



The Pursuit of the American Dream
San Diego Miramar College
SOCO 101 – Principles of Sociology
March 6, 2026

Subject: The Pursuit of the American Dream: Can you Survive on Minimum Wage?

The American Dream is not equally attainable to everyone, not only because of the existence of intersectionality, as explained by Kimberlé Crenshaw, but also because of the derogatory amount of the minimum wage offered in modern United States labor industry. In order to be able to afford a comfortable shelter you need to have a high income, higher than the average city of the United States, regardless of what city you choose. In order to afford rent you need to earn double of the minimum wage, and this is only for rent, not taking into account all the amenities involved in rent, nor additional financial responsibilities such as gas, a healthy diet, debts, medicine, clothing, bottled water, hygiene products, among other basic necessities that leave you without the ability to have a good weekend with your friends, your family, your significant other(s), or your colleges. Not to mention any additional financial responsibilities such as the imposing debt that most of us find ourselves oppressed by. The minimum wage is no longer sustainable for a healthy lifestyle, just as Marx explains: “*the worker receives a part of the available means of subsistence from the capitalist*”, in this case, your employer; “*For what purpose do these means of subsistence serve him? For immediate consumption*”. The minimum wage you arduously earned served only the miserable 50% of the cost of the rent, that is without taking taxes off nor without including other additional costs. So, what is there left to do? Work more hours, utilizing more of your leisure time to work instead of using it for education, interpersonal development, art, or skill building; “*as I consume the means of subsistence, they are irretrievably lost to me unless I use the time during which I am kept alive by them in order to produce new means of subsistence, in order during consumption to create by my labor new values in place of the values which perish in being consumed*”. That means that in order to live, you need to work, you live to work, and if you are similar to the majority of the working class, this type of work is quite monotonous, not creative nor interesting, not requiring any artistic input nor the building of a set of skills, and if you want to live comfortably, you need to do this activity you hate and contributes nothing than mere wages to survive 10-12 hours a day, every day, and sometimes extra days for months to years continuously.

My research on the inability for the minimum wage worker to sustain a comfortable lifestyle shows how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. As explained by Marx, when the worker sells his labor power to the capitalist, the capitalist obtains his investment plus the surplus value, that is, the profit derived from the labor power multiplied by two, three, or sometimes



even more, while the worker keeps only the value of his labor power (in this case the minimum wage) that miserably affords him a meal, a shelter, and unless he spends more of his time working additional hours, he starves and becomes homeless. Productive activity is more valuable than labor power, which is obvious because if the labor costs more than the profit then the capitalist is not earning any additional capital. The capitalist keeps the difference between the cost of the labor and the value of the productive activity, i.e. the profit. The laborer gets paid for his labor power only to survive, that survival is immediately consumed after the payment of the minimum wage. This while the capitalist keeps most of the profit. As a minimum wage worker, you are compelled to work additional hours if you want to get to save money for a better life, for an investment, a trip, a college education, art, or any other financial goals you might have, otherwise you only work to live. What's worse, the average cost of a single room condo in Santa Barbara, CA is of \$1.8 million dollars, that means that if you want to buy a property in Santa Barbara with minimum wage, you need to work 51 years, but keep in mind that within those years, you need to segregate your earnings for rent, taxes, car expenses, food, amenities, and hygiene, that is the basic necessities only, you are forbidden from having a hobby, saving for a trip, funding your education, or buying an additional object of your interest. That means that you work for 75 years to buy a condo in Santa Barbara, CA; you have to work arduously for your entire life to buy a condo that you will enjoy only 1-2 years of your life.

Now, why is this? Why is it that minimum wage offers so little leverage to advance in life? Among other political, social, psychological, financial, and economic reasons, one stands out: the refinement of the instruments of work, which increases the division of labor, removes the necessity of labor trades by replacing them by machinery with lower cost than the cost of labor power to produce the same result, and for those that keep the minimum wage job, the worker suddenly becomes worthless, monotonous, and easily replaceable. *“Further, as the division of labor increases, labor is simplified. The special skill of the worker becomes worthless. He becomes transformed into a simple, monotonous productive force that does not have to use intense bodily or intellectual faculties”*, explains Marx, *“His Labor becomes a labor that anyone can perform”*, *“the more simple and easily learned the labor is, the lower the cost of production needed to master it, the lower do wages sink”*. The skill of a minimum wage worker is easily acquired nowadays, whether it is in a fast-food joint, a car wash, a convenience store, or as an administrative assistant, the skill and goal of minimum wage worker is to supervise the correct procedures needed for the service to be offered to the public, nothing more than that. No creative, artistic, or intellectual input from the worker is implemented into the service or product being offered, just the superficial supervision of such service and product, an activity that is easy to learn, teach, and do, thereby the cost of labor for such activity is miserable, monotonous, easy replaceable, and badly paid.



Two questions surrounding this topic:

1. How can we organize and demand an increase in minimum wage nationally?
2. If such increase is implemented, how can we forbid an increase of prices in basic necessities of life?

Research of Minium wage profession:

Part 1:

City of choice: Santa Barbara

Part 2:

Minimum wage in city of choice: \$17.00

Minimum wage income: \$35,360.00 (based on 40 hours a week 52 weeks a year). That is around \$2,720.00 dollars a month, not including taxes.

Part 3:

Category	Typical Monthly Cost
Rent (1-bedroom apartment)	\$2,300 – \$2,700
Utilities (electricity, water, trash, gas)	\$150 – \$220
Groceries	\$300 – \$500
Transportation	\$100 – \$600
Health insurance	\$350 – \$600
Phone + Internet	\$120 – \$140
Miscellaneous expenses	\$300 – \$600
Total cost of living:	~\$4,200.00

Part 4:

Monthly Rent x 2.5 = \$5,750.00

A minimum wage worker does not even cover a miserable 50% of the monthly income needed to rent an apartment, let alone afford it if you take into account all the other financial responsibilities and any debts he or she might have. The minimum wage earner earns only 47% of the necessary monthly income to rent a basic apartment. The alternatives, just as Marx



explains in his “Wage, Labor and Capital”, is, after immediately consuming your means of subsistence earned in your arduous work, is to get more work, and thereby having less leisure, dedicating yourself to working the majority of your day, living to work. This contributes to housing insecurity by searching for lower income shelters, such as single rooms with a shared apartment, homeless shelters, living in one’s car, or even worse, becoming homeless.

Part 5:

Future career: Sociology professor

Average National Salary: \$82,100.00 on average

Santa Barbara, CA Salary of profession: ~\$91,000.00 on average

The minimum wage earns only the 38% of the sociology professor in the city of choice.

Part 6:

What are the transportation costs without a vehicle in Santa Barbara CA? If we take into account that we commute two times a day, from home to work and from work to home, and we work five times a week, and the fare of the bus (if we only need to take one, not multiple) is \$2.50 in Santa Barbara, CA, then that is \$25 dollars a week, or \$100 dollars a month, which seems similar or even better than the average \$25-40 dollars a week on gas, depending on the vehicle of course.