



THE STATE OF THE WORKING (AND NON-WORKING) MAN

**PROJECT FOR STRONG LABOR MARKETS
AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

THE OFFICE OF SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

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FOREWORD

Senator Marco Rubio: Honoring Labor Day

Labor Day is much more than the official end of summer and a three-day weekend. It is—and should remain—an opportunity for us to thank workers for their contributions to our country. It’s also an opportunity to reflect on how they are doing. For far too many, the answer is “not well.” As this report shows, some of the most serious problems are faced by men, who are suffering from a generational decline in quality jobs and falling out of the labor force in staggering numbers.

Some might wonder how this could be, with unemployment near a record low. The problem is hidden out of sight, driven by a slow erosion of workers’ earning power and millions of men who have dropped out of the labor force altogether. In 2022, there were seven million men in the prime of life missing from the labor force, and 10 million total without work. As the scholar Nicholas Eberstadt points out, this means the share of American men without work today is as large as it was during the Great Depression. Perhaps not coincidentally, four out of every five suicides last year were men. The individual stories are devastating, and the impact to our communities is immense.

I know from personal experience how important it is for boys to have good men as role models. My father worked late into the night as a banquet bartender so that he could provide a better life for his family—for me. My football coaches taught me important lessons, with every bear crawl and lap, about accountability and perseverance. And they taught me how to take a hit.

Unfortunately, fewer boys have fathers today, or positive male role models of any kind. The headlines are full of the consequences. Men and boys are depressed, lonely, angry, even suicidal. They lack direction. And to make matters worse, it often seems the only thing our leaders have to say about men is bad, as though they’re the source of all our problems.

This report sheds light on the problems men face as workers, but also describes the role that policymakers can play in shaping an economy and culture in which men can more often succeed as providers, husbands, fathers, and community leaders. That’s an ambitious task, and not one for government alone. It will require us to reorient our economy, our culture, and our politics so that they serve the common good of men, women, and children alike. But it’s the only way for us to break out of decadence and restore our nation’s strength and prosperity.

While there is no single culprit behind the carnage, several long-term trends stand out: deindustrialization, open borders, changes in education, corrosive welfare programs, and revolutionary changes in American culture and technology. We cannot ignore these problems because there is too much at stake for our nation. The problems described in this report took generations to manifest—and our efforts to solve them must therefore be multigenerational.

We'll need a lot of good men to rebuild our country and face the tremendous challenges ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized, flowing script.

Marco Rubio

U.S. Senator

“We find a race of men living in that day whom we claim as our fathers and grandfathers; they were iron men, they fought for the principle that they were contending for; and we understood that by what they then did it has followed that the degree of prosperity that we now enjoy has come to us.”

–Abraham Lincoln

INTRODUCTION: THE AMERICAN YEOMAN

Since colonial days, America has rewarded and respected men who work. Starting in the late 15th century, courageous young men fled the crowded, expensive, and hierarchical Old World for the bounty and promise of the New. Here they found a land of wonder and opportunity. Great tracts of land and quality timber—precious commodities and indicators of status in Europe—could be had for a song. The soil was rich, and game was abundant for hunting and trapping. As the late historian Paul Johnson noted in his history of America, “settlers were moving from an economy of scarcity to an economy of plenty, where men were valuable to a degree unknown in Europe.”¹ Tight labor markets were a feature of colonial America, and the settlers who were enterprising enough to cross the sea and get here thrived as a result.

The abundance of early America shaped the yeomen (or “young men”²) who lived here, in a literal sense. American men in the 18th century were hardy. They ate more than 200 pounds of meat every year, far more than their European contemporaries ate and not much less than Americans eat to this day.³ They were taller and stronger than European men, such that soldiers of the Revolution stood around 5’8”, on average, taller than European aristocrats—and only an inch shorter than the average American man today.⁴ The fertile American soil gave rise to such domineering leaders as George Washington, who stood at 6’2”, was reputed to be the best horsemen of his age, and threw rods of iron across his lawn for sport.⁵

The American yeomen acquired land, married early, and raised children—around seven or eight to a family.⁶ And this pattern of life created a nation that was prosperous and democratic, with a large and capable middle class. Johnson recounts that “over the course of a lifecycle, any man who survived to be forty could expect to live in a household of median income and capital wealth.”⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at the self-sufficiency of the American man, writing that “all that he asks of the State is not to be disturbed in his toil, and to be secure of his earnings.”⁸ It was these “men of iron,” as the sturdy rail-splitter Abraham Lincoln called the Founding generation, who felled the

¹ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 69.

² The etymology of this word, so central to Americans’ idea of citizenship and virtue, is obscure. The standard explanation is that it derives from “young man,” though some have proposed it came from something like “additional man.” Both explanations suit the early settlers of America. They were the “additional” or “surplus” people of Europe, and the “young men” who settled the New World.

³ Johnson, 94.

⁴ Associated Press, “American Men of 1776 Said to Have Stood Tall,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/15/garden/american-men-of-1776-said-to-have-stood-tall.html>.

⁵ “First in War, First in Peace, First in Sports?,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/facts/washington-stories/remarkably-robust-and-athletic-george-washington-the-sportsman/>.

⁶ John Komlos, “On the Biological Standard of Living of Eighteenth-Century Americans: Taller, Richer, Healthier,” Discussion Paper, University of Munich, July, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.5282/ubm/epub.53>.

⁷ Johnson, 95.

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Book II, Chapter 20, https://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/DETOC/ch3_20.htm.

trees, cleared the fields, and tamed the wilderness, turning America from an uncultivated Eden into the civilization we have inherited. And it was their sons, joined by waves of arrivals primarily from the Old World, who closed the frontier, built the soaring skyscrapers in our cities, sent men into the heavens, and journeyed beyond our shores to do battle with, and ultimately defeat, totalitarian empires.

But that was then. What of men today?

By many obvious standards, the modern American man is better off than his predecessors of even a generation ago. He has access to medicine and technology that have prolonged his life and eased his burdens. He has more leisure time and access, via the internet alone, to a galaxy of knowledge and amusements that would have staggered his settler forebears, with their Bibles and works of Shakespeare. Men of all races, colors, and creeds have new, hard-won legal protections that give them unprecedented access to education and gainful employment.

But not all is well with American men. The broad-based prosperity enjoyed by past generations of American men has evaporated. The sense of purpose that took them across the waves, the Great Plains, and the Rocky Mountains has likewise vanished. Young men today are having more trouble in school and in the workplace than their fathers did—and this fact has serious ramifications not only for them, but for women, children, and the nation as a whole.

Much ink has been spilled and much airtime has been devoted to describing the problems facing American men. The topic has gained a second wind recently. Conservatives like Senator Josh Hawley and the scholars Kay Hymowitz, Aaron Renn, and Christina Hoff Sommers have written about the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the crisis of American masculinity. The economist Nicholas Eberstadt has documented the alarming problem of male non-work. Tucker Carlson addressed the topic in a provocative documentary, *The End of Men*.

Those on the left have had less to say about men, perhaps because they struggle to define the term in the first place, or because their rigid concepts of “privileged” and “nonprivileged” groups do not make room for the problems of men. When they do acknowledge that men are struggling, often they do so in triumphalist tones, as though it is evidence of feminist triumph over patriarchy. But a few brave liberals have tackled the subject with seriousness and sympathy, notably Richard Reeves in his recent book, *Of Boys and Men*, and Senator Chris Murphy, who has urged his party to acknowledge the differences between men and women and the unique problems they have.

This report takes stock of the deteriorating situation of American men, particularly in their vital role as workers. It examines men’s difficulties in securing middle-class jobs that will enable them to provide for a family, long the hallmark of success in our republic. It explores the graver problem of male non-work—or the millions of adult men with no attachment to the labor force whatsoever, who live in shameful idleness and dependency. It considers the causes and consequences of those problems. And it

proposes solutions to give men access to better-paying work, restore male non-workers to the labor force, and help men fulfill their roles as providers, husbands, fathers, and leaders.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF MEN'S WORK

The Centers for Disease Control reported that 49,500 people killed themselves in 2022, the highest number on record.⁹ Four-fifths of the dead were men. Men have always taken their lives in greater numbers than women. But as the number of suicides steadily climbs, one can't help but take it as a grim sign that something has gone terribly wrong for men, in particular.

And it is not the only sign. From the schoolhouse to the workforce, boys and men are falling behind and failing to live up to their potential—especially in comparison to girls and women, who have notched impressive gains across the board. The gap emerges as early as grade school, where boys underperform girls in English and math in virtually every state.¹⁰ The problem continues in high school, where boys are less likely to graduate on time. The problem is perhaps most visible on college campuses, where there is now a larger gender gap in awarded bachelor's degrees favoring females than there was favoring males in 1972.¹¹ Most medical and law students are now women; only in business schools do men retain an edge in professional degrees, and even that advantage is dwindling.¹² The problem has gotten so bad that some colleges have begun practicing affirmative action for men.¹³

The underwhelming performance of men represents a dramatic and alarming reversal of fortunes compared to past generations. We have already seen how the yeomen of early America, however difficult their lives in other ways, earned a middle-class life through hard work. Something similar was possible for most men within recent memory. In the postwar era, families could be confident of achieving a middle-class life if the man of the house worked full-time in exchange for a breadwinner wage that allowed his wife to stay

⁹ Lisa O'Mary, "Suicides in U.S. Reached All-Time High in 2022: CDC," WebMD, August 11, 2023, <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20230811/suicides-us-reached-all-time-high-2022-cdc>.

¹⁰ Richard V. Reeves and Ember Smith, "Boys Left Behind: Education Gender Gaps across the US," Brookings Institution, October 12, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/boys-left-behind-education-gender-gaps-across-the-us/>.

¹¹ Richard V. Reeves and Ember Smith, "The Male College Crisis Is Not Just in Enrollment, but Completion," Brookings Institution, October 8, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-male-college-crisis-is-not-just-in-enrollment-but-completion/>.

¹² Brendan Murphy, "Women in medical schools: Dig into latest record-breaking numbers," American Medical Association, September 29, 2021, <https://www.ama-assn.org/education/medical-school-diversity/women-medical-schools-dig-latest-record-breaking-numbers>; American Bar Association, "ABA Profile of the Legal Profession: 2022," <https://www.abalegalprofile.com/women.php#:~:text=Women%20make%20up%20a%20majority,male%20student%20was%20in%202014>.

¹³ Charlotte West, "An Unnoticed Result of the Decline of Men in College: It's Harder for Women to Get In," The Hechinger Report, October 27, 2021, <https://hechingerreport.org/an-unnoticed-result-of-the-decline-of-men-in-college-its-harder-for-women-to-get-in/>.

home with their children. Millions of men with no more than a high-school education achieved the American Dream in this manner.

This avenue to a middle-class life has now closed for the bulk of American men. As the conservative think tank American Compass shows in its “Cost of Thriving Index,” earnings for the median male worker at a full-time job have failed to keep pace with the costs of attaining middle-class security.¹⁴ In 1985, the median male wage was sufficient to provide comprehensive health insurance, reliable transportation, good housing, a healthy diet, and college tuition, with 20 percent left over for other consumption and saving. The same man in 2022 could work the whole year to pay for middle-class essentials, and still come up 10 weeks short.

