:10:33: Fissures dividing these counties FX, open to suggestion.

01:10:42:17 - 01:10:58: Fissures dividing these counties FX, open to suggestion.

01:10:59 - 01:11:36:17: Driving noises with exterior cold wind FX from the interior of the car. POV we're in the driver's seat.

01:11:37:02 - 01:13:51:13: Lean into the gym throughout. Use the b-roll to emphasize our environment, as informed by what can be done to clean up the audio from the interview.

01:13:47: Some dialogue element seems to be coming in from Guy? Remove.

01:13:51:14 - 01:13:57:17: Cold wind FX, birds flapping and cawing on the lake, crashing waves FX

01:13:57:18 - 01:17:53:15: This should be a quieter space, just focus on cleaning up the dialogue. Introduce ambient FX for the exterior and interior b-roll shots as it makes sense.

01:15:00 - 01:15:02: The laughter should be a little more muted, less bright. The laughter at 01:14:46 is a good reference, not quite that low, but not as high as presented.

01:18:00 - 01:18:25:01: The cold wind FX moves into a full blizzard, calming down back to the wind at the end of the sequence. I think it's okay if that blizzard is happening outside as Ange speaks?

01:18:25:01 - 01:20:27:18: The blizzard has ended. We're in the suburbs FX. This should be a quieter space, just focus on cleaning up the dialogue. Introduce ambient FX for the exterior and interior b-roll shots as it makes sense.

01:19:21: Remove sneeze.

01:19:40: Can we do anything to remove the camera / tripod wobble noises in this segment?

01:20:10: Remove sniffle.

01:20:27:19 - 01:20:56:00: The wind starts picking up again, the snow trickling through FX. This falls off into Yuval Levin, a storm of nostalgia.

01:20:56:05 - 01:21:03:04: The storm SLAMS into a newspaper opening, entering the living room of the 1950s. See if something creative strikes you here.

01:21:05:04 - 01:21:59: Introduce ambient FX for the exterior and interior b-roll shots as it makes sense.

01:21:47 - 01:21:50: Suck the air out of the room as he completes that statement.

01:22:22:00 - 01:22:34:17: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:23:08:04 - 01:23:31:21: We're back in the car driving again. Flag flapping FX, interior car FX, etc.

01:23:31:22 - 01:23:50:08: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:23:50:09 - 01:24:09:09: Lighter wind and rural town FX, snow crunching FX, etc.

01:24:34:16 - 01:24:40:01: Bring the distribution warehouse to life, but we remain in the school/gym environment — more of an underlay FX.

01:24:41:12 - 01:25:12: Clean up the camera noise and lean into the environment of the pharmacy. Clean up the room tone for John, probably starting his space at the top of the sequence with the pharmacy integrated.

01:25:00 - 01:25:00: Remove my talking in the background.

01:25:19: There's a clip of something here that should be cut out.

01:25:33 - 01:25:38: Remove Guy talking in background

01:25:50 - 01:25:54: Remove Guy talking in background

01:25:59: Is Guy's audio missing?

01:26:02: Remove "mhmm" if possible

01:26:04:02: Lean into the news package FX for this section

01:26:10:03: Is Guy's audio missing?

01:26:32:00 - 01:27:45:21: Introduce ambient FX for the exterior and interior b-roll shots as it makes sense.

01:27:11: Is Guy's audio missing?

01:27:22: Through all of Carol Graham's interviews, she was clicking her pen til we stopped her. Try to remove.

01:27:39 - 01:27:53:10: As this Spanish scratch audio comes in, let's try to mitigate the room noise / air and make it textural to the environment. Remove camera noise as possible.

01:28:00:34: Remove "Mhmm" if possible.

01:28:01 - 01:28:06: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:28:17 - 01:28:21: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:28:21: Remove sniffle.

01:28:25:02 - 01:29:10:07: Introduce ambient FX for the exterior and interior b-roll shots as it makes sense. Rural town.

01:29:10:08 - 01:29:17:05: Bring the distribution warehouse to life, but we remain in Annie's environment — more of an underlay FX, shifting into Pranjal.

