

Braverman and the Structure of the U.S. Working Class: Beyond the Degradation of Labor

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Abstract The fortieth anniversary of Harry Braverman’s *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is the occasion here for a reassessment of his work as a whole. Braverman’s analysis of the degradation of work is shown to have been only a part of a much larger argument he was developing on the structure of the U.S. working class. Building on his pioneering empirical research into occupational composition, a new empirical assessment of the structural evolution of the U.S. working class over the last four decades is provided, throwing light on current problems of unemployment, underemployment, and socially wasted labor—and the rights of labor.

Keywords Braverman · Labor and monopoly capital · Labor process · Working class · New middle class · Degradation of work · Deskilling · Reskilling · Reserve army of labor · Capitalism

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Harry Braverman’s *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, first published 40 years ago in 1974 (Braverman 1998), was unquestionably *the* work that, in the words of historian Bryan Palmer (1999: 33), “literally christened the emerging field of labor process studies.” In the four decades since its appearance Braverman’s book has continued to play a central role in debates on workers’ struggles within industry, remaining indispensable to all attempts at in-depth critique in this area. On Labor Day, 2009, in the midst of the Great Recession, the *Wall Street Journal*, declared *Labor and Monopoly Capital* to be number one among the “Five Best Books on Working” (*Wall Street Journal* 2009).

This continuing relevance of Braverman’s analysis, we will argue here, has to do with the fact that his overall vision of the transformations taking place in modern work relations was much wider than has usually been recognized (see Foster 1998, xix). Viewed from a wide

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camera angle, his work sought to capture the dialectical relation between the labor process on the one hand, and the changing structure and composition of the working class and its reserve armies on the other. This broad view allowed him to perceive how the changes in the labor process were integrally connected to the emergence of whole new spheres of production, the reformation of the working class, and the development of new structural contradictions.

This larger context of Braverman's work was evident in the opening paragraph of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*:

This book first took shape in my mind as little more than a study of occupational shifts in the United States. I was interested in the structure of the working class, and the manner in which it has changed. That portion of the population employed in manufacturing and associated industries—the so-called industrial working class—had apparently been shrinking for some time, if not in absolute numbers at any rate in relative terms. Since the details of this process, especially its historical turning points and the shape of the new employment that was taking the place of the old, were not clear to me, I undertook to find out more about them. And since, as I soon discovered, these things had not yet been clarified in any comprehensive fashion, I decided that there was a need for a more substantial historical description and analysis of the process of occupational change than had yet been presented in print (Braverman 1998: 3).

Braverman followed up this statement with a discussion of how this led him to the analysis of the labor process, which was then to become the predominant subject of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and for which he is principally famous. But there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that Braverman saw this as merely a necessary step in a much more comprehensive analysis of the structure and process of the U.S. working class, serving to delineate it in an objective way and allowing one to understand the material changes and radical new possibilities that were emerging. This was indicated by the structure of his book itself. Parts I and II of the book addressed, respectively, “Labor and Management” and “Science and Mechanization” and were concerned with the theory of the labor process and of scientific management. Parts III, IV, and V, entitled “Monopoly Capital,” “The Growing Working-Class Occupations,” and “The Working Class” were focused on the changes in the structure and composition of the working class in late-twentieth-century monopoly capitalism. Part IV was devoted specifically to the rise of clerical work and service occupations and retail trade. The key chapter in Part V was entitled “The Structure of the Working Class and Its Reserve Armies.” For Braverman much of the importance of the labor process argument was that it provided the basis for a clearer conception of the formation of new working-class relations and occupations, charting the future of the class.

Our interpretation here that Braverman was concerned overall with developing a systematic conception of the U.S. working class—in which the evolving labor process and changing structure of the working class and its reserve armies were seen as together constituting interconnected parts of a complex, dialectical whole—finds further support in the pre-publication of parts of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* in the special July–August 1974 issue of *Monthly Review* (Braverman 1974). In that issue Braverman, who was director of Monthly Review Press, and Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy, who were editors of *Monthly Review*, decided to pre-publish in the magazine a little less than a third of the book, consisting of parts of the Introduction, plus the chapters on “Scientific Management,” “Clerical Work,” and “The Structure of the Working Class and Its Reserve Armies.” This reflected Braverman's overall conception in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, in which the labor process argument, represented by the chapter on “Scientific Management,” drew its meaning from the way in which it clarified both the growth of new working class occupations, as evident in the chapter on

“Clerical Work,” and the changing composition of the working class, as discussed in “The Structure of the Working Class and Its Reserve Armies.”

In February 1975, Braverman (1994) presented an extended talk, entitled “The Making of the U.S. Working Class,” at Empire State College in New York. Significantly, the organization of that talk inverted the ordering of the argument in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. It started with what had been his overarching question all along: “What do we mean by working class?” Avoiding facile definitions but concentrating rather on the historical processes and objective determinants, he commenced the analysis by looking at the major occupational groupings of the working class and how this changed from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century. Only then did he proceed to the labor process under the regime of monopoly capital, extrapolating from those tendencies the development of new occupational structures and the further evolution of the working class—taking into account also such issues as automation, the growth of the reserve army of labor, and the increasing employment of labor in socially wasteful and unproductive spheres such as real estate, insurance, and finance.

Governing much of Braverman’s analysis in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* itself was the recognition that portions of what had been referred to by earlier sociological theorists such as Lewis Corey (1935) and C. Wright Mills (1951) as “the new middle class,” comprising the disparate white-collar sector—stretching all the way from secretaries and sales clerks to managers and professionals—would increasingly be brought under the capitalist labor process. With the “degradation” of their work and pay structures, they would simply merge with the blue-collar workers (Corey 1935: 226; Oppenheimer 1985: 45–84). Corey (1935: 250) had perceived this tendency at an early stage, arguing: “the mechanization of clerical labor becomes constantly greater; a typical large office is now nothing but a white-collar factory.” Mills (1951: 226–27, 297) too believed:

The introduction of office machinery and sales devices has been mechanizing the office and the salesroom, the two big locales of white-collar work. Since the ‘twenties it has increased the division of white-collar labor, recomposed personnel and lowered skill levels. Routine operations in minutely subdivided organizations have replaced the bustling interest of work in well-known groups. Even on managerial and professional levels, the growth of rational bureaucracies has made work more like factory production. The managerial demiurge is constantly furthering all these trends: mechanization, more minute division of labor, the use of less skilled and less expensive workers....

