



ESSAY RULES*

General Guidelines:

- ♦ **In Microsoft Word format**
- ♦ **500-750 words in length**
- ♦ **12-point font, 1” margins**
- ♦ **Double-spaced**
- ♦ **Include name and address on separate cover page**
- ♦ **Include title at top of first page of text**
- ♦ **Absolutely no plagiarism**
- ♦ **Submitted by March 19, 2011 via email to debsessay@frontier.com**

***For complete rules, see website www.debsfoundation.org**

Essay Prompt

“The future of labor, the destiny of the working class, depends wholly upon its own solidarity.”

**From “A Plea for Solidarity”
by Eugene V. Debs, March 1914**

Using the above quote as the basis of your essay, explain how Debs’ words apply to America today.

The Debs Foundation website, www.debsfoundation.org provides additional information on Debs and his work that may be useful to you.

Students may enter the contest more than once, but past winners of the Eugene V. Debs essay contest are not eligible to win a second time.

\$500 First Prize



EUGENE V. DEBS (1855-1926)

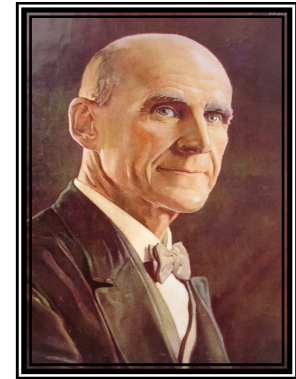
The Enlightenment principles of equality, fraternity and justice were a consuming passion for Terre Haute native Eugene V. Debs. More than being a union leader or Socialist, Debs was first and foremost a humanitarian. He became an advocate not only for the rights of workers, but also for African Americans, women and children, as well as being an outspoken peace advocate.

As a pioneering labor leader, Debs promoted shorter hours, restrictions on child labor, and the right of workers to organize unions and strike in order to protect their interests. He began his career in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF). However, Debs became frustrated over the ineffectiveness of the railroad brotherhoods, which were organized by craft. In 1893, he founded the American Railway Union (ARU), the first major industry-wide union in America.

The "Pullman Boycott" grew out of the ARU's sympathy for the plight of oppressed workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company. When Pullman executives refused all efforts at mediation, Debs had no choice but to lead the ARU in the boycott. The federal government sent in the National Guard to break the strike and destroy the up-start union, and Debs was sentenced to six months in jail for violating an injunction against the strike. The Pullman Strike taught Debs that major changes were necessary in our laws if workers' rights were to be advanced. After his release from Woodstock jail, he aligned with the American Socialist Party and became its presidential candidate.

Debs saw his presidential campaigns primarily as educational, a way to spread awareness of his vision of a better society where social justice and equality would prevail. Debs ran in five presidential elections: 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1920. He ran his last race from the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, where he was serving a 10-year sentence for giving a speech protesting America's involvement in World War I. As Convict No. 9653, Debs received nearly one million votes that year. However, the true measure of Debs' influence is not counted in votes alone. During his campaigns, Debs and the Socialist Party put a number of issues on the national agenda and advanced by decades legislation achieving these objectives for working class America. That list includes giving women the right to vote, restricting child labor, improving workplace safety, and protecting workers' rights to join unions and, when necessary, to strike.

EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION ESSAY CONTEST



\$500 First Prize

Open to all Vigo County Juniors and Seniors

Deadline March 19, 2011

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The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a non-profit, private organization founded in 1962. The Foundation maintains the home of Eugene and Kate Debs as a museum and shrine to labor. It conducts educational programs which aim to honor and promote the goals for which Debs struggled: industrial unionism, social justice, and peace. Each year in October, the Foundation holds a banquet and presents the Eugene V. Debs Award to an individual whose work in the field of labor, public service, or education has made a significant contribution to society in the "Debsian" tradition. In this way, the Foundation honors the memory of Debs while helping to keep alive the spirit of progressivism, humanitarianism and social criticism he epitomized. The Debs Home Museum is a State and National Historic Landmark. Built in 1890, the home at 451 North 8th Street in Terre Haute is open Tuesday through Saturday from 1:00 to 4:30 P.M. Admission is free.

Cover image: M. Baer, 1920