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ARTICLE

"A Crime Against Humanity": Prison, Capitalism, and Convict No. 9653 (Eugene V. Debs)

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Abstract

This article explores Eugene V. Debs's experiences at the Moundsville prison and the federal penitentiary in Atlanta (1919–1921). It looks at his relationships with other inmates and his supporters outside of prison and examines the effects prison life had on Debs and his ideology. Most importantly, it closely examines his only book-length work: his prison memoir, *Walls and Bars*. It explores Debs's critique of the prison system, the jailing of drug addicts, and the interconnectedness of capitalism and the penitentiary system.

Keywords: prison; capitalism; socialism; Eugene V. Debs; radicals

In an article that Eugene Debs published in *Century Magazine* in 1922 and later reproduced in his 1927 book, *Walls and Bars*, he stated, "Personally, I feel amply rewarded for the opportunity that was given me to see and know the prison as it is, for while I was a prisoner at Atlanta I learned more of a vital nature to me than could have been taught me in any similar period in the classroom of any university." For Debs, his imprisonment provided an opportunity to study "human nature in the abstract," but he also found prison to be a place "above all others, where one comprehends the measureless extent of man's inhumanity to man." Debs hated the prison system; he thought it was "the most loathsome and debasing of human institutions."[1] Nearly thirty years before that article was published, Debs discovered one of the many reasons why he hated prisons: "From the hour of my first imprisonment in a filthy county jail I recognized the fact that the prison was essentially an institution for the punishment of the poor." Beginning from his time at the Cook County jail in 1894 and lasting for the rest of his life, he believed "it to be my duty to do all in my power to humanize it as far as possible while it exists, and at the same time to put forth all my efforts to abolish the social system which makes the prison necessary by creating the victims who rot behind its ghastly walls."[2] And it was in prison where Debs "saw in a way I never had before the blighting, disfiguring, destroying effects of capitalism. I saw here accentuated and made more hideous and revolting than is manifest in the outer world the effects of the oppression and cruelty inflicted upon the victims of this iniquitous system."[3]

In September 1918, Eugene Debs received a ten-year sentence for violating the Espionage Act because of an anti-war speech he had made in Canton, Ohio, in June 1918.[4] Imprisoned from April 1919 to December 1921, first at the West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville and then at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary in Georgia, his time in prison convinced him that by abolishing capitalism, the penitentiary system would become superfluous. His time in prison also gave him the opportunity to examine prisons and prisoners in a way most criminologists and reformers could not: as a convict. After his release from Atlanta, Bell Syndicate, a national press organization, commissioned him to write a series of articles covering his time as a political prisoner. Journalist David Karsner, his friend and biographer, agreed to help Debs with the articles. The pieces that Bell published were heavily censored, however, omitting Debs's blistering attacks on capitalism and its relation to the prison system.[5]

Walls and Bars represented the culmination of Debs's prison experiences, as well as his more than two-decade struggle for socialism. Yet the existing historical scholarship on Debs fails to adequately examine his prison memoir, the only book-length work he produced. Until Nick Salvatore's *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (1982), the most important work on Debs was Ray Ginger's *The Bending Cross* (1949). While Ginger cites *Walls and Bars* a few times throughout the text, the title of the work does not appear. It is not until the "Selected Chapter Sources" that we see it and, even then, the description is brief: "The best source for this period is the series of newspaper columns by Eugene Debs, published after his death as *Walls and Bars*."[6] Like Ginger's work, Salvatore's *Citizen and Socialist* makes no reference to Debs's book and lacks even a brief description of it.[7] *Walls and Bars* received much more attention in historian Ernest Freeberg's *Democracy's Prisoner*, but Freeberg is more concerned "about the limits of free speech in times of war" than with Debs's revolutionary ideology.[8] Centering *Walls and Bars* and Debs's prison experiences provides an opportunity to reevaluate previous attempts to define both his thought and identity, and the process by which Debs developed both. Historians have placed Debs in a specific historical camp or ideological group; thoroughly dissected his theoretical prowess (or lack thereof); and long debated his place within the American radical tradition, as well as American, or "Debsian," socialism—from both a national and transnational perspective—and the role and influence of Christianity on Debs's ideology and activism.[9] Scholars have also disagreed about Debs's path to socialism, debating whether there was some kind of dramatic conversion experienced during his first imprisonment after being gifted Karl Marx's *Capital*, or if the course was more gradual, shaped by an increasing awareness of socialist theory, and most importantly, life experiences.[10] While there was not some dramatic conversion to socialism for Debs while imprisoned, it was his prison experiences that, more than anything, solidified his revolutionary anti-capitalism. And by looking at Eugene Debs through his prison experiences and his prison memoir *Walls and Bars*, we can set aside trying to locate a specific identity and focus on the fundamental elements of Debs's character that have made him such an enduring historical figure: his genuine love for people and the unwavering wanting to help those who, in his view, were suffering under an oppressive economic system.

In *Prisons and the American Conscience*, Paul W. Keve highlights Debs's "quality as a truly caring person," which "endeared him to union members and political radicals," and how "that simple quality of caring now assured his affectionate acceptance" by his fellow prisoners at Atlanta.[11] And although Keve acknowledges this critical aspect of Debs and briefly outlined his prison experiences, there is no analysis of Debs's overall view of the penitentiary system and the crucial role capitalism played in the construction of that

system, or of the concrete reforms regarding incarceration that Debs offered in *Walls and Bars*. Keve is not alone in this oversight. Historians and scholars who have written about prison reform and the people working toward reform in the Progressive Era have mostly ignored or have barely addressed Debs's views and ideas regarding prison reform.[12] Rather, they have placed their emphasis on educated individuals and people who operated within more conventional channels, such as Thomas Mott Osborne, a progressive New York capitalist and philanthropist who voluntarily went to prison for a week to study prison conditions in New York.[13] While Debs believed in and agitated for the abolition of capitalism, which, in turn, could abolish existing carceral institutions, he acknowledged that it would not happen overnight.[14] Along with the revolutionary rhetoric found within his prison memoir, Debs also put forward several reforms he thought would "humanize [prison] as far as possible while it exists." First, local communities had to concern themselves with their county jails. According to Debs, communities should look at who was held in county jails, examine why they were there, inspect the food served, study why someone was imprisoned, and demand that inmates either be immediately tried or released.[15] He also called for a complete overhaul of the prison labor system. He wanted to replace the political governance of prisons with a "commission consisting of resident men and women of the highest character."[16] The commission of experts would "have absolute control, including the power of pardon, parole, and commutation."[17]

