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Unemployment, Class Consciousness, and Radical Politics: What Didn't Happen in the Thirties

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ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES between American political history and that of most European nations is the peripheral role played by class conflict. Although relations between management and labor have been often tense and sometimes violent, the American labor movement has not spawned a class-based or socialist party, and the American worker has not manifested the sense of class consciousness characteristic of European workers. Even during the depression of the thirties, when one might expect massive unemployment and sharp disagreement over governmental policy to have heightened working class consciousness and alienation, American workers remained allegiant to a capitalist economy and a democratic polity. They were mobilized to support New Deal reforms, not to support radical political or economic change.

We know, both from the folklore of the great depression of the thirties as well as from scholarly accounts of that period, that the experience of being unemployed was a devastating one, both psychologically and economically. Why did such a massive disruption spawn reform, not revolution? In particular, why did those who

suffered the devastating experience of prolonged unemployment not turn to some more radical alternative? We propose to analyze the political responses of the unemployed in order to answer these questions. In the process of trying to understand the political reactions of the unemployed during the thirties we will be able to pose some general questions about the effects of unemployment, class, and class consciousness upon political attitudes in America. We shall use for this purpose a rich body of previously unanalyzed data on working class attitudes during the thirties.

Why Not Radicalism? Two Bodies of Literature

For some help in our inquiry as to why the widespread economic dislocation of the thirties did not produce more radical reactions, we can turn to two rather different bodies of literature: the first, that rather imposing set of tracts written in response to the question, "Why has working class radicalism made so little impact in the United States?"; the second, the various micro-studies of the unemployed which were conducted during the thirties.

That durable question about the failure of American socialism has produced a prodigious number of hypotheses.[1] One set of answers to this question focuses upon the Socialist Party and the trade union movement themselves and attributes the failure of radicalism to factors internal to them—for example, to the policy of the AFL under Gompers to avoid commitment to a single politicial

[1] The literature about the failure of American politics to sustain a radical alternative is too voluminous to cite. The essays in *Failure of a Dream*, ed. John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, Anchor Books(Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974) provide an excellent survey of the various hypotheses which have been forwarded as well as extensive bibliographical suggestions. In *The Socialist Party of America* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), Chap. XI, David Shannon gives a lucid summary of some of this literature. Works of special note, some of which are excerpted in the Laslett-Lipset volume, include Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928); Werner Sombart, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (Tubingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1906). (Parts of this essay are reproduced for the first time in English in the Laslett-Lipset book.); Leon Samson, *Toward a United Front* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); Daniel Bell, "The Failure of American Socialism," in *The End of Ideology* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960).

party; to the ideological splits which rent the Socialist Party from 1919; to the Socialists' ideological rigidity; to their failure to focus on local issues in contesting elections; and so on.

A second set of responses to the question of why socialist politics never took hold is more relevant for understanding why the economic cataclysm of the thirties did not produce more radical reaction from the working class in general and from the unemployed in particular. According to the various versions of this interpretation, the nature of the American Socialist Party and the American trade union movement was less crucial than the nature of the working class to which they appealed. What doomed working class radicalism from the start was the low level of class consciousness in the United States. In these explanations, the low level of class consciousness within the American working class is attributed to a wide variety of factors, among them, the role of the frontier as a safety valve for the discontents of the mobile and restless; the ability of an expanding economy to provide both a relatively high standard of living even for the working class and real opportunities for the able and ambitious to succeed; the pervasive belief in the American Dream of success; the lack of a feudal tradition and the hierarchy of ascribed social statuses which accompany it; and the effects of immigration and ethnic conflict which divided working people from one another and gave them alternative identities which were not class-related. Although these sometimes contradictory and sometimes complementary theories are an enormously rich source of hypotheses, the data marshalled to support them are often scanty. When there are data, they are usually used to measure antecedent variables which are presumed to be related to low levels of class consciousness; for example, those interested in this question marshall impressive data to demonstrate that geographic mobility or economic growth was greater in the United States than in Europe. The absence of class consciousness, the dependent variable, is always a given; it is never measured directly. This dearth of supportive data, especially insofar as class consciousness is concerned, is not particularly surprising given what archives are available. It would be quite unfair to remonstrate with the authors of these hypotheses for the fact that systematic surveys of public attitudes were not undertaken on a regular basis until well into the twentieth century. Still, these works are of somewhat limited utility for understanding what it means to be class conscious and how that consciousness predis-

poses a member of the working class—especially an unemployed one—to respond politically.

For additional insights into why the unemployed did not engage in political revolt, one can turn to several studies of the effects of unemployment upon the unemployed worker which were conducted during the thirties. These studies—unlike the analyses of the failure of American radicalism—are based upon an abundance of data, but they must be approached with some caution. Although there are a number of such studies, all of them are based on geographically and numerically limited samples. Furthermore, in no study is political behavior of more than marginal concern. Thus, conclusions about political life must be taken somewhat piecemeal from studies based upon what are—by the standards of survey research—inadequate case bases. In addition, these studies generally proceed by describing several representative families in considerable detail rather than by reviewing the universe of data collected.

Whatever the methodological limitations of these studies, their unanimity on one point is quite persuasive. All studies of the unemployed—whether conducted in the United States or in Europe—seem to concur that the experience of unemployment is a lonely and humiliating one. No matter whether the modal response of the unemployed man was to place responsibility for his dilemma upon himself, as in the United States, or, as in Britain, upon the system, unemployment seemed to be universally accompanied by withdrawal from community life.[2] In spite of additional leisure time

[2] This point is made in the following studies of unemployed Americans during the Depression: Grace Adams, *Workers on Relief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939); E. W. Bakke, *Citizens Without Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Eli Ginzberg, *The Unemployed* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1943); Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and His Family* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971, originally published 1940). Studies of the unemployed in Europe report a similar reaction. See, for example, E. W. Bakke, *The Unemployed Man* (London: Nisbet and Company, Ltd., 1933); Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel, *Marienthal* (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1971 [originally published in 1933]); *Men Without Work: A Report Made to the Pilgrim Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938). In addition, the works cited in two review articles seem to report no contrary evidence. See Boran Zawadski and Paul Lazarsfeld, "The Psychological Consequences of Unemployment," *Journal of Social Psychology*, VI (May, 1935), 224-251; and Philip Eisenberg and Paul Lazarsfeld, "The Psychological Effects of Unemployment," *Psychological Bulletin*, XXXV (June, 1938), 358-390.

available for such activities, the unemployed seemed to avoid their former workmates and to curtail both social visits and participation in organized activities—union, religious, recreational, social, and political. Given this general withdrawal from collective activity, it is not surprising that the unemployed failed to become the backbone of political rebellion.[3]

Because political attitudes are of peripheral interest in these studies we do not learn from them whether the political quiescence of the unemployed—an organic part of their general withdrawal from community life—was an indication of continued support of the political and economic system or whether among the unemployed there were some who rejected the system but failed to act upon that rejection. Thus, we learn from the micro-studies why political inaction was the modal political response among the unemployed, but we learn little of the attitudinal context in which that response was embedded.

