

The Reconstruction of the North American Working Class

By Theodore Adrian Zuur

Abstract

In 1946 it appeared to many that the largest, best organized and most powerful working class ever to exist anywhere in the world was to be found in the United States of America. In a very real way, the workers of the United States and the Soviet Union had won the Second World War. They had not only supplied the soldiers and sailors who had defeated the armies and navies of Germany, Italy and Japan, they had built an unending supply of ships, planes, tanks, and guns that could not be matched. But it was not their victory: even if they believed that it was for the rest of their lives.

American workers were well organized in unions, most of which were part of either the American Federation of Labor or the Congress of Industrial Unions. In the 1950's, to many of these workers, it seemed that the American dream was coming true. The little house in the suburb with free public education was a possibility that seemed to be open to every union member everywhere in the 48 states.

Then it all unraveled. By 2017 the promises of the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier and the Great Society were tattered or long gone. Nevertheless, the deconstruction of the working class created in the second half of the 20th century masks another, potentially far more important, story: the reconstruction of a new North American working class.

The 20th century working class was fatally flawed: dominated by a pro-imperialist property owning labor aristocracy whose racism fragmented the class and whose participation in the patriarchal and sexist family structure and ideology hobbled it. It could never even achieve its own political organization independent of the political parties of the capitalist state, and it failed to defend the American Dream that it believed it had achieved. By 2017, the unions represented only 11% of the work force. The dream of the little house in the suburbs has been mortally wounded and will not recover. Real wages of factory workers have been falling for decades.

Partially obscured is the fact that the 20th century also included a conscious struggle by black people, women, LGBT people and immigrants to remake the working class itself by eliminating its fragmentation. The essential social content of the civil rights movement, the black ghetto rebellions of the 1960's, Black Lives Matter, the women's movement, the LGBT movement, and the immigrant rights movement has been to integrate and unite the working class. Significantly, this has created new social relations that unite the working class in new ways across racial and cultural boundaries and across the national frontiers of the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Key words: US working class, American working class, multicultural, unions, feminism, Marxism

Introduction

The Second World War and the War in Vietnam are two pivotal points in the history of the modern North American working class. The first mobilized and reshaped the working class in the United States while transforming the country into the dominant imperialist power in the world. The second revealed that the weakness of the USA's dominance, and explosively triggered the contradictions within the working class as the ruling class failed to successfully mobilize young workers for imperialist war. This accelerated the unraveling of the old working class, while concurrently it began reconstruction of a new model US working class.

A Step Back in Time

The post World War II US working class was a product of the wartime transformation of the pre-war immigrant and black working class communities, working class housewives drawn into wage labor for the first time, and black and white share croppers and poor farmers sucked out of the countryside and into the war machines of the great cities.

To understand this class, a look at the pieces it was assembled from is necessary.

The Prehistory

Genocide, ethnic cleansing and environmental destruction eliminated the possibility that the population of the United States would be largely "mestizo" as are the populations of the countries south of the US border to Patagonia.¹ Instead, the continent north of the Rio Grande was repopulated by armed British settlers, kidnapped and enslaved Africans, waves of immigrants from all of the other countries of Western Europe, and later from growing streams of immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

The original ruling class was formed almost exclusively from Protestant English and Scottish settlers, with a few Protestants from France, Germany, and Scandinavia providing leaven. Because of the destruction of Native American societies, free and nearly free land from the Appalachian mountains west to the Pacific Ocean made it nearly impossible for a wage working class to form, and guaranteed that when a working class of wage earners did form, it would have to be paid a premium, surplus wage.

Under these conditions, slavery and patriarchal family exploitation "solved" the problem of high wages for the mostly agricultural and artisanal production that dominated the first two centuries of American history.

Not so Classical "Primitive Accumulation"

European events finally allowed for classical "primitive accumulation" of a wage labor working class in North America. In the 1840's, the great "potato" famine depopulated Ireland and sent millions fleeing across the Atlantic. Soon after, the defeat of the European revolutions of 1848 sent millions more refugees to North America. The consolidation of Germany and Italy, followed by the "freeing of the peasants" in the Austro-Hungarian empire and the "freeing of the serfs" in

¹ *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* by Charles C. Mann. Knopf, 2005 ISBN 1-4000-3205-9. The islands of the Caribbean are an exception because their indigenous populations died at the hands of Spanish exploitation and disease. Modern Caribbean populations are mostly mulatto rather than mestizo.

the Russian Empire, topped by the pogroms of the late 19th century, sent additional waves of immigrants across the Atlantic to the ports of Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

Immigrants from Europe were not only fleeing famine and political repression, they were drawn to America by the promise of higher real wages and the idea that there was free or cheap land.

For the growing capitalist class, the reality of high wages became a problem to be solved. On one hand, mechanization of production advanced rapidly in the face of scarce and expensive labor. On the other hand, large and small employers learned that competition and division among workers was essential for keeping a cap on wages.

The racist institutions of the early United States lent themselves perfectly to dividing the new working class which was segregated into black and white by legislation reinforced by the courts, legal contracts and church, business and social custom. Segregation was extended to cover Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Native Americans, and Mexican-Americans.

In Europe, national working classes were forming from the displaced peasantry and rural populations who most often spoke the same language, practiced the same religion, and bore the same customs and traditions.

In sharp contrast, when these same groups arrived in the United States, despite the high wages, they found themselves segregated into immigrant communities by nationality, language, and religion. The second generation of white immigrant families were more likely to have learned the prestige language of English, and had more opportunities to rise within the working class or to enter petty bourgeois layers of society, further complicating the mosaic. Table 1 shows European immigration to the United States from 1840 to 1940. Table 2 gives an approximate picture of the division of the total population of the United States into native-born, European-born and black.

Table 1. European Immigration to the United States by Country/Region per Decade 1840-1930*

Countries/year	1840-1849	1850-1859	1860-1869	1870-1879	1880-1889	1890-1899	1900-1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	Total
Total Europe	1,427,337	2,814,559	2,081,261	2,742,137	5,248,568	3,694,294	8,202,388	4,347,380	2,576,710	33,134,634
Great Britain ¹	218,572	445,322	533,006	578,447	810,900	328,759	469,518	371,878	299,233	4,055,635
Ireland	656,145	1,029,486	427,419	422,264	671,061	405,710	344,940	166,445	215,361	4,338,831
Scandinavia ²	13,060	25,429	96,490	208,101	672,283	390,729	538,208	238,275	205,235	2,387,810
Other NW ³	91,739	123,088	71,234	103,971	200,797	121,627	180,168	162,013	138,118	1,192,755
Germany	385,434	976,072	723,734	751,769	1,445,181	579,072	328,722	174,227	386,634	5,750,845
Poland ⁴	105	1,087	1,886	11,016	42,910	107,793	0	0	223,316	388,113
Other Central European ⁵	0	0	3,345	60,127	312,787	534,059	2,001,376	1,154,727	211,288	4,277,709
Russian Empire and former USSR	520	423	1,670	35,177	182,698	450,101	1,501,301	1,106,998	88,402	3,367,290
Other Eastern ⁶	45	94	127	319	7,222	10,407	153,829	111,895	87,004	370,942
Italy	1,476	8,643	9,853	46,296	267,660	603,761	1,930,525	1,229,916	528,133	4,626,263
Other Southern ⁷	1,106	4,457	3,732	20,310	22,058	47,945	235,893	340,392	164,664	840,557

¹Including Scotland and Wales

²Including Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Sweden

³Including the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland and France

⁴Poland was recorded as a separate country from 1820 to 1868 even though it had been partitioned by the Congress of Vienna. Some Polish immigrants into the USA continued to be counted separately until 1900 at which point the category disappeared. Polish immigrants were again counted after Poland again became independent following WWI.

⁵Austro-Hungarian empire and its successor states

⁶Romania, Bulgaria and European Turkey

⁷Spain, Portugal, Greece and other European not detailed elsewhere.

*Source: Original data available on Pp. 31-36 of *Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce*

Table 2. Native-born, Black and European-born People in the United States 1850 to 1940*

Year	Total Population	Native ¹ Born	Percent of Total	European ² Born	Percent of Total	Black	Percent of Total
1850	23,260,638	-	-	2,031,867	9%	3,638,808	16%
1860	31,513,114	-	-	3,805,701	12%	4,441,830	14%
1870	39,904,593	32,978,660	83%	4,936,618	12%	4,880,009	12%
1880	50,262,382	43,475,498	86%	5,744,311	11%	6,580,793	13%
1890	63,056,438	52,965,719	84%	8,020,608	13%	7,488,676	12%
1900	76,094,193	65,402,767	86%	8,871,780	12%	8,833,994	12%
1910	92,406,536	78,095,419	85%	11,787,878	13%	9,837,763	11%
1920	105,710,620	91,345,463	86%	11,877,991	11%	10,463,131	10%
1930	122,775,046	108,065,719	88%	11,743,680	10%	11,891,143	10%
1940	131,669,275	119,515,740	91%	9,700,744	7%	12,865,518	10%

¹Native born includes black and white populations.

²European-born does not include all immigrants.

*Source: Pp. 31-36 *Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce*

Racism fueled further fragmentation of each of the segregated sections of the working class.

White workers were privileged over all others in terms of the jobs that were open to them, the places they could live in, and their possibilities of entering into the petty bourgeois layers of society. Nevertheless, racism against non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants was strong. Edward Alsworth Ross, one of the founding fathers of American sociology and a President of the American Sociological Society wrote, “That the Mediterranean peoples are morally below the races of Northern Europe is as certain as any social fact.”²

A distinct hierarchy formed among the ethnic and immigrant groups. At the top were the Protestant immigrants from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In close proximity to these layers were the Protestant immigrants from Germany and Scandinavia. Next came the Catholic and Orthodox Christian layers of workers. Within this group, the Irish were the first to arrive and were the ones who achieved a privileged position over later Catholic and Orthodox immigrants from Italy, Poland, Greece and Eastern Europe. The nature of this mosaic varied within the United States as earlier layers of immigrants dominated in the East and later waves of immigrants had greater weight of numbers in the Midwest and the West.

