

Donald Trump is not always an easy man to take seriously. It's difficult to imagine the host of a reality TV show making an inaugural address or meeting with Pope Francis. It also isn't always easy for some Americans to imagine the people who are voting for Donald Trump. When the image of Trump is paired with some of his comments that have an eerie resemblance to a history of racial demagoguery in this country, for some Americans picturing Trump supporters involves images of hateful people promoting ideas such as xenophobia and white supremacy. While it's been revealed that some of the people who support Trump do in fact think that way, it would be unfair and inaccurate to attribute that ideology to all supporters. As Donald Trump wins more and more states in the primaries and other Republican candidates continue to drop out, it's becoming increasingly more important to recognize and listen to voices of those voting for Trump. Their opinions speak to very real feelings among an increasing segment of the United States population.

In the following case study, a group of Trump supporters express their reasons for voting Trump. Throughout the interviews many common themes appeared time after time in every interview. The themes are broken down into the following chapters: Trump's position as an outsider and businessman, his public personality, the role of nationalism in the 2016 election, and the role of race and racism within what some believe to be a "post-racial" United States. While I've included some analysis using other scholarly works in order to better understand particular viewpoints, the majority of this study is Trump supporters expressing their own reasons for voting for Trump. The group included here is small and cannot reflect the entire segment of the population voting for Trump in the upcoming election, but hopefully it will offer

a qualitative perspective that might dispel some of the rumors and images surrounding Trump supporters and offer a more realistic and honest look into their outlook on the country.

It will be shown that for most Trump supporters, the reason they are behind the candidate is because they are frustrated. As one supporter puts concisely:

The media makes it sound like Trump supporters are uneducated. It's so condescending.

We are fed up with them! They don't do anything. Our country stinks.¹

Supporters are tired of working hard and not seeing the pay off. They are worried about the future of the country and what will be left for their children. And they are exhausted with the lack of change that has been promised to the country year after year. For Trump supporters, the candidate offers a new chance for the country. As a political outsider and as a man who loves the country that gave him so much, supporters believe that Trump is the only candidate who might have a winning chance at making America great again.

CHAPTER I—Anti-Establishment and a Business Man

The theme that appeared within every supporter's interview and that was the number one reason for most supporters voting for Trump is the candidate's position as outside of politics and as anti-establishment. The excitement over a candidate who is not the traditional career politician seems to stem from feelings of being frustrated with the current state of the country. Many supporters are exhausted with the two-party political system, what they believe to be the overly liberal media, and the country's economy. Supporters believe that because Trump is not a career politician and because of his success in business, he is the candidate that will offer solutions to

¹ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

many of the problems ailing the country. For those voting for Trump, he is the only candidate that is truly for the people, while others are merely in the race to promote the same agenda.

Anti-Establishment

For many supporters the appeal to Trump is largely based on their feeling of being fed up with the current political system. Most supporters expressed a belief that both sides of the political spectrum were one in the same and as a non-politician, Trump offers a refreshing new approach to the problems of America. While many of the supporters identify as Republican and conservative, they have found that both the Republican and Democratic parties are beginning to frustrate them. One supporter explains that he has become upset with the Republican Party during this election:

I identified prior to this election season as Republican. And ever since they tried to derail the frontrunner, Trump, I realized probably not my party. I think Republicans are too conservative now and I think Democrats are too liberal and I think there's a middle ground and I think that's where I stand right now.²

The supporter has become tired of the way in which both political parties are running currently and believes that there needs to be some moderation. Further, he disagrees with the Republican parties attempt to discredit Donald Trump, which is something with which another supporter agreed:

I have never seen anything [other than Mitt Romney's condemnation of Trump] so disgusting in my life. Two years in a row loser came out and tries to knock down the

² V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

leader. It proved to me what I already knew about the Republican Party and strengthened my vote for Trump.³

Another supporter also stated that the disdain for Trump from both parties helped to bolster his support for the candidate:

As far as politically, he is hated by the Republican Party, he is hated by the Democratic Party, he is hated by the media. It shows me he is the only one who could make any changes. Both sides have been screwing us for years and years and years. He is the only one who is not able to be bought by the machine, let's just say.⁴

For this supporter, the fact that Donald Trump is disliked by every group in established politics, proves that Trump is the only candidate who will make a change to the system. The fact that Trump is largely paying for his own campaign and not held responsible to anyone within politics was an appeal for almost all supporters.

Trump has the freedom to not be controlled by lobbyists or people that are investing money. I think the Clintons and Obama and Bush are all conjoined. I think Republicans and Democrats are one in the same...The public kind of picks [the President] but there's still a hidden agenda. I'm a Trump supporter because maybe I'm a conspiracy theorist.⁵

Coming from outside of politics, supporters feel they have more reason to believe Trump because he is not going to be supporting the same agenda some supporters believe the government has been pushing since the eighties. Another supporter also believes there has been a certain set of ideals pushed throughout this country that Trump will put an end to:

³ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁴ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁵ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

He's not a career politician. He's not part of the establishment. I am so sick of establishment politics on both sides. There is no oppositional policy, no one to fight off this ridiculous liberal policy that has infiltrated our country. Nobody is stopping Obama, they're scratching each other's backs. The biggest reason I love Trump is because he's paying for his campaign, isn't beholden to anyone. He gets to say what he wants to say, do what he wants to do. He won't owe anyone anything.⁶

Supporters believe that because Trump is not taking money from anyone and financially, has nothing to gain, his motive for running is clear:

He's not owned by the establishment, he's not going to be owned. He's not a politician. He's going in there because he really has a belief in how American should be great. He believes in this country. He believes America can be great again and he's not going to go in there and do the same things that have been tried after Reagan left.⁷

Supporters believe Trump is not going into office to scratch the backs of other members of the political system but to actually bring about change because he sees the potential of the country. For supporters, Trump's self-sufficiency and role as an outsider of the political system is evidence of this.

Some supporters feel that Trump's position as outside of government means that Trump is more middle ground rather than far right. Because Trump is an outsider, and because he is more down the middle, Trump will be able to solve the issues that supporters actually feel are hurting the country. This supporter remarks on why he is able to overlook some of the aspects of Trump's campaign that he disagrees with:

⁶ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁷ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

I do disagree with him on quite a few things, but I have never found that I agree with anybody on every issue and that's the problem. There's a middle ground and I see him as being more of the middle ground, despite what people are saying. Saying he's far right. Ted Cruz is absolutely far more conservative than Trump could ever be.⁸

This supporter goes on to explain why he has faith that Trump will be able to solve the problems actually harming America:

It's hard because he wasn't a politician. You could site Hillary, she's been in politics forever, so, yeah, she's acted on a lot of things. Even Ted Cruz. So, Trump, a little bit of a wild card, but that's part of the fun, I think. We trust him because he's a successful person. We trust he's going to make the right moves, and I think he's a lot more liberal than we give him credit for. I don't think he cares that much about gay marriage or abortion. So, I like even his social ideals. I don't think he makes a big fuss out of nothing. I don't think he cares about gay marriage. It's legal, I mean, it's already legal. The Supreme Court already passed it. Abortion, all these things, he doesn't mind. And again, that's why I like Trump, it's the economy. I really think he's going to benefit the economy more than any candidate now.⁹

This supporter believes that Trump is not caught up in the liberal, conservative dichotomy but instead, as anti-establishment, is able to work to solve the problems, like the economy, that actually need solving, rather than focusing on distracting debates such as same-sex marriage and abortion.

⁸ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁹ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

Throughout the interviews, every supporter expressed feeling fed up with the current state of the country, be it the economy or the political system itself. Supporters feel as though both parties are working for themselves and one another rather than for the people. For this reason, supporters believe Trump is the candidate for the people. Because he is self-funded, because he doesn't have the same ties to Washington that other candidates have, Trump will put forth solutions that his running mates cannot. While discussing his role in the race as an anti-establishment candidate, many supporters also referenced Trump's success as a businessman. Because Trump has a history of success in the private sector, supporters feel he will be just as successful as the President of the United States.

The Business of Running the Country

Related to his outsider position, supporters call on Trump's success in the business field. For many supporters, this success is evidence that Trump will be able to run the country. When discussing Trump's business acumen, supporters defend the failures people have routinely called attention to and they also defend the idea of the next President coming from outside the political sector. Trump's success in business has proven to many supporters that he is actually more qualified than other candidates, as one supporter exemplifies:

The forefathers didn't want career politicians. They wanted teachers, lawyers, doctors, but no, we made career politicians. Donald Trump is the only person in the entire race who's ever done anything. Bernie Sanders was a bum, living off welfare. Hillary Clinton should be in jail. Donald Trump created an empire. We need someone very strong if anything's going to change. He's the man we need or else we'll see nothing [change.]¹⁰

¹⁰ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

Another supporter also agreed that because Trump has performed well in the business sector, he will likely perform well in politics because of his ability to work hard:

I'd point out his success as a businessman. And, I know, the small loan of a million dollars, we've all heard it probably 2,000 times now, but you give anybody a million dollars, let's say ten million, they're not turning it into what he turned it into. You could call out all his business ventures and say, "Oh, Trump Vodka didn't succeed." The fact that he even had his own airline or the fact that he even had his own vodka brand is incredible. So, I think those arguments are really not legitimate.¹¹

Not only has Trump proven that he can work hard and turn a small loan into much more than that, but supporters believe that Trump's business success proves that he knows how to negotiate. When explaining why he is voting for Trump, one supporter expresses a belief that Trump is the best candidate because he is willing to compromise:

Number one, he's a winner. Number two, he can get things done. While he hasn't been in government, he's been in the private sector and he's been able to take a company—he's been able to take one million dollars and turn it into, some people say four billion, some people say ten billion, but in the billions of dollars. And you have to be able to get stuff done. You have to be able to work with both sides. I think that's the biggest thing that he can offer the country. I think he wants to work with people and he's not just going to sit there and say, "Oh, you're a liberal so I'm not going to work with you." Because people with common sense realize that that's not the way to run the country and it's how it's being run right now. People like Ted Cruz don't want to work with Democrats and you're

¹¹ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

never going to run a country like that. The Republicans in Congress right now don't want to work with President Obama or any of the Democrats and it's why you have—it's why I believe there's a stalemate in government. So, I think that's the biggest thing that he offers.¹²

Like the other supporters, this man is not put off by the fact that Trump is coming from outside of government, but believes he has actually proven himself to be potentially successful in politics. He believes that unlike other politicians, Trump is willing to negotiate and work with a variety of people rather than favoring one party and therefore will accomplish more in Washington than any other candidate.

