

FORUM

Isaac M. Rubinow and the Migrant-Knowledge Origins of the Standard of Living

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Keywords: American standard of living; consumer capitalism; immigration; labor question; Progressive Era

In the Progressive Era, the standard of living became a social scientific and policy-relevant bureaucratic measurement. As historians have shown, the ostensibly objective statistical metric of consumption challenged a “market-driven conception of wages or income” and rested on normative assumptions about the ideal standard, family roles, and labor relations.¹ It was also embedded in a discourse on who could attain it and how. A migrant-knowledge approach to the development of standard of living measurements explores how American social scientists drew these normative contours in relation to their experience and understanding of what they termed the immigration problem, the influx of Southern and Eastern European immigrants who sought to live and work in the United States between the 1880s and 1920s. Migrant knowledge encompasses knowledge both by and about immigrants, drawing attention to immigrant actors who cross state borders, bring cultural baggage along with material belongings, and often maintain ties to their places of origin. This concept assumes that immigrants do not have particular knowledge by virtue of being immigrants; rather, it asks how immigration-related experiences, discourses, and institutions shape modes of knowing and communicating that knowledge. It takes knowledge as embodied practice, influenced by material conditions as well as its own materiality.² This approach frames the debate on immigration and the standard of living as a mutual engagement of both immigrants and native-born Americans, made tangible through their knowledge practices.

Recent scholarship has focused on Progressive Era social scientists—predominantly male, native-born, white, Protestant—who supported state intervention to address the ills of free-market capitalism. Echoing earlier public and labor movement concerns, these scientists argued that Chinese immigrant laborers harmed American workers by accepting a lower standard of living and should be excluded.³ Intellectuals similarly claimed that different races had different standards of living, and that protecting white American workers’ higher standards required legislation that restricted the immigration of lower-standard “races and peoples.”⁴ Even when progressive economists did not overtly use the standard of living to justify nativist or racist policies, its popularization and social scientific rendering in the Progressive Era established it as a conceptual tool for including

or excluding groups of people.⁵ When the discussion centered on who could fulfill the standard of living and who should be excluded from the body politic, the question of how to change political, economic, or social structures so as to be more inclusive was sidelined.⁶

Some Jewish social scientists, as Luca Fiorito and Tiziana Foresti observe, challenged the nativist, racist, eugenicist, and especially anti-Semitic proclamations of progressive social scientists. Some of these dissenting voices came from immigrants themselves, prominently among them the social insurance “prophet” Isaac M. Rubinow.⁷ Rubinow was born in Grodno in 1875 into a well-to-do secular Jewish family. Amidst growing anti-Jewish discrimination in Russia, the family emigrated to New York City in 1893. There, Rubinow first studied natural sciences, became a physician, and enrolled at Columbia University between 1900 and 1903 for graduate work in economics, sociology, political philosophy, and statistics. Though opinionated and faced with anti-Russian prejudices, he successfully navigated between the Russian-Jewish social life on the Lower East Side and federal bureaucracy; his contributions for Russian (socialist) newspapers and the Russian Ministry of Finance and his membership of the Socialist Party of America (SPA); and, by the 1910s, his increased lobbyism for social insurance legislation in the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL).⁸ Rubinow’s lingering ties to the Russian Empire and his devotion to socialism provided an intellectual ferment that arguably shaped both his own understanding of the standard of living and the statistical and bureaucratic tools used to measure workers’ ability to attain it.⁹