² Quoted on page 277 of “An Unlikely Union: The Love-Hate Story of New York’s Irish and Italians” by Paul Moses, New York University Press, 2017

Cohesion within each immigrant group was usually strong and crossed lines of social class as minorities of each group became small business owners and professionals. This cohesion was frequently stronger than working class solidarity across ethnic lines.

The deeply racist ideology of the United States, formed to facilitate genocide and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population of North America and the simultaneous barbarity of enslavement of millions of kidnapped Africans and their descendants, shaped the formation of the social consciousness of these immigrants. On the western frontier many joined in the final chapter of destruction of Native American societies while in Eastern and Midwestern states they were integrated into the bottom layers of white society, above the free black people who were there before them. Nevertheless, these groups had no special loyalty to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) ruling class, and in the case of the Irish had bitter enmity for the Anglo-Saxons back across the Atlantic.

When working class organization and consciousness emerged, it developed through the lenses of group social consciousness, emerging black consciousness and, in the case of immigrants “mother country working class consciousness”. Early working class organizations were influenced by British Chartism, while the Molly Maguires were influenced by traditions of clandestine Irish resistance to British imperialism, radical German workers were more likely to become socialists, and later radical Italian workers were divided between socialism and anarcho-syndicalism. Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe often supported the Bund.

Racism was a powerful force among white workers. In 1902, Victor Berger, the first Socialist ever elected to Congress in the USA, wrote, “There can be no doubt that the negroes and mulattos constitute a lower race – that the Caucasian and indeed the Mongolian have the start of them in civilization by many thousand years – so that negroes will find it difficult to ever overtake them. The many cases of rape that occur whenever negroes are settled in large numbers prove, moreover, that the free contact with the whites has led to the further degeneration of the negroes, as of all other inferior races.”³

Most of the American Federation of Labor’s craft unions either excluded black workers altogether, or segregated them into separate Jim Crow unions or locals.

In the West, racism was most strongly directed against Asian and Mexican immigration. The 1880’s Workingmen’s Party of California’s central slogan was “The Chinese must go” while its direct descendant, the Union Labor Party of San Francisco led the segregation of San Francisco’s public schools.⁴

Opposition to racism within the working class was strong, and always present, but was in a distinct minority until after World War II.

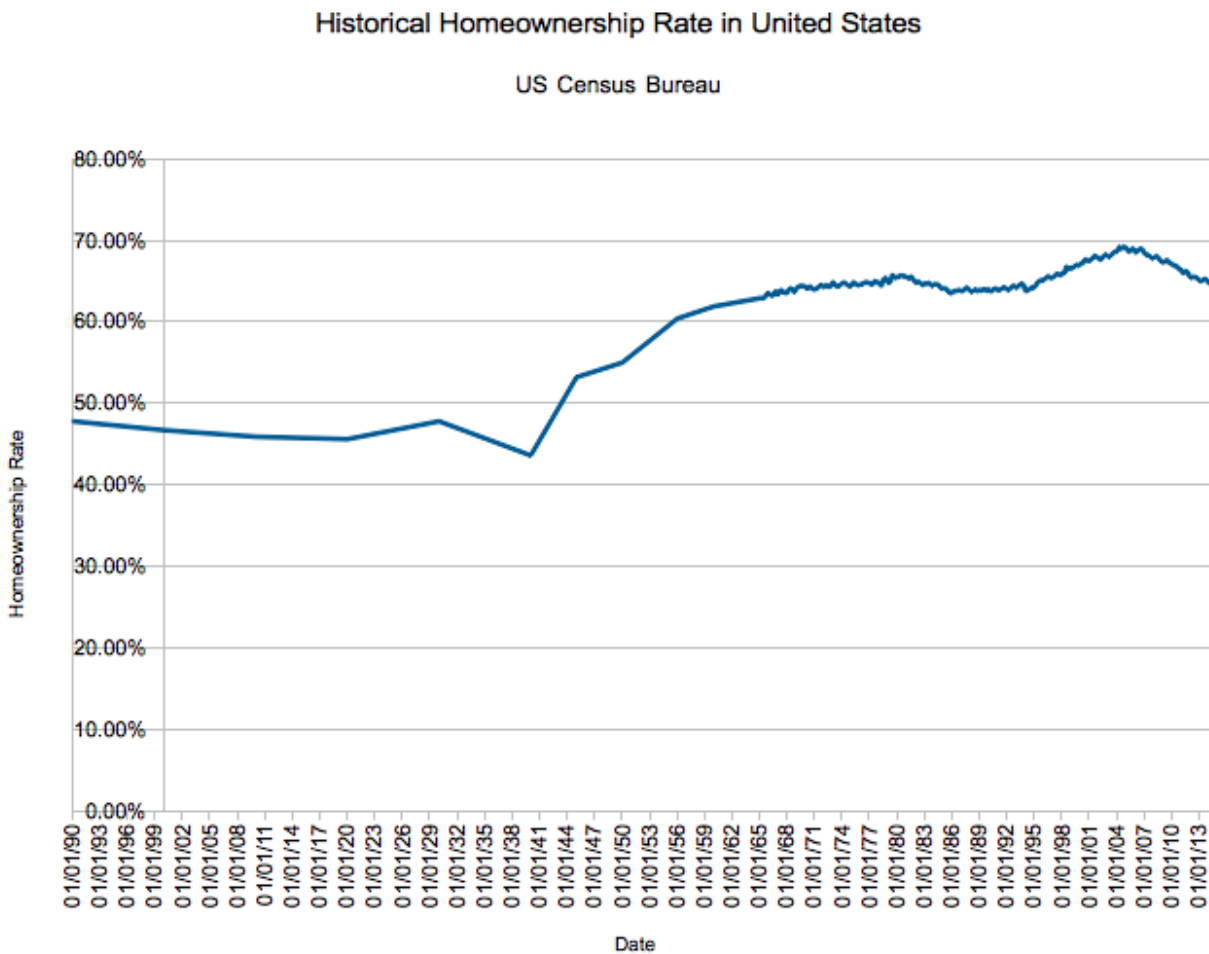
³ Quoted on page 120 of *Black Liberation and Socialism* by Ahmed Shawki, Haymarket Books Chicago, II 2005

⁴ Jerome Hart, *The Sand Lot And Kearneyism*, excerpt from 1931 Book “In Our Second Century” archived at The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist2/kearneyism.html>

Women workers were prohibited from joining the American Federation of Labor from the start, and early feminism had little impact on 19th century working class women until the rise of the socialist movement. When women entered the workforce it was most often in “women’s work” which finally led to the formation of a trade union movement among women centered in the needle trades.⁵

A Property Owning Aristocracy of Labor

Cheap land and high wages played another, sometimes hidden, role in conservatizing the working class, especially the higher paid aristocracy of labor. Skilled workers, most often drawn from the earliest layers of immigrants who had been in the United States longest and who were paid the highest wages, were able to borrow money, buy land and build their own houses or to buy houses built by real estate contractors and speculators.



Four Transformative Moments

⁵ The History of Women in the Labor Movement, United Healthcare Workers West, SEIU-UHW <http://www.seiu-uhw.org/archives/20663>

This broad brush description of the fragmented, racially and sexually divided, working class of the United States brings the story up to 1910. In the next forty years there were four transformative events that created the Post World War II American Dream working class: the First World War, the end of mass immigration into the United States attendant upon that war and the restrictive immigration laws that followed it, the Great Depression of the 1930's, and the Second World War.

The First World War created conditions that momentarily broke down the segregation that prevailed in industry, mobilized large numbers of black men into industry and the still segregated military, and most importantly, stopped the massive flow of immigrants into the United States.

Mostly out of fear of the spread of socialist, communist, and anarchist ideas in the immigrant layers of the working class as social revolution flared throughout Europe at the end of the First World War, the ascendant Republican Party kept the flows of immigrants to a minimum with restrictive legislation. Whereas the first decade of the century saw more than 8,000,000 European immigrants arriving in the USA, only a little more than 2,000,000 arrived during the 1920's.

Combined with harsh repression of the left and the trade union movement and the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, these measures appeared to have the desired effect of controlling the northern and western working class, maintaining northern segregation, and returning the south fully to prewar Jim Crow.

Nevertheless, deeper within society other forces were at work that were laying the basis for the rise of a militant new working class movement in the 1930's.

In the first place, second and third generation children of immigrants were filling up the places along the assembly lines, and they could speak the same language as the other groups of workers in the increasingly larger factories. Third generation Irish Catholics found that they could relate, at least sometimes, to second generation Polish and Italian Catholics. Second generation Swedes, Norwegians and Finns found that they had more in common than they ever imagined from their parents' stories of the old countries.

Ironically, these developments were related to the other major axis of Post World War I repression: Prohibition. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution and the accompanying Volstead Act prohibited production, sale and almost all consumption of alcoholic beverages. One of the aims of the Prohibitionists was to control the immigrant working class outside of the sphere of production, but Prohibition applied to the entire society. It was immediately disregarded and flouted by all layers of society which resulted in what has come to be known as the Roaring 20's.

The disdain and disregard that these laws immediately engendered spread to a general disdain for law, custom and tradition which, among other things, undermined the segregation and division of the working class. White intellectuals paraded to Harlem to listen to jazz, and the music became the most important popular music of the country. Inter-marriage across ethnic lines became more

common, at first within the same religion, and then across religious boundaries as well.⁶ Divorce became common. At the same time, the working class learned to speak the common language of the WASP ruling class: English.

Taken together, these seemingly cultural changes began to knot the working class together in ways that were not apparent until the next decade, despite the great chasm of segregation that kept the working class divided and immersed in an anti-working class ideology.