And while *Walls and Bars* has largely been ignored by historians, criminologists Kenneth Tunnell and Edward Green argue that Debs's work has also been omitted "from the criminological canon."[18] Further, they argue, "*Walls and Bars* offers a sociohistorical explanation for America's use of prisons as it describes the structural relationships of early [twentieth] century American society to prisons. Novel at the time, these elementary observations about crime and punishment were soon taken up by others and over time became central to criminology—although without reference to Debs and his book."[19] For example, in the introduction to *Crime and Capitalism: Readings in Marxist Criminology*, sociologist David Greenberg stated, "From the mid-1920s on … radical perspectives virtually disappeared from the criminology literature, at least in the English language."[20] Green and Tunnell assert that the major themes found in Debs's work—"economic inequality, the criminogenic character of capitalism, the importance of social structure, the subjective and dynamic definitions of crime and criminal, abolition of prisons, the medicalization of drug abuse and an early call for something akin to convict criminology"—remain critical to and are still "relevant to current positions within critical criminology."[21] In an immensely extensive, broad-ranging, and rapidly expanding, yet already vast, amount of scholarship, social scientists continue to ruminate and expound upon themes found in *Walls and Bars*.[22]

The first section of this article explores Debs's experiences at the prison in Moundsville and the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. It examines his relationships with other inmates and his supporters outside of prison, as well as the effects prison life had on Debs. The second section is a detailed examination of *Walls and Bars* that explores its origins and discusses its main arguments. It examines Debs's critique of the prison system, the jailing of drug addicts, the problems of cash bail, and the interconnectedness of capitalism and the penitentiary system.

From Moundsville to Atlanta

Debs arrived at the West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville on April 13, 1919. He did not make the trip alone. Accompanying him were his brother-in-law, Arthur Baur, as

well as David Karsner, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Louis Engdahl.[23] Warden Joseph Z. Terrel and the prison physician were waiting for Debs and his associates. His traveling companions waited in the warden's office as he was processed. Upon the warden's return, Wagenknecht, Karsner, and Engdahl began questioning him regarding the type of treatment Debs would receive at the prison. "He will be allowed to write all the letters he pleases," said Warden Terrell, "subject of course to limitations and to the prison censorship. He may receive visitors twice a month, but the understanding seems to be that visitors coming from some distance would be allowed to see Debs at almost any time." There would be no restrictions on papers, magazines, and books sent to Debs, but he would not be allowed to pass anything out to other inmates. "I am just going to use common sense in my treatment of Debs," the warden told them.[24] Because of Debs's advanced age of sixty-three, he would not be required to do any prison labor.[25] He would end up having to perform "light duties" in the prison hospital, "where he could 'lend a hand when he felt like it.'"[26] Terrell would later say that Debs "was a man of character, courage, integrity, and intelligence."[27] The respect Terrell afforded Debs was returned in kind.

The living conditions Debs experienced in Moundsville were similar to his experiences at the McHenry County Jail in Woodstock, Illinois, where he was held when he and some of his American Railway Union (ARU) associates were arrested for violating injunctions issued during the 1894 Pullman Strike. Writing to his parents in 1895, Debs described the jail in Woodstock as "the best jail in the state." The beds were clean and comfortable, they ate with the sheriff's family, they had plenty of room, and he described Sheriff Eckert as "a noble man."[28] Detailing his living conditions in Moundsville in a 1919 letter to his brother, Debs felt "lucky" to be in this particular prison: "Since I had to be imprisoned I congratulate myself upon being here for it is in all regards the best [prison] I have ever seen. The Warden, Mr. Terrell, is a gentleman in the true sense of that term and everyone here without exception respects & loves him. He maintains discipline mainly through kindness and the prisoners with rare exceptions behave themselves accordingly." Debs described his room as "delightful"; he said that the meals were "excellent," and that "everything is scrupulously clean."[29] Unfortunately for Debs, his stay in Moundsville lasted only two months. On the morning of June 13, 1919, the warden approached Debs and told him that he was immediately being transferred to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta.[30]

At the time, it was unclear why Debs had been transferred. Debs felt that his transfer was related to his proximity to the coal fields in West Virginia. "I had previously spent considerable time organizing the miners … At one mass meeting at Charleston, which was attended by several thousand miners and other citizens, resolutions were passed threatening a march on Moundsville if I was not released."[31] According to Freeberg, the transfer was most likely caused by "a mundane bureaucratic wrangle over money." Due to the influx of wartime prisoners, Debs was sent to Moundsville. Housing Debs cost the state of West Virginia an extra five hundred dollars a month, and since the Atlanta prison had just opened a new cell block, Debs was transferred there.[32]

Debs's imprisonment in Atlanta differed drastically from his time at both Woodstock and Moundsville. He was only allowed to send one letter a week, was barred from receiving radical literature, and was only allowed a limited number of visitors.[33] In a letter to his brother Theodore, Debs claimed he was locked in his cell day and night for the first five days. He was then assigned to light clerical work in the prison clothing room, working from eight o'clock in the morning to around four o'clock in the afternoon. From five o'clock in the afternoon to seven o'clock in the morning, inmates were locked in their

cells. He told his brother not to allow anyone to send him anything because he would not receive it. He also asked Theodore to "tell the comrades I can not [*sic*] write to them … I am treated exactly the same as the common run of prisoners and have no complaint on that score."[34] After work, the prisoners were allowed half an hour for exercise before dinner. "I was not eager about mealtime," Debs explained. "I was in Atlanta prison nearly two weeks and pretty well starved before nature forced me to become receptive to the food and the manner in which it was served."[35] According to Debs, "prison food was the one great unending source of complaint" by the prisoners.[36]

Prison food has long been a complaint from prisoners, especially during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. At the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, where anarchist Alexander Berkman served a fourteen-year sentence for his attempted assassination of steel magnate Henry Clay Frick, along with German anarchists Henry Bauer and Carl Nold, who served five years for their role in the attempted assassination plot, Bauer described the food as "awful," and said it was served to prisoners in "dirty, rusty, unappetizing tin bowls, from which no one can eat without disgust."[37] At the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City, where anarchist Emma Goldman served time for violating the Espionage Act in 1917, the food there was usually served cold, spoiled, or rancid, and infested with bugs.[38]