For many supporters, Trump's success in business is proof that he knows how to hire the right people and manage his employees. Because of his ability to do this, many supporters believe he will make smart appointments and manage the country like a business. One supporter explains how closely tied business and politics are:

As a businessman you better be a politician or you're not going to be successful. He's a manager. That's probably the basic reason, or number one reason, I support the man—is he has the personal skills.¹³

The supporter believes because of Trump's success in business, he has already proven that he can be successful in managing the country. Another supporter also believes that because Trump knows how to handle people, he will be able to manage the country well:

¹² 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

¹³ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

He's going to shake things up in Washington. Yes, he runs 20,000 employees. He does it successfully. We need to get rid of every lifelong politician and just send them back¹⁴

Not only do supporters believe Trump's personal skills and ability to manage large numbers of people reflect well on his ability to run the country, but they believe Trump knows how to hire the right people for the job. One supporter believes that in terms of Trump's public persona, he knows exactly what he is doing:

I am of the firm opinion he has the best minds on his payroll. People are telling him to act like a buffoon, but as he progresses he'll form into the presidential candidate.¹⁵

The supporter believes Trump has hired smart people to be on his team and to increase his popularity among voters. Another supporter expresses how he thinks Trump's skill in hiring smart people will translate into his presidency:

He's going to make really smart appointments, not people who are his friends, people who actually know what they're doing. Replacing people with education. The military is not a social experiment. What's next, transgender? You can't put this nonsensical transgender junk. The military is bred to kill. To kill, to defend America from aggressors, and Obama is destroying it. These women who've never served, never flown an airplane. Trump will put people who have the experience.¹⁶

The supporter believes that Trump, because of his outsider position and his ability to run a business, will make wise appointments within the government that best serve the country. The supporter then also used the discussion of Trump appointments to explain why he think Trump is

¹⁴ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

¹⁵ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

¹⁶ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

the best candidate to strengthen the military, demonstrating a concern over the state of the country.

Because Trump has been so successful, other than a few failed business ventures, supporters feel as though he will be able to handle the issues that are truly plaguing America. Every supporter who participated in this study expressed feelings of being fed up with the current state of the country and for that reason the number one attraction to Donald Trump is his anti-establishment position. Because they feel as though politicians are working for nobody but one another, supporters believe that Trump is the only candidate who is in the race for the betterment of the country and the American people. Further, because of Trump's success as a businessman, supporters trust he will act on his promises to the people.

CHAPTER II: Donald Trump's Image

Even for those who cannot stand the candidate, for those who disagree with everything he says, there is something intriguing about Donald Trump. Be it his flamboyant body language, his uncensored way of speaking or simply his hair, the candidate has a particular image from which many people can't look away. As one Trump supporter puts it, "Fascinating. Basically, the man is fascinating."¹⁷ While they may not agree with every word Trump says, Trump's refusal to heed to "political correctness", his personality, the way he presents his values has struck a chord with many supporters. For many supporters, Trump is a candidate they can trust, he is a candidate to whom they can relate, whether it is in the way he speaks or the things he values.

Political Correctness

¹⁷ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

Donald Trump's personality is arguably not like any other candidate's running for office in 2016. The candidate has made many comments that have garnered a lot of media attention and rarely backs down, if ever, from any of them. While some people find this offensive and destructive, many supporters believe Trump is simply being honest. Supporters feel that "political correctness" is a condition that has been negatively affecting the nation and that Trump is the only person running who sees this. For that reason much about Trump's personality and image resonates with them. While not all supporters agree with everything the candidate says, most have an appreciation for his unapologetic manner. Beyond the fear of a too politically correct country, many supporters believe that Trump is being honest, while other politicians are more secretive, that they connect with Trump and his style of speaking, and that Trump is not afraid to retaliate, which supporters see as an appealing attribute in a politician.

One supporter remarks that the country has become too concerned with niceties when talking with one another:

I think it's so overrated: having a class act, think we're beyond that, I think we've evolved past the suit and tie, like a nice guy, like no, we have really big issues and we need to solve them. We don't have time to watch what we say, who we offend. I think that's—I think we're letting words hold a little too much weight nowadays, but that's a whole other topic. So yeah, his appeal is that he doesn't care. He doesn't care what he says as long as it's on par with what he believes.¹⁸

This supporter demonstrates a disdain for what he feels is an overemphasis on political correctness, on focusing too much on words and missing the true meaning. For this supporter he

¹⁸ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

can appreciate the way Trump presents himself because Trump is speaking the truth. Another supporter also feels as though Trump is merely being honest despite others finding the candidate offensive:

The thing he said about Mexicans, I didn't find offensive at all. He said a lot of them aren't nice people. I'm never insulted by facts. I cannot stand political correctness. It's destroying America.¹⁹

This supporter reiterates the point made by the previous in that he believes that Trump is not being offensive but speaking the truth and that the country has become too sensitive to words. The supporter further argued that Trump has not actually said many things that can be deemed offensive but that it is the media portraying a particular image:

People like me know it's a lie. But the idiots who only watch the Golden Globes, listen to rap music, smoke pot, will believe everything they hear. Trump hasn't said too many offensive things, but the media will have you [believe otherwise].²⁰

The supporter believes that not only has American become too sensitive to issues of political correctness, but also that Trump hasn't actually said as many offensive things as the media would have the public believe. He believes that those who are properly informed are more likely to understand the truth that Donald Trump is speaking rather than think of him as making offensive or prejudice comments.

Another area where Trump is often accused of being offensive is in regards to women. However, most Trump supporters didn't comment much on that issue or disagreed with it

¹⁹ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

²⁰ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

entirely. For example, when one supporter was asked how he felt about the accusation of Trump making misogynistic comments he responded in the following way:

You're talking about Megyn Kelly and Rosie O'Donnell. He doesn't like them and I disagree with that statement.²¹

Another commented on the accusations of misogyny but rather than denying that Trump has been offensive to women or arguing that the media has portrayed him as more misogynistic than he actually is, this supporter thought that Trump was merely being honest:

It's a man's world. That's another reason I like him. I think men should run the country.

That's a man's position to be President. But he shouldn't have to say shit like that. I think that [it's a man's world] is what he's trying to convey though.²²

The supporter touched on a common theme of disagreeing with the way in which Trump says things, but supporting the honesty he sees in the comment. The supporter didn't think some of the comments directed towards women were necessary, but he agreed with what he believed to be the intention. Both supporters who commented on the image of Trump as misogynistic either completely disagreed with the portrayal or did not find the comments offensive enough to turn them off from the candidate. Again, the responses represent a disdain for what they believe to be the overly politically correct condition of the country.

Along with being fed up with what they believe to be the politically correct state of America, many supporters agree with the way Donald Trump presents himself because it offers a counter image to the typical politician that they have grown tired of seeing. One supporter expresses how he feels that the presentation of Trump in the media is unsubstantial:

²¹ J in discussion with the author, April 2016.

²² LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

To me, what people say about Trump being crass, not being polish, to me it's all bologna. I'm sick of these slick suits.²³

In regards to the way Trump speaks, the supporter reflects a common theme throughout all the interviews that supporters are fed up with career politicians. The supporter is tired of the polished way of the other politicians and Trump offers a needed break from that routine. While supporters feel that Trump offers something different than the typical politician, some also feel that Trump is merely doing in public what other politicians do behind closed doors:

I know there's a lot of stuff that other candidates are saying that aren't being brought to light. I don't believe that Obama was really crying at the press conference, Hillary is guilty. I don't believe that other candidates don't ever say comments that aren't politically correct. His stuff is brought to light, whereas theirs is hidden.²⁴

Another supporter also makes this point:

It doesn't bother me that much because all people speak like that. They all do. But the shady politicians do it behind closed doors.²⁵

These supporters report on a distrust for the typical career politicians that they feel have been leading the country down the wrong path for years. They feel as though while Trump might be saying things that are offensive or perceived as politically incorrect, it is refreshing to have someone running for the presidency who is speaking that way openly. The supporters reveal a lack of trust towards other politicians and Trump's boisterous attitude portrays an honesty they can support.

²³ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

²⁴ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

²⁵ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

Related to the way in which Trump's way of speaking stands out from other politicians, supporters appreciate Trump's candidness because they can either relate to his way of speaking or supporters feel it shows the way Trump is simply a "regular guy". One supporter, while he often agreed with Trump and believed political correctness to be destroying the country found he sometimes did disagree with some of Trump's comments but was able to look past them because he could relate:

I wish he would keep some comments to himself, but I'm kind of the same way. I like that better than a bunch of smiling idiots lying to your face.²⁶

The supporter found that he could connect with Trump and his ability to speak what it is on his mind at all times, and that he preferred the honesty to the behavior of other politicians. Another supporter felt similarly when discussing Trump's way of speaking she related the conversation to herself:

I'm brutally honest, I say what's on my mind. If you don't like it, don't fucking talk to me...I believe in Freedom of Speech...I respect him [for speaking his mind].²⁷

The supporter felt as though she could relate to Trump and his honesty in speaking his own opinion and for that reason she respects the value the candidate has placed on freedom of speech.

Another supporter felt that Trump's way of speaking showed the world that despite his fortune, he is like any other American:

While he may be a billionaire, he acts and speaks like a normal guy. You know, he's not one of these politically correct smooth talkers like you see in the news. He's like me and

²⁶ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

²⁷ Z in discussion with the author, May 2016.

anybody else I know...He comes off like an average guy, and I really like that. And I think he truly is. I think he's genuinely an average guy.²⁸

The supporter sees a bit of himself when he sees Trump. Like the other supporters, he appreciates the way Trump speaks because he stands out from the traditional politicians that supporters have grown weary of and Trump represents a "normal guy."

