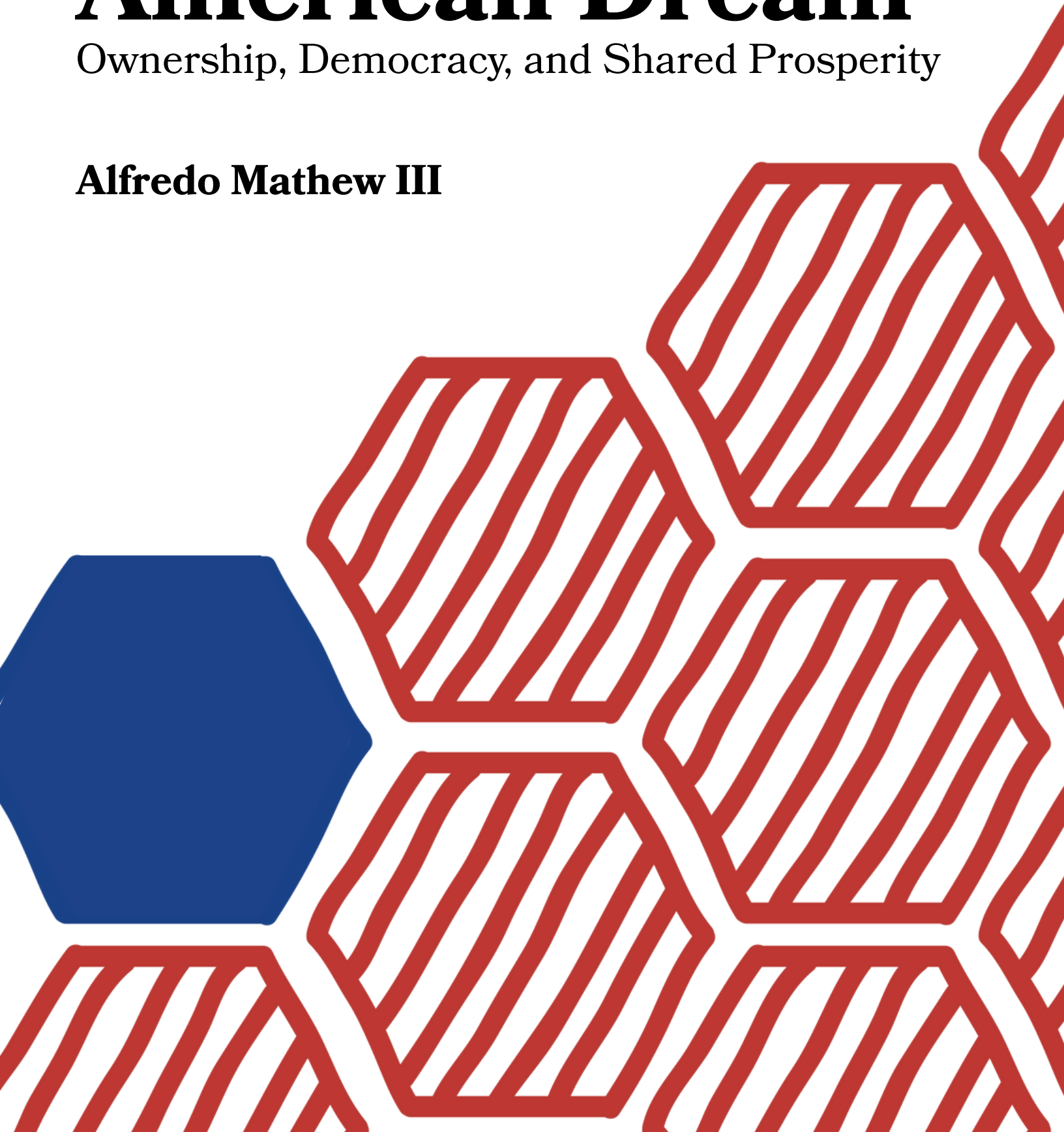


# Redefining the American Dream

Ownership, Democracy, and Shared Prosperity

**Alfredo Mathew III**





## INTRODUCTION


**At the core of the American Dream lies democracy and the belief in self-determination. These values are enshrined in America's founding documents and have united generations in a shared vision of opportunity.** The nation's first major crisis, the Civil War, tested these ideals by confronting slavery and states' rights, directly engaging questions of emancipation and economic sovereignty. In the decades following, the struggle between capital and labor reshaped the American political-economic landscape, culminating in a post-WWII consumer economy. This era defined prosperity simply: work hard, play by the rules, go to college, and economic mobility would follow. The path was clear—a stable job led to homeownership, financial security, and greater opportunities for future generations.