Another Piece of the Puzzle: The 1939 Roper Studies

Most of the survey data which make possible the analysis of political attitudes date from the past two decades. There are, however, two previously unexploited national surveys, conducted in 1939 by Elmo Roper for *Fortune Magazine*, which shed light on aspects of working class attitudes.[4] Although they must be used with care, their methodological limitations are not sufficient grounds for ignoring these data, for they are more relevant to our substantive concerns than any of the contemporary data we have unearthed.

An ordinary national sample survey includes too few unemployed

[3] These micro-studies are unanimous in their judgment that participation in collective attempts to effect political and social change—in particular, attraction to extremist movements—was quite limited among the American unemployed. Presumably, systematic national data about the political commitments of the unemployed would support this conclusion. We should note, however, that this conclusion about the overall political quiescence of the unemployed is not incompatible with data about support for movements of protest which show that the unemployed were overrepresented among supporters of figures like Huey Long and Father Coughlin. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 173, 193.

[4] The two polls, conducted in March and December of 1939, were made available by the Roper Center in Williamstown, Massachusetts. The results of the latter study were written up in a perceptive article in the February 1940 issue of *Fortune*, "The People of the U.S.A.," 14, 20, 28, 133, 134, 136.

respondents to permit analysis of the attitudes of this group. However, each of the Roper surveys contains 5,214 respondents and over two hundred respondents who volunteered their occupations as "unemployed." The Roper studies are relevant for our purposes not only because they contain so many unemployed respondents, but also because they were conducted at a particularly interesting time, after the reforms of the New Deal but before the onset of full economic recovery. In 1939, 17 percent of the labor force was unemployed. Although this figure represents a slight improvement over the 19 percent unemployment of the preceding year, it was still higher than the 14 percent level to which unemployment had fallen in 1937.[5] What makes these studies even more attractive is the unusual comprehensiveness of the questions about attitudes towards economic changes: together the questionnaires contain items about a variety of aspects of how the economy should be run—for example, whether the government should regulate utilities, whether the government should attempt to redistribute private wealth, whether the government should undertake to support those who cannot provide for themselves. Furthermore, the December study, upon which most of our analysis is based, contains a variety of questions which probe the respondent's sense of class consciousness. This study includes the usual question about subjective class identification—frequently used as a measure in studies of class consciousness. In addition, the study includes a question about whether the classes are in conflict with one another, a measure which allows us to understand something more about the cognitive context in which the respondent's class identification is placed. In addition, there are questions about the opportunities open to the respondent and to his children.

These studies permit us to draw a fuller picture of the political opinions of the unemployed than was possible to deduce from the micro-studies. Because they contain data about the employed working class—unlike the micro-studies of the unemployed—we can make comparisons between the attitudes of the unemployed and those in the working class who kept their jobs. Thus, we can test various hypotheses about the differential effects upon attitudes of class and unemployment: to see whether the relative political quie-

[5] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics figure cited in Neil W. Chamberlain and Donald E. Cullen, *The Labor Sector* (2nd ed., New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 516.

scence of the unemployed was accompanied by system support in excess of that shown by their employed working-class counterparts; whether the attitudes of the unemployed were simply a reflection of the class from which they came; or whether to be unemployed was in essence to add insult to the injury of working-class status and, thus, whether the unemployed tended to support the political and economic system even less than the employed working class. Furthermore, because the December study contains questions both about class self-identification as well as about perceptions of the relations among the classes, we can investigate the meaning of class consciousness and its impact on political attitudes and, thus, probe some of the unanswered questions contained in the works of those who attributed the failure of working class radicalism to the low level of class consciousness in America. Finally, we can follow up some of the hypotheses contained in those theories by analyzing the data about the respondent's outlook on the opportunities open to him and the hypothetical choices he would have made to pursue those opportunities, thus assessing the impact of unemployment, class and class consciousness on the acceptance of the American Dream.

However interesting and provocative the questions and however large the samples, these surveys have many shortcomings. In terms of the substance of what they cover, they seem just to whet the appetite; if only all those provocative questions about political attitudes had been supplemented by a few questions about political behavior—voting choice, political participation and the like—a much more complex and illuminating analysis would have been possible. Another drawback of the Roper studies is the way in which demographic variables—for example, education—which are considered standard in contemporary survey research were simply not included; others, such as age, were coded into rather primitive categories.[6] This means that we know unfortunately little about the unemployed. We do not know their previous occupations, their educational levels, the length of their unemployment and so on; all of which limit the questions which we can pursue.

An even more potentially damaging shortcoming of the Roper surveys is the somewhat primitive sampling technique used. The

[6] In at least one case, the demographic categories were not merely crude but downright bizarre: economic level was indicated by inclusion in one of five categories—A (High), B, C, D (Low), or Negro.

sample was an area probability sample to the local level at which point it became a quota sample.[7] Such a sampling design makes difficult the application of the kinds of statistical techniques which social scientists usually use with sample survey data. The sampling error is unknown.[8] An even more important problem with the Roper samples is that they underestimated substantially the number of unemployed in the work force. As we have mentioned, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that 17.2 percent of the civilian labor force was unemployed in 1939. However, our studies netted only 7.3 percent and 8.3 percent unempoyed respectively. Even allowing for our necessarily crude definition of what constitutes the work force—we simply remove from the samples those who identified themselves as "students," "retired," or "housewives"—it is clear that too few unemployed are included. There are, presumably, two factors at work here. First, because the occupation question was worded rather crudely, it is quite likely that some who were unemployed at the time the survey was taken listed their occupations as those they normally pursued and, thus, were included with the employed. Although any departure from randomness introduces unknown biases into a sample, the fact that there are unemployed persons buried within the ranks of those we consider employed may not be as damaging as it may seem. Such dilution of the employed category would serve to dampen the relationships we find, making the employed look more like the unemployed. It is, thus, possible that the relationships we report below are actually understated. The second factor, whose bearing upon our findings will be discussed below, is that early sample surveys are notorious for their failure to include a sufficient number of lower-class respondents.[9]

[7] The method of drawing the sample is described in some detail in an untitled, undated chapter from a handbook for interviewers which was provided to us by the Roper Center. Localities were chosen by the central office. Interviewers were then given explicit instructions about how to locate the households in which interviews were to take place and were told how many people to interview by age and sex (and, for women, employment status).

[8] For this reason we do not make estimates of statistical significance.