Similarly, the prison food at Atlanta "was the cheapest and stalest conglomeration of stuff that the market afforded. Coupled with this was the fact that the food was never properly cooked, but steamed and stewed." It was "served in a manner to cause revulsion to all alike, and that item in the prison life aroused more ill-feeling and resentment than all other causes combined."[39] Berkman, who served time at the Atlanta penitentiary from February 1918 to October 1919 for violating the Espionage Act, also described the food there as "awful."[40] Debs found it difficult to decide whether prisoners were "ruined more quickly physically by the rotten food served to them, or morally and spiritually by the harsh and bitter treatment they received." He thought that if prisoners were fed in a more civilized manner, it "would do more to humanize the prison and to make it reformatory, rather than a deformatory [*sic*], than any other one thing that could be suggested in the prevailing social system."[41]

Prison life in Atlanta began taking a toll on Debs rather quickly. He recalled, "After spending two months in a cell during the blazing hot summer of 1919, and starved rather than nourished by the food, I was reduced to almost a skeleton." There were reports to the outside world that Debs was in critical condition, and some even reported that he had died. Upon hearing these alarming reports, Marguerite Prevey, Socialist Party lecturer, organizer, and close companion of Debs, traveled to Atlanta to see for herself and was "greatly shocked" when she saw Debs.[42] At the time, Debs weighed only 160 pounds, around twenty-five pounds below his normal weight. After speaking with Debs, Prevey went to the warden, and Debs was transferred to the prison hospital later that night. During his time in the hospital, Debs witnessed "a number of particularly tragic and heartbreaking instances."[43] He "watched a friend die from a botched operation and many men suffer lonely deaths, ending in paupers' graves on the prison grounds." He saw hundreds of drug addicts suffering through their withdrawals. He had trouble sleeping, either from the screams of his fellow hospital inmates or from his own health problems. His heart troubles made it difficult for him to breathe, preventing him from sleeping lying down.[44]

While Debs saw so much ugliness and brutality during his imprisonment at the Atlanta penitentiary, he also witnessed and experienced moments of great beauty. Drawing back to his first arrest and the time he spent in the Cook County Jail, the kinship

he felt with all prisoners strengthened during his time in Atlanta. "The men here are my brothers," Debs told his biological brother, "and if you could but see how kind and loving these imprisoned souls are to me, you'd be touched to tears."[45] In *Walls and Bars*, Debs wrote extensively about the kinship and comaraderie he felt with his fellow prisoners, regardless of what crimes the felons had committed. One event, in particular, provided a stunning example: Christmas Eve, 1920. This event occurred almost two months after the 1920 presidential election. It was the fifth time Debs campaigned for the White House. Of the previous four, "he had spoken to adoring crowds across the country, but this time he spent his days tending to his fellow inmates at the prison hospital," Freeberg notes.[46] On election day, "inmates prayed for a Debs victory, some believing that his first act as president would be to throw open the prison gates."[47] He lost the election, even though he received almost one million votes, and afterward fell "into a deep malaise."[48]

Debs wrote "there are certain occasions in my prison experience that are vividly preserved as beautiful pictures. One of these was the celebration of Christmas Eve, 1920, in the basement of the prison hospital." Without Debs knowing, the inmates of the hospital managed to secure permission from prison officials to host a Christmas Eve dinner. Every hospital inmate who received a gift from their friends or family "contributed them to the common lot." They decorated the basement and the dinner table with flowers and colored ribbons. When all of the inmates were situated at the table, they had to decide who would have the honor of escorting Debs to dinner. Unable to decide, since every prisoner wanted the job, "they decided to hold nominations and elect an escorting committee of two." When Debs reached the basement, he was "beheld with astonishment and delight an extended table spread with a banquet of delicious dishes that was equally tempting to the eye and palate." Seeing all the inmates seated at the table, Debs felt a new kind of human happiness: "In every eye there was an expression of delight and kindness, and if I had never before understood the meaning of human happiness and the radiant heights to which it may ascend, I perceived it that night before me in the faces of my fellow prisoners who had in this loving and simple way translated the thought of 'good will among men' into kindly deed." The inmates placed Debs at the head of the table and named him their guest of honor. For a brief moment that night, Debs felt as though he was a free man.[49]

Similar to his fellow prisoners, people outside of jail showered Debs with support. Letters to Debs poured into the Atlanta jail from people from all walks of life, young and old. There was Hattie Norris, a young schoolgirl from West Monroe, Louisiana. Norris frequently wrote to Debs and was extremely devoted to him. George Sylvester Viereck, a German-born author and newspaper editor, wrote Debs to tell him how much he admired him, despite their political differences. Mae Bishop, a stenographer from Salt Lake City, Utah, and a member of the Communist Labor Party, reminisced about a time she met Debs in 1908 and hoped that her letter would simply "help to brighten a few moments of your time." Writing from a government hospital, Irving L. Spencer, a U.S. soldier who "fought in France and was wounded and gassed … believe[d] in every word you said in that speech for which you were convicted. I have seen war in all its horror. I have seen men kill one another and I know it's wrong." J. W. Nishida, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World and a self-described "yellow man from the Far East," wrote to Debs from his jail cell in Los Angeles to express his solidarity. Writing from Washington, D.C., Father Martin O'Donoghue, a socialist Catholic priest, sent Debs some reading material as well as his love and well wishes. Boyd Sloan, a lawyer, politician, and judge from Georgia, told Debs that he was not a socialist, "yet I firmly believe that we should erase this blot that stains our reputation for freedom [political prisoners], and should immediately release

you and the others who have been imprisoned for like reasons." There was also Gertrude Laitinen, a young schoolgirl from Fitchburg, Massachusetts, who wrote to Debs because she "thought it would make you feel happy for awhile [*sic*], If I send these few words." And there was Isabel Solomon, an eight-year-old girl from Brooklyn. Her father was one of the five socialists expelled from the New York state legislature in 1919. She told Debs that she was "so sorry because you are not our next president, if you were president our country would be the greatest in the world." Solomon signed her letter, "Yours for socialism."[50]

When Debs left Atlanta on December 25, 1921, he walked out of prison for the second time. After reading a report from Attorney General Harry Daughtry—which recommended a pardon "based on mercy rather than justice"—and facing pressure from "hundreds of thousands of citizens" petitioning for the release of Debs and other political prisoners, President Warren G. Harding decided he would free Debs and two dozen of his fellow political prisoners.[51] More than two decades earlier, after Debs's release from the jail at Woodstock in 1895, a joyous celebration had occurred as his train arrived in Chicago, where thousands of people gathered to celebrate his release.[52] This time, however, the celebration emanated from within the prison walls, and once again, Debs was profoundly moved by his fellow prisoners.