While most supporters were able to look past some of the things Trump has said in the past, they had a little more difficulty agreeing with the way he has presented himself during debates:

[His presentation in debates is a] Total embarrassment. You have to learn to size people up in the room, [know] who's the aggressor.²⁹

This supporter did not always disagree with the things Trump said, but he did feel as though the candidate could have been more reserved during some debates. Another supporter felt a similar way. While this supporter normally agreed with Trump's public persona, there was one moment in particular he thought could be handled differently:

How he presents himself in debates? I thought he was fine. The only thing he probably shouldn't have done was the comments on his hands. While he didn't start the comment, it was made to him, he fired back. I think he would have made himself look better if he moved past it and said something different, not allude to the size of—for lack of a better word—how big his penis is.³⁰

²⁸ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

²⁹ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

³⁰ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

Trump supporters do not necessarily agree with all of the candidate's behaviors and comments, and do recognize some of the more ridiculous moments in Trump's run for presidency. However, supporters believe there are positive aspects in the way that Trump speaks and presents himself that they respect and appreciate.

Supporters recognize the aspects of Trump's public persona that might be deemed unattractive to many Americans, but they believe these aspects, such as Trump's egotism and narcissism, might actually translate well into leadership power:

Most people don't like the path this country's on. He's not perfect. He's a bit of an egotist, but we need someone with his kind of leadership power.³¹

This supporter previously mentioned that he does not think "the humble and meek seek office," which is further reflected here. Trump's ego does not worry him, because he believes the country is in need of someone with strong leadership skills that Trump has proven to have. Another supporter also recognized Trump's ego and spoke of it as something that attracted him to the candidate:

I kind of like the fact that he's a little bit of a narcissist. I think the cockiness and the confidence is something we need. I don't think we should lead from behind. I don't think we should have somebody who's reserved and doesn't want to say the truth. I think that's most Trump supporters [who think that way]. That he came out, said some things and people were like, "oh, wow! We're not following the script anymore!"³²

Like the previous supporter, this man believes that a narcissistic attitude and a large ego demonstrate good leadership power. Further, he expresses a feeling, one he believes all Trump

³¹ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

³² V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

supporters have, that he is tired of the routine of politics and is looking for someone who will change the path of the country. Trump's confidence is evidence that he might be the candidate to make that change.

A final aspect of Trump's way of speaking and public persona that Trump supporters approved of is the way Trump retaliates. Supporters felt that while Trump can be harsh, for the most part he promotes the idea that when a person is hit, he should hit back. One supporter reflects on this when discussing Trump during debates:

I think people try to peg it like he's starting all this stuff. Go back and he's being attacked and he's retaliating and then they try to pin on him, "Oh, that's a first grade thing to say, 'He started it.'" So, is he supposed to keep his mouth shut? When you get called out, you retaliate. That's something I do. I don't let somebody question me and my life and then, "No, I'm just going to be the bigger"—No, it doesn't work that way... I would like for him to tone it down in general. I would like for him not to call names and stuff unless, again, it was fired at him first.³³

Like previous supporters, this man was able to make a connection between Trump and himself when discussing the way in which Trump is prone to retaliate. While noting that Trump might get a little out of hand, and that he does hope the candidate settles down in terms of making insulting comments, the supporter is able to overlook those comments when they are in self-defense. Another supporter also reflected this idea:

³³ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

And is he insulting? Yeah, he can be insulting. But only when he's attacked first and I don't find any problem with that. You know, like he always says he gets hit and hits back harder and I think that's fine and I think the country needs to take that view as well.³⁴

The supporter not only agrees with the way Trump defends himself during debates and other instances but also believes that the country as a whole should take on this same type of defense.

The theme of hitting back harder when hit first also presented itself more literally when supporters were asked how they felt about the violence that has occurred at Trump rallies. Many supporters emphasized that they believed the instigators to be Trump protestors rather than supporters and that Trump's response, or lack thereof, was representative of his position on retaliation. One supporter emphasizes that Trump is not the only candidate to blame, and that he feels Trump is handling the violence in a way reflective of his campaign:

It's not his supporters. We've seen some instances, the video [of] somebody getting sucker-punched while being taken out. But, time and time again, you don't see these violent Trump supporters going to Bernie Sanders rallies, going to Hillary Clinton rallies, going to Ted Cruz rallies, you don't see that. So, I don't see how violence occurs at his event because of protestors and it gets pinned on him. And even Republicans, like Ted Cruz, they keep saying, "Oh, when you run a campaign like this with this platform, you're going to incite violence." I don't think he's done much of that. I really don't think—what's the most he said? That he would—like, if somebody hits you, hit them back. Yeah, that's the same thing with the way people have been attacking him verbally is

³⁴ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

somebody insults them, you go back at them. That's what this is. It's a competition and if you're going to stay silent, that's not what we need as president.³⁵

For this supporter, the violence at the rallies and Trump's history of responding with insulting comments is the nature of the game. The supporter feels positively for Trump because Trump does not sit back and allow others to attack him, but he speaks up. Another supporter shared similar feelings that Trump protestors are the inciters of violence at Trump rallies rather than supporters, and also that Trump reflects a feeling of fighting back that many supporters understand themselves:

The one in Chicago was really antagonized by the non-Trump ralliers. I think he just understands the feeling of wanting to hit somebody who's just running [his] mouth. He should either say, don't do it at all or not say anything. I think he's going off of what he thinks people like about him: he's ready to fight back. But it should be between ourselves.³⁶

While some supporters are critical of Trump's way of speaking, many find the candidate's manner refreshing. The fact that Trump is not careful of what he says and not worried about being politically correct proves to supporters that he is a candidate unlike any other. For many supporters not only are they supportive of Trump's public persona, but they also find themselves relating to him. Supporters feel that like Trump, when they believe in something they will speak up, and when they are hit, they will hit back. Some supporters also felt as though their solidarity with Trump's outlook also includes an appreciation of the same values, particularly in regards to work and family.

³⁵ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

³⁶ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

Hard Work and a Beautiful Wife

Because Donald Trump was born into money and has had multiple marriages, as well as affairs, when one thinks of the candidate the first thing that comes to mind might not be an American who pulled himself up by the bootstraps or a man who is devoted to family value. Some supporters, however, see the candidate differently. Because Trump has continued to work despite coming from money, because he has intelligent and successful children, and because he has not given up on love, some supporters feel as though Donald Trump promotes values and morals than align with their own. For example, one supporter felt that some of Donald Trump's life choices represent his commitment to hard work:

He inherited money. Most Americans would take that money and scream, "Wahoo! I'm set for life" and live off of it. And everyone's trying to make it sound like it's so easy.

Has he made some mistakes? Yes, who hasn't?³⁷

The supporter finds value in the fact that despite beginning with money, Trump continued to work and develop an even larger empire. The significance of a work ethic for this supporter is more clear when he discusses how he thinks other Americans view work:

When people say there are no jobs out there, yes, there are jobs. I wouldn't hire half these people. I work at a high school here. I wouldn't hire any of my students. No people skills. No hireable traits. And then we tell this other lie that everyone should go to college and that's a lie. Get a degree in Women's Studies and African American Studies and get a job. It's liberal policies that have created this monster. The liberal teachers at my school, this idea, you created this.³⁸

³⁷ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

³⁸ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

The supporter strongly values hard work and believes that Donald Trump shares this value. Because Trump worked, rather than taking his inherited money and relaxing, the supporter believes he represents the opposite of the liberal policies that are destroying the work ethic of the country as a whole. Another supporter also felt as though Trump's values aligned with his own:

I think he values economic success and working hard and ultimately being happy. And I feel the same way...I think what he really wants to do is make sure the American people are working. With all the discrepancies in the unemployment number that comes out every month, I think he wants to make sure that we get a transparent view of what the real economic situation in America is and that's what matters the most to me. Because to me, If you have a job, and you're making money, you can put food on the table and you're happy, you don't really care about anything—other issues aren't as important and you'll be satisfied with what you have and that's the same way I am. So, I feel like our morals align. A lot of what he says, I agree with and I think he values the same things I do. Which is, I guess, why I like him.³⁹

Similar to the previous supporter, this man also puts much weight on the value of hard work. He believes that all people in America should be working hard and that Trump also promotes this belief through his actions and words.

Along with agreeing with Trump's work ethic, some supporters also thought that Trump promoted family values. When asked what main points he would make when arguing his support for Trump, one supporter mentioned Trump's children:

³⁹ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

Another, I guess a little bit of menial thing, is his family. I think your family reflects who you are. His kids are class acts, they're not drug addicts, they're not running around like a lot of these politicians' kids. I mean, think about it, you see a politician's kid you don't even hear about it, they're just off doing their own thing. These kids care. If you ever listen to them, they're intelligent. So, he raised his kids correctly.⁴⁰

When the same supporter was asked whether he thought his values and Trump's aligned, family was the first point he made:

I would say [our values align]. He's raised a great family, beautiful wife. I mean, I don't think what the media is saying about him or trying to portray him as such an evil man. He's never done anything that evil. I mean, you could point some business things, I guess, like you say, "Oh, he tried to—he evicted an old woman" or some nonsense, but no, I don't think he's done anything to say otherwise that he's against my values or morals.⁴¹

The supporter recognizes that the media depicts Trump in such a way that many people think Trump is lacking in morals or places value on the wrong things. However, the supporter believes that when actually looking at Trump's actions, words, and the children he has raised, he in fact does show morality and places value in family, and the supporter himself relates.

Another supporter also felt that because Trump doesn't do drugs, does not drink, and works hard, he is clearly a man of high moral integrity. The supporter also remarked on family values losing importance in the country today:

⁴⁰ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁴¹ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

There are problems in family structure. The youth who are committing crimes and getting into trouble, they have family problems.⁴²

This supporter recognizes the degradation of family structure as the root of many problems among American “youth” today. He went on to express a belief that the solution to this problem isn’t “throwing money at it.” The supporter believes that the solution to problems that young people are facing is not in policy change but in the restructuring of family values. The supporter yearns for a candidate that promotes less government assistance and more moral integrity as the solution to problems such as crime.

