The White Working-Class (How Trump Got Their Vote)
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Faculty sponsor: Dr. Fulmer

My topic, why the White working-class overwhelmingly voted for Donald Trump in the previous presidential election, was something I felt was pertinent to research and further understand. I, as were most Americans, was greatly shocked and frightened by the outcome of the presidential election. I am desperate to understand how the people of my own country could vote for such an unqualified, unsophisticated, and unmannered man to be the president of the United States. Like many others, I am greatly concerned about the implications of a Trump presidency and recent scandals have only confirmed this fear. Many political analysts struggled during and after the election to understand how Trump was able to reach to a portion of the country that previously was disenfranchised and dissatisfied with our political structure.

As I discuss in my research, there truly is a lot of uncertainty surrounding why people voted for Trump but there are many theories about his economic and social populism which addressed issues that appealed to these people, which the democratic party, specifically democratic candidate Hillary Clinton did not prioritize during her campaign (or at least the media did not make it seem as if it was her main priority). Much of my research suggested that the White working-class feels the democratic party does not represent them, and overall mainstream politics ignore their struggles, which is why Trump’s “anti-establishment” persona greatly appealed to this recently disenfranchised demographic.

My research addresses how liberals, the so-called coastal elites, pass judgements on this group of Americans, which in turn motivated them to vote for Trump. This is at the core of the problem, and I acknowledge that I, as a upper-middle class, White-American from northern New Jersey who leans left on the political spectrum, am the exact demographic that the White working-class despises and envies. I think most people on the Ithaca College campus can relate
to at least one if not more of the labels I just gave to myself which is why it will be so relevant and relatable to my audience. I hope my audience is able to acknowledge their role in the election process of Trump, and also acknowledge that it is essential for us to better understand the struggles of the white working-class rather than immediately call them names and dismiss their anger and frustration because they are “racists,” as so many liberals are eager to do instead of looking at the bigger picture. Identity politics has greatly affected the two-party system in the United States, and this behavior only exacerbates the divide.

My research was conducted for a final paper I wrote in my freshmen seminar class last semester with Dr. Fulmer who is sponsoring my presentation. For our final paper, we had to write a minimum 10 page paper about a topic related to the elements discussed in class surrounding social and political issues. Our paper required both traditional and non-traditional sources, I used five traditional and three non-traditional sources in my research. I used a powerpoint to present my information to the class, and I plan to do the same at the Whalen Symposium.

Additionally, globalism, capitalism, and outsourcing are topics I look into as they are a major underlying issue for people of this demographic who are losing their jobs because of these structures. Trump economic populism was able to gain popularity because he scapegoated immigrants and foreigners specifically in China who outsourced the jobs of white working-class Americans. I briefly discuss how there is a lot of misplaced anger in relation to this issue, as in many of these cases, corporations are more to blame than immigrants and fellow citizens.

I want people to come away from my presentation, as I have briefly mentioned, with a better and more sympathetic understanding for our fellow Americans who feel left behind by our political system. Our frustrations with politics, from liberals to conservatives, align a lot more
than we expect but identity politics has successful aimed to convince that this does not hold true. It has been excruciatingly frustrating for me to watch these people be manipulated by politicians like Trump, and rather than blame them, I want everyone, including myself, to have a deeper understanding of why and how this election played out as it did so we can unite as Americans, instead of continuing to play as a puppet in a world of fake news and political scandals that the Trump administration has distracted our country with to avoid the real issues.