

The Debs Foundation Newsletter

PO BOX 9454 ■ TERRE HAUTE INDIANA 47808-9454



Spring/Summer 2020

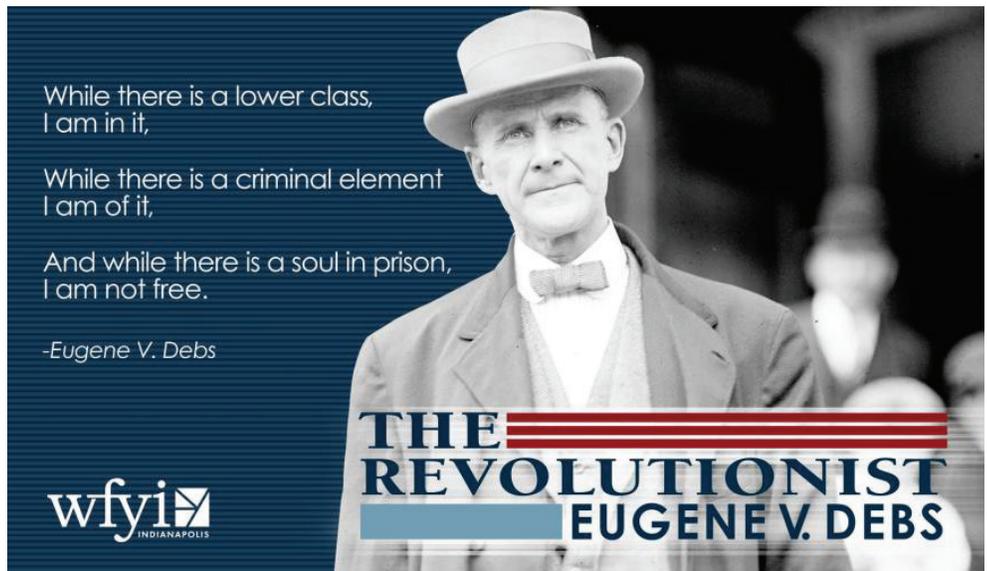
Revolutionist on the Road

The dynamic life of Eugene V. Debs continues to spark enthusiasm today, notably in WFYI Public Media's documentary film, *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*. Produced by Kim Hood Jacobs and Kyle Travers, and narrated by acclaimed actor, activist, and Debs Award recipient Danny Glover, the film has won two regional Emmy Awards for Best Historical Documentary and Best Writer (Kim Hood Jacobs). Tracing Debs' early roots in the then-frontier town of Terre Haute to his role as a budding labor agitator turned revolutionary socialist, the documentary offers a glimpse into a deeply unequal past that informs the tumultuous present.

The Debs Foundation hosted the world premiere of *The Revolutionist* in Terre Haute on September 27th, 2019. The film made its broadcast premiere the following October. Since then, Debsians across the country have used the film as a tool to promote understanding of Debs' relevance in their own communities.

From **New York**: The Amalgamated Bank hosted a screening of the film at the Cinopolis multiplex in New York on October 29, 2019. Co-sponsors were the NY Labor History Association, the Amalgamated Life Insurance Company, Workers United, and the New York City Central Labor Council. A lively discussion with an informed and engaged audience followed the film screening; it was led by Noel Beasley, retired president of Workers United, and President of the Debs Foundation, and Kim Jacobs, who co-wrote and co-produced the film. An honored guest for the evening was Philoine Fried, aged 102, daughter of labor icons Sidney Hillman and Bessie Abramowitz, and a longtime supporter of the Debs Foundation.

Foundation board member Gail Malmgreen was present and gave the film high marks: "It's a complicated history. The film's strength is that it emphasizes what a great soul Debs was, with a powerful universal appeal that transcended ideology. A few generations ago, progressives and labor leaders of all stripes, across the country and especially here in New York City, would have known who Debs was. He was sometimes seen as a Christ-like figure – and can certainly be seen as akin to an inspirational leader like Martin Luther King, Jr." The discussion went on to address decisions made about what to include in the film; its suitability for classrooms, union halls, and public television; the choice of title; and the hot topics of class and socialism, as they play out in our current political environment. Supplementary materials are available on the Debs Foundation website, including a 30-page study guide; a timeline of Debs' life; and an interview with the historian Paul Buhle, who appears in the film. (Jane LaTour, NY Labor History Association)



Narrated by Danny Glover, WFYI Indianapolis' new Debs documentary premiered last fall

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Revolutionist on the Road

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Next, to **Bloomington, Indiana:**

About 80 people gathered to view *The Revolutionist* on December 8, 2019 at the Monroe County Public Library. This event was co-hosted by The Debs Foundation, Democracy for Monroe County, Bloomington Democratic Socialists of America, Jobs with Justice, John Hamilton for Mayor, Monroe County Democratic Party, IU College Democrats, and

the IU Young Democratic Socialists of America.

