John Dos Passos: the Theme Is Freedom.

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JOHN DOS PASSOS: THE THEME IS FREEDOM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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January, 1967
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Dr. Lewis P. Simpson for his encouragement and advice during the writing of this dissertation.
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ABSTRACT

John Dos Passos has been neglected by the literary and academic worlds. Too often his work has been judged, not on its literary merit, but on its political content. This thesis was undertaken as an effort to help to elevate Dos Passos to his proper place in the ranks of American writers.

Continuity is given to almost all of his writings by the constant theme of the desirability for individual freedom. In his brief early period, Dos Passos sought freedom largely for the alienated artists of society. Then he became involved in the search for the maximum freedom for all people. The turning point came when the Sacco-Vanzetti case drew him from the isolated garrets into the streets. Management's abuses of labor and the general class war became his subject matter in U.S.A. and other books as Dos Passos fought for freedom from oppression for the workers. He enthusiastically endorsed Roosevelt and the New Deal. The liberal critics applauded his efforts.

Later, in District of Columbia, Dos Passos paused to question the effect on individual liberty of many of the New Deal programs. The critics looked askance at his temerity.
Not satisfied with either Wall Street's or Roosevelt's approach to the problem of human dignity, Dos Passos turned to an exploration of American history, particularly to Jefferson. The result of his continuing interest has been several books, but no satisfactory answer to the problem of freedom in highly industrialized society has yet been found by him. Critics have been unimpressed by his historical efforts.

By the early fifties Dos Passos had completely severed his association with the liberals. He felt that despite material gains the workers were being oppressed by their supposed benefactors, big government and big labor. To Dos Passos, the people were not yet free; they had only exchanged masters. *Midcentury* and other protests were the results. Dos Passos' literary reputation plummeted.

Throughout Dos Passos' career the political bias of the liberal critics has hampered their objectivity in assessing the literary worth of Dos Passos' books. Reviews have tended to dwell on his past association with Marxists and his new alignment with conservatives rather than on the book itself. Dos Passos is regarded as disillusioned and bitter, as a political deviate and a traitor to the good cause.

But it was, and still is, Thorstein Veblen, not Marx, who consistently furnished the philosophic basis for all of
the writings of Dos Passos. This was true when he was supposed to be a Marxist and is true now when he is thought to be a reactionary. He read much of Veblen while a student at Harvard and read Marx only in fragments in later years. Marx was an optimist. Veblen was bitter and pessimistic, dominant attitudes in Dos Passos. A great many of Dos Passos' characters are fictional counterparts of Veblen's "captains of industry," "captains of business," "engineers," and others. The treatment given to the subjects of Dos Passos' capsule biographies is the same as if Veblen had been doing the judging. Veblen's venom is directed against the parasites of society, the oppressors of the people. Dos Passos echoes this feeling, and he is as much against the users of uncaring power in Midcentury as he is in U.S.A. Veblen's heroes are Dos Passos' heroes; his villains are Dos Passos' villains. Veblen searched for and failed to find an ideal society based on freedom and equality. Dos Passos continues searching.

Perhaps, once it is realized that the constant theme of Dos Passos has been his search for individual freedom and that he has not been a political turncoat, attention can be focused where it should be, on his literary artistry, not on his supposed political positions.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG MAN

Jean Paul Sartre said in 1938: "I regard Dos Passos as the greatest writer of our time." If at the time, most critics probably thought this praise excessive, today they would no doubt regard, Sartre's statement as ridiculous. Sartre made his declaration when the literary reputation of John Dos Passos was high, just after his trilogy of novels, U.S.A.--composed of The 42nd Parallel, 1919, and The Big Money--had been published in its full form. Although response to his trilogy was not all favorable, Dos Passos, critics generally agreed, had become a major American literary figure, a writer belonging in the company of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Farrell.

By the time his second trilogy, District of Columbia--made up of Adventures of a Young Man, Number One, and The Grand Design--was published in 1952, Dos Passos' literary reputation had lost its power. Critics, especially those who had been ultra-liberal in their political philosophy during the 1930's and 1940's, showed concern about Dos Passos' apparent changing political beliefs--his switch
from liberalism to conservatism—as reflected in these three novels, and tended to review these books, not for their intrinsic literary merit, but solely for their political content. They read *Adventures of a Young Man* with a sense of uneasiness, *Number One* with dislike, and *The Grand Design* with indignation. Dos Passos had had the temerity to question the total good of the New Deal, and his defection was costly. He descended from literary prominence to relative obscurity, from critical acclaim to critical disapproval. He came to be viewed as a deserter of the world of reform, a tired, querulous old man, who had withdrawn from the field of battle to warm his bones by the chilly hearth of conservatism.

That Dos Passos did support liberalism, both before and during the early part of the Roosevelt era, is incontrovertible, and his critics were just in claiming he had changed his allegiance from the liberal to the conservative cause during the late 1930's. In 1932 he worked for the election of the Communist candidates for president and vice president Foster and Ford, and in 1964 he supported Goldwater and Miller for these offices. In view of these facts, to assert that Dos Passos has held a consistent political viewpoint seems absurd, at least at first glance. However, providing two things are kept in mind, one can claim that Dos Passos was not a political deviant. The first of these
is the radical difference between the government of the United States in 1964 and what it was in 1932. In 1932 our government had not yet enacted into law the Wagner Act, the Social Security System, the blue-eagled NRA, the Minimum Wage Laws, the AAA, the various Civil Rights Acts, the FEPC, and a host of other measures designed to improve the economic status of the individual and to restore his dignity and independence. In spite of the anti-trust laws on the books, big business was the major political force in the country. Dos Passos saw and recognized the enormous power of the few over the lives of the vast majority of Americans. He was appalled. His writing and whatever else he did were efforts to alleviate social conditions in the United States.

Today, Dos Passos is equally appalled by the power of bureaucratic government in American life. According to his views, the common man has simply exchanged masters. Once an oligarchy of business interests had exploited, dominated, and oppressed the American common man; now another oligarchy does so—an oligarchy of governmental bureaucrats and labor leaders. Dos Passos is still on the side of the common man. In this sense, one can say, with a great deal of justification, that he has remained in a relatively stable political position; his partisan political position has changed but the values underlying his political thinking have not.
A second aspect of Dos Passos' basic political consistency is implied in the first. Above all else, Dos Passos has been concerned with the freedom of the individual. Indeed, practically every page Dos Passos has written, beginning with his early writings in the *Harvard Monthly* and continuing to the present, could logically be bound together and issued as one large volume bearing the title of one of his books, *The Theme Is Freedom*. This central theme—particularly with reference to the integrity of the single person—gives his writings their continuity.

Dos Passos has fought every group, no matter what its theory and composition, capitalistic, communistic, or simply bureaucratic, that he has felt oppresses the individual. We live, he early realized, in an industrial age. No amount of wishing can do away with the complications inherent in industrial society. But Dos Passos has refused to believe modern society must, of necessity, be a regimented one. He has fought for and still fights for the maximum possible freedom of the individual to conduct his own life as he sees fit without exploiting or oppressing others. A few critics have lately seen his leading motive. In 1958, one put it this way:

Dos Passos has not really changed his basic views during the past thirty years; indeed, he has remained remarkably consistent. He has continued to see all kinds of dangers to the creative freedom of the individual, and I find
it hard to quarrel with his alarm at each of these potential dangers.\(^2\)

In 1965 another critic commented:

Dos Passos is a difficult man to talk about. . . . The shift from left to right may look contradictory, but I think is not. Dos Passos is a man always opposed to power. He saw power in the hands of capitalistic businessmen in the 30s and was, therefore, on the radical left; he sees power today in the hands of intellectual liberals, allied with labor, and is now on the conservative right. . . . Dos Passos has always been a negative function of power; that is, one finds him always at the opposite pole of where he conceives power to be. In this sense, he is more an anarchist, and always was, than a socialist or a conservative.\(^3\)

Dos Passos' stress on individual freedom has taken various forms during his long writing career, but the underlying motive has remained unchanged. At first he went through a kind of half-hearted phase of trying to discover individual autonomy in the "alienation" of the artist; then he made an effort to find individual freedom in socialist collectivism; then he turned toward a more or less nostalgic search for individualism in "free enterprise."

Of course, these phases are not always distinctly marked, but they are evident in his novels and other works.

The first phase, that of the "alienated artist," dominated all of his early writings. If one examines Dos Passos' life, it is easy to see why. He was born out of wedlock on January 14, 1896, to John Randolph Dos Passos and Miss Lucy Addison Sprigg, a spinster who was forty-seven
years of age. His father, son of an immigrant Portuguese shoemaker, was a truly "self-made man." He was a prominent criminal attorney, an author, and a personal friend of President McKinley. When he turned to the practice of civil law, he became instrumental in the development of the great trusts during the 1890's. A strong advocate of gold, industry, and capitalism, he received what was purported to be the largest legal fee then on record for his efforts on behalf of the Sugar Trust in 1895. The general governmental attitude toward big business at the time can be seen in the Supreme Court's decision which held the Trust's controlling ninety-eight per cent of the sugar refining industry did not constitute restraint of trade. The elder Dos Passos appears in several of the semi-autobiographical works of his son. He is the "Jack" and the "He" referred to in several of the "Camera Eye" divisions in U.S.A. and the James Knox Polk Pignatelli or Monsieur Dandy in Chosen Country. A strong, vigorous man, an impressive speaker, as well as an outstanding lawyer, the father of Dos Passos embodied the typical American success story. He was a self-made aristocrat. Dos Passos' mother was born one.

Lucy Addison Sprigg came of an old Southern family; her father had served the Confederate cause during the Civil War. She bore her child in Chicago but did not remain there long—young John was never to know a stable home life.
His mother carted him off to Mexico, to England, and to the Continent during his childhood. At times he was placed in the hands of governesses or friends of his mother while his parents went on extended trips. Only occasionally did he see his father, who must have been disappointed in his offspring. The lad was nearsighted and required thick glasses; he was shy, sensitive, self-conscious, and emotional; in short, he was the antithesis of the robust, vigorous father. Doubtless, the bar sinister and the rootless existence did little to give the boy self-confidence.