[9] Some further comments on the way in which the undersampling of the unemployed affects our analysis are probably in order. Even though neither study contains the number of unemployed persons predicted by official estimates, each contains sufficient cases to make possible a tentative analysis. (There are, respectively, 238 and 258 unemployed persons included in the March and December studies.) Furthermore, the data reported in Table A-1

Given all the shortcomings of these data, is it even worth bothering with them? We definitely think so. Even though we are somewhat limited, both substantively and methodologically, in the kinds of analyses we can undertake, the questions on the surveys are so interesting that it would be a shame not to glean from them whatever insights they might yield. We are not trying to estimate population parameters but rather to trace out a set of relationships. And the relationships which we find are so consistent with one another as to lend credence to our analysis. In spite of their shortcomings, the Roper surveys provide the best available data on a subject about which there has been much speculation but little hard evidence. They provide us with a rare type of historical record: systematic data on political beliefs for the population at large.

Attitudes of the Unemployed

We can begin our analysis of the attitudes of the unemployed by comparing their responses with those of the employed to a series of items about a variety of possible changes in the political and economic systems of the United States, changes which range from

show that the unemployed sampled were spread across social categories and were not concentrated in any one group—although then, as now, certain groups such as women and blacks contributed disproportionately to unemployment. We might add, parenthetically, that the December study breaks down those under 40 into two sub-categories. Just as youthful unemployment is particularly acute today, those who were 17 to 25 in 1939 were twice as likely to be unemployed as those 26 to 40—12 percent of the youngest age group was unemployed, as opposed to 6 percent of those 26 to 40.

Table A-1

Unemployment and Demography*

	Total	Sex		Race		Age	
		Men	Women	Whites	Blacks	40 and Under	Over 40
March, 1939 (N=3202)	7.3%	7%	12%	7%	8%	8%	9%
December, 1939 (N=3121)	8.3%	7%	10%	8%	13%	7%	7%

* Figure given is percentage of workforce (those not students, retired or housewives) who gave their occupation as "unemployed."

such mild reforms as the provision of relief for the needy to such radical transformations as the overthrow of capitalism and the overhaul of the Constitution.

In Table 1 we present data on the response of four employment groups—upper-white-collar workers, lower-white-collar workers, wage workers and unemployed—to various political and economic changes.[10] Although the occupational distinctions are admittedly

[10] In order to make a meaningful comparison between the views of those who have work and those who have none, we would like to be able to match the unemployed in our sample with respondents holding jobs similar to those the unemployed would have held if they were working. Unfortunately, such a strategy is ruled out because, as we have mentioned, we know nothing of the occupational histories of the unemployed. We have, however, refined our sample in order to specify more clearly what we are comparing with what.

First, we dropped those in the agricultural sector and blacks from our sample. The unfortunate omission of blacks is necessary for several reasons. First of all, we would have eliminated many of the blacks in any case because so many of them were concentrated among farm workers. More important, we dropped the blacks because we had reason to believe that the black samples are particularly unrepresentative; presumably the difficulties in contacting and communicating with blacks were more difficult in an era when the art of surveying was new. Finally, as mentioned in footnote 6, black respondents were never categorized as to economic level. As will be shown, economic level figures in the assignment of the respondents to broad occupational categories. Thus, it would have been impossible to assign black respondents in a manner analogous to whites. The omission of blacks is unfortunate because of the role attributed to racial tensions in some explanations of the pattern of working class politics in the U.S.

After eliminating blacks and farm workers, we stratified the employed portion of the remaining sample—non-farm whites—into three broad occupational groups: upper-white-collar, lower-white-collar, and wage workers. Finally, in order to overcome slightly the imprecision of the cumbersome occupational categorization, we dropped entirely from our sample those respondents whose economic level was out of phase with their employment status.

This particular refinement probably requires further explanation and justification. According to an undated mimeo, "Meeting Quota Requirements," provided to us by the Roper Center, interviewers were to classify white respondents into four economic level categories (A, B, C, D) on the basis of subjective observations of their life style or standard of living. Obviously, such categorizations are crude. In order to compensate for the crudeness of both the occupational and the economic level categories, we dropped those respondents for which the two were inconsistent—minor salaried workers, wage workers, or unemployed enjoying a luxurious or upper-middle-class life style (A or B) and salaried executives achieving only a lower-middle-class or subsistence life style (C or D).

By dropping from consideration those whose life style was inconsistent with

crude, even after the introduction of various refinements, these data make it possible to compare the unemployed with blue-collar workers—from whose ranks we presume most of the unemployed to come—and to compare blue-collar workers with other employed groups. A variety of such comparisons can be made from the data in Table 1; in our discussion below we highlight briefly some of the relationships we will pursue in greater detail later.

Welfare Programs. First, we consider the responses to the least radical of the proposed changes, the obligation of the government to provide for those in need: to see that all citizens can achieve at least a subsistence level, to provide relief for those in need and to guarantee jobs.[11] The data show widespread support for such measures. There are, however, important differences between the groups: not surprisingly, in each case the upper-white-collar workers were least likely and the unemployed were most likely to favor governmental action in the welfare field. The differences between blue-collar workers and the unemployed were smaller than we might have expected, given the special interest we assume the unemployed to have had in the provision of relief and the guaranteeing of jobs. Thus, support for such welfare measures seems to have varied more with economic class than with employment status.

Government Control over the Economy. Table 1 indicates that, although support for government control over parts of the economy was less widespread than for government activity in the provision of welfare, the general pattern of relationships is similar to that just described. The unemployed were consistently the most likely to

their reported occupation, we lose 7 percent of the white non-farm work force from the March study and 9 percent of the white non-farm work force from the December study. These losses are distributed in the following manner:

	March Study		December Study	
	Percentage	*N*	Percentage	*N*
Salaried Executives	16%	35	13%	24
Salaried Minor	18%	118	21%	123
Wage Workers	5%	28	5%	25
Unemployed	3%	7	10%	21

It might be argued that this manipulation, the dropping of the inconsistents, would exaggerate the differences between the occupational groups. However, it should be noted how few cases we are forced to eliminate from the two categories which are the primary focus of our inquiry, wage workers and unemployed.

[11] Exact wording of these and other questions appears in the Appendix.

