

THE REVOLUTIONIST EUGENE V. DEBS



DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. To listen and explore. Above all, to celebrate the spirit of our democracy and those who continue the hard work of bringing our country's ideals to life.

A Film by WFYI Public Media

Discussion Guide produced by WFYIC



The Revolutionist is made possible through the generous support of The William Craig and Teneen Dobbs Charitable Foundation, Amalgamated Bank, Amalgamated Life Insurance Company, SMART – International Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers, Local Union No. 20, Ullico, Incorporated, the Michael and Amy Sullivan Family Foundation and other generous donations.

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Cover photo: Debs Criminal Trial Exhibit: Canton Speech, June 16, 1918. Photo Credit: National Archives at Chicago



INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM and CONVERSATION

This guide is an invitation to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues or and your community in considerate conversation as opposed to debate. This guide is designed to foster a spirit of openness. Participants should be encouraged to actively listen to one another, incubate ideas and explore perspectives which may be disagreeable. The guide invites positive and curious attention and a dialogue that inspires learning.

Film Synopsis

Eugene Victor Debs was born in 1855 in Terre Haute, Indiana to newly settled, educated immigrants, Daniel and Marguerite Debs from the province of Alsace in France. Debs was the third of six children and named after two of his parents' favorite writers, Victor Hugo and Eugène Sue. His parents operated a grocery store and Debs enjoyed a middle class life, yet his early childhood—and perhaps his sense of social justice—was marked by the Civil War. Rail traffic that once carried goods and livestock to markets, now carried troops, supplies and the dead.

The Civil War brought an end to slavery just as the American Industrial Revolution was dramatically reshaping the way Americans earned a living. Machinery and new inventions changed the economy through increased production and distribution, but the change also fueled a rapid rise in income inequality. The majority of Americans no longer worked the land, and now were dependent on industrial jobs in urban areas. Companies were owned by a small collection of men who were amassing great wealth on the backs of this labor pool.

Debs saw these transformations first-hand. At 14, he dropped out of school to work for the railroad, earning 50-cents a day scraping paint and grease from locomotives. *Workers in the new economy generated the wealth but lived and worked in terrible conditions. More than 35,000 were killed each year on the job. Another half million were injured. Women and Children made up a high percentage of the work force and received a fraction of the wages earned by men. And legally, workers had no rights. (Italics from script.)*

These experiences shaped Debs' views toward industrial unionism, influenced his leadership in the Pullman Strike and subsequently led him to unite a wide range of Socialist beliefs into a unique type of Socialism congruent with America's democratic government.

Debs views evolved with the times. As a young man, he embraced conservative Victorian values and believed if one behaved with sobriety, morality and work ethic, he or she would be respected by society's elite. He stood against strikes as a young craft union leader—but came to realize that change might only come through legislation, so he ran for public office and tried to pass state laws to protect workers and give women equal rights. Failing that, Debs changed again; he saw that workers who did strike were being treated poorly and were not asking for much from their employers. He started a national industrial union for the railroads—the American Railway Union, and within a year he was leading members in a national strike against the Pullman Company.

Debs lost the strike and went to prison for his role as strike leader. Again, his views evolved. The principles of Socialism were not new to him—most families of European immigrants (including his wife, Kate) had grown up in Socialism. But now he considered how its principles might work in a democracy. Debs came to believe in the equality of all people and the role that government and companies might begin to play in protecting and promoting a better American society. Even those who disagreed, praised him for his moral rudder.



The story of Eugene Debs raises big questions such as:

- How can we balance personal liberties with social responsibilities?
- What constitutes a healthy balance between labor, government and business owners?
- Can radical ideas become future norms?
- Are there limits to free speech in times of war and who should decide?
- What constitutes courage? Is it won on the battlefield, or is it born of moral conviction and a willingness to tell one's country the truth, no matter what the cost.

Narrated by Danny Glover, *The Revolutionist* features interviews with a wide range of scholars who share intimate understanding of Eugene Debs – from his childhood to his final days.

Viewers visit Terre Haute, Indiana, where Debs was born and raised. They hear how famous leaders at the time were affected by his ideas. They gain understanding about his influence on organized labor, the formation of democratic socialism, prison reform, women's suffrage, racial equity, and worker's rights/safety. Viewers see how Debs spurred national reflection - not just in Congress or the White House, but in companies and at dinner tables.

The Production Team

The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs was produced by WFYI Public Media

WFYI distributes award-winning national content across Indiana - via radio, internet and television - and engages in community programming. It has a long history of producing its own high-quality programs and compelling stories about the life and residents of Indiana. Since 2004, WFYI has received nearly 300 regional Emmy nominations and 125 Emmys for its many productions, including *Hoosiers: The Story of Indiana*, *Eva: A-7063*, *A President at the Crossroads*, and *When the World Answered*. Nearly 50 of these productions have gone into national distribution through PBS and American Public Television.

Emmy-winning producers Kim Hood Jacobs and Kyle Travers, who co-produced the *Hoosiers* documentary series, have teamed to create *The Revolutionist*. The documentary is narrated by Danny Glover, an acclaimed film and television actor whose social activism made him a recipient of a Debs Award. Tim Grimm, an Indiana-based songwriter and actor, composed music and provided the voice of Eugene Debs in the production.



Our Hope for Your Discussion

Why are stories like *The Revolutionist* important to tell? Consider George Santayana's famous words, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to **repeat** it." History can be a comfort or a call to avoid similar consequences. It makes us aware that the work of making a more perfect union never ends—

Stories such as *The Revolutionist* help us work through the complex struggle of a democratic nation with very high ideals.

This film is about the life and work of one revolutionary American and Hoosier. It does not support any particular political or ideological beliefs. Through Debs' story, it does invite viewers to:

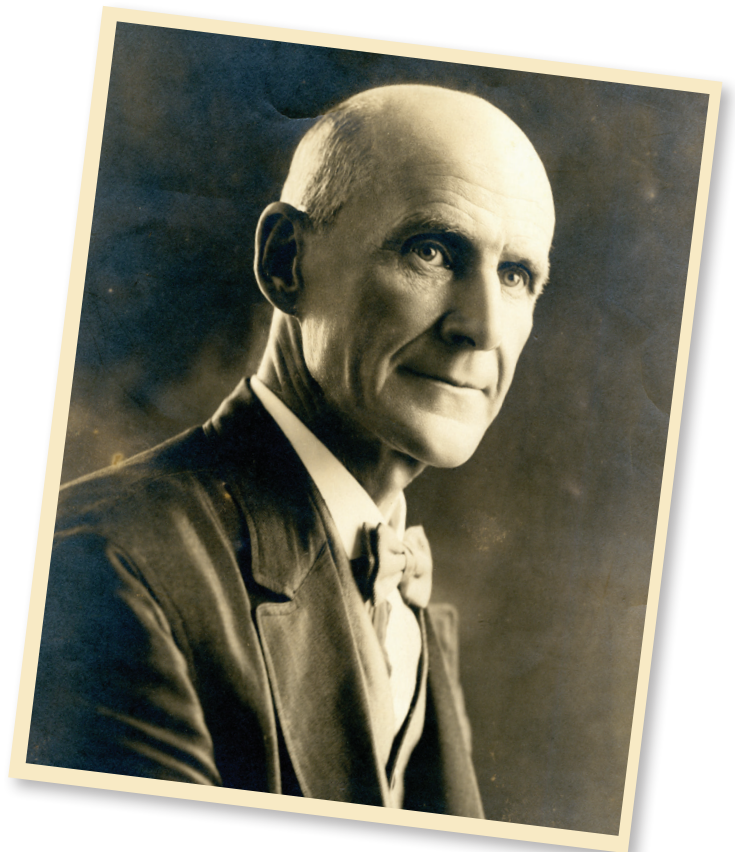
- imagine how difficult life was for most people 100-150 years ago;
- think how our shared values or faith teachings match our policies and practices;
- wonder if liberty and freedom inherently create haves/have nots;
- explore how dangerous or valuable another revolution might be today - and what we could learn from the past.

Your guests may not agree with Debs' ideas or methods. They may not agree with one another about the role of a democratic government in a pluralistic nation or even what constitutes a right. But these were the questions of Debs' life. And questions our founding mothers and fathers asked.

We hope you *take some risks* with viewers by exploring bigger questions – without any need to change anyone's mind. We hope viewers verbalize inequalities that worry them in some way. We hope viewers *find inspiration in one another* or decide to *use their voice* in a new way.

If they don't explore these big questions, we hope they takeaway a *simple appreciation* for the hard work that brought us workplace safety, how much easier our workplaces are today. Maybe a *personal reminder* that societal gains made 100 years ago are not to be taken for granted.

We hope your viewers will look beyond the compelling story of one bigger-than-life Hoosier to answer "*Does this story matter today? What might it be saying to me?*"



Undated portrait probably near the end of his life in the 1920s. Photo Credit: Indiana State University Library



FACILITATOR TIPS and GUIDANCE

This section helps you lead an active and interesting dialogue. Tips from expert facilitators! If you are a novice or a little concerned about leading this specific conversation, it will prepare you.

NOTE: Do not assume that this particular film-based discussion will be best led by an expert facilitator or political expert. Sometimes, the presence of “experts” stymies group vulnerability or ideas. You are sufficient!

Facilitating any Film-Based Conversation

Before the event, clarify what you want out of the event. *Why are you showing this film to this audience? Why do you want to talk about it? What do you hope will be gained from it?* Choose questions that achieve this hope. Become familiar with your goals and plan.

Consider a co-lead. *In choosing a partner, how well do you communicate? Is there already an “ease” between you? What gifts does this partner bring to a shared role?* He may be exceptional at keeping comments on track. She may be a great timekeeper. A partner can ease your own discomfort, provide a nice banter and course correct if one of you inadvertently steps out of a neutral role.