Today, however, that path is increasingly out of reach for most working Americans. While hard work and determination remain crucial, the link between wages and wealth creation has weakened significantly. Salaries often fail to keep pace with rising costs, particularly housing, healthcare, and higher education. As a result, many Americans find themselves in a perpetual cycle—paying someone else's mortgage instead of building equity, living paycheck to paycheck instead of accumulating assets.

Prosperity is now largely determined by asset ownership rather than wages alone. Without access to appreciating assets—such as real estate, equity stakes in businesses, or other capital holdings—the majority of families struggle to maintain financial stability, let alone build generational wealth. The gap between asset owners and wage earners continues to widen, undermining the foundational promise of the American Dream and threatening the democratic and economic principles upon which the United States was built.

This divergence has deep structural roots—but today it is being rapidly and dangerously accelerated. Artificial intelligence is not merely a disruptive technology; it is an amplifying force, increasing the productivity of capital while further decoupling value creation from labor. As AI systems increasingly replace both manual and cognitive tasks, wealth accrues to those who own the platforms, infrastructure, and data—not the workers or communities that make those systems possible. In doing so, AI does not create a new economic paradigm—it intensifies the imbalance already embedded in our system.

Today's growing economic divide isn't merely about money; it lies at the root of America's deepening political dysfunction. The erosion of economic mobility and broad-based prosperity has driven distrust in institutions, heightened polarization, and weakened democratic participation. Many argue that America's crisis is primarily cultural, but this paper contends it is fundamentally structural. The institutions we've relied on since the Great Depression to redistribute opportunity are now financially unsustainable, further intensifying partisan divisions and rendering political solutions increasingly elusive.



**Without economic freedom, we have no democracy. So how do we ensure the American Dream stays alive for the next generation—where ownership, democracy, and shared prosperity are within reach for all—not just a privileged few?**

The answer begins with a hard truth: America is not living up to its potential. The ideals established at our founding—self-determination, equality, and widespread prosperity—remain incomplete. By clinging to outdated economic structures designed for another era, we limit our capacity to evolve and grow. We face the uncomfortable reality that we cannot secure genuine democratic participation without universal economic agency. Yet this challenge also presents a profound opportunity: by reshaping our economic foundations, we can unleash America’s potential. Our best days lie ahead, not behind—but only if we are willing to build them together.

Democracy cannot function effectively when the majority is excluded from meaningful and realistic participation in wealth creation, asset ownership, and economic agency. While the right to vote has become universal in law, it remains limited in impact without a corresponding stake in society’s economic structures. Historically, citizenship was closely linked to property ownership—not merely as a reflection of status, but as recognition of a fundamental principle: ownership confers agency, and agency is indispensable for genuine political and economic independence.

Today’s economy has severed that link. As the gap between wage earners and asset holders grows, so too does the distance between civic voice and actual power. If democracy is to survive—not just procedurally, but substantively—we must democratize the economy itself. Shared prosperity is not just a social good. It is a civic necessity. Only by expanding ownership and embedding equity into the fabric of our institutions can we restore the promise of democracy and rebuild a society where freedom is both lived and shared.

To redefine the American Dream and strengthen democracy, we must rebuild our economic systems with a focus on shared prosperity. Rather than redistributing wealth after its creation, we must predistribute asset ownership—ensuring more people own productive assets, have a genuine stake in the economy, and commit more deeply to a shared national project of economic democracy. In an age where economic power is platformed, automated, and monopolized, *ownership itself becomes the frontline of democratic renewal.*

There is no perfect economic model that balances labor and capital in every scenario. What matters is our ability to adapt—to align prosperity with democratic governance, creating conditions for widespread opportunity. This paper builds on a tradition of pragmatic idealists—from Alexander Hamilton to Louis Kelso—who recognized that expanding access to ownership strengthens democracy.

That means rethinking how wealth is built—and who gets to build it. To update the American Dream, entrepreneurship must be recognized as a cornerstone of economic democracy. When people create businesses, take risks, and build value together, they’re not just generating revenue—they’re participating. They’re investing in their own agency and contributing to the civic fabric that binds us. Wealth-building and self-governance are not passive affairs. They require structure, coordination, and collective commitment. Entrepreneurship, done right, is not only a path to prosperity—it’s a practice of citizenship.

