

Discussion Menu #2

CONSIDERING DEMOCRACY: 8 THINGS TO ASK A REPRESENTATIVE

This study guide is intended for the DVD Extras - 41 Minutes

Appetizers - Before the Screening

It's good to wait some time after the film (in order to digest) before going into the DVD Extras. Remember that if you are hosting a screening, there will likely be people who have opposite points of view. Have respectful (yet spirited!) dialog. Also keep in mind that while the film brings up different ideas, we live in a democracy. It's good to discuss these things! The following questions are intended for facilitating conversation and thoughts after watching the DVD Extras. Of course, please do also ask your own questions and contribute to that distinctly delicious democracy flavor.

Main Course and Discussion - After Watching the DVD Extras

Foreign & American Views

On one side of the debate, Americans believe that we are helping people, doing generally good things, and acting on good morals. On the other side of the debate, people believe the opposite, believing that many politicians are lying, that there's too much secrecy, and they frequently call the war in Iraq a fallacy. How do you think this polarization of views happened?

Which point of view is more patriotic?

What do you think about the Patriot Act?

Media Extras

How many TV shows of the silly, pointless, train-wreck type, like, "Oh, it's so horrible, I can't stop watching!" can you name?

What is the overall effect of these types of shows on a democratic populace?

Fact: The airwaves are owned by the public

Should corporate media owners act in the public interest? Or, should they be allowed solely to use the airwaves for maximum profit? Do you think that they could do both? Give an argument for why they shouldn't act in the public interest, and then give an argument as to why they should.

Power in the Phrase or Question

How does the way that a phrase or question is worded have a positive or negative (possibly subconscious) effect on the viewer?

What if the anchors switched questions? What effect would it have on the viewer?

In your view, is the media liberal or conservative? Explain your point of view. If you had a TV station, what kind of different sections would you have on your news hour?

(Don't despair! Visit the website for links to your congressional representative. Write letters to the media or take things into your own hands and create your own media!)

A Difference of Opinion

The section about Nepal gives the point of view that the U.S. tends to oversimplify the debate. A Nepali person explains that there are 5 major parties that want to have a democratic voice in the nation. If social unrest is being funded by our tax dollars, why don't we know about it? Nepal is just one country. Do you think a similar pattern is being repeated around the world in other countries?

Choices

Corporate Power: Many Ways to Influence

Corporations can move their headquarters in order to influence Congressional decisions. If you moved from one house to another one in a different state, would you have the same political power? Yes, corporations employ people, but do the employees have the exact view as the corporation? (Think back to what the Enron employees may have thought.)

Lobbying and Large Amounts of Money

Corporations have tremendous power and frequently use their monetary wealth to sway legislation and policy. They also spend large amounts of money on gifts (like vacation houses, planes and what not) to representatives and officials, and have created quite the policy. (It is amazingly shocking, but not in a good way, because as a nation we have slid down the rankings in education and healthcare, yet went up dramatically in prison numbers, executions, billionaires and prices for healthcare and higher education. It's really quite phenomenal! Back to the question.) Do you think that corporate lobbying is fair, or is it a mild form of bribery? Give an argument for, "No, it is not a form of bribery. It's perfectly fine in a democracy." Then give an argument for, "Hey wait. Yes, it is a form of bribery, and we need to come together as a democracy and change it."

Rep. Billy Tauzin had a lot of power as the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and influenced major healthcare and media legislation. Shortly after the Medicare legislation was passed, he spoke of illness, left his public post and immediately became the president of PhRMA (Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America), the largest pharmaceutical lobby in the world. Even though he is employed by the lobbying organization, he is not an officially registered lobbyist, therefore, his actions are legal. He is being paid a purported 2 million dollars (perhaps being rewarded for the very profitable policy that he helped to create while in public office.) Do you think Tauzin's actions are okay for a Congress person to do?

The U.S. political and campaign system has been dramatically impacted since the 1976 and 1978 Supreme Court rulings because they extended first amendment rights to corporations by equating money with free speech. Have you noticed changes in the last 20 - 30 years? (Please let the people who were around speak on this.)

(There are also Supreme Court cases available on the website. They are pdf downloads so you can do your own research.)

Corporations give money to nonprofit think tanks to influence public opinion. People from these think tanks are often appointed to government posts. How does this affect a democratic republic? How does it affect the social debate within the country?

continued - Study Guide 2

Profit and Policy: At What Cost

The revolving door is an increasing phenomenon within U.S. foreign and domestic policy positions. It also seems that the bidding process for government contracts is frequently bypassed. The best company for the job could be declaring bankruptcy since lucrative contracts are given to well-connected corporations. Does this system seem like a fair and decent way to spend our tax dollars? Does it encourage or discourage competition, and how does it affect the economy? How does the current mainstream media environment fit into this conversation?

Certain corporations are given preferential rights. For example, Exxon Mobile, the corporation that generated the most profit in the history of the world, also received subsidized World Bank funds. The stated goal of the World Bank is to alleviate poverty. Does that make sense? Why do you think this occurred?

Conducting business is a necessity in any society, but how much power should a corporation have? (Other countries recognize people as having more rights and limit the rights of corporations.) Pfizer is one of the corporations that is profiting off of the recent Medicare legislation. While companies do benefit society by creating products that are beneficial, is it fair to let corporations have political power? Have corporations created social, political and economic systems that benefit them? Why do you think that our healthcare system is the way it is?

We Can Have Good Government!

Some people from outside of the U.S. felt that "The war is against the American People." Do you agree or disagree with this point of view and why?

Remember that democracy comes from the people. Yes, we are a republic, most governments are, however the United States is unique among developed industrial democracies. Think of how our society could be. The U.S. has great creativity and is the stuff of dreams. Dream a better world and let's make it a reality.

Talk to people! This can happen anywhere, even in the grocery line. Wait for a telemarketer to call you. The next time they call during dinner, pick it up and have some fun trying to convince them of your point. Don't take no for an answer.

Write, call, email and make appointments to talk to your representatives. They are your representatives after all. They can't turn you away if you're a constituent. Invite them to come to your potluck dinner. (Maybe have it the same evening as the swank party that PhRMA happens to be having. Ask them questions. Ask them why they would want to go to the party. What might they say? "But I need funding for my campaign!" Hummm. Maybe that's a problem.)

Find and ally yourself with people that you like and can work together with.

There are many things that a person can do! Brainstorm different things (let's keep it positive) that a person could do to affect change!

There is another study guide, but get some rest and take a break.
Remember to enjoy yourself!
www.consideringdemocracy.com

Discussion Menu #2 For the DOD Extras

CONSIDERING DEMOCRACY

A documentary to *Refresh* and *Recharge* your Dialog!

Host a Screening Party!

Think fresh. Think fun. Be empowered. Learn and define change!

www.consideringdemocracy.com