As a lad, Dos Passos briefly attended a private school in England and a public school in the District of Columbia, and then in 1907, he was enrolled in the Choate School, a preparatory school for boys in New England. He was registered under the name of John Roderigo Madison—his father did not publicly acknowledge the lad until he was sixteen years old. It was at Choate School that Dos Passos first began to write, when he became a staff member of the Choate School News. A year after having completed his preparatory schooling, he entered Harvard at the age of sixteen. During his freshman year he had his first story, "The Almeh," published in the July, 1913, issue of the Harvard Monthly. It was signed "J. R. Dos Passos."5

The tale is a rather well-written one about the pursuit of a beautiful Arabian girl by two young Americans who
discover to their dismay that she is nothing but a danseuse du ventre. The acceptance of a story, even one about an Egyptian belly-dancer, was quite an accomplishment by a freshman at Harvard. During the remainder of his year at the university, he had several more stories accepted by the Monthly. In 1915 he became an editor of the magazine and later in the year became its secretary. He wrote poems, stories, and editorials. After his mother died in April, 1916, he composed the most important of his early writings, an essay entitled "A Humble Protest," which came out in the Monthly in June, 1916. In it he tried to formulate a philosophy for living, asking the inevitable, unanswerable question: what is the end of life? The best possible course to follow, he tentatively concluded, is to divide life's aims between thought and art, between the two half-opposed ideals represented by Plato and Michelangelo. He saw one as a desire to fathom the meaning of life, the other to create it. The ideal would be a blend of the two. Dos Passos' dichotomy is quite similar to Matthew Arnold's Hebraism and Hellenism. Like Arnold, he abhorred the way in which most men spend their lives in an industrial society without any chance of self-expression, except in the hectic pleasures taken while suffocating in crowded cities. At this time Dos Passos refused to accept the reality of industrialization. Granville Hicks comments: "It does
startle us to discover that the man who, preeminently among his contemporaries, has refused to dodge industrialism began by repudiating it."

After graduating cum laude from Harvard in 1916, Dos Passos volunteered for duty overseas with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit. Because of the strong objections of his father, he went instead to Spain to study architecture. There he studied, wrote poetry, and, in the October 14, 1916, issue of the New Republic, saw his essay "Against American Literature" published. In this he complains of the sterility and lack of roots of American literature and praises Russian literature for its primitive savagery and color. He declares:

An all-enveloping industrialism, a new mode of life preparing, has broken down the old bridges leading to the past, has cut off the possibility of retreat. Our only course is to press on. Shall we pick up the glove Walt Whitman threw at the feet of posterity? Or shall we stagnate forever, the Sicily of the modern world, rich in the world's good, absorbing the thought, patronizing the art of other peoples, but producing nothing from amid our jumble of races but steel and oil and grain?

On January 27, 1917, his father died, and Dos Passos returned to America. He re-enlisted in the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit and, together with Hemingway, commenced a tour of ambulance duty in France. In the same year, Dos Passos appeared in Eight Harvard Poets. After the dissolution of the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit in 1918, he served
for a time on ambulance duty in Italy. Then he returned to America, was inducted into the army, and was assigned to Allentown training camp. In November he was sent back to France, a member of the Medical Corps, engaged in clerical and ambulance duty. When he received his discharge in France in the spring of 1919, he went to Portugal and Spain to write. In October, 1920, his first novel, *One Man's Initiation--1917*, was published in London.  

As could be expected, this first book of Dos Passos is his least important one. It shows little in the way of literary style and not much in the way of characterization, although it bears some similarity to Hemingway's future novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. Frederick Henry's counterpart is Martin Howe who, like Henry, is a volunteer ambulance driver in a foreign army. Henry, however, is older than Howe. He has served long enough at the front to come to some sort of terms with the life of war; he has already lost his illusions, and fine words are meaningless to him. Martin Howe is full of illusions and believes in the idealistic slogans of the day. Martin, like Dos Passos himself in 1917, is a naive young Harvard graduate who volunteers to serve with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit in France. He goes forth to "save the world for democracy." He sees the issues only in black and white. The Germans represent the forces of barbarism; they are brutal ravishers and
blood-thirsty Teutons. The Allies are on the side of decency and civilization. Though Martin is involved in the war, he is not directly a part of it, not for a while anyway. His is a spectatorial attitude.

Gradually he changes, losing both his sense of detachment and his illusions as the horrors of war impinge more and more on his consciousness. His romantic attitudes are nullified by the sight of the wounded, the maimed, and the dead. He becomes interested in the anarchist beliefs of his French friends and in social reform. In a discussion one of his comrades states:

All we have now is the same war between the classes: those that exploit and those that are exploited. The cunning, unscrupulous people control the humane kindly people. . . . We are too like sheep; we must go in flocks, and a flock to live must organise [sic]. . . . What we want is organization from the bottom, organisation by the ungreedy, by the humane, by the uncunning, socialism of the masses that shall spring from the natural need of men to help one another; not socialism from the top to the ends of the governors, that they may clamp us tighter in their fetters. We must stop the economic war, the war for existence of man against man.10

Martin talks of fleeing from all the stupidity, the hatred, and the cant of governments. The brooding young man seeks refuge, but finds none. Near the close of the book, Martin begins to hope once more. His former illusions about war are replaced by illusions of social reform, but when his anarchist friends are killed in action, the new illusions follow the path of the old ones to destruction.
Although *One Man's Initiation--1917* is not important as literature, it does have significance in the study of Dos Passos, for it forecasts the novels which have come after it. It is a portrayal of the condition of modern man and the institutions which he has created that defeat him. It is at once a protest and a story of destroyed illusions. Yet bathos is the prevailing mood of the book; the cold, hard anger of the better novels of Dos Passos is lacking in *One Man's Initiation--1917*. Martin is more concerned with his own disappointments than with the over all destruction going on about him. Although he speaks at times of freedom, he is more concerned with the idealistic freedom of the sensitive artist than with the freedom of ordinary people. Dos Passos writes from the point of view of the alienated artist rather than from that of the critic of society.

During most of the 1920's he continued writing in this vein, placing his chief emphasis on the frustration of the artistic temperament in confrontation with society, not on the social responsibility of the writer. However, in some of the writings of this period, clues to the direction which his major works would take are to be found. In an article appearing in the *Nation* during 1920, he speaks of the dislike of Europeans for Americans after the war. The continental people, he says, had been captivated by Wilson's Fourteen Points. They had renewed their hope for American
democratic freedom buried under the top-heavy industrial organization which dominated the United States after the Civil War, only to see their hope swept into the waste basket beside the conference table at Versailles. Dos Passos asserts a new tradition is needed, "something similar to the great agin-the-government tradition that England inherited from the turbulent seafaring folk that crowded into the island out of the northern seas." Taking his own advice, he became the foremost of the "agin-the-government" writers, invariably opposing those in control, for governments were responsible for the wholesale slaughter of men as they led their nations into battle. And war was to become the setting in Dos Passos' first really important book.

*Three Soldiers* was published in 1921. Not only was it Dos Passos' first major work, it was also the first really significant novel of the first World War. In its unsentimental and stark treatment of the citizen soldiers caught up in war's madness, Dos Passos set a tone later to be emulated by numerous writers. Even after World War II such books as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* show an indebtedness to *Three Soldiers*.

Dos Passos' three soldiers are separately drawn entities. Dan Fuselli is a San Franciscan of Italian
parentage. He is stupid and docile; vainly striving to make
good in the army and to gain recognition by being a good
soldier, he tries to advance to the rank of corporal. But
he is pathetic; he believes everything his superiors tell
him. When he contracts a venereal disease, his pitiful
military ambition is defeated. Chrisfield, who is from
Indiana, self-consciously talks like a Southerner. He is
the rebel from army discipline, the proverbial round-peg-
in-the-square-hole-type. Not too intelligent and believing
in little but his own personal dignity, he eventually kills
his sergeant who has offended him. The third soldier is
John Andrews, sensitive, educated, and artistic. Like Dos
Passos' earlier creation, Martin Howe, John Andrews is par-
tially an autobiographical character. While talking to a
French girl, he remarks: "My mother taught me to play the
piano when I was very small. . . . She and I lived in an
old house belonging to her family in Virginia. . . . Mother
was very unhappy. She had led a dreadfully thwarted life
. . . that unrelieved hopeless misery only a woman can suf-
fer."12 Unable to conform to army discipline, Andrews
throws away his uniform, deserts, and is caught by the
military police, who beat him to a pulp. Although he is
not explicitly told so in the book, the reader is left with
the impression that Andrews will serve a long term at
Leavenworth.
The story is related with unusual frankness, the soldiers talking much as they do in real life. The ugliness of petty men given authority, the facts of drunkenness and prostitution, the total effect of crushing army discipline on a sensitive soul are all depicted in Three Soldiers. The book describes no battles; rather, what it portrays is the transformation of minds and bodies under the pressures not of war as such, but of the army, the most undemocratic and autocratic organization of all the institutions created by men. "Making the Mold," "The Metal Cools," "Machines," and "Rust"—the four divisions of the novel—detail the transformation of the three soldiers as they progress from one state to another. It is the system of the army to strip the individual from his personality, to fashion him into a small cog of a gigantic machine, smoothly functioning as one of its minute units. This is what Dos Passos deplores. The army is the destroyer of the individual. John Andrews, after being wounded and feeling the futility and despair of army life with its discipline, hate, and killing, thinks of deserting: "He was ready to endure anything, to face any sort of death, for the sake of a few months of liberty in which to forget the degradation of this last year." 13

Three Soldiers has been criticized for being overly aesthetic, but such a charge can be substantiated only by making the loss of John Andrew's symphonic work the central
tragedy of the novel. It is not. Undoubtedly there is a keen affinity between the author and his character, John Andrews, but not to be forgotten is the fact that Andrews is but one of the men in Three Soldiers; not only Andrews, but also Chrisfield and Fuselli—neither of whom is artistic or sensitive—are destroyed by the army. Their function in the novel is also important; each one represents a large group of men. Chrisfield symbolizes those whose personal sense of the importance of individuality is never crushed, the rebels, those whom the army can never make into soldiers; Fuselli typifies those ignorant souls, those trusting and naive recruits who believe the drivel and do their best to conform and by so doing to rise to the majestic state of being corporals. Both the rebel Chrisfield and the truckling Fuselli are, like Andrews, mangled by the army machine. No one escapes.