Objectively...the structural position of the white-collar mass is becoming more and more similar to that of the wage-workers. Both are, of course, propertyless, and their incomes draw closer and closer together.... Increased rationalization is lowering the skill levels and making their work more factory-like.... In the course of the next generation, a ‘social class’ between lower white-collar and wage-workers will probably be formed.... This will not, of course, involve the professional strata or the higher managerial employees, but it will include the bulk of the workers in salesroom and office.

It was the evolution of the labor process that thinkers on the left like Corey in the 1930s, Mills in the 1950s, and Braverman (most convincingly) in the 1970s, saw as the key to understanding the whole process of class formation in the United States. Building on Marx’s historical dynamic, Braverman’s analysis ran directly counter to the interpretations of Galbraith (1952: 118, 154) and Bell (1960: 33, 42) who saw the new middle class of white-collar workers as forces of stability in U.S. society, transcending the polarization between capital and the working class.

For Braverman the new occupational sectors, originally associated with higher skills and higher status, and with a “new middle class” of salaried workers, were themselves being

subjected in turn to the relentless degradation of their working conditions, and thus integration with the old, production-based working class. Specifically, he sought to understand the evolution of what he called its “growing working-class occupations,” rising out of the conditions of monopoly capital: clerical labor and service-sector workers.

The ultimate object of Braverman’s analysis was the question of class consciousness—a topic which he did not approach except in minor ways in his completed work (see, for example, Braverman 1998: 96–104) but which would no doubt have loomed much larger if he had been able to develop his research further. (He died of cancer at age 56, 2 years after the publication of his book.) “It was my interest in class consciousness, in fact,” he wrote, “which led to my taking up the entire study [of labor and monopoly capital and the degradation of work] in the first place” (Braverman 1998: 313). But this required first addressing two problems: (1) the changing structure of the working class, and (2) the conditions under which the “relative quiescence” of class struggle in the post-Second World War years had occurred (Braverman 1976: 123).

These were not conceived by Braverman as static problems. Hence, the key was the analysis of changing historical conditions. *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was written in the years 1970–1974. These were years in which the prosperity of the post-Second World War years was beginning to ebb. As his book came off the press the United States was entering the major economic crisis of 1974–1975. The last part of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* addressed the issue of growing unemployment based on Marx’s reserve army analysis. But Braverman (1975) was to take this up more fully in his article “Work and Unemployment” in the following year in which he reasserted the importance of Marx’s general law of accumulation on the class polarization under conditions of monopoly capitalism. In this way he provided an analysis that tied into the stagnation of employment in our own time.

The Structure of the U.S. Working Class Including the Reserve Army

For Braverman (1998: 261), following Marx, the working class in its “formal definition” consisted of all those in the society who neither owned nor controlled the means of production, possessing nothing but their power to labor, which they sold to capital in return for their subsistence. But such a formal definition constituted only an initial starting point for any inquiry into class. For one thing, a substantial number of those who might have been viewed as working class in these terms, were professionals and higher level managers, who could properly be considered to belong to the middle layers of employment, and hence were not typically seen as working class—although substantial numbers of workers in such sectors, he argued, would become increasingly proletarianized (Braverman 1998: 279–83). For another, many of those unmistakably part of the working class were not able to sell their labor power and belonged for long periods of times to the reserve army of labor (or relative surplus population) and so were excluded from the active labor army. As Marx (1976: 792) pointed out in the nineteenth century, the working class as a whole had to be seen as being comprised of *both* the “active army of workers” and the reserve army of labor.

In order to develop what he called “a rough [first] approximation of the working class” for the United States in the twentieth century Braverman (1998: 262) began by looking at the six “mass occupational categories” that encompassed “the unmistakably working class population.” These included operatives, nonfarm laborers, craftsmen, clerical workers, sales workers, and service workers—excluding from these categories supervisory personnel. By 1970 workers in these categories, adjusted to remove management, accounted for 69 percent of the entire civilian labor force, up from 59 percent in 1920. The working class thus consisted of

“no less than two thirds and probably closer to three quarters of the entire employed population” as well as, obviously, the greater part of the unemployed and underemployed (Braverman 1994: 18–19). Over the course of the century the fastest growing of these working-class occupational categories were those of clerical, service, and sales, and no longer direct production, reflecting the overall, long-term transformations associated with the development of monopoly capital. This went together, Braverman noted, with the increase of women in the labor force, which already, by the 1970s, had risen to 40 percent, leading him to contend that “it will not be long before women make up half the labor force, or as near to such a situation as makes no difference” (Braverman 1994: 21).

A key characteristic of these basic working occupations was the low pay with which they were associated (outside of the category of craftsmen). Thus he explained:

Some 80 percent of service workers and workers in retail trade did not receive enough pay to support a family of four above the subsistence level. The same is true of at least 75 percent of all clerical workers and laborers, who are paid on about the same level, the clerical workers slightly above the laborers. It is also true of close to 70 percent of all operatives and kindred workers. Only craftsmen earn, in their majority, enough to lift a family of four above this officially defined minimal level of subsistence, and even in this grouping the wages of 40 percent, if used to support a family of four, were below the amount required for minimal subsistence (Braverman 1975: 26).

Today in applying Braverman’s general approach to delineating the working class based on mass occupational categories, we are presented with a quite different class structure—as depicted in Table 1. Here we include at the top of the table the same unmistakably working-class categories as used by Braverman—craftsmen, operatives, laborers, clerical workers, service workers, and sales workers. As in Braverman’s analysis, the traditional “blue collar” working class sectors of operatives, laborers and craftsmen, are stagnant or in decline in terms of the growth of employment. Not only has increased productivity accompanied by growing economic stagnation cut into traditional blue-collar employment, but this has been amplified by the shift of much of industrial production overseas due to what is known in financial circles as the “global labor arbitrage”—the location of production increasingly in the global South so as to minimize unit labor costs (Foster and McChesney 2011: 127–28, 137–43). At the same time, the appearance of what Braverman (1998: 188–96) called “the universal market,” or the commoditization of all aspects of life under monopoly capitalism, has led to the continued expansion of the service and sales sectors (which have the added characteristic that they are geared primarily to “nontradeable goods and services” that are not easily outsourced (Spence 2011: 64–65).

Where the transformation in working-class occupations over the last four decades departs most dramatically from what Braverman depicted for the twentieth century is in the area of clerical work. Up to around 1990 clerical work was a rapidly growing sector, but in the last couple of decades its growth has stagnated. This can be attributed to the computerization of the office by the beginning of the present century (together with some offshoring). Some earlier forms of clerical work, such as file clerks and traditional typists, have largely vanished.