At the turn of the century, American and Russian Jewish socialists debated the relationship between ethnoracial or national identity and class status, questioning which should take precedence and which formed the better basis for organizing.¹⁰ Russian Jewish immigrants actively participated, helping transmit socialist ideas across the Atlantic.¹¹ As anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia increased Jewish migration to the United States, Russian Jewish socialist leaders wondered if they should prioritize ethnic solidarity over class struggle. German Jewish elites likewise worried about the rising numbers of poorer, more radical, often Orthodox Russian Jewish immigrants and sought ways such as “dispersion” to reduce the community’s visibility and, they hoped, curb anti-Semitism.¹² Rubinow rejected this framing, arguing that this problem was not specifically Jewish but stemmed from modern industrial life. The solution, he insisted, was to “fight for [one’s] rights” and for respect.¹³ In this context, he articulated an ideal standard of living that included nonquantifiable aspects: on the Lower East Side, Jewish immigrants could live in economic independence and had “their own press, their own theatres, their own clubs, their own atmosphere, all of which harm[ed] no one and help[ed] to make them happier and more satisfied beings.”¹⁴ Rather than a revered sense of ethnic belonging, this argument rested on self-determination and individual autonomy.¹⁵

The tension between ethnoracially defined groups and other classifications such as class runs through much of Rubinow’s work of the early twentieth century. When participating in the American socialist discourse on race, he expressed the belief that socioeconomic status took precedence over essentialist notions of race. Writing under the pseudonym I. M. Robbins, Rubinow published a sixteen-part article in the *International Socialist Review* (ISR) condemning socialists for their indifference and patronizing pity toward the “ten million negro proletarians.” His “painstaking” study implicated U.S. institutions and society at large, as “the history of the Negro Problem is no more and no less than the History of the United States, of its politic, economic and social institutions.”¹⁶ Accordingly, for him, “the connection between race justice and socialism

[wa]s not self-evident.” Socialism alone could not automatically resolve racial conflict; the abolishment of discrimination and “the achievement by the negro of full civic political and social rights” was essential.¹⁷

Rubinow’s analysis drew on his migrant knowledge, as his comparison between Russian peasants and Black Americans makes clear. In his article “Lessons from Russia,” published in 1912 in *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, Rubinow drew parallels between these two groups, whose characteristics in habits, socioeconomic status, and legal, political, and social standing he thought were similar. However, in the case of the peasantry, neither Russian nor other observers could attribute these similarities to race. This comparison, Rubinow argued, was “the first important lesson which Russia may teach, how utterly unscientific, how utterly childish and silly is an effort to explain the economic, the intellectual or moral status of the American Negro by any inherent racial traits in view of the identical results accomplished by similar economic forces in an entirely different race.”¹⁸ Additionally, he found that racism in Russia was used against Russian Jews, manifesting in discrimination and contempt of this “higher race.” Rubinow concluded that “race inferiority has nothing to do with violent race persecution, but [rather that] an exclusive position under the law, a lack of political rights, foster and develop the race antagonisms ... and that the worst expression of this race antagonism usually may be traced to sordid motives and partisan politics.”¹⁹

In advancing structural arguments based on migrant knowledge, Rubinow adhered to the economic interpretation of history but added a psychological dimension that helped analyze the origins of racial categorization itself.²⁰ This analysis privileged socioeconomic status but did not take it as absolute. The Dillingham Commission, formed by Congress in 1907 to study the recent immigration problem, had undertaken industrial studies whose findings had focused similarly on economics and the standard of living. Their reports organized the data by race, an approach that did not concur with that of Rubinow.²¹ Moreover, Rubinow’s other studies challenged stereotypes underpinning claims that immigrant groups accepted lower standards. In 1907, he pointed out that Russian Jewish workers could very well be organized for union action, refuting a common argument as to why immigrants were employed for lower wages.²² Similarly, he contended that recent immigrants had higher standards in food than did native-born Americans.²³ And his 1905 study of Russian Jews in New York illustrated that this immigrant community was socioeconomically very diverse.²⁴ Overall, Rubinow’s attention to and understanding of the standard of living came out of his immigration experience on the Lower East Side and his particular understanding of race, racism, and socioeconomic status in relation to both American and Russian conditions.