The Great Depression, Working Class Rebellion and the Rise of the CIO

The Great Depression was the final culmination of the regime of accumulation that had evolved in the United States after the Civil War. The central role of the state had been military expansion of the United States to the Pacific Ocean. This led to the creation of a society based on cheap land, expensive white male labor, a fragmented and segregated work force, a mass market and heavily mechanized industry, an import substitution regime based on high oceanic transport costs and tariffs, a small farm and sharecropping agricultural sector, and a rent regime based on extensive capitalist real estate speculation rather than exploitation of rents by a landed aristocracy. Constant westward expansion had ended by 1890 and could not easily be replaced by US experiments in extra-continental imperial expansion. The 1920's was the sunset of the old system.

The agricultural crisis had become acute before 1929 driving increasing numbers of white and black sharecroppers into the cities. Industry, especially the new automobile industry, continued to grow, but after 1929, employment collapsed. Overall unemployment by all measures hit 25%, but for black workers it hit 50%.⁷ Labor market participation rates were not measured, but all evidence points to a huge decline.

This collapse of U.S. capitalism featured an unexpectedly rapid contraction of the economy, not only creating massive unemployment but also leading to bankruptcies, foreclosures, extreme poverty and large flows of internal migration westward and northward. The collapse also sent shock waves across the world capitalist system, further destabilizing both Europe and East Asia, fueling the rise of Nazism in Germany and militarism in Japan and Japanese conquest of Manchuria.

Table 3. Wages, Mortgages and Foreclosures 1929-1939*

Year	Average Hourly Earnings**	Average Weekly Earnings**	Total Amount of Mortgage Loans Made***	Total Number of Mortgage Loans Foreclosed
1929	\$0.566	\$25.03	\$5,088,000,000	134,900
1930	0.552	23.25	3,536,000,000	150,100
1931	0.515	29.87	2,175,000,000	193,800
1932	0.446	17.05	1,092,000,000	248,700
1933	0.442	16.73	865,000,000	252,400
1934	0.532	18.40	3,070,000,000	230,350

⁶ “An Unlikely Union: The Love-Hate Story of New York’s Irish and Italians” by Paul Moses, New York University Press, 2017 see also His Way - The Unauthorized Biography Of Frank Sinatra” by Kitty Kelley Bantam Books, 1986; ISBN-10: 0553265156

⁷ *Organized Labor & the Black Worker 1619-1973* by Phillip S. Foner 1974 International Publishers, New York

1935	0.550	20.13	2,011,000,000	228,713
1936	0.556	21.78	2,158,000,000	185,439
1937	0.624	24.05	2,499,000,000	151,366
1938	0.627	22.30	2,455,000,000	118,505
1939	0.633	23.86	2,873,000,000	100,961

*Sources: Series D 121-133 page 67 and Series H 113-127 page 174 of *Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945*, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce

**Production workers in manufacturing

***One to four-family nonfarm homes

The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Democratic Party at the end of 1932 ushered in a period of frantic improvisations, called the New Deal. Aimed at reviving the economy, its minimal successes instead ushered in a wave of massive class struggle. Repeal of prohibition was wildly popular, FDR's bank reorganization and regulation restabilized banking but only after bankruptcies and forced mergers had dramatically reduced the number of banks and the size of the banking sector.

Table 4. - Selected estimates of unemployment in the United States 1929-39*

[In thousands]

Year	Bureau of Labor Statistics	Alexander Hamilton Institute	American Federation of Labor	Congress of Industrial Organizations	National Industrial Conference Board	Robert Nathan
1929	1,550	3,456	1,864	1,831	429	1,752
1930	4,340	6,929	4,735	4,710	2,896	4,646
1931	8,020	10,939	8,568	8,322	7,037	8,118
1932	12,060	14,728	12,870	12,120	11,385	11,639
1933	12,830	14,394	13,271	12,643	11,842	11,942
1934	11,340	12,419	11,424	10,845	9,761	9,998
1935	10,610	11,629	10,652	10,050	9,092	9,102
1936	9,030	10,008	9,395	8,756	7,386	7,723
1937	7,700	8,366	8,282	8,109	6,403	6,856
1938	10,390	11,934	10,836	11,030	9,796	9,865
1939	9,480	10,696	9,979	10,813	8,786	9,835

*Source: *Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment, 1929-39: Estimating Methods* by Stanley Lebergott

The slight upturn of the economy in 1934 resulted in a wave of mass strikes with insurrectionary overtones. Conflicts with police, national guard and army units swept the nation: the West Coast longshoremen's and maritime strike became a general strike, so too did the Minneapolis Teamsters general strike. The Toledo Auto-lite strike mobilized the unemployed to support the striking workers while the great eastern textile strike took the movement into New England and the south. The strikes all emerged in open revolt against the leadership of the American Federation of Labor which opposed strike actions and opposed organization of industrial unions.

AFL craft unions kept workers divided by craft, empowered highly skilled workers but weakened the organization of unskilled labor, and were perfectly suited for maintaining racial and ethnic segregation of the working class.

Radicals were involved in the leadership of all of the strikes: anarcho-syndicalists and the Communist Party on the west coast, Trotskyists in Minneapolis, and the American Workers party in Toledo.

Only one of these strikes - the West Coast port and general strikes – mobilized black workers together with white workers. Nevertheless, the insurrectional nature of the three strikes broke down ethnic and racial barriers among workers. In the strike wave’s aftermath, the United Mineworkers Union led the formation of the Committee of Industrial Unions within the American Federation of Labor. Crucially, the CIO was organized along industrial lines rather than in craft unions. For the first time, unions in the United States opened their doors to black workers despite continuing white racism.

The insurrectionary strikes of 1934 were followed by the very different, but larger and in some ways more radical, wave of sit-down strikes in 1937.

The New Deal conceded the minimum possible to the working class upsurge, legalizing unions in a way that might allow them to be narrowly regulated into the National Labor Relations Board (NRLB) system while working overtime to reinforce the segregation of the working class through the revived banking system, the Federal Housing Administration and other newly created government agencies.

By 1939, it had become clear that the New Deal was dead in the water. Unemployment remained at close to 10,000,000. FDR’s improvisations had failed, yet now the working class was rapidly organizing and, as the 1937 sit-down strikes and the growth of the CIO had shown, it was nearly out of the control of any leaders who could be trusted by business or the state.

Table 5. Union Membership 1930 to 1939*

Year	Total Union Membership	AFL Membership	CIO Membership	Independent Unions
1939	8,980,000	4,006,000	4,000,000	626,000
1938	8,265,000	3,623,000	4,038,000	665,000
1937	7,218,000	2,861,000	3,718,000	635,000
1936	4,164,000	3,422,000	-	556,000
1935	3,728,000	3,045,000	-	554,000
1934	3,249,000	2,608,000	-	482,000
1933	2,857,000	2,127,000	-	505,000
1932	3,226,000	2,532,000	-	538,000
1931	3,526,000	2,890,000	-	438,000
1930	3,632,000	2,961,000	-	424,000

*Source: Pg. 72 *Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce*

Table 6. Strikes 1930 to 1939*

Year	Total	Total	Percentage	Wages	Union	Other
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	Number of Strikes	Number of Workers on Strike	of employed workers	& Hours	Recognition	
1939	2,613	1,170,000	4.7	699	1,411	529
1938	2,772	688,000	2.8	776	1,385	611
1937	4,740	1,860,000	7.2	1,410	2,728	582
1936	2,172	789,000	3.1	756	1,083	317
1935	2,014	1,120,000	5.2	790	945	298
1934	1,856	1,470,000	7.2	717	835	265
1933	1,695	1,170,000	6.3	926	533	213
1932	841	324,000	1.8	560	162	130
1931	810	342,000	1.6	447	221	128
1930	637	183,000	0.8	284	207	160

*Source: Pg. 73 *Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce*

World War II

World events created the political conditions which saved the day for American capitalism and the New Deal. The Roosevelt administration set a path towards war as early as 1937, but without any significant support from Congress or business. The escalation of the war in Europe from the German invasion of Poland until the British fled the continent at Dunkirk turned the tide of ruling class opinion and set the wheels slowly in motion for mobilizing the United States for war.

FDR easily won an unprecedented third term in 1940. During the 1930's, the military budget of the United States stayed near \$2 billion/year, fluctuating between 9% and 13% of the total Federal budget. In 1941, the USA began to prepare for war: the military budget jumped to \$7.2 billion, 30% of the Federal budget. With the declaration of war in December of that year, the next year's military budget jumped again to \$27.1 billion, 59% of federal spending.

The economy and the state were reorganized, militarized and centralized, roughly following plans that had been made and updated throughout the 1930's. A series of new institutions based on the experience of World War I were rapidly created to mobilize and train soldiers and workers, to set wages and prices, and to plan the economy from housing and consumption to research and development and to mass production of weapons. In 1943 the military budget hit \$70.4 billion, 76% of the total.

GDP rose dramatically: in 1939 it was 92.2 billion, in 1940 it was 101.4 billion, in 1941 with war preparation under way it surpassed 1929 GDP by hitting 126.7 billion. In 1942 it was 161.9 billion, eventually hitting a WWII high of 223.1 billion in 1945. Massive direct injections of state capital, rapid mobilization of idle factory capacity, extension and diffusion of the advanced technical and organic compositions of capital achieved on a restricted basis in the 1930's led not only to enormous increases in production, but a jump in conventional measures of labor

productivity to 23% above its 1928 level. The number of machine tools doubled to 1945, and virtually all of this expansion was state financed.

The new Post World War II regime of accumulation was in the making. The United States would remain a militarized economy and society after the end of the war even though most of the centralized government planning was dismantled.

Mobilization for war took 16.5 million men and women out of the civilian labor force and into the armed forces during World War II.