TABLE 1

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE BY EMPLOYMENT

	Total	Upper White Collar	Lower White Collar	Wage Worker	Unemployed
Welfare Programs					
Percent Saying:					
The government should see that everyone is above subsistence	73%	59%	73%	82%	86%
The government should provide relief for those in need	66%	56%	65%	73%	83%
The government should guarantee job opportunities[a]	61%	46%	60%	73%	76%
Government Control of Economy					
Percent wanting:					
The government to regulate utilities[a]	55%	47%	57%	58%	62%
Some government ownership of railroads[a]	38%	27%	39%	42%	54%
Some government ownership of telephone & telegraph system[a]	33%	23%	34%	38%	42%
Percent Saying:					
The government should redistribute wealth through high taxes on the rich[a]	35%	24%	32%	44%	54%
There should be a law limiting income	24%	13%	22%	32%	42%
The government should confiscate wealth beyond what people need[a]	15%	6%	12%	24%	28%
End of "Free Enterprise"					
Percent Wanting Relief Even If It Means:					
The end of capitalism	16%	7%	16%	20%	32%
Government assignment of jobs	12%	5%	12%	16%	26%
Change in the Constitution					
Percent Wanting:					
Some changes in the Constitution	30%	22%	31%	36%	31%
Complete change in the Constitution	6%	3%	6%	10%	7%
March	(2102)	(563)	(803)	(539)	(197)
December	(2048)	(530)	(818)	(508)	(192)

[a] Question is taken from March study. All others are from December study.

favor such change, but were not strikingly different from the employed wage-workers. In each case, the distinctive group was the upper-white-collar group which was decidedly the most conservative.

Income Redistribution. Three measures designed to redistribute income—redistribution of wealth through high taxes on the rich, a limitation on income, and confiscation of wealth "beyond what people need"—elicited lower levels of enthusiasm, even from those lower-income groups which, presumably, would have benefited from them most. Once again, the unemployed were most likely to advocate such changes; in this case, however, fairly sharp differences emerged among the employed groups. Thus, both class and employment status seem to have an impact on attitudes towards redistributive measures.

Ending the Capitalist System. Support for change was still more limited in the responses to two questions which linked the provision of relief to radical restructuring of the economy. The respondent was asked if he would favor the provision of relief even if it meant the end of capitalism, or if it meant that the government would assign jobs. In no group did such changes command majority support; once again, however, the unemployed were most amenable to the changes, and once again there were sharp differences both among the various employed groups and between the unemployed and the wage workers.

A comparison of these questions with the simple question about whether or not the government should provide relief is informative. When it was simply a matter of relief, the responses of the unemployed and wage workers were quite similar. However, the unemployed seemed more willing than employed wage workers to sanction radical changes in order to obtain relief.

Changing the Constitution. A different pattern of responses emerged on a question about favoring no change, substantial change, or complete change in the Constitution. Once again, those favoring radical change were a small minority and, once again, the upper-white-collar group was least favorable to change. However, when it was a question of political change, the clear pattern of differentiation among the lower–white–collar workers, wage workers and unemployed disappeared. In this case, it was the wage workers who were most likely to favor change, but the differences were neither large nor consistent.

Unemployment and Attitudes, a Brief Summary. An interesting pattern of responses emerges from this analysis of the two 1939 Roper surveys. When it was a matter of economic reforms, whether mild or radical, the occupational groups located themselves in the expected order in the ideological spectrum: the upper-white-collar group was least likely to favor change, followed in order by the lower-white-collar workers, the wage workers and the unemployed. However, on most items the unemployed were less clearly differentiated from other groups, particularly from the wage workers, than might have been expected. With the exception of attitudes towards constitutional change, unemployment seems to nudge attitudes which are already differentiated by social class towards the left. However, it is difficult to discern a coherent pattern to the absolute size of that leftward push; that is, it is not immediately obvious why the unemployed are especially distinctive on certain items, but are not clearly differentiated from the wage workers on other items which seem similar in their substance.

Class Consciousness and Political Radicalism

Although attitudes towards political and economic change seem to have been related both to class and to being unemployed, these data show neither the wage workers nor the unemployed to have been very radical. While majorities in both groups tended to favor moderate reforms, only minorities among the unemployed—and even smaller minorities among the wage workers—favored substantial change in the economic system.

One explanation for this relative moderation among the unemployed—and, for that matter, among wage workers—is suggested by the literature on the failure of radicalism in America; that is, that the moderation of these groups is a function of their failure to develop a subjective class consciousness to match their objective class status. Analysts of political behavior have demonstrated empirically that subjective class identification is related to political attitudes and to party support.[12] However, as we have mentioned, the hypothesis that working class moderation is related to the failure to

[12] See, for example, V. O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), Chap. 6; David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), Chap. 4; Richard Centers, *The Psychology of Social Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

TABLE 2

SUBJECTIVE CLASS IDENTIFICATION BY EMPLOYMENT

	Total	Upper White Collar	Lower White Collar	Wage Workers	Unem-ployed
Class Identification:					
Closed-Ended Question					
Upper	7%	15%	5%	4%	4%
Middle	84	85	91	80	69
Lower	8	—	4	16	27
	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(1658)	(423)	(661)	(411)	(163)
Open-Ended Question					
Upper or Middle	51%	67%	54%	38%	30%
Working	16	3	15	28	28
Miscellaneous "American," "Liberal," "Average," etc.	12	12	12	9	13
No Answer	21	17	18	25	29
	100%	99%	99%	100%	100%
	(2048)	(530)	(818)	(508)	(192)

achieve class consciousness has never been subjected to empirical test. Fortunately, the December 1939 Roper study has a number of questions about class consciousness which permit us to examine whether those whom we define objectively as being wage workers or unemployed had a subjective sense of their working class status.

The Roper survey contains two questions about subjective class identification, one closed-ended, the other open-ended. The former offered the respondent the choice of upper-, middle- and lower-class identification, a choice which we know from Richard Centers' classic study to be an unfortunate one because a much larger "middle class" response is elicited than when the third alternative is "working class."[13] The top portion of Table 2 reports the answers to this closed-ended question for our four economic groups. Not surpris-

[13] *Ibid.*

ingly, "middle class" was the modal response for all four groups, including the unemployed. It is interesting to note, however, that 27 percent of the unemployed, as opposed to 16 percent of the wage workers, selected "lower class." This may reflect the fact that the unemployed were, presumably, differentially recruited from the lowest ranks of the working class, those farthest from middle-class status. It may also demonstrate that the experience of unemployment had an impact on a person's self-perception in class terms, making it somewhat less likely that he would have thought of himself as "middle class."

We have chosen not to use the closed-ended question but to adopt instead the open-ended question which preceded it in the interview schedule, an item which asked the respondent what word he would use to name the class to which he belonged. This question, it would seem, provides a more nearly genuine measure of consciousness because the respondent's reply was untainted by suggestions from Roper. Not surprisingly, this question evoked a wide variety of responses, some of which could easily be collected under one of the rubrics "middle class" or "working class" and others which could not be so readily characterized.[14]

[14] A complete list of the responses to this open-ended question, along with our categorization of them, follows:

Upper or Middle Class		Working Class	
Upper	(29)	Lower	(28)
Other Upper	(16)	Poor	(40)
Upper Middle	(31)	Other Lower	(12)
Other Upper Middle	(10)	Working	(217)
Middle	(897)	Laboring	(36)
Other Middle	(14)		
Business Professional	(50)		

Miscellaneous	
Average	(98)
American	(29)
White Collar	(22)
Lower Middle	(13)
Liberal	(10)
Foreign	(5)
Farming	(4)
Unemployed	(10)
Respectable	(2)
Other	(44)

From the bottom portion of Table 2, which presents responses to the open-ended class self-identification question, we can draw two conclusions: the large number of respondents who gave no answer indicates that the question was a difficult one, especially for lower-status respondents; also, in all groups the modal respone was "middle class."