Many of America’s families have compensated for the stagnation of male earning power the way they always have during hard times: by sending the wife into the labor force. As the Brookings Institution notes, practically all of the gain in middle-class household income over the past 40 years has come from women entering the workforce full-time.¹⁵ The Pew Research Center reports that the share of marriages in which the husband is the sole earner fell from 49 percent in 1972 to 23 percent today.¹⁶ And whereas men’s employment rose by 45 percent from 1980 to 2018, women’s employment increased by 74 percent.¹⁷

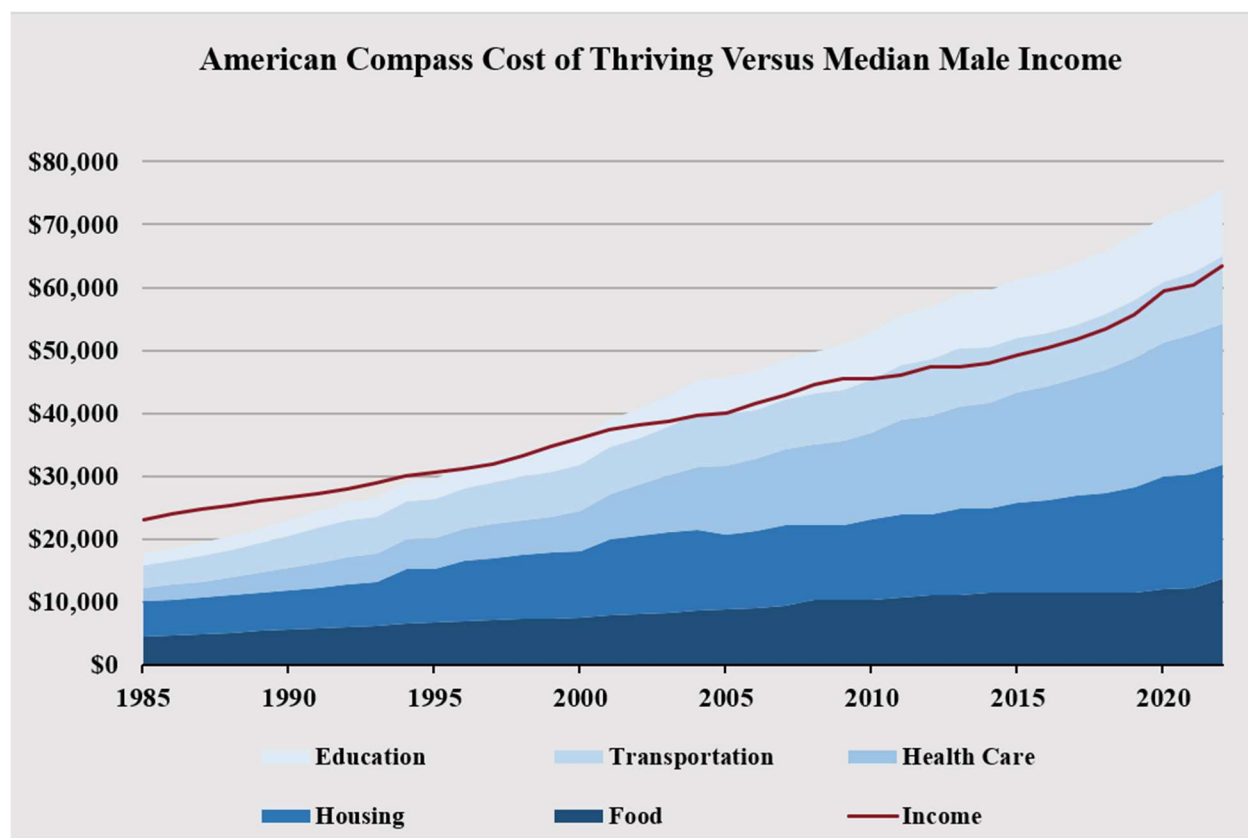
As Senator Elizabeth Warren—in a past role as a professor—noted in her book, *The Two-Income Trap*, the rise in dual-earner households has bid up the price of middle-class staples like houses in good school districts, while making more families vulnerable to sudden financial catastrophes. Previously, if the husband was laid off or disabled at work, the wife could find a job to supplement at least some of the family’s lost income. The wife thus acted as a kind of “labor reserve” for the household. In the dual-earner model, by contrast, if one worker or the other loses a job or becomes disabled, there is no one else waiting in the wings to make up for the lost earnings; the other worker can only bring in his or her existing income, which was already accounted for in the family’s budget. Unless the dual-income family lived beneath their means and saved some of their second income during the good times, they could well be less prepared for the bad times than a household that based its budget off of just one income.

¹⁴ Oren Cass, “The 2023 Cost-of-Thriving Index: Tracking the Catastrophic Erosion of Middle-Class Life in America” (American Compass, February 2023), https://americancompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/COTI_2023_Final.pdf.

¹⁵ Isabel V. Sawhill and Katherine Guyot, “Women’s Work Boosts Middle Class Incomes but Creates a Family Time Squeeze That Needs to Be Eased,” Brookings Institution, May 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/womens-work-boosts-middle-class-incomes-but-creates-a-family-time-squeeze-that-needs-to-be-eased/>.

¹⁶ Richard Fry et al., “In a Growing Share of U.S. Marriages, Husbands and Wives Earn About the Same,” Pew Research Center, April 13, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/04/13/in-a-growing-share-of-u-s-marriages-husbands-and-wives-earn-about-the-same/>.

¹⁷ Rakesh Kochhar, “Women Make Gains in the Workplace Amid a Rising Demand for Skilled Workers,” Pew Research Center, January 30, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/30/women-make-gains-in-the-workplace-amid-a-rising-demand-for-skilled-workers/>.



Source: Oren Cass, "The 2023 Cost-of-Thriving Index," American Compass, February 2023, https://americancompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/COTI_2023_Final.pdf.

Working men face serious problems. The millions of men who do not work at all face far more.

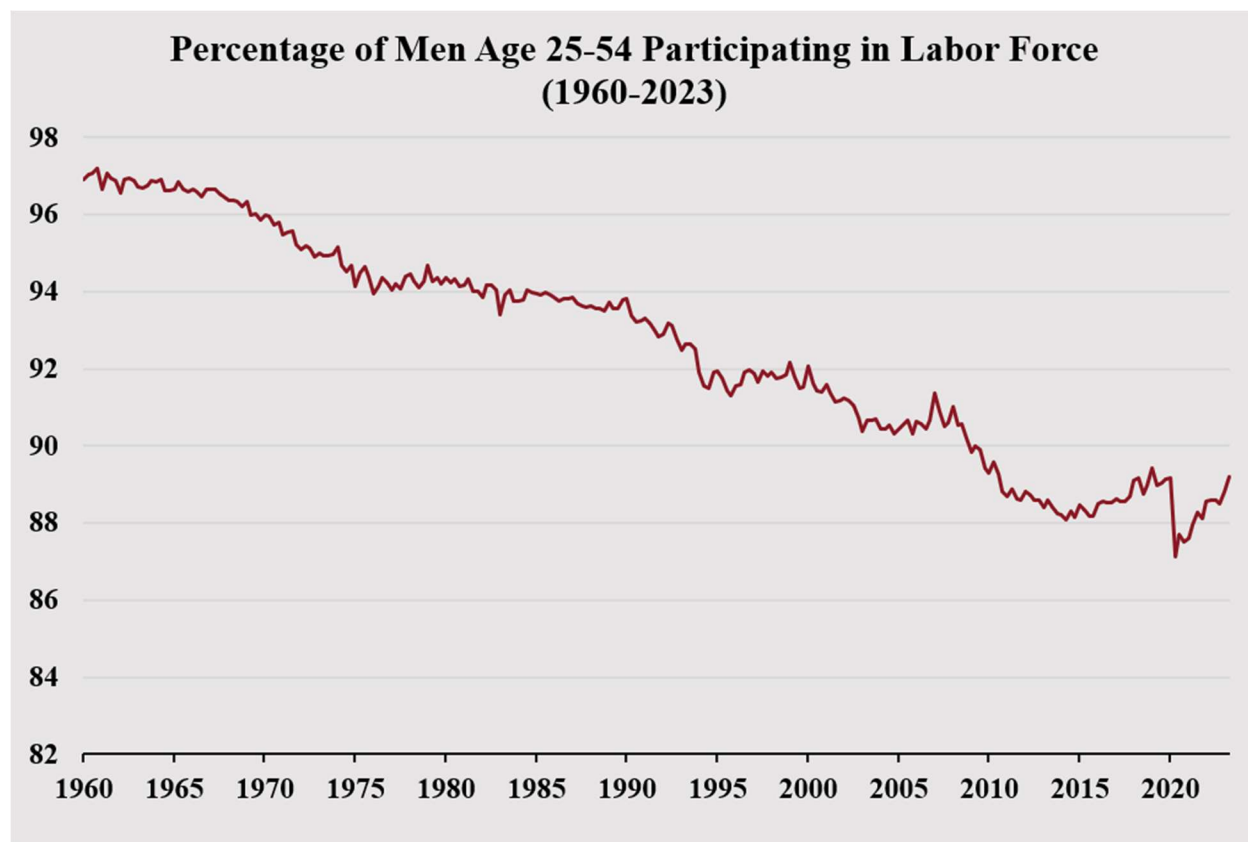
For most of America's history, the vast majority of men in the prime of life who did not work were disabled or unemployed through no fault of their own. If large numbers of adult men were not working, it was safe to assume this was due to some serious disruption in the economy, such as a recession. Able-bodied adult men who chose not to work were rare and stigmatized. Thus did Captain John Smith implore the colonists at Jamestown in 1609 to work or starve, paraphrasing a verse from St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "You must obey this now for a law, that he that will not work shall not eat (except by sickness he be disabled). For the labors of thirty or forty honest and industrious men shall not be consumed to maintain a hundred and fifty idle loiterers."¹⁸

Today, the situation has flipped on its head: there are far more men who choose not to work than who are unemployed through no fault of their own. Labor-force participation among all men has fallen by nearly 20 percentage points, from a high of 87.4 percent in 1949 to 68 percent in July 2023.¹⁹ Among men in their prime working years (ages 25-54), the labor force participation rate has declined by eight percentage points, from 97.0 percent in 1963 to 89.1 percent in 2023.

This decline in labor-force participation equates to nearly seven million "missing men" out of a labor force of 63 million men in the prime of life. The share of men not participating has more than tripled over 60 years. As Eberstadt notes, the staggering decline in male work means that our economy, even in "good" times, has a similar share of men out of work as it did in 1940, during the Great Depression. Policymakers puzzling over the economy's lackluster performance might consider the effect if those millions of men were re-connected with work of even the most basic kind. It is scarcely hyperbole to say that compared to a half-century ago, the American economy is suffering from a perpetual and invisible depression. One major cause is male non-work.

¹⁸ John Smith, *The Journals of Captain John Smith: A Jamestown Biography*, ed. John M. Thompson (National Geographic, 2007), 139.

¹⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Participation Rate - Men [LNS11300001], <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS11300001>.



Source: Author's calculations using Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Activity Rate: Aged 25-54: Males for the United States, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LRAC25MAUSM156S>, August 17, 2023.

Still, some downplay the problem, arguing that the decline in male labor force participation can be explained by an increase in the number of men enrolled in school relative to generations past, or to “stay-at-home dads” caring for children full-time due to changing social norms. These mitigating factors can explain a small share of the decline in male work, but not as much as their proponents think. Eberstadt, using Census Bureau data, finds that education took roughly one million men out of the labor force in 2014 compared to 1965; male college enrollment has declined by about one-fifth since then, so the number today is likely smaller. And while many headlines have trumpeted the rise of the stay-at-home dad since the pandemic, the numbers are less impressive. The Current Population Survey shows an 11 percent increase in married, stay-at-home dads since 2000, which comes out to 140,000 new male homemakers.²⁰ The vast majority of non-working men, by their own admission, are not caring for children. In 2016, men who were not in the labor force reported spending an average of 28 minutes a day caring for household members, the same amount as employed men.²¹ Only 23 percent reported having a minor in the house at all.²²

Setting aside questions of scale, it is far from clear that an increase in male students would be good for society or the nation in the first place. Higher education is only a value-add, from a strictly economic standpoint, if the student is learning skills that help him replace the income he forewent and the debt he accrued to attend school. It also requires, crucially, attaining a degree. Many students never do. Roughly 38 percent of college students (and 42 percent of men) drop out without getting their degree, having wasted their time and potentially saddled themselves with debt.²³ The 23-year old male who putters around campus working toward a non-technical degree and then drops out would have been better off doing almost anything else with those five years of his life. If more men in the prime of life are studying rather than working, whether that is good or bad for the nation as a whole depends on what they are learning—and whether they finish.