Try not to be too rigid with time (beyond starting and ending on time.) Facilitation is a bit of an art. Lead viewers through the entire process – so you reach your goal – but be willing to skip a question if the last one brought forth rich and valuable comments but put you behind schedule.

During the film, occasionally observe your guests. Pay particular attention to reactions at certain moments in the film. Their reactions provide great clues. Without calling attention to any one person’s reaction, incorporate what you saw or sensed into the conversation.

Also:

- Avoid spending too much time on any question – especially if some viewers are getting restless. Thank everyone for their thoughts and move on to the next question.
- Consider a break in the middle of the film. Ask a few objective questions. Stretch before diving back in.
- Group size, screen size and how people are seated in the room can all impact viewing and conversation.
- Watch the film at least once and read this entire guide before leading a conversation.

Balancing Time and Good Questions

Keep your goals in mind. *How much time do you have for this conversation? Is it reasonable given the conversation you want to have?* Choose the best number and type of questions that will achieve your goals within your allotted time. A few excellent questions can bring forth better discussion than lots of questions.

- If you only have 20 minutes, you only have time for one or two questions.
- If you have an hour, ask probing and reflective questions.



When time is very limited, a group of five will have a better conversation than a group of 15. If you only have 20 minutes and a large group, divide into small groups of four or five viewers. Ask each group the same questions. (Mixing small groups is ideal.)

How much time do you want to devote to each question? If you have three great questions, you may want to spend 15 minutes on each. You might prefer two easy questions (5 minutes each) that prime the pump for one or two deep questions (10 minutes each.)

Managing the Quality or Tenor of Film-based Conversation

Take special care not to push individuals on self-disclosure. Some audiences, including youth, may have little experience talking publicly about their own ideas or connections with the film. People from some cultural or religious backgrounds may worry about retaliation or embarrassment from being judged by someone from their own or a different background.

Try reframing questions so viewers can make an observation of their peer group, not themselves. (For example, ask what scares most of their neighbors rather than what scares them.) The ease of the tone of your voice and the way you present yourself will let viewers know it's a safe space to be honest and kind to one another.

Try to hear from everyone sometime during the dialogue but don't ask each viewer to respond to each question.

Call people by name. It helps them feel valued. And slows down those who like to be the first to respond. Watch for those who seem afraid to share, and seem to have a thought. They may be waiting for your gentle invitation. Over the course of the discussion, invite each person to share at least once.

Create and share a few non-verbal rules at the start if you worry about losing control of the conversation.

Establish a non-verbal cue with the group like hand-to-heart when someone empathizes with something said. This allows people to connect without repeating a similar comment. Or, agree that if anyone raises her hand, the group will take a collective deep breath.

Turn to these solutions for common facilitator challenges:

- A viewer is consistently stuck on a point – acknowledge and redirect that we need to move on. (Repeat as needed.)
- A Dominator – “Thank you so much. I’ve realized I’ve not given others an opportunity to share their own thoughts.” Turn your body and eyes to others. Ask if anyone has a different idea or thought. If not, move on to the next question. Invite someone else to respond first.
- An angry or intense emotion to something a viewer said – “You seem _____. Am I correct? Films like this can create intense emotions. I appreciate that you’ve shared your _____. Thank you. At the same time, I promised to make sure everyone feels respected and safe to share their own perspectives – even if we don’t all agree. Turn to the group. “As a reminder, we aren’t here to convince each other or agree. It’s ok to disagree with Debs’ perspective. My request is that we just listen to each other with curiosity. I appreciate everyone’s openness, especially if you’re sharing your thoughts on this topic for the very first time. After we finish, those of you who want to continue talking about this can do so.”



- Off topic – “Thank you for sharing that. It’s a very interesting comment. I do want to keep our discussion specific to this film and its themes, especially because our time is so limited. Perhaps you and others can continue on that idea after we finish up. Does anyone have another idea in response to my question?”
- Disclosures that are too personal for the conversation or group – “Stories or memories like that can be very difficult to share. I suspect others here have similar stories so thank you for sharing. Does anyone else have a different thought in response to my question? If not, let’s move on to the next question.”

Facilitating A Film-based Conversation About *The Revolutionist*

The Revolutionist may create uncomfortable moments, especially between strangers with very different life experiences or political opinions. Some may deflect their discomfort with personal attacks or sweeping statements intended to make others uncomfortable, too. Avoid getting bogged down by unproductive attacks. Remind everyone of the ground rules. **Do what you can to bring the offending person back into the conversation appropriately after this moment passes. To head this off, start your conversation with a few reminders:**

1. The film’s topic and themes may seem specific to one man’s vision or one time in U.S. history. It also unearths ideas might be good to chat about. We might talk about things that could help us better understand what’s happening today. Let’s use this time to be curious about the views of others in this room.
2. We aren’t on a television show. We don’t need to counter-punch. We aren’t trying to change anyone’s opinion or beliefs. We’re just here to learn what we can from each other and the film. We don’t have to agree. We probably won’t!
3. Joking is a fun way to interact with friends. It can lighten a difficult moment among those who share a common experience. Since we don’t have those relationships with everyone in the room, and since comments – even jests – can be easily misunderstood, let’s be mindful.
4. If someone’s comment irritates you, tell yourself, “I don’t agree, but I don’t need to convince anyone here.”

Create an atmosphere that makes people feel safe, encouraged, respected. Controversial topics can make for excellent discussions. And they can give rise to deep emotions and expressions of strongly-held beliefs. Set the right tone and folks will likely share their ideas openly and honestly – and move past difficult moments with grace. Acknowledge but don’t make anything a big deal.

Take care of yourself and group members during the conversation. If the intensity level rises, join everyone in a deep breath. Remind viewers that, quite often, our own outbursts or flashpoints are typically not our most thoughtful responses or deeper ideas. We do not have to attach meaning to every comment someone in the group says.



Manage your own emotions. Here's how to prepare yourself before the event:

- Identify your own hot-button issues: View the film before the event. Give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions while trying to facilitate a discussion.
- Be knowledgeable: You don't need to be an expert – you are not teaching. But, knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. If helpful, review the Resources section in this guide.
- Be clear about your role: You may have several roles for this event – host, organizer, tech person and facilitator. A facilitator remains *neutral*, helping move the discussion along while refraining from sharing his or her personal views or expertise with the group. Make sure you can focus on that role. Avoid distractions during the discussion.
- Know your group: Topics can play out very differently for different groups. *Is your group new to this topic?* Other factors like geography, age, race, culture, gender, religion and socioeconomics can play into comfort level, relatable experiences to share, topic knowledge-even speaking styles. But don't assume that all members of a particular demographic or neighborhood are monolithic!



Stand in Terre Haute where people could petition to get Debs out of prison. Photo Credit: Indiana State University Library



HOW TO SEGMENT THE FILM AND CONVERSATION

Two Common Hosting Options

Most groups will watch the film and discuss it in **one session**. Because this film is about 60 minutes long, you could have an introduction, watch the film and enjoy a 30-45 minute conversation afterwards – all in two hours.

You might prefer to watch it over two **days**. This film does not have distinct sections. Decide ahead of time where a logical natural break is for your group, typically at the end of a topic.

Checking-In and Extending the Experience Between Sessions

If you watch the film over two sessions, include a brief “**check-in**” with viewers at the end of your first session. Check-ins helps viewers commit images to memory between sessions. They’re more likely to have good recall for your full conversation at the film’s conclusion.

This check-in should be brief (5-6 minutes.) And simple. Do not require everyone to answer.

- *What image, comment, interviewee or scene has caught your attention so far?*
- *Has anything in this first section made you more curious or raised a question in your mind? (You don’t need to respond to their answers.)*

To keep viewers engaged between sessions, **assign a simple activity (or choice of activities) to do before the next session**. (Find ideas in the *What’s Next?* section at the end of this guide.)

As guests settle in to start the second session (before you start the film again), hold a **brief check-in to re-focus on the film**:

- *(If you gave an assignment), what did you do? Anything interesting you want to share?*
- *Since we last met, have you been thinking about something you heard or saw in the film? Have you noticed a connection between the film and your everyday life?*



OPENING REMARKS BEFORE THE FILM

NOTE: As people arrive, try to *informally* introduce yourself to each person. This can help people open up during conversation.

Introduce yourself as facilitator in 1-2 sentences.

Why we are here: Share your general expectations (e.g., looking forward to an interesting conversation after a fascinating movie, your plan if doing event in 2 sessions, any logistics – ending time, breaks, bathroom location - 5 minutes)

Who we are: Name, where each of us is from/where we grew up (city, neighborhood, type of area.) If large group, do this in small groups. This builds comfort. (Keep very brief or you will lose 10-15 minutes.)

Raise your hand if you have: 1) been to Terre Haute, 2) heard of Debs', 3) heard stories from someone who worked for Pullman or lived in a company town, 3) met someone who identifies as a socialist or social democrat, 4) advocated for change, even if small (Feel free to substitute with other statements that are neutral. This non-verbal exercise can help group get acquainted.)

Our general rules for conversation: (To help viewers relax.)