Truly, the book has been criticized as being antimilitaristic. It is not a novel which would be recommended by the American Legion. It strips away the facade of glory, honor, and duty, showing the ugliness underneath. The book is naked and bitter. The posturings of the Y.M.C.A. people are exposed, as is their unctiousness. The officers and G.H.Q. are shown as a class apart, a different face from the common soldier. They are in fact his enemy.
During the year in which Three Soldiers was published, Dos Passos traveled widely, working for the Near East Relief organization. He assimilated much of what he saw and heard, later using the information in a travel book. His next work, however, was based on the knowledge of Spain which he had accumulated while studying architecture there before enlisting in the ambulance corps. *Rosinante to the Road Again* (1922) was published shortly after the writer had returned to the United States, when he took up residence in New York.

In this story we again meet the shy, introspective, literary, and aloof young man found in so many of Dos Passos' early books. This time he is Telemachus, ostensibly searching for a "father" and looking for the gesture which truly represents Spain. The semi-fictional and semi-autobiographical Telemachus is juxtaposed by the other main character of the book, Lyaeus, who is engaged with life and living, with gaiety and love. Telemachus stands back, gazing enviously at his counterpart, eagerly zesting for life and action but too inhibited to partake of it himself. In contrast with the sober treatment given Martin Howe, a note of mockery and self-ridicule is sounded in Telemachus. Dos Passos is becoming increasingly aware of the ridiculous position of his heroes in their disattachment from life.
Basically, *Rosinante to the Road Again* is the story of the meanderings of Telemachus and Lyaeus as they travel about Spain; at times it seems to be no more than a series of notes taken by Dos Passos during his sojourn there. The intent is to grasp the essential heart of Spain, the quality which has given the people of the Iberian peninsula their uniqueness. Early in the book Telemachus says, "... an instant swagger of defiance in the midst of a litany to death the all-powerful. That is Spain... Castile at any rate." In the end he finds the gesture for which he has been searching in an effort to find the soul of Spain; it is a pail of slop dumped on his head from an upstairs window by a girl.

At this time Dos Passos seemed to have two principal ideas about Spain, one being that Spain was a kind of pastoral paradise having escaped the sordid industrialization of the rest of Europe, the other being that the lower classes had ample reason for revolutionary impulses. He phrases his dual attitude this way:

The problem of our day is whether Spaniards—evolving locally, anarchically, without centralization in anything but repression, will work out new ways of life for themselves, or whether they will be drawn into the festering tumult of a Europe where the system that is dying is only strong enough to kill in its death-throes all new growth in which there is hope for the future. The Pyrenees are high.
Dos Passos finds in Sancho Panza and the original rider of Rosinante, Don Quixote, two contrasting figures who, when combined, represent the real Spain. Walking in a village, seeing the gaiety and laughter of the inhabitants, he thinks, "Here was the gospel of Sancho Panza . . . the easy acceptance of life, the unashamed joy in food and color, and the softness of women's hair." As he walks on out of the village across the plain, the memory of "the knight of the sorrowful countenance, Don Quixote," comes to him, Quixote, "blunderingly trying to remould the world, pitifully sure of the power of his own ideal." Contrasted with them is "the restless industrial world of joyless enforced labor and incessant goading war." He wonders to what purpose it would be for the knight errant once again to throw the saddle upon lean Rosinante. The wonder evidently turned to resolve in Dos Passos, for seldom has he dismounted from his own Rosinante during the ensuing forty years. Sway-backed, spavined, and wind-broken though he may be after all the battles his rider has spurred him to, he still remains unstabled.

There is a definite change of mood in Rosinante to the Road Again. Roughly the book is divided into two halves. In the first Dos Passos describes the wandering of Telemachus in rather lush and florid prose; in the second
he speaks about Spanish society and notable Spaniards in a more direct, firm style. An example from the first part of the book will illustrate both the lush style and the idealistic romanticism which still possessed the author. A baker of Almorox has been talking to Dos Passos who muses:

In him I seemed to see the generations wax and wane, like the years, strung on the thread of labor, of unending sweat and strain of muscles against the earth. It was all so mellow, so strangely aloof from the modern world of feverish change, this life of the peasants of Almorox. Everywhere roots striking into the infinite past. For before the Revolution, before the Moors, before the Romans, before the dark furtive traders, the Phoenicians, they were much the same, these Iberian village communities. Far away things changed, cities were founded, hard roads built, armies marched and fought and passed away; but in Almorox the foundations of life remained unchanged up to the present.17

The nostalgic wish for the idyllic life of romantic primitivism, of the pastoral anarchy of village life, gives way to a more realistic attitude in the last half of the book. Dos Passos faces the reality of the contemporary situation in Spain, the necessity of protecting the rights of the individual by some means or other. A syndicalist tells him that the Spanish people are being buried under industrialism; the people are fast acquiring a bourgeois mentality and are in danger of losing their individuality. He regrets that the people had not had the foresight to capture the means of production when the system was in its early stages. Then the machines would have been the slaves of
man instead of the reverse. The syndicalist sees the political situation as a race between communism and capitalism, neither of which, he feels, reflects the soul of Spain.  

Also to be found in the last half of Rosinante to the Road Again are several semi-formal essays in which Dos Passos writes of Miguel de Unamuno, the radical poet, of Cordova, of Antonio Machado's poetry, and of Blasco Ibanez whom he compares with H. G. Wells, both in productivity and in genius. Ibanez wrote more than Wells, a total of ten volumes of universal history, a three-volume translation of the French Revolution by Michelet, works on cooking and science, a geography, a social history, a nine-volume history of the European War, a translation of the Arabian Nights, some books on travel, miscellaneous items, and two dozen novels. In Ibanez, whom he praised for the great extent of his learning, Dos Passos found someone to emulate both in magnitude and in variety of writing.

A more profound Spanish influence on Dos Passos was that of Pio Baroja, another prolific writer. Baroja's fundamental political position rested in anarchism. Dos Passos, analyzing one of Baroja's books, points to the Spanish writer's observation that in a reorganization of society the only part the middle class could play would be destructive. Not having been subjected to the discipline of common slavery under the industrial machine, the
bourgeoisie did not have the qualifications of builders. The middle class, in its own isolated slavery, is forever removed from becoming an integrated part of the community. But by using the vast power of knowledge which training has given them, they should consider it their mission to test existing institutions by reality. Dos Passos then declares— in words that were to echo in the criticism of himself by others:

I don't want to imply that Baroja writes with his social conscience. He is too much of a novelist for that, too deeply interested in the people as such. But it is certain that a profound sense of the evil of existing institutions lies behind every page he has written, and that only occasionally, he allows himself to hope that something better may come out of the turmoil of our age of transition.19

In 1923 in an article entitled "Baroja Muzzled," Dos Passos complained about the poor translation of Baroja's The Quest by Isaac Goldberg. The translator, according to Dos Passos, had embellished Baroja's work; Baroja had scorned the pompous rhetoric of professional men and admired scientific thought above all else. Dos Passos claimed that Baroja "felt intensely the restlessness and disruption of the world about him in which the middle classes, dazed and bloated by the tremendous power and riches a century's industrial growth had brought them, were already losing control." An age, Baroja believed, was coming to an end, and a climax was in the offing. Because of this apocalyptic
mood, literary punctilio and urbanity in writing must give way to the colloquial, sarcastic, and acid. "A novelist," Baroja says, "was an advance agent of revolution who measured out and described what was to be destroyed."20 This became one of Dos Passos' precepts. He came to realize, too, that the old order which he described in "Benavente's Madrid" in 1921 was gone forever. The Anglo-Saxons had never been capable of understanding the communal quality of life around the Mediterranean where the first thing one does on awakening is to go out to see what the neighbors are talking about, and the last thing before bed is to chat with them about the happenings of the day; where instead of the exclusive nordic hearth, there is the open courtyard around which the women set and gossip.21 Now rumblings of discontent and revolt were being heard. Spain was awakening from her centuries-old sleep, and Dos Passos sensed the uneasiness which culminated in the fratricidal prelude to World War II.

During the same year in which Rosinante to the Road Again was published, 1922, Dos Passos' only book of poetry, A Pushcart at the Curb, came out. It was disappointing and was justly condemned by the critics. The poetry is sensuous, impressionistic, and written in free verse. A contemplation of life from the viewpoint of aesthetic experience, it provides nothing fresh or new. Now and then Dos Passos
creates good images, but they are rare. The book is surfeited with classical and literary allusions; it is more a display of scholarship than poetry of genuine feeling and intensity. The best of the poems are those depicting his travels rather than those devoted to his musings in solitude.

In 1923 Dos Passos again travelled to Spain. The same year he had another novel, *Streets of Night*, published. It is a poor effort and displays no power in any way. Fanshaw Macdougan, the leading character, is an art teacher and an artist; repressed and inhibited, he is afraid to live. Dominated by his mother, he is afraid of all other women. After World War I he is in Italy, when he succumbs to what little masculine urge he possesses and goes to bed with a woman. Naturally he does not like it. David Wendell, Fanshaw's friend, also has problems. He is an intelligent and sensitive person, a Harvard aesthete and, like Fanshaw, afraid to live. He desperately wants to break away from his sterile life and to come to some kind of terms with existence. He has become alienated from his father, a preacher, because of a basic lack of affection and understanding between them. Love enters his life in the person of Nan Taylor, but when he tells her of his undying love and devotion, she rejects him. He commits suicide by shooting himself with a pistol. Nan is a musician, who is studying
the violin. She and Fanshaw become engaged for a short
time, but both of them are so afraid of the complications
of love with its attendant emotions that the engagement
withers away. After poor Wenny's suicide she, although
frigid by temperament, discovers, alas, that she really and
truly had loved Wenny. She now finds the answers to life
with a Ouija board, and she and Fanshaw sit around drinking
tea as life passes them by.

_Streets of Night_ is a novel of protest but not of
social protest. Dos Passos returns to the story of the
alienated artist with its aesthetic heroes. He protests
against a society which fails to understand those who are
creative, a society too crassly materialistic to pay much
attention to the needs of its artists, a society which
punishes those who fail to conform. Basically, the novel
is about individual timidity. (It would have been better
if Dos Passos had been too timid to offer this book to the
public.)

Dos Passos' sensitivity to people and places and his
artistic yearnings are brought out in a travel book, _Orient
Express_ (1927), a recapitulation of his experiences while
working with the Near East Relief shortly after World War I.
In the book he tells of the customs of the inhabitants of
the various countries through which he passed. Scattered
among the pages of the work are several water-colors and
gouaches (water-color paintings with opaque colors, mixed with water, honey, and gum). The paintings show originality; Dos Passos splashed water-colors with the same free hand that he used to invent his word combinations.