If most men without work are not in school or tending to the home, what are they doing with their time? The answer, according to the best survey data we have, is nothing, or worse than nothing. Time-use surveys from the period between 2015 and 2019 show that prime-age men who are not in employment, education, or training spend more than 10 hours a day on “personal care,” the bulk of which is sleeping, and 7.5 hours a day on

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, “Table A3. Parents With Coresident Children Under 18, by Living Arrangement, Sex, and Selected Characteristics: 2022,” Current Population Survey, 2022 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/demo/families/cps-2022.html>; and U.S. Census Bureau, “Table FG1. Married Couple Family Groups, by Labor Force Status of Both Spouses, and Race and Hispanic Origin of the Reference Person: March 2000,” Current Population Survey, 2000 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2000/demo/families/families-living-arrangements.html>.

²¹ Nicholas Eberstadt, *Men Without Work: America’s Invisible Crisis* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2016), 87.

²² Donna S. Rothstein, “Male Prime-Age Nonworkers: Evidence from the NLSY97,” *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2020, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2020.25>.

²³ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, “Completing College: National and State Reports,” November 2022, https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Completions_Report_2022.pdf.

“socializing, relaxing, and leisure.” The bulk of that leisure is spent watching television, although some is spent on other activities, including gambling and drinking.²⁴

Male non-work is associated with many other forms of pathology. The economist Alan Krueger found that prime-age men who are not in the labor force report feeling sad and purposeless at much higher rates than men with jobs. They are isolated, spending more than 50 percent more time alone each day than those who are working. In all, nonworking adult men spend about one-third of their waking hours in isolation.²⁵ More than two-thirds have never married.²⁶ Close to a third live with their parents. Nearly half take painkillers every day.²⁷ And they are more likely to take their own lives. Men are the victims in three-quarters of so-called “deaths of despair,” or deaths attributable to suicide, drug overdose, or alcohol poisoning.²⁸ Adults out of the labor force are at much higher risk of dying in those ways, with twice the risk of suicide and a staggering seven times the risk of accidental poisoning.²⁹

These statistics paint a bleak portrait of life for the millions of men without work in this country. Devoid of purpose, they are sinking into a morass of dissolution and self-destruction. The situation is better for working men, but they face a crisis of their own: their outcomes and prospects in work, education, and family life are dimmer than their fathers’, and growing dimmer still. The days of the prosperous yeoman are no more. America’s men face an economy and society that no longer reward their efforts the way they once did, and in some cases are hostile to them.

The next section of this report sketches the causes of this crisis in the great changes that have engulfed our country over the past 60 years.

BEHIND THE DECLINE

For every think-tank scholar and lawmaker who looks at the charts above with alarm, there is another who shrugs, or even cheers them as signs of social progress. Even among those who agree on the problem, identifying the culprit is a vexing task. There are many possible contributors, and weighing their importance is challenging. It is

²⁴ Nicholas Eberstadt and Evan Abramsky, “What Do Prime-Age ‘NILF’ Men Do All Day? A Cautionary on Universal Basic Income,” Institute for Family Studies, February 8, 2021, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/what-do-prime-age-nilf-men-do-all-day-a-cautionary-on-universal-basic-income>.

²⁵ Alan B. Krueger, “Where Have All the Workers Gone? An Inquiry into the Decline of the U.S. Labor Force Participation Rate,” Brookings Institution, September 7, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/where-have-all-the-workers-gone-an-inquiry-into-the-decline-of-the-u-s-labor-force-participation-rate/>.

²⁶ Donna S. Rothstein, “Male prime-age nonworkers: evidence from the NLSY97,” Monthly Labor Review, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2020/article/male-prime-age-nonworkers-evidence-from-the-nlsy97.htm>.

²⁷ Krueger, 3.

²⁸ Casey B. Mulligan, “Deaths of Despair and the Incidence of Excess Mortality in 2020,” National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2020, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28303/w28303.pdf.

²⁹ Iliya Gutin and Robert A. Hummer, “Occupation, Employment Status, and ‘Despair’-Associated Mortality Risk among Working-Aged U.S. Adults, 1997-2015,” *Preventive Medicine* 137 (August 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2020.106129>.

difficult, as well, to untangle cause and effect. For example, do men not work because they aren't getting married, or do they not get married because they aren't working? It is challenging enough to get policymakers to agree there is a problem in the first place, much less to determine the nature of the problem and its causes.

Nonetheless, several possible causes stand out: deindustrialization, mass immigration, the decline of the education system, welfare, and revolutionary changes in American culture and technology. This section provides an overview of those issues and their effect on male work. While not a comprehensive or exhaustive treatment, we aim to help readers wrap their heads around a complex crisis.

Our core contention is that structural changes to the nature of the economy, the culture, and public institutions have conspired to offer men less pay, fewer job opportunities, and less respect for the work they perform. Stripped of material and psychological motivation, many men naturally have opted out of productive life and turned to self-destructive behaviors.

Deindustrialization and the Rise of the Service Economy

The decline in men's economic fortunes tracks closely with the decline of the United States as an industrial power. In the 20th century, factory jobs were one of the surest paths to a middle-class life for men of normal abilities and educational attainment. They offered predictable schedules, strong worker protections through labor unions, and good pay that enabled a worker to get married, have kids, buy a house, and retire comfortably with a pension. They also offered upward mobility from the factory floor to the corporate office. The wholesome vision of the family we have received from the 1950s and 1960s was not a mere fiction created by ad makers or a simple mask concealing deep unhappiness, the way resentful left-wing critics assert. Much of it was a reality of life during a period of national ascendance, and it was made possible by widespread industrial employment. In 1953, just shy of one-third of American workers, excluding farm hands, worked in manufacturing.³⁰

Manufacturing has always been a heavily male profession due to the physically demanding nature of the work. While women proved perfectly capable of doing such jobs during the Second World War, even then, "Rosie the Riveters" accounted for just one-fourth of workers in war industry.³¹ The same holds true today. Despite the decline in blue-collar male work and years of effort to promote female employment in stereotypically male professions, more than two-thirds of factory workers are men.³²

Manufacturing jobs were easy to come by in the mid-20th century due to a combination of good luck and good policy. The United States emerged from the Second World War

³⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, All Employees, Manufacturing [MANEMP], <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MANEMP>.

³¹ "World War II," University of Louisville: Women's Work in Louisville, KY, <https://womenwork.library.louisville.edu/era-ww2.php>.

³² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Women in the labor force: a databook," April 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/home.htm>

with an unscathed (and indeed supercharged) industrial base, while most of its competitors had been reduced to smoldering ruins. American industry was thus without peer in the years after the war. The onset of the Cold War further strengthened the American industrial base, as the federal government worked closely with private industry to accomplish strategic objectives. The quintessential example of such a partnership was the Apollo space program, which employed 400,000 Americans and 20,000 industrial firms.³³ The technical challenges of sending men to a rock 240,000 miles away and returning them safely to Earth, to paraphrase John F. Kennedy, led to revolutions in microelectronics, precision manufacturing, and other fields.

America's industrial renaissance was not to last, however. Just as good luck and policy created that golden age, so bad luck and policy conspired to end it—with devastating effect for American men. In the decades after the Second World War, the near-miraculous recovery of the Japanese and West German economies and the aggressive export-oriented policies of the Asian Tigers meant that U.S. manufacturing again faced stiff foreign competition. The United States was essentially defenseless against the rising volume of foreign goods, having reduced tariffs to record lows from the 1930s through the 1950s.³⁴ Policymakers erred again in the 1970s by imposing onerous environmental regulations and other red tape that made American industry less competitive relative to foreign manufacturers. But the worst blunders came in the decades after that, when the nation's leaders convinced themselves that a *laissez-faire* policy of free trade and unfettered finance was the surest path to economic growth. Under this regime of “turbo-capitalism”³⁵—a term the historian Edward Luttwak uses to distinguish the new *laissez-faire* from the healthier, developmental capitalism that preceded it—a more powerful financial sector pressured firms to offshore or dismantle costly domestic operations and neglect long-term capital investment, in effect selling off the nation's inherited capital stock. Steep defense cuts following the end of the Cold War led to consolidation and closures that created a temporary “peace dividend” at the expense of the thousands of manufacturers, mostly small businesses, that had won the Cold War. Finally, to top it all off, American leaders naively fostered closer trade ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC), extending Permanent Normal Trade Relations status to the communist country in 2000 and fast-tracking its accession to the World Trade Organization.

Partly as a consequence of these missteps, the share of the population employed in manufacturing fell relentlessly for 60 years before bottoming out after the Great Recession. Approximately 8 percent of non-farm workers today are employed in manufacturing, down from 32 percent in 1953.³⁶ The steepest periods of decline in manufacturing employment—which track broadly with the steepest periods of decline in

³³ National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “NASA Langley Research Center's Contributions to the Apollo Program,” <https://www.nasa.gov/centers/langley/news/factsheets/Apollo.html>

³⁴ Drew Desilver, “U.S. Tariffs Are among the Lowest in the World – and in the Nation's History,” Pew Research Center, March 22, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/03/22/u-s-tariffs-are-among-the-lowest-in-the-world-and-in-the-nations-history/>.

³⁵ Edward Luttwak, “Turbo-Charged Capitalism and Its Consequences,” *London Review of Books*, November 2, 1995, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v17/n21/edward-luttwak/turbo-charged-capitalism-and-its-consequences>.

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, All Employees, Manufacturing [MANEMP].

male labor force participation as a whole—occurred during the 1990s and 2000s, the decades of globalization and the China Shock. And while deindustrialization ravaged countless communities, it was particularly devastating for minority men.^{37 38}

There is also a cyclical element to the decline in male work, as the writer Henry Olsen and the Council of Economic Advisers under President Obama have pointed out.³⁹ The steepest declines in the employment-to-population ratio for prime-age males, which measures the share of men employed at a given time, have occurred during recessions. During the economic recoveries that have followed, this share has failed in most cases to return to pre-recessionary levels, resulting in a “downward ratchet” of male work. In other words, countless men have been pushed out of jobs by economic calamity and then slipped into long-term unemployment or worse.

The new economy, by whatever name it goes (“post-industrial,” “service,” or “information”), has simply not been as favorable to men as its predecessor. Katelynn Harris of the Bureau of Labor Statistics has documented the change in employment in various sectors from 1979 (the peak of manufacturing employment in raw numeric terms) to 2019.⁴⁰ The sectors that lost the greatest share of employment were, for the most part, heavily male: manufacturing, government, “trade, transportation, and utilities,” and mining and logging. The sectors that gained the most were mixed-gender or heavily female: education and health services, professional and business services, leisure and hospitality, and “other services.”

Richard Reeves refers to these booming sectors as “HEALS” jobs (Healthcare, Education, Administration, and Literacy). He proposes that the solution to the crisis of male work is to encourage more men to buck social convention by entering those professions.⁴¹ This may work in some cases—for example, adding more male teachers to schools may help boys’ academic performance—but it is hardly a panacea. Effort must be made to rejuvenate manufacturing and other sectors “left behind” by the new economy, and to restore the kind of solid jobs that will allow more men to start and provide for families.