Because Trump has been married three times, many argue that Trump in fact does not place as much value in family as he and his supporters would like people to believe. One supporter, however, argues that the Trump’s marriages do not reflect poorly on him, but can actually be demonstrative of a positive quality:

My friend said to me, “He’s been married three times” and I said, “You’re point being what?” What does that have to be with being President? Think of it this way: he believes in a grand love so much that he won’t give up until he finds it. That could show that he won’t give up on us.⁴³

Rather than look at the multiple marriages as a lack of value placed on the family structure, this supporter found that they demonstrated Trump’s ability to aim high. Because Trump only wants the best for himself, he will aim for the best for the country as well.

Supporters drew on the condition they felt America was in today when they discussed why they thought Trump was the best candidate. Whether they believe there is decay in work

⁴² F in discussion with the author, February 2016.

⁴³ Z in discussion with the author, May 2016.

ethic across the country or deterioration in family structure, they felt as though Trump will be the candidate to most effectively address these problems as President. They used Trump's history of working hard and the success of his children as evidence to support why they feel they share the same values with their candidate, and why those values make him a positive choice. The next chapter will demonstrate that supporters believe Trump not only values hard work and family, but he also values the success of the country as a whole, a feeling that many supporters can get behind.

CHAPTER III: Making America Great Again and Following the Rules

Donald Trump will tell you how proud he is to be an American. Once fined \$250 a day for flying a 15 by 25 feet American flag on an 80-foot-high flagpole in front of his home in Palm Beach, Florida, Trump told the city of Palm Beach they should be ashamed and sued for \$25 million seeing as his rights as an American were being violated. The issue was settled and Trump didn't walk away with 25 million dollars, but he did stand firm in his patriotism.⁴⁴ Those who are planning to vote for Trump in the 2016 election know how much Trump loves America and they love America too. They believe that Trump sees how great America is, or once was, and believe he wants to see the country meet its full potential. For many supporters, the appeal of Trump is that he loves the country that he wants to lead, he puts the interests of America first, and he cares about the citizens of the country. Not only does he care, but Donald Trump's policy plans and values reflect the traditions of the country as well. Throughout the interviews, supporters expressed strong feelings of nationalism and appreciation for America and its traditional beliefs. These ideas of nationalism displayed themselves in a variety of ways. The most common themes

⁴⁴ Donald Trump, *Crippled America*

related to the discussion of nationalism, however, included the way Donald Trump reflects a deep love for America and how that love mirrors their own, the moral and general state of the country, national security, immigration, the American Dream and the rules that must be followed to fairly achieve it.

Patriotism: The Need for a President Who “Loves America to Death”

One of the many reasons, for some the number one reason, these supporters have found themselves behind Trump is because they feel he truly loves America. In terms of patriotism, the clearest statements were in reference to Trump’s obvious love for America and it’s values. However, other patriotic themes came into play when discussing the state of the country itself and appreciation for the Constitution and what the interviewees believe to be the foundational values of the country.

When asked to list three words that describe Donald Trump, responses such as “American,” “Patriotic,” “Loves America” and “Caring” were commonly heard. The question was the first asked regarding Trump specifically demonstrating that Trump’s patriotism is a predominant marker of his image for many supporters. One supporter uses the fact of his outsider position as evidence that Trump is truly in the race for the love of the country:

He’s going in there because he really has a belief in how America should be great—he believes in this country. He believes America can be great again and he’s not going to go in there and do the same things that have been tried after Reagan left office [on] both sides [of the political spectrum].⁴⁵

⁴⁵ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

For this supporter, Donald Trump's stance as an outsider proves that rather than just being involved in the race for the political gain, he is in the running because he truly loves the country and has faith in it regaining the perceived lost greatness. Further, because Trump is not a politician and because he loves the country he is going to promote change that the supporter feels has not happened since the 1980's. Another supporter also stated that it is Trump's outsider position that proves he has a genuine love for the country and a desire to improve it:

He is self-funding. Yes, I know he does take donations from small donors but he's not bought by corporations or lobbyists I think he puts the interest of America first. I think that's the biggest thing, that he puts the issues of America first.⁴⁶

This supporter reiterates that because Trump holds a position different from the politicians who are running, he is not in the race for the advancement of his political career but for his genuine love for America. The supporter makes his point further when he was asked what Trump had to offer that the other candidates do not:

I mean, all the candidates love their country I believe, so they all feel the same way, but I think he has the desire, and he really wants to—for lack of a better phrase—make America great again. Displayed by his private sector record, he has the drive and the power—not the power but the ability to get things done.⁴⁷

The supporter believes in Trump when the candidate says he wants to “Make America great again,” and for this supporter it is a quality that Trump represents more than the other candidates. Another supporter drew on Trump's success to validate why he believes Trump truly loves this country and wants to see it succeed:

⁴⁶ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁴⁷ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

I think he cares. I think he cares a lot more than people give him credit for. I think people think it's all about the narcissism. I think he cares about this country because it's given him so much. I think he's caring, I know that's cliché. He's caring [and] a little narcissistic.⁴⁸

This supporter reflects a belief that if one receives success and wellbeing within his or her country, he or she will have a greater appreciation for the country in which they're living and a desire to see it improve or succeed. Not only did this supporter find Trump's care for the country as a identifiable factor of the candidate, but he discusses the trait in conjunction with another term, narcissist, he had also used to describe the candidate. While recognizing what he deems to be the narcissistic traits of Trump, the supporter finds a redeeming quality in Trump's capacity to care for the country.

Not only did many supporters find Trump as the candidate most representative of patriotism and a true love for the country, but also many supporters themselves demonstrated a sense of patriotism. The personal patriotism is demonstrated not only by the fact that they find this an important quality in a candidate but also in a great faith in the Constitution and in a concern for the safety of the country and it's ability to lead. One supporter demonstrates this type of patriotism when discussing the issue he sees as his current biggest concern:

[My biggest concern is] gun laws. I just think that's what makes America great. The reason they had [the Second Amendment] was so that we wouldn't be over thrown by our government, and that's why we have less terrorist attacks. I don't think it's guns that are the problem, I think it's drugs that are the problem and the border issue.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁴⁹ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

This supporter demonstrates a strong faith in the Constitution and the rights that it promises America's citizens. Not only does he have an appreciation for the country's rights but he also reveals another kind of nationalism, discussed later, that reflects the connection between patriotism and national security and defense. Not only did supporters find that Trump was the best suited candidate to protect their Second Amendment rights, but they also showed a great appreciation for the First Amendment, and believe that Trump does as well. A strong faith in the First Amendment appeared most frequently when discussing two topics. The first was in regard to comments Trump has made in the past that many people deemed offensive. The second topic was in response to the violence that has occurred at Trump rallies across the country. One supporter invokes the First Amendment right to freedom of speech when discussing things Trump has said, but applies it to the larger context of the American society:

[The] First Amendment is there to protect offensive speech---that offends me, you can't say it. Ironically, the Democrats and liberals are the fascists. They're trying to shut [freedom of speech] down on college campuses. If conservatives are coming in, if I don't like what you have to say it's hate speech, it's racism.⁵⁰

The supporter includes themes discussed earlier, about the way in which "political correctness" or disagreeing with somebody deems them a racist or hateful. In this instance, however, the supporter turns the tables when he declares that those trying to stop speech they disagree with, such as the Democrats and liberals, are the fascists. By mentioning fascism in contrast with the freedom of speech, the supporter reveals a strong belief and support in founding American values, so much so that anything countering those values is so un-American as to be fascist.

⁵⁰ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

It was also common that supporters bring up the First Amendment when asked about the violence at the Trump rallies and Trump's reaction to it. One supporter believes that those who protest Trump rallies are attempting to impede upon his right to free speech and not following the traditions of the country:

The fact that you have to organize protestors and send them to shut down Donald Trump's First Amendment right to speak, I think that's pretty pathetic. If you really want to shut down somebody like that, if you think they're a hateful demagogue or whatever you like to use, you know, you have the right to vote. Just like I have the right to vote for him, you have the right to vote against him.⁵¹

Not only did this protestor invoke Trump's First Amendment right that he feels is being restricted, but also he demonstrated a faith in the election process of the country, demonstrating his patriotism. The supporter has faith in the American political system and in the idea that if somebody wants to voice his or her opposition, then voting is an easily attained and effective way to make a point. The supporter's response to violence demonstrates that the traditional action of voting is American, whereas limiting someone's freedom of speech is not.

Simply by looking at Trump's now well known slogan, "Make America great again," there is a strong sense of patriotism Trump hopes to invoke in his supporters. By looking at the beliefs many of his supporters hold, there already exists a belief that America can be, and maybe once was, the greatest country in the world and that it has a responsibility to other countries. Trump's slogan itself demonstrates the attempt to bring out the feelings of patriotism in his supporters as noted by one interviewee:

⁵¹ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

I like that he's trying to bring some patriotism back because we've demonized it.⁵²

The supporter recognizes Trump's attempt to inspire patriotism within the country. Also, his use of the word "back" and by stating that patriotism has been demonized, demonstrates the way in which some Americans feel as though the country is not meeting its potential. While supporters all demonstrate a deep love for America and the desire to be represented by someone who also loves America, this quote emphasizes the way in which "again" in "Make America great again," resonates with supporters.

The "Messy" Decline of America: The Downfall of Morality and Stability in America

Despite their display of patriotism and support for Trump due to his clear love for America, many Trump supporters found that, while they love America, the state of the country is not one with which they are happy. This theme largely presented itself in the conversation of what they found to be morally right or wrong. While often this came up when asked whether or not they felt Donald Trump's values or morals aligned with their own, it also came up unprovoked when they were simply discussing why they felt the country needed Trump at this moment in time. Given the public discussion on the morals of Donald Trump, reflected in the comments he has made that many mark as xenophobic and racist and his declarations of how he would like to handle the situation of undocumented people within the country, some might find the strong moral compass of supporters as contradictory to what is being presented in the media. When one looks at the way in which Trump supporters understand things Trump has said, as discussed previously as well as in the next chapter, one might observe the wide definition of

⁵² V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

morality and how it is being applied by Trump supporters when discussing the state of the country.

Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham explain the way in which those who typically identify as liberal and those who usually identify as conservative often have different ideas of what the word “moral” encompasses. They explain that moralities have five foundational psychological systems that prepare emotional reactions to issues involving, harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity. Haidt and Graham argue that those who identify as liberal have moral intuitions that largely rely on harm/care and fairness/reciprocity whereas conservatives typically rely on all five foundations when discussing morality. When understanding the different ways in which political liberals and conservatives discuss questions of morality, one can see the gap that exists between those who oppose Trump, typically liberal, and those who support Trump, who are typically conservative, in understanding the moral drive of one another. When discussing the moral state of the country, many of these five foundations play a large role in what leads supporters to believe the country as a whole is facing a time of moral decay.⁵³

The foundation that was brought up most frequently was the one referencing purity and sanctity. Haidt and Graham explain that in many societies, this foundation is often applied to support a variety of virtues and vices related to bodily and religious activities. One supporter reflects this moral foundation when discussing things she has seen that she believes to be in poor moral standing:

⁵³ Haidt and Graham

I do really think morality is a big issue...[like] little kids having sex...we've become so nonjudgmental, that whole live and let live, we can't tell the difference between good and evil any more, be it marriage or crime...I don't want to see America go down the tubes.⁵⁴

The supporter reflects the psychological foundation of purity/sanctity as she emphasizes a clear value in the virtue of chastity, or at least until a reasonable age. Using "little kids" having sex as an example, the supporter emphasizes that the country is developing looser morals. Because of these looser morals, and a erasure of the boundary between "good" and "evil," the supporter concludes her discussion on morality with a fear that America itself is going to flounder. This supporter also emphasized a virtue in religious activity that falls into Haidt and Graham's description of purity/sanctity when discussing morality within the United States:

We have totally thrown God, any type of God, out of our schools, practices. Kids don't have a sense of boundaries...you don't make [sound] choices unless you're morally right.

⁵⁵

While not limiting her opinion to only a Christian God, the supporter does reflect a traditional American belief that some type of guiding divine force should play a role in structures such as schools. The supporter fears that without this guidance, children are not going to be making the type of choices that fit within the understanding of morality that encompasses all five foundations.

The foundation of purity/sanctity was the predominate theme among supporters when they were asked about whether or not their morals aligned with Trump's or when they themselves discussed their worry over the moral state of the country, however, supporters also

⁵⁴ M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

⁵⁵ M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

invoked the foundation of authority and respect. The authority/respect foundation is most prominent when the supporters discussed immigration, but it did appear in a general matter as well when discussing the trajectory of the country. Haidt and Graham argue that under this foundation societies value virtues related to respect, duty and obedience. One supporter, a high school teacher, emphasizes the importance of duty when discussing the way in which he feels students are not performing their responsibilities:

Nobody is asking them not to do their homework—except Xbox and pot. We've created this monster.⁵⁶

The supporter acknowledges that as a teacher he sees the way in which students are succumbing to less productive pleasures, such as video games and marijuana, rather than performing the duties that they have as students. He uses this example to reflect the way in which the country as a whole has deemphasized the value of hard work and responsibility through its changing moral state.

The largest themes when discussing the potential downward spiral of America were largely related to premarital sex, abortion, family structure and hard work, but there was also conversation revolving around the state of America that was not necessarily related to what one might think of as moral or immoral. For many supporters, this worry about the future of America is why they are getting behind Trump. One supporter put this very simply:

Everything's a mess. Everything in this country is a mess and you can't keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different outcome.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁵⁷ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

For this supporter, Trump offers something new that will change the direction of the country and hopefully clean up the mess left behind by both Republican and Democrat presidents in recent years. Another supporter also sees the condition of the country as poor and worries about the future:

Trump as a manager sees [economic insecurity]. It's not even on the horizon, it's here. I have four grown children, eleven grandchildren and I am so concerned with the future for them if the money they earn goes to debt service... Trump understands debt service, he's used it to his advantage to get out of bad situations.⁵⁸

Referencing the economy, and the burden it has on the American people, this supporter sees Trump as the best option to help prevent an economic future that continues to hurt the American people. Given the state of the country and its economy, the supporter feels he has legitimate reason to also worry about the future and the harm it may cause his children and grandchildren. Another supporter also reflected a fear for the future of America:

I do not like the place America is going. I knew what Obama was before he was elected. I do not want to live in a Socialist/Communist country.⁵⁹

While expressing some of the same fear as other supporters about the future of America, this supporter also emphasizes a strong faith in the traditional American system of capitalism. He expresses a feeling that President Obama has not done enough to avoid taking America down a particular path. He makes this point again, but also demonstrates a belief in the potential of changing the course of the country:

⁵⁸ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

⁵⁹ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

I think this is a turning point in this country. After eight years of Obama, I don't think we can survive four more years.⁶⁰

The supporter recognizes this election as an important time for America. He worries that the country might have a bleak future, but Trump offers the possibility of change for many supporters.

Overall, Trump supporters reflected a theme of strong patriotism and love for the country along with the need of a president who feels the same way, however, this did not mean that they felt that America is currently reaching its full potential. Many supporters expressed concern over the morality of the country. When one considers that viewpoints that are deemed more conservative place great importance on a variety of the psychological foundations of morality described by Haidt and Graham, it might become more clear as to why Trump supporters feel the way they do about the moral state of the country, and why they feel Trump reflects those same moral concerns. The supporters demonstrated a fear that America is generally, and more specifically, economically and morally, not in a positive place and the future looks dim. They find that Trump's love for America, what they perceive to be his moral values, and his background and knowledge offer the possibility of changing the course of the country. While domestic issues elicited heated responses from many of the supporters that reflected their patriotism and support for traditional American values, the discussion of national security, particularly involving the Islamic State, also encouraged a strong sense of nationalism, as well as fear, among many interviewees.

National Security: Knocking "the Hell out of ISIS"

⁶⁰ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

Of the people interviewed for this particular case study of Trump supporters, when asked which current issue is their number one concern, the vast majority listed national security and the threat of the Islamic State as the most pressing issue. In his run for presidency, Trump has advocated a “get tough” policy for handling situations that threaten America and for strengthening the American military. Under his platform, Trump has presented Americans with multiple groups to be fearful of and that Trump believes must be dealt with forcefully. Trump has promoted the idea of bombing all of the areas Trump suspects ISIS is holding oils. Trump argues that attacking those who attack America is putting America first and is something President Obama has not been doing. Trump states, “America is *not* what’s wrong with the world. I don’t believe we need to apologize for being hated by Islamic radical terrorists who hate our religion hate our freedom, and hate that we extend human rights to women.”⁶¹ This argument has resonated with many of the supporters who believe in foundational values of this country and who are fearful of those attempting to destroy it. The Trump supporters reflect a belief in retaliation, protection, and strengthening the military in order to bring back safety to the world and respect of the country. One supporter reflects on how she feels about the state of the country and why Trump is the best candidate to solve the problem:

I think we’re living in a very scary place and Donald Trump wants to make sure [we’re safe]. Others aren’t being realistic.⁶²

Not only are many Trump supporters concerned about morality and the economy, they are also worried about the current safety of the country. This supporter emphasizes the fear she feels about the safety of the country and believes that Trump’s solution to terrorism is both the best

⁶¹ Trump Get Tough

⁶² M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

and most realistic one. Another supporter also believes Trump will handle the issue of terrorism in a way that protects America:

I think, to use his phrase, he will knock the hell out of ISIS. The fact that they're still around—they're still there, taking over parts of Syria and whatnot is the problem. It just shows the lack of coordination that's been put by our President and the rest of the world by not addressing this issue. I think Trump has the right attitude. We can't treat these people like humans because they're not treating us like humans. So, let's even the playing field and let's kick their ass.⁶³

This supporter feels as though there has not been enough of an effort in attacking the threat of terrorism both in America and overseas. He emphasizes an American toughness that needs to be enacted upon those committing terrorist acts. The words and attitude of Donald Trump make sense to the supporter given his view on the people who are committing these acts. Another supporter disagrees with Trump's plans but offers a view of terrorism and the way in which it should be handled congruent with other supporters:

He supported ground troops in Syria, I don't think that's a good idea either. I think we should bomb the hell out of them, whatever, do our thing, but ground troops has proven to fail over and over. These people are animals, and not like in the racist way, but I mean this is never ending violence, so this is something we need to address. So, I think his platform with ground troops isn't going to work.⁶⁴

Similar to the supporter before, this interviewee has a strong view of terrorists as “animals” or less than human. While he disagrees with Trump's support of ground troops, he does believe

⁶³ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁶⁴ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

they should be handled in a serious way. Like the supporter before, he believes America should “do our thing” and bomb those suspected to be terrorists, representing a traditional support of American military strength. One supporter referenced recent attacks when making this point:

With terrorist stuff and the borders, his solution is extreme but he said it’s temporary. If you were to ask someone in Paris or Brussels they’d probably say absolutely [get tougher on national security and illegal immigration.]⁶⁵

This was not the only supporter to recognize the extremity to some of Trump’s suggestions to increase national security. Many found that some of his suggestions seemed impractical or questioned whether or not they agreed with them morally. However, many were willing to overlook this conflict for the safety of the country and the aspects of the platform with which they did find themselves agreeing.

Along with a strong support of traditional American values, and the belief that one of the things that make Trump the best presidential candidate is his love for the country, supporters also demonstrated their patriotism in terms of defense. One supporter believes that Trump is the best choice because Trump will bring the country to a place of respect in the eyes of other countries:

I really do think he’s going to make great changes in the country. I believe he wants to strengthen our military which is at its lowest since Reagan. I believe he will bring respect from other countries, which, I feel, is something that’s been lacking.⁶⁶

The supporter demonstrates a traditional nationalistic belief that the strength of a country’s military is linked to gaining respect from others. Further, he shows patriotism by stating that at

⁶⁵ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁶⁶ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

one point when there was another Republican in office, America was strong and with the right leadership America will be greatly changed.