- After the film, I'll explain how we'll hold our conversation
- I won't steer us toward any specific "lesson" from the film. I'm not pushing any idea. I'm here to help you explore your own meaning from the film. I'm looking forward to benefiting from hearing each of your thoughts.
- At the end of this evening, _____. (e.g. follow-up conversation, suggested activities, list of resources they can explore on own)

Read the Film's Storyline to the group

Alternately loved and reviled, Eugene Victor Debs was a passionate labor leader, a progressive political figure, and a formidable speaker in a time of great change in the United States. WFYI's new documentary, *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*, tells the story of this Hoosier's life. Born in Terre Haute in 1855, Eugene Debs emerged as a divisive figure when he led the nationwide Pullman Strike in 1894. Seeking an alternative way for workers to gain power, he helped establish the Socialist Party in the United States and ran as its candidate for president five times. His campaign across the country drew massive crowds, and his oratory tested the limits of the First Amendment. When he spoke out against America's involvement in World War I, the Supreme Court upheld a guilty verdict that sentenced him to ten years in prison for violating the Espionage Act. From his cell, he ran for president for the final time, garnering nearly a million votes...and sparking a national conversation about the right to free speech in times of war.

Produced by WFYI Public Media, *The Revolutionist: Eugene V Debs* highlights an Indiana story with national scope and impact we still feel today. It premiered in fall 2019.

As we watch the film together, please pay attention to:

- Key messages you connect with
- Scenes, images, statements that stand out to you
- Feelings that arise in various parts
- Ideas that pop into your head, things that make you curious



HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION AFTER THE FILM

Take a short break immediately after the film: Give viewers a chance to transition.

- Ask viewers to stay seated and quiet for a minute or two, simply to help transition into discussion. During this one minute of quiet, you might assign a question: *"Without responding, recall a time in your life, even your childhood, when doing something very small but positive helped you navigate a difficult time or helped you feel you were making things better for someone else."*
- After a maximum 1-2 minutes, folks may have anxiety about the conversation to come. Take a 3-minute social break – get up, stretch, pass the popcorn.

Logistics: Remind group the length of time set aside for conversation. Pledge to end on time.



Railroad Painters. Debs is seated on the far left, and he is 14 years old. Photo Credit: Indiana State University Library



Review your Role as Facilitator(s): For example,

- Beyond a factual error you might make from the film, I won't correct your responses, offer advice or teach.
- I'll guide conversation, making sure everyone has the chance to talk. I won't answer any of the questions myself.
- I'll make sure we all follow ground rules for good conversation. And redirect as needed.

Active Listening: Paraphrase the following in your own words or read aloud,

In exchange, I have something to ask of you. I would like you to be active listeners. Essentially, when any of us speaks, the rest of us won't interrupt even with a sound. It's great to rephrase each other's words and ask if we understand them correctly. If we don't agree with them, we say something like *"I hear what you're saying. I see it differently though. I think..."* Or maybe, *"I can see that, but I struggle with/I'm uncomfortable with....."*

If you will be an active listener, we can all enjoy this conversation with folks who see the world differently from us. We're here to try to understand another person's perspective, maybe walk away with a little expanded thinking of our own. It's a good chance for all of us to just practice being okay with not seeing eye-to-eye.

Ground Rules/Discussion Agreements: Post on wall or review with group. Remind the group that all of us are responsible for creating a satisfying dialogue. Here are some examples:

- All voices are valued. Be respectful - put downs, slurs, yelling are off limits
- One person at a time. Share airtime with everyone
- Speak in 1st person - "I think...", NOT "I think you ...", "Everyone knows -..."
- To help us understand, we might ask you, "why?"
- Listen to comments that may challenge your own thinking
- Accept that others may have gotten different things from the same scene
- You don't have to answer a question. I may prompt you if you've been quiet awhile.
- If you don't like a comment, practice not responding or just asking a question
- Personal stories are great - brief and on topic. Limit how much you share.
- I may redirect, stop, or push ahead as needed - it's not personal

FACILITATOR NOTE ON QUESTION FORMATION: Use the next four sections to help craft the conversation you hope to have. The first provides a *tested protocol for leading quality conversations*. The second lists quotations your group may prefer to respond to. If you want to further specialize your dialogue, the third section lists *possible themes and sample questions you could explore with certain groups*. The fourth includes tips if viewers try to dive more deeply.



SELECTING and ORDERING QUALITY QUESTIONS

Well-crafted question prompts help an audience think more deeply about the topics or themes in any film - even look at a film from different perspectives. Quality questions matter.

Questions in this guide are designed to draw people in at a comfortable pace and meet the needs of different types of people. In every group, you have those who prefer talking about:

- facts ("sensate" in discussions)
- feelings, memories, reflections
- their own interpretation or opinions, broader values or significance
- their ideas for change, community relevance, building consensus, action

Every person leans toward one or more of these types. She will gravitate in that direction quickly once discussion opens. Without steady facilitation, groups tend to struggle between these competing individual needs.

One viewer may get stuck on fact-sharing. Another type becomes anxious. His attempt to move away from facts frustrates the "fact" person. The "reflector" may feel dismissed for her storied responses. The "action-oriented" viewer is frustrated - he wants to jump right into "what do we do?" but no one seems interested.

Competing needs are easily managed by asking questions in the right order. A structured method ensures that each person has an opportunity to speak to what is most interesting to them. It gives airtime for every type of viewer. Order gives introverts time and space to participate.

Keeping questions in the right order also allows every viewer time to become increasingly more comfortable with sharing - by starting with facts, moving to personal reflection, sharing meaning and moving toward "What does this suggest for the future?" By the time the group gets to that last stage, everyone is usually on board.

Tips for Question Selection

Choose at least one question from EACH of the four categories below. Here's where you don't need to be rigid. You might ask one question from Category 1 but two or three from Category 2 - whatever works best given your group, goals and time.

No matter how many questions you choose, keep the category order. Start with Category 1. End with Category 4. If you jump back and forth between categories, the conversation will not flow easily. (If you come up with your own questions, order them in the same way.)

Choose questions that make sense for this group. *If everyone knows each other, you could take more risks. Are they strangers? All in the same age group? Expecting multiple generations? Is it a group of only conservative or liberal thinkers? Mixed incomes or cultures?* Questions should be "answerable" by everyone. For example, if you have a mixed group of Jewish, Muslim and Christian viewers, don't ask a question only Christians could answer.



Question Menu

The following questions are appropriate for middle school to adult. Feel free to adapt.

CATEGORY #1 (observation, sensory, objective)

- *What one word, phrase, or image caught your attention in the film? Why?*
- *What scenes or interviews do you remember most from the film?*
- *What statements, facts or phrases from the movie are memorable to you?*
- *What surprised you in the film?*
- *In the film, what bits of history were new to you?*
- *What tensions did you notice in this story? (Tensions are good/bad, difficult/easy, competing goals or expectations)*
- *If you could rename the film, what would the title be? If you wouldn't, why not?*
- *Describe Eugene Debs (or his life) in 10 words or less*

CATEGORY #2 (reflection, internal connection with film, own memories, associations)

- *What part of the film or Deb's story could you most relate to or connect with?*
- *What one comment in the film or one part of Debs' story did you find especially moving or disturbing?*
- *What's something you learned in this film about socialism in the U.S.?*
- *Debs decided early in his life that he had to learn a skill that didn't come naturally*
- *and made him very anxious – public speaking. It paid off. He became a celebrated orator. Have you ever pursued a skill that made you anxious but would catapult your life in some way?*
- *Debs was elected to the Indiana legislature in the 1880s – he voted for expanded rights to women and minorities. As a Hoosier, does that surprise you?*
- *Who in the film would you most like to interview? What one question would you ask? OR Is there someone else you wish WFYI had interviewed in the film?*
- *Debs made a mark on our nation but never moved from his hometown, Terre Haute. Is that possible today - to live in a small community and still make a huge impact?*
- *The film is titled "The Revolutionist." Would you call Debs one? Would he be considered one today? How do you define revolutionary? Any come to mind? Is a revolutionary seen during their time as working toward a greater good or as an agitator and destroyer?*



CATEGORY #3 (interpretation, life meaning, broader value or significance of story)

- *What themes did you notice in this film? What's universal about Eugene's story?*
- *What major lessons do you take from Gene's life and work?*
- *Is this story important to tell almost 100 years later? Why/Why not?*
- *How does this film remind you of the world you experience today?*
- *What similarities, if any, do you see between events happening during Debs life and events and attitudes today?*
- *Debs was clear about the kind of leader he consistently wanted to be. What was his leadership style? Are some types more effective than others?*
- *Could today's low-income workers, rural workers, farmers, auto workers, wait staff, coal miners, prisoners relate to their peers of the late 1800s-early 1900s?*
- *Debs brought national attention to a throw-away segment of society - prisoners. Is there a group living on the margins today, ignored by society and in need of a respected voice to bring major change for it?*
- *Is there a modern-day Debs? Someone respected, but agitating? Someone we might one day look back on in awe for the many things she or he did to advance our democratic ideals?*
- *Is it possible to create economic equity in this country? Is it a moral question? Is it a question of national stability? It is necessary?*
- *Debs saw a nation out-of-balance, where a small group of business owners and the government had a singular focus on churning an economic machine to the detriment of all else. A democratic government no longer focused on its founding role or ideal to be for and by the people. Taken over. He found it morally unacceptable. Can you see his point at the time? Would he be pleased today or more convinced?*

CATEGORY #4 (group consensus or actions, what's next for me, relevance to future)

- *What questions does this film raise about your own local community, faith community or neighborhood?*
- *Where does this film and discussion leave you? What has piqued your interest? Anything you want to further explore?*
- *How has this film inspired you or planted some ideas in you?*
- *In a positive way, how has this film challenged you? What might you do with that challenge?*
- *As a group, what can you take from this film that helps your group?*
- *How are shared film discussions like this helpful as you navigate life?*

FACILITATOR NOTE about CATEGORY #4: If you are facilitating a group that meets regularly and it is appropriate, leave time at the end to talk about concrete actions your group could take next. This can help youth and adults leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.