Producer Kim Hood Jacobs introduced the film. Michael Sullivan and Chuck Deppert, who along with Kim were instrumental in the making of the film, were also in attendance. Following the screening, there was a panel discussion on Debs' relevance in today's world, featuring panelists Kim Hood Jacobs, Jeff Isaac, and Joe Varga, and moderated by IU YDSA President Jessy Tang. One of the most interesting discussion points was a difference of opinion between Jeff and Joe, IU professors of political science and labor studies, respectively, about the most effective way for activism and socialist principles to impact modern politics. The overall reaction to the film was extremely positive, with several attendees remarking that they had learned a lot and were glad for a concise and informative way to teach others about Debs. (Kaisa Goodman, Eugene V. Debs Foundation)

Westward to **Lawrence, Kansas:**

The University of Kansas screening of the new documentary, *The Revolutionist: Eugene V. Debs*, occurred on February 12, 2020, at Burge Union. The event was sponsored by the Eugene V. Debs Foundation, KU American Studies Department, and the Graduate Teaching Assistants Coalition (GTAC-AFT). Despite snow and cold temperatures, the program was attended by 37 people. A panel discussion followed the film, with Debs Foundation president, Noel Beasley, KU American Studies Professor Betsy Esch, and Ph.D. students Neill Kennedy and Bobby Cervantes participating.

In his opening remarks, Noel Beasley pointed out that Debs and the Socialist Party had a number of links to eastern Kansas. For a time, Debs resided in Girard, Kansas, while editing the socialist newspaper, the Appeal to Reason. In the 1912 presidential campaign, Debs carried Gi-

rard and Crawford County Kansas, with 35% of the vote in a four candidate contest. In the same election, the Crawford County Socialist Party was successful in winning nearly all of the county's offices. Beasley also reminded the audience that Debs had spoken at Lawrence, Kansas, on December 18, 1909. In that speech, Debs declared:

"The world's leaders are demagogues who are opposed to social order... The world produces enough but the trouble is it does not distribute what it produces equally or honestly among those who produce it."

Noel described Debs' Lawrence comments as relevant today as they were more than a century ago. He also expressed his hope that the new film will "...draw attention, both to the differences and similarities of the 19th and 20th centuries with the tumultuous period we are now in", and that it will educate and mobilize people as we approach an extremely important national election. (Tim Kelley, Eugene V. Debs Foundation)

Additional screenings have been hosted from **Pullman, Illinois** to **South Portland, Maine**, and in **Terre Haute** at the Vigo County History Center.

In June, Senator Bernie Sanders hosted a live virtual screening followed by a discussion with Danny Glover and David Nichols, correspondent for *The Nation*. To date, this screening and discussion have been viewed over 200,000 times.

Ready to continue the conversation? Host your own virtual or physically distanced screening. The full film, plus trailers and a comdiscussion guide, are available at wfyi.org/debs. DVD copies are available for \$20 each in the Debs Museum gift shop. *The Revolutionist* is an excellent tool for crafting thoughtful dialogue on Eugene V. Debs, his historic impact, and his enduring significance in today's world.

EUGENE V. DEBS FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020

Published by

The Eugene V. Debs Foundation

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Terre Haute, IN 47808

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The Debs Foundation Newsletter is published twice yearly for distribution to supporters and friends of the Foundation. The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a non-profit, private organization which maintains the home of Eugene and Kate Debs as a museum and shrine to labor, and carries on educational and informational programs which aim to honor and promote the goals for which Debs struggled: industrial unionism, social justice, and peace. For those wishing to become supporters, a donation form is provided elsewhere in this issue.

Debs in Our Voices: Walls and Bars



On June 20th, 2020, the Debs Foundation and Museum recognized our third annual (and first virtual) Eugene V. Debs Day with a live presentation of *Debs in Our Voices: Walls and Bars*. Twenty-seven readers, from Los Angeles to New York, Atlanta to Chicago, and back to Terre Haute, brought Debs' words to life with a virtual reading of his writings on the prison system. Other relevant texts were included, such as Debs' 1918 Statement to the Court, as well as testimonials by Hellen Keller, Ralph Chaplin, and James Whitcomb Riley. The event originally streamed on Facebook Live. A captioned recording of the event is now available at: debsfoundation.org.

NPR Podcast Highlights Debs

NPR's history podcast *Throughline* peers into the past to understand the present. Released in March, the episode "American Socialist" delves into the life of Eugene V. Debs and the trajectory of socialism in the early twentieth century, illustrating how this history shapes the present day. Co-hosts Ramtin Arablouei and Rund Abdelfatah interview Nick Salvatore, author of *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*; Ernest Freeberg, author of *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent*; and Allison Duerk, director of the Debs Museum.

