

Both Sides of the Issue

Democratic Socialism Revisited

A Mini Teacher's Guide

stosselintheclassroom.org

Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Objectives | 2 |
| Concepts & Key Terms | 2 |
| Discussion Questions | 3 |
| Activities | 4 |
| Activity 1: Evidence Mapping | 4 |
| Activity 2: Common Ground Finder..... | 6 |
| Activity 3: Policy Proposal | 6 |
| Activity 4: Perspective Swap Debate..... | 6 |
| Activity 5: Real-World Connection | 7 |

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- define democratic socialism as characterized in both videos.
- trace the historical and contemporary examples each video uses to support its position.
- analyze how specific policy proposals — such as universal child care, rent freezes, and minimum wage increases — are evaluated by each side.
- critique which video makes the stronger case and justify the choice with evidence from both sources.

Concepts & Key Terms

The following terms appear across both videos in this pairing. Understanding them will help students follow the arguments and engage in discussion.

8-Hour Day Movement: a late-19th-century labor movement that called for workers to have eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for personal time. The 1886 Haymarket Rally in Chicago was held in support of this cause.

Democratic Socialism: a political movement that uses the democratic process to advocate for policies associated with socialism, such as public ownership of services, stronger worker protections, and redistribution of wealth. Candidates may run on existing party lines rather than on a separate Socialist Party ticket.

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA): a national grassroots organization that organizes campaigns, supports like-minded candidates, and advocates for democratic socialist policies at the local, state, and federal levels.

Gilded Age: the period of rapid economic growth and stark inequality in the United States from roughly the 1870s through the 1890s, often cited by democratic socialists as a historical parallel to today's economy.

Haymarket Affair: a labor protest in Chicago on May 4, 1886, held in support of the 8-hour work day, that turned violent and led to the death sentence of four activists. It is sometimes called the first "Red Scare."

Minimum Wage: the lowest hourly wage an employer is legally permitted to pay a worker. The videos debate whether raising the minimum wage helps workers or causes layoffs, price increases, and automation.

Rent Control (Rent Freeze): a government policy that limits how much landlords can charge for rent or restricts how much rent can rise each year. A rent freeze prevents any increase during the freeze period.

Red Scare: a period or tactic in which socialist, communist, or labor ideas are portrayed as foreign, dangerous, or un-American in order to discredit them. The

term is used to describe both historical and contemporary responses to socialist proposals.

Supply and Demand: the economic principle describing how the availability of a good or service (supply) and the desire for it (demand) interact to determine price and quantity sold. John Stossel invokes this concept to argue that mandated wage increases lead employers to raise prices or cut jobs.

Trade Union: an organized association of workers formed to protect and advance their rights, wages, and working conditions. Socialism in the industrialized world first took root in trade unions.

Universal Child Care: a policy proposal in which child care services are made available to all families at no direct cost to the user. Because the service is paid for through public funds, the guide uses the term taxpayer-funded rather than "free."

Discussion Questions

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video. Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. What is democracy?
3. What is socialism?
4. What is democratic socialism?
5. In the AJ+ video, Francesca Fiorentini said that "socialism used to be a dirty word in the U.S." Why did socialism have a negative connotation in America? Does it still have a negative connotation? Should it? Why/Why not?
6. In the Stossel video, we saw Zohran Mamdani promise to make childcare available to all New Yorkers at no cost. Is that a good idea? Why/Why not?
7. Francesca Fiorentini said that the success of democratic socialist candidates causes panic not only in the Republican Party, but in the Democratic Party. Why would the Democratic Party be concerned about the success of democratic socialism?
8. John Stossel asked people if they knew who built New York's subways. Did you know the answer? If not, were you surprised to learn that the subways were mostly built by private companies? Why/Why not?