Entrepreneurship has become the defining career path of the 21st century—critical to job creation and wealth-building. America remains a nation of entrepreneurs: half of all adults will start a business, and a third will launch multiple ventures. Yet starting a business does not automatically translate into asset creation or financial independence. Today, more than 26 million Americans are sole proprietors, most operating in survival mode, without employees, adequate capital, or sustainable infrastructure. These businesses depend entirely on their owner's labor, meaning when the owner stops working, the business stops generating revenue.

A business transforms into a wealth-building asset only when it grows beyond the founder's individual capacity. Small businesses—representing 99.9% of all U.S. firms—rarely have the infrastructure, scale, or capital to effectively compete against larger enterprises that dominate global supply chains and capital markets. This growing economic consolidation threatens more than economic mobility—it undermines democratic participation itself. Amid rising distrust in key institutions, losing faith in entrepreneurship would signal a deeper societal fracture, jeopardizing the foundational promise and attainability of the American Dream.

America doesn't need a brand-new economic model—it needs a better way to connect the assets, tools, and institutions we already have. The Shared Prosperity Model is a structured approach to doing just that: aligning the strengths of capitalism with the values of inclusion by reassembling proven mechanisms—ESOPs, shared services, Donor-Advised Funds, cooperative governance, and capital strategies—into a more coherent, scalable, and equitable system. Rather than relying on top-down solutions, this model activates a "4P" approach—public, private, philanthropic, and people-powered—to build local economic engines that distribute ownership, circulate wealth, and strengthen democracy from the ground up.

Rather than inventing something from scratch, this model repurposes the tried and true. It draws from private equity roll-ups, but redirects the upside to community owners. It adopts the operational efficiency of platform companies, but embeds equity in the design. It builds on 50 years of community development, but challenges us to stop subsidizing access to services and start underwriting ownership. And it embraces the logic of sovereign wealth funds—pooling collective capital, investing for long-term returns, and ensuring that the benefits of growth are broadly shared. The future will not be shaped by zero-sum cultural wars—it will be shaped by structure: who owns, who governs, and who profits from the systems we build next.

**The Shared Prosperity Model offers one such structure: a practical framework for aggregating fragmented small businesses, circulating capital locally, and transitioning workers into owners.** But it is not complete. It is a system in motion—one that will emerge through real-world experimentation, critique, refinement, and commitment.

This white paper is organized in three parts:

- Part I outlines the core economic and democratic challenges we face.
- Part II introduces the Shared Prosperity Model as an approach rooted in universal capitalism and economic democracy.
- Part III calls for early adopters to help test, build, and invest in creating democratic capitalism.

We are not looking for passive endorsements. We are looking for co-builders: investors, entrepreneurs, funders, policymakers, and practitioners ready to put their resources to work—not just for return, but for regeneration.

This is a moment of transition—and we need to meet it with urgency. It's on us to redefine the American Dream for the next generation—and to leave our nation better than we found it.





## PART ONE

# A MOMENT OF RECKONING AND RENEWAL

**There is nothing more American than self-determination. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—fundamental rights embedded in our founding documents—define our national identity.** Each generation has worked to bring these ideals closer to reality, continually shaping our economic and democratic institutions. From the American Revolution to the Civil War and the Great Depression, the United States has repeatedly navigated periods of profound transformation, resetting our nation's foundations to meet new challenges. Today, we face another critical juncture, marked by a strained and evolving relationship between capitalism and democracy—and it is now our turn to reconcile this tension.

For much of its history, America successfully fused free-market capitalism with representative democracy, generating widespread prosperity that aligned private interests with the broader public good. This fusion was intentional. From the nation's founding, Alexander Hamilton recognized the essential role of capital and infrastructure in establishing national sovereignty and economic independence. He championed federal authority and public-private partnerships to build foundational economic structures—the First Bank of the United States, a unified national currency, and domestic manufacturing capacity. Hamilton understood a fundamental economic principle: capital, properly structured and broadly accessible, serves as the engine of sustainable prosperity, providing individuals the tools to thrive while ensuring collective economic resilience.<sup>1</sup>

At its core, capital is not merely money or wealth. It is a transformative mechanism that converts fixed assets—land, real estate, intellectual property, human creativity, and data—into productive resources. Economist Hernando De Soto clarified this insight, explaining how capital's true power lies in its capacity to formalize assets into collateral, enabling leverage, credit, and future income generation.<sup>2</sup> Capitalism, therefore, is most effective when it democratizes this power, allowing broader participation in ownership, risk, and reward.