Always responsive to the moods of people, Dos Passos was impressed with the new upsurge of national pride and the loss of respect for Europeans expressed by the people with whom he talked. It is rather extraordinary how much he saw and recorded during his peregrinations. He went to Constantinople, Teheran, Prinkipo, and out on to the desert wastes of the Near East. Part of the time he traveled by camel. His special favorites were the nomads of the desert, the Arabian brigands who have changed little from the time of the Arabian Nights. In Orient Express he contrasts their earthy way of life with the superficial life of industrial society.

The Near East during the time covered by the book, roughly 1921 to 1926, was disturbed by massacres and plagues, ferment and revolt, but Dos Passos found under all this misery a quiet and dignified acceptance of life. His travels took him to Russia, where communism was in its infancy as a practicing method of government. Dos Passos talked with the people about their new place in the state. He watched, observed, and listened. He was not converted. Although Russian socialism later strongly colored his work
and the talk of Utopian brotherhood which he heard in Russia obviously captured his sympathy, he experienced doubts and misgivings about the Russian world. He tells of his early hopes for communism, stating that the dream was for a wind out of Asia which would blow all the knick-knacks, the fancy junk, the curtain rods, all the Things that have become our gods from our cities. The wind would sweep away all the junky possessions which divide the rich man from the poor man; it would sweep away all the worthless goods that are prized so highly by our civilization, all those things we spend so much energy and effort to acquire. Dos Passos queries:

That wind has blown Russia clean, so that the Things held divine a few years ago are moulding rubbish in odd corners; thousands of lives have been given and taken... a generation levelled like gravel under a steamroller to break the tyranny of Things, goods, necessities, industrial civilization. Just now it's the lull after the fight. The Gods and devils are taking their revenge on the victors with cholera and famine. Will the result be the same old piling up of miseries again, or a faith and a lot of words like Islam or Christianity, or will it be something impossible, new, unthought of, a life bare and vigorous without being savage, a life naked and godless where goods and institutions will be broken to fit men, instead of men being ground down fine and sifted in the service of Things?22

Dos Passos seems to feel that perhaps, under the guise of communism, men will have a new chance, a chance to live rich, full lives, unhamped by all the restrictive devices which they, in their madness, piled one on top of the
other until looking about them they found that the edifice they had so painstakingly constructed was a jail. Even so, all the odds were against such a happening. Men had had opportunities before to gain real freedom and had recklessly and ignorantly thrown them away. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" had once reverberated through the halls of Europe, promising freedom from oppression; institutions crumbled before the onslaught of the ideal; the consciences of poets were awakened. Then came Napoleon. The ruins of the old institutions when properly mixed with blood proved to be an excellent fertilizer for new institutions. Normalcy returned. The poets became quiet again.

At the end of Orient Express Dos Passos and his friend Achmed sit quietly smoking. The traveler thinks about the contrast between Western and Eastern civilization. He reflects upon the magnitude of the world and of the serenity with which it is viewed by the Easteners. The calm drowsiness of the East is contrasted with the frenzied madness of the West where men burn themselves out in their pursuit of elusive wealth and power. Dos Passos asks himself what name can be given to this idiotic concept of living, which has taken the place of glory, of religion, of knowledge, of love. It is more contagious, more subtle, more lasting, and of more consequence "than the pox Columbus brought back from the New World." Still contrasting
the East and the West, Dos Passos wonders what is the end result of the frenetic pace of the Westerner; does it lead to any kind of happiness? "Is it worth the drowsiness of kif and a man alone in the sheer desert shouting the triumphant affirmation: There is no God but very God; Mahomet is the prophet of God?"  

In 1925, two years before the publication of Orient Express, Dos Passos had written a novel in which all of the evils of Western civilization that he deplored in his travel book are summed up. Taking New York City for both locale and subject in Manhattan Transfer, he wrote a biting condemnation of life in the city.

The novel was greeted with mixed reviews. Some critics panned it for its extreme literary realism, that is, Dos Passos' inclination to stress rather than just to report the ugly and the sordid. Grudgingly, critics admitted its vigor and vitality but said that its overall crudeness and vulgarity more than offset these virtues. Manhattan Transfer received its greatest praise from Sinclair Lewis, who saw it as a possible forerunner of a whole new school of novel writing. He claimed that Dos Passos, possibly more than Dreiser, Cather, or Anderson, might be "the father of humanized and living fiction . . . not merely for America but for the world!" Lewis saw Manhattan Transfer "as more important in every way than anything by Gertrude Stein or
Marcel Proust or even the great white boar, Mr. Joyce's 'Ulysses.'” 24

Although there are many characters in the novel, the real protagonist of the book is the city of New York itself. The back-alleys, the sky-scrapers, and the tenements contribute as much to the story as do the characters, who are really nothing except animated extensions of the city's various moods, of its light and dark sides. The atmosphere of New York is portrayed in all its vulgarity and garishness. The contrast between the idealism of the American Dream and its repudiation in reality is revealed in the bitter, indignant juxtaposition Dos Passos sets up between the external glamour of the city and the inner barrenness of people who inhabit it. All together, New York is a mad world of sex, high finance, and crime.

Yet to Dos Passos it represents a search for meaning. The function of the novelist, he believes, is to be an "architect of history"—one who shapes the moral opinions of his time by influencing the group mind through revealing and compelling works of art. This concept accounts for the historical sweep of Manhattan Transfer and for its focus on the city rather than on the people who reside there. Manhattan thus becomes a major symbol of Western industrial civilization. The people in the novel represent not so much flesh and blood as states of being, and the city is not so
much the real New York City as it is the personification of a historical trend toward monopolistic, industrial capitalism with its denial of the American ideals of individual freedom, self-fulfillment, and equality in favor of a mechanized, inhuman type of existence.

Jimmy Herf is the central human character of the novel. Born into a rather wealthy family, he is an idealist, who is constantly being hurt by the confrontation of life as he feels it should be and life as it is. He rejects the life of business and becomes a newspaper reporter. He is more passive than active, a spectator of life, not a participant. He falls in love with Ellen Thatcher, but his marriage ends in divorce. At the end of the book he has sloughed off the brittle varnish of the city, gotten rid of all of his money except for three cents, and is heading out, looking for a life that has some meaning.

Contrasted with the introspective Jimmy is Congo Jake, a penniless immigrant as the story begins. He realistically sees beyond the fine slogans of democracy into Manhattan as the jungle it is; seizing the opportunities offered by the Volstead Act, he becomes rich, riding around in a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce.

Ellen Thatcher rises from obscurity and poverty to become a highly successful actress and the darling of New York. However, her monetary and artistic successes are
responsible for her unhappiness in love, and life becomes worthless to her. One of her lovers is George Baldwin, a Babbitt-businessman, who rises in the world to empty plenitude.

The most tragic of the characters is Bud Korpenning, an upstate farm boy, who has justifiably murdered his tyrannical father. He comes to the city but is unable to cope with it. Defeated by the city, he commits suicide.

There is not much that is strictly political in nature in Manhattan Transfer. Congo Jake is a philosophical anarchist, who says: "It's the same all over the world, the police beating us up, rich people cheating us out of their starvation wages, and who's fault? . . . Your fault, my fault." Primarily, the book's purpose is to expose and condemn the greed, the pretentiousness, and the drab conformity of a way of life rather than to revile a political or economic system. At the same time it would be difficult for anyone to find much in the book which would incline him to admire the qualities of capitalistic enterprise.

Young Dos Passos' general attitude, during the early years of his career, toward the relationship between society and the individual is given concrete expression in his first play, The Moon Is a Gong--later renamed The Garbage Man--and produced by the Harvard Dramatic Club in 1925.
Dos Passos, like Henry Adams before him, equates the modern age with a machine. In *The Garbage Man*, Jane comments on society: "They'd make us work till our hands couldn't feel and our faces were gray and our eyes were blank. Tom, the engine is the power plant; that's all people. The engines are made out of people pounded into steel. The power's stretched on the muscles of people, the light's sucked out of people's eyes." The "Voice on the Radio"--society's spokesman in the play--urges that a list of all nonconformists of any sort be made and forwarded to the Department of Justice; further, "no man shall live for himself alone. . . . For the sake of national prosperity no man shall think for himself alone. No man shall work for himself alone." To Dos Passos, the smooth whirring of the dynamo necessitated the calcification of men's minds and talents.

Essentially, Dos Passos began and ended the first phase of his career as a romanticist, seeking for a way to assert personal individuality in modern industrial society. Jimmy Herf of *Manhattan Transfer* is representative of most of the early Dos Passos heroes who find themselves on the outside of society, alienated from ordinary people by their introspection, their aestheticism, and their frustration, desiring and finding solace in romantic primitivism. Dos Passos, as much poet as novelist during his early period,
was writing "arty" novels, much more concerned with the displaced individual than with the whole of society. His innocuous rebels, Martin Howe, Fanshaw Macdougan, and Jimmy Herf are all to some degree autobiographical characters; they are all exiles, pallid young men who see rather than do. They are egocentric characters complaining about society's lack of understanding and sympathy for themselves. All Western civilization is at fault, and real happiness can no longer be found except in nostalgic dreaming of the romantic past when each man was an entity, not an unfeeling, unthinking automaton. At times there is an air of petulance in the writing. The freedom and individuality which Dos Passos seeks is for too esoteric a group, the "alienated artists."

Nevertheless, there is a clear foreshadowing of the works to come in the works he had already written. Dos Passos' writings are already voicing the cry of protest on behalf of all mankind, a cry to be heard in most of his later books. He is condemning industrial society for its emphasis on greed and materialism and its evil institutions, such as the army and the impersonal and unfeeling cities, which allowed little if any individuality. Only in the isolated villages of Spain and in the nomadic Near East can Dos Passos find men living meaningful lives. But the voice of protest is muted by an underlying note of despair; the
bitter strategy of head-on attack is to come later in Dos Passos' development. In his first period Dos Passos had a cosmopolitan outlook; he was a kind of "man without a country," groping about the world, like his own Telemachus, searching for a meaning for life. He had not yet fully acquired a "social consciousness," an acute awareness and concern for the well-being of the mass of individuals which comprise an associative system. He was not yet absorbed in the politics and history of the United States, the two areas which were to become central to him. He was still an expatriate in his thinking; he had not yet come home. He would eventually, make the trip. From the isolated garret he would make the trip to a picket line in Boston and a coal miner's ramshackle dwelling in Harlan County, Kentucky.
Footnotes: Chapter One


5 Ibid., p. 13.


7 Granville Hicks, "The Politics of John Dos Passos," Antioch Review, X (Spring, 1950), 87.


13 Ibid., p. 211.

14 John Dos Passos, Rosinante to the Road Again (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), p. 17.

15 Ibid., p. 65.

16 Ibid., p. 70.

17 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
18 Ibid., p. 240.

