

# [***Free College Won't Make the American Dream Attainable for the Working Class***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPN-FFX1-DY68-11WP-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

April 3, 2024 Wednesday 6:00 AM EST

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**Length:** 998 words

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**Highlight:** For working-class Americans, attaining the American Dream is out of reach, says Newsweek Opinion Editor Batya Ungar-Sargon in her new book.

**Body**

For working-class Americans, attaining the American Dream is out of reach, says Newsweek Opinion Editor Batya Ungar-Sargon in her new book, [*Second Class: How the Elites Betrayed America's Men and Women*](https://www.encounterbooks.com/books/second-class/). Her book analyzes who constitutes the working class and why it is more and more difficult for this group to attain the stability that previous generations achieved. Ungar-Sargon shares intimate stories of the struggles of hard-working Americans across the country, finding commonalities across lines of race, political affiliation and occupation. In this Q&A, she discusses barriers to upward mobility for the working class, whether universal college education would help, their enduring patriotism and more.

**Q \_ You interviewed working-class people across the country. What is the most significant lesson you learned from them?**

**A \_** That you can love a country that has betrayed you. That you can love people who vote for the other party and support policies that you don't. That polarization is a totally elite phenomenon.

Despite being incredibly diverse, working-class Americans are surprisingly united on the big issues, whether it's abortion or immigration or equal opportunity or the need for better jobs and better health care. The problem is that neither party represents where the vast majority of working-class Americans are at politically, so it's something of a crapshoot which party they choose. Unlike the college educated (on both sides), they don't identify with the list of positions listed on the DNC or RNC websites, so they aren't overly invested in ***politics*** and would never dream of holding it against someone who picks the other party in the voting booth because it signifies so little.

**Both President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump say their policies are better for the working class. What policies really would have a positive impact?**

Greatly expanding vocational training. Greatly limiting immigration. A government-backed catastrophic health care plan. Outlawing degree requirements for jobs that don't require them, and [outlawing] software that weeds out those without a college degree during the application process. Making zoning laws illegal and expanding light-touch density housing which greatly expands the housing stock by allowing for duplexes and triple deckers to be built in areas currently zoned exclusively for single-family detached homes. Expanding tariffs on foreign imports. Reducing welfare fraud but expanding the child tax credit. Basically, finding ways to make sure people who work really hard are ensured a dignified life and the American Dream, which they aren't today.

**Good health care is a significant concern for everyone. How has the Affordable Care Act impacted people you interviewed?**

It didn't solve the problem for most of the people I interviewed. Many of them had insurance through work but were still going broke due to things like copays and deductibles. Others were paid so little they qualified for Medicaid. The health care system in this country is such a disaster.

**What do you think are the most significant barriers to upward mobility?**

The offshoring of manufacturing to China and Mexico and the expansion of immigration are the two biggest ones. We took good-paying, working-class jobs that ensured a stable, middle-class life to millions of Americans and shipped them overseas to build up the middle class of other countries. Then we imported millions of low-wage immigrants, most of whom are working in jobs that don't require a college degree, to compete with working-class Americans in the jobs that remained here, driving down the wages of those jobs. Corporations started to offload the risk they used to take onto their workers, depriving them of pensions, then good health care, then stable working hours and then a living wage. That's how we got here.

The diploma divide is another big one. Our economy rewards people who work in the knowledge industry in a big way, while there is constant downward pressure on working-class wages.

And then there's the cost of a middle-class life. While working-class wages are up, the hallmarks of a middle-class life—a home, adequate health care, an education, a retirement—have risen astronomically, in large part due to what [*Elizabeth Warren*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/elizabeth-warren?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) called "The Two Income Trap": upper middle-class couples in the top 10 or 20 percentile who can afford to pay twice as much for everything, which drove up the prices where they live.

**If moving into the upper class is correlated so closely with higher education, would free universal college tuition solve the problems you've identified? Or is college not really the answer?**

This is an extremely important question. The answer is no, both on the part of the workers and on the part of the economy. From the perspective of the economy, there simply isn't a demand for significantly increasing the number of college grads out there. Those industries are pretty full up—and even contracting, thanks to AI. Over half of college grads are working jobs that don't require a college degree (though they still make more than their working-class counterparts), meaning we're already producing way too many college grads—while there is a devastating dearth of skilled tradesfolk.

The other reason free college for all isn't the answer is that not everyone wants to go to college, excels at that type of learning or wants that kind of career. And that's a really good thing! We already have too many lawyers and gender studies majors and podcasts. We're never going to have too many plumbers or janitors, but we took all the money to educate the former and put it in higher education, and then devalued the latter through mass migration.

It's unfair that it's those people whose work we rely on most who can't sustain their families.

**What surprised you most when researching and writing this book?**

The patriotism of the Americans who were left behind. They aren't willing to give up on this country and we shouldn't give up on them.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2367633/author-book-cover.jpg)

**Graphic**

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**Load-Date:** April 3, 2024

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