However, American capitalism carries complex historical baggage. The nation's economic infrastructure was originally built on profound inequalities and systematic exploitation—most notably, the chattel slavery system and the plantation economy, which established patterns of extraction and concentrated ownership. This historical legacy shapes attitudes toward capitalism to this day, leading many Americans to view capital

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<sup>1</sup> Parenti, Christian. *Radical Hamilton: Economic Lessons from a Misunderstood Founder*. Verso Books, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> De Soto, Hernando. *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*. Basic Books, 2000.

skeptically or even antagonistically—associating it with exploitation rather than empowerment. Historically, movements for economic justice often positioned capital itself as the adversary, rather than recognizing it as a tool capable of enabling self-determination if broadly accessible and equitably structured.

## Asset Ownership and Platform Based Consolidation

The real problem lies not with capital itself, but with the historical and structural frameworks that have governed its distribution and use—from the plantation economy of the past to today’s concentrated platform monopolies. Traditional economic structures inherently centralize power and consolidate wealth, excluding broad segments of the population from meaningful ownership and economic self-determination. This systemic exclusion has deepened inequality, weakened public trust, and undermined democratic participation.

**Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) provide a crucial on-ramp to asset-building and ownership opportunities that make shared prosperity achievable.** They represent accessible entry points for widespread economic participation and serve as primary economic engines for broad-based, regenerative wealth creation. Yet creating genuine pathways for SMBs to achieve economic resilience, democratic stability, and shared prosperity demands more than incremental policy adjustments. It requires new economic vehicles built specifically to reconnect capital to communities, distribute ownership broadly, and ensure long-term value creation for the many—not just the few.

Over the past five decades, however, shareholder supremacy and financialization have instead concentrated wealth and power among asset holders.<sup>3</sup> Labor’s share of national income has declined sharply, while most wealth accumulation has shifted to capital gains, dividends, and interest income.<sup>4</sup> SMBs have steadily lost market share as corporate consolidation undermines local ownership and economic resilience.<sup>5</sup> For individuals without access to appreciating assets, stagnant wage growth has failed to keep pace with rising living costs—making it increasingly difficult to maintain purchasing power, let alone build intergenerational wealth.

We argue that preserving democratic legitimacy in America requires structurally updating capitalism—by systematically expanding access to asset ownership and economic participation. Our analysis centers on a crucial insight: modern capitalism is now predominantly defined by asset ownership and platform-based consolidation. Research consistently demonstrates that industries with greater corporate concentration often experience faster growth, driven by technological integration and economies of scale.<sup>6</sup> From industrial trusts of the past century to today’s digital platforms, economic power accrues primarily to those who control infrastructure, aggregate networks, and achieve scale efficiently. The inevitable result? Economic

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<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center, *How the American Middle Class Has Changed in the Past Five Decades*, April 20, 2022 <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/04/20/how-the-american-middle-class-has-changed-in-the-past-five-decades/>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor share of output has declined since 1947*, February 7, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/labor-share-of-output-has-declined-since-1947.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Kobe, Kathryn, and Richard Schwinn. *Small Business GDP, 1998-2014*. U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, December 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Kwon, Spencer Y., Yueran Ma, and Kaspar Zimmermann. *100 Years of Rising Corporate Concentration*. Working Paper No. 2023-20, Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, University of Chicago, Feb. 2023.

power becomes centralized, deepening inequality and further concentrating opportunity among a narrow group of platform owners and asset holders.

## Why Now? From Redistribution to Predistribution

For nearly a century, the New Deal model—built on expanded federal government programs, public subsidies, and a broad social safety net—successfully stabilized American society and broadened economic opportunity. However, this redistributive approach has reached a critical breaking point.<sup>7</sup> The Social Security Trust Fund, for instance, faces insolvency by 2033, potentially triggering a 23% benefit cut for millions of retirees unless decisive action is taken.<sup>8</sup> Not only is it fiscally unsustainable—driven by demographic shifts, escalating costs in healthcare, education, and housing, and a widening gap between appreciating assets and stagnant wages—but it also reflects a deeper compromise. Redistribution, by its very design, assumes most Americans are incapable of sustained economic agency, relegating them to passive beneficiaries rather than active creators of wealth. In doing so, it reinforces a capitalist structure that privileges a small economic elite as primary drivers of growth, relegating the majority to lower-skilled, dependent roles.

Traditional community economic development strategies, established after WWII and scaled up in the 1960s and 1970s, are no longer sufficient. Programs like childcare assistance, education subsidies, affordable housing initiatives, and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) were initially designed as redistributive interventions. While essential, they require ongoing investment, often inadvertently reinforce dependency rather than promoting self-determination, entrepreneurship, or long-term economic mobility.