19 Ibid., pp. 93-94.

20 John Dos Passos, "Baroja Muzzled," Dial, LXXIV (February, 1923), 199.

21 John Dos Passos, "Benavente's Madrid," Bookman, LIII (May, 1921), 228.


23 Ibid., p. 179.

24 Sinclair Lewis, "Manhattan Transfer," Saturday Review of Literature, II (December 5, 1925), 361.


28 Ibid., p. 70.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CRY OF PROTEST

At some time during the latter half of the 1920's Dos Passos' view of his own role in society, both as an author and as a citizen, underwent a radical change. This alteration led Joseph Warren Beach to conclude:

The author's first concern is no longer with individuals, with their precious moral problems to be met, their precious sentiments to be indulged. His first concern is with that Leviathan society, striving weakly to adjust itself to the industrial conditions of the new world, more or less blindly struggling forward to the creation of a group consciousness and a group will.¹

At the same time Dos Passos began thinking in terms of masses of people rather than of isolated individuals; he shifted what had been a cosmopolitan view to one more nationalistic in scope: he became more concerned with the conflicts in American society than with those of Western civilization in general. For the next decade, American capitalism dominated his works. Edmund Wilson commented in 1929:

Dos Passos is apparently a social revolutionist: he believes that, in the United States, as elsewhere, the present capitalistic regime is some day destined to be overthrown by a class-conscious proletariat.
And his disapproval of capitalistic society becomes a distaste for all the beings who compose it.²

By degrees Dos Passos became more and more a political activist. Together with Michael Gold and others, he founded New Masses magazine in 1926. This was a radical periodical, closely associated with communistic thinking. In an article, "The New Masses I'd Like," Dos Passos set forth certain principles which he urged the magazine to follow: "I'd like to see a magazine full of introspection and doubt that would be like a piece of litmus paper to test things by."³ He did not think this was the time "for any group of spellbinders to lay down the law on any subject whatever. Particularly I don't think there should be any more phrases, badges, opinions, banners, imported from Russia or anywhere else."⁴

Dos Passos quite frequently wrote articles for the New Masses during the next few years, even though the magazine came to reflect almost exclusively the Communist Party's opinions. The association between the author and the periodical can be attributed to the fact that both were opposed to the capitalistic system and that both, purportedly at least, were interested in the welfare of the lower classes. However, Dos Passos' general attitude towards communism as a specific solution can be seen in his remark to Malcolm Cowley one evening during the organization of New Masses.
In a derisive tone Dos Passos called over to Cowley and some others at a table, "Intellectual workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your brains." Although Dos Passos was to find himself often on the same side politically as the Communists during the ensuing years, he always maintained certain reservations concerning them. They, in turn, looked on Dos Passos as one of their own, but even in their whole-hearted approval of his work during the next decade, a note of uncertainty and disappointment can be detected in their criticism. Dos Passos's work did not quite fit their notion of what an author should write.

Dos Passos was jailed in Boston in 1927 for picketing in behalf of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Dos Passos felt—as did many liberals all over the country—that the two men had been judged guilty of burglary and murder, not on the basis of evidence but because of the hysterical fear of immigrants, especially those of unpopular political views. The Sacco-Vanzetti case moved Dos Passos deeply. He left his garret and stormed down the stairway into the streets with clenched fists. His concern with the fate of the artist seemed secondary compared to fate of all humanity, particularly of those like Sacco and Vanzetti who lived under the stars and stripes, supposedly enjoying maximum freedom and independence. He appealed to President Lowell of Harvard University to act in behalf of the two
men, closing with this thought: "It is upon men of your class and position that will rest the inevitable decision as to whether the coming struggle for the reorganization of society shall be bloodless and fertile or inconceivably bloody and destructive." The plea was in vain; the men were executed in August, 1927. At the time of their deaths Dos Passos saw the United States divided into two parts: one part which controlled the wealth, the machinery of law, and the reins of the government, was dominated by greed and directed by exploitation; the other part, which made up of the vast majority of Americans, was enslaved by the whims of the capitalists, who indoctrinated them with the sop of democratic slogans.

The next year Dos Passos took an extended trip to Russia, and saw at first hand the actual practice of communism. After returning to this country, he was listed as a contributing editor to the Daily Worker. He became active in the New Playwrights Theatre, and his second play, Airways, Inc., was published. It is a drab tale of a family by the name of Turner who see all of their dreams shattered. Walter Goldberg, a sort of composite of Sacco and Vanzetti, is a Jewish labor agitator who is framed by the police and executed. Although supposedly a tragedy, the play is more nearly a series of more or less incidental disasters. It ran only four weeks and most of these to an empty house.
Refocusing his attention once more upon the novel, Dos Passos issued two statements concerning the role of the novelist in contemporary society. In one he claimed that "the only excuse for a novelist, aside from the entertainment and vicarious living his books give the people who read them, is as a sort of second-class historian of the age he lives in." Although he writes of imaginary people rather than real ones, by the use of facts of social experience he is better able to build a "reality" than a historian or biographer. He goes on to say: "I think that any novelist worth his salt is a sort of truffle dog digging up raw material which a scientist, an anthropologist or a historian can later use to permanent advantage." In the other article he complains about authors who are absorbed in "picking up the garbage of European belles-lettres small-talk" instead of concerning themselves with "the compelling events and personalities that are molding their lives." He declaims: "It's about time that American writers showed up in the industrial field where something is really going on, instead of tackling the tattered strawmen of art and culture." One of the "compelling events" of the time was the investigation and prosecution of Communists. In one article for the New Republic he cited several cases of Communists being arrested and given outrageous sentences, all out of proportion to their offenses. Old, nearly-forgotten laws
were being dusted off and brought into play. Two Northern white girls faced possible death sentences in Georgia under an old 1861 law. Dos Passos compares the persecution to the red hysteria which followed World War I. In another article for the same periodical he takes the Fish Committee to task for its methods of obtaining evidence against radicals, claiming they use professional testifiers and "gentlemen with very obvious axes to grind." There was no doubt as to what Dos Passos was against, the vested interests and the power structure which arbitrarily used its power to preserve the status quo. There yet remained an uncertainty as to what he was for, a conundrum which critics have found themselves faced with in discussions of his work. His ambivalent attitudes are reflected in his next work.

The 42nd Parallel (1930), 1919 (1932), and The Big Money (1936), three novels, were combined and published under the title U.S.A. in 1938. Dos Passos's claim to fame now rests and probably will continue to rest in the future more upon this trilogy than upon anything else he has written. For the trilogy Dos Passos laid aside his soft quill and took up a hard steel pen. U.S.A. is not just another sad book, a book of defeat; it is one of the coldest and most despairing books in American literature. For many years, writers have attempted to write "the great American novel," to capture all of the sprawling complexity which
makes up our country. So many have tried that the phrase itself has come to be sneered at by the critics. The grandiose idea of the "great American novel" has fallen short; most of the time the scope of a novelist has been too limited. It has represented but one facet of all that is America. We have had good character novelists, good regional novelists, and good class novelists, but we can boast of only one writer who has cut across the whole spectrum of our society and the whole of the vast land of America. That man is John Dos Passos. His achievement has gone virtually unrecognized; he has received no major literary awards; he is more widely read in other countries than his own. In the introduction which he wrote for the one-volume trilogy, he attempts to define America:

U. S. A. is the slice of a continent. U. S. A. is a group of holding companies, some aggregations of trade unions, a set of laws bound in calf, a radio network, a chain of moving picture theatres, a column of stock-quotations rubbed out and written in by a Western Union boy on a blackboard, a public-library full of old newspapers and dogeared history-books with protests scrawled on the margins in pencil. U. S. A. is the world's greatest rivervalley fringed with mountains and hills, U. S. A. is a set of big-mouthed officials with too many bankaccounts. U. S. A. is a lot of men buried in their uniforms in Arlington Cemetery. U. S. A. is the letters at the end of an address when you are away from home. But mostly U. S. A. is the speech of the people.

In U.S.A. he takes the whole United States as his subject and attempts to organize its feverish complexity into some kind of an artistic whole.
Generally, **U.S.A.** is regarded as being in the tradition of the naturalist's novel, a genre which is not so much a technique or style as a point of view. It is motivated by a certain amount of determinism, the actions of the characters being partly determined by outside forces rather than by their own personalities. In our country the impact of industrialism resulting in the mushroom growth of urban areas led to the stress by authors on the overpowering mastery of environment. One problem encountered in such naturalistic writing is that one can have no hero in the traditional sense because environmental force transcends the individual or individuals involved. The environment itself is the fundamental subject. Such a work is **U.S.A.** The time span covered is from the Spanish American War to the stock market crash in 1929.

The main characters appear, disappear, and reappear in the long book. They extend across the whole range of society coming into contact with each other at various times. Mac McCreary is a kind of stumblebum. Working his way across the United States as a typesetter and as a laborer, he becomes an ardent supporter of the IWW in the Northwest. He settles down with a wife for a while, but the urge for action thrusts him back into the labor movement. His activities force him to go to Mexico, where he sets up house with a Mexican girl and becomes owner of a
radical book store.