There are, however, important differences among the groups. The portion of working-class identifiers increases as class declines: at one end of the scale only a fraction of the upper-white-collar workers identified with the working class; at the other, the number of working-class identifiers among the unemployed, 28 percent, approaches the number of middle-class identifiers, 30 percent.

These findings, taken in tandem with the finding that a large number of respondents—especially within the working class and unemployed—did not even command sufficient class consciousness to answer the question, suggest that we should look further into the possibility of a link between the moderate attitudes of the working class and unemployed and their lack of class consciousness. It may be, however, that the class self-identification question usually used in survey research to measure class consciousness is inadequate. For there to be class consciousness in the Marxist sense of the term, it would seem that sense of identification with a class group would have to be accompanied by a belief that the interests of that group are opposed to the interests of other groups. Thinking of oneself as a member of the working class—whether that identification implies a feeling of solidarity with other workers or is a simple descriptive statement that the respondent works for a living—would seem to have little potential political effect unless the individual believes that the working class has special interests which conflict with the interests of other class groups. Fortunately, the December Roper study does include a measure of the perception of the existence of class conflict—a question which asks whether the interests of employers and employees are basically in opposition or basically the same. This question can help us to achieve a more meaningful assessment of class consciousness by permitting us not only to differentiate those who identified with the working class from those who identified with the middle class but also to distinguish those who perceived the classes to be in conflict from those who did not.

Table 3 reports the proportions that saw management and workers in opposition to each other, by both objective economic status

and class self-identification. The results are quite interesting. The data in the first column, for those at each economic level, illustrate a point found in other studies: the higher one is on the socio-economic scale, the less likely one is to believe that the interests of the social classes differ. As Dahrendorf has pointed out, advantaged groups in a society are likely to believe in social harmony, disadvantaged groups to believe in conflict.[15] Wage workers and the unemployed were twice as likely as the managerial group to see class conflict.

TABLE 3

PERCEPTION OF CLASS CONFLICT BY EMPLOYMENT AND CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Percent Seeing Management and Workers as Being in Opposition						
	All		Middle Class Identity		Working Class Identity	
Upper White Collar	19%	(507)	18%	(342)	19%	(16)
Lower White Collar	29%	(748)	27%	(412)	32%	(112)
Wage Workers	40%	(438)	32%	(183)	49%	(120)
Unemployed	41%	(159)	40%	(53)	48%	(40)

Controlling for subjective class identification produces additional interesting patterns. Class identification seems to have had little impact on seeing conflict among the classes within the white-collar groups. Given that it is not clear what it means when a manager identifies with the working class, this is not a particularly startling finding. However, both for wage workers and for the unemployed, those who identified with the working class were more likely to see the classes as being in conflict. Within this group of working class identifiers, being unemployed seemed to make no difference. The division is a class one—between the white-collar groups on the one hand and the wage workers and unemployed on the other. However, among middle class identifiers the unemployed were somewhat more likely to see conflict among the classes than were the wage

[15] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Consciousness in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961). For data on this point see Butler and Stokes, *op. cit.*, 91-92; and Sidney Verba, Bashiruddin Ahmed and Anil Bhatt, *Caste, Race and Politics: A Comparison of India and the United States* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971), 284.

workers. Thus, the impact of unemployment on the perception of social conflict seems to have been greater among those who had a middle-class identification. The loss of a job for a middle-class identifier may have violated the belief in social harmony more than it did for a worker whose identification was with the working class.

Table 3 locates for us two groups which seem to have been class conscious in a more complete sense—those wage workers and unemployed who both perceived themselves to be working class and saw the interests of management and labor to be in opposition. However, the data also show that, even after a decade of economic trauma, these class-conscious groups were very small in size. As we saw in Table 2, less than a third of the wage workers and the unemployed identified as working class. Moreover, these minorities were further divided into those who saw the interests of management and workers as harmonious and those who saw those interests as opposed. As shown in Table 4, the fully class-conscious groups were tiny minorities, less than 3 percent of the white work force.[16] The fully class-conscious wage workers and unemployed were even a small minority within the two objectively defined groups from which they are drawn: only 12 percent of the wage workers and 10 percent of the unemployed can be categorized as fully class conscious.[17] In short, assuming that our two measures together provide a richer measure of full class consciousness, we do find a class-conscious group within the objectively defined working class, but that group was a very small one. In addition, unemployment does not appear to have increased the likelihood that an individual would become class conscious: the proportions of unemployed and employed wage workers who were fully class conscious are quite similar.

[16] We do not consider the small number of upper- and lower-white-collar workers who identified as workers and saw class conflict as being part of the "fully" class conscious group, since the meaning of these questions is different for those higher in the status hierarchy. We may in this way be missing some professional or intellectual allies of the class conscious working class, but our goal is to find the fully class–conscious working class.

[17] The data may understate slightly the extent of full class consciousness among the unemployed. As pointed out earlier, we cannot distinguish between those unemployed who previously had had blue-collar jobs from those that had had white-collar jobs—though we have eliminated those with an above average life style. If we had considered only blue-collar unemployed, we might have found a higher proportion of fully class–conscious individuals.

TABLE 4

The Fully Class Conscious among
Wage Workers and Unemployed Represent:
2.8% of the entire white work force ($N = 2778$)
3.4% of the white non-farm work force ($N = 2241$)
3.8% of the classifiable non-farm work force ($N = 2048$)[a]
11.1% of the classifiable wage-working and unemployed segment of the white work force ($N = 700$)

The Fully Class Conscious among
Wage Workers Represent:
11.6% of the classifiable wage workers ($N = 508$)

The Fully Class Conscious among
the Unemployed Represent:
10% of the classifiable unemployed ($N = 192$)

[a] As explained in footnote 10, we attempted to compensate for some of the inadequacies in the occupational classification by dropping from our sample those whose economic level was inconsistent with their occupation. Thus, we eliminated, for example, very affluent wage workers and very poor salaried executives. The resulting group referred to in the remainder of the table as "classifiable" was the case base for Tables 2 and 3.