To address these structural limitations and truly realize the American Dream, America must shift decisively from redistribution—addressing inequality after it emerges—to predistribution, proactively embedding equity, ownership, and economic opportunity from the start. Instead of reacting to economic exclusion, predistribution creates structural conditions for broad-based prosperity through expanded business ownership, entrepreneurship, and universal economic participation. The Shared Prosperity Model embodies this vital shift, purposefully designed to regenerate local economies and elevate all citizens as active economic agents, co-owners, and creators of our collective prosperity.

This dual crisis—fragmented social responses on one side and concentrated economic power on the other—threatens democratic stability. Restoring solvency, rebuilding trust, and enabling genuine economic participation require a fundamental shift toward predistribution: proactively broadening access to ownership, capital, and opportunity. Economist Louis Kelso foresaw precisely this challenge decades ago, warning that if capital ownership were to decisively overtake wage labor as the primary driver of wealth creation, capitalism itself would undermine democracy. Kelso, creator of the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), recognized that redistribution through wages and taxes alone could never sustainably resolve economic disparities. Instead, he championed “universal capitalism,” which structurally embeds ownership, enabling workers to build wealth directly from the productive assets they help create.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Peter G. Peterson Foundation, *The National Debt*, <https://www.pgpf.org/our-national-debt/>.

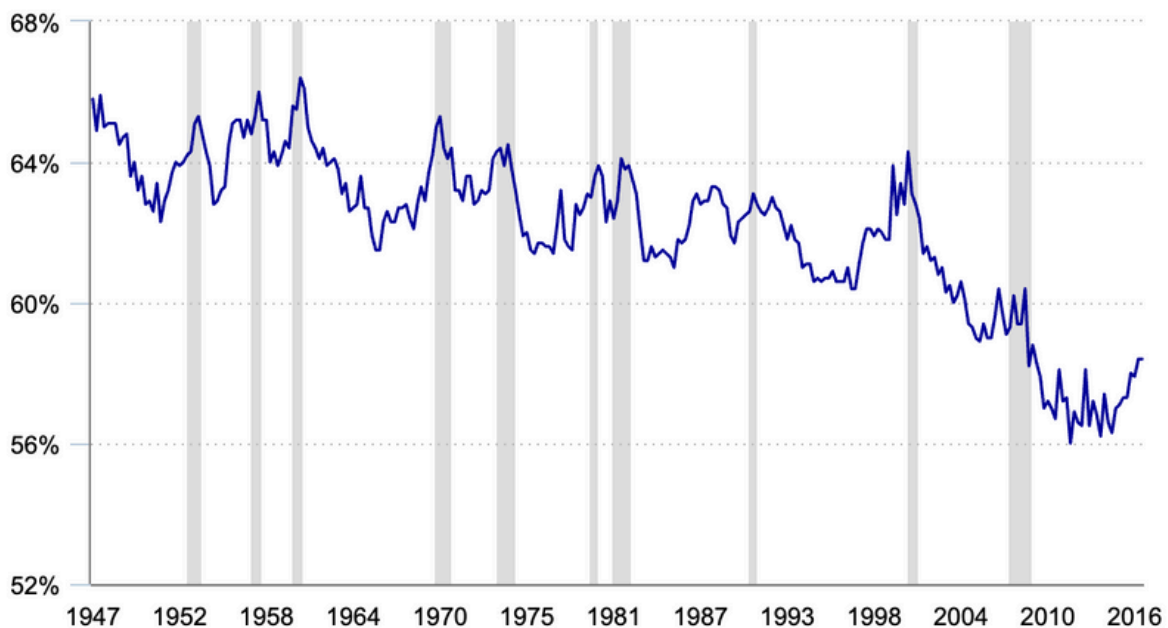
<sup>8</sup> Social Security Administration. (2025). *The 2025 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds*. U.S. Government Publishing Office. Retrieved from <https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/TR/2025/>.

<sup>9</sup> Kelso, Louis O., and Mortimer J. Adler. *The Capitalist Manifesto*. Random House, 1958.

Kelso's insights have never been more relevant or urgent. The share of labor income in the U.S. economy remained relatively stable for most of the postwar period, hovering between 60–65% of GDP. But beginning in the early 2000s—with the rise of the digital economy—and sharply accelerating after the 2008 financial crisis, labor's share began a steep and persistent decline. Wealth accumulation increasingly accrues to owners of technology, digital platforms, and financial assets, leaving wage earners further behind. Meanwhile, the traditional social safety net, designed to redistribute opportunity, faces mounting fiscal pressures and demographic strain, revealing its structural limitations.