Debs had spent nearly three years inside the Atlanta penitentiary. After it was announced that he would finally be released, "the prison was tense with excitement." His fellow prisoners loved Debs, and he loved them back:

> For nearly three years I had been the daily associate and companion of these tortured souls—these imprisoned victims of a cruel and relentless fate. I had shared with them on equal terms in all things and they knew it and loved me as I loved them. They were my friends not only, but my brothers and realized and rejoiced in our mutual and intimate relations. In a thousand ways, by stealth when necessary, and by other means when possible, they made manifest their confidence and their loyalty, and coming from that pathetic source, from hearts that once beat high with hope but many of which had long been dead to the thrill of enthusiasm and the joy of life, this tender, loving tribute touched me to the heart and had for me a meaning too deep and overmastering to be expressed in words.[53]

His brother Theodore arrived at the prison to accompany Debs on his journey home. Outside of the prison, there was a car waiting to take Debs and his brother to the depot. As they made their way to the car, they "were halted by what seemed a rumbling of the earth as if shaken by some violent explosion. It was a roar of voices—the hoarse voices of a caged human host that had forgotten to cheer and gave vent to their long pent-up emotions in thunder volleys I never heard before and never shall again." Debs felt "overwhelmed with painful and saddening emotions." As the prisoners cheered, Debs, stricken with guilt, thought to himself that he had no right to leave. "Those tearful, haunting faces, pressing against the barred prison windows—how they appealed to me—and accused me!" Another "mighty shout was heard" as Debs waved a final goodbye, and he could still hear the prisoners cheering as they drove away.[54] That moment, Debs later wrote, was "the most deeply touching and impressive moment and the most profoundly dramatic incident in my life."[55]

Back in 1895, when Debs was a prisoner in Woodstock, Illinois, he told Nellie Bly of the *New York World* that if he ever got the time, he wanted "to devote some study to prisoners." During his eight days spent in the Cook County Jail, he witnessed "more fellowship among [the prisoners] than I have ever seen elsewhere in my life. Poor fellows!

They are confined four to a small cell, and they are in that cell 22 of the 24 hours. It is horrible."[56] More than twenty years later, Debs finally had the time to devout some study to prisoners, but perhaps not the way he had originally intended. After his time in Atlanta, Debs produced his one and only major written work, *Walls and Bars.* The revolutionary ideas espoused in *Walls and Bars* were forged through a lifetime of struggle and incarceration, and his leadership within the socialist movement. Debs spent most of his adult life tirelessly trying to organize the American working class to fight against the U.S. capitalist system, one that Debs was convinced was rooted in exploitation and repression. His time in Atlanta helped him realize the role that prison played in propping up the capitalist system as well as oppressing both the working class and the revolutionaries battling against it. *Walls and Bars* was his attempt to expose the evils of the penitentiary system, a system that society had allowed itself to ignore: "Not until the average man finds himself behind steel bars does he realize how indifferent he has been to a problem in which he should have felt himself vitally concerned."[57]

Walls and Bars

During the last few days of Debs's incarceration in Atlanta, Bell Syndicate of New York wrote to him requesting a series of articles describing his prison experiences.[58] Upon completion of the articles, plans were already underway for them to be compiled into a book.[59] Debs "saw an opportunity to give the general public certain information in regard to the prison, based upon my personal observation and experience, that I hoped might result in some beneficial changes in the management of prisons and in the treatment of their inmates." During his time in Atlanta, Debs witnessed so much that offended him. He saw cruelty and abuse. He observed prison mismanagement and the effects it had on its victims. "I resolved upon my release," Debs explained, "to espouse the cause of these unfortunates and do what was in my power to put an end to the wrongs and abuses of which they were the victims under the present system."[60] For Debs, his fellow prisoners were not the "irretrievably vicious and depraved element they are commonly believed to be, but upon the average they are like ourselves, and it is more often their misfortune than their crime that is responsible for their plight." Debs felt that if prisoners were treated appropriately, "instead of being diseased, crazed and wrecked morally and physically under a cruel and degrading prison system," they "would be reclaimed and restored to society, the better, not the worse, for their experience."[61] For political prisoners like himself, he felt guilty that he received his release while others remained locked away. "If the officials told the truth," Debs wrote in the *Appeal to Reason*, the widely popular socialist newspaper, "I was more guilty than they, and if any one should have been held he is myself."[62]

Bell Syndicate negotiated to publish Debs's prison articles, although the pieces had to be void of any "propaganda." According to Debs, the reason for this was obvious:

> The reason for this precaution on the part of the capitalist press is perfectly obvious and self-evident. Any intelligent understanding of the prison system as it now exists, based upon a true knowledge of the graft and corruption which prevail in its management, and of the appalling vice and immorality, cruelty and crime for which the prison is responsible and of which the inmates are the helpless victims, would inevitably mean the impeachment of our smug and self-complacent capitalist society at the bar of civilization, and the utter condemnation of the capitalist system of

> which the prison is a necessary adjunct, and of which these rich and powerful papers are the official organs and mouthpieces.[63]

The capitalist press did not want the truth, Debs proclaimed. If people heard the truth about the "corrupt, brutalizing and criminal-breeding prison system," it would both "shock and scandalize the country" and "expose and condemn the impoverishing, enslaving and crime-inciting social system of which they are the organs and beneficiaries."[64] What the capitalist press considered "political propaganda," though, Debs simply intended as a description of the "naked truth about our foul prison system"; and that truth "would be the deadliest kind of 'political propaganda' against the capitalist system which created and is responsible for that festering evil, and against the equally foul political parties which uphold capitalism and perpetuate its corrupt and criminal misrule."[65]