Indeed, an indication of how far the white-collar occupations have subsided, is that the very “term white collar,” as Jacoby (2002: 372) points out, “has fallen into relative disuse.... ‘White-collar’ surfaces” in academic discourse today “mainly in connection to white collar crime, where it has become a catch-all for nonviolent offenses.” So clearly are the bulk of white-collar employees now *working* rather than *middle* class that this whole distinction, which was tied to the notion of the new middle class, has lost most of its meaning. Similarly in the scholarly literature “blue collar” is usually referred to only when discussing

the relative decline of this segment of the working class in relation to the growing segments of clerical, service, and sales workers. Although the inclusion of clerical and sales workers in the working class was still fairly contentious when Braverman was writing, today it is taken for granted in sociological studies.

Our overall estimate for the “basic worker occupations” delineated by Braverman as a percentage of total reported occupations (see Table 1) is nearly identical with his for 1970—69.8 percent in our figures as compared to 69.1 percent in Braverman’s original estimate. (In both Braverman’s

Table 1 The structure of the working class (in millions)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2011
Basic worker occupations						
Operatives & laborers	15.5	17.9	19.9	19.2	18.2	18.2
Craftsmen	8.3	8.8	10.5	11.2	12.2	12.1
Clerical workers	9.0	13.2	16.7	19.2	20.0	20.4
Service & sales workers	11.7	15.2	19.8	24.1	27.7	35.8
Total basic worker occupations	44.5	55.2	67.0	73.7	78.2	86.5
Total with reported occupations	63.8	79.1	103.4	122.1	136.5	153.8
Basic workers as percent total with reported occupations	69.7 %	69.8 %	64.8 %	60.4 %	57.3 %	56.2 %
Growing worker occupations						
Low-level supervisory workers		0.11	2.41	3.91	5.27	5.63
Marginal teachers and counselors	0.15	0.45	0.70	1.08	2.57	3.48
Agricultural workers	1.69	1.32	1.47	1.73	2.02	2.77
Sales workers insurance/real estate/advertising	0.62	0.79	1.34	1.63	1.49	1.65
Recreation workers	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.26	0.44
Unemployed (occ. unclassified)		0.3			1.1	1.9
Total growing occupations	2.5	3.0	6.0	8.4	12.7	15.9
Active Labor army (basic + growing worker Occupations)	47.0	58.2	72.9	82.1	90.9	102.4
Total labor force	69.0	81.4	105.8	124.8	138.8	157.5
Active labor army as percent total labor force	68.1 %	71.5 %	69.0 %	65.8 %	65.5 %	65.0 %
Additional labor reserves						
Marginally attached	0.90	0.97	1.12	0.99	3.37	4.94
Non-working Poor (20–55 yrs.)	1.87	3.28	5.75	7.15	7.64	12.08
Returning students (two-thirds)	0.12	0.34	0.62	0.94	1.01	0.93
Incarcerated	0.24	0.22	0.33	0.77	1.39	1.61
Estimated labor reserves	3.1	4.8	7.8	9.9	13.4	19.6
Active + reserve labor army	50.1	63.1	80.7	91.9	104.3	121.9
Potentially available labor force	72.2	86.2	113.6	134.6	152.2	177.1
Working class as percent available labor force	69.5 %	73.1 %	71.1 %	68.3 %	68.5 %	68.9 %

Sources: Ruggles et al. 2010; King et al. 2010. The following samples were used: Census: 1960, 1 %; 1970, 1 % metro fm2; 1980, 1 % metro; 1990, 1 %; 2011, ACS. CPS: March samples. *Notes:* See Statistical Appendix.

analysis and ours the workers counted in these occupations include those who are officially unemployed and hence the percentages reflect the official labor force in these occupations.) However the share of these basic worker occupations as a percentage of all reported occupations is shown to have declined in the subsequent four decades (since the publication of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*) to 56 percent in 2011, a drop of 14 percentage points. Has the working class therefore been in decline?

The stagnation and decline of most of the basic worker occupations, rather than suggesting a shrinkage in the working class, is reflective of a change in its composition. This can be seen by adding in today's new "growing worker occupations," depicted further down in Table 1. This designation is based on three criteria, all of which must apply in order for an occupational grouping to be classified as both growing and working class: (1) growth in numbers, (2) growth in unemployment, and (3) low and stagnant/declining median wages.¹ These growing worker occupational groups include: (a) low-level supervisory workers in offices, sales, services, and agriculture² (b) marginalized teachers and school counselors (about half of all teachers)³ (c) agricultural workers⁴ (including large numbers of individuals who work usually on a casual/temporary basis as yard and landscape workers in cities);⁵ (d) sales workers in insurance/real estate/advertising (a function of the growth of insurance and financial services and marketing in monopoly-finance capital);⁶ and (e) recreation workers.⁷ Once these growing worker categories are added in, the active labor army can be seen as accounting fairly steadily for around two-thirds of the total labor force. (Compare Zweig 2012: 30). Needless to say this is a very conservative accounting of the working class labor force, leaving out many employees who are now properly considered working class given their low wages and the proletarianization of their labor process, as, for example, in the lower levels of the nursing profession.

¹ See the Statistical Appendix for a listing of the specific occupations composing each category. It is worth noting that the sample used to calculate median wages is restricted to those counted as officially employed. Similarly, the sample used to calculate unemployment figures is restricted to the official labor force. Given the large number of labor force dropouts in recent decades the unemployment figures for 2000 and 2011 must be taken as a conservative approximation, since the official definition of the labor force artificially lowers unemployment rates. This is also the case with median wages, which are inflated to some extent by high unemployment and significant numbers of labor force dropouts in low-wage occupations.

² Median wages for these workers declined from \$52,454 in 1970 to \$35,088 in 2011.

³ For these occupations median wages declined steadily from \$23,643 in 1960 to \$18,576 in 2011, while unemployment stood at 7.4 percent in 2011.

⁴ Unemployment has always been high among agricultural workers, averaging 13.4 percent from 1980–2000. However, by 2011 the unemployment rate had jumped to 18.2 percent. Meanwhile, median wages have been flat since 1970, averaging \$12,514 for the entire period.

⁵ This is evidenced by the fact that the most significant growth within this group occurred among "Gardeners and groundskeepers," whose numbers increased from 192 thousand in 1960 to 1.5 million in 2011. Another important aspect of this group is that workers in the occupation, "Farm workers," decreased from around 1.5 million in 1960 to 800 thousand in 1990, but then started to increase again, growing to 1 million by 2011. This is suggestive of an important change in the nature of farm work, and it is subtle changes like these that most likely account for the unusually high percentages in 1970 and 1980. In other words, in our data these two decades most likely include a substantial number of workers in the growing worker occupations that were 36 still in a period of transition, but pinpointing the gradations of this transformation would be impossible to capture with any degree of accuracy using extant Census occupational data.