(OPTIONAL) QUOTATIONS YOU CAN DISCUSS

Instead of asking a Category #2 or #3 question, ask viewers to discuss one quotation from the film. This section offers some, but feel free to pull your own from the film or other texts. Look to his contemporaries or a modern-day advocate. Any short quotation works if it aligns with themes in this film and resonate with your viewers. Try an opposing view!

Instructions: Share the quotation. Ask the group to explore one of the following: 1) *if and why they agree/disagree* 2) *if and why they can relate or can't relate to it*, 3) *if the quotation is universally true for every culture or situation*, or 4) *is the quotation relevant today*.

If you like several quotations, divide the group into small clusters of three or four. Give each small group a different quotation and instruction. After 5-7 minutes, reconvene. Ask a spokesperson for each group to share his/her group's quotation along with one compelling comment from their discussion.

On Labor

As long as he owns your tools he owns your job, and if he owns your job he is the master of your fate. You are in no sense a free man. You are subject to his interest and to his will. He decides whether you shall work or not. Therefore, he decides whether you shall live or die. And in that humiliating position anyone who tries to persuade you that you are a free man is guilty of insulting your intelligence. (Debs)

But, alas, this wealth, instead of blessing the race, has been the means of enslaving it. The few have come in possession of all, and the many have been reduced to the extremity of living by permission. (Debs)

Only the very ignorant and foolish believe that a president who has surrounded himself with Wall Street darlings as cabinet ministers has any serious designs on the trusts. (Debs)

I am not a Labor Leader; I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I led you in, someone else would lead you out. You must use your heads as well as your hands and get yourself out of your present condition; as it is now the capitalists use your heads and your hands. (Debs)

ON DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. (Debs)

We forget how influential and respectable socialism was at that time, both in the rural south and in northern industrial cities....It's the moral vision of that kind of political and economic organization, that African Americans, and other Americans, really respond to. (William Pretzer)

I am opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for a wretched existence. (Debs)



He was really not as interested in Karl Marx or European theory about socialism as he was about socialism as a political tradition in the American grain. He never jettisons that fundamental commitment to that small "d" democratic world that he sees being destroyed, not only by corporations' actions but by their collusion with the federal government (Freeburg, Salvatore)

The few own the many because they possess the means of livelihood of all. [...] The country is governed for the richest, for the corporations, the bankers, the land speculators, and for the exploiters of labor. The majority of mankind are working people. So long as their fair demands—the ownership and control of their livelihoods—are set at naught, we can have neither men's rights nor women's rights. The majority of mankind is ground down by industrial oppression in order that the small remnant may live in ease. (Helen Keller, 1913)

ON DEMOCRACY AND ITS FUTURE

They tell us that we live in a great free republic; that our institutions are democratic; that we are a free and self-governing people. This is too much, even for a joke. But it is not a subject for levity; it is an exceedingly serious matter. (Debs)

He was an American and his whole effort here was not to transform America into some other entity but to have it live up to its own professed reality. (Salvatore)

We don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an endless succession of presents, and to live now as we think humans should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory (Howard Zinn)

He ...shares some of his deepest beliefs about the nature of democracy, about the promise of American life and the failure of our leaders to work towards those goals (Salvatore)

ON DEBS' MORAL COMPASS

What Debs continues to come back to as he evolves [is]... a much broader vision of humanity of the broad humanness of individuals and their absolute equality at that level, and the necessity to find social ways of implementing that vision. (William Pretzer)

I may not be able to say all I think; but I am not going to say anything that I do not think. I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than to be a sycophant and coward in the streets. (Debs)

We are the party of...the whole working class, and we will not suffer ourselves to be divided by any specious appeal to race prejudice; and if we should be coaxed or driven from the straight road we will be lost in the wilderness and ought to perish there. (Debs)

He who advises the white wage-worker to look down upon the black wage-worker is the enemy of both. The capitalist has some excuse for despising the slave – he lives out of his labor, out of his life, and cannot escape his sense of guilt and so he looks with contempt upon his victim. You can forgive the man who robs you, but you can't forgive the man you rob - in his haggard features you read your indictment and this makes his face so repulsive that you must keep it under your heels where you cannot see it. (Debs)

To stir the masses, to appeal to their higher, better selves, to set them thinking for themselves, and to hold ever before them the ideal of mutual kindness and good will, based upon mutual interests, is to render real service to the cause of humanity. (Debs)



Never mind what others may say, or thing, or do. Stand erect in the majesty of your own manhood. Listen for just once to the throbbing of your own heart... Lift your bowed form from the earth! The dust has long enough borne the impress of your knees. Stand up and see how long a shadow you cast in the sunlight! Hold up your head and avow your convictions, and then accept, as becomes a man, the consequences of your acts! (Debs, 1905)

When we are in partnership and have stopped clutching each other's throats, when we have stopped enslaving each other, we will stand together, hands clasped, and be friends. We will be brothers and sisters, and we will begin the march to the grandest civilization the human race has ever known (Debs, 1912 Presidential nominee acceptance speech)

Your Honor, years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free. (Debs)

ON FREE SPEECH IN TIME OF WAR

[Oliver Wendall Holmes'] argument in the Debs case...was that context matters. Essentially that the first amendment means one thing in times of peace and another thing in times of war. And that when the country feels like it's faced with a national crisis people have to give up their free speech rights on behalf of the majority. (Ernest Freeberg)

In every age it has been the tyrant, the oppressor and the exploiter who has wrapped himself in the cloak of patriotism, or religion, or both to deceive and overawe the People. (Debs, 1918 Anti-War speech)

Intelligent discontent is the mainspring of civilization. Progress is born of agitation. It is agitation or stagnation. (Debs)

The master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles. "The working class who fight the battles, the working class who make the sacrifices, the working class who shed the blood, the working class who furnish the corpses, the working class have never yet had a voice in declaring war (Debs)



"Red Special" campaign train in 1908. Photo Credit: Indiana State University Library



THEMES TO EXPLORE and SAMPLE QUESTIONS for SPECIFIC GROUPS

Themes

Some themes in Eugene Debs' story are timeless. Your group might think the film's release is timely given currents flowing through the U.S. We invite you to frame this film around themes or topics you find relevant.

If *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs* is part of a larger group conversation you are having, focus your film-related questions around one or two themes/topics that meet your group's broader conversation. Your group might identify the themes they want to explore. Here is a sampling:

- Empowerment or perseverance against all odds
- Forces behind racial, ethnic, religious, economic inequities - democratic solutions
- The continuum of intersectionality found across political/economic philosophies
- Large-scale social issues in our democracy (e.g. immigration, prison, living wage, gun violence, poverty, arrest/sentencing inequities, reparations, multi-generational housing, job, banking discrimination, healthcare/health disparities, climate change)
- Rural/city divide
- Civility
- Labor unions - a thing of the past or a re-emerging phenomenon?
- Free speech in times of war.
- Feelings of being "dispossessed" or unable to participate in our democracy
- Cycles in our nation – demonizing and labeling each other, more interested in "winning" than working together for a greater good
- Philosophies of advocacy/social change work from leaders around the world
- Industrial Revolution: Lessons from the chaos/massive change for every element of our society. Are we in another seismic transformation?
- Civil Rights: Eugene Debs issued an iconic statement in 1905, challenging Socialists to set aside race and gender and unite by class. Debs was a mentor and friend to emerging leaders such as W.E.B DuBois who started the NAACP and A. Phillip Randolph who united Pullman porters to form the first African American Union. Randolph's leadership helped desegregate the military. Randolph is also credited with organizing the March on Washington in the 1960's. Democratic Socialists including Martin Luther King emerged as leaders for social justice and equality.
- Feminism and equal pay battles

Legislation to guarantee equal pay in government service was introduced in 1870, passing by a wide margin in the House. The first equal pay, private industry strike by women was in 1883. In 1911, New York teachers were guaranteed equal pay. In WWI, all women who worked in war-related jobs were guaranteed equal pay. Debs and his party actively championed women's suffrage (1900-1920.) It may have been women who gave Debs' a large percentage of the presidential vote. He advocated for the decriminalization of prostitution because of its impact on



women.

More Challenging or Group-Specific Questions

Are you hosting a specific type of group? If yes, craft a question or two to help the entire group respond from their perspective as _____. Below is a sampling of questions you can easily adapt. Or, tweak any questions in this guide.

Choose questions that work for your group. Some work best if your group has built good trust or has a successful history talking about meaty subjects!

As Elected officials

- The U.S. prides itself as a “melting pot.” Maybe it’s more of a hearty stew. Either way, do you see a growing undercurrent of “us” vs “them,” “deserving” and “undeserving,” “acceptable” and “not acceptable,” or “people we serve” and “people we don’t serve?”
- If institutional barriers and inequities exist, is the “American Dream” open for all? Is it a myth? If we do nothing in government to remove institutional barriers, are we complicit or are they unavoidable? If they are unavoidable, do we have a duty to care for those caught in them?
- The U.S. was founded on two untested ideas – revolutionary at the time – that all people had the freedom to decide their own lives regardless of station in life and that a nation had an “equalizing” social responsibility to all of its people. (A democracy would ensure this.) Is it possible to do both well?
- Debs spent his life trying to improve circumstances for low-wage workers, prisoners, minorities, women. There’s a common saying that before you judge a person, you should walk a mile in their shoes. He walked a mile in lots of shoes. Does it help leaders to do this? Policymakers? Residents? If you have, did it change or clarify your views?
- While he worked for broad civil rights, Debs saw growing divisions in the U.S. as much more about class and income than race, gender or religion. With economic equality (or equity), one could then create his/her own life and assert his/her rights. Do you agree or disagree?

