

Healey is right when he notes that Gordon's text "provides a baseline of research data for understanding the history of African Americans in South Bend" (p. 14), though he perhaps understates the case. *The Negro in South Bend* and Gordon's sermon offer much more: they tell an alternate history of the Great Migration; they provide primary materials with which to consider the complexities and contradictions of the ideologies of racial uplift; and they

document struggles that might otherwise be overshadowed by larger urban histories or attention to national figures such as Booker T. Washington or W. E. B. Du Bois.

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Democracy's Prisoner

Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent

By Ernest Freeberg

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. ix, 380. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95.)

Of Eugene Debs's five presidential runs, the 1920 campaign arguably had the most lasting impact. That year, running as Convict No. 7653 in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, he found himself at the center of a national debate over free speech.

The story of Debs's 1918 arrest in Canton, Ohio, for allegedly violating federal law by advocating insubordination and obstruction of the draft, is a standard feature in Debs biographies. Even surveys of the World War I era almost invariably mention his arrest, though few of these do more than treat his candidacy as an oddity. Ernest Freeberg, however, puts Debs's arrest, trial, incarceration, and the campaign for his release at the center of the era's

bitter national debate over the nature of free speech.

Debs did not set out to put himself in this position. His statements were no more extreme than those made by many others, and considerably less than some. When he spoke at Canton, many critics of the war had been arrested and jailed. Some even had successfully fought similar charges.

But this was Gene Debs, whose arrest was sure to provoke interest. It met with widespread approval in the hyperpatriotic wartime atmosphere, even from many who formerly had a good opinion of the man, if not of his politics. But from the beginning some argued that he had been arrested for his political beliefs, not because he

posed a threat to the nation. As the months passed, from his trial in Cleveland to his time in Moundsville Penitentiary and then Atlanta; from wartime to peacetime; from the Wilson administration's dithering over a pardon or other form of release to its (or, rather, President Wilson's) bitter, angry decision to do nothing; through the Harding administration's delicate handling of what had become the Debs Issue, Debs remained at the center of the debate over wartime measures to restrict speech.

While he may not have intended to provoke arrest, Debs generally embraced the role of "democracy's prisoner." His rhetoric became, if anything, more revolutionary; he refused to ask for leniency or pardon; and he linked his case to those of other, lesser known "political prisoners." At the same time, Debs remained the stubborn, frustratingly likable radical, winning the grudging admiration of his warders and other prisoners, and slowly rebuilding substantial—but not nearly universal—public sympathy.

As Freeberg shows, all of this was useful to activists who had been appalled by wartime restrictions like the Espionage Act. Knowing that many Americans were uncomfortable with these restrictions, Lucy Robins, Roger Baldwin, Rose Stokes, Max Eastman, and countless others argued, lobbied, wrote, and organized tirelessly for the release of prisoners and for repudiation of the idea of restrictions on speech. Having Debs as the most visible victim of wartime

repression was invaluable—he was unthreatening (at least to many), kind-hearted, aging, and beset by medical problems (what a nightmare for a president to have Debs die in prison!). Add the calming of passions after the Red Scare, which Freeberg nicely details, and the beginnings of national second thoughts about the war itself, and Debs's release was all but inevitable. When he left prison, he may not have realized it but his political career was over. But the pro-free speech attitudes and arguments developed during the fight in which he was a central figure continue to shape discussion of this issue today.

Democracy's Prisoner is a valuable contribution to the literature on free speech and on Eugene Debs. Freeberg deftly moves back and forth between the national struggle over speech and Debs's personal experiences. His research is broad and deep, and he makes a good case for the importance of Debs's imprisonment to the free speech battle. His discussions of the internal debates over Debs that took place in the Wilson and Harding administrations are fascinating. He also writes cleanly and smoothly, even when discussing complicated legal arguments. The book is a pleasure to read.

Freeberg's descriptions of wartime repression vividly remind us of the ugliness brought on by violations of that freedom, just as his discussion of the free speech campaign reminds us that it is a freedom hard-won and never to be taken for granted.

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An American Hometown
Terre Haute, Indiana, 1927

By Tom Roznowski

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 264. Illustrations, index. Paperbound, \$24.95.)

Writer and editor David Hamilton posits that every place generates an initial, telling existential question when one moves into it. He told me that when he moved to Virginia, the question was, "Who are your people?" When he moved to Alabama, "What church will you be going to?" Michigan prompted, "What work do you do?" And Iowa, where David finally moved and still lives today, "What will you garden?"

Reading Tom Roznowski's Borgesian science fiction compendium, er, excuse me, history, *An American Hometown*, I was reminded of David's wry rubric. The interrogative crowbar that the book inserts to pry open each of its many characters is primarily the Michigan wedge of occupation. Roznowski fruitfully employs the varieties of employment found in the 1927 Polk City Directory of Terre Haute, Indiana, to leverage the nature of this place and this time. The book is an abecedarian of citizens' names, each followed by an italicized appositive of his or her job.

And, yes, the annotated encyclopedia that results does read a lot like

detailed notes for an epic science fiction in a galaxy far far away. Terra Haute might as well be the planet Mingo for all its remote strangeness, for all these remote people occupied in these bizarre and unusual tasks.

As a history, there is little story. The book is all, or almost all, exposition, as Roznowski expands names and occupations into a series of energetic speculative essays on timely common cultural technologies, social practices, and the coincidences of daily life. The effect is that of a vast museum, a cabinet of wonder, its bare bones framed by intriguingly complex enabling apparati. Every inch of this museum's walls is papered with ever-expanding interpretive labels.

Imagine a map more detailed than the thing it represents. In such a setting, juxtaposition is all. The arbitrary ordering spontaneously creates valences, insightfully opening up spaces for emotional response and intellectual connection.

This isn't "story" as much as anecdote on steroids. The white space between each entry is a graphic invitation for the reader to participate in