⁶ Median wages for this group of sales workers peaked in 1970 at \$45,706; they have since declined continuously, sitting at \$30,134 in 2011.

⁷ This occupation is not very large in absolute terms but it has grown rapidly, from 54 thousand in 1990 to 439 thousand in little more than two decades. Meanwhile, median wages declined precipitously, standing at a mere \$10,320 in 2011—less half the median wage level of 1960 and 1970. Unemployment has also remained persistently high since 1980, averaging over 11 percent.

Such numbers based on official labor force figures, moreover, do not come near to accounting for the full working class or proletariat in Marx or Braverman's conception since they are restricted to the active labor army (or labor force) and do not reflect those parts of the *potentially available* labor force that are not captured in official unemployment statistics (termed "U-3" in the Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] calculations). Capturing this dimension of the working class, Table 1, near the bottom, integrates some of the main categories of the potentially available labor force, not included in official statistics. These include what the BLS classifies as "marginally attached workers" (those who have not looked for jobs recently for various reasons but desire work and have looked in the past year); the non-working poor of prime working age (20–55); returning students (age 25 or above); and the incarcerated population—which as Western and Beckett (1999) have shown, is the distinctive U.S. way (as compared with other advanced economies) of soaking up elements of the population that have been pauperized and have turned to petty crime. Each of the above categories have seen dramatic increases since 1970. Once these categories are added in the working class as a percentage of the available labor force in 2011 is 68.9 percent, exceeding two thirds of the entire available labor force.

Although all such calculations are fraught with minor difficulties, including various anomalies and exceptions, these turn out to be for the most part statistically insignificant in the context of a measurement of the working class as a whole. Hence, the general order of magnitude of the U.S. working class—from two thirds to three quarters of the working-age population—is hardly in doubt. Indeed, the primary obstacle in ascertaining the size and composition of the U.S. working class today—aside from the complicated questions of what sections of the professional and managerial strata are being proletarianized and how much of the old middle class of small business is being dispossessed—lies, as Table 1 indicates, in uncovering the mounting numbers of individuals of prime working age who are jobless, only a fraction of whom are counted as officially unemployed, and yet who are properly seen as part of the working class (Mishel et al. 2012; Zweig 2012; Jonna 2013; Magdoff and Foster 2014).

In order to understand more fully the significance of this growing reserve army in the U.S. economy, it is necessary to look at its various components in a more comprehensive way than was possible in Table 1. This wider view is provided in Chart 1, which depicts the full extent of the civilian reserve army of the United States, presenting its various layers, based on Marx's categories of floating, stagnant, latent, and pauperized. This shows just how extensive this relative surplus population has become.

In our conception here what Marx called the "floating" reserve army population is seen as equivalent to the official unemployed. The "stagnant" population includes: the various precarious elements of the reserve army associated with: (1) the BLS's category of the "marginally attached" (including discouraged workers), (2) part-time workers wanting full-time work, and (3) temporary workers. The "pauperized" population encompasses the working- and non-working poor aside from the officially unemployed.

In Marx's conception, related to a still developing capitalist economy, the "latent population" referred to surplus workers in agricultural districts. Here we use the term "latent" to refer to elements of the population that are considered outside the labor force for institutionalized or semi-institutionalized reasons: (1) those incarcerated in state and federal prisons, which in the United States has assumed huge proportions, making the United States an outlier in this respect in relation to all other developed capitalist economies; and (2) returning students age 25 or above who are essentially seeking retraining to enhance their employment opportunities (often a disguised form of unemployment).

If all of these categories are added together, the reserve army of potentially available labor—representing the unemployed, underemployed, pauperized, and latent-institutionalized

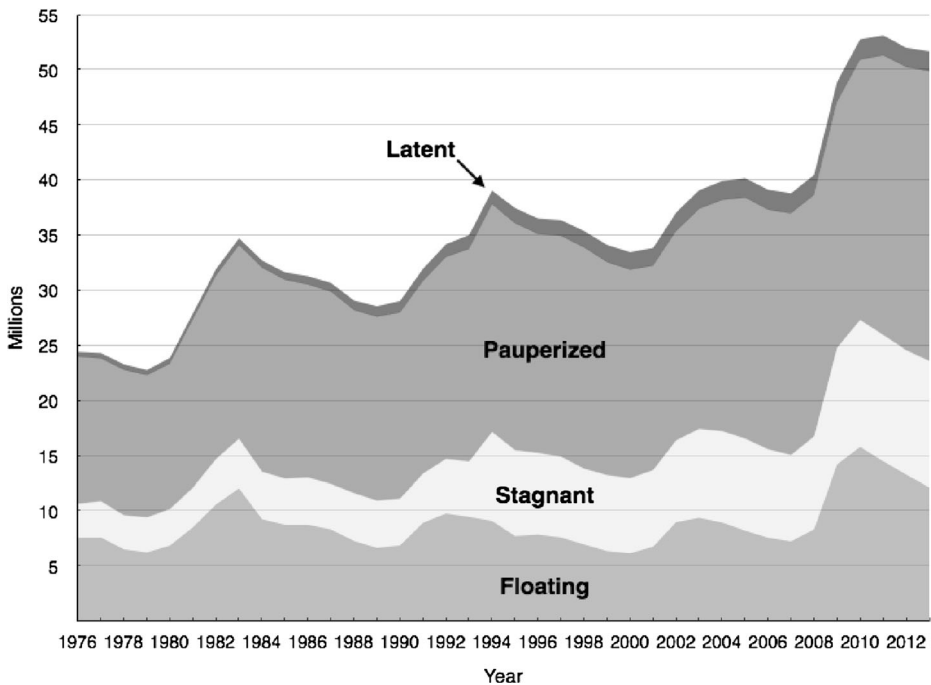


Chart 1 The reserve army of labor in the United States.

Sources: King et al. 2010. March samples were used for each year. *Incarceration rates*: BJS 2005; Carson and Sabol 2012. Notes: The reserve army categories are mutually exclusive so the actual size of certain layers is underreported in some cases. See the Statistical Appendix for a detailed explanation of the composition of each layer

parts of the community—accounted for 30 percent of the working population in the United States in 2013, as compared to around 22 percent in the late 1970s.

A large part of this increase, visible in a fanning out in the chart, is the expansion of the stagnant and pauperized layers of the working-age population, and particularly the former which grew from 13 to 23 percent of the whole. These represent the most precarious layers of the working population. In Marxian theory as well as in most contemporary sociological analysis, the poor are seen as part of the working class or proletariat, rather than being treated (as is common in the wider public discourse) as an entirely separate class/underclass. As Braverman (1982: 13) expressed it discussing the unemployment data: “Those who rise to the surface in active search of jobs are counted as unemployed; those who sink to the bottom and are forced onto the welfare role are counted as paupers.” In reality both the employed and the chronically unemployed and underemployed, including those designated as officially poor, are properly perceived as elements of the working class or proletariat as a whole, sharing its chief characteristic of dispossession in relation to the means of production.