Rubinow’s embrace of the consumer-oriented issue from his self-identified socialist position warrants further explanation. By the turn of the century, revisionist socialists such as Eduard Bernstein favored reform over revolution, arguing that Marxian predictions—such as increasing proletarianization and poverty—lacked empirical basis. As historian Eric Rauchway notes, American socialists struggled to offer a distinctively socialist solution to the new problem of the high cost of living, one that could not be reduced to more efficient consumption and that addressed the organization of production. By adhering to the Marxian *Verelendungstheorie* (immiseration theory), which lost appeal amid increasing availability of consumer goods, socialists failed to attract a popular following and lost discursive ground to advertisers, progressives, and industrial

interests.²⁵ Rubinow was not a revolutionary, but his statistical work diverged from Bernstein's. He was skeptical that rising consumption also lifted the working class, an argument which united revisionist socialists and many progressive economists who began to focus on the distribution of wealth rather than its production.²⁶

This divergence was not only ideological but also methodological. Rubinow's statistical measurement of the standard of living provided the counterargument to both socialists and progressives. Trained in quantitative disciplines, Rubinow used statistics to prove his point or to study a problem. His conception of economic problems encompassed a social dimension that in his opinion many economists were starting to neglect. In 1909, he criticized how "every economic problem in which business does not take any great interest [was relegated] to the domain of sociology," for example that information on the "differential profits" found more attention than "the real live American farmer, white, black, or yellow, American, Scandinavian, Italian, Jewish, or Japanese, and his actual standard of life."²⁷ Just as he advocated for immigrant self-determination in social and cultural life, Rubinow believed workers should define their own standards of living. When the "high cost of living" entered public debate in the early twentieth century, many home economists, reformers, and public commentators promoted thrift, saving, and careful spending to cope with it.²⁸ Rubinow, writing in *The Outlook* in 1906, countered that the "supposed extravagance" of workingwomen spending money on clothing was really the "energetic efforts to raise the material standard of life—efforts often crude or humorous, but in their final synthesis of more importance to the well-being of the workingmen (as factors forcing a demand for higher wages)."²⁹ This assertion echoed the labor movement's "politics of more," but Rubinow was too much of a professional middle-class intellectual to pour his efforts into union work.³⁰

By the 1910s, Rubinow challenged the popular narrative of rising universal prosperity.³¹ In 1914, he published a "real wages" index in the *American Economic Review* (AER). For this, he updated and combined data first collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) into a time series that showed the purchasing power of wages based on retail food prices from 1890 to 1912 relative to 1890. He cautioned that methodological changes in BLS data complicated comparisons.³² Yet he found the trends clear enough to confidently dispute political slogans about workers' rising standard of living. If workers indeed enjoyed modern luxuries ("bathtubs, gas and electricity, phonographs, pianolas, movies, etc."), and if they were indeed "better dressed and better housed than fifty years ago," it was not due to adequate compensation. Rather, "native-born white families" among whom this "increased standard of living [was] found" had been forced to reduce their number of offspring and required women regardless of marital status to supplement the family income. Rubinow intimated that economic forces were responsible: In years of depression, falling prices were offset by increased unemployment; in years of prosperity, better labor conditions were offset by the "use of immigration." Considering "the [enormous] increase in productivity of labor during the last three decades, especially as measured in consumer's values," Rubinow concluded that despite unions' best efforts, workers were receiving "a much smaller share of the value" than previously.³³ While the article echoed the restrictionist economic argument, he never proposed immigration legislation as the solution—indeed, if a suggestion was implied, it lay in profit redistribution.³⁴

Tracing the origins of the AER data leads first to Rubinow's social reform work.³⁵ In 1913, he published *Social Insurance*, a collection of his lectures on the topic with the overarching claim that the United States needed an extensive social insurance program.³⁶ The index of real wages appeared in its protean form in one of its first chapters, laying the

groundwork for the points he later made in the *AER*: he reprinted the BLS data, criticized Republican Party campaign claims on rising wages and inevitable worker prosperity, and concluded that working families did not and likely would not automatically receive wages high enough to obtain an appropriate standard of living or save for the uncertainties of modern industrial life.³⁷ This view diverged from many reformers in the AALL, who likely supported social insurance legislation because they thought industrial wages were sufficient. Rubinow himself acknowledged that wage policy was the logical solution to declining purchasing power.³⁸ Therefore, he supported minimum wage laws. However, he considered them only a partial solution for workers' living conditions.³⁹ Thus, he used his corrective wage statistics to position social insurance as a standard of living issue: by protecting against economic risks, social insurance would help workers maintain—and potentially improve—their standard of living.⁴⁰