Along with connecting defense with respect, supporters connect America's military with protection. One supporter speaks about the military and America's duty to the world when discussing national security that reflects a viewpoint reflective of exceptional role of America:

There has been trouble in the Middle East since the beginning of time. I do like [Trump's] toughness. I believe we need national security. I believe we have to have the most powerful armed services that are in the world. When America leads, the world is a safer place.⁶⁷

This supporter reflects an idea rooted in American exceptionalism that America has a duty to the rest of the world to protect it. She believes Trump is the best candidate because he promises to be tough in the area national security and thus improve the defense of the country, which inevitably leads to a safer world. The supporter further demonstrates why she feels Trump is the best candidate to improve the safety of the country:

We need a president who loves America to death and to protect America and bring back safety to the rest of the world...when you have [the country] in the hands of a conservative we are a little bit safer than in the hands of a liberal.⁶⁸

Again, she reflects the belief that America has a duty to protect the world. Further, if a president loves the country "to death" he or she is then more likely to ensure that America performs its duty to the rest of the world and protects itself. She then states that she feels conservatives, who

⁶⁷ M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

⁶⁸ M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

are traditionally understood to be more supportive of war and stricter national security laws as well as a stronger sense of patriotism are better suited to keep the country safe.

The discussion surrounding national security demonstrated nationalism in that there was a strong concern over putting America first, deciding who should be allowed in the country, and how terrorism overseas should be handled in a traditional American militaristic manner. Given the current discussion surrounding Syrian refugees, and some of the comments Trump has made both about Muslim and Mexican immigrants, there is much overlap in the discussion between national security and immigration.

Illegal Immigration and Following the Rules

Donald Trump and many of his supporters have stood firm in the belief that if it weren't for Trump, the conversation on illegal immigration would not be what it is today. While the supporters were asked questions regarding illegal immigration, many offered an opinion on the issue without being provoked. Before being asked, the discussion of illegal immigration would arise either as a main concern or as one of the reasons supporters plan to vote for Trump. While discussing immigration there were some particular themes that recurred with many of the supporters that reflected nationalistic views as well as a belief in some of the traditional values of American culture. Throughout the interviews, supporters agreed with Trump's stance on illegal immigration because they believe without borders, a country is no country at all, that illegal immigration is a threat to both the safety and general well being of the country, and that laws are meant to be followed. Supporters also demonstrated a faith in the American Dream, and did believe the dream is available to everyone if people follow the same rules, the same way

themselves and their family did. One supporter listed illegal immigration as one of his major current concerns:

[My biggest concern is] illegal immigration and its effect on the economy. [Another concern] would be ISIS, but I'll stick with illegal immigration because I think effects everything. No borders, you have no nation.⁶⁹

Another supporter also discussed immigration in terms of the significance of borders and control in maintaining a nation, along with some other traditional American values:

I hear what [Trump] is saying about immigration. The basis for our nation is immigrants, so it's something that's written into the Constitution by the men who wrote it. If you just remove borders, you lose control. I'm not [saying] put an end to Muslim and Mexican [immigration]. Here I am at a car wash and here's all these Spanish guys. They're working. That's what America's about.⁷⁰

This supporter recognizes the history of immigration in America and argues that he supports it, reflecting the point that many who come to America come to work, and that, he argues, is the nature of our country. Like the previous supporter, however, he fears that an open border would mean a lack of a control of the country.

Similar to the thought that without strict borders control of America would be lost, many supporters worry that illegal immigration threatens the safety and wellbeing of Americans. For this reason, Trump's suggestion to build a wall and to make it difficult for Syrian immigrants to seek refuge in America strikes a chord with many of the supporters as he supports these policies with stories of criminals coming from Mexico and terrorists coming in as refugees. While there

⁶⁹ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁷⁰ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

is concern for the safety of the country, this does not mean that supporters are prone to generalize all those who desire to come to America:

My biggest concern is national security. My heart bleeds, but we don't know what kind of people are coming in. We cannot simply have an open nation.⁷¹

The supporter recognizes the struggles faced by people around the world, a sentiment that is not often attributed to Trump supporters, however, her largest concern is the safety of the country in which she is living and loves.

Along with a concern for the safety of the country, some supporters worry more generally about the overall state of America without stricter immigration laws:

America's the land of the free, but if we just let anybody in, that threatens our class of living. People taking over jobs and stuff like that—standard of living I guess.⁷²

The supporter recognizes the American tradition of being a land open to all, however, he is also concerned about those already living in the country in need of jobs. Similar to the previous supporter, there is an understanding and concern expressed for those who wish to come to America, but a worry about the wellbeing of the country prevails.

Also drawing on the value of work in America, one supporter rebuts the arguments for being looser on immigration:

If we need those people to pick fruit and do jobs that [they say] Americans won't do, [then there should be] an intelligent work visa program.⁷³

⁷¹ M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

⁷² LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁷³ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

Like many other supporters, this interviewee believes in the value of hard work in America, but he also begins to touch on another theme that was common when supporters discuss immigration and Donald Trump's plans. That is the theme of legal immigration, with a strong emphasis on the "legal."

Many Trump supporters found themselves agreeing with Trump that yes, America is a country of immigrants and immigration has deep roots in the history of the country, but that immigration needs to happen legally. When arguing this point, many invoked the idea of the American Dream and their own family history.

Anybody who comes here must do it legally. Even though there's been immigration, they've wanted to enjoy the American Dream, make their lives better... The people who come here now want to misuse and abuse the generosity [of the country].⁷⁴

Again, there is recognition of the history of immigration within this country and the supporter believes that the American Dream should be open to all, however, it must be done according to the rules. When recognizing the emphasis Trump supporters put on following the rules, Haidt and Graham's argument about differences in reactions to moral issues between conservatives and liberals once again becomes evident. When discussing immigration, Trump supporters are not only drawing from the first two foundations (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity), but from all five. There is an emphasis on the virtues of respect, duty, and obedience that stem from the psychological foundation of authority/respect that is represented in supporters' discussion on immigration as well as an emphasis on justice and fairness that stems from the psychological foundation of fairness/reciprocity. To be sure, the virtues of kindness and compassion that stem

⁷⁴ M in discussion with the author, February 2016.

from the harm/care foundation are not completely absent from the discussion but they are discussed in relation to the other foundations of moral reactions. For example, one supporter finds that while he doesn't always agree with Trump's choice of words, he agrees with his immigration policy:

I do disagree with the things he says sometimes [but] I strongly believe we have to stop the influx of illegal aliens in this country. Everyone on the left says they're good, but they drain our economy. My father is first generation American. They came here. They came here legally, and they bust their asses to provide for my family, and my father did and I did. I don't care what color you are, what gender you are, you're gay, you're straight, as long as you're not an asshole. If you want to come here legally, come here legally. Come here, be willing to follow our laws. Don't change it and do what you want. The Muslim refugees left third world shit countries, they come here and all they want to do is turn it into a third world shit place.⁷⁵

The supporter doesn't discourage immigration all together, referencing that members of his own family were recent immigrants, but those who choose to come to the country, who aspire to reach the American Dream, must do it according to the rules, the way his grandparents, father and he himself have done. He also demonstrates a kind of nationalism and pride in the way things are in America and its traditions when he argues that refugees are attempting to change the shape of the country to align with the country they are leaving. While disagreeing with some of what Trump says, the supporter emphasizes his belief that the discussion of illegal immigration is not an issue that involves race or prejudice, rather it is a question of right and wrong, of following the rules or

⁷⁵ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

breaking them. Another supporter makes a similar point and defends Trump's position on immigration:

I think he's 100% correct on immigration...He's multiple times said he's for immigrants but you have to come in legally. I don't see it as a problem for calling out illegal immigration for what it really is. Illegal.⁷⁶

Again, the supporter has a strong belief in the idea that laws are meant to be followed, and he feels as though Donald Trump shares that belief. Also like the previous supporter, he does not think the conversation surrounding illegal immigration is racist or prejudice, rather it is a matter of following the laws or not.

Overall, while most supporters are behind Donald Trump's immigration plans, they are all aware of the critiques made about the language Trump uses and the plausibility of his plans. Nonetheless, their misgivings do not seem to dissuade supporters and some even believe that despite the critiques, some of Trump's plans are still possible:

As for his plan to deport illegal immigrants, I don't know if that's really possible, but I like the big thinking. And the fact that okay, well, I like the fact that he's actually talking about it and really wants to do something about it as to most of these politicians on the Republican side that just say, "No, no, we can't really do anything," because they want to be politically correct about it.⁷⁷

The supporter recognizes the faults in some of Trump's plans, but because they represent bold thinking on the part of the candidate and because Trump has opened the door to conversation about illegal immigration, something this supporter feels other Republicans have not done, he

⁷⁶ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁷⁷ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

continues to agree with Trump's plans. He continued to express faith in Donald Trump when discussing Trump's proposition of building a wall:

As for his border wall, I think it needs to happen. I think it's a great idea. Mexico—if he says Mexico will pay for it, he knows how to negotiate deals, I'm not going to tell him how to negotiate deals, so I think that's great. But ultimately, I think he encourages immigration but it has to be legal and I don't have any problem with legal immigration. I have a problem with illegal immigration because that's what it is: illegal.⁷⁸

Again, this supporter recognized the faults that some people have found in Trump's propositions, but he believes the candidate has shown himself capable of getting things done and so he continues to have faith in Trump's ability to handle illegal immigration. Further, the supporter concluded his discussion about illegal immigration by returning to an original argument that the problem is not about all immigration but immigration that breaks the law.

Some supporters did express some misgivings about the way in which Trump has spoken about certain groups of immigrants as well as some of the statements he made when explaining what he was going to do about undocumented people already in the United States. One supporter reflected on this issue:

I don't think it's plausible to get rid of 11 million or 11 million plus people. That's pretty scary I think, that you would go around rounding people up, illegally or not. I don't think that's right and I don't think it's going to happen. I don't think that's very plausible.⁷⁹

Like the previous supporter, this interviewee did not think the deporting of millions of undocumented people was very likely. Not only does the supporter think Trump's plan is not

⁷⁸ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁷⁹ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

possible, but he doesn't agree with the idea all together. Another supporter thought that some of Trump's statements about the crimes committed by undocumented people were not necessarily accurate reflections:

[The stories about the crimes undocumented people have committed against legal citizens are] exaggerated images. I think most illegals are employed and working here and doing the right thing. I think he's a little out of touch because he's so rich.⁸⁰

This supporter believes that Trump's success in the business world might have put him out of touch with what is actually happening in America, and he does not necessarily agree with image Trump has attempted to portray of undocumented people in the United States. The supporter does however see the topic of illegal immigration as an issue and does support some of Trump's suggestions:

What really concerns Americans is terrorists and Second Amendment rights. Building a wall, that's kind of vague, but it's simple though too—a simple solution to a big problem.