This divergence—illustrated clearly in the graph below—is not simply economic; it threatens the democratic ideals at the heart of the American Dream. And now, the accelerating force of artificial intelligence is poised to deepen these dynamics, reshaping our economic landscape even more dramatically.

**Labor's share of nonfarm business sector output, first quarter 1947 through third quarter 2016**



Shaded areas represent recessions as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.  
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

This trend isn't just about numbers. It reflects a deeper imbalance—one that reveals how value is created, who owns it, and who benefits.

## **The Rise of AI: Accelerating the Divergence and Collapse**

Up to this point, we have discussed the dominant trends and structural challenges making the current economic status quo untenable. The rapid and widespread adoption of artificial intelligence since OpenAI's public launch of ChatGPT in April 2022 has not created a new economic paradigm; instead, it has

significantly amplified—and will exponentially expand—the divergence between asset holders and wage earners. Without intentional interventions such as public-private partnerships designed to generate broad-based prosperity and public infrastructure, the accelerating inequality caused by AI technology risks hastening the collapse of our economic and political systems.

**Three core economic realities underscore this current challenge, which AI will further accelerate in the coming decade:**

1. **Asset Growth Outpaces Wages:** The wealth generated through capital appreciation consistently exceeds income earned through labor, increasingly marginalizing workers and driving deep structural inequality.
2. **Automation Enriches Owners:** Technological gains disproportionately benefit asset holders rather than the workers who develop and operate these technologies, exacerbating existing economic disparities and concentrating wealth.
3. **Concentrated Wealth Erodes Demand:** As assets and wealth become increasingly concentrated in fewer hands, consumer demand weakens broadly across the economy, creating systemic instability and undermining long-term economic growth.

**Artificial intelligence represents more than just another technological shift—it actively magnifies existing structural inequalities in our society.** Unlike earlier waves of technological innovation, such as the rise of Silicon Valley and the early digital economy, which were substantially catalyzed by public investment in basic research, universities, and government-funded R&D, today's AI landscape is predominantly driven by private capital from a small group of powerful technology corporations. The University College London (UCL) Policy Commission on Responsible AI highlights how this transition toward industry-led AI development—marked by massive investments in computational infrastructure, proprietary datasets, and concentrated pools of elite AI talent—centralizes economic and decision-making power within a handful of technology giants, notably Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, Meta, NVIDIA, and Tesla.<sup>10</sup>

This private-sector dominance introduces an unprecedented economic dynamic in the digital era, characterized by a winner-take-all ecosystem. The enormous financial barriers to developing advanced large language models (LLMs), which require tens to hundreds of millions of dollars each, ensure that only established corporations can effectively compete. These firms control critical layers of the AI economy, from specialized hardware and cloud computing infrastructure to consumer-facing platforms, creating substantial barriers to entry for smaller innovators or startups. Technologist Jaron Lanier critiques this highly concentrated power structure in his book *Who Owns the Future?*, describing such tech monopolies as "siren servers" that extract value by controlling vast amounts of data, monetizing collective human creativity, and failing to fairly compensate those who generate this value.<sup>11</sup>

The economic implications of this dominance are increasingly clear. The so-called "Magnificent Seven"—Apple, Microsoft, NVIDIA, Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Meta, and Tesla—have grown to exert

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel, Itgebeyogene Patrick. *Who Owns AI? Rapid Review on Responsible AI*. UCL Public Policy, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Lanier, Jaron. *Who Owns the Future?* 2013.

unprecedented influence over the broader U.S. economy. Their combined market strength has driven much of the recent growth in major indexes such as the S&P 500, underscoring how the gains from AI-driven innovation and digital transformation are disproportionately accruing to a small group of powerful corporations and their shareholders. This concentration further entrenches existing disparities by channeling economic rewards primarily to asset holders, rather than broadly benefiting workers or the wider economy.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside this market concentration, artificial intelligence has increasingly been framed as an urgent national security imperative. Influential voices in industry and government, such as former OpenAI researcher Leopold Aschenbrenner, have positioned AI development as a critical geopolitical contest, asserting that securing artificial general intelligence (AGI) before China is essential to maintaining the free world's global dominance. Aschenbrenner's manifesto, *Situational Awareness*, explicitly calls for massive governmental intervention and capital investment—up to \$1 trillion over the coming decade—and suggests constructing AI "research bunkers" staffed by elite talent akin to a modern-day Manhattan Project.<sup>13</sup> This stark language exemplifies how the rhetoric around AI often blurs the line between genuine national security considerations and strategic industry positioning designed to accelerate public and private investment.