David Karsner traveled to Terre Haute, Indiana, in March 1922 to help Debs with the series of articles.[66] After the publication of Debs's first article, Bell Syndicate received several complaints claiming that the articles contained propaganda. Subsequently, entire paragraphs were removed and the closing articles of the series were never published. The parts omitted were deemed "'too radical,' thus withholding from their readers the very points of information and the very vital passages to which the writer was most anxious to give publicity for the end he had in view." *Walls and Bars* contained all twelve of the original articles (nine of which were published after heavy censorship), reprinted in their original form, along with three added chapters "for the purpose not only of amplifying the treatment of the subject, but that the writer might discuss more critically and fundamentally the vital phases of the prison question, including especially the cause of and the responsibility for this crying evil, than was possible in the newspaper articles."[67] But Debs would not live long enough to see it published. In March 1926, seven months before he passed away, he was still making final revisions to his "prison book."[68] For the remainder of his life, he was unable to secure funds for the publication of *Walls and Bars.* After his death, the Socialist Party in Chicago published his book, thanks to the efforts of his brother Theodore.[69]

Walls and Bars was the culmination of a lifetime of struggle. From Debs's days as a union organizer to his antiwar speech in Canton, Ohio, which once again forced him into a prison cell, Debs's steady ascent to a revolutionary socialist had reached its peak. It was a work that could only be written by someone who had experienced the cruelty and the repression of a prison cell. It could only have been written by someone who experienced that cruelty solely for their beliefs and for exercising their right to free speech. *Walls and Bars* was Debs's opportunity to

> show that the prison in our modern life is essentially a capitalistic institution, an inherent and inseparable part of the social and economic system under which the mass of mankind are ruthlessly exploited and kept in an impoverished state, as a result of which the struggle for existence, cruel and relentless at best, drives thousands of its victims into the commission of offenses which they are forced to expiate in the dungeons provided for them by their masters. *The prison as a rule, to which there are few exceptions, is for the poor.* The owning and ruling class hold the keys of the prison the same as they do of the mill and mine. They are the keepers of both and their exploited slaves are the inmates and victims of both.[70]

For Debs, prison reform was only the beginning. He hoped that, eventually, "the time will come when the prison as we now know it will disappear, and the hospital and asylums and

farm will take its place. In that day we shall have succeeded in taking the jail out of man as well as taking man out of jail."[71] He viewed prison as "a monumental evil and a burning shame to society. It ought not merely to be reformed but abolished as an institution for the punishment and degradation of unfortunate human beings."[72] *Walls and Bars* not only addressed the evils of the prison system but also passionately critiqued the society that created and allowed that evil to persist.

Before his first arrest, Debs saw the prison system as a "rather sad affair," one that could not be fixed. It was not until he became a prisoner himself that he realized how problematic the prison system was and how it was the responsibility of society to correct it. "The prison problem," Debs stated, "is directly co-related with poverty, and poverty as we see it today is essentially a social disease." Hardworking people should not be forced to live in poverty: "Those who produce should have, but we know that those who produce the most—that is, those who work hardest, and at the most difficult and most menial tasks, have the least." Debs viewed the prison problem "as one of the most vital concerns of present day society," one to which any person could go at any time:

> Some of us go to prison for breaking the law, and some of us for upholding and abiding by the Constitution to which the law is supposed to adhere. Some go to prison for killing their fellowmen, and others for believing that murder is a violation of one of the Commandments. Some go to prison for stealing, and others for believing that a better system can be provided and maintained than one that makes it necessary for a man to steal in order to live.[73]

The only society that "constructs a cage for his neighbor and puts him in it" is human society, Debs explained. Man is the only animal that constructs cages to punish, even torture, by imprisonment. He described punishment by imprisonment as "a most tragic phase in the annals of mankind." In ancient times, the certainty of reformation supposedly depended on the severity of the punishment. "We now know that brutality begets brutality, and we know that through the centuries there has been a steady modification of discipline and method in the treatment of prisoners." Debs conceded that over the years the penal system had undergone some reform, "but there is yet room for vast improvement."[74] In his study on American prisons, historian Blake McKelvey argues that, even though during the years 1915–1930, several reforms were implemented within the U.S. prison system, prison wardens knew that "more meaningful jobs, more constructive training, and a more scientific classification were needed to develop effective penal programs."[75] For Debs, improvements had to start at the local level: communities had to start paying closer attention to every aspect of their jails.

Debs viewed county jails as an integral part of the community, and as such, a community should have as much concern about its jail as it "pretend[s] to have in its schoolhouse, and as it certainly has in its center of amusement and entertainment." "The abuses of the prison system," Debs wrote, "and the crimes against criminals in the perverted name of law and order, are as constantly visited upon the community responsible for them as a devastating plague follows in the wake of disease and death-dealing germs." According to Debs, communities ought to examine who was in their jails, why they were there, and how they were being fed. Were the inmates being held there "for purposes of graft that finds its way into the pockets of the petty politicians, the chief of whom in this case is the sheriff of the county?" A community should "insist that the men held in its jail be either tried or released, for every hour that a man is held in jail he is a

liability, not an asset, to the community which pays the tax that is levied against it to feed and shelter its erring members."[76]

One of the most egregious forms of punishment, according to Debs, was the jailing of drug addicts. During his time in the prison hospital in Atlanta, he explained, "one of the most harrowing aspects … is the drug addict whom I learned to know there in a way to compel the most vivid and shocking remembrance of him to the last of my days." He wrote, "It is incredible that a human being mentally and physically afflicted should be consigned by a so-called court of justice in a civilized and Christian nation to a penitentiary as a felon, there to expiate his weakness; and yet, hundreds of these unfortunates were sent to Atlanta prison while I was there, and ofttimes I had to bear witness to the horror of their torture when they were summarily separated from the drug they craved."[77] Debs witnessed numerous prisoners as they suffered through their horrific withdrawals, and he described many sleepless nights because of their suffering. A person may blame the addict, Debs noted, but "how is it possible to punish them for their awful affliction with a prison sentence as if they were common felons[?]" To Debs, drug addicts were not criminals: "They are sick people who require special treatment, and not vicious ones to be sent to the torture chamber of a prison, and it is nothing less than a reproach to society and a disgrace to our civilization that this malady is branded as a crime instead of being ministered to as an affliction, which it most assuredly is."[78]

