A growing number of American workers are no longer employed in 'jobs' with a long-term connection with a company but are hired for 'gigs' under 'flexible' arrangements as 'independent contractors' or 'consultants,' working only to complete a particular task or for defined time and with no more connection with their employer than there might be between a consumer and a particular brand of soap or potato chips. While the rise of this 'gig' economy is praised by some as a response to the wishes of a more entrepreneurial generation, it is more likely that it is driven by the concerns of businesses to lower wages and benefit costs during business down-turns while also reducing their vulnerability to unfair dismissal lawsuits. The rise of gig labor calls for new initiatives in social policy because it shifts more of the burden of economic risk onto workers even while removing gig workers from many of the employment-bound New-Deal-era social insurance programs.
For these gig workers, working from home, from remote offices, or even within the corporate walls, means greater flexibility, reduced stress from office politics, and opportunities to pursue their crafts. For employers, it means being able to draw from a vast, global pool of talent as needed, without the delays inherent in onboarding or relocation. The digital economy has created incredible opportunities for these more entrepreneurial-minded workers. Resources such as cloud and mobile apps provide just about every type of business function needed to serve and please their clients, at virtually zero cost.

The growth of the gig economy represents a shift in the way Americans view work. Instead of a more traditional system where a worker works full-time for only one employer, some workers choose to enter the gig economy for the flexibility, freedom and personal fulfillment that it provides them. Dr. Brown explained to workshop participants that his students expressed interest in more control and autonomy over their career paths. His students are also serial multitaskers: many of them want the stability of one anchor employer, alongside the flexibility of simultaneous, smaller jobs. The gig workers, however, are freelancers without the benefits provided by traditional work arrangements; hence, they may end up consuming more county social services.