Table 7. World War II Labor Force*

Year	Total Armed Forces	Total Civilian Labor Force	Total Women in Civilian Labor Force	Total Men in Civilian Labor Force	Unemployment
1940	390,000	55,640,000	14,160,000	41,480,000	6,995,000
1941	1,470,000	55,910,000	14,640,000	41,270,000	2,699,000
1942	3,820,000	56,410,000	16,110,000	40,300,000	-925,000
1943	8,870,000	55,540,000	18,700,000	36,840,000	-6,472,000
1944	11,260,000	54,630,000	19,170,000	35,460,000	-7,141,000
1945	11,180,000	53,860,000	19,030,000	34,830,000	-4,909,000

**Source: Pg. 65 Series D 62-76.-Labor Force-Industrial Distribution Of Employed (NICB): *Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce*

Importantly, the fragmentation and segregation of the working class began to break down. As workers were drafted into the military, the total work force including the military rapidly grew. In industry, ethnic and male monopolies on skilled jobs began to break down, Italians moved into Irish jobs, women moved into men's jobs and black workers moved into white jobs. The total size of the civilian labor force actually fell from 55,640,000 in 1940 to 53,860,000 while the total number of armed forces personnel hit 11,180,000. The total number of unemployed fell from 6,995,000 in 1940 to -4,909,000 in 1945. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported *negative* numbers for unemployment from 1942 to 1945.⁸

Women and black workers were massively mobilized into wartime industry, but the barriers of racial and sexual segregation were only damaged, not destroyed. New industries in the West, and the militarized automobile industry in Detroit employed a far greater percentage of black and women workers than did traditional industry in the North East. Housing remained segregated

⁸ *Source: Pg. 65 Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce. Negative unemployment numbers in BLS statistical tables result from derivation of unemployment as the difference between the employment estimate and the estimated labor force or total number of gainful workers. Later revisions of BLs statistics show slightly different numbers for some categories.

throughout the country, and industry in the south remained stubbornly segregated even as it grew. About 1,500,000 black people migrated to the north and to the west during the war.⁹

As the war progressed, union membership rapidly grew. The strike wave of the 1930's continued to grow throughout the war, only now in a new form: wildcat strikes. Wildcat strikes took advantage of the fact that there was no unemployment and no possibility of hiring scab replacement workers. Even small numbers of workers could stop war production even when they were opposing the government, the boss and the official union leaders.

The AFL and the CIO unions, including especially those led by the Communist Party,¹⁰ had enthusiastically signed up for the war time no strike pledge and the tripartite system of arbitration set up under the War Labor Board.¹¹ The one important exception was the United Mine Workers which refused to join the no-strike agreement.

Some of the strikes reflected racial conflicts within the working class. In Philadelphia white transit workers struck to keep black workers from being employed.¹² In contrast, at the Calumet Shipyard in Chicago, "...black workers organized a strike in 1944 over discrimination in hiring and promotion, and won the support of many white workers, as well as the United Steelworkers local at the plant."¹³

Table 8. Union Membership and Strike Activity During World War II*

Year	Total Union Members	Total AFL Members	Total CIO Members	Total Independent Union Members	Number of Strikes	Number of Workers Involved	Average Duration in Days
1940	8,944,000	4,247,000	3,625,000	1,072,000	2,508	577,000	20.9
1941	10,489,000	4,569,000	5,000,000	920,000	4,288	2,360,000	18.3
1942	10,762,000	5,483,000	4,195,000	1,084,000	2,968	840,000	11.7
1943	13,642,000	6,564,000	5,285,000	1,793,000	3,752	1,980,000	5.0
1944	14,621,000	6,807,000	5,935,000	1,879,000	4,956	2,120,000	5.6
1945	14,796,000	6,931,000	6,000,000	1,865,000	4,750	3,470,000	9.9

* Series D 218-223.-Union Membership-Labor Union Membership: 1897 To 1945 P72 And Series D 224-238.- Work Stoppages-Workers Involved, Man-Days Idle, Major Issues, Average Duration: 1881 To 1945 Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce.

The enormous world changes that resulted from World War II have sometimes eclipsed the very large social changes that occurred in the United States. Two of these are highlighted here:

⁹ Gregory, James N. (2005) *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 12-17.

¹⁰ The Communist Party USA had been one of the most important forces fighting against racism in the working class and fighting to organize industrial unions, but the CPUSA by this time had become blindly loyal to Stalinism.

¹¹ Strike by Jeremy Brecher Chapter 6 Page 221

¹² The Philadelphia Transit Strike of 1944 Author(s): Allan M. Winkler Source: *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jun., 1972), pp. 73-89 Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians

¹³ New York Times Letter to the Editor by Larry Peterson published November 25, 1992

wartime mobilization broke down ethnic, racial and gender barriers within the working class, and the working class was organized into unions which were themselves integrated into a new system of state control of the class struggle.

The changes that took place during the war were a watershed in the development of the working class. They could not be undone after the war despite enormous efforts to do so.

The American Dream

The Cold War and the Military Industrial Complex

The Post World War II period is unique in world history and US history. The United States had become the dominant military, economic and political power in the world and had plunged into the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The entire capitalist world was in debt to the United States, and the industrial capacities of the United States and the Soviet Union had been enlarged and improved far beyond anything imaginable a decade earlier while the capacities of Germany, Japan, France and the United Kingdom had been degraded. The agriculture of the United States remained dominant in world markets, only now fortified by new technology and the new openness of world markets. The nuclear arms race and the television age of mass communications had begun.

The mass market and heavily mechanized industry expanded, California-style industrial agriculture continued to replace small farms and sharecropping, and the rent regime switched from extensive capitalist real estate speculation based on expansion of the western frontier to intensive capitalist real estate speculation based on creation of enormous working class and petty-bourgeois suburbs combined with expansion of financial and commercial urban centers.

In contrast to the Post World War I decade, the new military-industrial complex was not dismantled, but instead became the central axis of the new regime of accumulation. The automobile, chemical, aviation and electronics industries all produced for the military while also producing for the civilian market. The national highway system was built as part of the strategic defense plan even as it served to knit the national market together and increase domestic commerce.

Nevertheless, the Post World War II decade was similar to the Post World War I decade in several important ways: it began with a strike wave by organized labor, the Republican Party returned to power, immigration remained minimal and tightly controlled, employment gains by women and black workers were rolled back, and the labor movement faced a decade of repression. Outwardly, these recurrences took on the trappings of the cold war.

The Republican Party returned to power not as enemies of the New Deal or as America Firsters, but as more aggressive Cold Warriors than the Democratic Party which had just led WWII and which had initiated the Cold War. The new repression of the labor movement had begun during the Second World War with jailings of Trotskyists, accelerated under Truman, and took the form of McCarthyism and the security clearance system of the military industrial complex in the 1950's.

Even though alcohol was not prohibited, there was a renewed effort to impose control and ruling class social norms. Sexual content was censored out of movies, television, radio and books, popular music was sanitized, the pledge of allegiance was invented, and air-raid drills became a staple of life. The war on drugs, which had actually begun as soon as prohibition ended, continued and especially targeted Latinos and blacks, and later targeted hippies and the antiwar movement.¹⁴

The immigration controls imposed in the 1920's were strengthened. During the depression, the rate of immigration to the United States (defined as the number of immigrants per 1,000 residents) hit 0.4, its lowest point ever in the history of the United States. During the 1940's it crept up to 0.7, and then stabilized in the 1950's and 1960's at about 1.6.¹⁵

Pragmatic Capital

The post war strike wave began at the end of 1945 within a month of the surrender of Japan. By the end of the year there had been national strikes in the automobile, electrical machinery, steel, meatpacking, and meatpacking industries. These were followed by national strikes in coal and on the railroads in the first half of 1946. Hundreds of large regional strikes occurred in virtually every sector of the economy. Altogether, there were over 4.5 million workers involved in the strikes of 1946.

The Truman administration intervened to control the strike wave. Government fact finding boards dictated wage settlements of around 18%, more than employers had offered, but less than the unions had demanded. When employers or unions failed to accept the deals, Truman confiscated the industry and imposed settlements over their objections.¹⁶

Truman had tamed the unions, but had failed to roll back the working class's historic surplus wage.

Capital improvised. It remained firmly centered in the military industrial complex and continued to increase the organic composition of capital, but added new flows into construction, mortgage banking, household appliances, televisions and home furnishings. It also flowed into the West and especially into the South where segregation remained the most solid, and where unions were the weakest. It continued its migration for the next half century, crossing borders and oceans and becoming a key part of what is now commonly called globalization.

The political counteroffensive of capital to control the organizations of workers continued what had begun with New Deal labor legislation. It reached a finished form in the 1950's. This phase dovetailed with McCarthyism which targeted every sector of the labor movement which was not sufficiently loyal to the state, and promoted patriotic and cooperative labor leaders to replace them.

¹⁴ Johann Hari (2015). *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*. Bloomsbury. ISBN 978-1-620-408902.

¹⁵ Page 10 Population U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2002

¹⁶ *Strike!* by Jeremy Brecher South End Press 1972, see also *Labor-Management Disputes* in Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 63, No. 1 (JULY 1946), pp. 82-89 and *The Oil Strike of 1945* by Myron L. Hoch in Southern Economic Journal, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Oct., 1948), pp. 117-133

Witch-hunting of the Communist Party was used to target union leaders, and even entire unions. This was the case with the unsuccessful joint effort of the CIO and General Electric to replace the United Electrical Workers (UE) with the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE).

McCarthyism involved far more than security clearances and censorship: it continued the drive to incorporate the bureaucratic social layer of the unions into the state apparatus. Patriotism combined with anticommunism was given institutional form with security clearances which could be required of anyone working in any industry connected to the military. Clearances required a check of the person's previous political and personal history and renunciation of communism. Loyalty oaths were required of professors at universities and colleges, and played a similar role of enforcing patriotism within academia.¹⁷

While the high profile part of McCarthyism involved the Senator's televised inquisitions and those of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and famous people from Robert Oppenheimer to Humphrey Bogart, the most important part of McCarthyism was aimed at the unions. A conservative estimate is that 10,000 to 12,000 people lost their jobs and uncounted millions suffered the discipline of obtaining security clearances.¹⁸

The First Made in America Working Class

To a much greater degree than ever before, the working class of the United States consisted of people who had been born in the United States and whose native language was English. Whereas, this had always been true for the segregated black sector of the working class, it was now true for the overwhelming majority of white workers and Asian workers. The only sector for which this was not true was the new flow of immigrants from Latin America. This flow had begun as a highly regulated trickle of mostly seasonal agricultural workers in the World War II Bracero program but was to become increasingly important as the 20th century came to an end.