OBJECTIVE CLASS STATUS, SUBJECTIVE CLASS IDENTIFICATION AND ATTITUDES

Having identified relatively small groups among the wage workers and unemployed who were fully class conscious, we can proceed to inquire whether class consciousness as we have defined it was related to more radical attitudes. To make this assessment we consider again the views of the wage workers and unemployed, this time controlling for class self-identification and perception of conflict among the classes.[18]

We begin with attitudes towards the provision of welfare by the government. Table 5 presents the proportions of eight groups, defined on the basis of three variables—employment status, class identification and perception of class conflict—who felt that the government should provide for all people who have no other means

[18] Unfortunately, we cannot look at all the political attitudes summarized in Table 2 from this perspective since many come from the March, 1939, study which does not contain class identification questions. Because the number of cases in some of our crucial groups is quite small, differences must be interpreted with caution. Because the results are so consistent we believe them to be convincing.

of obtaining a living. The main distinction seems to have been between the wage workers and the unemployed. Both groups favored the provision of relief, but the unemployed favored it somewhat more than those who were employed. Class consciousness—measured either by class self-identification or by perception of conflict—played less of a role. Among the employed wage workers, those who had "full" class conciousness were more in favor of relief. But this was not the case with the fully class-conscious unemployed. In general, the pattern we find in connection with the provision of relief is that the objective status of being employed or unemployed made a difference, but subjective class consciousness did not.

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE WANTING THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE RELIEF BY CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND PERCEPTION OF CLASS CONFLICT

	Wage Workers		Unemployed	
	Middle Class Identification	Working Class Identification	Middle Class Identification	Working Class Identification
See no class conflict	68% (120)	66% (58)	77% (30)	90% (20)
See class conflict	63% (54)	76% (55)	79% (19)	82% (17)

Table 6 reports the percentages of the various groups favoring a more radical change in the economic structure, a government limitation on the amount an individual may earn. In this case, subjective class consciousness is more important. The most radical group—the only one in which a majority favored such a limitation—was the fully class conscious unemployed. Similarly, the fully class conscious wage workers were substantially more radical than other wage workers. The data indicate that full class consciousness did result in more radical economic views; and it did so to a greater degree when it was coupled with unemployment. Furthermore, the data make clear that working class self-identification was associated with a more radical set of political attitudes only when it was coupled with a perception of conflict among the social classes.

TABLE 6

PERCENTAGE WANTING LIMITATION ON INCOME BY CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT

	Wage Workers		Unemployed	
	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication
See no class conflict	26% (121)	25% (59)	36% (31)	29% (21)
See class conflict	28% (58)	45% (56)	48% (21)	65% (17)

Table 7 provides parallel data for still another economic issue: whether the respondent would still have favored the provision of welfare even if it meant the end of the capitalist system. As we saw in Table 1, this was hardly a popular alternative. However, class consciousness played an important role in determining who favored such a radical change. Among the employed, those who had "full' class consciousness were more likely to take such a position. Among the unemployed those who saw the classes in conflict —whether they were middle- or working-class identifiers—were more likely to have taken the radical position; and those who were fully class conscious favored such a position by two to one. On this issue, each component of class consciousness played a role, with the combination of the two components into full class consciousness resulting in the highest proportion of radical views among the unemployed. However, objective employment status was important as well: the fully class-conscious unemployed worker was even more radical than the fully class-conscious employed worker.

A similar pattern is found in Table 8, which shows the proportion willing to have the government assign jobs in order to achieve relief for the needy. The assignment of jobs was generally unpopular with the working class, but again we find greatest support for this alternative among the fully class–conscious. While the unemployed were generally more likely than employed wage workers to tolerate government assignment of jobs as the price of obtaining relief, within each group it was the fully class–conscious who were most likely to favor job assignment.

TABLE 7

PERCENTAGE WILLING TO SEE THE END OF CAPITALISM IN ORDER TO PROVIDE RELIEF BY CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT

	Wage Workers		Unemployed	
	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication
See no class conflict	17% (115)	18% (54)	19% (26)	20% (15)
See class conflict	20% (50)	28% (46)	44% (16)	67% (15)

TABLE 8

PERCENTAGE WILLING TO SEE THE GOVERNMENT ASSIGN JOBS TO WORKERS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE RELIEF BY CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT

	Wage Workers		Unemployed	
	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication
See no class conflict	8% (118)	15% (53)	24% (29)	20% (20)
See class conflict	10% (52)	27% (52)	29% (17)	53% (15)

Finally, in Table 9 we present data on the proportion wanting some change in the Constitution. The data form no regular pattern. There is little clear difference between the employed and unemployed, but there does seem to be a tendency for those who favored constitutional change to be concentrated among those who saw class conflict.

The patterns we have presented are complex. It seems useful to summarize the effects of our three independent variables (objective employment status and the two types of class consciousness) on the various economic and political attitudes. To do this, we use Multiple Classification Analysis. The analysis, based on analysis of

TABLE 9

PERCENTAGE FAVORING CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE BY CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT

	Wage Workers		Unemployed	
	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication	Middle Class Identi-fication	Working Class Identi-fication
See no class conflict	34% (116)	27% (56)	26% (31)	57% (21)
See class conflict	53% (58)	38% (58)	47% (19)	33% (18)

variance, tells us the impact of each of these characteristics on the political and economic attitudes controlling for the impact of the other two. The results of such an analysis are in Table 10. Each column represents a multiple classification analyis for one of the political issues. For each issue we show the independent effect of having been unemployed rather than employed, having had a working-class identification rather than a middle-class one, and having seen the classes as being in conflict. The numbers represent the difference in the percentage taking the "left" position on the issue that is associated with the independent variable when the other two variables are controlled. For instance, the upper left figure indicates that the unemployed are 13 percent more likely to favor the government provision of relief than are the employed wage workers (when the two class-consciousness variables are controlled.

Consider the column of figures for the least radical of the policy alternatives: whether the government should provide relief. In this case class consciousness played a limited role: class self-identification had a small effect and perception of conflict no effect at all. Objective unemployment status had the greatest impact on attitudes towards relief. By 1939 the provision of relief by the government appears to have become an issue on which there was little ideological polarization. The individual's objective need for such relief had the greatest effect on the likelihood of favoring such a policy. The unemployed preferred such relief more than the employed.

TABLE 10

MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

	Issues				
	Government Provision of Relief	Government Limits Income	End Capitalism	Government Assigns Jobs	Change the Constitution
Effects of:					
Being unemployed rather than employed	13	12	14	16	3
Having a working rather than a middle class identification	5	5	5	10	-5
Seeing class conflict	0	12	11	9	12

The pattern for "government provision of relief" provides a contrast with the pattern with respect to the three more radical economic changes: preferences for a limitation on income, for the provision of relief even at the cost of ending capitalism, and for the provision of relief even at the cost of government assignment of jobs. As shown in the middle three columns of Table 10, class consciousness had a larger impact on attitudes towards all three of these issues. In each case, perception of class conflict (controlling for other variables) increased substantially the preference for the more radical position. Working class identification added an independent effect as well, especially in relation to the "government assign jobs" position. The effect of being unemployed is also quite striking for these attitudes. Unemployment status *per se* (controlling for class consciousness) made one substantially more favorable to the radical position.