Such narratives invoke Cold War–era logic, driving unprecedented resource allocations and policy initiatives that further solidify existing monopolies' control over AI infrastructure. Public intellectual and historian, Yuval Noah Harari, has critiqued this rhetorical framing, warning that depicting AI development as existential geopolitical competition risks prompting unchecked investments and rash strategic decisions made without adequate public debate or democratic accountability.<sup>14</sup> The intense focus on international rivalry diverts attention from critical questions regarding broad-based economic inclusion, equitable distribution of AI's benefits, and democratic governance over emerging technologies.

By framing AI primarily through the lens of national security and geopolitical rivalry, industry advocates and policymakers reinforce an approach that deepens existing structural imbalances rather than addressing them. Under this paradigm, investments are justified not by their social benefit but by the perceived existential threat posed by international competitors. The resulting dynamic exacerbates economic inequality, further consolidating resources, control, and influence within a narrow circle of corporations and governmental actors, while leaving behind the broader populace—especially those whose livelihoods are directly impacted by AI-driven automation.

**The result: asymmetric pain. While AI automates cognition—threatening roles once safeguarded by education—labor earns no return from the technology it helps train.** White-collar professionals are already seeing wage pressure and job displacement. The form of automation has evolved from physical to mental labor, widening both economic and psychological exclusion. Recent analysis by the Burning Glass Institute highlights that entry-level roles requiring college degrees are disappearing rapidly as generative AI absorbs tasks traditionally done by junior employees, significantly raising unemployment and

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<sup>12</sup> Rosen, Phil. *The Stock Market Is Outpacing Its Own History in 2025*. Inc.com, 2 July 2025, [www.inc.com/phil-rosen/stock-market-outlook-tariffs-trump-trade-war-economy-recession-fed-rate-cuts/91208927](http://www.inc.com/phil-rosen/stock-market-outlook-tariffs-trump-trade-war-economy-recession-fed-rate-cuts/91208927).

<sup>13</sup> Aschenbrenner, Leopold. *Situational Awareness*. 2024, <https://situational-awareness.ai/leopold-aschenbrenner/>. Accessed 18 July 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah. *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*. Fern Press, 2024.

underemployment among young graduates.<sup>15</sup> As AI intensifies competition for a shrinking pool of professional jobs, education alone no longer ensures economic security or mobility.

This moment represents far more than a technological transition—it is a structural inflection point. Traditional policy responses such as regulation or redistribution become insufficient when power and economic advantage are structurally embedded within the platforms themselves. The exponential pace of technological advancement risks deepening existing inequalities, channeling economic rewards toward an increasingly narrow group of elite corporations and asset holders. As artificial intelligence infrastructure grows more powerful—spanning cloud computing, algorithmic decision-making, and automated cognitive processes—it threatens not only economic inclusion but also democratic accountability and public governance.

If the current trajectory continues without a fundamental shift in ownership, the emerging economic system will inevitably extract value from the many to enrich the few. Without democratized ownership and meaningful control over AI platforms and the infrastructure upon which they rely, the promise of widespread prosperity and democratic power will remain unattainable for most people. As Huang and Manning argue in "Here's How To Share AI's Future Wealth," predistribution—a strategy of proactively ensuring broad-based access to productive assets before economic disparities solidify—is essential to countering the extreme concentration of AI-generated wealth. Predistribution provides the necessary economic infrastructure for widespread participation and shared ownership, addressing inequality at its root rather than attempting to correct it after the fact.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the core challenge we face today is akin to the privatization of historical public commons, where collective human knowledge—once a shared public infrastructure—is now increasingly commodified by a select group of corporate entities. Large Language Models (LLMs) and other AI technologies, now foundational to the economy, should be regarded not merely as private assets but as public utilities—much like electricity or clean water—managed to serve broad societal interests. The collective legacy of human communities, whose intellectual contributions form the basis of these technologies, must not be monopolized but treated as common assets, benefiting all.<sup>17</sup> A predistributive, cooperative approach to digital infrastructure would democratize ownership and control, giving communities a meaningful stake in shaping their economic and democratic futures.