Reproduction of the working class now depended on the children of workers already in the United States rather than mass flows of immigrants. In 1946 the working class started reproducing at the fastest rate since before WWI. From 1910 to 1935 the birth rate had steadily fallen from 30.1 per thousand to 18.7 per thousand. It stayed below 20 per thousand until 1945 when it hit 20.4 per thousand. During the baby boom years from 1946 to 1960 it hit a new peak at 25 per thousand in 1955.¹⁹

The Post-War Surplus Wage and the Little House in the Suburbs

¹⁷ "Secrecy, Security and Loyalty" Special edition of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Volume XI no. 4 April 1955. Statistics were not released on the numbers of security clearance holders until recently. According to a March 24, 2017 Washington Post article, 5.1 million people currently have security clearances.

¹⁸ *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* by Ellen Schrecker 1998 by Little, Brown. An article by Brian Fung in the Washington Post of March 24, 2014 is headlined, *5.1 million Americans have security clearances. That's more than the entire population of Norway.*

¹⁹ Page 50 Vital Statistics, Health and Nutrition Page U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1972

During the first half of the 20th century, the 19th century American dream of becoming an independent farmer with a little house on the prairie had slowly changed and become urbanized, or more precisely, suburbanized. The age of the automobile had arrived in the 1920's, and with it, the age of middle-class commuter suburbs. Nice white men in nice dark business suits drove to their nice offices downtown in their brand new cars hot off the assembly line in Detroit.

During and after World War II this dream, minus the suit and tie, was extended to the very large, and very largely white, aristocracy of the working class. The dream became a reality for many as the result of the successful *defense* of the surplus wage by the great working class struggles of the 1930's and the 1940's. The material social conditions which had made the surplus wage a hated necessity for capitalists in the United States had disappeared prior to the First World War, but the depression era capitalist offensive to drive it down had failed. More than this, surplus wages had effectively been extended to the entire unionized working class which now accounted for a very high percentage of the working class including many black workers.

During the war, the surplus wage had been diverted into forced savings in the form of War Bonds, but at the end of the war, these savings fueled the start of the new boom in housing, automobiles, appliances and other consumer products.

Continued payment of the expanded surplus wage was now possible because of the new geopolitical situation of the United States. Domestic US markets continued to be protected from import competition by high oceanic transport costs, the tariff and regulatory regime, and for a decade after the war by the diminished productive capacity of Europe and Japan.

To the extent that this American dream was realized, it was configured in a way that strengthened the state and the state ideology. A whole series of institutions were established to benefit military veterans. They began with what was called the GI bill which established a program of interest free or low interest government insured home mortgages for veterans as well as a massive scholarship program to send former soldiers to universities and trade schools. Attached to this was an expanded program of Federal Housing Authority guarantees for home mortgages. This program was used to extend and enforce segregation through redlining, a practice that denied loans to people based on race and ethnicity.²⁰

The Civil Rights Movement

Like prohibition, prewar levels of segregation of the work force could not be reimposed, albeit not for the same reasons. Black workers were still the last to be hired and the first to be fired, but production for cold war militarism and the new consumerism meant that labor force participation rates could not return to those of the 1920's (let alone those of the 1930's).

According to the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), reconversion of war industry to civilian uses had led to greater losses of jobs among black workers than among white workers in every city studied except Chicago. Nevertheless, wartime gains were not completely destroyed as can be seen in a comparison of some key statistics from just before the war and 1950. According

²⁰ *Redlining Revisited: Mortgage Lending Patterns in Sacramento 1930–2004* by Jesus Hernandez Volume 33.2 June 2009 291–313 International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

to the FEPC, in 1939 the median income of non-white wage and salary earners was just 41 percent of the white median, but in 1950 it was 60% of the white median. The percentage of male black workers in white-collar and professional jobs had risen from 5.6% in 1940 to 7.2% in 1950 while black craftsmen and operatives accounted for 28.8 percent of the total in 1950 compared to only 16.6% in 1940.²¹

Wartime integration of industry had created a conflict deep in the heart of the Democratic party whose base had always been the segregated Jim Crow south. As the northern big city Democratic machines increasingly appealed to black working class voters, regional antagonisms began to intensify within this party. Ideological pressure played a role as well, since the United States had fought both World Wars under the guise that it was a champion of democracy against dictatorship and totalitarianism. The reality of segregated America was in sharp conflict with its public relations.

The Civil Rights movement throughout the 1930's and 1940's had focused on legal defense of black victims of racist criminal charges, and legal challenges to segregation and Jim Crow laws.

Beginning in 1948, the military begin to desegregate despite strong opposition from the southern Democratic Party.²² In the same year, the United States Supreme Court ruled that racist restrictive covenants used to segregate white and black neighborhoods were unconstitutional, thus opening the door for the long struggle to desegregate housing.²³ Then, in 1954 the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision ruled that school segregation was unconstitutional.

These legal decisions opened the crack in the wall that the Civil Rights movement flooded through. By the end of 1955 with the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, the Civil Rights movement began the transition into a mass protest movement seeking to make desegregation a reality.

Met with violent police repression in the south, the movement gathered momentum and became more powerful and more radical. The crack in the wall was about to widen and break open.

Whatever Happened to Rosie the Riveter?

The percentage of women in the labor force had been steadily growing ever since the beginning of the 20th century, but spiked during World War II as massive numbers of women entered war industry.

Unlike men, women workers often left the labor force when their children were born, even if they returned to the labor force a few years later. Large numbers of women temporarily left the

²¹ *Organized Labor & the Black Worker 1619-1973* by Phillip S. Foner 1974 International Publishers, New York

²² Executive Order 9981: Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948) available at <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=84> In practice, desegregation of the military occurred in a slow, piecemeal fashion. During the Korean War the army remained completely segregated until late in 1951.

²³ *Shelley v Kraemer* [1948] USSC 63 available at <http://www.worldlii.org/us/cases/federal/USSC/1948/63.html>

labor force as the post war baby boom began, and labor force participation rate of women fell from its WWII high. Nevertheless, overall participation rates had fully recovered by 1960.²⁴

While women had returned to the work force, they had not returned to the same jobs. After the war, “Women were often unwelcome in manufacturing industries; unions were resistant to change; and the work may have been altered to accommodate women during WWII but was not after.”²⁵ In 1950, nearly half of all employed women worked in jobs and professions considered to be “women’s work” from seamstresses to secretaries and in which at least 70% of those employed were other women.²⁶

The Jump Blues Becomes Rock n’ Roll

In 1951, when Alan Freed began to promote the term *Rock n’ Roll*, he was just tuning in to something that was already happening. White teenagers, born in the depression, were listening and dancing to black popular music just as their parents had to black big band music.²⁷

During the Cold War, *Rock n’ Roll* played the cultural roll that jazz and big band music had played in earlier generations. Not only did white teenagers listen to music composed and played by black artists, white performers routinely covered black music. While white covers were often censored versions of the originals which eliminated sexual content, and while white musicians invariably made far more money than the black artists who originated the music, rock represented another inroad into segregation in America.

The Children of Soldiers

The cold war floundered on the rock of the Vietnamese revolution. French imperialism had been defeated, so United States imperialism, dominant after World War II, stepped into the breach to stop the revolutionary tide. It too was defeated, but only after causing enormous social upheaval within the United States itself.

In 1961, when the United States began its military build-up in Vietnam, 118,586 young men were drafted. Most of them had been born in 1942 during the Second World War. In 1972, the last year of the draft, 49,514 young men were drafted. Most of them had been born in 1953. In total, 2,160,551 young men were drafted during the Vietnam War, 9,087,000 people served in the US military, and 2,709,918 served in Vietnam.²⁸

²⁴ *Shocking Labor Supply: A Reassessment Of The Role Of World War II On U.S. Women’s Labor Supply* by Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti, Working Paper 18676 of the National Bureau Of Economic Research

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Page 25 *US Women at Work* by Linda J. Waite, the Rand Corporation 1981

²⁷ Jackson, John A. (1991). *Big Beat Heat: Alan Freed and the Early Years of Rock & Roll*. Schirmer. ISBN 0-02-871155-6

²⁸ Defense Manpower Data Center, Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense. Figures through 1976 are for the count at June 30 of that year and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Vietnam Conflict—U.S. Military Forces in Vietnam and Casualties Incurred: 1961 to 1972,” table 590, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1977 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980), 369 and <https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Induction-Statistics>

About 20% of the children born between 1942 and 1953 served in the military during the Vietnam war. About 5% of that entire generation were drafted into the military against their wishes, and those drafted were overwhelmingly from the working class and poor.

That generation turned overwhelmingly against the war.

For the first time ever, United States soldiers were fighting in integrated platoons.

Camaraderie among the “grunts” crossed racial lines and became a powerful force, at first supporting the war effort of United States imperialism, and later tearing it apart as the soldiers followed their generation’s increasing opposition to the war.

Table 9. US Military Personnel during the Vietnam War *

Year	Total Military Personnel	Vietnam	Drafted
1961	2,483,771	3,205	118,586
1962	2,442,000	11,300	82,060
1963	2,699,677	15,894	119,265
1964	2,687,409	23,300	112,386
1965	2,816,000	184,300	230,991
1966	3,094,058	385,300	382,010
1967	3,376,880	485,600	228,263
1968	3,394,000	536,100	296,406
1969	3,460,162	475,200	283,586
1970	2,861,000	234,600	162,746
1971	2,504,000	156,800	94,092
1972	2,335,000	24,200	49,514
1973	2,186,000	0	646
Total**	9,087,000	2,709,918	2,160,551

* Defense Manpower Data Center, Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense. Figures through 1976 are for the count at June 30 of that year and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Vietnam Conflict—U.S. Military Forces in Vietnam and Casualties Incurred: 1961 to 1972," table 590, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1977 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980), 369 and <https://www.sss.gov/About/History-And-Records/Induction-Statistics> **The totals for “Total Military Personnel” and “Vietnam” are not sums of the individual years since military personnel typically served for more than one year, but tours of duty in Vietnam sometimes lasted less than a year.