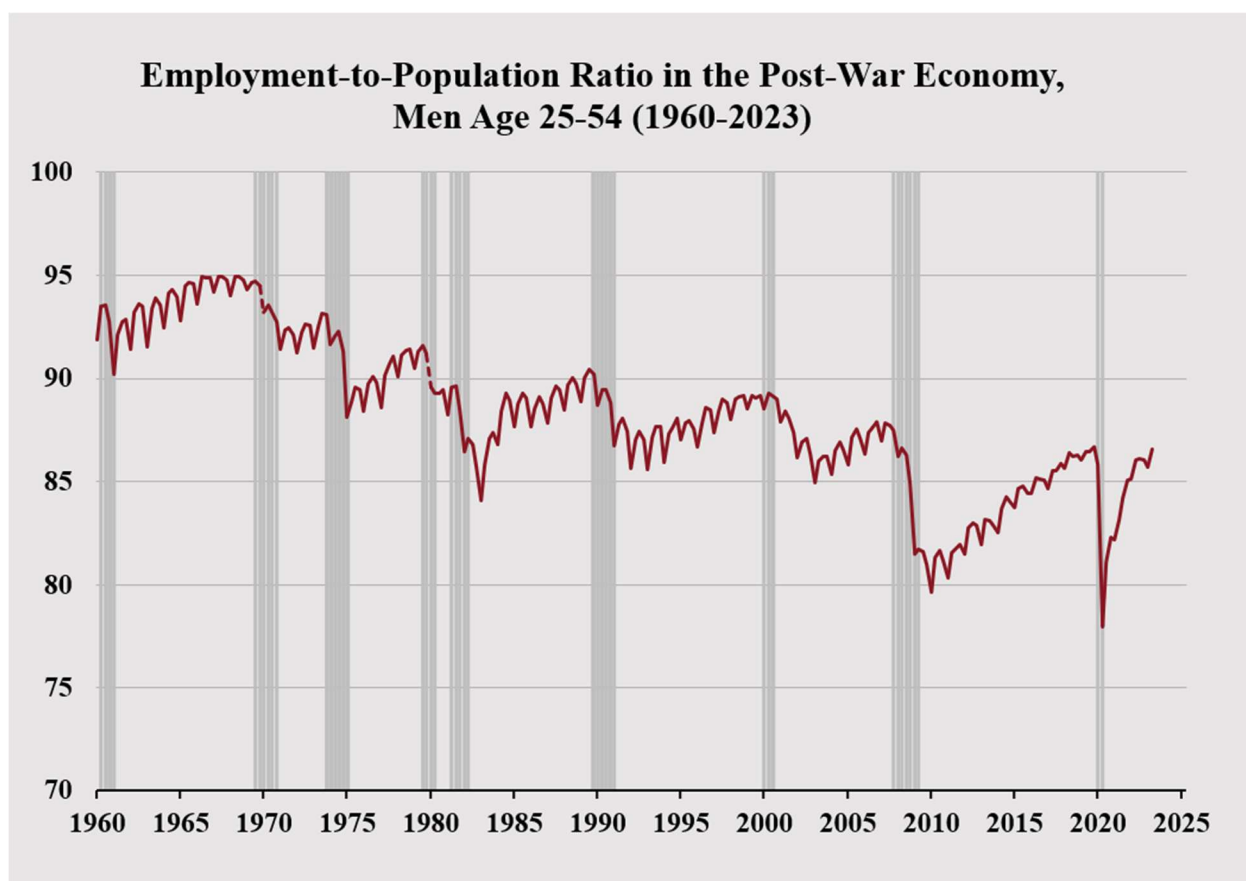
³⁷ Senator Marco Rubio, “Deindustrialization, racial discrimination, and the case for common good capitalism,” May 27, 2020, <https://senatormarcorubio.medium.com/deindustrialization-racial-discrimination-and-the-case-for-common-good-capitalism-dafabef958e2>.

³⁸ William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, IL: 1987); and William Raspberry, “How the Underclass Came to Be,” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1988/02/19/how-the-underclass-came-to-be/eba3a548-2bdd-43b2-a349-1f42a0dfb4d7/>.

³⁹ Henry Olsen quoted in Eberstadt, 161-163; Council of Economic Advisers, “The Long-Term Decline in Prime-Age Male Labor Force Participation,” June 2016, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/page/files/20160620_cea_primeage_male_lfp.pdf.

⁴⁰ Katelynn Harris, “Forty Years of Falling Manufacturing Employment,” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Beyond the Numbers, November 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-9/forty-years-of-falling-manufacturing-employment.htm>.

⁴¹ Richard V. Reeves, “Men Can HEAL,” Substack, September 25, 2022, <https://ofboysandmen.substack.com/p/men-can-heal>.



Source: Author's calculations using Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Employment Rate: Aged 25-54: Males for the United States, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LREM25MAUSQ156N#0>, August 17, 2023; US Census Bureau, "Table 5. Employment Status of the Population by Age and Sex, for the United States by Regions (with Nonwhite for the South): 1940," Accessed at <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1943/dec/population-vol-3.html>, August 17, 2023; and US Census Bureau, "Table 4. Employment Status of the Population by Age and Sex, Urban and Rural, and for Regions (with Nonwhite for the United States and South): 1950," Accessed at <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/pc-07/pc-7-02.pdf>, August 21, 2023.

“College for All”

Structural changes to the American economy have been accompanied by structural changes to American education, again to the detriment of men and boys.

In the previous section, we explored the stunning divergence between men and women at all levels of education. From grade school to medical school, females outperform their male peers; on college campuses, they outnumber them by as much as 20 percentage points. Underperformance in school harms men in the workplace later. The majority of men (and women) who do not go to college find themselves locked out of the best-paying jobs, which typically require a bachelor’s degree as a basic qualification. And they emerge from high school with far fewer marketable skills than their counterparts in virtually every other developed country, due to the neglect of vocational education.

These failings were worsened by a shift in the philosophy of education to prioritize college above all other pathways to success. Previously, K-12 educators saw their goal as teaching every child the fundamentals—such as reading, writing, mathematics, and civics—and then preparing them for the vocation to which they were best suited; this meant college for some and dignified work for the rest. The new philosophy argued that vocational and technical skills would be obsolete in the economy of the future, and that resources therefore needed to be devoted to prepare as many students as possible for college and a lifetime of knowledge work. Many of the same policymakers and leaders who presided over the deindustrialization of the economy presided over this tectonic shift in education. Blue-collar work was on the way out, they reasoned, so everyone would have to be trained for the white-collar future—without regard for their aptitude or interests.

The “college for all” push received extraordinary government support. Per-pupil expenditures in K-12 schools doubled, in inflation-adjusted terms, in the past 40 years.⁴² Meanwhile, the federal government offered virtually unlimited loans so that anyone with an admissions letter and a pulse could attend college, regardless of whether they could actually pay for it.

The consequences of this bonanza are by now well known. Standardized test scores for K-12 have flatlined, with the worst outcomes among male students (who are all nonetheless treated as potential college students). Colleges and universities have responded to the obvious incentive of limitless federal money and limited accountability with unfettered spending. They have spent their fortunes building decadent amenities to one-up their competitors,⁴³ hiring armies of administrators (a classic HEALs profession), or else hoarding their cash in endowments. They have paid for these

⁴² American Compass, “A Guide to College-for-All,” January 19, 2022, <https://americancompass.org/a-guide-to-college-for-all/>.

⁴³ Melissa Korn, Andrea Fuller, and Jennifer S. Forsyth, “Colleges Spend Like There’s No Tomorrow. ‘These Places Are Just Devouring Money,’” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/state-university-tuition-increase-spending-41a58100>.

spending sprees by raising tuition to sky-high levels, thus saddling students with ever-more-burdensome debt loads.

K-12 schools' transformation into college-prep academies proved more harmful for boys, especially because it meant the decline of vocational education. Federal spending on vocational education and job training plummeted, from 12 percent of total K-12 spending in 1980 to 3 percent today.⁴⁴ Practical subjects that could have exposed boys to other ways of making a living—such as shop classes for welding, auto repair, and other skilled trades—have become harder to find. As a consequence, many young men come to believe that they aren't cut out for the modern world of work, slip out of the labor force and, in too many cases, enter into lives of aimlessness or criminality. Meanwhile, young men who graduate and get into college are hardly assured of success. If they fail to attain a degree, they will have wasted some of their most productive years for nothing—except possibly a crippling debt load. These boys are among the casualties of an education system that has defined its vision of success too narrowly and increasingly does not prepare its students for the real world of work beyond its doors.

Mass Immigration

When businesses couldn't export their operations overseas to lower labor costs, they have sought to import cheaper labor—legal and illegal alike. This surge in low-skilled immigration has also contributed to the decline in work for American men.

Many policymakers and journalists nervously ignore or loudly deny the connection between immigration and employment, but the theory underlying it is common sense and the evidence is all around for those who bother to look. Economic theory tells us that an increase in the supply of workers in a given industry will lower wages in that industry. In a glutted labor market, workers become replaceable and thus lose their ability to bargain for a higher wage. Employers hold all the power. By contrast, a "tight" labor market, in which workers are scarce, turns the tables. Workers can set the terms of their employment. Employers must come to them and offer concessions in the form of higher wages, better working conditions, and the like.

Over the past half-century, the labor market for entry-level male jobs has been glutted by the arrival of millions of low-skilled immigrants. The harm this change did to American workers was immediate. The writer Christopher Caldwell records that by the mid-1970s, three million illegal immigrants were in the United States (today, the number is at least 11 million⁴⁵), and "47 percent of news stories about immigration mentioned its dampening effect on wages."⁴⁶ Illegal immigrants were disproportionately men of working age; the gender skew was especially lopsided in the four decades before the Great Recession, the period that coincides with the bulk of the decline in labor-force

⁴⁴ American Compass, "A Guide to College-for-All."

⁴⁵ Steven A. Camarota and Karen Zeigler, "Estimating the Illegal Immigrant Population Using the Current Population Survey," Center for Immigration Studies, March 29, 2022, <https://cis.org/Report/Estimating-Illegal-Immigrant-Population-Using-Current-Population-Survey>.

⁴⁶ Christopher Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 117.

participation by American men. In 2008, 35 percent of the illegal-immigrant population was men ages 18-39, compared with 14 percent among the native-born population.⁴⁷ These men flooded into fields like meatpacking, landscaping, agriculture, and construction, which had long been redoubts for less-educated American men.

And it wasn't just illegal immigration. Since 1965, 59 million legal immigrants entered the United States. They, too, have contributed to falling wages for blue-collar jobs. In 2016, the Harvard labor economist George Borjas reported that "immigrants admitted in the past two decades lacking a high school diploma have increased the size of the low-skilled workforce by roughly 25 percent. As a result, the earnings of this particularly vulnerable group dropped by between \$800 and \$1,500 each year."⁴⁸ The harm was especially severe for high-school dropouts and black Americans, as the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform under Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-TX) and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights have found.⁴⁹

Politicians and activists on the left used to be able to talk about the effect that immigration had on wages and jobs for working-class Americans. Less than a decade ago, Senator Bernie Sanders denounced open borders as a "Koch brothers proposal" that would make "people in this country even poorer."⁵⁰ Or as he said in 2007, "I think at a time when the middle class is shrinking, the last thing we need is to bring, over a period of years, millions of people into this country who are prepared to lower wages for American workers." Sanders wasn't an outlier. Organized labor viewed mass immigration as a method for management to break the bargaining power of American workers. Notably, the United Farm Workers, led by Cesar Chavez, marched on the Southern border and called for the deportation of illegal immigrants.⁵¹

Few mainstream news stories today mention the damage that low-skilled immigration is doing to American workers. Democrats call for abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement and for a moratorium on deportations. Labor unions, from the United Farm Workers to the AFL-CIO, have embraced amnesty and illegal immigration in tandem with their embrace of the Democratic Party.⁵² And while Chavez's bust sits in President Biden's Oval Office, one suspects this administration would disavow his organizing against illegal immigration as the rankest bigotry.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States" (Pew Hispanic Center, April 14, 2009), <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2009/04/14/iii-demographic-and-family-characteristics/>.

⁴⁸ George J. Borjas, "Yes, Immigration Hurts American Workers," *POLITICO Magazine*, September/October 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/09/trump-clinton-immigration-economy-unemployment-jobs-214216>.

⁴⁹ United States Commission on Civil Rights, "The Impact of Illegal Immigration on the Wages and Employment Opportunities of Black Workers," 2010, https://www.usccr.gov/files/pubs/docs/IllegImmig_10-14-10_430pm.pdf.