J. Ward Moorehouse, the most important character in the book, starts off life filled with the promise of the American dream of success. His first work is in a real estate office, where he discovers he is a born promoter. His two marriages are to wealthy women. He becomes an advertising agent for the steel industry. His success emboldens him to set himself up as a public relations counselor in New York specializing in labor-management disputes. During World War I he offers his services to the government and is sent to Paris as publicity director of the Red Cross. He helps to shape the Versailles Treaty. Upon his return to this country, he becomes a successful lobbyist. He has an occasional affair with a woman, but nothing takes precedence over business in the life of J. Ward Moorehouse. His secretary is Janey Williams, a dowdy girl, very efficient, who watches over him with a jealous eye, particularly when Eleanor Stoddard is around. Eleanor, brought up in the vicinity of the Chicago stock yards, is overcome with the desire to avoid all that is ugly. She studies at an art institute and becomes a fashionable interior decorator in New York, where she does Moorehouse's home. The relationship between the two remains platonic until they reach Paris as Red Cross workers. Before coming home she marries a Russian prince.
Charley Anderson begins as an automobile mechanic, enlists in the army, and becomes an aviator. After the war he becomes a builder of airplanes, but he speculates, loses his money, and dies in an auto accident with a girl he has picked up. At one time he has an affair with Margo Dowling, who becomes a movie star. She beds her way up the Hollywood ladder of success while married to a Cuban dope-addict.

The remnants of Dos Passos's early semi-autobiographical heroes are found in the character of Richard Ellsworth Savage, Harvard man, poet, college editor, and ambulance driver in the war. He ambles about Europe for a while, and then comes home, working for J. Ward Moorehouse, prostituting his literary talents to the highest bidder. While in Rome he has an affair with Daughter, a vivacious Texas girl who is killed in an airplane accident in France.

Other characters of importance are Joe Williams, Janey's brother, a sailor, not too bright and who never really amounts to anything; Eveline Hutchins, one-time partner of Eleanor Stoddard, an interior decorator who commits suicide; Ben Compton, a Jewish Communist and friend of labor who ends up in the federal prison at Atlanta for his opposition to the draft; and, Mary French who works hard in behalf of labor organizations in Pittsburgh, eventually landing in jail in Boston for her protestations concerning the Sacco-Vanzetti case.
The picture of America rendered by Dos Passos through his fictional characters is a bleak one. Most of them seem to feel that the world is their oyster, but the world provides them with hard lessons. Their main differentiation lies in their varied opportunities and differing imaginative capacities. J. Ward Moorehouse, early in the novel is described as an All-American boy: "He was twenty and didn't drink or smoke and was keeping himself clean for the lovely girl he was going to marry, a girl in pink organdy with golden curls." Later, he achieves an empty success through the exploitation of whoever comes his way. Eleanor Stoddard shrewdly exploits art to reach success while Margo Dowling exploits sex to reach fame and fortune. Charley Anderson with his knack for machinery is doing fine until the urge for big money hits him. Joe and Janey Williams, together with Mac McCreary, represent the little people, those without much imagination or opportunity who are forever the exploited, the used, those who never get anything from life but a series of hard knocks alleviated occasionally by a few moments of happiness. Mac did have his glimpse of something that was not entirely selfish, an ideal objective of helping the workers, but he lacked the character to become a hero or martyr. The two unselfish characters in the book, Benny Compton and Mary French, both of whom work for something more than themselves, are so
ineffectual and fail so miserably that their altruism does little to affect the bleakness of the entire society depicted.  

Benny's only moment comes when he is allowed to address the court just before being sentenced. After a weak, faltering start, his voice rings through the courtroom as he concludes his address with the last words of the Communist Manifesto: "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." This is his finest hour.

Mary French does what she can to alleviate the dreadful conditions she sees. On a train one night she lies awake thinking of the work that needs to be done to make the country what is ought to be; she thinks of the slums, the shanties, overworked women stooping over stoves, hunger, unemployment and drink, of the lawyers and judges always so ready to take it out on the less fortunate. If only the people in the pullmans could be shown what the true conditions are! Later, as a reporter for a Pittsburgh newspaper she is forced to listen to her editor expound on the labor situation in the mills. Mr. Healy, a representative of the callous capitalism Dos Passos detests, storms at Mary for asking about the conditions at the mills. He tells
her that "those damn guineas" are making more money than they had ever made, that they are getting fat while "our boys" were fighting overseas. He continues his diatribe with:

The one thing they can't buy is brains. That's how those agitators get at 'em. They talk their language and fill 'em up with a lot of notions about how all they need to do is stop working and they can take possession of this country that we've built into the greatest country in the world. . . . I don't hold it against the poordevils of guineas, they're just ignorant; but those reds who accept the hospitality of our country and then go around spreading their devilish propaganda. . . . We have absolute proof that they're paid by Russian reds with money and jewels they've stole over there; and they're not content with that, they go around shaking down those poor ignorant guineas. . . . Shooting's too good for 'em.17

In the one paragraph Healy voices all the arrogance, the blind prejudice, and the callousness of the whole power-structure Dos Passos was fighting against. Healy's mouthings echoed and re-echoed across the land during the early years of the century. The entrenched lashed out at those who sought to change the social structure in any way. Any one like Ben and Mary who had the temerity to seek social justice for the mass of humanity was squashed like a bug. There was little relationship between the Fourth of July speeches about "the land of the free," "independence and equality for all," and the actual institutions under which men lived. Monopolistic capitalism was in control and devil take the hindmost. The contrast between the "haves" and
the "have-nots" is explicitly shown in the last chapter of U.S.A. entitled "Vag." A young man trying to hitch a ride looks up into the sky and sees a shining airplane. Inside a transcontinental passenger thinks about fat contracts, profits, and vacations. He gets sick from the bumpy air over Las Vegas and vomits the steak and mushrooms he had eaten in New York into a carton, but no matter, he has silver and greenbacks in his pocket, certified checks, and drafts; there are plenty of good restaurants in Los Angeles. The young man continues to wait beside the road after the plane has disappeared. When cars pass, his eyes seek the driver's eyes as he moves his thumb in a small arc. He feels ill:

Head swims, belly tightens, wants crawl over his skin like ants:
went to school, books said opportunity, ads promised speed, own your own home, shine bigger than your neighbor, the radiocrooner whispered girls, ghosts of platinum girls coaxed from the screen, millions in winnings were chalked up on the boards in offices, paychecks were for hands willing to work, the cleared desk of an executive with three telephones on it;
waits with swimming head, needs know the belly, idle hands numb, beside the speeding traffic.
A hundred miles down the road.18

Dos Passos quite evidently is in sympathy with the good and honest people like Mary French and Benny Compton, but his sense of truth governed by what he has seen makes him portray them as they actually are, poor, homeless, and ineffectual. Some of the characters like Janey and Joe are
suckers, people to be exploited by all the Moorehouses and the Savages. Some, like Charley Anderson, are suckers who try to become exploiters but do not have the ability to make it. Dos Passos uses the point of view of the omniscient narrator, recounting the lives of his characters in the third person, but he enhances the effect by telling each of them in the particular idiom, locale, and social stratum of each of the characters. He gives the reader immediate contact with the character, and by this means helps create the characters by the very style used to describe them.

The purpose behind such creativeness is to attain the greatest degree of objectivity. Dos Passos withdraws himself as narrator, thus permitting the characters to be the means by which their stories unfold. Another achievement is the identification of each character with the spirit of the times; Charley Anderson and J. Ward Moorehouse typify the spirit of the "Big Money" days, much as Joe Williams typifies the restless, dislocated spirit of the immediate post-war years. The madness of the years of the war and the ignominious pursuit of money during the twenties is reflected by Dos Passos in the tragedy of the inner vacancy of the characters.\(^{19}\)

He has been criticized for being unable to develop memorable, three-dimensional, living characters in \textit{U.S.A.}
However, Dos Passos is emphasizing the effect of the capitalistic system—at least as he views it—on the people of the country. What he sees in the country were two-dimensional people; if he saw skin-deep characters, this necessarily resulted in skin-deep portrayals. This is not to say that Dos Passos likes flat souls, but his theme is that souls are flattened by the existing society. His artistic intention would have been betrayed had he portrayed them otherwise. He displays a brilliant virtuosity in the method he uses, and he is highly successful with it. It must be kept in mind that the whole of society rather than any one individual or group is the protagonist of the novel. The standard novel usually follows the life of one person with other characters being introduced who have some kind of relationship to him. The interest is thus centered more or less continuously on the leading character (or, in some cases, a group of characters) facing a problem or conflict. Whether there is one or more than one leading character, there is usually a binding agent to hold the story together and gave it continuity. There is, moreover, an objective to be reached or at least a resolution to be affected. The difficulties faced and the decisions made depend to a large extent on the character, his aims, ideals, and ruling passions. Even though the effort to obtain objectives may be thwarted, the direction of the effort is largely determined
by the major character.

U.S.A. is not such a novel. It depicts a society, the mass of humanity collectively makes up what is known as the United States of America. Had Dos Passos allowed any one character to dominate the trilogy, his primary purpose would have been thwarted. The reader would have been forced to take a rather narrow view of what America was like during the thirty-year period covered in the book. Of course, Dos Passos has been accused of creating a limited focus in U.S.A. Why does he not include in his perspective or our society that part of the American people "who live a well-rounded and deeply satisfying family life, for whom friendship and love are not merely interludes between business conventions, and who do their own thinking in spite of the radio commentators, the syndicated columnists, and the synthetic concoctions of Hollywood?" But Dos Passos was a sensitive idealist who was grossly offended and disillusioned by what his perceptive eyes and ears recorded for him. As he saw them in the 1920's and 1930's, he concluded that the great majority of the American people led, literally, two-dimensional lives, interested only in their own selfish goal of "getting ahead," in having a good time, in resisting the intrusion of anything more intellectual than the sports and comic sections of their daily newspaper. According to Pope, the people were blissful indeed; any political entrepreneur
had an easy task in bending them to his wishes. And such people as these are the ones portrayed in *U.S.A.* Delmore Schwartz says of the American Life represented in the narrative sections of *U.S.A.*: "It is true; we have seen this with our own eyes and many of us have lived in this way. This is a true picture of many Americans, and anyone who doubts the fact can learn for himself very quickly how accurate Dos Passos is."21

In order to give the maximum sense of the great mass of actions and emotions which lie behind the relatively few lives he depicts and to establish a background for them, Dos Passos employs three devices. One is the "Newsreel" passages. These consist of bits and pieces of newspaper stories, various headlines of the day, excerpts from speeches made by prominent people, and snatches from popular songs. Sixty-eight of them are scattered throughout the book, showing the passage of time, defining the mood of the populace, and acting as a kind of chorus, raucously keeping up a running commentary on the events of the day in which the characters are involved. In Newsreel I the twentieth century is given a welcome: McKinley is President and is hard at work; Oscar Wilde has just died; there are snatches from a song, "For there's many a man been murdered in Luzon." In the last Newsreel the stock market
has crashed; the President "sees prosperity near"; a headline reads, "Police Turn Machine Guns on Colorado Mine Strikers Kill 5 Wound 40"; two songs are partially recorded, "This is not Thirty-Eight but it's old Ninety-seven," and "While we slave for the bosses / Our children scream an' cry."