In this respect, Braverman’s conception of the working class is similar to that of Miliband (1989: 23) who argued that it was “made up of all those people whose main, and usually exclusive, *source of income* is the sale of their labour power, or transfer payments by the state, or both; whose *level of income* places them in the lower and lowest income groups; and whose

individual *power* at work and in society at large is low or virtually non-existent.... It is on the basis of these combined factors that the vast majority of people in these [advanced capitalist] countries may be said to belong to the working class.” In this approach, the working class, defined principally by its need to sell its labor power for subsistence, encompassed both those who sold their labor power and those who, failing to do so, fell into a precarious relation to the labor force or into grinding poverty—represented by the various layers of the reserve army.

Nothing could be further from Braverman’s argument, than Gorz’s (1982: 67) claim in *Farewell to the Working Class* that the working class was being replaced by a “non-class of non-workers” as a result of technological change, deskilling, growing unemployment, and the increasing dissociation of workers from the labor process. Although Braverman focused on all of these trends, he saw this as part of a dynamic process of decomposition and recomposition (including some reskilling) of the working class, not a disappearing working class (see Braverman 1998: 282). The degradation of work, the increased dissociation of workers from the labor process, growing marginalization, and increased unemployment—along with the fall of some working class (and some middle class) occupations and the rise of others—were all seen as integral to the long-term evolution of the working class itself, in line with Marx’s general law of accumulation. For Braverman (1975), 1998: 266–77) this conformed to the theory of monopoly capital presented by Baran and Sweezy (1966). The “golden age” of capitalism following the Second World War was already giving way in the 1970s to the relative stagnation to follow, accompanied by a tendency toward greater inequality both with respect to income/wealth and control of the labor process itself.

The Labor Process and the Class Process

Braverman’s (1998: 279) analysis of the structure of the working class led, as we have noted, to the conclusion that “some two thirds to three-fourths” of the working-age population “appears readily to conform to the dispossessed condition of a proletariat.” The data for the 40 years since the publication of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* strongly corroborates this conclusion. But, as Braverman (1998: 279) was acutely aware, that only leads to the further question of the new middle class, which he saw as constituting between 15 and 20 percent of the labor force. (The remainder of the population that was not working class consisted of the remaining “old middle class” of small proprietors—also in decline.) In an argument that anticipated Wright’s (1978: 74, 88) notion of “contradictory class locations,” Braverman insisted that this new middle class was notoriously difficult to get a hand on in class terms, since it was doubly determined, taking “its characteristics from *both sides*”—having some of the traits of labor, and some of capital. Formally, in their contractual and property relations such middle-class employees were in a position similar to that of “the clearly proletarianized working-class population” in that they were hired by capital (or the state) and were compelled to sell their labor power for their subsistence (Braverman 1998: 281, 279). Nevertheless, within this strata there tended to be more control over the labor process and with it somewhat higher incomes (including in some cases at the relatively higher levels a small management share of surplus value).

Today, the notion of the middle class and even upper-middle class as stable, secure, propertied, and solidifying elements of the population has so eroded that the Occupy movement’s critique of the 1 %, which highlighted the growing polarization of U.S. society between a relatively small capitalist class and its hangers-on and the rest of the population, was immediately embraced by the majority of the U.S. population. This reflects the fact that the

United States now has the most unequal distribution of wealth of all the advanced economies—an inequality that is greater than that of India and South Africa (Credit Suisse 2013; Zuesse 2013). Under these circumstances the myth of the United States as a “middle-class society” stabilized by a large intermediate strata is eroding rapidly.

In Braverman’s (1998: 279) terms this intermediate layer—since the lower white collar occupations in clerical, service, sales were shown to be working class—consisted mostly of: “the engineering, technical, and scientific cadre, the lower ranks of supervision and management, the considerable numbers of specialized and ‘professional’ employees occupied in marketing, financial and organizational administration, and the like, as well as, outside of capitalist industry proper [workers] in hospitals, schools, government administration and so forth.” This “privileged intermediate strata in professional occupations and in middle management” had been brought into being, he contended, by the development of monopoly capitalism and its relentless process of “rationalization” (Braverman 1975: 25; 1998: 321). The economy of the giant corporations generated what was called a “managerial revolution” leading to the expansion of managerial, financial, marketing, media, and state professionals in order to: (1) control the labor process; (2) enlarge the propensity to consume; (3) run a growing financial superstructure; (4) manage public opinion; and (5) provide public-spending supports to private corporations and relief work on behalf of the general population (itself a vital subsidy to capital, which was then not compelled to pay the full cost of the reproduction of labor power) (Braverman 1994: 30–34, 1998: 177–78; Magdoff and Foster 2014: 16–17).

Although Braverman recognized the importance of the intermediate strata to the functioning of monopoly capitalism he also saw this and other developments within capitalism as dynamic and subject to change. Indeed, “classes, the class structure, the social structure as a whole,” Braverman (1998: 282) wrote, “are not fixed entities but rather ongoing processes, rich in change, transition, variation.” The intermediate layer of the new middle class brought into being by monopoly capitalism would eventually, he believed, succumb in large part to the same general forces that had broken down skilled labor, creating a more homogenous general work force—although this tendency was subject to various countervailing forces. As he wrote in no uncertain terms:

If we are to call this a ‘new middle class,’ ... as many have done, we must do so with certain reservations. ... Not only does it receive its petty share in the prerogatives and rewards of capital, but it also bears the mark of the proletarian condition. For these employees the social form taken by their work, their true place in the relations of production, their fundamental condition of subordination as so much hired labor, increasingly makes itself felt, especially in the mass occupations that are part of this stratum. We may cite here particularly the mass employments of draftsmen and technicians, engineers and accountants, nurses and teachers, and the multiplying ranks of supervisors, foremen, and petty managers. First, these become part of a mass labor market that assumes the characteristics of all labor markets, including the necessary existence of a reserve army of the unemployed exercising a downward pressure on pay levels. And second, capital, as soon as it disposes of a mass of labor in any specialty—a mass adequate in size to repay the application of its principles of the technical division of labor and hierarchal control over its execution by means of a firm grasp on the links of conception—subjects that specialty to some of the forms of “rationalization” characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.