⁵⁰ Bernie Sanders, "Bernie Sanders: 'Open Borders? That's a Koch Brothers Proposal,'" interview by Ezra Klein, *Vox*, July 29, 2015, <https://youtu.be/vf-k6qOfXzo?si=elQIUPXMQAk1FhCx>

⁵¹ Mark Krikorian, "Hail Cesar!", *National Review*, March 31, 2017, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/03/cesar-chavez-illegal-immigration-foe/>.

⁵² AFL-CIO, "Resolution 11: Advancing a Humane Pro-Worker Immigration Agenda," Adopted Convention Resolution, June 15, 2022, <https://aflcio.org/resolutions/resolution11>.

Why the change in tune? One reason is the migration of the business lobby, which relies on cheap labor from abroad, into the Democratic camp. The industries that benefit most from the cut-rate cost of illegal labor have the most to gain by keeping the border open. American workers have lost out as a consequence.

The Welfare and Disability Trap

Another culprit in the decline of male work is the government, which has effectively paid people not to work through poorly designed welfare and disability programs. Men who have fallen out of work are scraping by on Uncle Sam's dime, thanks to a constellation of federal welfare programs, with little incentive to change their situation.

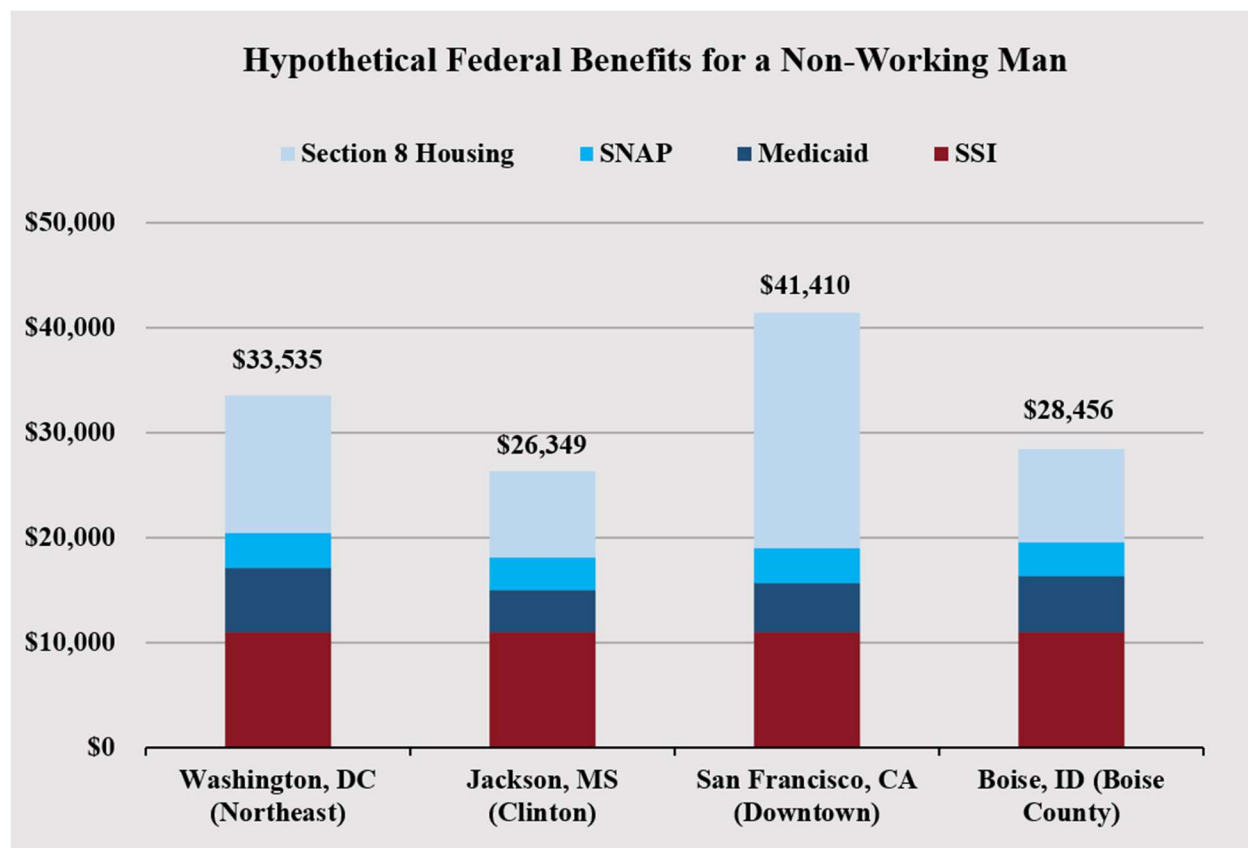
As Eberstadt notes, it is impossible to get a full picture of welfare dependency because the various programs do not talk to each other. We do not know, for example, how many men receive disability payments.

We do know, however, that men who don't work rely heavily on welfare. Two-thirds of inactive men say they receive at least one government benefit, and 40 percent report receiving support from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Work by Joseph Price suggests that the proportion of prime-age men who receive means-tested benefits has more than doubled, rising from 11.1 percent in 1985 to 27.2 percent in 2013.⁵³ Sixty-three percent of non-working men were on welfare in 2013, an increase of 20 percentage points from 1985 (43.6 percent).

Welfare payments are not princely sums, but they provide recipients with enough to discourage them from getting back on their feet. As the think-tank scholar Angela Rachidi put it: "America's current strategy for supporting low-income people with disabilities and health limitations is to isolate them from the rest of society by providing them with just enough material assistance to get by. Not only does this have detrimental effects on the financial prospects of disabled Americans and those with health conditions, but it also likely compounds the very challenges that drove them out of the labor force in the first place."⁵⁴ The chart below shows the amount of government benefits that a hypothetical non-working man could qualify for in four different parts of the country. When Medicaid, SSI, SNAP, and Section 8 housing assistance are considered, the potential payments reach into the tens of thousands of dollars. Many non-working men supplement these amounts with off-the-books gig work or earned income from girlfriends and family members.

⁵³ Cited in Eberstadt, 115.

⁵⁴ Angela Rachidi, "Health and Poverty: The Case for Work," American Enterprise Institute, April 2020, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Health-and-Poverty-The-Case-for-Work.pdf?x91208>.

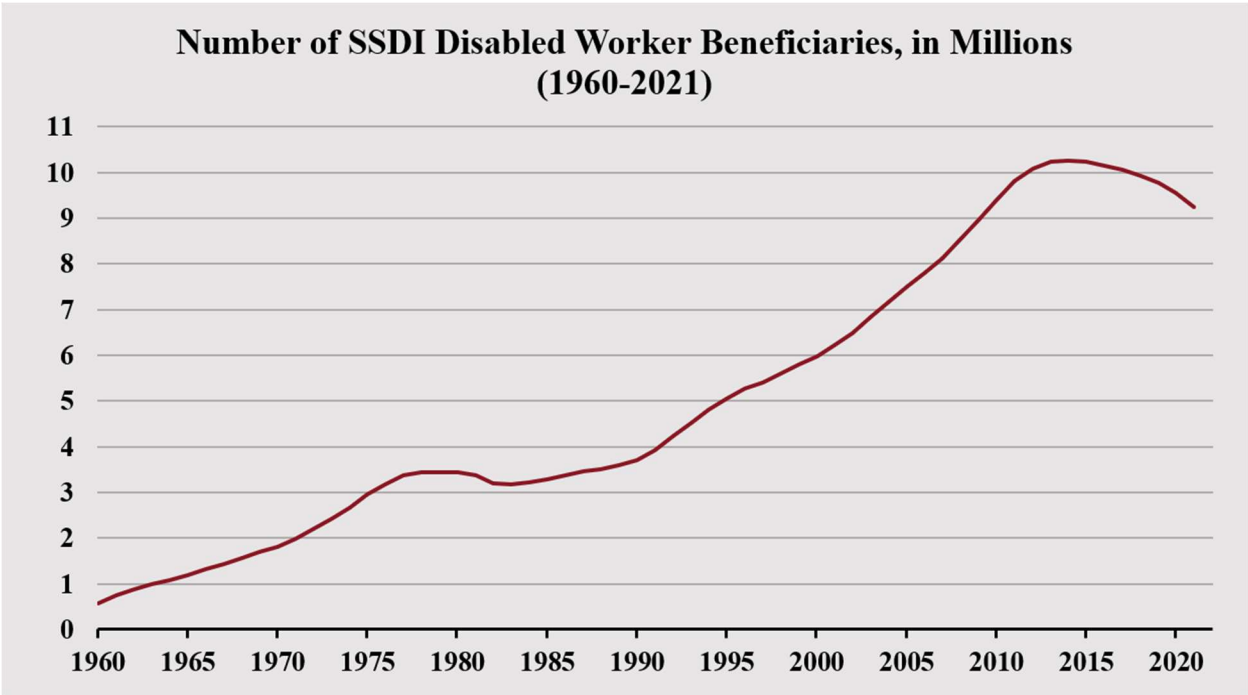


Source 1: Kaiser Family Foundation, "Medicaid Spending per Enrollee (Full or Partial Benefit)," Accessed August 21, 2023 at <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/medicaid-spending-per-enrollee/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

Source 2: Author's Calculations using U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Small Area FY 2023 Fair Market Rents," Accessed August 21, 2023 at https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2023_code/2023summary.odn.

Source 3: U.S. Social Security Administration, "SSI Federal Payment Amounts for 2023," Accessed August 22, 2023 at <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/SSI.html>.

Source 4: Author's Calculations using U.S. Department of Agriculture, "SNAP FY 2023 Cost-of-Living Adjustments," Accessed August 22, 2023 at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fy-2023-cola>.



Source: Social Security Administration, "Table 3. Number, average, and total monthly benefits, December 1960–2021," Annual Statistical Report on the Social Security Disability Insurance Program, 2021, October 2022.

SSDI, in particular, seems to suck its recipients into prolonged nonwork. Since its inception in 1960, SSDI underwent a continuous generational expansion through the second half of the 20th century, from fewer than one million recipients to more than 10 million at its peak in 2014. The hard caps on earned income imposed by SSDI and SSI provide strong disincentives to work for recipients. In 2023, SSDI recipients could earn no more than \$1,470 per month before losing eligibility for an average monthly benefit of almost equal value.⁵⁵

Despite the foregoing, it should be noted that the disability picture seems to have improved somewhat in recent years. The number of SSDI recipients has fallen since its peak in 2014, hitting 7.6 million earlier this year. This is partly because a growing share of disability recipients have hit retirement age and “switched” to standard Social Security benefits. However, the number of *new* SSDI claims and awards has likewise fallen, while the number of Americans with a disability who report working has surged since the pandemic (possibly as a result of new work-from-home opportunities).⁵⁶ This development hints at a relationship between disability payments and non-work—and the possibility that further reform could help more men re-connect with work.

Cultural and Technological Revolution

Policy analysts are apt to think about problems through a material lens, as being essentially problems of money and how it is distributed. But the more one studies the problems faced by men today, the more obvious it becomes that other factors play a role—including radical changes in the culture and its expectations for the sexes.

Past generations of American men had a clear sense of their duties and the role they were expected to perform in society. They lived by a cultural script that was transmitted to them as boys through the family, by the example of their fathers, and enforced later in life by social sanctions and rewards. The transmission of values was assured because intact homes were once the norm. A man could expect to be born into an intact family, raised by a father and mother (along with extended family), and then go off to start a family of his own. Then the virtuous cycle continued. Men, in this paradigm, were providers and protectors. They were expected to lead their families and help build the nation by their effort. They were called to be sturdy free citizens—yeomen—and if they were exceptional, they were called to be even more: statesmen, church leaders, business leaders, and the like.

In the postwar period, this cultural script was especially strong. Millions of men had fought in uniform and earned the gratitude of their nation. America’s conquering heroes returned from Europe and Asia, went to school on the GI Bill, married, and settled into

⁵⁵ William R. Morton, “Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI),” Congressional Research Service, April 14, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/IF10506.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Nicole Maestas, “Identifying Work Capacity and Promoting Work: A Strategy for Modernizing the SSDI Program,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 686, No. 1 (2019).

jobs paying a family wage. But in the decades that followed, the cultural script that guided men, rewarding their efforts and giving them purpose, was lost.