As a community of faith,

- In the 1890’s Christian Socialists were town leaders—ministers’ wives who led weekly book clubs to study history, science and biographies. Christian Socialists promoted public schools for all, better communities, etc. What does the Bible tell us about our responsibilities to education? To our communities?
- In 1897, a Topeka, KS minister, Charles Sheldon wrote a best selling book called “In His Steps: “what would Jesus do?” that Christian Socialists changed to “what would Debs do?” in an effort to recruit Debs to run for President on the new Socialist ticket. Why do you think many Christians supported Debs?
- During this time, there was a strong belief among Christians in advancing the brotherhood of man. How does the Christian church today compare?
- Debs’ was known for his moral compass which even his detractors respected. Christians even compared Eugene Debs’ actions and political ideas to the teachings of Christ. How might this compare to modern political or spiritual leaders?



- What is courage? Is it won in the chaos of battle or is it marked by a willingness to speak out against injustice. Consider the words of Christ and the consequences.
- Debs saw Christ as a radical figure—storming the temple, challenging leaders to care for their communities, feed the poor, etc. Do you see Christ as a radical?
- Does the faith community have a role in democracy? Can or should the faith community promote democratic ideals?

As a middle or high school student,

- Do kids have the power to make their school, neighborhood, city or country a better place? What's easy about it? What's hard? Have you ever looked for groups of kids who are improving the world - even online?
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a South African civil rights activist said, "It means a great deal to those who are oppressed to know that they are not alone. Never let anyone tell you that what you are doing is insignificant." Do you think that's true?
- A majority of young people in the U.S. have positive feelings about Democratic Socialism in some form. What would your peers think about this film or knowing that some of our founding fathers and mothers embraced socialist ideas?

As parents, educators, adults or elders,

- What messages do our children receive from their schools, neighborhoods or our community that help them understand themselves as democratic citizens? And what that means/the responsibility that brings?
- What messages do we send about the delicate national balance of individual liberty, and social responsibility?
- Eugene's mom used the last \$40 of the family's money to buy dry goods so they could open a store. This is a common immigrant story. If that's you - the parent - if you are the child of that, how might that shape your American experience?

For existing groups with good trust and deep interest in these topics,

- In what way does this film connect with why we exist as a group or with the work we do? What can we take from our conversation to further our mission? What questions do we need to ask?
- Early on, Debs said the huge influx of immigrant workers was a detriment to U. S. workers. Employers recruited and paid below-standard wages, undercutting American workers. He later realized that if he believed in the rights of the working class, he could not discriminate against gender, race or culture. Do you agree or disagree with this?



- Debs and others pushed for change in the early 1900s because huge inequities and institutional barriers left masses of Americans to suffer. Communities were getting sick, people were dying on the job, poor people were thrown in jail. Over time, the United States has embraced large, socialized efforts to help level the playing field, protect those who live on the margins or right wrongs that naturally occur in a capitalistic society. All these forms of “equalizing” or “redistribution” came from both sides of the aisle. Given your current political beliefs, would you have been a supporter of reforms in 1908?
- “The man who dies rich dies in disgrace,” said Andrew Carnegie was a steel magnate during Debs’ time—and one of the richest Americans in history. Like Debs, Carnegie’s views about the wealth and his responsibilities toward social reform also changed. Carnegie came to believe that wasteful, irresponsible spending and self-indulgence by Capitalists was wrong and only worked to increase the divide between rich and poor. In 1880, Carnegie published an article entitled “Wealth” (later published as “The Gospel of Wealth”). He had decided that the wealthy class should use their riches to improve society and the lives of poor people. Giving was a code of honor. “In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who help themselves.” Do you agree or disagree? Do Carnegie’s views apply today?
- Debs went to jail for “sedition” as the US entered WW I – others did too. During the Vietnam War there were riots, demonstrations and speeches against the war. The country was torn apart. In the aftermath of 9/11, many name-called anyone who didn’t display a flag or who spoke up against going to war. Including Debs, most advocates would say they speak up because they love their country. Others call them unpatriotic. Can we become a more perfect nation without advocates? If we believe in free speech and freedom to live as you like, do we have room for someone to be both a citizen and an advocate of social reform? Why do some people call them traitors?
- Every major religion teaches a version of the Golden Rule – treat every person as you would want them to treat you. Debs took that teaching and his belief in the ideals of democracy to heart. Both grounded all his advocacy work. Does our nation model these today?
- Some see capitalism as the most moral and ethical of all economic philosophies. Others think it brings the worst out in humans. Does an over-emphasis on some capitalistic ideas (winners and losers, peers as competitors to beat, pecking order) breed attitudes in us to win at all costs, run over others, push others down so we can succeed? Does it breed “Me first”? A communal greediness to withhold for the greater good? Does it encourage us to fight each other? Encourage a “survival” mentality? If we have a reverence for capitalism, could it get in the way of our ideal of one nation and one people?
- We don’t have a pure capitalist system and never have. It is supported by our local and state governments. As is our social fabric. What are some examples we often forget? Is our economic model more socialistic and less capitalistic than we like to admit? Are we as self-governing as we like to believe we are? There are upwards of 8 gradations of Socialism—from Socialist government led by authoritarian leaders that most resemble Communism—to Debs’ brand of Socialism on the other end of the spectrum—led by elected officials and supportive of capitalist ideas.
- Debs believed the government should provide a minimal quality of life for average Americans. He was an advocate for public schools, fire departments, police departments, old age pensions, 8 hour work day, equal rights for women, workers compensation, libraries, etc. Some argue that we take these for granted today—other say these programs are more at risk than ever before. What do you think?
- Is the unfettered acquisition of personal wealth and individual profit compatible with improvement of and gains over human and social conditions over time? Is it pie-in-the-sky?



TIPS FOR INTENDED OR UNINTENDED DEEPER DIVES

Films like *The Revolutionist* may leave viewers encouraged, defensive, compassionate, angry, frustrated, validated or conflicted. The film might elevate anxiety among those who worry that the discussion will become yet another place where people divide and emotions escalate.

If you plan to have just one conversation about the more complex themes of this film, there is no “right” way to do it. Keep your goals realistic. Know your audience and their willingness to listen well to each other or take emotional risks. Conversations about religion, justice, identity, society and history are evolving and complex.

As facilitator, you control the direction this dialogue takes. Keep this tip in mind just in case the “simple” conversation you created quickly turns into a deep or thorny dialogue:

If the *entire group* wants to discuss a theme you don’t feel prepared to lead right now, host a follow-up after the event. At the point you feel concerned, tell them this plan. Move back to your questions. Set the time at the end of your event.

Some viewers might try to deepen the conversation after your first few questions. You may feel prepared for this new direction, but other viewers are not comfortable and feel a bit trapped. Invite the first group to meet with you after dismissal to set a time for a deeper dive. Honor those who do not want to move in that direction. Keep your head in this event.

Because there is no “right” response in discussions on justice, democracy and political theories, keep a few things in mind – to do and to accept - as you lead this deeper dive:

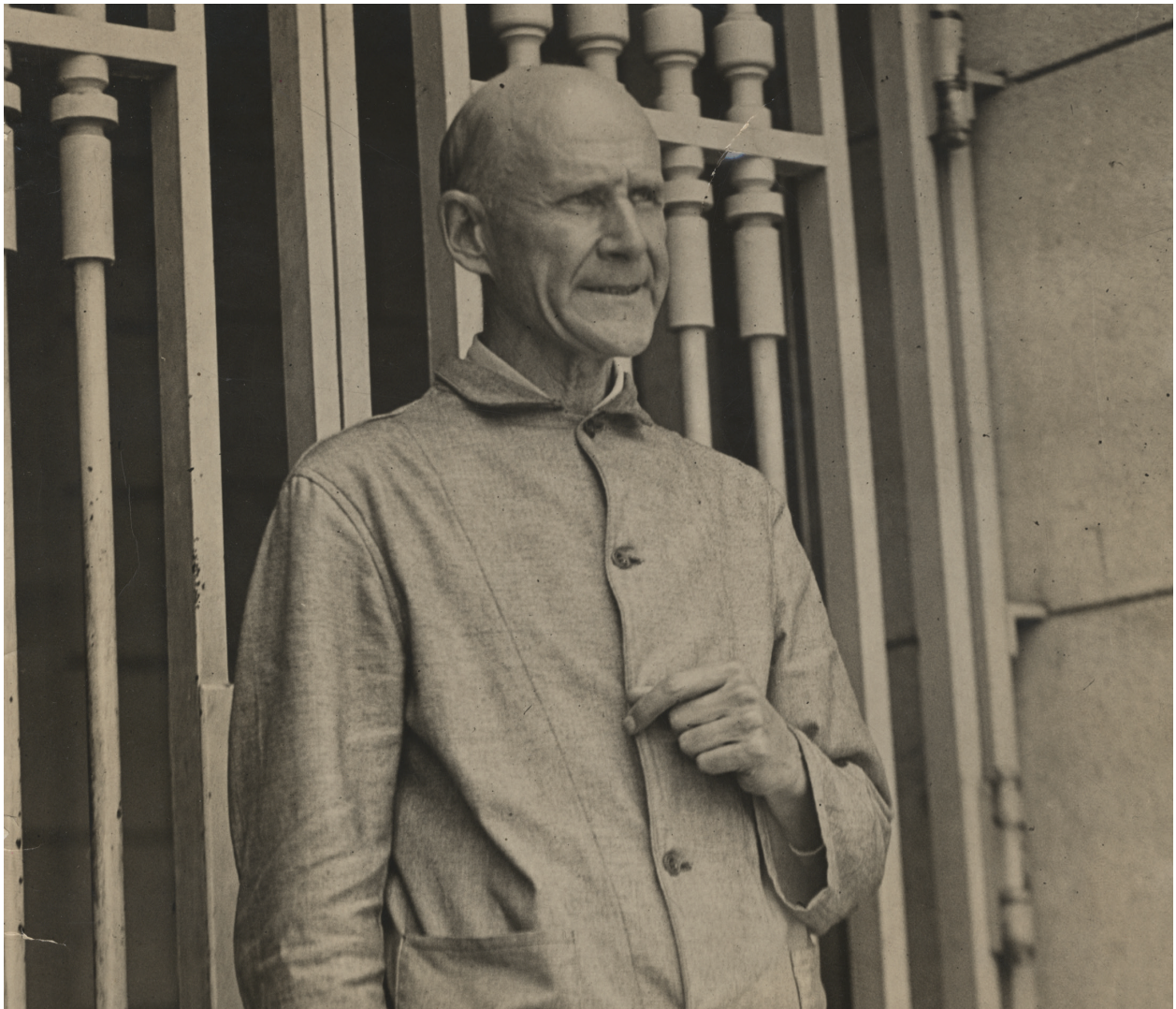
- Listen for and respond to emotional substance behind statements. Without serving in a “therapeutic” role, these reactions can be explored briefly but without personal details. You can also simply acknowledge the emotion and moving on. Often, that is enough.
- Help each viewer take risks in looking honestly at themselves or their beliefs. They might be inconsistent. Shine light but do not question their viewpoint, stories, assumptions about others or their own resistance to ideas.
- Stop a viewer when she discredits another viewer’s experiences, makes assumptions about another or lays blame. Then remind all that others in the group do not need to accept their perspective. That we all have complicated views and feelings about each other, our own histories and our society.
- Remember a few things about human nature: 1) Most of us think our own beliefs are consistent with core human values and our nation’s founding vision; 2) We like to believe we are on the side of goodness; 3) Our perspectives are colored by our own level of privilege and life experience. We all find worth in our own beliefs over someone else’s. We are confident we see out of objective eyes. And, every human is hardwired with bias – ancient biology.
- All of us have grown up in a nation – unless we immigrated – that appears through a specific lens to us. It’s hard to imagine a time before when it was different than it is now (for better or worse) and hard to believe it won’t stay this way forever. All of us care about the state of our nation. And only know it as it is today.



