

ACTON INSTITUTE POWERBLOG

Weekend viewing: Watch ‘America Lost’ for free

by REV. BEN JOHNSON • April 17, 2020



For a few moments, filmmaker Christopher Rufo’s documentary *America Lost* seemed in danger of becoming an anachronism. But in the age of coronavirus shutdown orders, his portrait of life in the forgotten, jobless corners of America could not be more timely.

Rufo spent years interviewing and documenting the lives of struggling people in the depressed cities of Youngstown, Ohio; Memphis, Tennessee; and Stockton, California. (You can [read our review here.](#))

Rufo—who serves as director of the [Discovery Institute](#)’s Center on Wealth, Poverty, and Morality—said that he found the “real problem” for those in areas with inadequate work is “not just economic but deeply personal, human, even spiritual.” His movie

found the profound ways the cycle of hopeless impacted individuals, families, and whole communities in the grip of widescale unemployment. And he found that people without a way to offer their gifts to others in a system of free and mutually beneficial exchange often undergo an identity crisis marked by hopelessness and self-destruction.

Rufo's film perfectly embodies the desperation of the ignored and marginalized people eking out a living in the Rust Belt in the last three decades.

But in the last three years, as tax cuts and deregulation took hold, unemployment levels fell to historic lows and wages rose. Reinvestment in these communities became palatable. While none of the three cities have recovered fully, the surging economy brought a new sense of optimism and purpose to their citizens.

Then the coronavirus hit. COVID-19 triggered statewide shutdown orders and shelter-in-place regulations that destroyed many jobs—and, with them, the hope of too many people in places like Youngstown and Stockton.

Now, the nation has begun to experience the same pathologies that these communities have lived for decades. Nationwide alcohol sales increased by **55%** during the week ending March 21. Police in Chicago, Boston, Dallas, and Los Angeles report **double-digit** spikes in domestic violence. Drug overdoses have more than **doubled** in parts of western New York state. And calls to suicide hotlines have risen dramatically. “At Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, a nonprofit organization, crisis counselors fielded more than 1,800 calls related to COVID-19 in March, versus just 20 in February,” **reports** the *Los Angeles Times*.

These calamities make *America Lost* more relevant than ever. The film is hosting an online premier this weekend. Anyone nationwide may watch the documentary for free by visiting:

<https://americalostfilm.com/premiere>.

Take a few moments this weekend to view this **extraordinary film**, feel the pain of those trapped in generations of joblessness and addiction, and learn the spiritual values that we will all need to get through our long national nightmare.

(Photo credit: Christopher F. Rufo. Used with permission.)



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