Without such predistributive interventions, critical societal assets—wealth, political influence, and even human cognition—risk becoming privatized, centralized, and inaccessible to the majority. By proactively distributing ownership and control over AI platforms, data, and infrastructure, we create conditions for shared prosperity, broad economic participation, and genuine democratic accountability. Only through such structural predistribution can we ensure that artificial intelligence becomes a tool for inclusive economic growth and democratic renewal, rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

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<sup>15</sup> Levanon, Gad, et al. *No Country for Young Grads: The Structural Forces That Are Reshaping Entry-Level Employment*. Burning Glass Institute, July 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Huang, Saffron, and Sam Manning. *Here's How To Share AI's Future Wealth*. Noema Magazine, Berggruen Institute, 22 Apr. 2025, [www.noemamag.com/heres-how-to-share-ais-future-wealth](http://www.noemamag.com/heres-how-to-share-ais-future-wealth). Accessed 18 July 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Mathew III, Alfredo. *The Brave New Automated World: Why a Platform Cooperative Should Shape the Next Economy*. LinkedIn, 15 Oct. 2024, [www.linkedin.com/pulse/brave-new-automated-world-why-platform-cooperative-shape-mathew-iii-mexjc](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/brave-new-automated-world-why-platform-cooperative-shape-mathew-iii-mexjc). Accessed 18 July 2025.

The structural imbalances we face today cannot be resolved by returning to old models of redistribution or relying solely on top-down interventions. Instead, we must proactively democratize ownership and fundamentally redesign our economic structures. In Part II, we introduce the Shared Prosperity Model—an actionable approach that draws from proven economic mechanisms to create broad-based asset ownership, economic resilience, and genuine democratic participation.



## About the Author

**Alfredo Mathew III** is a social entrepreneur, educator, and systems thinker with more than 25 years of experience working at the intersection of education, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic development. Driven by the belief that economic agency and ownership are foundational to democratic participation, Alfredo has dedicated his career to democratizing access to economic opportunity and broad-based prosperity.

His journey began as a public school teacher and instructional leader in historically marginalized communities across the Bronx, Oakland, and Pasadena. During this time, Alfredo recognized that education alone was insufficient to break cycles of systemic economic inequality. Inspired by this insight, he pivoted toward entrepreneurship, emerging as a prominent advocate for inclusive business practices, equitable capital access, and regenerative economic models.

Alfredo co-founded **ESO Ventures**, a pioneering social enterprise headquartered in Oakland, California. ESO Ventures incubated more than 500 minority-owned businesses, secured over \$22 million in public and philanthropic funding, and significantly shaped California's policy landscape for inclusive entrepreneurship. Before co-founding ESO Ventures, Alfredo served as Regional Director for the Network For Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) in the Bay Area, creating new pathways for historically excluded entrepreneurs and directly influencing statewide economic development strategies.

In 2024, Alfredo launched **SPCC.1 (Shared Prosperity Community Corporation)**, an innovative platform designed to aggregate small businesses into scalable, community-owned enterprises. The Shared Prosperity Model builds upon proven economic tools—including Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs), private equity roll-ups, and sovereign wealth fund frameworks—to regenerate local economies and democratize asset ownership. Central to this model is a unique "4P" investment approach that integrates Public, Private, Philanthropic, and People-powered capital to pilot new structures in residential electrification, healthcare, and education.

Alfredo's recent efforts have gained significant national recognition. He advanced to Round 3 in the MacArthur Foundation's \$100M global competition and the Trust in American Institutions Challenge \$10M

national competition. His TEDx talk, *Manifesting an Economic Engine for Shared Prosperity*, became one of the top 10 most-viewed TEDx talks globally in May 2025 with over 100k views, further validating and elevating the narrative of shared prosperity.

Alfredo leads a skilled, multidisciplinary team. **Amy Chan**, Chief of Staff, brings over two decades of strategic leadership and deep experience in equity-driven initiatives, community engagement, and operational excellence. **Alfred Solis**, Chief Catalyst, contributes extensive expertise in cooperative governance, systems innovation, and transformative learning strategies gained at the XQ Institute and the Buck Institute for Education. **Claudia Escobar** provided essential early structure, strategic feedback, and narrative positioning as the inaugural Ecosystem Research & Writing Fellow, significantly shaping the early drafts and framework of this paper. Additionally, the author has benefited from refinement and research supported by ChatGPT, underscoring a collective intellectual debt to the countless data sources and contributors behind this groundbreaking technology. This leadership group is supported by an extended team of legal experts, financial strategists, policy analysts, and community organizers who actively operationalize and refine the infrastructure underlying the Shared Prosperity Model.

## What's Coming Next?

Today, we invite investors, entrepreneurs, policymakers, ecosystem builders, and community practitioners to move beyond passive endorsement toward active co-building. The Shared Prosperity Model is not theoretical—it's a dynamic, evolving system created through strategic experimentation, rigorous testing, and real-world refinement. At this critical moment, your insights, resources, and commitment are essential. Join us in piloting and scaling cooperative structures capable of redefining the American Dream, renewing democracy, and creating an equitable economic future for generations to come.