CLOSING YOUR CONVERSATION

Once the last question from Category #4 has been answered, keep the closing brief. You might include the following:

- Pass out any handouts from the **Resource** section
- Suggest activities for further exploration or engagement (your own or pulled from **Resource** section)
- Remind everyone one reason you/your hosts wanted to share this film
- *"As your facilitator, one thing/one takeaway our conversation has left me with is _____"*
- Thank everyone for the great conversation, great ponderings, taking the risk to explore this film together. Invite them to continue talking with others. You might suggest they invite people from different cultures, communities, religious or political affiliation over for dinner or out for fun together.



Debs in front of prison as he is notified that he is the Socialist Party nominee for President. Photo Credit: Indiana State University Library



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In this section, you'll find background information about Eugene V. Debs, some historical material and resources/follow-up activities you can share with viewers if you like. It also includes a "cheat sheet" on basic terms and ideas behind socialism. You might find it helpful as you prepare.

Books

***Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist** (Nick Salvatore)

Definitive biography of Eugene V. Debs with well researched sources and deep dives into the labor movement, the history of American Socialism and the consequences of Debs' Canton speech, testing free speech in a time of war.

***Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, The Great War, and the Right to Dissent** (Ernest Freeberg)

Narrative about Debs' case as he went on trial for sedition and the country wrestled with the balance of free speech and national security in a time of war.

***Eugene V. Debs: A Graphic Biography** (Paul Buhle)

Buhle's new graphic novel introduces young adults to the story of Eugene Debs. Buhle is professor emeritus from Brown University and has written extensively about radicalism in the United States.

The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs (Ray Ginger) 1947

Published 20 years after Eugene Debs death, .

Eugene V. Debs, A Man Unafraid (McAllistar Coleman) 1930

Early biography.

***Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana** (James H Madison)

Madison is a professor emeritus from Indiana University and a celebrated historian whose focus has been the Hoosier state.

1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft & Debs—The Election that Changed the Country (James Chace)

Walls and Bars (Eugene V Debs, 1927)

Part memoir, part collection of his writings on prison reform, the only full-length book Debs' ever wrote. Buy through Amazon and others. PDF of original 264-page typed manuscript is online.

*Authors are featured in "The Revolutionist"

Television

The Contenders (C-Span) www.c-span.org/video/?301271-1/eugene-v-debs-presidential-contender

Interviews some experts featured in *The Revolutionist* - at the Debs home



Articles and Speeches

***Something To Offer** (William P. Jones) www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/debs-socialism-race-du-bois-socialist-party-black-liberation/

An opinion piece about Debs and black liberation, it discusses his interactions with contemporaries, Margaret Lamont, W. E. DuBois (published *The Souls of Black Folk* earlier in 1903) and others. NAACP emerged a few years after DuBois, Debs and others realized black political power was essential.

When America's Most Prominent Socialist Was Jailed for Speaking Out Against WWI (Smithsonian Magazine, 2018) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/fiery-socialist-challenged-nations-role-wwi-180969386/>

Eugene V Debs Internet Archives <https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/index.htm>

Collaborative project of the Socialism Party of America (Debs founder), the Marxist Internet Archives and the Socialist Labor Party. Of his 4000+/- writings, archive includes 100+ articles on wide-ranging topics written by him. Includes rare texts, interviews from jail and speeches he made at conventions in Indianapolis and across the country. Also includes 1905 statement on race, gender and class, Canton, OH speech transcript, and closing arguments in the court case.

The Debs Project <https://debsproject.org>

A collaborative project of Debs scholars around nation. For the first time, contributors are building six volumes of Debs' writings, combined with contemporary political cartoons and photographs.

Indiana State University Debs Special Collections <http://library.indstate.edu/rbdc/debs/debs-idx.html>

includes 6000+ letters, telegrams, portraits, family scrapbooks, photos and political cartoons of the day, along with items from and about his family, contemporaries, socialism/socialist leaders and political movements. Many came directly from Eugene's niece; his brother, Theodore, was his personal assistant. Items have been collected from 1700+ individuals and groups including US government surveillance notes on Debs

Eugene V Debs Foundation <https://debsfoundation.org/>

A repository of Debs history and opinions. Founded in 1962, opened the Debs home as a **museum**. A few years later, created the annual **Eugene V Debs award** and banquet to honor someone whose work aligned with Debs' vision – advancing "industrial unionism, social justice or world peace." Past winners have included John Lewis, Dorothy Day, Coretta Scott King, Kurt Vonnegut, Studs Terkel, Edward Asner and Danny Glover

Read about **Deb's role in helping secure women's suffrage** and advocating for rights and equal pay for over 25 years. Debs was an early feminist. The website includes writings on the topic <https://debsfoundation.org/index.php/landing/debs-biography/womens-rights/>



Historical Context

Das Kapital/Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Karl Marx, 1867)

The most cited social sciences book prior to 1950. After 20 years of analysis, Marx lays out his deepest concerns and solutions to combat a widely-spreading economic engine that he thought was destructive – capitalism (out of feudalism.) Most of his peers (1700s-1800s) wrote about the benefits of the self-regulating/invisible hand of trade. This book is a foundational theoretical text.

When American Small Towns Loved Socialism (2019) <https://portside.org/2019-03-09/when-american-small-towns-loved-socialism>

This easy-to-read, mostly graphic article explains why socialism gained strong popularity in the U.S. Heartland in the 1800s to mid-1900s.

Socialist Party national platform of 1912 (and 1900, first year Debs ran for President) <http://sageamericanhistory.net/progressive/docs/SocialistPlat1912.htm> www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1900/0915-sdpa-platform.pdf

Truth Has a Power of Its Own: Conversations About A People's History (2019)

Collection of conversations between Howard Zinn and Ray Suarez re U.S. history from the perspective of people on the margins

Book Traces Origin of Phrase in WWJD Movement to Topeka Minister, Social Activist

<https://news.ku.edu/2015/04/24/book-traces-origin-phrase-wwjd-movement-topeka-minister-social-activist>

Read speeches by several contemporaries who held similar views to Debs and were vocal advocates: Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) Helen Keller and Albert Einstein. You might be surprised to know that the writer of the Pledge of Allegiance (Francis Bellamy, 1892), another contemporary, was a minister and Christian socialist.

Debs opposed violent revolution. **Read from other leaders** and groups that support(ed) nonviolent change over the last 100-200 years: *Gandhi, Martin Luther King* and notably, *Quaker writings*. One of the earliest writings for a Western audience on Gandhi's beliefs was written by a Quaker lawyer (1934)



Socialism 101 “Cheat Sheet,” Terms to Explore

NOTE ABOUT THIS “CHEAT SHEET”: *It is not necessary to understand or explain socialism in order to have a quality conversation about this film! Remember that Eugene Debs was faced with unifying a very broad range of American socialists. In the study of basic political science, at least 8 gradations of Socialism and types of socialism can be identified and each relates to both economic models and government leadership models. This sheet is only meant to offer a very basic understanding. Remember: Governance and economic philosophies are nuanced. Definitions can help. They can also lead to assumptions and to heated, stereotyping discussions. Each philosophy has many definitions. Discourage viewers from using labels.*

Capitalism is based on private ownership—free from government interference. Factories and businesses are owned by private individuals and not by the government. Owners decide what and when to produce something and how much it will cost.

Capitalism assumes that the most deserving person will win and prices will be kept as low as possible because consumers will seek the best product for the least amount of money. Supply and demand will dictate how many products there are and how many people want them.