Listen at this link or on your preferred podcasts app: <https://n.pr/3jyBSCq>

npr



Debs Award Dinner Postponed Until 2021

The Debs Award Dinner had been scheduled for September 12, 2020. The Foundation selected the next recipient of the Award to be the Innocence Project, an organization which plays a major role in fighting for the exoneration and rights of the wrongly convicted. After discussion during the Spring meeting of the Foundation's Board of Directors, it was unanimously concluded to present the Award to the Innocence Project on a yet to be determined date in 2021. The primary reasons for the decision were the dangerous and uncertain conditions in the world and in the U.S. that would make it impossible to predict whether we could hold any kind of a successful event in the Fall of this year.

**INNOCENCE
PROJECT**

One hundred years ago, Gene Debs was Convict No. 9653 while he ran for President of the United State from his cell in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. He received almost a million votes. He was imprisoned for the crime of exercising his right to freedom of speech by declaiming against the role of the United State government in the First World War. He wrote about his experiences in the penitentiary and his reflections on the injustices suffered by prisoners in "Walls and Bars," one of the most important books ever published about the American penal system. A century later,

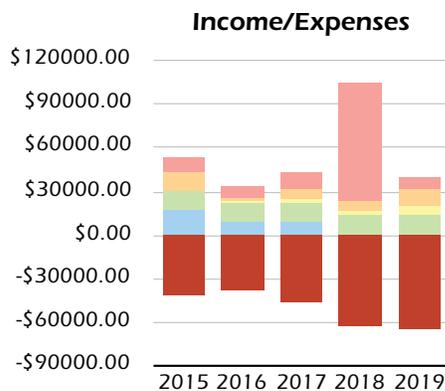
as we prepare to vote again for candidates for the President of our country, the critical issues Debs raised about the prison system have yet to be addressed and remedied.

The Debs Foundation will be pleased to honor the work and accomplishments of the Innocence Project in 2021. The words of Prisoner No. 9653 are as pertinent, precise and prescient now as they were when he wrote them. We will not wait another hundred years to create a just society.

2019 Financial Report

Five-Year Profit/Loss Comparison

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Dues, Donations and Support	\$ 11175.00	\$ 8848.20	\$ 11834.00	\$ 80388.48	\$ 7521.53
Banquet Income	\$ 13165.00	\$ 1216.00	\$ 6228.00	\$ 7709.70	\$ 12581.37
Memorabilia Income	\$ 196.00	\$ 1442.00	\$ 3211.00	\$ 2112.13	\$ 6287.77
Investment Income	\$ 11874.00	\$ 12612.00	\$ 13280.00	\$ 14261.24	\$ 13249.47
Capital Gains (Realized)	\$ 17489.00	\$ 9176.00	\$ 9347.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
Total Revenue	\$ 53901.00	\$ 32421.00	\$ 54526.00	\$ 104471.55	\$ 41499.06
Expenses	\$(40,028.00)	\$(37,865.00)	\$(46056.00)	\$(61652.10)	\$(63344.07)
Net Income (Loss)	\$ 13873.00	\$ (5444.00)	\$ 8470.00	\$ 42819.45	\$(21845.01)



Expense Breakdown (2019)

Salaries, Other Compensation, and Employee Benefits	\$ 24205.73
Professional Fees and Other Payments to Independent Contractors	\$ 12073.86
Occupancy, Rent, Utilities, and Maintenance	\$ 10963.74
Printing, Publications, Postage, and Shipping	\$ 3058.59
Other Expenses	\$ 13042.15
Total Expenses	\$ 63344.07

Labor Folklore for Your Inbox

Fridays Labor Folklore is a free weekly newsletter bringing its readers working-class heritage and tradition. Subscribe and find all back issues, including "Gene Debs Remembered" at: <https://conta.cc/30x10Ry>

Call for Conference Papers

"While There Is A Soul In Prison, I Am Not Free" ■ The History of Solidarity in Social and Economic Justice

April 9-10, 2021 at Indiana State University
 Sponsored by the Eugene V. Debs Foundation, Cunningham Memorial Library, and the Department of History at Indiana State University
 Keynote Address: Peter Cole, PhD., Professor of History at Western Illinois University

The conference's theme is broadly the history of solidarity in social and economic justice, and the organizers are specifically interested in the fields of labor and social movement history. However, to give specific focus to prison abolitionism and mass incarceration, special attention will be given to scholars and activists working in the prison abolitionist movement. Themes in terms of geographic location and time are being left purposefully open to encourage a wide range of topics in world history throughout the long struggle of working class social movements.