The second origin of Rubinow's real wages index lies in his socialism, indicating that the index's creation should be understood as a triangulation between economists, social reformers, and socialists. In *Social Insurance*, Rubinow merely reinterpreted existing BLS data from 1890 to 1907. Before expanding this interpretation in the *AER*, Rubinow presented a first summary of this additional index data in his pamphlet *Was Marx Wrong? The Economic Theories of Karl Marx Tested in Light of Modern Industrial Development*, published in early 1914.⁴¹ Over sixty pages, the pamphlet critiqued *Marxism versus Socialism*, a book by socialist-turned-progressive immigrant Vladimir Simkhovitch that partially replicated Bernstein's *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus* (1899) and sought to prove statistically that Marx's predictions had failed to materialize.⁴² Rubinow readily allowed that if statistical, scientific study gave cause for modifying Marx's vision, such changes should be made. However, he insisted that no such cause presently existed, that in fact correctly interpreted statistics thus far supported Marx's predictions.⁴³

The *Verelendungstheorie* was crucial in this debate. Simkhovitch built on the work of T. C. Adams and Helen Sumner to make the case for rising wages—the work Rubinow criticized in *Social Insurance* for its overly optimistic conclusions.⁴⁴ He accused Simkhovitch of being deliberately misleading by ending his wage analysis in 1900. Going beyond reinterpreting BLS data as he had done in *Social Insurance*, Rubinow combined various new BLS publications to compute the purchasing power, i.e., “real wages per hour [and per week] as expressed in cost of food,” up until 1912.⁴⁵ According to Rubinow, the results exhibited a marked decline in purchasing power.⁴⁶ This decline showed that “under the influence of a rising price level, which benefits the property owner primarily, the tendency” refuted the idea that “capitalist industry [produced] any marked automatic improvement in the condition of the wage worker.”⁴⁷ Organized labor could not compete with these tendencies, Rubinow contended. The unions' struggle “for a higher standard” was commendable but its results were ultimately limited; “radically changing our social institutions” was the necessary work that socialists were undertaking.⁴⁸ For Rubinow, social insurance was part of this work.⁴⁹

Tracing Rubinow's work on refining an index of purchasing power shows that this work served a dual purpose: reaffirming the need for a socialist critique of capitalism and advocating for social insurance, which he saw as a socialist means of redistributing profits to workers.⁵⁰ Examining this statistical practice through the lens of migrant knowledge reveals two new perspectives. First, Rubinow's nondogmatic commitment to a race-conscious yet structurally focused socialism made it possible if not imperative for him to promote socioeconomic reform. Rubinow's index-making reflected this commitment. Social surveys at the time often used various national and racial categories when studying low-income groups.⁵¹ While surveys largely described the objects of their study, the real

wages index was further abstracted from physical phenomena, making the index number its own reality. Thereby, index numbers offered no possibility of tying low incomes to race or nationality; its abstraction posited that the high cost of living and declining wages were structural issues that stemmed from capitalist profit-seeking. Whereas progressive economists like W. Jett Lauck recognized the same problem but argued in favor of immigration restriction, Rubinow placed blame solely on capitalists and sought to include immigrants in social insurance proposals.⁵² However, the Socialist Party provided weak support for both social insurance legislation and the cost-of-living issue. Rubinow noted the absence of a “serious contribution to the [cost-of-living] subject from the Socialist point of view” and referred to his own article in the *AER* as the only one to do so.⁵³ Faced with limited political alternatives, Rubinow found more effective allies among progressives.⁵⁴