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by a cultural revolution that called into question the expectations of the sexes and dealt a serious blow to the institution most responsible for transmitting them, the family.

Second-wave feminist theorists attributed disparities between the sexes purely to unfair laws, outdated convention, and social conditioning—and what could be learned through social conditioning could be unlearned through the same. They saved special vitriol for the family as a locus of repression and patriarchy.

The sexual revolution assaulted the family from another angle, arguing that men and women alike should be freed from the restraints of marriage, monogamy, and children. The avatar of this revolution was *Playboy's* Hugh Hefner, who provided a new vision for American masculinity. While presented as a kind of suave, intellectual bachelorhood, the “Playboy lifestyle” was in fact a sterile, perpetual adolescence that only became more grotesque with age.⁵⁷

While irreconcilably opposed in some ways, both the feminists and the sexual revolutionaries shared a contempt for the traditional family and its archetypes, especially the male provider. Their combined assault threw American culture into disarray, with catastrophic ramifications for marriage and family life.

The assault on the family had the most dramatic and immediate effect among those on the margins, in places like Appalachia, the rural South, and distressed inner cities. The poor in those areas suffered from a pre-existing “tangle of pathologies,” as Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it.⁵⁸ Those pathologies worsened in the 1960s and 1970s because America’s political and cultural elites lost the moral conviction to fight them. Worse still, these elites treated marriage and family life, formerly a pathway to respectability for even the poorest citizens, with contempt—despite the fact that their own family lives remained strikingly bourgeois,⁵⁹ apart from a few eccentrics.

Nonetheless, the new script was received. Americans on the margins of society began to dismiss marriage, work, and other bourgeois values as a sucker’s game. Many men slid into destructive cycles of idleness, substance abuse, promiscuity, and criminality. Poor women suffered greatly, raising children without fathers and forced to live off of means-tested benefits or low-wage service work. For these women, feminist “liberation” meant drudgery and the dole. The children raised in these single-parent households suffered, as well. Fatherless boys contributed disproportionately to the terrifying crime waves

⁵⁷Ross Douthat, “Speaking Ill of Hugh Hefner,” *The New York Times*, September 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/30/opinion/hugh-hefner.html>.

⁵⁸ Daniel P. Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” Office of Policy Planning and Research United States Department of Labor, March 1965, <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/webid-moynihan>.

⁵⁹ Wendy Wang and W. Bradford Wilcox, “State of Contradiction: Progressive Family Culture, Traditional Family Structure in California,” Institute for Family Studies, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org/ifs-admin/resources/ifs-stateofcontradiction-final-1.pdf>

that enveloped America's cities in the latter decades of the 20th century. Men raised in fatherless homes are twice as likely to have spent time in jail before roughly age 30.⁶⁰ When they get out of jail, they join the vast population of ex-felons, who are far less likely to work even than high-school dropouts.⁶¹ The breakdown of the family thus contributed to a vicious and intergenerational cycle of dysfunction.

When Moynihan published his landmark Department of Labor report on the crisis of the black family in 1965, he noted alarming levels of welfare use, unemployment, and illegitimacy (25 percent of all black births, at a time when the comparable figure for all births was 8 percent).⁶² Those problem only worsened in the decades that followed. Today, the out-of-wedlock birthrate among black Americans is 70 percent; the rate for the population as a whole is 40 percent, well above the rate that Moynihan identified as "catastrophic."⁶³

For affluent Americans, the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s had a dramatic but different effect. Foremost, it meant the entrance of bright young women into higher education and the workplace. As seen in previous sections, women have taken these institutions by storm, succeeding beyond all expectations of feminist theorists and creating, as the journalist Kay Hymowitz termed it, a "New Girl Order" in American education and business.⁶⁴ Changes in marriage and family life quickly followed. Unlike the broken families that plague poor communities, affluent Americans still generally have normal family patterns. However, the demands of higher education and professional life have caused many to put off marriage until later in life; in 2022, the average age of first marriage for a woman was 28, up from about 21 in 1960. Because women increasingly outnumber men in higher education and elite work settings, women find that once they are ready to settle down, there are far fewer men than they hoped who can match or exceed their education and earning potential. Here we see another consequence of men's struggles in education and the workplace: a dire shortage of marriageable men.⁶⁵

This is a recipe for disappointment and resentment, and helps to explain—along with the difficulties of poor woman, described above—why self-reported female happiness

⁶⁰ W. Bradford Wilcox, "Life Without Father: Less College, Less Work, and More Prison for Men Growing Up Without Their Biological Father," Institute for Family Studies, June 17, 2022, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/life-without-father-less-college-less-work-and-more-prison-for-young-men-growing-up-without-their-biological-father>

⁶¹ Keith Finlay and Michael Mueller-Smith, "Justice-involved individuals in the Labor Market since the Great Recession," U.S. Census Bureau, September 2021, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2021/econ/ADEP-WP-2021-04.pdf>

⁶² U.S. Public Health Service, "Vital Statistics of the United States: 1965," https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsus/nat65_1.pdf.

⁶³ Michelle J.K. Osterman et al., "Births: Final Data for 2021," in *National Vital Statistics Reports: Volume 72, Number 1*, National Center for Health Statistics, January 31, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr72/nvsr72-01.pdf#10>.

⁶⁴ Kay S. Hymowitz, "The New Girl Order," *City Journal*, Autumn 2007, <https://www.city-journal.org/article/the-new-girl-order/>.

⁶⁵ W. Bradford Wilcox, Emma Fuentes, and Michael Krieger, "Where have all the good men gone?" *Deseret News*, June 20, 2022, <https://www.deseret.com/2022/6/20/23172767/perspective-where-have-all-the-good-men-gone-marriage-college-university-of-virginia-dating>.

has been in steady decline despite impressive achievements in so many areas.⁶⁶ The researcher Lyman Stone has observed that the gap between the number of children women say they want to have (2.6 in 2019) and the number of children they are expected to have in real life (1.7) is at its widest point in 40 years.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, mothers report not being able to spend as much time with their kids as they would like. A majority of married mothers say the ideal arrangement is to have one parent work full-time while the other stays home with the kids full-time⁶⁸; a 2015 Gallup poll found that a majority of working mothers said the same.⁶⁹ From marriage to childbearing to childrearing, the gap between Americans' stated desires and actual lives is large—and threatens to grow larger.

This cultural sea-change has been facilitated by technology. Mass media helped to communicate cultural revolution to the masses, creating a powerful narrative that promoted the new “liberated” man and woman while heaping scorn on the family. The rise of the Internet and the smartphone have had similarly disruptive effects in recent times. For men, these changes brought addictive pornography and video games that could serve as simulacra of marriage and work, providing a Hefnerian lifestyle on the cheap. The Internet also popularized the new, more radical belief that “man” and “woman” are totally subjective states—identities to be chosen—rather than objective conditions. This transgender ideology spread thanks to the unique properties of the Internet, which allow users to fantasize about who they “really are” in ways divorced from their physical lives and bodies. The economist George Gilder noted something similar decades ago, when he described how television dissolved distinctions between the sexes by presenting exceptional cases as the norm and utter fantasies as reality. “Our very bodies fade away in our minds,” Gilder wrote, “replaced by the strange creatures on the screen and their manic messages of change.”⁷⁰ These “manic messages of change” are with us still, amplified by social media and the smartphone.

The cultural revolution of the past half-century has left our nation shell-shocked and our men adrift. Modern society offers men neither expectations nor respect—quite the opposite. The best evidence for this aimlessness among men is in the polling data. When men who are out of the labor force are asked why they are not working, by far the most popular response is the mysterious “other,” beating out alternatives like “couldn’t find work,” “ill health/disability,” and “family responsibilities” by a wide margin. This survey response points to a lack of purpose. Positive male identity is a casualty of cultural revolution, though it is far from the only casualty.

⁶⁶ Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, “The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness,” Working Paper, (National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2009), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w14969>.

⁶⁷ Lyman Stone, “Escaping the Parent Trap,” *American Compass*, February 11, 2021, <https://americancompass.org/escaping-the-parent-trap/>.

⁶⁸ American Compass, “Home Building Survey Part II: Supporting Families,” February 18, 2021, <https://americancompass.org/home-building-survey-part-2/>.

⁶⁹ Lydia Saad, “Children a Key Factor in Women’s Desire to Work Outside the Home,” *Gallup*, October 7, 2015, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/186050/children-key-factor-women-desire-work-outside-home.aspx>.

⁷⁰ George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1986), 138.

WHAT TO DO

Restoring opportunity and work for American men will require a concerted effort by government, civic institutions, and private industry. But first, it requires recognition that there is a problem at all. The recent uptick in attention to men's issues, even in mainstream outlets, is encouraging. But still, the issue is treated as an oddity and sideshow to the more important advance of progressive priorities. Recognition comes grudgingly. Men still exist, these pieces seem to sigh, so we need to figure out how to deal with them.

If this is the default attitude among Democrats and the left, then it is Republicans and the right who must take the lead in finding solutions. Republicans are uniquely positioned to play this role because we are unafraid to affirm important truths about men and women. Truths such as, men and women are distinct and different. That a man cannot become a woman, or vice versa. That men and women have unique abilities to contribute to America's economy and culture. And that they face unique challenges. Policymakers must ground ourselves in these truths as we create policies to address the challenges that men and women face. Those who cannot define what a man or woman is are hopelessly confused from the outset.

The reforms that could be proposed to address the problems of male non-work and economic precarity are endless. Below are a few aimed at two distinct groups: first, policies to help adult men re-connect with meaningful work and improve their lot; second, policies to educate and train America's young men and boys so they are filled with purpose and better equipped to lead, in the workplace, the home, and the public square.

GETTING MEN BACK TO WORK

Seven million men in the prime of life are currently sitting on the sidelines; millions more are under-employed and underpaid, with little chance of achieving a middle-class life. Building pathways for these men to re-engage with the workforce will be difficult, especially for the millions of men who remain out of the labor force for long periods of time. Bringing back the kind of widespread, well-paying jobs that enabled past generations of Americans to form families and thrive will be as challenging a task, if not more challenging. Nevertheless, a number of reforms could dramatically shift the landscape and restore strong connections to work for millions of men.

Rebuilding American Industry: Deindustrialization was a key driver in the disappearance of well-paying jobs for men; reindustrialization, therefore, should be a top priority to get men back to work.

Congress can start by rolling back or reforming the burdensome regulations that make the United States an uncompetitive destination for industry, in particular environmental-review requirements that delay projects by years and increase costs. It can shield American industry from unfair competition by retaining Section 301 tariffs on Chinese firms and increasing tariffs where necessary. The government can also help mobilize private capital by identifying industrial projects of strategic significance, securing commitments of funding, and backstopping those commitments with loan guarantees and other incentives. As the government directs funding to restore America's industrial base in critical sectors, it should ensure that funding is geographically distributed, so that depressed areas hit hardest by globalization and the China Shock regain good jobs.

Efforts to make American industry competitive, while important, are not a panacea, and their limitations should be noted. First, factory work has grown progressively less labor-intensive over time, as automation has driven productivity increases. This means, at the very least, that efforts to reindustrialize must be supplemented by a focus on other sectors, including the many sectors that support and supply America's factories. Second, as we have seen with the *Inflation Reduction Act* and *CHIPS and Science Act*, the success or failure of industrial policy hinges on program design and implementation. Care must be taken to ensure that every manhour and dollar of funding is directed to its ultimate goal—building more factories in critical industries—not wasted on costly regulatory reviews and diversity requirements, such as the Biden administration's efforts to boost female representation in the construction industry. But these limitations are not reasons for inaction or despair. With proper focus and implementation, it is possible to rebuild the industrial base. That outcome would give more men access to fulfilling and well-paying work—whether on an assembly line or in one of the many jobs that support a nation's industrial infrastructure.