In an article in the *New Age* published six months after his release, Debs described a "huge scandal … uncovered at the United States penitentiary at Atlanta." It was discovered that a "dope ring" had been operating at the prison, overseen by a prison physician and several guards. The operation was "making dope fiends of young prisoners and supplying all who could pay for it at robber rates with the poisonous drug that would ruin them for life," wrote Debs. "And this is the benevolent United States government institution," he stated ironically, "where drug addicts are sent to be reformed."[79] Almost one hundred years later, his words still ring true. About contemporary strategies for drug addiction, Kenneth Tunnell and Edward Green state that Debs's comments "are enlightened, humanistic and progressive."[80]

The same can be said regarding Debs's stance toward another critical component of contemporary prison reform: cash bail.[81] Time and again, Debs witnessed people in jail "not because they had committed a crime, but because they could not furnish bail for their release until the charge of crime lodged against them was proven at their trial. They were not guilty, but were presumed to be innocent … Yet, they were in jail and their poverty was therefore their crime." During his time in Atlanta, many of his fellow prisoners told him that such detention was how their life as a criminal began.[82] How could someone who was presumed innocent until proven guilty be thrown in jail while they awaited their trial? "No man and no women [*sic*], more especially no boy and no girl should ever be put in jail for being unable to furnish bail," said Debs. The real crime, "a crime of cruel and tragic consequences," was the jailing of persons who were awaiting their trial but unable to produce a cash bail; in this case, the criminal was "society itself."[83] The hypocrisy of the idea that "all men stands equal before the law" was obvious:

> The man with money is never the victim of such a crime. His money and not necessarily his innocence keeps him out of jail. He can furnish bail though he may be guilty, while the poor man must go to jail though he may be innocent. Yet we proudly boast that all men stand equal before the law. If this were true one of two things would follow, either men would no longer be sentenced to prison and the prison

> would cease to exist, or so many would be sentenced to prison that innumerable additional bastiles [*sic*] would have to be built to confine them.[84]

For Debs, it was clear that society created the criminal. It was also clear that a majority of people in prison had lived in poverty. All too often, Debs explained, prison punished poverty, not crime. Once society becomes "intelligent enough to realize the responsibility for poverty it will also be humane enough to refrain from punishing its victims by consigning them to felons' cells."[85] To produce an "intelligent study of the prison," Debs wrote, the connection between poverty and the prison population demanded close examination.[86]

For a person living in poverty, the ability to defend oneself against criminal charges was extremely difficult, Debs explained. For that reason, the majority of people in prison "are there not so much because of the particular crime they are alleged to have committed, but for the reason that they are poor and either lacked the money to engage the services of first-class and influential lawyers or because they lacked the means through which they might have been able to put off the day of final conviction and sentence." A wealthy individual, on the other hand, could afford to post bail and hire a lawyer to handle "all the myriad technicalities his purse will permit him to take advantage of."[87] While the ways in which the wealthy could avoid serving time in prison angered Debs, it did not mean that he wanted the wealthy to be imprisoned: "I do not believe that a prison is a fit place for any human being, rich or poor, and I would not confine my worst enemy in its cruel cages."[88]

While Debs was imprisoned in Atlanta, one of his goals was to talk with prisoners and "to ascertain to what extent their poverty, their lack of pecuniary means, was responsible for their imprisonment." He concluded that "an overwhelming majority were sent to prison only because they did not have money to take full advantage of the means afforded to those who possess it of escaping the penalties of the law in the prevailing system of its administration."[89] Debs was convinced that "when the scourge of poverty" was eliminated, the prison would be as well.[90] Until then, Debs described several reforms that he would institute if he were in charge of the penitentiary system.

Debs called for a complete overhaul of the prison labor system: "Plans could be formulated upon a nation-wide scale for the development of the country's resources, for the opening of highways, the reclaiming of swamp and desert wastes, and the construction of public works of all kinds to absorb the labor of every prison inmate." Thus, prison labor would be reconstituted in a useful and constructive way, with inmates receiving a decent wage that allowed them to send adequate funds to their families. Debs would also eliminate prison governance by politicians. He would "place it under the absolute control of a board or commission consisting of resident men and women of the highest character, the humanest [*sic*] impulses, and the most efficient qualifications for their task." This body would have complete authority over the prison, including full power of pardon, parole, and commutation. Debs witnessed many offenses inflicted by prison guards, so he would eliminate them and "have the prison population organized upon a basis of mutuality of interest and self-government." Recalling the most consistent complaint among prisoners, food would be "served in a clean, decent and appetizing manner."[91] Debs was so confident that his ideas on prison management were so "fundamentally sound and practical" that he challenged "the powers that control our prisons to give me the opportunity to put it to the test in any prison in this country." He guaranteed that within a week the conditions inside the prison would be greatly improved. "I should expect no remuneration for my service," he wrote, "but should regard it as a

contribution to society in return for my education in and graduation from one of its chief penal institutions."[92]

While *Walls and Bars* aimed to expose the evils of the prison system, Debs also used it as a platform to condemn passionately what he viewed as "a crime against humanity": capitalism. He wrote,

> Crime in all of its varied forms and manifestations is of such a common nature under the capitalist system that capitalism and crime have become almost synonymous terms. Private appropriation of the earth's surface, the natural resources, and the means of life is nothing less than a crime against humanity, but the comparative few who are the beneficiaries of this iniquitous social arrangement, far from being viewed as criminals meriting punishment, are the exalted rulers of society and the people they exploit gladly render them homage and obeisance.[93]

Channeling Karl Marx, Debs quickly traced the evolution of legal bondage to the private ownership of the means of production. With the capitalist class in control of industry, the economic exploitation of the masses continued. "To buttress and safeguard this exploiting system, private property of the capitalist has been made a fetish, a sacred thing, and thousands of laws have been enacted and more thousands supplemented by court decisions to punish so-called crimes against the holy institution of private property." Most crimes for which people are sent to prison "are committed directly or indirectly against property." The capitalist system cares far more for property than for human life, Debs cried. Yet, at the same time, "Multiplied thousands of men, women and children are killed and maimed in American industry by absolutely preventable accidents every year, yet no one ever dreams of indicting the capitalist masters who are guilty of the crime." As Debs explained it, "the economic-owning class is always the political ruling class." It was under a system based on private ownership that "[t]he exploitation that follows impoverishes the masses, and their precarious economic condition, their bitter struggle for existence, drives increasing numbers of them to despair and desperation, to crime and destruction. The inmates of an average county jail consist mainly of such victims. They also constitute the great majority in the state prisons and federal penitentiaries. The inmates of prisons are proverbially the poorer people recruited from what we know as the 'lower class.'" It was on this basis that "[c]apitalism needs and must have the prison to protect itself from the criminals it has created."[94]