Finally, the right hand column of Table 10 reports data on the

issue of changing the Constitution. This issue resembles the radical economic issues in that class consciousness played a major role. However, only the "perception of conflict" component of class consciousness was significant. Attitudes towards changing the Constitution differ from attitudes on the other issues in that the objective status of being unemployed had little independent effect. Considering the independent effect of unemployment status across issues, we see that on the three economic issues, unemployment *per se* pushed the group 12 to 16 percentage points further left, as opposed to only 3 percent on the constitutional change issue.

The data on Table 10 provide a useful summary of the way in which objective employment status and class consciousness interact to affect political views. In terms of attitudes towards government provision of relief, objective employment status had an impact on attitudes; not surprisingly, the unemployed, who obviously had a special need for such relief, were likely to favor it more than employed wage workers. Class consciousness, on the other hand, had little effect on attitudes towards relief. When it came to more radical changes in the economic system—limiting income, ending capitalism, assigning jobs—both unemployment and full class consciousness increased the likelihood of preference for radical economic change. Finally, in terms of attitudes towards changing the Constitution, objective employment status played little independent role. Class consciousness—particularly perception of conflict—was the dominant force. In short, we have three kinds of issues: the provision of relief where objective need influenced attitudes; radical economic change where objective need and class consciousness both influenced attitudes; and change in the Constitution where the dominant effect was from sense of class consciousness.

Of the two class-consciousness measures, the perception of conflict between the classes was the more potent. When it came to limiting income, ending capitalism, or changing the Constitution, the perception of class conflict had an important effect on the percentage of the group that was radical while class identification was less important. Only on the issue of assignment of jobs did the components of class consciousness play an equal role. The point is worth noting. Subjective class consciousness has been found in many studies to play an important role in political attitudes and in voting decisions. The measure usually used is class self-identification. Our analysis suggests that self-identification as "working class"

does not necessarily imply the kind of class consciousness that is likely to result in more radical political attitudes or behavior. The perception that the interests of workers and management are in conflict was a more potent indicator of politically relevant class consciousness. As our data show, when both components of class consciousness were present, radical political views were more frequent.

These data, in sum, tell us something important about radicalism among American workers and the role of class consciousness in American politics. As we have seen, in terms of attitudes towards change in the economy and political structure, a full sense of class consciousness did lead to radicalization. However, the secret of why such radicalization had so little impact was contained in Table 4: the group of fully class conscious potential radicals was very small. Thus, our data are consistent with the view in the literature that widespread class consciousness in the thirties would have played a major role in increasing the numbers favoring radical change. Indeed, class consciousness, among those few who manifiested it, had such an effect. But few in the U.S. had that class consciousness.[19]

Class Consciousness and the American Dream

Our analysis simply pushes the question one step further back: why do we find so little full class conciousness in the U.S. despite the fact that our data were collected toward the end of a massive depression? Most of the historical explanations for the lack of radical class consciousness among American workers cannot be tested with our data. The Roper data, however, allow us to consider one explanation of the special character of the American working class: their supposed commitment to the "American Dream"—an individualistic belief in the opportunity to advance through hard

[19] From this perspective, our inability to use the data on blacks from the 1930's (see footnote 10) is particularly unfortunate. Though there is little evidence for the development of class consciousness among whites since the 1930's, there is evidence that the development of race consciousness among blacks has had an impact on their political attitudes and behavior. (See Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), Chaps. 10 and 14; and Joel D. Aberbach and Jack L. Walker, "The Meanings of Black Power: A Comparison of White and Black Interpretations of a Political Slogan," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64 (June, 1970), 367-389. Our guess is that we would have found little race consciousness among blacks in the 1930's data.

work and risk-taking. The Roper study asked several questions relevant to the "American Dream." Two were on employment preferences: would the respondent prefer to work for others or to go into some kind of business for himself; would he prefer a job that offered security or one that provided opportunities for advancement. In addition, there were questions on the extent to which the respondent believed that America offered him personally opportunities for advancement. Table 11 shows the answers to the questions on employment preferences given by the four employment groupings. The percentages represent those taking the "individualistic" position —preferring to go into business for oneself and preferring advancement over security. The data show a difference across the employed group and between the employed and the unemployed on these issues. In particular, the unemployed were less likely to prefer to go into business for themselves and less likely to prefer the risky job over the secure one. But what may be more interesting is the fact that the dominant position in all groups was the individualistic one. Seventy percent of the wage workers would have preferred to be self-employed than to work for others. And two out of three of this group preferred a job with advancement chances over one with security. The unemployed, though not as individualistic in their answers, still leaned in that direction: 59 percent preferred to go into business for themselves, and 52 percent preferred advancement opportunities over security.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 12, there is a relationship—although not a strong one—between preference for individualistic employment and the absence of class consciousness. Table 12 presents the proportions who manifest full class consciousness in various

TABLE 11

"INDIVIDUALISM" BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	Percent Preferring to Work for Self Rather than Others		Percent Preferring Chance to Advance Over Security	
Upper White Collar	79%	(493)	89%	(507)
Lower White Collar	69%	(765)	76%	(776)
Wage Workers	70%	(464)	64%	(497)
Unemployed	59%	(172)	52%	(182)

See Table 2 for number of cases.

groups: those who prefer self-employment in comparison with those who prefer to work for others; those who prefer a job with advancement opportunities in comparison with those who prefer a secure job. In each case, those who take the more individualistic position on employment are less likely to be fully class conscious. This is clearly the case among the employed. Among the unemployed the difference is slight though in the same direction. However, the more important point may be that even among those who reject individualistic alternatives for themselves, the level of class consciousness is low.

TABLE 12

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS BY COMMITMENT TO INDIVIDUALISM AND EMPLOYMENT

Percent Who Are Fully Class Conscious				
	Workers		Unemployed	
A. Work Preference				
Go into some kind of business for self	18%	(197)	15%	(47)
Work for someone else	25%	(80)	18%	(34)
B. Prefer Job Offering				
Opportunities to advance	16%	(205)	19%	(52)
Job security	30%	(91)	22%	(40)

We can look at the data from a somewhat different perspective and ask whether our class conscious respondents prefer individualistic solutions for themselves. Consider the fully class conscious group—the small band of potential radicals that stood out from the rest of the work force in their preference for political and economic change. We find that a majority answered the employment question in an individualistic way. Among the fully class conscious 62 percent preferred the capitalistic alternative of going into business for themselves and 54 percent preferred advancement opportunities over a secure job.