Supporting America's Protectors: Manufacturing is not the only industry that has fallen into decline. "Protector" jobs, such as those of police officers, military personnel, border-patrol agents, and correctional officers, also deserve attention. These roles are important not only because they guard the nation against lawlessness and foreign threats, but also because they mold and train their members to use their strength and authority for the good of society.

These professions face serious recruiting crises. Fewer men meet the physical-fitness requirements of the military, despite declining standards.⁷¹ Radical social movements have stigmatized and threatened to abolish the police and Border Patrol. Veterans are

⁷¹ Thomas Novelty, "Even More Young Americans Are Unfit to Serve, a New Study Finds. Here's Why," *Military.com*, September 28, 2022, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/09/28/new-pentagon-study-shows-77-of-young-americans-are-ineligible-military-service.html>

not encouraging their children to go into their line of work, due to a lack of support for servicemembers and veterans and changes to the character of the armed forces.

Congress should work to ensure that these “protector” jobs are adequately resourced, while also grappling with the steps that are necessary to solve these recruiting challenges. Increasing pay and restoring respect for these professions—and pushing back against hateful efforts to demonize the police, in particular—are good places to start.

Alleviating the recruiting crises of law enforcement and the military would have positive effects beyond providing training and courageous work for many men (and women, for that matter). A larger Border Patrol would mean fewer illegal immigrants could enter the country to compete with American workers. Larger police forces would suppress crime, perhaps deterring lost young men from venting their resentment and nihilism in criminal acts. A larger military end strength would allow our armed forces to reinforce Pacific garrisons and deter the PRC.

Break Out of the “Two-Income Trap”: One of the most consequential changes to the American family over the past half-century has been the rise of the two-earner household. In some cases, this change has occurred due to economic necessity rather than the preferences of men and women. The consequences of this change have been complex, but far from uniformly positive. As we have seen, the increase in two-earner households has bid up the price of middle-class staples, such as homes in good school districts; it has also, unexpectedly, left many families less capable of weathering unexpected financial crises.

Congress should help families break out of the “two-income trap” by eliminating policies that put a thumb on the scale in favor of dual-earner families. For example, Congress can scrap unfair programs like the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, which offers thousands of dollars in tax breaks for families with child-care expenses, but which can only be claimed if both spouses work, and which is useless for families with no formal childcare expenses.⁷² Congress could also reform tax-advantaged retirement savings plans, which currently allow two-earner households to save more tax-advantaged dollars for retirement than single-earner households. This could be accomplished through the creation of a jointly held “Family 401(k),” as American Compass has suggested.⁷³ Or it could be accomplished by increasing the contribution limit and tax advantages of the existing spousal Individual Retirement Account, perhaps by making such accounts “triple tax-advantaged” the way that Health Savings Accounts are at present. Such a change would provide an attractive savings vehicle for single-earner households,

⁷² Senator Marco Rubio, “Reviving the American Dream for Families Through Public Policy,” *Harvard Law School Journal on Legislation* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 201–17, <https://journals.law.harvard.edu/jol/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2023/06/Rubio.pdf>.

⁷³ Ivana Greco, “A Home Security System,” American Compass, September 21, 2022, <https://americancompass.org/a-home-security-system/>.

sending a message that the nation values the work of parents who stay at home and simultaneously providing a financial incentive for couples to marry.

Finally, Congress should consider what it can do to promote flexible work arrangements, which are useful for families that want one parent to “lean out” of the workforce to spend more time at home. The single most important thing Congress could do is to make sure workers have flexibility when it is needed most: upon the birth of a child. Parental leave policies should emphasize choice and flexibility. Senator Rubio’s *New Parents Act* would allow a husband and wife to pull forward up to six months of combined Social Security benefits when they welcome a new child into the world. The couple would be able to decide how to apportion that time away from work between the two of them. Facilitating flexible, part-time work would correspond most closely to the preferences of mothers, but it could also help men who are disconnected from the labor force and who want to ease back into the world of work.

Predicting Workforce Shortages and Supporting Training in Critical Industries: During the Cold War, the federal government expended great effort to predict workforce needs in critical industries and plug the gaps through workforce training and development.⁷⁴ As the United States faces the PRC, a similar effort is needed.

According to a report by the Government Accountability Office, in 2017, the federal government administered 43 different workforce development programs across nine agencies.⁷⁵ Many of these programs are authorized under the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*, which will need to be reauthorized soon. These programs almost certainly require repurposing and refocusing.

However, Congress will not be able to tailor workforce reforms effectively if we do not have a better understanding of the labor needs of critical industries. Despite the federal government’s multiplicity of programs, we do not have data on the extent or causes of skills mismatches and shortages in the labor force.

Congress should create a commission tasked with collecting that data and forecasting future needs for labor. The commission would also be charged with recommending a policy approach to bring the 43 workforce development programs currently administered by the federal government in alignment with the jobs that will be needed to secure the nation in the future. Such an effort would not only prevent costly and counterproductive labor shortages, it would also help men—who comprise the majority of enrollees in federal workforce development programs—gain valuable skills and secure jobs in growing industries.

⁷⁴ Gladys Roth Kremen, “MDTA: The Origins of the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962,” U.S. Department of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/mono-mdtatext>.

⁷⁵ United States Government Accountability Office, “Employment and Training Programs: Department of Labor Should Assess Efforts to Coordinate Services Across Programs,” March 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-200.pdf>.

Restoring a Work-First Approach to Welfare: Given the outsized role the federal safety net plays in the lives of men who have retreated from work, Congress must reform the safety net to help men find work instead of erecting walls that prevent them from working.

We can start by getting a better sense of the scale of the problem. Congress should commission researchers to employ new methods of harmonizing administrative data across the major safety-net programs (SSI, SSDI, SNAP, Medicaid, and Section 8 housing assistance, at the very least) so we can better grasp how these programs affect the decisions of millions of men to pull away from work.

Second, Congress should strengthen work requirements for prime-age men, following the lessons of the 1996 welfare reform. Republicans in the House of Representatives succeeded recently in restoring work requirements for childless, able-bodied SNAP recipients through the *Fiscal Responsibility Act* that President Biden signed into law this year. For the first time since the Great Recession, able-bodied adult men will need to demonstrate that they are working, looking for work, or participating in training in order to qualify for food stamps. We should replicate these efforts across other programs, such as Section 8 housing assistance. Child support enforcement programs are another opportunity to reach prime-age men who are not working. Senator Rubio's *Providing for Life Act* would strengthen grant programs to equip non-custodial fathers who are behind on their child support payments with the skills they need to access stable jobs with good pay.

Lastly, Congress should rethink how federal disability assistance programs approach people who suffer from mental health challenges. Rising mental health claims have been one of the largest sources of growth in SSDI in recent decades. Depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia accounted for more than one-fifth of total SSDI claims in 2020.⁷⁶ This is particularly concerning because psychiatric research identifies stable work as an important ingredient in the treatment of people who suffer from severe mental illness.⁷⁷ Places of work offer structure, purpose, community, and social connection—which are all positive forces for a person with mental health challenges. Congress must reform disability programs to provide people with mental illnesses a speedy pathway to employment.

⁷⁶ Social Security Administration, “Annual Statistical Report on the Social Security Disability Insurance Program, 2020,” November 2021, https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/di_asr/2020/di_asr20.pdf.

⁷⁷ Robert E. Drake and Michael A. Wallach, “Employment Is a Critical Mental Health Intervention,” *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 29, e178 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045796020000906>; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Psychiatric Disorders and Other Disabilities,” April 2014, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/private/pdf/77086/EmpOut.pdf>.

EQUIPPING YOUNG MEN TO LEAD

Supporting adult men who are struggling to work is a serious and important task. However, the problems described in this report took generations to manifest—and our response must therefore be multigenerational. We must prepare the next generation of young men so they are equipped to contribute in the world of family and work. That will require us to change teaching practices, encourage marriage, and connect young men with vocational training and jobs.

Promoting Vocational Education and Alternative Pathways: The federal government spends about \$175 billion each year supporting postsecondary education and a tiny fraction of that amount on vocational education and training.⁷⁸ A comprehensive reevaluation of the federal government’s approach to education is needed.

For starters, Congress should reapportion a significant share of higher education spending to help young people access high-quality vocational education. Congress should also expand grants that help high schools launch new vocational education programs, with an emphasis on training that will help students who are not college-bound access well-paying job out of high school. The results could be transformational. High schools implementing Career Academies (apprenticeship programs for skilled trades) have been shown to boost the future earnings of young men and increase their marriage rates.⁷⁹ Bringing shop classes and the skilled trades to more high schools would expose young men to a different world of work than what it typically found in the classroom.

Congress can also support public-private partnerships that create career pipelines so high-school students can access good-paying jobs in local industries. Orange County, Florida just graduated its first class of ten students who participated in the H2O partnership program.⁸⁰ These students graduated high school with an immediate offer to participate in an apprenticeship program that will prepare them to operate a wastewater treatment plant. Alabama’s state government is attempting to streamline programs like this, consolidating the state’s workforce development programs into a single unit broken into regional workforce councils.⁸¹ During the 2022-23 academic year, the West Alabama workforce council piloted a partnership between the Tuscaloosa County School System and Mercedes-Benz that taught high-school students advanced

⁷⁸ National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 401.30. Federal on-Budget Funds for Education, by Level/Educational Purpose, Agency, and Program: Selected Fiscal Years, 1970 through 2019” (Digest of Education Statistics), https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_401.30.asp.

⁷⁹ James J. Kemple, “Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Work, Education, and Transitions to Adulthood,” MDRC, June 2008, <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/career-academies-long-term-impacts-work-education-and-transitions-adulthood>.

⁸⁰ “H2O Pipeline Program Puts High School Students on a Promising Pathway to a Lifelong Career,” Orange County Florida Government, May 24, 2023, <https://newsroom.ocfl.net/2023/05/h2o-pipeline-program-puts-high-school-students-on-a-promising-pathway-to-a-lifelong-career/>.

⁸¹ Alabama Works, <https://alabamaworks.com/about/>.

manufacturing skills. The program was so successful that four additional automakers have joined and the pilot program has been replicated in more than 24 high schools across the state.⁸² Similar programs could target other industries facing worker shortages, in fields ranging from construction to pharmaceutical manufacturing.

Third, Congress can take steps to ensure that Americans are not excluded from jobs that they are otherwise qualified for because they lack a college degree. Senator Rubio's *Federal Skills Act* would contribute to this goal by removing education requirements from many federal government jobs, opening the door for applicants with alternative credentials, relevant experience, or demonstrated abilities.

Finally, Congress must continue to think about how to reform the student-loan system so that young people are not trapped with debts they cannot pay back. As we have seen, the "college for all" system encourages Americans to take out large amounts of debt for degrees of dubious value that they may not even receive. For millions of Americans, this debt becomes a millstone that keeps them from getting married, having kids, and otherwise attaining a middle-class life. Senator Rubio's *LOAN Act* would reform this system by replacing interest on student loans with a transparent, one-time origination fee and placing borrowers on an improved income-based repayment plan. The up-front origination fee would make the cost of taking out student loans more apparent to borrowers, while the elimination of interest and repayment plan would reduce the burden of paying back loans.

Encouraging Marriage: One of the most important steps policymakers can take is removing barriers that prevent young men and women from getting married. Research shows over and over that men and women who marry and build families together tend to flourish in other aspects of life. Married men earn higher wages than their single peers at every age.⁸³ They are more likely to consistently save money and build wealth than unmarried men.⁸⁴ The General Social Survey shows that married men are more than twice as likely as unmarried men to say they are "very happy," and a major longitudinal study at Princeton University found that married fathers are 25 percent less likely than unmarried dads to struggle with severe depression.⁸⁵

⁸² "Modern Manufacturing Center of Excellence," West Alabama Works, <https://westalabamaworks.com/career-pathways/modern-manufacturing-center-of-excellence>.

