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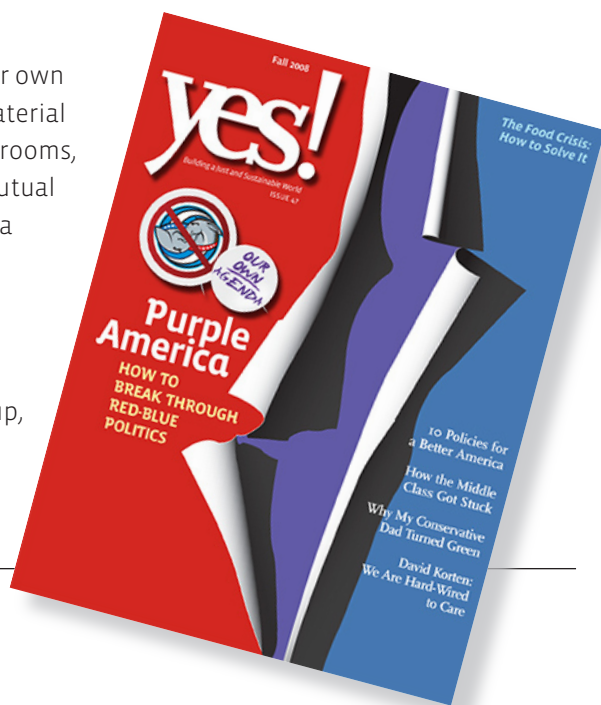
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Building a Just and Sustainable World

DISCUSSION GUIDE | ISSUE 47 | PURPLE AMERICA

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, see the order form on the back.



Brendan Clarke

Pundits divide U.S. politics into red states versus blue states. But it isn't that simple. Fed up with thirty-second sound bites and a gross oversimplification of their values, Americans are taking back their democracy. This issue of YES! explores how ordinary people are finding the courage to speak their mind, and more importantly, to listen to others' ideas. People across political, economic, religious, and ethnic spectrums are putting aside their differences and finding their shared values. An emerging populist movement is bridging the red-blue divide and discovering Purple America. Rather than have the agenda set by special interests and politicians, people are making their own agenda that deals with the issues most important to them.

- This discussion guide focuses on these articles:
- David Sirota, "Seeing Red and Feeling Blue in Purple America"
 - Kate Sheppard, "Farmer and Daughter"
 - Valerie Saturen, "Evangelicals Put New Faith in Environment, Social Justice"
 - Pramila Jayapal, "Immigrants and American-born: 'Are you listening?'"
 - *Our Own Agenda: 10 Policies for a Better America*
 - David Korten, "We Are Hard-Wired To Care and Connect"

Seeing Red and Feeling Blue in Purple America

People across the United States are fed up with politics as usual and are looking for answers to the issues that affect >>

their lives—especially the bread-and-butter issues of the economy, health care, housing, and jobs. David Sirota traveled the country talking to people who are pushing for a political agenda that addresses the needs of everyday people. Organizations like the Working Families Party in New York are channeling this populist energy into political power.

1. Sirota talked to people from Montana to New York to the California-Mexico border who are frustrated with the direction the country is headed. Do these stories match your experience, or that of family and friends? Have you or those you know channeled the kinds of frustration Sirota talks about into political action?

2. The Minutemen and the WFP take radically different approaches to addressing the problems they see in the country. Do you think the members of the two groups could find common ground? Why or why not?

3. Sirota says that populism requires “genuine courage and selflessness, because participants in the uprising must make their own personal power a lower priority than popular control.” What do you make of this statement? Is this an attitude you think can take hold in the United States? Why or why not?

Farmer and Daughter

Kate Sheppard is young, liberal, and green. She has long been at political odds with her conservative father, a farmer in New Jersey. But for different reasons, both have come to a similar conclusion about the importance of organic farming. Kate’s dad is now starting to grow organic food, invest in solar and wind power, and become politically active on environmental issues. Kate is realizing what is lost when people write off groups that can become allies for change. She is learning to re-think her assumptions and get past stereotypes to find common ground in unexpected places.

1. What is it like when you talk politics with people whose views are different from yours? When have you had a particularly rewarding or challenging experience talking about politics with someone who holds different views?

2. This article highlights areas of common interest between people of different political backgrounds. Can you think of other areas where liberal, conservative, green party, or other affiliations share common goals?

3. When her father asked her to look up the voting record of a Republican congressman, Sheppard discovered she’d made wrong assumptions about what she’d find. What

experiences have you had where people surprised you by acting contrary to stereotypes? Has anyone made assumptions about your beliefs based on surface appearances? What was your reaction? What, if anything, did you do to change their mind about you?

Our Own Agenda: 10 Policies for a Better America

Politics would be easier and more engaging if we could only agree on what we want. If you follow coverage of political campaigns, though, you know that’s impossible. YES! says it’s not only possible, it’s already happened. Here’s an agenda that serves the needs of real people, and here’s the polling data that says there’s majority public support for it.

1. Are there any polling results here that surprise you or are different from your expectations? Which ones?

2. Which of the agenda items do you think are most important? Which do you think are least important? What are the factors you consider to make those choices?

3. Did we include categories on the agenda that shouldn’t be there? Which ones are they, and why should they be deleted? Did we leave out agenda items we should have included? What are they?

4. Do you think there’s a possibility that the items on this agenda will be enacted by politicians? Why or why not?

Immigrants and American-born: “Are you listening?”

The United States is a country of immigrants. But today immigrants are often scapegoated for economic woes and security concerns. Pramila Jayapal’s article describes a campaign called the Night of 1,000 Conversations, which brings together small groups of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The questions that participants discuss: What kind of America do we want? And how is immigration part of that America?

1. Have you participated in a public discussion like the Night of 1,000 Conversations? If so, what was the experience like? Did you feel that your words were heard and respected?

2. If your family immigrated to the United States, when did they arrive? What is their story? Did they face any discrimination when they arrived? Do you know any recent immigrants to the United States? If you do, how do their stories differ from your family’s story?

3. The people at these events discussed the questions



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“What Kind of America do we want?” and “How is immigration part of that America?” What are your answers to these questions?

We Are Hard-Wired To Care and Connect

Purple America is not just about the red-blue divide, or American politics. Our common interests are part of a “larger human story” that highlights the shared core values and aspirations across cultures—“healthy, happy children, loving families, and a caring community with a beautiful, healthy natural environment.” The biggest obstacle to realizing this better world is a belief that competition, individualism, and materialism are the essence of human nature. But now, scientific research based on brain imaging is providing support for the idea that humans are actually

hard-wired to cooperate and to care for one another. The real challenge is not to overcome our human nature, but to learn how to nurture the part of it that will fulfill our need for caring and compassion.

1. Have you helped or been helped by a total stranger? What was it like? How did you feel?
2. Are you involved with any volunteer groups, charity organizations, or community projects that are set up to benefit others? If so, what do you do and how did you get started? What have you gained from the experience?
3. Does the Empire story Korten outlines sound familiar to you? Where do you notice that story being reinforced? How do you feel about the idea that competition and greed are not the only true expressions of human nature? What led you to your conclusions?

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