In such occupations, the proletarian form begins to assert itself and to impress upon the consciousness of these employees. Feeling the insecurity of their role as sellers of labor power and the frustrations of a controlled and mechanically organized workplace, they

begin, despite their remaining privileges, to know those symptoms of dissociation which are properly called “alienation” (Braverman 1998: 281–2).

An ongoing, historical analysis of the development of the working class is therefore needed; one that focuses above all on the changing labor process itself and how that affects occupations and whole classes, altering their work and power relations. Ultimately under capitalism the tendency is towards the greater degradation of labor in any given sector and the creation of a more homogeneous mass of relatively unskilled workers—even as the “skill,” or the cumulative knowledge and technological capacity of society as a whole, increases (Foster 1998: vii–xx). What Ehrenreich (1989) called “the fear of falling,” applicable to the U.S. middle class, was thus a rational fear, not only on the part of individuals, but the middle class as a whole—as was the case for various skilled “blue-collar” workers before them. And while it was true that new skills and re-skilling always arose, the overwhelming tendency was towards the degradation of work in U.S. monopoly capitalism. Focusing on instances of reskilling or improvements in working conditions was, for Braverman (1980: 36), like “talking about a little bit of froth at the top of a tidal wave going in the opposite direction.” The degradation of work, while not universal under capitalism, “becomes the norm and spreads to all occupations” (Hunt and Lautzenheiser 2011: 527).

This was because the evolution of the labor process was also the evolution of class power. Capitalism, Braverman (1998: 157; Pagano 2000: 82–83) wrote, is characterized “by the incessant drive to enlarge and perfect machinery on the one hand, and to diminish the worker on the other.” The relation of this to class power is reflected in the fact that the “critical, intelligent, conceptual faculties [of workers], no matter how deadened or diminished, always remain in some degree a threat to capital” (Braverman 1998: 96).

Trends in the Structure of the Working Class

Braverman’s famous analysis of the degradation of work in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was only one of three trends with respect to labor that he saw as characterizing the advanced monopoly-capitalist economy, the other two being the growth of unemployment and under-employment (associated with economic stagnation), and the increasing growth of wasteful or socially unproductive employment. Together these reflected the evolution of Marx’s (1976) general law of accumulation under conditions of monopoly capitalism.

Braverman’s argument on the labor process specifically is of course well known (as is the argument of Marx on which it was based), and can be briefly summarized here. Braverman explained that the scientific management introduced by Frederick Winslow Taylor at the outset of monopoly capitalism in the opening decades of the twentieth century rested on three interrelated principles: (1) “dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers,” (2) “separation of conception from execution,” and (3) “use of this monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution” (Braverman 1998: 77–83). In this way management was able to obtain near complete control over the work process and thus control the labor power at its disposal.

Rather than the simple, straightforward enhancement of absolute efficiency in production the managerial logic was primarily aimed, as encapsulated in the famous Babbage principle (Braverman 1998: 124–25, 1998: 55–57), at cheapening labor (or reducing unit labor costs) in order to enhance profits. This reduction in relative labor costs was achieved by dividing and subdividing labor, which was degraded to the point of simply performing labor in the form of predetermined “tasks.... none of which can engage the interests or capacities of a mature

human—or even a child—for more than a few weeks or months, after which they become sheer and empty drudgery” (Braverman 1975: 24). This manifested itself as an overwhelming tendency towards the polarization of skill and the downgrading of work for most workers (Foster 1998: vii–xx). The result was the reshaping of the majority of workers into a general, homogeneous mass, reducing any skill components and lessening the ability of workers to resist the directives of capital within the labor process itself. It was this general process of the degradation of work associated with capitalism’s relentless “rationalization” that Braverman (1998: 282) thought would eventually overwhelm much of the new middle class of professionals, reducing their work relations to the relentless drum beat of the system—a phenomenon that by the beginning of this century is apparent to all (Fraser 2001).

Alongside the evolution of the labor process and inseparable from it was the second trend of the growth of unemployment and underemployment, already visible by the mid-1970s, with the end of the post-Second World War boom. Braverman stressed in 1975, what now, almost 40 years later, has come to be generally recognized as a long-term trend—namely the tendency for a secular increase in the rate of unemployment/underemployment. As he put it: “The most striking thing to emerge from an examination of the unemployment statistics from the Second World War to the present is the secular trend of the gradual but persistent enlargement of the pool of officially counted unemployment.... The unemployment rate of 5 to 6 percent which characterized the recession years of 1949–1950 has now become the prosperity rate of the seventies, the rate which we would be delighted to have back again” (Braverman 1975: 24).

Yet, such data, he argued, were only crude indications of what was really happening, since the larger part of the industrial reserve army remained uncounted in the official statistics. It was this growth of the reserve army that was, for Braverman, substantially undermining the relatively well-paid working class sectors (and even the new middle class), throwing more and more workers into the low-paid service and retail sectors and into precarious employment, underemployment, unemployment, and unproductive employment—and, ultimately, further enhancing the reserve army, along with wasted work and wasted lives, in a relentless dialectical progression.

The third strand in Braverman’s argument on the changing structure of the working class under monopoly capitalism was the development of unproductive or wasteful labor—not strictly in Marx’s original classical sense of labor that didn’t generate surplus value so much as the proliferation of socially useless labor which existed only in order to realize surplus value or to promote speculative value, and hence was inherently irrational *from any wider social standpoint*. Despite its rapidly growing productivity capitalism continues to demand ever greater productivity, longer working hours, and often more exploitative conditions. It thus does not respond as a society of cooperating associated producers might—by promoting more worthwhile, useful, artistic, rewarding forms of labor. Instead, the growing army of surplus labor thus freed up within production is used for the purpose of expanding the circuit of capital, or allowing fuller realization of surplus value, thus increasing the realm of unproductive work associated with the sales effort and financial speculation. As Braverman stated:

What sort of unproductive labors? Let me give you these examples: the banking, the insurance, the investment [financial], the brokerage, the real estate industries; the advertising and other marketing industries; the accounting and control industries, including those operated by the government in the form of regulatory or tax agencies; the relief industries, such as those which deal with unemployment compensation or welfare.... These are some examples of unproductive industries, but furthermore, even manufacturing industries—whose total employment, as we have seen, is shrinking in relative terms—have an increasing number of unproductive jobs on their payrolls. For

instance, all manufacturing industries now have swollen marketing sections which employ labor of all sorts and armies of clerks as they compete to enlarge sales of their products. Or as another example, even a good deal of labor that actually goes into working on products can be unproductive, insofar as it is made necessary by marketing considerations rather than by the actual requirements of a solid and useful product. In this class are the model changes in automobiles and other products, as well as various means of shoddy and useless ornamentation, which the demented styling departments proliferate in order to pile up selling points against their competitors (Braverman 1994: 30–31).