Not only do the working class and unemployed seem to have shared the "American dream" but also, as shown in Table 13, they seem to have been fairly optimistic about the future. The December Roper study asked about personal opportunities to succeed in three different ways: respondents were asked whether they had had a better opportunity to advance than their parents; whether they

themselves would have chances for advancement in the future; and whether their children would have better opportunities than they had had. As can be seen in Table 13, the unemployed differed from the other groups in their perception of the opportunities offered to them in the past and in their outlook for the near future. They were much more pessimistic. They differed less substantially when it came to their hopes for the next generation; indeed, they were as optimistic as the upper-white-collar groups in their expectations for their children.[20]

TABLE 13

PERCEPTION OF OPPORTUNITIES BY EMPLOYMENT

	Percent saying that they have had a better opportunity than parent		Percent saying future holds opportunity for advancement		Percent saying children will have a better opportunity than they	
Upper White Collar	67%	(504)	73%	(489)	62%	(457)
Lower White Collar	69%	(772)	71%	(752)	71%	(707)
Wage Workers	60%	(486)	64%	(459)	76%	(433)
Unemployed	45%	(176)	45%	(168)	64%	(147)

As Table 14 indicates, there is some relationship between belief in opportunities for advancement and the absence of class consciousness. Those who believed that their own chances for advancement exceeded those of their parents and those who believed that they would have opportunities to advance in the future were less likely to manifest full class consciousness. The pattern holds for both the employed and the unemployed. On the other hand, we find no difference in the proportions of the fully class conscious when we compare those who believed their children would have better opportunities than they did with those who did not expect the next generation to have better opportunities. Again, the more interesting point may be the high proportion of the fully class conscious who had optimistic views about chances for advancement, especially in relation to the next generation. Slightly less than half of the

[20] This is perhaps not surprising. The offspring of the upper-white-collar workers had nowhere to go but down; the children of the unemployed had nowhere to go but up.

fully class conscious (46 percent) saw their opportunities as better than their parents and slightly less than half (44 percent) reported a belief that the future held chances of advancement for themselves. When asked, however, about the more distant future—the chances of advancement for their children—74 percent gave optimistic answers.[21] In sum, our most radical group seems to have shared in the individualistic beliefs and optimistic hopes of the American dream.

TABLE 14

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS BY PERCEPTION OF OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

Percent Who Are Fully Class Conscious				
	Workers		Unemployed	
A. Opportunities to succeed				
Are better than father's	17%	(169)	14%	(42)
Are same or worse than father's	23%	(126)	28%	(47)
B. Years ahead hold				
Good chance for advancement	14%	(193)	12%	(40)
Probability of no improvement	31%	(88)	32%	(44)
C. Children's opportunities to succeed				
Will be better than respondent's	20%	(191)	16%	(49)
Will be same or worse than respondent's	18%	(67)	18%	(22)

CONCLUSION

One of the major mysteries of the recession has been the lack of visible anger with which it has been endured by the American people. There has been no violent protest and even orderly, peaceful demonstrations have been few and not very large . . .

Why such calm? There is no readily available answer. (*New York Times*, Aug. 3, 1975)

The 1939 Roper studies have permitted us to take a retrospective look at the attitudes of the working class at the end of the Great

[21] One could argue of course that they expected things to be better for their children not because of a belief in the opportunities for advancement that the American system promises but because of a belief that the radical changes they preferred would be instituted by the next generation. We cannot tell from the data, but the commitment of the class conscious workers and unemployed to the American dream of individual employ and advancement made it likely that they saw their children as working their way up through the system, rather than as the beneficiaries of a radically changed system.

Depression. The data have many shortcomings, but they are superior to any available alternatives in their ability to shed light on a subject about which there has been a great deal of speculation but little hard data. Our analysis is gratifyingly consistent with several themes in the literature on the American working class:

(1) The data support the proposition that there would have been more political radicalism among American workers if they had been more class conscious. Where we find class consciousness, we find a tendency towards more radical political attitudes. But few workers or unemployed were fully class conscious.

(2) The failure to develop such class consciousness seems, in turn, to have been related to a more basic theme in American culture —the acceptance of the American dream of rugged individualism and optimism about the future. The workers and the unemployed appear to have shared in this dream.

Do our findings about the unemployed during the thirties have any relevance today? As we write in mid-1975, unemployment is about 9 percent of the civilian work force. Even though the economy seems to be rousing itself from its current torpor, many economists predict the levels of unemployment will remain high for some time to come. Like their counterparts during the 1930's, the unemployed of today seem little disposed to political mobilization. They are—as they were four decades ago—remarkably quiescent.

Some have argued that the lack of complaint from the unemployed is a function of their objective situation—protected, as they were not at the onset of the Depression, from the full impact of unemployment by unemployment insurance and, in some cases, private supplementary benefit plans. But, as Eileen Shanahan points out, the financial cushion provided to the "affluent worker" by such plans and by the income earned by second wage earners is probably exaggerated. For example, she notes that 59 percent of the wives of unemployed married men were either unemployed themselves or not in the labor force. Furthermore, some 2,386,000—or 28 percent —of the 8,567,000 unemployed in June 1975 were not drawing unemployment benefits. Also, much has been made of the Supplementary Unemployment Benefits available to workers in certain major industries; yet the number of unemployed receiving SUB's is less than half a million.[22] Thus, it seems likely that in the seventies,

[22] Eileen Shanahan, "The Mystery of the Great Calm of the Unemployed," New York Times, August 3, 1973, Sec. 4, 4.

as in the thirties, widespread unemployment is accompanied by widespread economic hardship.

Why, then, is there no rebellion? One would have assumed that we could have attempted to answer this question directly by drawing upon the extensive archives of survey data which have been collected in recent years. Ironically, we could not pursue this obvious strategy since we were unable to locate data with sufficient cases of unemployed respondents and appropriate questions about class consciousness and political attitudes to which we can pose our questions.

In the absence of such data we can only extrapolate from our findings about the 1930's and from the findings of other investigators who have probed the nature of working class relief systems in an age of affluence. In recent years a number of social analysts have attempted to understand the nature and extent of the commitment by the working class to the American dream of success. Although their conclusions indicate that members of the working class are at best ambivalent about the promise of the American dream, there is nothing in their data to indicate that members of the contemporary working class have either abandoned their individualitic assessments of their own situations or acquired a sense of class consciousness.[23] These findings, taken in tandem with those presented here, would indicate that absence of class consciousness is indeed a crucial catalyst in the production of contemporary working class moderation. Such an ambitious conclusion, however, awaits the proper data for substantiation.[24]

[23] See, for example, Ely Chinoy, *Automobile Workers and the American Dream* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Robert Lane, *Political Ideology* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., The Free Press, 1962); Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1972); Joan Huber and William H. Form, *Income and Ideology* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., The Free Press, 1973); Kay Schlozman, "Injured Dignity and the American Dream," *Politics and Society*, VI, (Dec. 1975), 241-263.

[24] We have conducted a survey of the contemporary workforce, stratified to produce a substantial proportion of unemployed which we are currently analyzing from this perspective and on which we hope to report in subsequent publications.