

5 Trends That Are Destroying the Middle Class in America

The middle class in America has been shrinking for decades, and our leaders seem powerless to do anything about it. Two years ago, the middle class became a minority in this country for the first time ever. In other words, the middle class now accounts for less than 50 percent of the population. But back in the early 1970s, the middle class made up more than 60 percent of the population. I have often compared being in the middle class to playing a really bizarre game of musical chairs. When the music stops playing each month, more chairs are being pulled out of the middle class, and most of us are just hoping we will still have a chair for the next go around.

Earlier today, I came across a *USA Today* article that discussed some of the factors that are slowly, but surely, eviscerating the middle class. I am going to share four of those factors with you, and at the end, I am going to add one extra one. First of all, the article pointed to a decline in manufacturing and the rise of service jobs as one of the key trends that is changing the nature of work in America:

“Once dominant industries, like manufacturing—which paid well even without a college degree—have been overtaken by service sector jobs, most of which are low-paying, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.”

In the old days, even if you didn't have any higher education, you could support a middle-class family by working in manufacturing. We were the greatest manufacturing society the world had ever seen, and Detroit had the highest per capita income in the entire country. But after decades of sending manufacturing jobs overseas, manufacturing's share of the U.S.

economy is at an all-time low, and formerly great manufacturing cities such as Detroit have become rotting, decaying holes.

Second, the *USA Today* article pointed to the rising cost of a college education:

"The cost of getting a college degree is up more than 1,000 percent since 1978, according to Bloomberg."

This is a particular pet peeve of mine because I am still paying off my old law school loans. We encourage our students to get as much education as possible and to not worry about all the debt, but then millions of them find themselves financially crippled and without good jobs once they graduate. This makes it extremely difficult for a lot of our young people to enter the middle class.

Third, the *USA Today* article brought up stagnant wages and the rising cost of living:

Decades of stagnant wages mean both parents must often work to make ends meet, creating a need for child care and elder care that didn't exist in 1950, for example, when two-thirds of women were full-time "homemakers," aka caregivers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Once upon a time, a single income could easily provide for a large middle-class family in America. But today, so many families have both parents working, and yet many of them still find it very difficult to pay the bills each month. In fact, surveys have found that somewhere around two-thirds of the entire country is living paycheck to paycheck.

Fourth, the *USA Today* article mentioned the gig economy as a major issue:

"The gig economy (Uber, Airbnb) has exploded, giving workers

more control and flexibility, but fewer benefits or legal protections."

Independent work and contract work have become major societal trends, and this isn't going away any time soon. These types of jobs do not typically come with health insurance, retirement benefits and the like, so this is something that our nation is going to have to wrestle with.

Fifth, I would like to throw in the decline of small business and entrepreneurship in America. Working for yourself or starting a business have always been ways to lift yourself up into the middle class in this country, but today it is harder than ever to become independent. The government is absolutely killing small businesses and entrepreneurs with rules, regulations, red tape and high taxes, and little relief appears to be coming their way any time soon.

At this point, the percentage of Americans that are self-employed is hovering near the all-time record low, and if we hope to have a thriving middle class ever again, we need to get this fixed.

We also need to train our young people for the jobs of the 21st century. At one time, we had one of the best education systems on the entire planet, but today, our system of public education has become a global joke.

And I am not exaggerating one bit when I say that.

To give you an idea of how badly the quality of our workforce has declined, I want to share with you something that the owner of a small manufacturing company posted in an internet discussion forum:

I own a small manufacturing company. Most of the assembly work is done at a bench, with hand tools. The work is not difficult, but quality and consistency is paramount.

We are entering into our busiest time of year, and steady growth combined with losing one of our senior bench techs has caused me to run some ads (after spreading the word around to friends and associates).

I have been involved in the manufacturing business for about 30 years and have seen thousands of resumes.

The last couple weeks I have been reviewing a couple dozen resumes a day. What I am seeing now is stunning and disappointing. When did people stop learning how to compose a sentence? When did they decide that a resume composed of two sentences is somehow complete? The poor level of spelling, grammar and frankly, effort, has me perplexed and perpetually face-palming.

So far, I have two resumes that were not immediately round-filed. Just two.

If this is the current state of our potential work force, we are in trouble.

That really resonated with me because I have heard pretty much the same thing from so many business owners over the years.

Decades of following the progressive agenda, and I am talking about both Democrats and Republicans, has been absolutely disastrous for our society.

We desperately need a complete and total cultural revolution, and that means returning to the values and the principles that this nation was founded upon.

If we continue on the same path that we are currently on, the middle class will continue to deteriorate, and our nation as a whole will continue to decline.

We can do better, and we must do better. {eoa}