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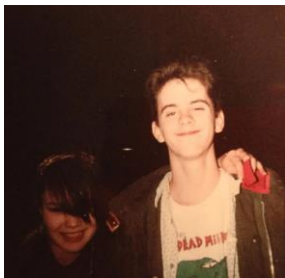
EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

## MEN IN CRISIS: CLASS, DESPAIR, AND POLITICS

### Introducing Mike, Deaths of Despair, and the Crisis Facing Modern Men

By Jeff Bloodworth  
March 2025

*Editor's note: Following is the introduction of a new series of articles focusing on modern men and the social crisis that has resulted in many men succumbing to despair. Gannon University Professor Jeff Bloodworth is coordinating the monthly series, which will include several writers.*



The personal is political. And a crisis for millions of individual men is now a major societal calamity. Across the Western world, men, especially working-class men, are poor, lonesome, and dying young and alone. This social crisis, spawned from economic and cultural changes, fuels right-wing populism from America to Hungary. To understand why, we must look beyond the headlines and empathize with those we struggle to understand. This piece is just one in a series of essays and talks devoted to exploring the larger theme “Men in Crisis: Class, Despair, and Politics.”

Two years ago, my best friend died of [loneliness](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Technically, acute myeloid leukemia killed Mike. But he died, like he lived: alone. Co-workers, not a spouse or his supposed best friend, noticed his absence. They called the police, who found the body. Mike died in his bed, like he lived — all alone.

Few in Mike's anodyne St. Louis community took much note. He was his condo community's resident oddball; the lonesome soul who smoked obsessively while walking his dog. Mike was kind and wicked smart. But he was, alas, in beer language, a sour Berliner Weisse — an acquired taste.

Anonymous in life, Mike is now a statistic in death. Like 209,224 other Americans in 2023, Mike died a Death of Despair.<sup>[2]</sup> Suicides in slow motion, they are caused by alcoholism, addiction, and risky life choices. For Mike, he chain-smoked Camels — like the death wish it was. This was no bad habit. It was a death wish, a way out of his lonesome, broken life. Heavy smoking caused his leukemia, which remained undiagnosed until his passing at 51.

Alone in the Western world, America's white working class is the lone demographic that has seen a decline in life expectancy. In 2020, Princeton University economists Ann Cass and Angus Deaton "discovered" this scourge in their work, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. This malady emanates from an economy and culture in transition. An entire demographic category of Americans — those who once worked in the mines or on the assembly line — sense they have lost their once vital societal roles. Outmoded, redundant, and obsolete, they die anonymous deaths at bus stops<sup>[3]</sup> and McDonald's<sup>[4]</sup> parking lots. Their desolation is found in a deindustrializing economy, a mass culture that mocks them, and a (long overdue) gender-role revolution.

Our own Ohio Valley leads the nation in this awful malady. In the year that Mike died, [Erie County](#), Pennsylvania, led the entire commonwealth in overdose rates.<sup>[5]</sup> Weeks after Mike's death, Top's Friendly Market employees discovered two Erieites<sup>[6]</sup> dead of a drug overdose in a mini-van left idling in the grocery store lot. Local media covered the tragedy, unaware this was a textbook Death of Despair. A working-class disease that disproportionately kills men — 75% of victims are male — Deaths of Despair are where class and gender intersect.

Mike's death pushed me to tally the Deaths of Despair in my milieu. To date, my aunt, uncle, dad, and two (male) first cousins have died a Death of Despair. More are on the way. Every day, the equivalent of a fully loaded jetliner crashes to Earth and kills 550 (or so) middle-aged, (mostly) white American men. A leading cause of death in the so-called Blue Wall states — Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania — Kamala Harris never mentioned Deaths of Despair once on the campaign trail. But this is scarcely surprising. The progressive left has a blind spot as it relates to men and the working class.

You may have noticed that Donald Trump won the 2024 presidential election. He won on the strength of a working-class and male vote. You may not be interested in Deaths of Despair but Deaths of Despair, or, at least, the maladies causing them, are interested in you.