⁸³ Tyler Smith, "Household Job Search: What Causes the Marital Wage Premium?," American Economic Association, November 15, 2021, <https://www.aeaweb.org/research/marital-wage-premium-household-search>.

⁸⁴ W. Bradford Wilcox, "Two Is Wealthier Than One: Marital Status and Wealth Outcomes Among Preretirement Adults," in *The Future of Building Wealth: Brief Essays on the Best Ideas to Build Wealth—for Everyone* (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis & Aspen Institute, 2021), 285–92, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Sec5-Ch35-Wilcox.pdf?x91208>; William Hawk, "Household Spending by Single Persons and Married Couples in Their Twenties: A Comparison" (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), <https://www.bls.gov/cex/anthology11/csxanth6.pdf>; Melissa A. Z. Knoll, Christopher R. Tamborini, and Kevin Whitman, "I Do . . . Want to Save: Marriage and Retirement Savings in Young Households," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, no. 1 (2012): 86–100, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41329661>.

⁸⁵ W. Bradford Wilcox, Chris Bullivant, and Peyton Roth, "Family Stability: Bridging America's Social Capital Divide" (Social Capital Campaign, May 2022), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60abb375ca5a79523fb94711>

If more young men married, many of the problems discussed in this report would diminish, including the problem of worklessness. Ariel Binder, an economist for the U.S. Census Bureau, has found that young men are less likely to work because their marriage prospects have dimmed.⁸⁶ Congress should take steps to eliminate roadblocks that are causing young men and women to delay, or forego altogether, marriage and family formation.

The first step is reforming welfare programs and the federal tax code, which penalize adults for getting married. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which supplements the earnings of low-income workers, is a useful example. Consider a hypothetical couple, Stacy and Mark. Stacy has two children and earns \$20,000 per year in a part-time administrative job at a hospital. Mark has one child and earns \$35,000 per year at a construction job. If Stacy and Mark marry, they can expect a \$1,763 EITC benefit when they file their taxes at the end of 2023. If they cohabitate instead, they can expect a combined \$8,447 EITC benefit from their separate tax filings. That's a \$6,684 penalty, or 12 percent of Mark and Stacy's earned income, from a single government program.⁸⁷ The picture is even bleaker when other safety-net programs, such as SNAP, are considered. Research suggests that marriage penalties can surpass 30 percent of a couple's annual income.⁸⁸ And, as sociologist Brad Wilcox has noted, working class families that make between 100 percent and 250 percent of the federal poverty line usually suffer the largest penalties.⁸⁹

Congress can correct this problem by restructuring the EITC so that couples who marry can qualify for the same credit as those who cohabitate.⁹⁰ Lawmakers should also explore reforming the eligibility for major safety-net programs such as SNAP and Section 8 housing assistance so that these programs do not impose harsh penalties on couples who marry.

/t/62703654462def272d60f94d/1651521110209/SCCFamilyStability.pdf; Letitia E. Kotila and Claire M. Kamp Dush, "Involvement with Children and Low-Income Fathers' Psychological Well-Being," *Fathering* 11, no. 3 (2013): 306–26, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4299464/>.

⁸⁶ Ariel Binder, "The Effect of Declining Marriage Prospects on Young Men's Labor-Force Participation Rate," August 7, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3795585>.

⁸⁷ Author's calculations using publicly available tables: "Earned Income and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Tables," Internal Revenue Service, <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/earned-income-and-earned-income-tax-credit-eitc-tables>.

⁸⁸ Douglas J. Besharov and Neil Gilbert, "Marriage Penalties in the Modern Social-Welfare State," *R Street Policy Study*, no. 40 (September 2015): 1–16, <https://www.rstreet.org/research/marriage-penalties-in-the-modern-social-welfare-state/>.

⁸⁹ W. Bradford Wilcox, "HMRF Research Brief: The Marriage Divide, Marriage Penalties, and United States Welfare Policy," 2020, https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/HMRF_Brief_Marriage_Divide_Marriage_Penalties_FINAL.pdf?x91208.

⁹⁰ Senator Marco Rubio, "Reviving the American Dream for Families Through Public Policy," 214; Senator Marco Rubio, "Reclaiming the Land of Opportunity: Conservative Reforms for Combatting Poverty," speech as prepared for delivery on January 8, 2014, <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/rubio-delivers-address-on-50th-anniversary-of-the-war-on-poverty/>.

Congress can provide additional support to young people, who commonly cite financial anxiety as a reason to delay or forgo marriage.⁹¹ Tax relief for working families is one way to relieve this anxiety. In 2017, Senators Rubio and Mike Lee successfully doubled the Child Tax Credit (CTC) to \$2,000—a reform that allowed working families to keep more of their hard-earned income. Congress should further expand the CTC so that working families can receive up to \$3,500 per child (or \$4,500 per child under age six).⁹² This reform would make marriage and family formation more attractive, while encouraging men to work to ensure their eligibility for the credit. The higher credit for families with young children would provide additional financial support to families during the period when they are most likely to want one parent to stay home with the children.

Finally, Congress has created numerous grants to prevent teenage pregnancy and educate young people about healthy relationships, but these programs rarely mention the benefits of marriage. The Personal Responsibility Education Program, Teen Pregnancy Prevention program, and Title V Sexual Risk Avoidance Program account for hundreds of millions of dollars in federal spending each year. Congress should reform the guidelines for these programs so that grantees not only help young people avoid pregnancy outside of wedlock, but also learn about the importance of marriage to their future success and well-being.

ASVAB in High Schools: An important part of preparing young men to stay in the workforce long-term is providing them with opportunities to learn about their aptitude and assess aligned career opportunities. Thankfully, the U.S. government has developed an assessment that can provide young people with valuable insights about their talents. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) tests eight areas of core competency: general science, arithmetic reasoning, word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, mathematics knowledge, electronics information, mechanical comprehension, and auto and shop information.⁹³ Generally, the test is used by military recruiters to identify the best job placements for recruits. But the ASVAB provides insights that extend far beyond military applicability.

High schools that receive federal funding should be required to offer the ASVAB to all of their third-year students on an annual basis. Students who choose to take the examination could then have the opportunity to meet with a school counselor or military recruiter who could help them understand their assessment results and discuss career opportunities (including non-military opportunities) that align with their skills. Studies have shown that students who take the ASVAB in high school have higher career self-

⁹¹ Claire Cain Miller, “Americans Are Having Fewer Babies. They Told Us Why.,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/05/upshot/americans-are-having-fewer-babies-they-told-us-why.html>.

⁹² Providing for Life Act of 2023, S. 74, 118th Cong. (2023).

⁹³ “The ASVAB Career Exploration Program: Technical Summary,” https://prod-media.asvabprogram.com/CEP_PDF_Contents/ASVAB_CEP_Technical_Chapter.pdf.

efficacy.⁹⁴ Bringing the ASVAB to every high school would also expand awareness of the numerous career opportunities within the armed forces at a time when the U.S. military is struggling to recruit.

Encouraging Summer Jobs: America has at least one “tried and true” pathway for young people to gain essential work skills: the summer job. But summer jobs are in decline. In 1980, nearly 60 percent of U.S. teenagers (age 16-18) participated in the labor force during the summer months.⁹⁵ That share had fallen to 25 percent in 2012 and has stayed around that level since. One major force behind the “death of the summer job” is the arms race of educational enrichment activities by middle-class and affluent families. Another is the importation of immigrants for jobs that previously were dominated by American teenagers, such as lifeguards and babysitters. And while affluent families can make up for the lack of summer work by engaging their children in camps, travel sports teams, and test-preparation services, teenagers from less affluent families have far fewer productive outlets.⁹⁶

There is a sense of pride that comes with earning a paycheck. That first paycheck creates a sense of independence and self-worth at an early age, reinforcing the dignity of hard work that carries through over a lifetime. Congress should help more young people gain experience on the job. Bringing high-quality apprenticeships and vocational education into schools would be a great start. Numerous high-school apprenticeship programs take advantage of the summer months by offering time-intensive training that helps young people go beyond an hour or two in the classroom each week. Congress could also require high schools that receive new vocational-education grants to host a school-wide job fair for their students in the months leading up to summer. Local employers could set up booths to make students aware of job openings in their area.

Promoting Single-Sex Education and Classroom Reforms: A final way to address the unique needs of boys and young men is to promote more single-sex education. Research suggests that single-sex education can offer advantages over coeducational schools for certain children.⁹⁷ In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a systematic review of academic literature studying the impacts of single-sex schools.⁹⁸ The review identified promising results showing temporary academic and socio-emotional benefits of single-sex education. However, the report also noticed a widespread lack of research

⁹⁴ Mark D. Foster, “The Effects of the ASVAB Career Exploration Program on High School Students’ Career Decision Self-Efficacy” (University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2019), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/81260>.

⁹⁵ Nicholas Eberstadt, “Men Without Work in the Post-Pandemic Era,” American Enterprise Institute, September 19, 2022, <https://www.aei.org/events/men-without-work-in-the-post-pandemic-era/>.

⁹⁶ Alina Tugend, “If a Teenager Lands a Summer Job, the Value Is Lasting,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/14/your-money/For-Teenagers-Summer-Jobs-Are-Valuable.html>.

⁹⁷ Katherine Dix, “Single-Sex Schooling and Achievement Outcomes,” Australian Council for Educational Research, September 28, 2017, <https://www.acer.org/au/discover/article/single-sex-schooling-and-achievement-outcomes>; Devin M. Demaske, “The Differences Between How Boys and Girls Learn and the Benefits of Single Gender Schools” (Cleveland State University, 2010), <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/572/>.

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of Education, “Single-Sex Versus Coeducation Schooling: A Systematic Review,” December 20, 2005, <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/single-sex/index.html>.

on single-sex elementary schools, noting that most studies examined schools that separated students by sex in early adolescence. The report also emphasized a “pronounced tendency [among researchers] to study girls’ schools more than boys’ schools.”

Congress should expand the funds available for public-school districts that want to pilot single-sex education programs, while commissioning additional studies to address the dearth of research on the potential for single-sex education in elementary school settings and single-sex education for boys. We should also continue to support school choice and increased access to public funds for private schools, where the vast majority of single-sex schools are located.

CONCLUSION

In this report, we have attempted to chronicle the deep and persistent challenges that men face in their vital role as providers. We have sketched the disappearance of jobs paying a family wage, the explosion in cost of middle-class goods, and the mass exit of men from the labor force over more than half a century. We have linked these trends to shifts in the American economy and culture over the same time period, from deindustrialization to mass immigration to the decline of the family. In many cases, these structural shifts were the result of foolish decisions and destructive ideas peddled by political leaders, the consequences of which fell most heavily on working men and women, as well as their children. Finally, we have proposed solutions to bring back well-paying jobs for men, re-connect idle men to the labor force, and prepare a new generation of young men to be providers and leaders.

The disappearance of men from the workforce could not come at a worse time. The United States, a nation of 330 million, is now pitted in conflict against the PRC, a nation of 1.4 billion. The PRC is an adversary wealthier, stronger, and more populous than any we have faced in the past. Victory in this contest will require every American to pull his or her weight, so it is concerning that America’s men are struggling. But we should not care about these problems solely because of their consequences for America’s security and competitiveness; we should care because they mean that many millions of our countrymen are cut off from meaningful work and family life, which are crucial components of a happy life.

If we can provide productive work for our men, give them respect and purpose, and set high expectations for their behavior, then they will strengthen the nation in turn. They will prove the worthy heirs of the yeomen farmers, the backwoods trappers, the cowboys, the rail-layers, the oil men, the GIs, the astronauts, and all the other archetypal men who built America. If we do not give men the opportunity to succeed, then we can expect a further stagnation in men’s fortunes and further alienation

between the sexes. That would be a tragedy for men, women, and the increasingly lonely children born into such a future.

We can avoid that fate. The task for policymakers is to correct the mistakes of the past and create the conditions for the revitalization of American masculinity. Then it is up to America's young men to seize the chance, and to lead.