The Newsreels are a jumble of information. They are "incoherent and even chaotic, they are the raw material of history, the actual and undigested stuff of experience, out of which the narrative sections have been fashioned."

Granville Hicks remarks.

Another device used by Dos Passos is the "Camera Eye." There are fifty-one of them in the book. They are prose poems in structure and are the most subjective element in the novel. They are without punctuation; the division of ideas is made by the use of unusual spacing, by the employment of italics, and by erratic paragraphing. By means of these techniques, the introspective quality of the interior monologue is brought out. The reader gets the feeling of a kind of random musing, of a mind which has been disturbed by events and is now thinking out loud. The Camera Eye is impressionistic, sometimes vague and meandering, sometimes hard and to the point. There is much that is autobiographical in the Camera Eye sequences, but it would be fallacious to accept them as a portrait of John Dos Passos. The narrator of the Camera Eye is extremely
sensitive to impressions and to little else. He is a pas­sive onlooker, seldom a participant, eager to share in other people's lives but not quite able to bring himself to a state of action. For illustration, consider Camera Eye 46. The thoughts revolve around a soap-box oration which falls on deaf ears:

you suddenly falter ashamed flush red break out in sweat why not tell these men stamping in the wind that we stand on quicksand? that doubt is the whet­stone of understanding is too hard hurts instead of urging picket John D. Rockefeller the bastard if the cops knock your blocks off it's all for the advance­ment of the human race while I go home after a drink and a hot meal and read (with some difficulty in the Loeb Library trot) the epigrams of Martial and pon­der the course of history and what leverage might pry the owners loose from power and bring back (I too Walt Whitman) our storybook democracy and all the time in my pocket that letter from that collegeboy asking me to explain why being right which he admits the radicals are in their private lives such shits23

In Camera Eye 25 Dos Passos recalls his college days during which he "tossed with eyes smarting all the spring night reading The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus," while important events were taking place in the world outside the ivy-covered walls. He heard of the "millworkers marching with a red brass band through the streets of Lawrence, Massa­chusetts"; he dawdled with his books and later wondered why "I hadn't the nerve to jump up and walk out of doors and tell them all to go take a flying Rimbaud at the moon."
The bitterest and the most politically important of the Camera Eyes is the one in which he comments once again on the implications of the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti, this time in Camera Eye 50, the next to last in U.S.A. Here is distinctly the America he sees as two nations; one is "ours" and the other is "theirs," the latter embracing the power-structure of the country. Dos Passos claims "they have clubbed us off the streets they are stronger they are rich." He calls them "betrayers" and the hirers of guns and uniforms. He admits that his side is beaten and that there is nothing left to do except to "sit hunched with bowed heads on benches and hear the old words of the haters of oppression made new in sweat and agony." The America of our forefathers "has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out." They have taken "the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul." It is they who hired the executioner to throw the switch on the chair which they had built. But their time is coming to an end. They know that the haters of oppression have once again begun to stir; the words of freedom are now being voiced and listened to by people from all over the country. The spirit of freedom is not dead. Dos Passos saw a cleavage in the country, as great as the one which had resulted in the Civil War some seventy years before; then the split was more or less along geographic
lines; now it was economic in nature. Some kind of solution must be found to bring the two halves back into the one whole.

In addition to the Newsreel and the Camera Eye, Dos Passos, in his attempt to capture all of America in one great work, uses yet another device, the short biography. Clifton Fadiman once made this observation: "If you lean to the exquisite and prefer small things done perfectly, Dos Passos is not your man, nor are you his." Yet the biographic studies in _U.S.A._ are "exquisite," and they demonstrate "small things done perfectly." There is almost universal agreement that the life portraits in the book represent some of the finest writing Dos Passos has done. In anthologies of American literature the space devoted to Dos Passos is often taken up with his most widely known biographic studies, such as "Lover of Mankind," "Meester Veelson," "Tin Lizzie," and "Power Superpower."

At first glance the biographies give the impression of being written in a simple, journalistic style. A closer reading reveals the power in them. They are poetic. There is definite, if unusual, rhythm in them; the sentences and paragraphs are broken according to a rhythmic structure to lend a vitality and force to the writing. The punctuation seems to be rather haphazard, but it is all consciously used for greater effect. At times, notably in the
biographical treatments of Roosevelt and Bryan, the voice of the subject is in italics. Sometimes the speaker's voice is implied in indirect discourse. In the important biography of Veblen there is a "public voice" which registers the approval or disapproval of society. But for the most part, the portraits are all narrated in the third-person.

Some of the capsule biographies are done in a sympathetic manner; others are scathing denunciations of their subjects. One critic has pointed out that the test which Dos Passos usually applied to the subjects was whether they had supported the war or not. Those who did represent the historic forces of oppression. Those who did not represent the common goal of the masses of people, the constant drive towards a true democracy. Illustrative of this attitude of Dos Passos toward his subjects are the portraits of Isadora Duncan and Andrew Carnegie. The one dealing with Carnegie is ironically entitled "Prince of Peace." It is only a little more than a page long, but it is one of the best. These are the last few lines:

Andrew Carnegie believed in oil;  
Andrew Carnegie believed in steel;  
always saved his money  
whenever he had a million dollars he invested it.  
Andrew Carnegie became the richest man in the world  
and died  
Bessemer Duquesne Rankin Pittsburgh Bethlehem Gary
Andrew Carnegie gave millions for peace and libraries and scientific institutes and endowments and thrift whenever he made a billion dollars he endowed an institution to promote universal peace always except in time of war. 28

Although the biography of Isadora Duncan does not present the dancer in a particularly favorable light—she is representative of the shallowness of the twenties—there is an obvious note of sympathy by the author for the wasted life of the artist. Her world travels took her to St. Petersburg in 1905, where she saw the funeral of marchers who had been shot down by the soldiers. Her heart ached for the people: "She was an American like Walt Whitman; the murdering rulers of the world were not her people; the marchers were her people; artists were not on the side of the machineguns; she was an American in a Greek tunic; she was for the people." 29

More so even than their attitude toward the war, the attitude of the biographical subjects toward the common people governed the treatment given them by Dos Passos. Those who were genuinely interested in improving the lot of mankind were dealt with sympathetically; those who were interested only in money and power were flagellated. The first biography in U.S.A. is that of Eugene V. Debs, socialist and labor leader; the title is "Lover of Mankind." To Dos Passos he was a man of vision; Debs had once stated:
"I am not a labor leader. I don't want you to follow me or anyone else. If you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of the capitalist wilderness you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into this promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else would lead you out."30

The truth of Debs's observation is shown in "The Boy Orator of the Platte," the portrait of William Jennings Bryan. Dos Passos quotes a portion of Bryan's most famous speech in which Bryan lumps together the producers, the commercial interests, the laborers, and the toilers everywhere and then declares: "we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."31 The one speech captured the fancy of the people and vaulted Bryan into the nomination for the presidency. Dos Passo illustrates the blindness of the people by following the career of the politician who, having captured their fancy, dreamed "of setting back the clocks for the plain people, branding, flaying, making a big joke of Darwinism and the unbelieving outlook of city folks, scientists, foreigners with beards and monkey morals."32 Bryan was "a silver tongue in a big mouth."
Minor Keith, the man who put together the United Fruit Company in 1898, is given a scathing portrayal in "Emperor of the Caribbean." He serves as a perfect example of "yankee imperialism." Through his efforts the "banana republics" (Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala) became mere extensions of the corporate policy of the company. Puppet governments rose and fell; officials with the temerity to establish reforms were replaced by more subservient ones. The enormous cost in human life in the building of the railroads tying the countries together was ignored by the banana interests. As long as the Great White Fleet steamed north with holds filled with golden fruit, Keith was satisfied—living conditions of the workers were not considered of any importance. Dos Passos closes the portrait with: "Why that uneasy look under the eyes . . . in all the pictures the newspapers carried of him when he died." Keith was "absentee ownership" at its worst.

Two of the other business tycoons who fare badly at the hands of the author are J. P. Morgan and Samuel Insull. Morgan's financial manipulations during the war period come under bitter attack: "By 1917 the Allies had borrowed one billion, ninehundred [sic] million dollars through the House of Morgan: we went overseas for democracy and the flag; and by the end of the Peace Conference the phrase J. P. Morgan suggests had compulsion over the power of seventyfour [sic]
billion dollars."34 The hypocritical mouthing of American platitudes by such a person was particularly anathema to Dos Passos. After quoting Morgan's favorable comments on the open shop in the Gary, Indiana, steel mills the quote concludes: "I believe American principles of liberty are deeply involved, and must win if we stand firm."35 Dos Passos observes: "Wars and panics on the stock exchange, machinegunfire and arson, bankruptcies, warloans, starvation, lice, cholera and typhus: good growing weather for the House of Morgan."36

In "Power Superpower" the career of Samuel Insull is given. Pointing out that the war had shut up all notions of trust-breaking, thus providing the means by which men like Insull could rise to such a position of dictatorial power, Dos Passos says that at one time Insull, through interlocking corporations and trusts, controlled about a twelfth of all the electrical output of the United States. Insull was power personified. The enormity of his holdings gave him a feeling of omnipotence, but the bankers in New York brought him down in disgrace. His empire crumbled, and he was brought to trial for the misuse of funds. The idiocy of the populace is brought out by Dos Passos in the last portion of the sketch after Insull's lawyers have gotten him acquitted— he had admitted an error of some ten million dollars in accounting, but it had been an honest
error. Dos Passos remarks: "Smiling through their tears the happy Insulls went to their towncar amid the cheers of the crowd. Thousands of ruined investors, at least so the newspapers said, who had lost their life savings sat crying over the home editions at the thought of how Mr. Insull had suffered." He retired on a pension of twenty-one thousand dollars a year. To Dos Passos the people had not changed much from Shakespeare's time, except, perhaps, to smell a little better.