At the same time, the Civil Rights movement was being supplanted by ghetto rebellions back home in the United States. From 1964 to the early 1970’s there were dozens of rebellions against local police and government. The Watts riot of 1965 and the wave of social explosions that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 may have been the most memorable, but there were dozens of others spread throughout the entire country.

The youth of the nation were rebelling not only against the war, but against what they saw as the failure of their parent’s version of the American Dream. The little house in the suburbs had eluded most of the black working class despite the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, and the children of the movement had run out of patience. At the same time, the children of the white

working class were rebelling against the hypocrisy of their parent's generation's politics, morality, sexuality and especially of their wars.

The youth rebellion crossed class lines and took three forms: the ghetto rebellions, a cultural movement that came to be known as the hippies, and a mass student movement against the war and in support of the struggles of the black community.

As the storm advanced, the modern feminist movement and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement grew and became important forces as well.

Quelling the Rebellion

Concessions to the rebellion included Supreme Court decisions, Acts of Congress, Executive Orders, and actions on the parts of local and state governments. Transportation and public facilities were desegregated, public schools were desegregated, equal pay for equal work became the law, denial or restriction of the right to vote was prohibited, laws prohibiting interracial marriage were declared unconstitutional, and women won the right to legal abortions.

Finally, the United States was defeated in Viet Nam and withdrew its military forces in 1973. In the same year, the draft was ended.

The mass movement seemed to have disappeared almost overnight. In fact, it had either gone to a party or been captured by the Democratic Party.

Disco Dancing

The youth who rebelled in the 1960's and early 70's stopped demonstrating and started dancing. Unlike in the days of rock, big band music and jazz, night clubs and dance palaces were integrated. Black men could dance in public with white women, and in many places men could dance with other men of any color.

Disco dancing was the first multiracial, multicultural moment in US cultural history which brought common people of all races, ethnicities and sexual orientations together to have fun and get to know each other.²⁹ Cross denominational marriages had already become common, now biracial marriages began to become common as well, and gay marriage became a political issue for the first time.

Meanwhile, many movement leaders had joined the Democratic Party. Rather than organizing demonstrations, leaders as diverse as Tom Hayden and Elaine Brown moved into supporting Democratic Party candidates for office, or becoming candidates themselves. They were successful in terms of getting their candidates elected, too. Thousands of black leaders and women were elected to jobs ranging from city council to the President of the United States. For the first time in the history of the United States, openly gay candidates were elected as well.

Public attitudes had changed, racism and sexism had not been destroyed, but they had suffered an enormous defeat. In 1958, only four percent of white Americans said they approved of

²⁹ Professional sports was the first cultural institution to begin integrating.

interracial marriages, by 1968 this number had leaped to 20%, by 1997 it had reached 61%. By 2000, according to the United States census bureau, there were two million marriages between non-Hispanic whites and Latinos, almost 700,000 white-Asian couples, and 363,300 black-white couples.³⁰ In that year the census bureau added a new category for racial identification “Two or more” to reflect the number of people who were the children of interracial couples who no longer wanted to identify themselves as only black, only Asian, only white, etc.³¹ Since these statistics only take into account legally married couples who report membership in a racial and ethnic group, and since there are approximately 16 million additional cohabiting couples in the United States, the real numbers are almost certainly significantly larger.³²

Table 10. Interracial Marriages 1980 to 2010*

(In thousands)

Year	Total Married Couples	Total Interracial Couples	Black/White	White/Other Race	Black/Other Race	Hispanic/Other Origin
1980	49,714	651	167	450	34	891
1990	53,256	964	211	720	33	1,193
2000	56,497	1,464	363	1,051	50	1,743
2008	60,129	2,340	481	1,737	122	2,222
2009	60,844	2,437	550	1,759	128	2,421
2010	60,384	2,413	558	1,723	132	2,289

*Source: Table 60 of the Population section of the Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012

Nixon, Reagan, Bushes and Clinton: Slicing away the Surplus Wage

In 1960 the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Pacific Maritime Association signed the historic Mechanization and Modernization Agreement. In 1962 the Port of Oakland, CA began to load and unload container ships. In 1971 and 1972 Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong conducted the secret and public diplomacy that led China to adopt the capitalist road and to become the world’s greatest manufacturer and exporter. Then the 1973 Arab–Israeli War resulted in the OPEC oil embargo.

The surplus wage of the American working class was about to come under attack.

It began in the mid-1970’s in the construction industry and has grown in scope to include every sector of the economy. “Employers formed early in the decade the ‘Construction Industry Users Roundtable’. Its strategy was to undermine the then powerful building trades unions by a new tactic: the ‘double breasted operation’. This simply put was a way to undermine the construction unions by setting up parallel, non-union companies. The unions ignored the threat more or less, since the double breasted operations were set up in the suburbs and outlying regions. The urban bastion of unionization in construction wasn’t immediately impacted. Employers progressively then moved jobs and work to the non-union operations. The loss of jobs in the unionized

³⁰ Race Mixing by Renee C. Romano 2006 University of Florida Press

³¹ Ibid.

³² Pew Research Center <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/number-of-u-s-adults-cohabiting-with-a-partner-continues-to-rise-especially-among-those-50-and-older/>

operations eventually forced workers and unions to start granting concessions in an attempt to prevent their work shifting to the non-union companies.”³³

The container-logistics revolution had already resulted in a flood of imports. The import substitution regime based on high oceanic transport costs and tariffs had finally come to an end and price competition increased in the previously protected markets. This led to additional attacks on wage levels, now in manufacturing rather than construction.

In 1950, only 21,287 automobiles were imported into the United States. Imports passed 700,000 in 1969, passed two million by 1976 and hit 4.1 million by 1986. Home electronics and appliances followed suit.³⁴

Table 11. UAW Contract Hourly Wage for newly-hired workers*

Year	Rate at start of employment (“entry rate”)	Maximum rate attainable over course of contract
1961	\$18.97	\$19.72
1970	23.58	24.75
1982	19.17	22.55
1990	23.66	27.85
1996	19.11	27.30
2007	15.25	16.72
2011	14.78 - 15.78	18.28 - 19.28
2015	13.63 - 14.55	16.86 - 17.79

*Source: <http://www.remappingdebate.org/map-data-tool/putting-new-gm-uaw-contract-historical-context>

As World War II era factories became obsolete, they were closed throughout the industrial cities of the North East, the Midwest and the West. When new factories were opened in the United States, they were most often opened in the open-shop South and South West.

Beginning in the 1970’s, assembly work began to move maquiladoras along the Mexican border. When the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, the maquiladoras became more important and spread to the interior of Mexico as well.

Foreign direct investment in US manufacturing plants followed the same path to the south and south west that US industry had already been following, most often successfully avoiding unionization altogether.³⁵

Beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the ruling class of the United States turned decisively against the New Deal-World War II social contract. By breaking the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike, Reagan added union busting to the concessionary bargaining spiral that was already under way.

³³ *Concession Bargaining at the Crossroads* by Jack Rasmus, CounterPunch January 7, 2014

³⁴ *Foreign invasion: imports, transplants change auto industry forever* May 1, 1996 Arnholt, Mike; Keenan, Tim Wards Auto

³⁵ *German union, UAW together target auto plants in the South*, Associated Press November 19, 2015

Union membership began to shrink in both absolute and relative terms.

Table 12. Union Membership 1983 to 2001*
(in thousands)

Year	Wage and salary workers				Public sector workers				Private Sector Workers			
	Union Members	%	Covered by unions	%	Union Members	%	Covered by unions	%	Union Members	%	Covered by unions	%
1983	17,717.4	20.1	20,532.1	23.3	5,737.2	36.7	7,112.2	45.5	11,980.2	16.5	13,419.9	18.5
1985	16,996.1	18.0	19,358.1	20.5	5,743.1	35.7	6,920.6	43.1	11,253.0	14.3	12,437.5	15.9
1990	16,739.8	16.1	19,057.8	18.3	6,485.0	36.5	7,691.4	43.3	10,254.8	11.9	11,366.4	13.2
1995	16,359.6	14.9	18,346.3	16.7	6,927.4	37.7	7,986.6	43.5	9,432.1	10.3	10,359.8	11.3
1997	16,109.9	14.1	17,923.0	15.6	6,746.7	37.2	7,668.0	42.3	9,363.3	9.7	10,255.0	10.6
1998	16,211.4	13.9	17,918.3	15.4	6,905.3	37.5	7,814.7	42.5	9,306.1	9.5	10,103.6	10.3
1999	16,476.7	13.9	18,182.3	15.3	7,058.1	37.3	7,966.3	42.1	9,418.6	9.4	10,216.0	10.2
2000	16,258.2	13.5	17,944.1	14.9	7,110.5	37.5	7,975.6	42.0	9,147.7	9.0	9,968.5	9.8
2001	16,288.8	13.5	17,878.1	14.8	7,147.5	37.4	7,975.4	41.7	9,141.3	9.0	9,902.7	9.7

*Source: No. 628. Labor Union Membership by Sector: 1983 to 2001, The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Washington, DC, Union Membership and Earnings Data Book: Compilations from the 2002 Current Population Survey

Extortion of concessions from unions in contract negotiations escalated. According to Jack Rasmus, concessionary bargaining developed in four phases.³⁶ The first stage, discussed above, began in the mid-1970's and continued to about 2000. It involved constant pressure to reduce wages and medical benefits. The second phase attacked the scope of union contracts, and began to replace defined medical and pension plans with "health savings accounts" and 401k accounts. The third phase, beginning in 2012, extended concessionary bargaining into the public sector. According to Rasmus, the fourth stage emerged in 2014, "The latest phase of concession bargaining now emerging in the past year—concessions giving back the 'social wage'—is historic. It represents concession bargaining over workers' income that is shifting to the political level on a grand scale. It is 'grande scale concession bargaining'. Not content with concessions in money and benefits at the shop level in the private sector, not even content with extending that in intensified form today to the public worker sector, corporate interests now demand concession bargaining over social wages at the political level.