01:29:25: Is Guy's audio missing?

01:29:50: Is Guy's audio missing?

01:29:57 - 01:30:18: Introduce ambient FX for the exterior and interior b-roll shots as it makes sense. Rural town.

01:30:29:08 - 01:30:57: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:31:01 - 01:31:06:23: Suck the air out of the room as he completes the statement.

01:31:07:00: SLAMS into the sound of children at school, playing and talking, heard from the interior center in the exterior POV

01:31:13:11: Children talking interior FX begin, extend through the sequence as it makes sense.

01:31:14:00: Remove sniffle

01:31:25:00: Remove sniffle

01:31:35:00: Remove sniffle

01:31:40:00: Some camera or mic rumble going on here? Can we clean that up?

01:31:57:00: Remove “hmm” if possible

01:32:12:01: Ambient FX for the exterior b-roll shot. Rural town.

01:32:19:14 - 01:32:40: Ambient hits between these old photo transitions, moving between these shots for emphasis? Should call back to the opening logos, but subtle.

01:32:45:16 - 01:32:53: We're on the boat FX

01:32:56:17 - 01:33:17: Ellis Island arrival to America FX, noisy, echoey hall, outdoor ship etc.

01:33:21:22 - 01:33:31:00: Ambient hits between these old photo transitions, moving between these shots for emphasis? Should call back to the opening logos, but subtle.

01:33:39:14 - 01:34:06: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:34:15:23 - 01:34:35: Ambient hits between these old photo transitions, moving between these shots for emphasis? Should call back to the opening logos, but subtle.

01:34:37:00 - 01:35:13: We're hearing the storm thaw for the first time. Lean into the drips and the melting FX, starting to hear some birds and nature.

01:35:10 - 01:35:20: Suck the air out of the room as Amy completes her statement, culminating into a loud flapping away of the birds.

01:35:20:14 - 01:35:50: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life. Moving into the b-roll, ambient FX as they make sense.

01:37:07:22 - 01:37:26: Ambient exterior winter / interior car FX / exterior wind from interior house FX

01:37:35:07 - 01:37:46:05: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:37:46:06 - 01:39:25:13: There's some camera noise / dog panting throughout the interview, I'd like to clean that up as much as possible.

01:39:25:14 - 01:40:55:10: Ambient exterior / interior FX as they make sense

01:40:50:00 - 01:42:39:00: The audio here is pretty rough with all of the environmental areas, no individual labels on the subjects. Anything we can do to clean this up is great, especially the slamming noises from walking and such.

01:41:03:10 - 01:41:13: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:42:40:00 - 01:46:22:04: Through this whole transitional sequence, let's use the same technique from the title sequence — using a bass ramp to build tension, escalating throughout. Since this is longer, it probably has to build in a different way, but consider how to do it.

Smooth out the audio between news clips to make it as seamless as possible.

It also might be good to play with rising voices of tension / protest and such throughout too, get creative with it!

01:42:52:00: Ambient FX slam to emphasize 2017

01:43:31:00: Ambient FX slam to emphasize 2018 (remove the existing one for consistency)

01:44:30:19: Ambient FX slam to emphasize 2019

01:45:11:00: Ambient FX slam to emphasize 2020

01:46:17:16 - 01:46:22:04: Suck all the air out of the room with Amy's statement, all of the ambient FX and music and noise comes to a deafening roar — and then —

01:46:22:04 - 01:46:50:06: The silence of nature, a stark contrast FX, with walking noises, birds, wind — tranquil calm.

01:46:50:06 - 01:46:55:17: Writing noises, computer noise FX, etc.

01:46:55:18 - 01:47:41:17: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:47:59:02 - 01:48:06:23: Rope tugging FX

01:48:20:08 - 01:48:50:00: Ambient FX as they make sense for the images

01:49:02:18 - 01:49:12:12: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:50:30:16 - 01:50:39:02: Sketching FX, interior mind FX, perhaps something with breath, like someone is about to say something — if it doesn't get in the way of Tania?

