

**What if people's ability to produce matters more than how much they can consume?**

“Would the average person rather talk on the iPad or make the iPad?”

This is a quote from conservative writer Oren Cass on BookTV (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?454499-2/the-future-worker>). His new book, *The Once and Future Worker* is a groundbreaking re-evaluation of America.

Cass begins his argument by pointing out the American worker is in crisis:

- Wages have stagnated
- Reliance on welfare programs surges
- Life expectancy is falling as substance abuse and obesity rates climb

He says these issues are the direct consequence of a decades-long economic consensus that prioritized increasing consumption--regardless of the costs to American workers, their families, and their communities.

Cass begins by questioning a foundational assumption of modern macro-economics: *prosperity is best measured by the ability to consume*. He concludes that the emphasis on consumption, which is the heart of modern capitalism, is turning out to be misdirected. So, Cass suggests we consider these ideas and actions:

- People want to work: workers in our economy are whole human persons who want to belong and participate, who need to be needed, who strive to be moved by their obligations and not just their appetites, who play key roles in families and communities, and who care about their neighbors and their cities and their states and their country
- Deemphasize the American citizen as a consumer
- Deemphasize growth as the purpose of our economy
- Respect unions and the right of workers to organize, bargain collectively
- See work as important not just as a means to improve our purchasing power but also as a way to give us a role and a place and a purpose and a sense of responsibility and worth
- Renew investment in the employment of Americans—not unfettered access to the cheapest labor in the world,
- Ensure that every student acquires the skills to succeed in the modern economy—not smoothing the path through college for the best students
- Add money to low-wage paychecks—not cutting taxes, expanding the safety net
- Reinforce the vital role of workers in supporting strong families and communities. This can provide the foundation for a thriving, self-sufficient society that offers opportunity to all.

The labor market does more for us than provide us with money to spend. And this points to Cass's core thesis: “a labor market in which workers can support strong families and communities is the central determinant of long-term prosperity and should be the central focus of public policy.”

"[Cass's] core principle--a culture of respect for work of all kinds--can help close the gap dividing the two Americas...." - William A. Galston, The Brookings Institution

The good news is that we can still turn things around--if the nation's proverbial elites are willing to put the American worker's interests first.

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This month's newsletter is a compilation of ideas and quotes from Yuval Levin's, “The Worker and the Person” <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/the-worker-and-the-person/> and from the Good Reads website at <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40068724-the-once-and-future-worker>