The Not-So-New Immigrants

There have been Latinos in the Western United States since long before it became part of the United States. Soon after Cortes conquered Mexico, the Virreinato de Nueva España extended northward into what are now Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and California. Following the victory of the United States in the Mexican-American war, the northern half of Mexico was annexed to the United States and approximately 300,000 Spanish-speakers became US citizens.³⁷

³⁶ Op. Cit. Rasmus

³⁷ Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce

Then, when the United States annexed Puerto Rico following the Spanish American War, it gained 953,243 Spanish speaking subjects. They subsequently became citizens in 1917.³⁸

The fact that millions of Latinos have been citizens of the United States since the 19th century not as the result of immigration, but as the result of colonial conquest and annexation means that subsequent immigration has always had a different character from immigration from Europe. Despite the fact that Latinos come in all shades and colors – some are white, some are black, many are mulattos, and most are mestizos – Latinos as a group are subject to racism simply because they are among the conquered subjects. Nevertheless, because of the large long-standing Latino communities within the United States, immigrants from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America have been able to integrate into the United States, and to move freely across the border with Mexico regardless of the current laws of the United States.

Like European and Asian immigration, real flows of Latino immigration have responded to perceptions of economic opportunity in the United States, as well as economic and political conditions within Latin America. The enormous expansion of Southwestern industrial agricultural and the cities of the Southwest have drawn millions of Mexicans into the United States for over a century, while the Mexican Revolution, the Cristero war, the destruction of the ejido system by land reforms in the 1980's, and the further destruction of small scale Mexican agriculture following NAFTA have all led to surges of immigration from Mexico. Similar patterns can be observed in the immigration patterns from all of the countries of Latin America. Statistical flows reflect real flows modulated by fluctuations in legal (authorized) flows. In general, the countries that have contributed the most immigrants are those in the northern part of Latin America: Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and the three countries at the northwestern corner of South America.

Table 13. Selected Authorized* Latin American Immigration to the United States**

Decade	Mexico	Cuba	Dominican Republic	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua	Panama	Colombia	Peru	Ecuador
1910-1919	185,344	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1920-1929	498,945	12,769	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1930-1939	32,709	10,641	1,165	712	632	809	564	1,774	1,278	460	320
1940-1949	56,158	25,976	4,802	4,885	1,303	1,874	4,393	5,282	3,454	1,273	2,207
1951-1960	273,847	73,221	10,219	5,094	4,197	5,320	7,812	12,601	15,567	5,980	8,574
1961-1970	441,824	202,030	83,552	14,405	14,357	15,087	10,383	22,177	68,371	19,783	34,107
1971-1980	621,218	256,497	139,249	29,428	23,837	15,653	10,911	21,395	71,265	25,311	47,464
1981-1990	1,009,586	132,552	221,552	137,418	58,847	39,071	31,102	32,957	105,494	49,958	48,015
1991-1999	2,757,418	159,037	359,818	273,017	126,043	72,880	80,446	28,149	137,985	110,117	81,358
2000-2009	1,704,166	271,742	291,492	251,237	156,992	63,513	70,015	18,120	236,570	137,614	107,977

³⁸ Historical Statistics of the United States, A Supplement to the Historical Abstract of the United States 1789-1945, Bureau of the Census, United State Department of Commerce

*Figures do not show total immigrant flows, but only “persons obtaining lawful permanent resident status.

** Source: Table 2, 2013 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics, United States Homeland Security

Asian immigration, which had been almost completely cut off during the 1930’s and 1940’s, also slowly increased following the Second World War. Two countries which under different circumstances had each been defeated and militarily occupied by the United States led the way at first: Japan and the Philippines. They were followed in time by two other countries that, each in its own way, had also fallen victim to US invasions: South Korea and Vietnam. By the end of the 1970’s other Asian countries were sending largely flows of immigrants to the United States, and significant numbers began to come from Central Asia and the Middle East. By the first decade of the 21st century, China and India had had joined the Philippines as the largest sources of the new flow of immigrants.

By the 1990’s total authorized immigration flows into the United States had once again reached pre-World War 1 levels in terms of absolute numbers. In the first, decade of the 21st century there were a total of 10,299,430 authorized immigrants into the United States and additional 12 million or more undocumented immigrants.³⁹

The new wave of immigration differs in some fundamental, and explosive, ways from the 1845 to 1914 wave of immigration. First of all, the new immigrants are overwhelming from Latin America and Asia. Second, when they arrive they find well established communities waiting to aid them in the new and sometimes hostile society. Third, a very large proportion of them enter without the authorization of the government of the United States.

Table 14. Selected Authorized* Asian Immigration to the United States**

Decade	China	Hong Kong	India	Japan	Philippines	South Korea***	Vietnam
1910-1919	20,916	-	3,478	77,125	-	-	-
1920-1929	30,648	-	2,076	42,057	-	-	-
1930-1939	5,874	-	554	2,683	457	-	-
1940-1949	16,072	-	1,692	1,557	4,099	83	-
1951-1960	8,836	13,781	1,922	41,968	17,245	4,845	290
1961-1970	14,060	67,047	18,638	40,956	70,660	27,048	2,949
1971-1980	17,627	117,350	148,018	52,812	337,726	241,192	121,716
1981-1990	170,897	112,132	231,649	44,150	502,056	322,078	200,632
1991-1999	342,058	116,894	352,528	66,582	534,338	179,770	275,379
2000-2009	591,711	57,583	590,464	84,552	545,463	209,758	289,616

*Figures do not show total immigrant flows, but only “persons obtaining lawful permanent resident status.

** Source: Table 2, 2013 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Office of Immigration Statistics, United States Homeland Security

***South Korea after partition

³⁹ The US Immigrant Rights Movement by Paul Engler, April 2009 International Center on Nonviolent Conflict

The Immigrant Rights Movement

The Immigrant Rights Movement began to develop in the 1980's to protest against, and then to protect against the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). It became a mass movement in the first decade of the new century. In many ways it is similar to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's: it aims to win basic rights for a major oppressed group on US society, and it consists of a diverse array of organizations ranging from churches, to unions to cultural organizations. Like the Civil rights Movement, the Immigrant Rights movement has ongoing debates about strategy, tactics, and program.⁴⁰

Despite the similarities, the issue of immigrant rights poses geopolitical issues in ways that black civil rights did not and poses practical problems more like those encountered by the abolitionists underground railroad.

In political practice, the movement has opposed efforts to make immigration laws and regulations harsher, and worked to soften them through measures like the sanctuary cities movement and the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act.

What it has not done is confront the racist nature of the border and immigration controls themselves.

Whereas, in 1985 the European Union adopted the Schengen Agreement allowing virtually free movement for the citizens of the signatory countries throughout all of their territories, adopting a similar right in the NAFTA area has never become a rallying cry in the Immigrant Rights Movement largely because of the opposition of the AFL-CIO, some churches, and Democratic Party political interests.

Despite its weaknesses, the immigrant rights movement is still growing and faces greater tests ahead from the new Trump administration.

Losing the Little House in the Suburb

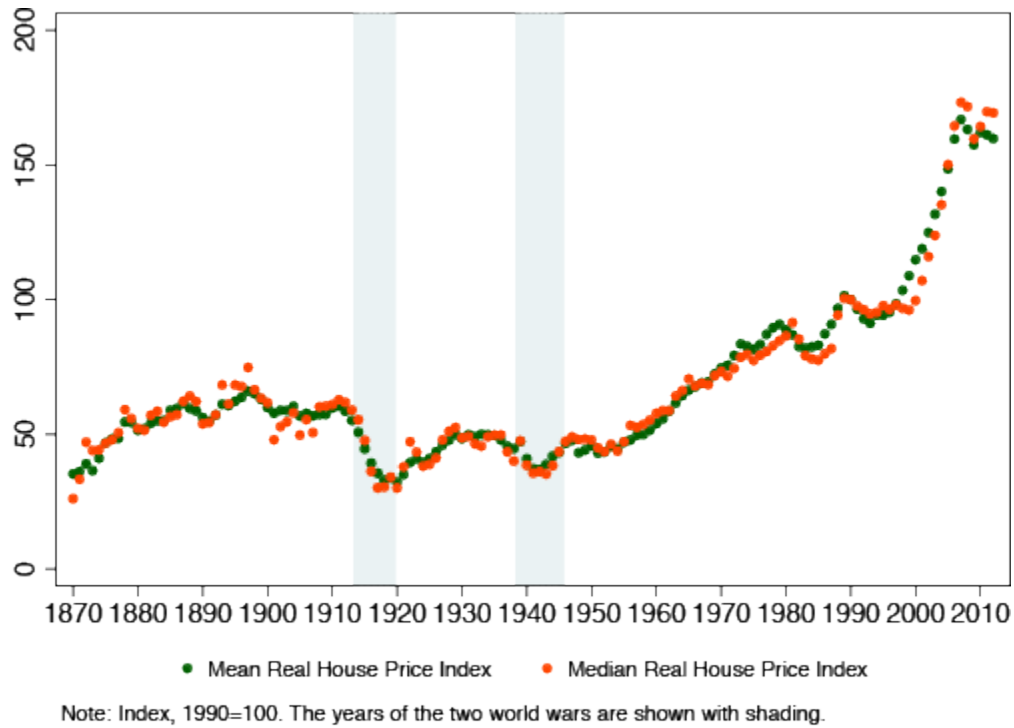
For nearly 50 years, the surplus wage which made the American Dream of a little house in the suburbs possible has been under concerted attack. It has been whittled away and reduced piece by piece. It still exists, as the massive flow of immigrants into the United States attests, but it is relentlessly falling.