Eugene V. Debs viewed prison as a capitalist institution, "an inherent and inseparable part of the social and economic system under which the mass of mankind are [*sic*] ruthlessly exploited and kept in an impoverished state;" one that was "as a rule … for the poor."[95] As a prison abolitionist, he argued that prisons should "not merely … be reformed but abolished as an institution for the punishment and degradation of unfortunate human beings."[96] He thought jailing drug addicts was an egregious form of punishment, and he condemned the cash bail system. Yet, as one of his era's most prominent and influential revolutionary labor and political leaders, Debs's writings on the carceral state and prison abolition have generally gone unnoticed. By examining his lived experiences and his prison memoir, we see Eugene Debs as a revolutionary anti-capitalist, prison abolitionist, and reformer. He understood that revolutionary change would take time, and he offered significant reforms to the carceral system. And while Debs's ideas have become central elements of criminology, they are not, for the most part, attributed to him. Debs's revolutionary views were ignored by progressives for being too radical, and revolutionaries ignored his reforms for not being radical enough.

Debs wrote, "I have seen men working for paltry wages and other men in enforced idleness without any income at all sink by degrees into vagabondage and crime, and I have not only found no fault with them, but I have sympathized with them entirely, charging the responsibility for their ruin on the capitalist system, and resolving to fight that system relentlessly with all the strength of mind and body that I possess until that system is destroyed root and branch and wiped from the earth."[97] Debs did not arrive at these conclusions from reading dense theoretical texts. By contrast, he arrived at them through life experiences and incarceration. *Walls and Bars* encapsulates who Debs was, and the ideas to which he dedicated his life. Despite decades of state repression and years of incarceration, his passion and unrelenting commitment to fighting what he viewed as an oppressive economic system never faltered; rather, his time behind bars solidified and reinforced it.

Notes

1 Eugene V. Debs, *Walls and Bars* (Chicago: John F. Higgins, 1927), 218–19.
2 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 185–86.
3 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 191–92.
4 David Karsner, *Debs Goes to Prison* (New York: Irving Kaye Davis, 1919), 5.
5 Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 309.
6 Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene V. Debs* (1947; Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007), 482.
7 Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Similar to Ginger and Salvatore regarding the attention paid to *Walls and Bars* are the following: Bernard J. Brommel, Eugene V. *Debs: Spokesman for Labor and Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1978); H. Wayne Morgan, *Eugene V. Debs: Socialist for President* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962). In *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), there are four excerpts from *Walls and Bars* and a very brief explanation of the book.
8 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 327.
9 Salvatore's excellent biography of Debs, *Citizen and Socialist*, provides the strongest argument for Debs's Americanism. According to historian Adam J. Hodges, the "Americanist" argument remained prevalent until a 2008 article by historian Dave Burns: "Burns persuasively demonstrated that Debs rejected nationalism, citizenship, and the American Revolution as inadequate ideological means toward global socialism." See Adam J. Hodges, "Red Scare," in *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Ross A. Kennedy (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 538. Burns argued that religion was the driving force for Debs: "the doctrines of socialism played a major role in Deb's movement from the particular to the universal, but his conversion to the political philosophy was an outgrowth of his radical religious views." According to Burns, Debs "combined [Victor] Hugo's Christian humanism with Marx's radical socialism to create a dynamic revolutionary creed to combat the capitalist system that moved well beyond the parameters of Americanism." See Dave Burns, "The Soul of Socialism: Christianity, Civilization, and Citizenship in the Thought of Eugene Debs, "*Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 5 (July 2008): 89, 114. For more on Debs and Christianity, see Jacob H. Dorn, "In Spiritual Communion": Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Christians," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 303–25. For a transnational perspective of Debsian Socialism, see Stephen Burwood, "Debsian Socialism through a Transnational Lens," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 253–82.
10 See John T. Popiel, "'Prison Cannot Crush Their Spirit': The Ideological Impact of Incarceration on Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and Eugene V. Debs" (MA thesis, University of Houston–Clear Lake, 2020), 8–26.
11 Paul W. Keve, *Prisons and the American Conscience: A History of U.S. Federal Corrections* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 143.

12 See Keve, *Prisons and the American Conscience*; David J. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience: The Asylum and Its Alternatives in Progressive America*, rev. ed. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002); Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne, 1990); Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

13 McLennan, *Crisis of Imprisonment*, 319–20.

14 Today, *Walls and Bars* fits squarely into what law scholar Allegra McLeod describes as the "prison abolition framework." According to McLeod, a "prison abolitionist framework" is "a set of principles and positive projects orientated toward substituting a constellation of other regulatory and social projects for criminal law enforcement." Furthermore, with a "prison abolitionist ethic" McLeod intends to "invoke and build upon a moral orientation elaborated in an existing body of abolitionist writings and nascent social movement efforts, which are committed to ending the practice of confining people in cages and eliminating the control of human beings through imminently threatened police use of violent force." Allegra M. McLeod, "Prison Abolition and Grounded Justice," *UCLA Law Review* 62, no. 5 (2015): 1161–1162. Debs's writing on the carceral state and prison abolition has generally gone unnoticed. For more works on prison abolition, see Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Change Everything: Racial Capitalism and the Case for Abolition* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2024); Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022); Marina Bell, "Abolition: A New Paradigm for Reform," *Law and Social Inquiry* 46 (Feb. 2021): 32–68.

15 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 45–46.

16 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 165–68.

17 Sullivan, *Prison Reform Movement*, 30; Philip Jenkins, "The Radicals and the Rehabilitative Ideal, 1890–1930," *Criminology* 20 (Nov. 1982): 359.

18 Edward L. W. Green and Kenneth D. Tunnell, "Critical Criminology in the Life and Work of Eugene Victor Debs," *Critical Criminology* 23 (Mar. 2015): 39.

19 Green and Tunnell, "Critical Criminology in the Life and Work of Eugene Victor Debs," 47. Tunnel and Green provide numerous examples. See also Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1963; New York: Free Press, 1973); Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969); Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963); E. H. Sutherland, "White Collar Criminality," *American Sociological Review* 5 (Feb. 1940); Frank Tannenbaum, *Crime and Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).

20 David F. Greenberg, ed., *Crime and Capitalism: Readings in Marxist Criminology*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 1. Throughout this collection, there are no mentions of Debs's work.