That is why, the Jefferson Educational Society has commissioned this series on “Men.” Hyper-ventilating over Elon Musk and DOGE (the Trump-administration created Department of Government Efficiency) is a tempting exercise. But it does nothing to repair democracy. Donald Trump is president again because he wins men and working-class votes. And he wins them for reasons beyond the left’s favored explanations: misogyny and racism. To defeat Trumpism, you must first understand it.

Sexism and racial bigotry exist. Trump freely traffics in both. But this explanation for Trumpism is far too simple. In 2008, Barack Obama won a majority of the male vote. Just down the road in Corry, Pennsylvania, Obama won all four of the city’s lily-white wards. Across a series of seven northern states, stretching from Minnesota to New Hampshire, Obama took a majority of the white working-class vote. In 2024, Kamala Harris<sup>[7]</sup>, the bi-racial female Democratic standard-bearer, lagged only two points behind Joe Biden’s 2020<sup>[8]</sup> share of the male vote. Trump won because he maintained his advantage with men and increased his margins with the non-white, working class. Trump speaks to concerns of voters the left has dispensed with — that’s why he wins.

JES, thankfully, has not dispensed with the issues of class and men. In 2023, Richard Reeves, founding president of the American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM) and prior a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, came to the think tank’s annual Global Summit speaker series to talk about his award-winning book, “Of Boys and Men.” In his book, Reeves details the economic and consequent social struggles of the West’s working-class men. In 1972, more men than women earned a bachelor’s degree, by a 12-point gap.<sup>[9]</sup> Today, that gap is wider, 14 points, but it is now in the favor of women. The diploma divide is increasingly a class division separating middle-class women from working-class men. For working-class men who entered the workforce after 1983, they will earn 10% less than the generation prior. Little wonder that one in three high school-educated men have dropped out of the labor force.<sup>[10]</sup>

But men’s struggles, like Mike’s, do not stop with their wallets. A changing economy and family life have hurt men, more so than women. In his book, Reeves shows how working-class men increasingly lead desolate, isolated lives. Nearly one in six men report having no close friends.<sup>[11]</sup> Twenty percent of fathers live apart from their children. Obsolete in the workforce and in family life, three of every four “deaths of despair” are men. The anger of Trump’s voters is not

manufactured or a mirage. Trump may be a charlatan, but the anger he exploits is real.

This series follows in the Reeves tradition. Tending to issues of class and men need not detract from our concerns with race and misogyny. This is a “both and” equation, not a zero-sum game. As a boy, I watched my dad batter my mom. In 1980s Alabama, single motherhood came with deep social shame. Momma left anyway. I was a feminist before I even knew the word. Desperately poor, we lived in a low-income, majority-minority neighborhood. I, consequently, didn’t need a history textbook to tell me America lacked racial justice. Race and misogyny matter. But to paraphrase American philosopher Cornell West, class and men (also) matter.

In this series, I have invited an array of contributions from thinkers and writers across America and the political spectrum to delve into the issue of “men” and “class.” JES will be publishing and disseminating these semi-regular essays. We cannot arrest our nation’s Trumpist death spiral until we heed the problems of class and gender disparities (both men and women). We do so by first understanding the roots of the problem.

Mike Alfred Moore died alone. Let’s understand why.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jeff Bloodworth is a professor of political history in the School of Public Service & Global Affairs at Gannon University (Erie, Pennsylvania). He is midway through a biography of Speaker Carl Albert, who presided as Majority Leader during the Great Society and Civil Rights era and as Speaker during Watergate. *Heartland Liberal* is under contract with the University of Oklahoma Press.

Bloodworth’s has published *Losing the Center: The Decline of American Liberalism 1968-1992* (University of Kentucky Press). His work has also appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Historian*, *The Liberal Patriot*, *The Un-Herd*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Political Science & Politics*, *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, *Tikkun*, *The Free Press*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *the Erie Reader*.

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