⁸¹

Nationalism was an important theme for all of the supporters when discussing why they felt Trump was the best candidate. Whether it came up when describing Trump himself or when discussing their own views on national security, immigration, the law, and the American Dream, there was a clear thread of patriotism throughout the interviews. The supporters revealed a love for this country and an appreciation for many of the values and foundational beliefs people traditionally think America represents. Because there is such a strong appreciation for the founding principles of America, Trump and his promise to “make America great again”

⁸⁰ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁸¹ LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

resonates with many of the supporters. They believe that the country once was, and still can be, something great, despite what they believe to be the current declining state. They support borders and following the rules, and they think that Trump is the best option in taking steps to secure those beliefs.

Chapter IV: Donald Trump, Barack Obama and Race in 'Post Racial' United States

The most disturbing issue for many people who are opposed to Trump and his run for the 2016 Presidency is the idea that he is inducing fear among white Americans of religious and racial minority groups who are attempting to disrupt the "American way," thus perpetuating the idea that people who identify as Muslim or Hispanic are truly American. While those who oppose Trump worry that the candidate is creating a divide among white Americans and minority groups throughout the nation, many Trump supporters do not see this as a serious issue. For the most part, unless provoked, Trump supporters avoided any mention of race of discrimination within the United States. However, when asked their feelings on the comments Trump has made and the support he has received from white supremacists most, if not all, supporters expressed a belief that Trump himself is not a race demagogue, and any claim that he might be is merely a way for the mainstream media and the political Left to bring the candidate down. Further, when discussing the issue of race in this country, two supporters made strong connections between racial tensions and President Obama. Overall, the subjects race and prejudice throughout these interviews were ones Trump supporters wished to avoid.

Donald Trump is Not A Racist

Upon making his announcement that he would be running in the 2016 presidential race Trump made the following comment in regards to illegal immigration:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime: They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.⁸²

The comment was met with large amounts of criticism and the image of Trump as promoting hate and discrimination was created. While this comment was the most public, Trump has been persistent in creating an image of the undocumented person as one who commits crimes against American citizens. In *Time to Get Tough* Trump argues that “not enforcing our laws leads directly to the deaths of American citizens” and tells the story of Sister Denise Mosier who was killed in a drunk driving incident by an undocumented man. Trump uses the story as an example of, “hardly isolated” cases of American citizens dying at the hands of undocumented immigrants.

⁸³ Along with these comments about undocumented people from Mexico, Trump has made some comments regarding those who practice Islam coming into the United States. Trump has said he would be open to requiring all Muslims in America to register on a database along with also calling for a complete shut down on Muslim immigration to the United States. While his comments maybe pleased xenophobes and white supremacists, many Trump supporters do not feel the comments were presented to the public in the way they were intended. In fact, many Trump supporters feel as though the comments were misused and misrepresented by the media and people on the left of the political spectrum. Many supporters do not view Trump as a racist,

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<http://www.newsday.com/news/nation/donald-trump-controversial-campaign-quotes-1.11206532>

⁸³ *Get Tough*,

but seem him as making a point about illegal immigration that has been lost. One supporter feels as though the media and public have misread Trump's comments:

He's the only one saying what really needs to get done. Both the media and both parties are skewing what he's saying. He's saying [illegal immigration] has to stop and stop legally. Calling him a racist and a race baiter, he's not any of those things. He wants Mexico to stop flushing their drugs and garbage into this country.⁸⁴

The supporter believes that most people are not given an accurate representation of Trump. He believes that Trump is not attempting to be intentionally offensive or to create any kind of racial divide; rather Trump has a legitimate desire to put an end to problems caused by illegal immigration. Another supporter makes a similar point:

Everyone likes to jump to call him racist, but I believe he's not racist. What he called out when he announced [his candidacy] was illegal immigration.⁸⁵

This supporter believes that despite what people are saying, what Trump said when he made the notorious comment on Mexico sending criminals to America wasn't actually about race at all. It was about illegal immigration and the problems it has been causing America. For this reason and others, this initial comment struck this particular supporter:

What initially appealed to me was when he announced and he came out with those comments about illegal immigrants and he caught a lot of flack for it and he didn't back down on them. He doubled down on them, and I thought, you know, wow, I actually respect this guy.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁸⁵ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

⁸⁶ 2R in discussion with the author, April 2016.

This supporter believes that Trump was saying what other people were not. While he recognized that people were offended by the comments Trump made, the supporter respected the fact that Trump stood firm in his beliefs and continued to insist upon the troubles caused by illegal immigration.

Speaking more generally, another supporter expressed feelings that when one is attempting to speak out against something with which he or she doesn't agree, people are quick to call names:

If you're against illegal immigration, you're a racist. If you're against homosexual marriage, you're homophobic. It's fascism under the guise of political correctness.⁸⁷

Like the previous supporters, he believes that being against illegal immigration does not make one racist or a race baiter. Instead, this supporter sees the problem in what he believes to be the politically correct culture of America. Interestingly, while many people are referring to Trump as a fascist because of the comments he has made, the supporter sees the attempt to stifle those comments as the actual fascist act. During the interview, this same supporter made a point that it was the media as well as Hillary Clinton that have helped portray Trump as a racist to the public:

[Hillary Clinton says two things about Trump]: He's a racist and he's just a mean guy.

Mean and a little kooky. She has to have the black vote or they'll lose, so she has to say

[that Trump] is racist. What better way to help Hillary than to keep saying it and keep saying it? Mainstream media has sided with the liberal side, it's just fact.⁸⁸

The supporter believes that Trump is not a racist, but in fact, the presentation of him as such is a tool for Clinton and the media to further push a more liberal agenda. The supporter does not

⁸⁷ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁸⁸ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

believe that Trump is a racist, and as mentioned in previous chapters, instead has a distrust for those who are saying he is.

None of the Trump supporters who participated in the interviews said they felt that Trump was a racist. Some expressed disagreement with the way he has said things, and did not agree with every comment he has made in the past that people have argued as offensive, however, they often argued that there was a bigger point Trump has been trying to make. While the media and people from both parties are declaring what Trump said offensive, supporters believe that he was simply trying to speak out against illegal immigration. The supporters were able to understand and agree with this point. While those who participated in the interviews for this study do not identify with white supremacist ideas, some who support Trump found that some of the candidate's points resonate with their prejudicial and racist outlooks.

White Supremacists Hurting the Cause for Trump

In February of 2016, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and founder of the white nationalist organization, The National Association for the Advancement of White People, spoke out to endorse Donald Trump's run for presidency. In February, Trump did not immediately say he rejected the support of Duke and other white supremacist groups. The fact that a presidential candidate did not condemn such hate groups or hateful ideologies was greatly disturbing for much of the American public. Because it caused so much disgust many people were asking the question what it is about Trump that attracts those who think like Duke. Along with that question, one must ask how do those who support Trump but disagree with Duke feel about the endorsement. Most of those who participated in the study were disappointed in the endorsement, but not so much so that they now consider other candidates. For many supporters, the

endorsement and the conversation surrounding it was less of a reflection of Donald Trump and more of a reflection of mainstream media and the left.

One supporter was disappointed with Trump's response, but found it fitting for the candidate's platform:

That really hurts our cause. I'm not happy with the way he responded, but he's not a politician, so he's not going to respond [how a politician would], which is what I like about him.⁸⁹

While this supporter was not pleased with the endorsement itself and wished that Trump had handled it differently, Trump's response actually reinforced one of the reasons this supporter provided for why he gravitates toward Trump. Trump's response, while not one the supporter liked, emphasized Trump's position as anti-establishment and as outside the typical political spectrum. Trump did not respond the way a seasoned politician would because Trump is not a seasoned politician. So, while he believed the response was weak, it actually pointed at one of Trump's strengths for this supporter.

Another supporter believed that Trump responded properly and honestly and turned the conversation to another issue involving race:

I didn't see the clip. I don't watch Sunday [news]. I believe he didn't know who was endorsing him...Nobody made a big deal about [Senator Robert] Byrd [and his relationship to Hillary Clinton]...[Trump] tweeted out that he completely denounces that endorsement and had to say it seven or eight times.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ J in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁹⁰ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

This supporter was less upset about the endorsement itself than he was about the way the endorsement was covered. He begins the question by brushing off the original news source where Trump first refused to condemn the endorsement. He then mentioned other former members of the KKK and his relationship with another running candidate, Clinton. For this supporter, Duke's endorsement does not represent faults in Trump so much as it represents the faults in the political system and the media's reporting of it. He concluded by making it clear that Trump did respond to the endorsement and did condemn the KKK, but the public does not discuss that as often as they discuss the endorsement itself.

Another supporter also believes that the picture painted by the media of Trump not denouncing the endorsement was more of a reflection on liberals than on Trump himself:

I mean [the endorsement] is fine. They can support whoever they want to support. Trump already came out and said, 'I don't really want their support.' Yeah, I know, I'm sure this question is referring to him not instantly [denouncing] the KKK but two days later and he—multiple times said, 'I don't want the support of David Duke or the KKK.'

Everybody made a big deal about it two months ago or three months ago, whenever it happened, but what they forget to realize is that the same guy came out and said the same stuff in August and Trump instantly said, 'I don't want the guy's support.' And I think it's just more the media and the left-wingers trying to make a big deal and trying to bring down Trump.⁹¹

The supporter begins his response by explaining that the endorsement is "fine," and continues in a way that makes it clear that Duke's endorsement should not really be an issue for Trump. He

⁹¹ 2R in discussion with the author April 2016.

makes it clear that Trump did in fact denounce Duke's endorsement as well as the KKK, but the media and those on the left failed to either present that or discuss it. For the supporter, the endorsement is not necessarily detrimental to Trump's campaign, rather the other side of the political spectrum and the media use the endorsement to discredit Trump and his run for presidency.