Second, Rubinow’s index-making crossed the discursive and institutional boundaries between socialism and progressivism, illustrating the cross-fertilizations between socialist and progressive movements, particularly around the concept of the standard of living.⁵⁵ Following the movement of knowledge also shows the standard’s selective and sometimes unintended transmission. *Was Marx Wrong?* provided the statistical foundation for Rubinow’s *AER* article. In order to publish the index of real wages in the *AER*, the pamphlet was stripped not only of socialist rhetoric but also of its statistics on corporate consolidation, concentration of property and income, and the disappearing proprietary middle class.⁵⁶ As historian Eli Cook argues, statistics on wealth distribution and profits struggled to compete with metrics of economic growth and living standards—such as wages, prices, and purchasing power—in both public and academic discourse.⁵⁷ Rubinow’s work complicates this dynamic: his purchasing power index in the *AER*, divorced from its redistributive context, found support among economic elites who came to doubt the hitherto accepted BLS conclusions on rising wages. They confirmed Rubinow’s overall findings but not his critique of the profit motive. After World War I, the debate over methodology and the state’s role in determining wages intensified. Economists such as Paul Douglas used Rubinow’s work to advocate pro-labor policies including social insurance. Rubinow’s index stimulated the discussion among academics, laborers, and bureaucrats about time-series data on retail prices and wages, which were first used to arbitrate labor disputes in the shipbuilding industry during World War I and later evolved into the Consumer Price Index.⁵⁸ In this way, Rubinow—the immigrant socialist concerned with workers’ well-being regardless of their race or nationality—helped normalize the American standard of living and contributed to the epistemological tools used to measure and manage it.

Notes

1 Margo Anderson, “Standards, Statutes, and Statistics: Carroll Wright and the American Standard of Living,” *Advancing the Consumer Interest* 9 (Spring 1997): 4–12 (quotation on 50); Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and Its Legacies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 126–127.

2 Andrea Westermann and Onur Erdur, “Migrant Knowledge: Studying the Epistemic Dynamis That Govern the Thinking in and Around Migration, Exile, and Displacement,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Supplement* 15 (Mar. 2020): 5–18; Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, “Knowledge on the Move: New Approaches Toward a History of Migrant Knowledge,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43 (July–Sept. 2017): 313–346; Simone Lässig, “The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (Fall 2016): 29–58, esp. 43. For a practice-oriented approach that harmonizes well with migrant knowledge, see Thomas A. Stapleford, “Historical Epistemology and the History of Economics: Views through the Lens of Practice,” in *Research in the History of Economic Thought*

and *Methodology: Including a Symposium on the Historical Epistemology of Economics*, ed. Luca Fiorito, Scott Scheall, and Carlos E. Suprinyak (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2020), 113–145, esp. 119–120.

3 For the earlier sentiments among public and labor, see Rosanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 36–59; Lawrence Glickman, “Inventing the ‘American Standard of Living’: Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity, 1880–1925,” *Labor History* 34, no. 2–3 (1993): 221–235.

4 Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

5 Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem*, 104–107, 123, 126–127, 131–134.

6 Though the principal investigator’s main conflict, as Benton-Cohen writes, was with capitalists, he argued for immigration restriction and union work to raise workers’ wages, revising this stance only gradually throughout the 1920s. Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem*, 133–135.

7 Luca Fiorito and Tiziana Foresti, “Economists and Eugenics: Progressive Era Racism and Its (Jewish) Discontents,” in *Hayek: A Collaborative Biography. Part X: Eugenics, Cultural Evolution, and the Fatal Conceit*, ed. Robert Leeson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 317–353, esp. 320.

8 J. Lee Kreader, “America’s Prophet for Social Security: A Biography of Isaac Max Rubinow” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1988), 6–38, 110–140.

9 On Rubinow’s ties to the Russian Empire and socialism, see Fiorito and Foresti, “Economists and Eugenics,” 334, 336; Kreader, “America’s Prophet,” 39–40.

10 Lorenzo Costaguta, *Workers of All Colors Unite: Race and the Origins of American Socialism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023). By 1901, the SPA adopted a “class-focused and race-conscious” stance that nonetheless proved politically impotent because it tended to be too colorblind. Costaguta, *Workers of All Colors*, 13–15. For Russian Jewish socialists, see Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 453–499.