01:50:45:15 - 01:50:54:08: A variation of the previous FX, processing information, some kind of ambient effect for "share back a little summary"

01:51:02:19 - 01:51:33:13: Sketching FX, interior mind FX, digital computer noises to indicate Facebook, Twitter, etc., build the bubble FX

01:52:23:14 - 01:52:32:21: Office FX, computer keyboard FX

01:53:01:02 - 01:53:13:20: Sketching FX, interior mind FX, something with the prism that's creative FX — maybe the digital noises and the prism blocking it out?

01:54:23:08 - 01:54:29:23: Ambient rising FX for tension, subtle

01:54:59:14 - 01:55:18:00: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

01:55:30:23 - 01:55:36: Car passing FX, exterior FX

01:55:37 - 01:58:03: Ambient FX as they make sense, photo sequence FX, etc.

01:57:21:00: Ambient FX to emphasize news transition

01:58:12:05 - 02:00:46: Have fun with this sequence, we have all the rights! Let's lean into the music to enhance it. I've edited it in a way where some of those pauses can help emphasize the content with rises and falls and such.

The singing should feel big and fill that church space.

Eliminate any off camera talking that might be in mics from me.

The "call me" at the end should echo off into Tania.

02:00:54:04 - 02:01:17:00: Phone noises, social media news feed FX, the microscope makes a hovering noise, zooming into that feed FX

02:03:52 - 02:04:05: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

02:04:39 - 02:05:32:11: Ambient FX as they make sense. Remove Carol Graham's pen clicking.

02:05:32:12 - 02:06:57: Annie's mic was having lots of issues during this shoot AND she had just had mouth surgery. Thus, it's a little muddly. Anything we can do to clear this up would be helpful.

02:06:55:17 - 02:07:03: Exterior Ambient FX

02:07:07:19 - 02:07:23: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

02:07:23 - 02:09:30:00: Ambient exterior FX, school FX

02:09:30:01 - 02:09:57:20: These structures collapse into rubble FX, burning into a smolder (see the smoke rising!), replaced with social media noises

02:10:09:18 - 02:10:17:22: Ambient FX

02:10:17:23 - 02:10:45:13: FX calling back to the opening animated sequence, but this is peaceful. Lean into the idea of glue that holds a country together with FX.

02:11:05:04 - 02:11:20: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

02:11:44:21 - 02:12:16: Ambient FX as they make sense

02:12:17 - 02:14:15: There's room tone changes in this, even out for consistency.

02:14:16 - 02:14:29: Ambient FX, the dripping water, etc.

02:14:30 - 02:14:41: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

02:14:42 - 02:16:39: City noise FX, Ambient FX as they make sense.

02:15:12: Get rid of Guy's "hmmm"

02:15:36: Get rid of Guy's "mhmm"

02:16:39: We cut off the rest of his statement, anything we can do to make it feel more like a period instead of a comma is great.

02:16:40 - 02:17:11: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life. Ambient FX to emphasize the typography when introduced.

02:17:18 - 02:17:42: Open to creative ideas that may bring these animated sequences to life.

02:17:49 - 02:17:58: Ambient outdoor FX

02:19:25:10: Ambient outdoor FX

02:19:50:19 - 02:20:00: Flag flapping FX, ambient outdoor FX

02:20:30 - 02:20:33: Suck all the air out of the room

02:20:34:23 - 02:20:55: No ambient FX! This should be in silence aside from the VoiceOver.

02:21:46:16 - 02:22:02:00: It might be good to do some FX here that harken back to the immigration, protests, etc., to make a statement about the nature of progress — a summary.

02:22:07 - 02:23:09:06: Ambient noises as they make sense. In this cemetery sequence, I have thought about the idea of calling back to the wars and "voices of the past," kind of echoes of all the people who have died to create the society we enjoy. The notion of shared sacrifice. What do you think?

02:23:09:07: Baby noises, contrast death and life FX

02:23:43:23 - 02:24:09: Ambient FX, suitcase wheeling back, door closing, etc.

02:24:36:00 - end of animated titles: Ambient FX that enhance the typography