Stressing the growing role of “specifically capitalist use value” under monopoly capitalism (see Foster 2011), Braverman argued that “the capitalist system has special needs of its own which guide labor into channels that make sense only from the capitalist point of view, not from the point of view of useful labor” (Braverman 1994: 31).

The Right to Useful, Non-Degraded Labor

Braverman’s analysis of the labor process in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was thus an integral part of a much larger argument on the generation and absorption of an enormous “surplus of labor” under monopoly capitalism. The resulting reserve army was used to leverage still higher levels of socially useless labor—for the unwavering purpose of feeding the accumulation of capital at the top of society (Braverman 1998: 177–78). The great potential of this enhanced productivity to free up labor for more meaningful, rewarding and socially productive work (along with enhanced leisure) was largely undermined by the very nature of the capitalist juggernaut itself.

Crucial to capitalism’s logic, Braverman argued, was “the habituation of the worker to the capitalist mode of production” itself, which needed to “be renewed with each generation, all the more so as the generations which grow up under capitalism are not formed within the matrix of work life, but are plunged into work from outside, so to speak, after a prolonged period of adolescence during which they are held in reserve.” The requirement of overcoming the natural-human resistance to capitalism’s “antagonistic social relations” thus recurs with “the succession of the generations” and becomes a “permanent feature of capitalist society” (Braverman 1998: 96). During most of childhood and adolescence, it is the creation of market needs—turning individuals into commodity purchasing machines or “consumers”—that is paramount. As the world’s leading marketing guru, Kotler (2003), declared a decade or so ago: “But part of capitalism is, it’s a system where we’ve got to motivate people to want things so they’ll work for these things” whatever they are, and buy them.

But once the majority of workers enter employment the sacrifice of their own working lives requires, as Braverman contended, a further habituation, an “acclimatization of the worker to the new modes of production.” This requires “the destruction of all other ways of living, the striking of wage bargains that permit a certain enlargement of the customary bounds of subsistence for the working class, the weaving of the net of modern capitalist life that finally makes all other modes of living impossible.” Nevertheless, he adds: “Beneath this apparent habituation, the hostility of workers to the degenerated forms of work which are forced upon them continues as a subterranean stream that makes its way to the surface when employment conditions permit, or when the capitalist drive for a greater intensity of labor oversteps the bounds of physical and mental capacity. It renews itself in new generations, expresses itself in the unbounded cynicism and revulsion which large

numbers of workers feel about their work, and comes to the fore repeatedly as a social issue demanding solution” (1998: 104).

In the end Braverman’s analysis returns us inexorably to the fundamental characteristic of workers in capitalist society: that they are, as Weber (1958: 21, 1978: 85–86, 138–156) famously put it, merely “(formally) free,” subject to endless rationalization and hence to *substantively irrational* working conditions by virtue of their dissociation from ownership and control of the means of production—a reality that reduces their working lives to the mere exertion of abstract labor power at the direction of capital in return for a wage.

In neoclassical economics, particularly “new institutional economics,” as Pagano (2000: 85–86) explains, the fact that workers have no rights in firms is explained as resulting from the threefold fact that they have no real skills to sell, are “general purpose” factors of production, and are “easy to monitor” (see Williamson 1985). Braverman’s argument, like Marx’s, is exactly the opposite. “According to Braverman,” Pagano (2000: 85) writes, “it is because of capitalist property rights that the detailed division of labour on the lines suggested by Babbage and Taylor is implemented, with the result that the workers perform simple tasks which are easy to control and require only general purpose skills.” Braverman’s whole analysis is thus directed at the institutional basis of labor power in capitalist production relations and the need to transform this in fundamental ways if the condition of labor is to be advanced. And this requires at a minimum a reinvigoration of class struggle.

Braverman’s understanding of the structure and process of working-class existence, it might be argued, flounders somewhat in the end due to the absence of concerted class struggle in his time down to our own. Forty years of deepening economic stagnation and growing unemployment and underemployment, coupled with stagnant and declining wages, and worsening working conditions have not led to the revival of working-class consciousness and struggle that he clearly hoped for—though the subterranean anger at the 1 % is clearly growing (Magdoff and Foster 2014; Braverman 1976). Part of the reason for this seeming lack of a radical class consciousness no doubt lies in the widespread perception of the globalization of production and the divide and rule approach to labor worldwide.

Yet, for Braverman, as for Marxian theorists in general, there is a dynamic, dialectical relation between “social structure and forms of consciousness” (Mészáros 2011). With the rapidly evolving social structure of the working class, which has, if anything, increased its numbers (albeit in more differentiated form) while worsening its conditions, new forms of radical consciousness and subterranean resistance, he believed, were bound to form. As an organic intellectual of the working class, Braverman was convinced that the future resistance and revolt of the workers could be expedited by knowledge of the conditions governing the structure and process of class formation. “Marxism,” he declared, “is not merely an exercise in satisfying intellectual curiosity, nor an academic pursuit, but a theory of revolution and thus a tool of combat” (Braverman 1976: 122). *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was such a tool of revolutionizing practice, which would derive its full meaning only with the revival of “the working class as a class conscious of and struggling in behalf of its own interests” (Braverman 1976: 123).

Statistical Appendix

Table 1. The Structure of the Working Class Estimates of the categories of the working class were primarily derived from U.S. Census or American Community Survey (ACS) samples for given years; however, to make estimates of *Marginally Attached* and *Non-Working Poor*, samples from the Current Population Survey (CPS) were also used, as discussed in the *Additional Labor Reserves* section below. All calculations are restricted to individuals 16 years and older.

Occupational estimates make use of the OCC1990 variable, which was created by IPUMS to standardize occupational categories over time, using 1990 as the base Census year. The data were recoded to make it possible to aggregate occupations at higher-level Census categories, as OCC1990 contains over 396 distinct occupations.⁸ Calculations of the *Basic Worker Occupations* exclude all supervisory or managerial positions and the higher-level Census category “Farming, Forestry, and Fishing Occupations.” *Operatives & Laborers, Craftsman and Clerical Workers* are roughly equivalent to the higher-level categories “Operators, Fabricators and Laborers,” “Precision Production, Craft and Repair Occupations,” and “Administrative Support Occupations, Including Clerical,” respectively. *Service and Sales Workers* is the sum of two higher-level categories: “Service Occupations” (excluding “Police and Detectives” and “Firefighting and Fire Prevention Occupations”) and “Sales Occupations” (excluding “Sales Representatives, Finance and Business Services”). *Total with Reported Occupations* equals the section of the labor force (employed or officially unemployed) for which an occupation was reported—this follows Braverman’s original methodology.

