# *The following excerpt is taken from a July 2019 Carnegie Council podcast entitled "*[*The Crack Up: Eugene Debs & the Origins of Socialism in the U.S., with Maurice Isserman.*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20190708-crack-up-eugene-debs-origins-socialism-usa-maurice-isserman)*” The podcast is based off* The New York Times *opinion piece “*[*America’s Original Socialist*](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/20/opinion/americas-original-socialist.html)*” written by historian* [*Maurice Isserman*](https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/our-faculty/directory/faculty-detail/maurice-isserman)*. This transcript has been edited for classroom use.*

I think he [Eugene Debs] was reacting to changes in American society…The old idea—[Lincoln](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln)'s idea and before him [Benjamin Franklin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin)'s idea—that any skilled workman could become self-employed, could open up his own workshop, manufacture shoes, and hire other young promising men to work for him, and they in turn would go on to become independent, that was fading. If you go to work in a steel mill, even if you're a skilled worker, you're never going to open up your own steel mill.

…Debs thought that Americans were becoming dependent upon their employers, they were at the mercy of their employers, in this new hugely expanding industrial economy. The United States is becoming the foremost industrial power in the world in the years leading up to the First World War…Had he [Eugene Debs] been born before the Civil War, he might well have shared Lincoln's optimism about social mobility. But he believed this was no longer possible. [Debs thought] the only way you could restore the independence and the citizenship (in the largest sense of that term) that Americans had enjoyed prior to this great change in the economy was through cooperation, was through building strong unions, was through electing their own working-class members/brothers to public office, creating new kinds of institutions that drew upon the collective power of many individuals, rather than seeing America simply as an arena in which rugged individuals made their own way forward.

1. How did Eugene Debs believe the economy had changed from the Civil War to his time? Why did he believe this was a problem?
2. Eugene Debs was a socialist. What did he believe was a solution to the changing economy? Do you think his proposals would have worked?
3. How does Eugene Deb’s view of socialism in 1919 compare to the Democratic Socialist and progressive view of socialism in 2019? Explain.