Communism is based on principles meant to correct the problems caused by capitalism. It is a system designed to eliminate the gap between rich and poor. The most important principle of communism — there is no private ownership of property. In theory, property is shared, and the people are ultimately control the economy. Communist puts the power in everyone’s hands, but is controlled by an elite few. Profits are distributed supposedly evenly with the government keeping a fair share.

In 1848, Karl Marx saw capitalism as an outmoded economic system that exploited workers. They labored 12-14 hours a day, 6-7 days a week in dangerous, even deadly conditions. They earned paltry wages and had no rights. Marx, a German economist, sociologist and political theorist theorized that workers would eventually become outraged by the growing gap between rich and poor and rise against the rich. He published his ideas in the controversial *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*.

Traditional Socialism is an evolutionary state between Capitalism and Communism. This type of Socialism calls for wealth and income to be more equally shared among citizens and sometimes putting production in the hands of the people. Traditional Socialism is different from Communism in that the main goal is simply to narrow, but not eliminate the gap between rich and poor. Socialists do not believe that the workers will overthrow capitalists. Nor do they believe that all private property should be eliminated. While government leadership is often authoritarian, the goal is simply to better redistribute wealth in order to create a more just and fair society.

Democratic Socialism opposes an authoritarian government. Modern Democratic Socialists are also opposed to ending capitalism but instead support reforms that address inequalities is a philosophy that argues that capitalism is incompatible with the values of freedom and equality.



Broad History of Socialism

Roots of **socialism** were seen 2000+ years ago in loosely-styled forms of governing. **Liberalism** (an idea in response to *feudalism*) emerged in the 1700s alongside the U.S. and other revolutions. It picked up steam during the French Revolution, fed by Enlightenment thinkers. The world was coming out of the Dark/Middle Ages – an intentional effort by humanity to consider a more humane way to live together.

Capitalism was gaining strength at the same time (from its organic start in the Middle Ages.) It slowly became a way out for some whose economic fate was determined only by their station and master. Capitalism is basically private ownership of goods and services and private investment. Prices, costs, distribution, profits are determined by competitive free trade (vying for customers.)

While the idea of having power over one's livelihood was transforming, to many it seemed like more of the same – something for the elite, class/economic inequities of the Middle Ages. To address this worry, Marx developed an idea to remove classes and ensure everyone had enough through both political and economic transformation – **communism**. Communism guaranteed economic equity through an unchanging totalitarian central body that managed both the economy and governance. Marx thought the world had to move to communism over a long time. For him, socialism was the perfect transition between "free-for-all" capitalism where many were left without and communism. (To date, no country has been 100% communistic. All use a mix of political and economic philosophies.)

At the same time, western ideas of **democracy** and *liberty* (liberalism) were flourishing. To many, economic socialism plus democracy seemed a smart solution for addressing capitalism (snowballing) and guaranteeing the world would not return to the Middle Ages. (Some founding fathers leaned socialist as a tool to protect democracy and against income inequality which they worried would lead to a ruling class.)

In the U.S., socialism was widely popular in the 1800s-early 1900s (until the federal push against in the 1950s.) It appealed to Debs because he believed a democracy was responsible for ensuring it lived up to its democratic values – in all aspects. Socialist newspapers were among the most widely read newspapers in the country. Debs edited "The Appeal to Reason" which boasted over a million readers weekly. The Federal Government even subsidized the postal rates for Socialist newspapers deeming them key in the educational advancement of American citizens. By 1910, Socialist ideas became so popular that presidential candidates, including Teddy Roosevelt co-opted several of Debs' most popular ideas, many of which became law.

Many European immigrants in the late 1800's had grown up in Socialist countries and brought their values to the United States. The first organized U.S. party was founded in 1877 – the *Socialist Labor Party of America* (originally Workingmen's Party.) It still exists. But there were multiple factions of Socialists including Christian Socialists, Spiritualist Socialists, Traditional authoritarian Socialists, anarchists Democratic and Liberal Socialists. In 1901, Debs united the disparate groups to create *The Socialist Party of America*. His platform was dubbed "Debsian Socialism" because it was deemed purely American. It embraced elected leadership but called on the government to do more to improve the lives of citizens.

Countries are still experimenting with equity, democracy, social responsibility and capitalism. Today there is no pure capitalist or communist economy in the world. The United States has Social Security, a government-owned postal service. In China, the government now lets citizens keep some of the profits they earn. Which is to say, these models are starting places for different economic and social systems.

Most Americans have mixed beliefs about *personal freedoms and shared governance*, depending on the issue. Our personal "platforms" are often eclectic, even if we claim allegiance to a specific party.



What's Next? (Connect, Stay Curious, Get Involved)

Learn more. Explore more. Become a change agent. Get involved. These ideas might help.

To start, hop on WFYI's website and look for the following www.wfyi.org:

- **All IN:** one edition of this weekly call-in radio show features the film and Debs
- **Cultural Manifesto:** one edition of this weekly world music radio show will feature labor music
- **Curious Mix:** one story on this weekly arts and culture radio show features Debs
- **Simple Civics:** this web series covers civics topics like *Censorship During Times of War*, *How the Draft Works* and *Can You Run For President From Prison?*

VISIT

Visit **Debs museum/home** <https://debsfoundation.org/index.php/landing/visit-the-museum/>

Visit the historic district of **Pullman, Illinois** 12 miles south of the Chicago Loop. The National Park Service is creating the **Pullman National Monument** (administrative clock tower.) **Pullman State Historic Site** includes the *Pullman factory* and a *museum*. **Historic Pullman Foundation** manages a *visitor and interpretation center*. www.nps.gov/pull/index.htm, www.pullman-museum.org/, www.pullmanil.org/tours.htm,

Visit The **A. Philip Randolph Museum** which honors Randolph's leadership of African Americans and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the labor movement. Randolph played a key role in helping desegregate the United States' military. He also organized the March on Washington in 1963. www.aphiliprandolphmuseum.com

Visit the **Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture**. Comprehensive, interactive exhibits help all Americans see how' their stories, their histories and their cultures are shaped and informed by global influences.

<http://nmaahc.si.edu/>

Visit the *Power of Children* interactive exhibit at the **Children's Museum of Indianapolis** to learn more about Anne Frank, Ruby Bridges and Ryan White. Learn about youth who are change agents.

Visit the **Southern Poverty Law Center** (online) to learn about their work in economic justice, children's rights and prison reform, particularly in southern states. www.splcenter.org

GET CREATIVE

Create an **art piece**, **write a poem** or collaboratively create **a song** based on the film or on a quotation from Eugene Debs. Get super creative and record a **short video**! Visit an **art museum's** labor movement collection or a virtual, curated arts museum **Labor Arts**, hosted by New York University. This site also offers includes links to resource clearinghouses about labor and unions www.laborarts.org



EXPLORE THROUGH MEDIA

Watch a **POV (Point of View)** film like *Bisbee '17*, *The Uprising of '34*, and shorts like *Money Rules, Our Voices Are Rarely Heard*, *Common Ground*, *Public Money* www.pbs.org/pov

Explore two other **WFYI** films – *Eva: A-7063* and *Attucks: A School That Changed a City*. Companion discussion guides offer ideas for further exploring race, bias and social justice.

Sign up for the podcast **Ear Hustle** to better understand prison life as hosted and shared by inmates at San Quentin State Prison www.earhustlesq.com

GET OTHERS TALKING

Check out SPLC's companion project, **Teaching Tolerance** www.tolerance.org

Dozens of free resources to help you explore or teach around issues of rights and justice as well as the basics of civic education – literature lists, film kits, discussion guides, magazines

Organize your book club. **Read and discuss a fiction or nonfiction book.** Ask your librarian or reserve a free book kit online from **Indiana Humanities** (your state's humanities council.) A few ideas:

- Two novels written by Victor Hugo that deeply shaped Debs' thinking - **Les Misérables** (1862) and **The Hunchback of Notre Dame** (1831)
- **Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis** (J D Vance, 2016)
- **A World Waiting to Be Born: Civility Rediscovered** (M Scott Peck, 1993)
- **The Healing of America** (Marianne Williamson, 1997)
- **Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America** (Barbara Ehrenreich, 2011)
- **White Trash. The 400 Year Untold History of Class in America** (Nancy Isenberg, 2016)
- **The War on Normal People: The Truth About America's Disappearing Jobs and Why Universal Basic Income is Our Future** (Andrew Yang 2019, a data-centric book on the rapid rise of automation—a new industrial revolution) plus solutions for addressing seismic challenges

Explore **PBS Learning Media** www.pbslearningmedia.org for **lesson plans and multimedia stories** (by grade, topic) from around the U.S. - resources on civics, government, and the industrial era.

Organize a local event similar to the Smithsonian's program, **A Seat at the Table**. Inspired by Langston Hughes' iconic poem, participants come together for dinner where they eat and join lively conversations led by community leaders and noted speakers. Participants can expect civil conversation and lively discussions around topics of social justice. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/event/seat-table-well-being-through-lens-social-justice>.

Read **The Citizen's Share: Putting Ownership Back Into Democracy** (Blasi, Freeman, Kruse, 2013.) For a quick summary, go here: www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/what-the-founding-fathers-beli

Our Founding Fathers, especially Madison, Adams, Washington and Jefferson worried about the potential for income inequality over time. Many of their ideas were grounded in socialism – ensuring public lands, a broad base of shared resources, worker ownership of businesses, making sure that



property ownership was easy and accessible to the majority. In one of his first acts, Washington approved federal tax incentives to New England fisheries. In exchange, they had to create profit-sharing contracts with their workers. He tried to pass a law that denied the right of first-born sons to inherit family property.