The *Growing Worker Occupations* include those employed or officially unemployed and were selected based on the following three criteria: 1) growth in overall numbers; 2) growth in the rate of unemployment; and 3) low and stagnant/declining median wages, measured in constant 2011 dollars.⁹ *Low-level Supervisory Workers* is composed of: “Office supervisors,” “Supervisors of cleaning and building service,” “Supervisors of personal service jobs, n.e.c.” (“n.e.c.” means “not elsewhere classified”), “Supervisors of agricultural occupations,” and supervisors in retail sales.¹⁰ *Marginal Teachers and Counselors* is composed of the following occupations: “Kindergarten and earlier school teachers,” “Teachers, n.e.c.,” and “Vocational and educational counselors.” *Agricultural Workers* is composed of the higher-level categories, “Farm Occupations, Except Managerial” and “Related Agricultural Occupations,” excluding “Inspectors of agricultural products,” “Farm laborers and farm foreman” and “Supervisors of agricultural occupations.” *Sales Workers Insurance/Real Estate/Advertising* is composed of: “Insurance sales occupations,” “Real estate sales occupations,” and “Advertising and related sales jobs.” *Recreation Workers* is composed of the single occupation, “Recreation workers.” Finally, *Unemployed (occ. unclassified)* is a residual category that has apparently only been used in certain years to isolate those who are unemployed and not reporting any occupation. *Active Labor Army* is the sum of *Basic Worker Occupations* and *Growing Worker Occupations*, while *Total Labor Force* follows the official definition of the labor force.

The list of *Additional Labor Reserves* is intended to summarize components of the working class defined as “Not in the Labor Force,” i.e., neither employed nor officially unemployed.

⁸ See <https://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variables/OCC1990> for a list of higher-level occupational categories.

⁹ Note that wage figures (cited in the text) are for the previous calendar year. Conversion factors are taken from Sahr (2013).

¹⁰ This last occupational group had to be modified using the OCC variable (which changes each year) because the OCC1990 occupation, “Supervisors and proprietors of sales jobs” (code 243), was inadequate. First, the occupation includes managers for 1960 (OCC code 254, “Floor men and floor managers, store”); second, the label, “Supervisors and proprietors of sales jobs” (used in 1980 and 1990) suggests that owners of sales establishments or franchises are included. This problem was clarified somewhat when the occupation was split into two for the 2000 Census: “First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers” (OCC code 470 [2000] and 4700 [2011]) and “First-Line Supervisors of Non-Retail Sales” (OCC code 471 [2000] and 4710 [2011]). In the 2000 and 2011 samples, median wages are significantly higher (nearly double) for supervisory workers in non-retail sales occupations. However, excluding the supervisory workers in non-retail sales is not an option because the category does not exist in 1980 or 1990 (there were no observations in 1970). To construct a consistent occupational grouping we used the following procedure: first, cases for 1960 were dropped; then, for the remaining years, the IND1990 variable was used to restrict observations to the Retail or Wholesale Trade Industries (codes 500 to 691). This proved effective in removing the highest income earners from the OCC1990 category, as the examples below demonstrate.

The definition of each layer corresponds to those described in Chart 1 (see below), with the exception of *Returning Students*, which makes use of the Census/ACS variable, SCHOOL (unavailable in the Current Population Survey [CPS]), to estimate those age 25 years and older who have exited the labor force and returned to school (only two-thirds of each annual total is reported). CPS data had to be used for the *Marginally Attached* and *Non-Working Poor* (20–55 years) because it was not possible to make consistent estimates using Census/ACS variables.¹¹ *Estimated Labor Reserves* totals the *Additional Labor Reserve* categories, and this is added to *Total Labor Force* to get *Potentially Available Labor Force* (since additional reserves exist outside of the labor force according to official methodology).

Chart 1. *The reserve army of labor in the United States* To make estimates of the reserve army it was necessary to use a variety of conditions to prevent the possibility of double counting. In addition to the fact that some of the layers overlap conceptually, this means that some of the layers are necessarily underreported (as discussed below). The “Floating” layer is equal to the *officially unemployed*.¹² The “Pauperized” layer is composed of: *working poor*, defined as officially employed with the poverty status “Below poverty” or “100–124 percent of the low-income level”¹³; and *non-working poor*, defined as those age 20 to 55 years outside the labor force with the poverty status “Below poverty” or “100–124 percent of the low-income level.”¹⁴ The “Stagnant” layer is composed of the following, excluding those counted in the Pauperized layer: *marginally attached*, defined as not in the labor force and wanting employment;¹⁵ *part-time*, defined as employed but working less than 35 hours for economic reasons;¹⁶ and *temporary*, defined as employed in the temporary work industry at least 35 hours per week.¹⁷ Finally, the “Latent” layer, exclusive of any cases counted above, is composed of: *returning students*, defined as two-thirds of individuals 25 years and older outside the labor force and “going to school,” but not counted elsewhere;¹⁸ and the *incarcerated population* (2013 is estimated based on previous 5 years).

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¹¹ Unfortunately, even some CPS variables were not available for all years, so the totals for 1960 and 1970 for *Marginally Attached*, and 1960 for *Non-working Poor*, had to be estimated based on the trend of previous years. Consequently, the estimates for these years must be approached with caution.

¹² Variable EMPSTAT (codes 20, 21, or 22).

¹³ Variables: LABFORCE; and POVERTY (codes 10 or 21).

¹⁴ Variables: POVERTY (codes 10 or 21); and AGE.

¹⁵ Variable WANTJOB (codes 2 or 3).

¹⁶ Variable WHYPTLWK (codes 10, 60, or 80).

¹⁷ Variable IND: 1971–1982: code 737, “Employment and temporary help services”; 1983–2002: code 731, “Personnel supply services”; 2003–2013: code 7580, “Employment services.”

¹⁸ It is worth noting that returning students may be significantly underestimated, even apart from the fact that some returning students may have been counted in previous layers. This is because it was only possible to use the “Activity when not in labor force last year (part-year workers)” variable (ACTNLFY code 30), rather than the much more appropriate, “School or college attendance” variable (SCHLCOLL). The problem being that the universe for SCHLCOLL was restricted by age (16 to 24 years) until 2013, when the age ceiling was pushed up to 54 years. When the SCHLCOLL (codes 3 or 4) variable is used for 2013, the estimate of individuals 25 and older attending college or university full- or part-time comes to 1,077,484; using the ACTNLFY variable, the estimate is only 230,159—a difference of just under 850 thousand.

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