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## Trump Country

By Chris Welzenbach  
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Flyover Country is now Trump Country. Those regions of the South and the Upper Midwest one flies over to reach someplace worth reaching are where Trump's monolithic, unswerving support mostly resides. The Quad Cities (Davenport and Bettendorf in Iowa; Moline and Rock Island in Illinois) reside smack in the middle of Trump Country, yet Clinton did well here on November 8, taking Rock Island County in Illinois by about ten percentage points while sneaking past Trump in Scott County on the Iowa side by less than one percent. Nonetheless, the Quad Cities are a monument to trickle-down economics and the export of manufacturing jobs, and an incubator of white blue collar angst.

Following the election of Ronald Reagan, the Quad Cities lost 20,000 high-paying manufacturing jobs. Rock Island County, Illinois is where the cities of Rock Island, Moline,

East Moline and Silvis reside—all former manufacturing hubs. The County lost nearly 9% of its population between 1980 and 1990 (from 165,968 to 148,723), another full percentage point between 1990 and 2000, and a further percentage point between 2010 and 2015. Its present population is 146,133. The Quad Cities were once home to Farmall, Case-International Harvester, Caterpillar, John Deere and their various ancillary suppliers. Today only John Deere remains. In 1984 Farmall, Case-IH and Caterpillar shut down for good, moving their operations overseas, and the resulting ripple effect was magnificent: McCabe's, an old-fashioned department store that for many decades anchored Rock Island's busy downtown shopping district closed its doors that very same year. Today Rock Island's downtown is a dead zone. The immense Case-IH plant in East Moline is a vast corrugated steppe of broken concrete and Farmall's Rock Island headquarters currently houses state welfare offices and Caterpillar's enormous 2.4 million square foot Davenport facility stands mostly empty.

Jobs that remain in the region are for the most part low-paying positions in the healthcare and fast food industries. As the local population ages, healthcare has usurped a larger and larger portion of the Rock Island County economy. Retirement homes, managed care facilities and home care providers are burgeoning. Paychecks are not. Nurse's assistants make little more than minimum wage. In devastating parallel, menial labor (landscaping, lawnmowing, etc.) has grown in importance as a source of income while openings for welders, pipefitters, electricians and machinists become increasingly scarce. And any job at all requires the degradation of a piss test.

John Deere of Moline remains the leading employer in the Quad Cities area, with 7,625 on its current payroll. (However, there are rumors that the remaining jobs at John Deere's East Moline assembly plant are headed south for Mexico.) Next comes the Rock Island Arsenal with 6,200 workers, but these are government employees, many of whom are transient—sent here temporarily from elsewhere in the US—and as such have limited local economic impact. The next two largest employers are Genesis Healthcare with 4,800 and Unity Point Healthcare with 4,500. These numbers make painfully obvious the transition from manufacturing—that is, actually building things—to changing the diapers of retirees entering senescence.

Food processing—Tyson, Oscar Meyer, ADM and others—currently employs about 5,200, while the big Alcoa aluminum plant on the Iowa side of the river has a little over 2,000 on its payroll. Thereafter, one must look to the big food store chains, community colleges, local school systems and local government to find significant sources of employment.

The effect of despair on the local population cannot be over-emphasized. Those with real gumption departed the region shortly after Reagan's wanton act of economic destruction, leaving any future progress to those who remain, and this residue does not inspire much confidence. Trump spoke to these people with his promise to end business as usual, and to actually help them escape their dire economic straits.

The Quad Cities are further handicapped by an absolute lack of civic planning on the part of the relevant municipal authorities. Downtown areas in Davenport, East Moline, Moline and the above-mentioned Rock Island are economically moribund while shopping centers on the margins of these communities are allowed to siphon off consumer dollars, to destroy neighborhood mom

and pop stores and to seriously harm regional quality of life. Purchasing so much as a roll of paper towels or a pack of razor blades often entails a journey of some miles, making car ownership a practical necessity.

Compounding the damage caused by the absence of civic planning is the lack of a coherent transit system. Buses on the Illinois side run more frequently (the bus system in Davenport is a joke), but the two most important stations (where riders must transfer to reach their ultimate destinations) are located on the wrong side of the Burlington Northern-Sante Fe Railroad tracks, where freight trains constantly travel, so that delays at level crossings are both unavoidable and distressingly frequent.

Further hampering local economic development is the knack various municipalities have acquired for nickle and diming small businesses to death with piddling no-account fees and mosquito-bite taxes to compensate for revenue once distributed by state and federal governments but that today is solely earmarked for the Pentagon, a nibbling away of what little economic activity these minor enterprises generate with the result that small business failure is a deadening constant in the Quad Cities while so-called “big box” operations—that destroy neighborhood life and wreak havoc on wage earners—continue to flourish.

Support for unions remains solid in the Quad Cities, but Iowa is a right to work state and in Illinois there is growing impetus to follow suit, which would effectively destroy collective bargaining and all the benefits and protections such representation assures, as business interests work to complete a deliberate process of economic enslavement by creating a world where jobs become so precious that workers will literally accept any form of humiliation to simply keep on working.

Rendered voiceless and politically impotent, their interests routinely pushed aside in favor powerful corporations with pockets deep enough for the pay-to-play system that has not only captured Capitol Hill but also the seats of government in all fifty states, faced with a future shorn of any hope and angered that for generations they have been completely ignored, on November 8 they fought back by voting *against* a system that offered up candidates they despised and *against* news media that reduced them to knuckle-dragging cartoon cut-outs, and *for* a twisted sociopath who has no interest in them, no empathy for them and not only has no real desire to help them but will likely commit to policies that do them real lasting harm. Unfortunately, this is hardly the first time people have responded to economic stress by behaving irrationally and self-destructively, nor is this the first time those who feel beaten down seek protection from the schoolyard bully. The end is predictable.