PRACTICE NEW SKILLS

Make civic engagement a weekly *habit*. Listen to **How to Revive Your Belief in Democracy** (Eric, Liu, 2019), www.ted.com/talks/eric_liu_how_to_revive_your_belief_in_democracy

Read Karen Armstrong's practical guide (based loosely on Alcoholics Anonymous), **12 Steps To A Compassionate Life** or listen to her 30-minute **interview** on NPR's *Talk of the Nation* (2011) www.npr.org/2011/01/10/132809627/concrete-ways-to-live-a-compassionate-life

Practice civil conversations as a family with tips from **Doing Good Together** www.doinggoodtogether.org/bhf/blog/civil-conversation-skills-for-kids

Check helpful tips created by Diane Goodman PhD - **"Straight As" of facilitation** around thorny social topics www.umass.edu/tefd/sites/default/files/Straight%20A%27s%20of%20Facilitation.pdf

Connect with the **Civil Conversations Project** (Krista Tippett of *On Being*) for audio conversations, events, resources to support better conversations. Try a **Better Conversations Guide** with friends or peers. <https://onbeing.org/civil-conversations-project/>

If you feel divided from your family and friends who see social issues differently, take a few tips from Debs' playbook (via *Ted Talks*.) He seemed pretty adept at bridging the gap!

- **10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation** (Celeste Headlee, 2015, 15M+ views, 11.5 min) ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation?language=en
- **5 Ways to Listen Better** (Julian Treasure, 2011, 7M+ views, 7.5 min) www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better?language=en
- **How Our Friendship Survives Our Opposing Politics** (Caitlin Quattromani, Lauren Arledge, 2017, 1M+ views) www.ted.com/talks/caitlin_quattromani_and_lauran_arledge_how_our_friendship_survives_our_opposing_politics
- **How to Lead a Conversation Between People Who Disagree** - re a project that successfully brought together 25 liberals/25 conservatives from CA/AL to talk (Eve Pearlman, 2019, 2M views) www.ted.com/talks/eve_pearlman_how_to_lead_a_conversation_between_people_who_disagree
- **Ted Radio Hour: Dialogue and Exchange (July 2019)** 5 Ted speakers share how to better talk with the "other side." www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/558307433?showDate=2019-07-26
- **10 Tips for Talking about News and Current Events in Schools** <https://blog.ed.ted.com/2017/03/01/10-tips-for-talking-about-news-politics-and-current-events-in-schools/>

LEARN MORE

Organize a **poverty simulation** for a group of friends, peers at work. A Google search will net many organizations that will host one for you. Or try it alone at www.playspent.org



Dig into data from **Pew Research** re **how Americans feel about socialism** right now (summer 2019) or **Roper/Fortune Survey** (Gallup April 2019) www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/25/stark-partisan-divisions-in-americans-views-of-socialism-capitalism/ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/257639/four-americans-embrace-form-socialism.aspx>

Check out **iCivics**, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's legacy. This free, web-based resource engages students in high-quality civics education (knowledge, attitudes, literacy) iCivics.org

Learn about the complicated work of suffrage at the turn of the century. **Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage**. Find an event or two! Susan B Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth and the whole lot of them were considered troublemakers, too. Debs was an ally!

Discover **Howard Zinn** (d. 2010) one of many controversial, vocal modern-day revolutionaries. The Debs Foundation gave him a Eugene V Debs Award.

Before becoming an author and professor, he worked in shipyards and a warehouse – alongside the working class. Later, he taught at Spelman College but was fired after organizing students for Civil Right protests. His partner in protest was Ella Baker. Some of his more famous students were Marian Wright Edelman (founder, Children's Defense Fund), Alice Walker (Pulitzer Prize winning novelist) and Bernice Johnson Reagon (Freedom Singer composer, historian.) www.howardzinn.org/about/biography/

*Schools or legislatures in at least three states have attempted to censure/ban Zinn's books from schools, including Indiana. Having found no history textbook from which to teach the American story from the perspective of the people, he wrote **A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present** (Harper Collins, 1980)*

Follow the work of **Jobs With Justice** which leads local/national campaigns to improve wages, create secure jobs and develop an economy that benefits everyone. It uses grassroots networks. <https://jwj.org>

Get a copy of the **Bill of Rights** and **U.S. Constitution**. Suspend what you know. Make counter-arguments in your head. *How might you reorganize the US right now to best reflect the founding ideals? How would you have organized differently?* Don't worry. Be creative. No one's listening!

Re-acquaint yourself with Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Read his **Letters from Birmingham Jail** (1963)
- Visit The King Center website. Talk with friends about the precepts of Beloved Community and non-violence (<https://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>)
- Learn about his prophetic work in the *Poor People's Campaign*, economic justice and labor activism.
- Explore King's interest in socialism, **To The Promised Land: Martin Luther King and the Fight for Economic Justice** (Michael Honey, 2018)

Take a deep dive into "topical" justice issues – housing, employment, healthcare or justice.

- Find out local realities in your town. Get on the ground. Take on a short-term, low-wage job if you don't have one.



- Find out about **The Sentencing Project**. Watch the film, **13th**.
- Check out the **Prison Policy Initiative** (non-partisan research and “actionable” data re growing industry/incarceration, advocacy work, state profiles on rates, where, by race, for what) www.prisonpolicy.org
- Explore **writings by Angela Davis, Ta-Nehisi Coates or Bryan Stevenson**.
- Read **The Color of Law** (history of institutional housing discrimination in the U.S.)
- Seek out **perspectives from inside an activist group you may not agree with**.

Follow the economic justice work of **Sojourner**, an inter-denominational, inter-cultural group of progressive and conservative Christians (since 1970s) <https://sojo.net/join/campaigns/economic-justice>

Read three articles from **Christian Science Monitor**:

- **Teens Take The National Stage Armed With...Civic Lessons?** (March 2018) www.csmonitor.com/EqualEd/2018/0323/Teens-take-the-national-stage-armed-with-civics-lessons
- **Faces of a New Capitalism: How Millennials are Embracing Socialist Values** (Oct 2018) www.csmonitor.com/Business/2018/1011/Faces-of-a-new-capitalism-How-Millennials-are-embracing-socialist-values
- **Conflict Exhaustion or Democracy Resistance? The Age of In-Your-Face Activism** (Oct 2018) www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2018/1010/Conflict-exhaustion-or-democracy-renaissance-The-age-of-in-your-face-activism

START A REVOLUTION: TALK TO SOMEONE FROM THE “OTHER SIDE”

Make a friend of a different political party, culture, life experience or religion. Bring a friend! Regularly talk over dinner or a walk. Start a **MeetUp** to socialize with the “other.”

Recreate the **Occidental Literary Club**.

At age 20, Debs began inviting inspiring orators/culture-shapers like Robert Ingersoll, Susan B Anthony, Wendall Phillips, James Whitcomb Riley to Terre Haute on a weekly basis, inviting residents to discuss and debate with one another. (Learn from the Debs Foundation why Susan B Anthony caused a revolt when she was invited!)

Get involved in a local interfaith body – or start one! In Indianapolis, try the **Center for Interfaith Cooperation**. CIC brings people from all faiths together to learn about and from each other. It offers volunteer opportunities, summer camps, events and festivals. www.centerforinterfaithcooperation.org/

Create a group of neighbors to continue the conversation. Or, step up your game. **Organize and host intimate, community-wide dinner conversations** between residents whose lives rarely cross paths, like ones happening in Columbus, Chicago, Portsmouth and other towns. www.everyday-democracy.org/news/new-take-role-public-volunteers-public-engagement

Create a group, join a club or volunteer - find a natural opportunity for you to develop authentic relationships, share meals, explore books or enjoy activities with people whose paths you rarely cross.



Explore local groups founded by cultures, ideas or faiths little known to you. Attend their public events. Follow them on social media (e.g. local theatre, art group, business network, industry collaborative, university, media outlet, club and speaker series’.)

Host a **reflective civic dialogue** with tools from **The Center for Civic Reflection** (originally housed at Valparaiso University.) It has training on how to facilitate good-quality discussions at work, in school, in your community, a resource library of readings for reflective or provocative conversation, tips for good conversation and sample discussion plans. <https://civicreflection.org/>.

STAND UP

Did the film **inspire you to speak up as a young person? Or as an adult who mentors young people?** An online search will net hundreds of books and stories about youth of all ages advocating for change. Local nonprofits offer meaningful service and leadership opportunities for youth.

- National and international NGOs support meaningful youth service and leadership.
- In Indiana, reach out to **Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana**.
- Find K-12 lessons, ideas, support and mini-grants at **Learning to Give**. www.learningtogive.org.
- Visit **YouthGiving** to learn about the extraordinary work/philanthropy of youth, as well as resources to support them. www.youthgiving.org
- Listen to **Malala Yousafzai**, a young, vocal teen in Pakistan when growing intolerance made it difficult for girls to learn. She’s now an advocate for girls education and Noble Prize winner.

Connect with **Citizen University**. This group is on a mission to build a strong civic culture of citizens engaged and empowered as problem-solvers across the U.S. The co-founder is Eric Liu. Become a **Civil Seminarian** to help them establish a local **Civic Saturday** program, a weekly gathering of residents from all walks of life. Apply for **Youth Collaboratory**, a year-long program for young adults. Grab a **Joy of Voting Toolkit**. <https://citizenuniversity.us>

Become a **“Sworn-Again” Citizen** www.swornagainamerica.us/

Learn about **The Bail Project** and how to start/support one in your own community <https://bailproject.org>. Learn more via a *Ted Talks*: www.ted.com/talks/robin_steinberg_what_if_we_ended_the_injustice_of_bail

Find tools at **Everyday Democracy** www.everyday-democracy.org. This group morphed out of the Study Circles Resource Center (1989). It offers tested, step-by-step *discussion guides* for community conversations around many topics, plus tools to move from talk to action, training, coaching and other resources for becoming everyday change-makers.