Most supporters were in agreement that the support from David Duke was not beneficial to Trump's campaign, but they did feel Trump responded to the endorsement better than the story the media presented. Further, while they don't agree with David Duke's viewpoint, some supporters understood why Duke found Trump a compelling candidate:

I think it's one radical dude acknowledging another. [Trump] is the most unliberal person to openly come out and I think Duke saw that.⁹²

While not agreeing that Trump is racist, this supporter does recognize some similarities between Duke and Trump. Both men represent an anti-liberal way of speaking and thinking, and the supporter thought that it would make sense that Duke would come out and endorse Trump of all the candidates. A second supporter also could see the appeal of Trump to people like Duke, while also commenting on Trump's response:

It's wrong. I think he's—he hasn't—at first, I know, he didn't condemn it that one time, but he has since. I mean, Hillary, there's the—I forget the gentlemen's name—but he was a KKK leader and she spoke at his funeral, she said he was a mentor—I forget his name right now. But David Duke, he's not even in the KKK. The KKK has not come out and endorsed him, they have not. So, you know, I think that's nonsense. Yeah, he's garnered

⁹² LF in discussion with the author, March 2016.

some racists' floor because of his illegal immigration stance—doesn't mean he's racist. I think because that type of belief may align with racists more because they think, 'Oh, white supremacy,' but I think they're also kind of confused because he's not anti-immigration. We've been over this. I mean this has been debunked over and over and people stick with it. He's anti-illegal immigration.⁹³

Like the other supporters, this interviewee sees a problem not only with the endorsement but the way the media has been portraying the endorsement and what stories, such as the Clinton's comments about Robert Byrd, are left out of the conversation. While he does argue that there are inaccuracies in some of the things that have been reported or are being said, he does acknowledge that Trump might offer a platform that is attractive to people with racist beliefs and thoughts. Like the comments made by supporters in the previous section, however, the interviewee does not believe that Trump is a racist and therefore garners racist support. Rather, the supporter believes that because Trump has spoken out against illegal immigration, white supremacists are attracted to Trump. The supporter believes, however, that this is a fault in the understanding of those supporting Trump rather than a fault of Trump's.

While supporters do not look at the Duke endorsement as beneficial to their cause and those that participated in this study do not agree with Duke, many do not think the endorsement is representative of Donald Trump or his campaign. Instead, they understand it as a tool used by Trump opponents to "bring down" the candidate. When responding to questions about the endorsement, supporters invoke former arguments about why they support the candidate. Most insist that Trump handled the endorsement well, that it is the media and the political system that

⁹³ V in discussion with the author, April 2016.

is at fault, and that Trump is not a racist and his feelings about illegal immigration are also not racist, but are misunderstood by some to be. None of the supporters suggested that the endorsement bothered them as it is not a reflection of Trump or his platform.

President Obama and A ‘Post-Racial’ United States

Given the way many Americans have responded to Trump’s comments on Muslim and Mexican immigration as well as his support from white supremacists, like Duke, there has been conversation describing Trump as a racial demagogue. While most supporters deny this label, and all the supporters who participated in interviews do not believe that Trump is a racist and did not pose any openly racist beliefs, the conversation regarding race and the racial climate today was illuminating in many respects. Supporters discussed issues such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, and racial tensions that have come to light in recent years. I will explore their comments in light of Bruce Bartlett’s article “Donald Trump and ‘Reverse Racism’” which explores the feeling of some white Americans who support Trump as well as some perceptions of President Obama’s election and eight years in office.

In his article, Bartlett provides statistics regarding racial progress in the United States as well as information regarding who Americans feel is the most discriminated against group today. Bartlett found that of those who identify as “steadfast conservatives”, 81 percent believe that the US has made the changes needed in order to give black people equal rights, and 89 percent believe that black people who are not upwardly mobile are responsible for their own condition rather than facing any discrimination that acts as a barrier. Bartlett argues that the election of President Obama has led to increased racial tension because “many whites cannot help harboring at least a suspicion that some of Obama’s actions are motivated by his race, to the detriment of

whites.” Bartlett continues to explore this argument in order to find out what it means for the 2016 election seeing as the next president will almost certainly be white. Some of the comments made by the Trump supporters who participated in this study do reflect animosity towards President Obama, which is particularly prevalent when discussing racial matters.⁹⁴

One supporter discussed the current fight against the disproportional police killing of black people when referencing appointments Obama has made:

Al Sharpton, a race baiting fool, has been an assistant to Obama. Some kind of race war going on in America, all these make believe wars. People who go to Baltimore and agitate. [As if] it’s white cops waking up in the morning [thinking] ‘I want to shoot black kids.’⁹⁵

The supporter believes that the tensions between white people and people of color in the recent years is part of a “make believe war” and that the real issue is not in fact racism against black and brown people within the United States, but the problem is that people believe in these tensions. This supporter further explains that he believes the racial tension in America is largely due to the election of President Obama:

The racism issue was kind of gone until Obama became President and I’m sorry, but I just don’t see it.⁹⁶

Another supporter also discussed the Black Lives Matter Movement and President Obama when referencing Trump’s social politics:

⁹⁴ Bruce Bartlett “Donald Trump and ‘Reverse Racism’”.

⁹⁵ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

⁹⁶ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

Today Black Lives Matter is prominent. I was a police officer for thirty years. I risked my life for black people, for Spanish people. Socially, I have no problem with Trump as long as he doesn't over extend his bounds. Barack Obama has brought his personal life into the way he manages the society. He has not treated cops fairly, he treats cops from the experience with the segment of the society he came from. [Trump] will treat everybody as they should as American citizens, unless you're here illegally.⁹⁷

When looking at these comments made by these two supporters, Bartlett's argument comes into play about President Obama's election as creating racial tensions. The first supporter feels as though the election of President Obama has created more racial tension and now, "make believe wars" are being fought between races. The second supporter reflects Bartlett's argument in that he references President Obama's background as a contributing factor of President Obama's treatment of police officers, while the first supporter references Obama's selection of Al Sharpton as an assistant. Both supporters might provide an example of Bartlett's argument that some Americans worry that President Obama is favoring people of color to the detriment of white people. The second supporter believes Trump is a good candidate for president because regardless of race, as long as the person is a legal citizen, Trump will treat that person fairly.

In his study, Bartlett also found that whites believe discrimination against blacks has decreased at sharper rates than black people believe. Further, more white people now believe that there is greater discrimination against whites than there is against blacks today. Bartlett argues that "zero-sum ideas" are often prevalent among Republicans. He explains that this zero-sum idea means that in order to give to one group, something must be taken from another. He further

⁹⁷ C in discussion with the author, February 2016.

explains that if discrimination against people of color in the United States is prevalent, then foundational beliefs about the country are threatened: “If one views the current social and economic system as racially fair, with individuals being punished or rewarded based on the merits of their contribution to society, hard work, obedience to the rules of society etc., then claims of discrimination call that belief into question.”⁹⁸

One supporter emphasizes Bartlett’s point by arguing for the traditional American way of upward mobility:

It’s about class warfare, pitting races against each other. Black against white. Rich against poor. Stealing from the rich and giving to the poor because the poor are just helpless victims being crapped on. America’s the greatest country in the world and if you’re willing to work you can have a pretty good life.⁹⁹

The supporter does not believe there is any real animosity between people of different races and people of different classes, but that these “wars” were created. He stands strong in the belief that anything can be achieved within America if one works hard to get it. As Bartlett argues, if the discrimination between different classes and races did exist, then the belief that anybody who works hard in America can achieve success would be threatened.

When discussing Duke’s endorsement of Donald Trump, this supporter offered a view of the Black Lives Matter Movement not as movement fighting discrimination, but as one endorsing it:

⁹⁸ Bruce Bartlett Donald Trump and Reverse Racism

⁹⁹ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

To me, the other side of the KKK is the Black Lives Matter—saying death to the police, killing the police. Nobody has come out and said, ‘That’s bad, that’s a racist group.’¹⁰⁰

The supporter believes that there is rhetoric surrounding the KKK that is not necessarily used to describe what he believes to be another racist group, Black Lives Matter. The supporter sees violence and threats when he looks at the Black Lives Matter Movement and believes the media and others are not calling it like it is.

Not many supporters chose to participate in a discussion of race, and those that did attributed the racial tensions to the election of America’s first black President as well as groups such as Black Lives Matter who are calling creating and calling attention to “race wars.” When prompted to discuss the conversation surrounding Trump as a racial demagogue and the support he has received from white supremacists, most supporters who participated in the interviews believed that both topics were not serious issues and merely tools used by the mainstream media and the political Left to discredit Trump. While discussion about Trump is never had without remarking the way in which he has spoken offensively about particular groups, supporters believe that accusations of racism and prejudice are false and that people are misunderstanding what it is that Trump is actually doing: speaking the truth.

Conclusion

As Election Day comes closer and Donald Trump gets closer to the presidency than many imagined, it’s time to begin thinking about Trump’s growing support as more than just a phenomenon. Supporters have grown tired of seeing the country they love struggle. They have grown tired of hearing the polished tone of politicians who continue to work to push the same

¹⁰⁰ K in discussion with the author, March 2016.

agenda. And they have grown tired of seeing their access, and their children's access, to the American Dream slip further and further away.

Counter to many of the portrayals of Trump supporters seen in viral videos and on the news, many Trump supporters are not all white supremacists, they are not all uneducated people caught up in a cult of personality. Instead, Trump supporters are drawn to Trump because he offers an alternative to the established career-politician, he speaks the truth no matter who he may offend, and his love for the country reflects their own. For those who oppose Trump, it's hard to imagine supporters as more than the stereotype that the media perpetuates. However, supporters and opponents of Trump do not see the same thing when they look at the candidate. While opponents often see a race demagogue who is condoning violence, supporters see a man who isn't afraid to speak without filter and isn't afraid to retaliate. Understanding the position from which Trump supporters are coming might begin to create some positive discussion between those who vote Trump and those who don't that opens both sides' eyes to the various living realities of America for different people.