11 For example, see Steven Cassidy, “Chernyshevskii Goes West: How Jewish Immigration Helped Bring Russian Radicalism to America,” *Russian History* 21 (Spring 1994): 1–21.

12 Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 463, 473, 477; Jack Glazier, *Dispersing the Ghetto: The Relocation of Jewish Immigrants across America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 15–24, 117–125.

13 Isaac M. Rubinow, “Concentration or Removal—Which?” *Menorah*, Aug. 1903, 70–78 (quotation on 77; original emphasis).

14 Rubinow, “Concentration or Removal,” 72 (quotation). See also Kreader, “America’s Prophet,” 41–46.

15 Rubinow “Concentration or Removal,” 74–75.

16 I. M. Robbins [Rubinow], “The Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem: I. The Negro Slave in Colonial Times,” *International Socialist Review*, Feb. 1908, 480–88 (quotation on 481–482).

17 I. M. Robbins [Rubinow], “The Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem: The Solution: A Prophecy and a Remedy,” *International Socialist Review*, May 1910, 1010–1020 (quotation on 1013).

18 Isaac M. Rubinow, “Lessons from Russia,” *The Crisis*, Aug. 1912, 191–95, 193.

19 Rubinow, “Lessons from Russia,” 194.

20 I. M. Robbins [Rubinow], “The Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem: VII. The White Man’s Point of View,” *International Socialist Review*, Mar. 1909, 690–702, esp. 690.

21 Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem*, 104, 129, 132. See also Axel Schäfer’s contribution in this forum.

22 Isaac M. Rubinow, “Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia,” *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor* 72 (Sept. 1907): 487–583, esp. 530–532.

23 Isaac M. Rubinow, *Social Insurance: With Special Reference to the American Situation* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), 208. See also Anja-Maria Bassimir’s contribution in this forum.

24 Isaac M. Rubinow, “The Economic Condition of the Russian Jew in New York City,” in *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of the Social Conditions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, with a Description of Rural Settlements*, ed. Charles S. Bernheimer (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1905), 101–121, esp. 103.

25 Eric Rauchway, “The High Cost of Living in the Progressives’ Economy,” *Journal of American History* 88 (Dec. 2001): 898–924, esp. 899–900, 912–914, 924.

26 James Livingston, “The Social Analysis of Economic History and Theory: Conjectures on Late Nineteenth-Century American Development,” *American Historical Review* 92 (Feb. 1987): 69–95, esp. 88–89.

27 Isaac M. Rubinow, “Review of Cyclopedic of American Agriculture IV: Farm and Community by Liberty Hyde Bailey,” *Economic Bulletin* 2 (Dec. 1909): 354–359. Rubinow himself provided such studies, for example

"Russia's Wheat Surplus: Conditions Under Which It Is Produced," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Statistics Bulletin 42 (1906), esp. 32, 47–65, 99–103, which discussed the structural barriers to the Russian peasants' productivity and their well-being.

28 Thomas A. Stapleford, *The Cost of Living in America: A Political History of Economic Statistics, 1880–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 61–63.

29 Isaac M. Rubinow, "Workingwomen's Extravagance" (letter to the editor), *The Outlook*, Dec. 1, 1906, 848.

30 On the politics of more, see Currarino, *Labor Question in America*, 36–59.

31 Mark Hendrickson, *American Labor and Economic Citizenship: New Capitalism from World War I to the Great Depression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.

32 On the history of the BLS index and emerging bureaucratic use of cost-of-living indexes in the United States in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, see Stapleford, *Cost of Living*, 47–95.

33 Isaac M. Rubinow, "The Recent Trend of Real Wages," *American Economic Review* 4 (Dec. 1914): 793–817 (quotations on 814–816).

34 In 1917, when Rubinow responded to the overall favorable reception among economists, he urged readers to consider that not even the war-time induced lack of competition by immigrants could compensate for workers' previous losses. See Isaac M. Rubinow, "The Present Trend of Real Wages," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 69 (Jan. 1917): 28–33.