9. In the AJ+ video, Carlos Ramirez-Rosa said that in Chicago "the Democratic Party is very much tied to the establishment and the moneyed interests." What did he mean by this?
10. John Stossel described a subway line that has been under construction for decades, arguing that "that's what you get when government runs things." Do you think construction would have been completed sooner if the subway line had been owned by a private company? Why/Why not?
11. In the AJ+ video, Francesca Fiorentini and Larry Spivack used the term "red scare." What does that mean?
12. John Stossel mentioned two ways that employers respond to increases in the minimum wage. What were those two responses?
13. In the AJ+ video, John Nichols said: "We are currently experiencing the equivalent of three industrial revolutions at the same time." What did he mean by this?
14. John Stossel explored the concept of rent freezes. What is a rent freeze? What impact did John say rent freezes have on housing?
15. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
16. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
17. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
18. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
19. For more on this topic, see these installments of Both Sides of the Issue: (a) *Both Sides*: "[Democratic Socialism](#)"; (b) *Both Sides*: "[Mamdani for Mayor?](#)"

Activities

Activity 1: Evidence Mapping

Have students complete the Evidence Mapping worksheet on the next page while or after viewing both videos. Students record the specific claims each video makes and the evidence each provides to support those claims. After the worksheet is complete, lead a class discussion: where did each video provide concrete evidence, and where did each rely on assertion, anecdote, or historical analogy?

Follow-up prompt for class discussion: Which side provided the strongest piece of evidence? Which side made the weakest argument? Were there claims in either video that you could not verify from what was shown?

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Evidence Mapping: Democratic Socialism Revisited

Directions: As you watch each video, record the main claim being made and the evidence used to support it. Evidence can include statistics, historical examples, personal stories, or expert statements.

AJ+ – "What If America Was a Social Democracy?"

Main Claim: _____

Evidence #1: _____

Evidence #2: _____

Stossel – "Mamdani's Bad Ideas, Part 2"

Main Claim: _____

Evidence #1: _____

Evidence #2: _____

Which piece of evidence was strongest? Why?

Activity 2: Common Ground Finder

In small groups, students list places where the two videos appear to agree or at least share a concern, even when the proposed solutions differ. For example, both videos acknowledge that many Americans are struggling economically, that housing and child care are expensive, and that the current system is not serving everyone well.

Each group produces a short, written list titled "Points of Agreement" that includes at least three items, each supported by a specific moment or line from each of the two videos. Groups present their findings, and the class compiles a master list on the board. Close with the question: If both sides agree on a problem, why do they disagree on the solution?

Activity 3: Policy Proposal

Students choose one of the three policy areas debated in the videos — universal child care, rent freezes, or a higher minimum wage — and design a written policy proposal that incorporates concerns from BOTH sides. Students must address three parts:

1. The problem the policy is intended to solve, as described in the AJ+ video.
2. The concerns, unintended consequences, or trade-offs raised in the Stossel video.
3. A proposal that attempts to address the problem while respecting the concerns — including how the policy will be taxpayer-funded, whom it will affect, and how success will be measured.

Proposals should be two pages or less. Pair students with a peer who chose a different policy area for a brief peer review focused on whether both sides were truly addressed.

Activity 4: Perspective Swap Debate

Divide the class in half. Ask students to privately write down which side of the debate they currently find more persuasive. Then assign each student to argue the OPPOSITE side in a structured debate. Students supporting the AJ+ perspective will argue the Stossel position, and vice versa.

Debate prompt: Resolved, the policies advocated by democratic socialists will improve the lives of working Americans. Each side prepares two opening arguments, one rebuttal, and one closing statement. After the debate, students reflect in writing: What was the strongest argument you were forced to make for the side you initially disagreed with? Did arguing the other side change or soften your original view?

Activity 5: Real-World Connection

Each student (or pair of students) finds a current news story — published within the last 30 days — that connects to one of the policy debates in the videos.

Possibilities include a local minimum wage decision, a proposed rent freeze, a ballot measure on child care, a campaign by a democratic socialist candidate, or a story about housing construction.

Students write a one-page brief that includes: a summary of the news story, a paragraph explaining how the AJ+ perspective would interpret the story, a paragraph explaining how the Stossel perspective would interpret the story, and a short personal reflection on which interpretation the student finds more convincing and why. Students share briefs in small groups and discuss patterns: Are the two perspectives predictable? Do they miss anything important about the story?