21 Green and Tunnell, "Critical Criminology in the Life and Work of Eugene Victor Debs," 47.

22 For example, see Greenberg, ed., *Crime and Capitalism*; Mark Lanier, Stuart Henry, and Desiré J. M. Anastasia, *Essential Criminology*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015); Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018); Richard D. Vogel, "Capitalism and Incarceration," *Monthly Review* 34 (Mar. 1983), and Richard D. Vogel, "Capitalism and Incarceration Revisited," *Monthly Review* 55 (Aug. 2003); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

23 Eugene V. Debs to Theodore Debs, Apr. 16, 1919, in *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, ed. J. Robert Constantine, 3 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 2:508.

24 J. Louis Engdahl, *Debs and O'Hare in Prison* (Chicago: National Office, Socialist Party, circa 1919), 18.

25 Engdahl, *Debs and O'Hare in Prison*, 19.

26 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 149.

27 Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 2:509.

28 Eugene V. Debs to Jean Daniel Debs and Marguerite Bettrich Debs, Jan. 8, 1895, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 1:81–82.

29 Eugene V. Debs to Theodore Debs, Apr. 16, 1919, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 2:508.

30 David Karsner, *Debs: His Authorized Life and Letters*, 101.

31 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 53.

32 This was a result of extra security that Debs required. Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 172.
33 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 175.
34 Eugene V. Debs to Theodore Debs, July 3, 1919, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 3:20.
35 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 61.
36 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 71.
37 John T. Popiel, "'Prison Cannot Crush Their Spirit,'" 30, 37, 41–43.
38 Popiel, "'Prison Cannot Crush Their Spirit,'" 89.
39 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 72.
40 On the day of his release, Berkman publicly stated many allegations against the prison in the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the next day, Warden Zerbst responded to the attacks in a letter to the editor, denying all of Berkman's allegations. In a response to the warden, Berkman stated that he "did not yet tell one-hundredth part of the terrible things that happen in the daily routine of the Atlanta Prison," pointing out that he never brought up the awful food, the abuse of political prisons (except for Debs, Berkman wrote), or the trafficking of drugs. Popiel, "'Prison Cannot Crush Their Spirit,'" 82–83.
41 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 72–73.
42 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 78–79 (quotations); Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 1:525.
43 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 79–80.
44 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 258.
45 Eugene V. Debs to Theodore Debs, July 5, 1920, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 3:108.
46 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 1.
47 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 253.
48 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 255–57.
49 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 110–12.
50 See the following letters to Eugene V. Debs, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*: Hattie Norris to Debs, 1919–1921, 3:16; George Sylvester Viereck to Debs, Nov. 10, 1919, 3:30–31; Mae Bishop to Debs, Jan. 8, 1920, 3:46–48; Irving L. Spencer to Debs, Feb. 4, 1920, 3:52; J. W. Nishida to Debs, Mar. 10, 1920, 3:59–60; Father Martin O'Donoghue to Debs, Apr. 20, 1920, 3:74; Boyd Sloan to Debs, Oct. 11, 1920, 3:132–33; Gertrude Laitinen to Debs, Jan. 20, 1921, 3:183; Isabel Solomon to Debs, Nov. 16, 1920, 3:159.
51 Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 292–93.
52 David Karsner, *Debs: His Authorized Life and Letters* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 162–63.
53 Debs, Walls and Bars, 122–23.
54 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 124–26.
55 Quoted in Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner*, 296.
56 Nellie Bly, "Interview with Eugene V. Debs at Woodstock Jail, January 19, 1895." Published as "Nellie Bly in Jail: Chat with Eugene Victor Debs, the Imprisoned Labor Leader" in *New York World*, Jan. 20, 1895.
57 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 128.
58 David Karsner, *Talks with Debs in Terre Haute (and Letters from Lindlahr)* (New York: New York Call, 1922), 9.
59 Eugene V. Debs to David Karsner, Jan. 18, 1922, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 3:288.
60 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 18.
61 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 19.
62 Eugene Debs, "These things We Must Do," *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kansas), Apr. 15, 1922; Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 197.
63 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 20.
64 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 20–21.
65 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 21.
66 Eugene V. Debs to Otto Branstetter, Mar. 25, 1922, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 3:298–99.
67 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 22.
68 Eugene V. Debs to Theodore Debs, Mar. 31, 1926, in Constantine, ed., *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, 3:562.
69 Brommel, *Eugene V. Debs: Spokesman*, 184.
70 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 23.
71 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 35.
72 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 23–24.

73 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 31.
74 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 32.
75 Blake McKelvey, *American Prisons: A History of Good Intentions* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1977), 267–96.
76 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 45–46.
77 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 84.
78 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 85.
79 Eugene V. Debs, "From Atlanta Prison: A Letter from a Prisoner with a Warning," originally published in *The New Age* (Buffalo, New York), July 6, 1922, 7. Available via *marxists.org*: https://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1922/0706-debs-letterfromatlanta.pdf (accessed Mar. 3, 2025).
80 Edward L. W. Green and Kenneth D. Tunnell, "Critical Criminology in the Life and Work of Eugene Victor Debs," *Critical Criminology* 23 (Mar. 2015): 50.
81 For works on bail and pretrial detention, see Christine S. Scott-Hayward and Henry F. Fradella, *Punishing Poverty: How Bail and Pretrial Detention Fuel Inequalities in the Criminal Justice System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Shima Baradaran Baughman, *The Bail Book: A Comprehensive Look at Bail in America's Criminal Justice System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Rachel Smith, "Condemned to Repeat History? Why the Last Movement for Bail Reform Failed, and How This One Can Succeed," *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* 25 (Spring 2018); Alexa Van Brunt and Locke E. Bowman, "Toward a Just Model of Pretrial Release: A History of Bail Reform and a Prescription for What's Next," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 108, no. 4 (2018): https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc/vol108/iss4/3/ (accessed Mar. 3, 2025).
82 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 150–51.
83 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 153.
84 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 153–54.
85 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 143.
86 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 138.
87 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 138–39.
88 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 142.
89 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 142–43.
90 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 142.
91 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 165–68.
92 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 169–70.
93 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 172.
94 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 171–74.
95 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 23.
96 Debs, *Walls and Bars*, 23–24.
97 Debs, *Wall and Bars*, 176.

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