

UNITED AMERICA

WAYNE BAKER

Images of America Guide

By David Crumm

Read The Spirit Books



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A United America **discussion guide**

How to organize an ice-breaker “Images of America” discussion with Dr. Wayne Baker’s book, *United America*.

This is the second in a series of discussion guides that readers may want to use while talking about Dr. Wayne Baker’s book. This guide describes a one-session exercise that the team at our publishing house has used several times with groups starting a discussion series on this book. It works well as an ice-breaker and does not require anyone to have read the book before jumping into this exercise.

The goal: help class participants meet new people on the first day of class and begin talking about their deepest feelings when they consider American values.

Preparation

Divide your larger group into small groups. We do this by “numbering off” around the room, which usually has the effect of separating spouses and friends into different small groups. Small groups of three to four people work best in this exercise.

You will need space so that the small groups can physically separate and have room to consider the images of America. In our groups, we printed a selection of the images on standard 8-by-11-inch paper and groups laid them on the floor between their chairs to consider the whole array. Some laid them on a table. Some simply passed around the images.

NOTE: Printing photos on paper frees you from having to find digital means of displaying the images, but you could load them onto iPads, laptops or other hand-held devices for each group to view. It is important for the groups to carefully look at the images, as they talk, so it is not effective to ask them to simply remember them from a one-time projection on a big screen.

ALSO NOTE: We did not ask the small groups to consider all of the 100-plus photos. That would have taken too much time, we felt. We made a selection of 10 to 12 images for each small group. We drew from the total pool of images so that each small group had a different mix of images. This avoided the situation of small groups starting to “report back to the entire group” and discovering that too many people had chosen the same image. In the final sharing, each time, we wound up a wide range of personal stories.

The Question

Here is the question we asked participants, once they were divided into small groups and each group had its selection of images to consider:

In your small group, please look carefully at these images of America. Some are quite famous; some might be new to you. Each group has a different mix of photos, so you're not likely to duplicate each other. Please, ask each person in your group to choose the image that sparks the deepest feelings about America. Which image strikes the strongest emotion? That emotion might range from pride to worry, from humor to sadness. Your chosen image might trigger a national memory we all share; or it might trigger a personal memory from your own family. Then, in each small group, choose one person who will talk about his or her image, when we reassemble the whole group.

WHY WE DO IT THIS WAY: In every series, we encountered men and women who approached group leaders on the first day and said, "I want to be part of this group, but I don't want to talk in front of the group." So, our instruction to the small groups was a solution for that initial anxiety. People got to know each other; they heard personal stories in the privacy of their small groups; they were able to choose one person to speak in the larger session, at the end, which reassured the more anxious participants on the first day. As the series unfolded in each venue, we found everyone eventually felt comfortable speaking in the larger group. But, as an ice-breaker activity, this kind of instruction to the small groups reduces anxiety and invites small group members to share deep responses to the photos with others.

Surprises and an Invitation

When we made our initial selection of 100-plus photos, we drew from the breadth of the vast Wikimedia Commons storehouse of images. The URL is <http://commons.wikimedia.org>.

We chose images from history, popular culture, commerce and all phases of American life. Our surprise in the early groups using this exercise was that participants chose a wide range of images that sparked deep feelings about America.

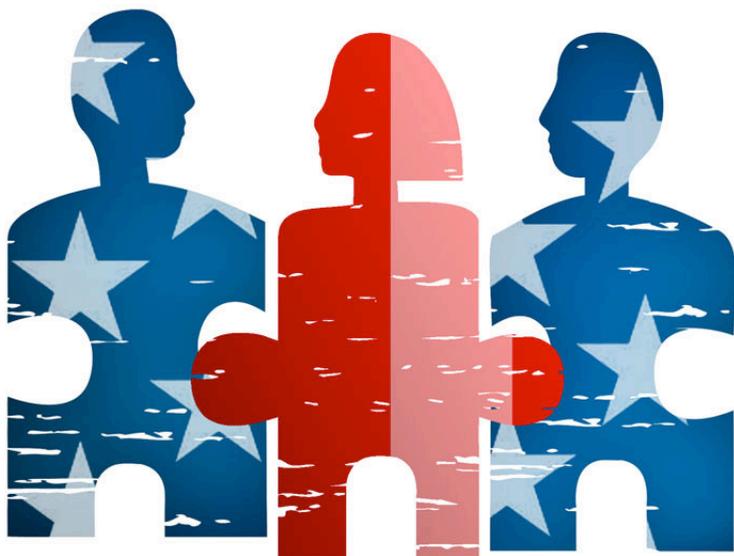
In one group, an elderly man spoke emotionally about the Google logo, connecting Google's helpful global interface with the same spirit that sent America into World War II and into post-WWII rebuilding of Europe. "We've always tried to help the world and we're still doing it," he said. You may agree or disagree with this man's assessment, but he spoke with obvious emotion about his pride in America.

A woman surprised us by choosing an image of a classic American car with a big tailfin. When she showed the image to the larger group, we expected she might talk about nostalgia for an earlier era. Instead, she recalled generations of her family who made their living in U.S. auto factories and, once again, spoke with great emotion about her pride in that heritage.

We guarantee: You will be surprised, too.

We also invite you to email us at OurValuesProject@gmail.com if you find other free-to-share online images that should be included in our recommended collection of images.

You can find our online gallery of more than 100 American images at UnitedAmericaBook.com. Just follow the link on the left, or access the gallery directly at <http://www.readthespirit.com/bookstore/books/united-america/united-america-join-nations-dialogue/gallery-american-images>.



UNITED AMERICA

The surprising truth about American values,
American identity and the 10 beliefs that a large
majority of Americans hold dear

WAYNE BAKER

Preface by Brian McLaren

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