35 Rubinow, "Recent Trend," 798n5.

36 Kreader, "America's Prophet," 166–175.

37 Rubinow, "Recent Trend," 797–798; Rubinow, *Social Insurance*, 36–39, 44.

38 David A. Moss, *Socializing Security: Progressive Era Economists and the Origins of American Social Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 23, 246–247n5.

39 Frank Julian Warne et al., "Public Regulation of Wages: Discussion," *American Economic Review* 5 (Mar. 1915): 278–299, 290.

40 Rubinow, *Social Insurance*, 44–45, 419.

41 The pamphlet's contents originally appeared in the *New York Call* in November 1913. The preface to the pamphlet was written on Christmas 1913 and Rubinow unsuccessfully tried to publish it in journals and magazines in the spring of 1914, before ultimately self-publishing it; see Kreader, "America's Prophet," 140, 146; Isaac M. Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong? The Economic Theories of Karl Marx Tested in Light of Modern Industrial Development* (New York: Co-Operative Press/Karl Marx Institute of America, 1914), 5.

42 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 11–13; Kreader, "America's Prophet," 140–143.

43 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 57–58.

44 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 52–53; Rubinow, *Social Insurance*, 34–35.

45 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 55–56 (quotation), 46–52. The numbers listed in the *AER* in table 9 diverge slightly from those in the pamphlet. See Rubinow, "Recent Trend," 811; Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 56. The retail price of food for 1912 is indexed at 154.2 in both publications, but the wages per hour for 1907 are listed at 129.3 in the *AER* and at 128.8 in the pamphlet. The base seems to be the average of 1890–1899 in both publications. See Rubinow, "Recent Trend," 805; Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 56. Rubinow likely recalculated the figures for the *AER*.

46 For hourly wages, 93.7, and for weekly wages, 86.8; see Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 56. In the *AER*, these numbers are lower by almost another two percent. See Rubinow, "Recent Trend," 811.

47 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 53.

48 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 52, 59.

49 Kreader, "America's Prophet," 147.

50 Kreader, "America's Prophet," 170–171; Warne et al., "Public Regulation," 289; Fiorito and Foresti, "Economists and Eugenics," 338.

51 Stapleford, *Cost of Living*, 69.

52 For example, when in 1911 socialist Victor Berger suggested an old age pension bill, Rubinow insisted that pensions should be tied to residence, not citizenship, and that socialists should discriminate against non-citizens was incomprehensible. See Isaac M. Rubinow, "Citizenship and Pensions" (letter to the editor), *New York Call*, Sept. 28, 1911, and "Old Age Pensions" (letter to the editor), *New York Call*, Oct. 16, 1911. On Lauck, see Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem*, 131–134.

53 Isaac M. Rubinow, "The Rising Cost of Living: Review of *The Cost of Living* by Walter R. Clark and *Cost of Living* by Fabian Franklin," *New York Call*, ca. 1915, Microfilm Scrapbook, reel 1, Isaac Max Rubinow

Selected Files on Microfilm, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York.

54 Kreader, “America’s Prophet,” 147–152.

55 Currarino explores the influences of socialism on the AFL’s “politics of more,” but transferences among intellectuals still await detailed analysis. See Currarino, *Labor Question*, 86–113.

56 Rubinow, *Was Marx Wrong*, 19–45.

57 Eli Cook, *The Pricing of Progress: Economic Indicators and the Capitalization of American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 11–12, 191–254, esp. 196.

58 Hendrickson, *American Labor*, 78–79, 81–85, 91; Stapleford, *Cost of Living*, 12–13, 48–51, 64–144. For Rubinow’s work on a Dependency Index that must be seen in the same context, see Ylva Kreye, “Freedom from the Fear of Want: Isaac Max Rubinow, Migrant Knowledge, and the Statistical Measuring of Need in the Progressive Era” in *America and Ownership: Territory, Bondage, Jubilee*, ed. Gesa Mackenthun and Nikita Vasytsov (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2025), 387–414.

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