During the same period, housing prices increased. The ratio between housing prices and household income and the number of moderately and severely burdened mortgages, both measures of the probability of mortgage default, skyrocketed. Nevertheless, overall home

⁴⁰ Immigrant Labor, Immigrant Rights by David Bacon NACLA Spring 2014

ownership rates remained fairly stable at slightly above 60% (These rates include homes that are owned free and clear of mortgages, and those that are security on any mortgage or loan.)⁴¹

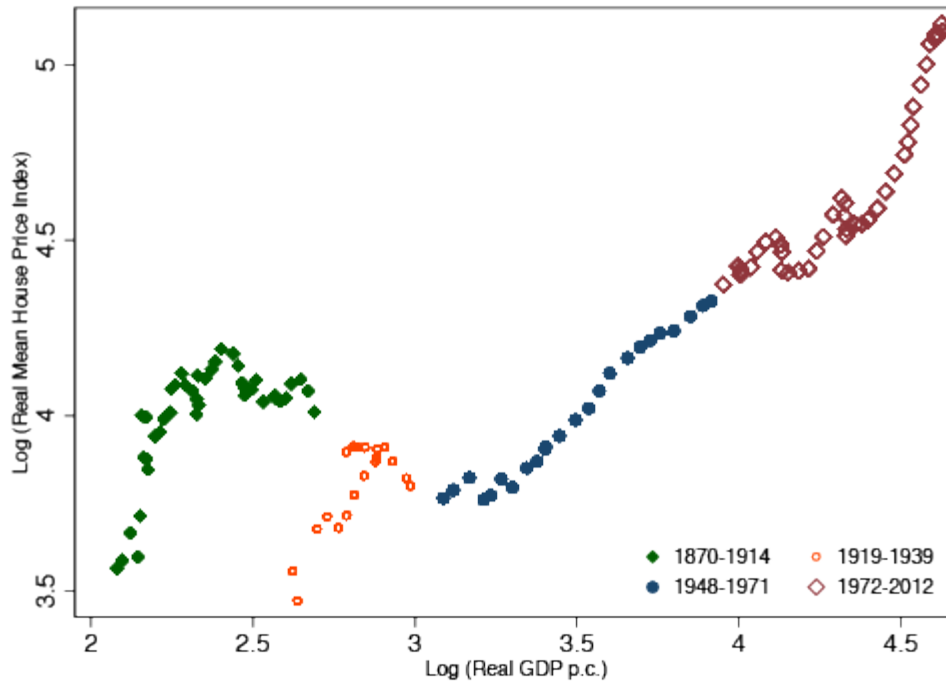
Mean and median real house prices, 1870–2012*



*Source: *Home prices since 1870: No price like home* by Katharina Knoll, Moritz Schularick and Thomas Steger in Vox 01 November 2014

Ratio of real house prices and income per capita, 1870–2012*

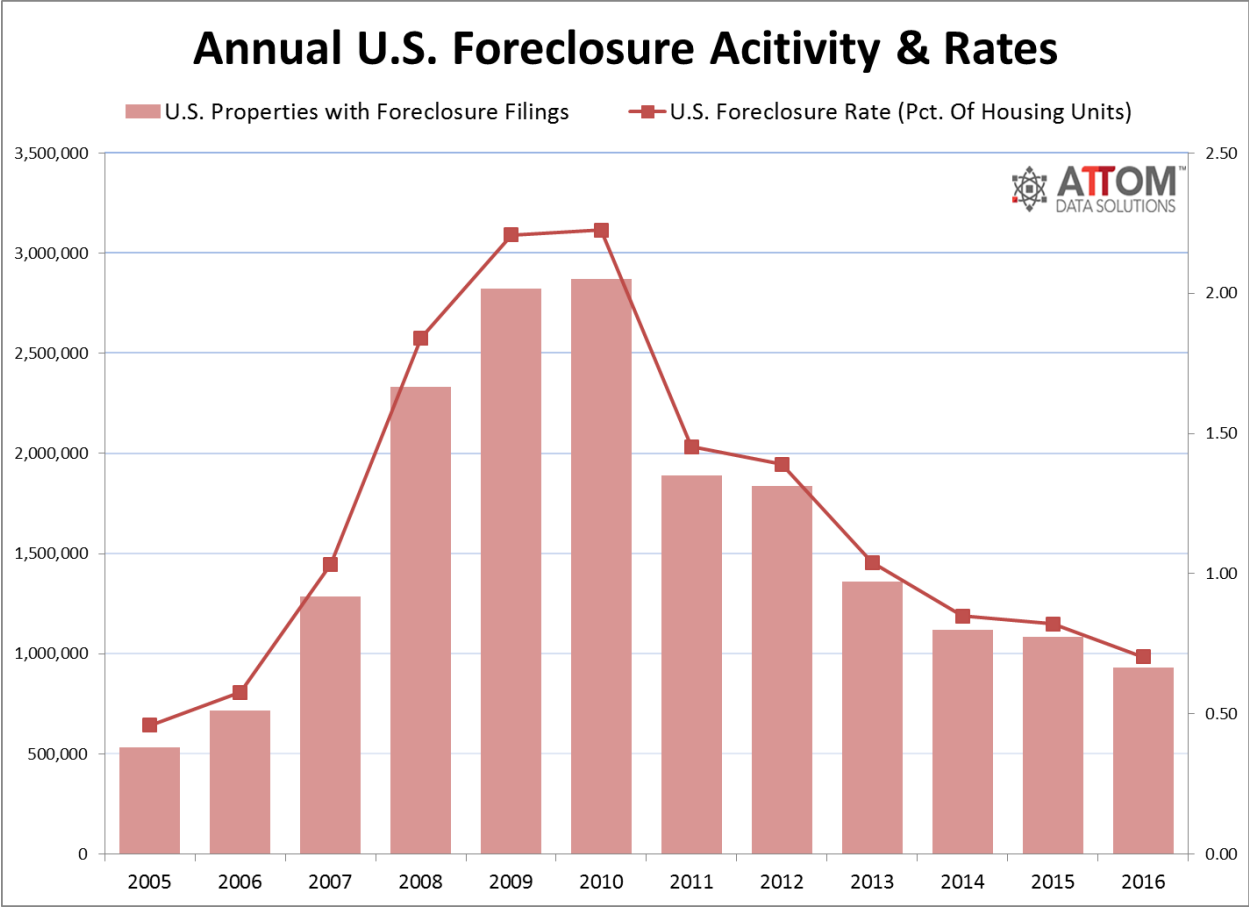
⁴¹ Table 4 Quarterly Residential Vacancies and Homeownership, Second Quarter 2017, US Census Bureau



*Source: *Home prices since 1870: No price like home* by Katharina Knoll, Moritz Schularick and Thomas Steger in Vox 01 November 2014

This trick of falling real income but stable home ownership rates was accomplished with “creative financing” which meant deregulation of the financial sector and the creation of mortgage backed derivative securities. The bottom line was the creation of an enormous, and now-famous, bubble of unpayable debt. The bubble was mostly based on mortgages extended to low income workers, disproportionately black, Latino and women workers.

The bubble burst in 2007. The annual number of foreclosures shot up from about 500,000 to over 2,000,000.



*U.S. Foreclosure Activity Drops to 10-Year Low in 2016 ATTOM Data Solutions 2017
<https://www.attomdata.com/news/heat-maps/2016-year-end-u-s-foreclosure-market-report/>

Home ownership rates hit their peaks before 2007. For non-Hispanic whites, the peak of 76% was reached in 2004, for Asian-Americans a peak of 60.8% was reached in 2006, for Native-Americans a peak of 58.2% was reached in 2006, for African-Americans a peak of 49.1% was reached in 2004, and for Latinos a peak of 49.7% was reached in 2006. They continued to fall until 2015 and have only recovered slightly since then,

Home Ownership Rates by Race: 2004-2015*

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
White (non-Hispanic)	76.0	75.8	75.8	75.2	75.0	74.8	74.4	73.8	73.5	73.3	72.6	71.9
Asian American	59.8	60.1	60.8	60.0	59.5	59.3	58.9	58.0	56.6	57.4	57.3	56.1
Native American	55.6	58.2	58.2	56.9	56.5	56.2	52.3	53.5	51.1	51.0	52.2	50.3
African American	49.1	48.2	47.9	47.2	47.4	46.2	45.4	44.9	43.9	43.1	43.0	42.3

Hispanic or Latino	48.1	49.5	49.7	49.7	49.1	48.4	47.5	46.9	46.1	46.1	45.4	45.6
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* Quarterly Residential Vacancies and Homeownership, Second Quarter 2017 July 27, 2017
The U.S. Census Bureau

The real estate market crash sent shock waves through the financial markets of the world leading to what is now called the Great Recession. Beyond the immediate impact of the mortgage foreclosures there were massive layoffs in every sector of the US economy, and a new round of concessionary bargaining which lowered wages still further.

Since then, lower energy prices due to Obama era promotion of hydraulic fracturing has led to an apparent recovery of the domestic economy. This recovery features falling unemployment rates, but stubbornly low wage rates.

The scissors between falling real wages and increasing real estate prices has returned in a more severe form than it existed just after the turn of this century. Areas of the highest housing prices like Silicon Valley face a new wave of homelessness, this time involving employed workers who cannot afford housing anywhere near where they work. A quick drive around the hipster invaded Mission District of San Francisco, or the older industrial districts of the East Bay will reveal hundreds of cars, campers and RVs which serve as people's homes, and hundreds of campsites of less fortunate homeless people.

Conclusion

This little paper is really just a sketch of the skeletal structure of the working class of the United States. Without proving it, the most important assumption is that the working class of the United States, like those of all other settler states, has historically received a surplus wage. The second factor kept the surplus wage in check and is not an assumption: the working class of the United States has always been fragmented and divided by racism, segregation, ethnic division, patriarchal social relations and sexual oppression.

Both of these factors have been under attack from opposite directions: capitalism has been successfully struggling to drive down the surplus wage since the 1970's. This has raised a question mark over the symbol of the privilege of the American working class: the little house in the suburbs.

Contrary to the media hype about how the white working class went over to the extreme right in last year's election, the working class is in fact less divided by racism now than it has ever been in its entire history. This is the result of the struggles of blacks, women, LBGT people, Latinos and other immigrants to obtain fair shares of the surplus wage. By doing so, they have gone a long way towards breaking down the social fragmentation of the working class in the United States and creating a working class that has the potential to become a class for itself as Marx envisioned.

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