To submit a paper or panel proposal, email a 200-300 word abstract with a CV by December 31, 2020 to all of the organizers at:

Wesley Bishop, wbishop@marian.edu ■ Nancy Gabin, ngabin@purdue.edu
 Micki Morahn, michelle.morahn@debsfoundation.org ■ Lisa Phillips, Lisa.Phillips@indstate.edu
 More information: debsfoundation.org/index.php/2019/10/04/call-for-conference-papers

Jailbird

Noel Beasley

The place is the Atlanta Federal Prison, the year is 1920 and it is Election Day for President of the United States. Eugene V. Debs is in his cell and listening to radio reports as the ballots are being counted. We are watching a production of a new play called *Jailbird*, written by **Colin McLaughlin** and produced in St. Louis in November 2019 by **Bread and Roses Missouri**.

Using the techniques pioneered by Bertolt Brecht, the playwright provides a panoramic review of Debs' life and work. A chorus of performers assumes a number of roles. Key figures in Debs' life appear and engage with him in both political and personal discussions



The cast of *Jailbird* brings to life the saga of Convict No. 9653

that enrich our knowledge of not just the great socialist leader but of those who assisted and those who resisted his positions.

The characters are not cardboard stereotypes but have depth and conviction. McLaughlin has done a masterful job of presenting through monologues and dialogues the complexity of that period of U.S. history. The actors brought warmth and sincerity to performances which were lively and staged with great skill.



Playwright Colin McLaughlin wrote the imaginative play *Jailbird*

The current focus of filmmakers and authors on Debs is inspiring and long overdue. One hundred years later, while engaging once again in the election of a president of our country, we owe it to our future to expose and explain the true facts of our past. Walls and bars could not restrain the courage, bravery and determination of Gene Debs and his generation of comrades and crusaders. Thank you Colin and thank you Bread and Roses Missouri for this bold and imaginative production.

Museum Director's Report

Allison Duerk

Eugene V. Debs exemplified hope and solidarity in the face of adversity—qualities that we can all draw upon during difficult times. While our era is already unpredictable, the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak presents a particularly difficult challenge for cultural institutions. To prevent the continued spread of the virus and practice physical distancing, the Debs Museum closed to the public in mid-March. This closing will likely extend through at least the fall of 2020 to as we move forward with the long-anticipated resotation of the 1890 Debs Home. Please consult our website for updates on this closure before planning a visit in the coming season.

Even as usual museum programming is halted, I am exploring new avenues for keeping the Debs legacy alive, including live video tours, virtual events, and an increased presence on social media platforms. Closing to the public also frees up extra time for redesigning the exhibits on the second floor, just one of many exciting things to come in the next year. Still, the museum will lose revenue from visitor donations and gift shop purchases. Supporters can help make up the difference by donating online at donate.debsfoundation.org and by ordering memorabilia from our online store.

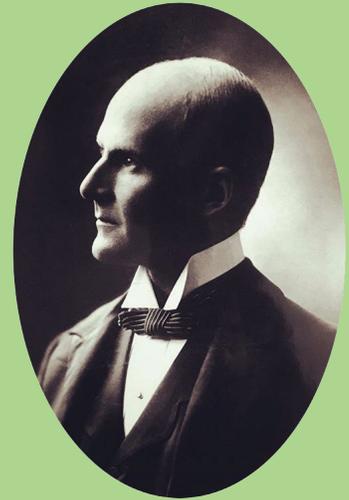
With all that said, the museum continues on a positive trajectory. Attendance steadily climbed through 2019, dozens attended the 40th Anniversary Celebration of the John Laska Murals in September, and we ended the year with our first Holiday Open House, complete with reproductions of Gene and Kate's Christmas cards and a lovely tree in the parlor. Many thanks to foundation secretary **Michelle K. Morahn** and stalwart volunteer **John S. Morahn** for their work in making that event a success.

Special appreciation is also due to **DiAndre Francis** and **Kevin Tengdin**, two Indiana State University students who completed internships at the museum during the fall semester of 2019. They were both assets to the museum as researchers and docents, as well as by aiding in day-to-day tasks at the house. DiAndre wrote of his internship experience, "I learned about a movement that desired a society built on a foundation of respect and prosperity for the people, and their dedicated pursuits against injustice. I will treasure the words of Eugene V. Debs and the history of this political movement."

In Debs' Words

from his 1915 article "My Political Faith"

"In competition we have fought each other savagely and engendered the spirit of selfishness, jealousy, and hate. In cooperation we shall be taught to practice mutual kindness and mutual aid. Working together in harmonious cooperation we shall rise to a higher plane and become conscious of the inherent divinity of our nature."



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The Eugene V. Debs Foundation is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit educational organization. Your contributions are tax-deductible. The Foundation owns and maintains the Eugene V. Debs Home and Museum and offers educational and cultural programs.

Your Continued Support Makes It Possible!