Like the Pied Piper, President Wilson had taken these same dupes into war—at least this is the impression which Dos Passos gives in "Meester Veelson." The author has always felt Wilson betrayed the trust of the people by getting this country involved in the European hostilities. After the fighting had ceased, the "high Contracting Parties,—as Dos Passos refers to them—met to discuss the terms of the peace. At first there was a Council of Ten, but the number being too large for effective action, a Council of Four was set up to formulate the peace. Dos Passos cynically records: "Orlando went home in a huff and then there were three: Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson. Three old men shuffling the pack, dealing out the cards: the Rhineland, Danzig, the Polish corridor, the Ruhr, self determination of small nations, the Saar, League of Nations, mandates, the Mespot, Freedom of the Seas, Transjordania, Shantung, Fiume and the Island of Yap:
machine gun fire and arson starvation, lice, cholera, typhus; oil was trumps."  

The callousness of those in authority towards the mass of humanity is nowhere better shown than in "The Body of an American," the biography of the Unknown Soldier. Stripped of all the glory, the fine words, the patriotic slogans, war is here depicted in all of its ugliness and horror. Brilliantly capturing the impersonal and unfeeling character of the manner in which the resolution was made by Congress, Dos Passos begins:

Whereasthe Congressoftheunitedstates bya-concurrentresolutionadoptedon the4thdayofmarch lastauthorizedthe Secretaryofwar to cause to be brought to theunitedstatethe body of an American whowasamemberoftheamericanexpeditionary forceineuropewhoislifeislostduringshadowarand-whoseedentityhasnotbeenestablished for burial inthememorialamphitheatrofthenationalcemeteryat arlingtonvirginia

Dos Passos then comments on the matter of the selection of the soldier for the honor. In a morgue at Chalons-sur-Marne, a pine box is randomly selected for the honor. Imaginary orders tell the men who are doing the choosing to "make sure he ain't a dinge, boys, make sure he ain't a guinea or a kike." The selecters point out the difficulty of choosing a soldier who is "a hundred percent," when all that is left is a bag full of bones and some puttees. Dos Passos then imaginatively describes the death of the unknown
hero: "The blood ran into the ground, the brains oozed out of the cracked skull and were licked up by the trenchrats, the belly swelled and raised a generation of bluebottle flies, and the incorruptible skeleton, and the scraps of dried viscera and skinbundled inkhaki they took to Chalons-sur-Marne." After the body was brought to Washington, a speech was made; medals were pinned where his chest ought to have been. With pomp and ceremony, the shrine was dedicated by President Harding. "The Body of an American" is acidly concluded with the comment: "Woodrow Wilson brought a bouquet of poppies."

Contrasted with the bitterness shown Wilson is Dos Passos' regard for La Follette, champion of the progressives. In "Fighting Bob" Dos Passos points out that the man had not supported the war and had not been responsible for the mass betrayal and death of so many men. Dos Passos says: "We will remember how he sat firm in March nineteen seventeen while Woodrow Wilson was being inaugurated for the second time, and for three days held the vast machine at deadlock. They wouldn't let him speak; the galleries glared at him; the senate was a lynching party." La Follette sat there, holding an undelivered speech, a lone voice of silent protest against involvement.

Too many men suffered and died in the war for Dos Passos to forgive Wilson, whom he blamed for our participation in the conflict. The author's antagonism was further
heightened by the harassment and jailing of the communists and their sympathizers during and after the war. One of those persecuted was Jack Reed, the writer and war correspondent who got caught up in the "red hysteria" and went to Russia to serve "the first workers republic."

The sanguine hope of Dos Passos for a better world through communism is best revealed in the biographical treatment of Paxton Hibben, an Indiana journalist. While the leaders of the Allies were still haggling over the peace terms, carving up the world into zones of influence, and evidencing no concern for the lot of humanity in general, Dos Passos says: "In Moscow there was order in Moscow there was work, in Moscow there was hope." Hibben believed in the new order. But at a reunion at Princeton, his classmates started to lynch him; someone had found a picture of Hibben placing a wreath on Jack Reed's grave. Our leaders had so aroused the emotions of the people that they called for lynching "the goddam red"; there was "no more place in America for change, no more place for the old gags: social justice, progressivism, revolt against oppression, democracy; put the reds on the skids." The "red hysteria" also engulfed such people as Joe Hill and Wesley Everest, two who were genuinely interested in improving the conditions of workers through organization. Joe Hill was executed by a firing squad after being convicted
of murder on rather flimsy evidence (Dos Passos implies) by the Mormons of Utah. Dos Passos observes: "(The angel Moroni didn't like labor organizers any better than the Southern Pacific did.)"46 In "Paul Bunyan," the biography of Wesley Everest, the hysterical fear of labor organizers by owners and the general attitude of the public toward the leaders of the workers is given. After breaking into jail and seizing Everest, who was accused of murder, some men took him out into the country, castrated him, and then hanged him. The coroner's report claimed that "Everest had broken out of jail and run to the Chehalis River bridge and tied a rope around his neck and jumped off, finding the rope too short he's climbed back and fastened on a longer one, had jumped off again, broke his neck and shot himself full of holes."47

All of Dos Passos' sympathy is not exclusively reserved for the workers and their leaders. Simply because a man was connected with corporate life other than as a manual laborer did not necessarily mean Dos Passos was against him. Quite obviously during this period Dos Passos' main opponent is the corporations themselves; however, it is the impersonal, the coldly mechanical, the completely de-humanized manner in which they are operated that he writes so strongly against, not always against the men involved in the corporate structures. Examples of favorable biographical
treatments of such men are those of Steinmetz and Fred Taylor, men who spent most of their lives working for industrial giants. In "Proteus," the biography of Steinmetz, the soullessness of corporations is brought out. The disfigured wizard spent the most productive years of his life in laboratory research for General Electric, furnishing much of the imaginative and intellectual force behind the company's productivity. Dos Passos, after tracing the career of the man, makes his point by concluding the sketch with: "And Steinmetz was the most valuable piece of apparatus General Electric had until he wore out and died." 48

Another corporate figure, Fred Taylor, one of the first and most well-known efficiency experts, is favorably treated in "The American Plan." Taylor worked hard for more and better production at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. He hoped to raise production levels to the point that every American who worked hard and had ambition could become rich—the American Plan. His dream was thwarted by the owners who siphoned off the profits for themselves, leaving the workers with nothing but increased work loads. The result was a perversion of Taylor's goal; the rich became richer and the poor remained poor. Taylor, the man for whom the maximum usage of time was the key to a new world, died at the age of fifty-nine, his watch in his hand. 49 Had it not been for the cupidity of the owners,
Taylor's plan could have been a means for bettering the condition of the workers; in actual practice, Dos Passos points out, Taylor's efforts resulted in placing further burdens on the back of labor.

A somewhat similar treatment is given the Wright brothers by Dos Passos in "The Campers of Kitty Hawk." The invention of the airplane could have contributed to the welfare of the people; however, shortly after the first successful flights, industry stepped in and made aviation a new and deadly instrument of war. Bombs, smokescreens, and gas were given birth high in the air by the descendants of that first airplane, built by the two brothers. After the war the aviation industry went through a period of doldrums, but having proved economically profitable in later years, big money moved in and captured it. But, as Dos Passos points out, nothing can ever make us forget the "two shivering bicycle mechanics" on a cold December day as they watched their homemade contraption, "whittled out of hickory sticks, gummed together with Arnstein's bicycle cement, stretched with muslin they'd sewn on their sister's sewing machine . . . soar into the air above the dunes and wide beach at Kitty Hawk." The builders, the men of vision: these were the kind of men Dos Passos admired.

Having studied architecture at one time, Dos Passos had a natural sympathy for Frank Lloyd Wright. In
"Architect" he praises him as a builder. The key to Wright's thinking was the belief that architecture had to be functional; for the architect there are only uses and needs. Parenthetically, Dos Passos demands: "Tell us doctors of philosophy, what are the needs of man. At least a man needs to be notjailed notafraid nothungry notcold not without love, not a worker for a power he has never seen that cares nothing for the uses and needs of a man or a woman or a child." The author draws an analogy between the construction of buildings to reflect the lives of the people of a culture and the construction of various cells in a bee colony for the type of bee desired by the hive. The inertia of the public, the general taste of the period, and the antagonism of others in his profession are seen as obstacles to Frank Lloyd Wright's vision of the future in which the logic of uses and needs would be the basis of construction. Dos Passos feels, however, that the great architect's blueprints stir the young men of the country, much as the words of Walt Whitman had once done. Much as Wright wanted to strip away the gingerbread of homes, Dos Passos wanted to strip away the useless, the costly fripperies of society.

In none of the biographies does Dos Passos present an objective and unbiased portrait. The figures chosen fall into two distinct groups: those who have been genuinely
interested in the welfare of the common people and those who have been on the other side, the selfish and the exploiters. The cold fury of Dos Passos towards the latter group makes them the best of the portraits, those such as "Power, Superpower," "Tin Lizzie," and "Meester Veelson." Such portraits far overshadow those in which he attempts to portray someone sympathetically; Dos Passos is always at his best when he is being "anti" rather than "pro."

Indeed, the whole of U.S.A. is a negative, panoramic look at the country during the first thirty years of this century. The class struggle which took place during this period is one of the major themes, and Dos Passos' treatment of the struggle certainly makes the book no paean of capitalism. However, neither is there a really affirmative view of some kind of glorious revolution of the proletariat to take place any time in the near future. As Maxwell Geismar points out, for a revolution to succeed against a social order, strong traits which have been crushed by the old order are needed by the revolutionists. But the Ben Comptons, the Mary Frenches, those who believe in and work for some kind of new deal, are inherently weak characters, and the total picture presented is that of inherent human weakness rather than crushed strength.52

What Dos Passos sees is a society drifting from the old competitive capitalistic system to a monopolistic
capitalism, creating a dual nation composed of the "haves" and of the "have-nots." *Big Money*, the last book of the trilogy, clearly shows the loathing which Dos Passos has for the frozen nation which the monopolists have brought into being. At the same time, he shows some fondness for the old America, the one which existed before the growth of the monopolies. He depicts the new America much as T. S. Eliot did in "The Waste Land," as an icy land in which there is little to be admired. There is not much hope for the happiness of the little people and even less hope for the supposedly successful people in the book, the J. Ward Morehouses and the Eleanor Stoddards; for them an even more sterile and meaningless existence is reserved. Hollow and with a surface of enameled brilliance, they rise in the world only to live out their empty lives in frantic pursuit of money and power even as they preside over the wasted land from which there is no escape.

Even though the struggle between the classes is rather fully depicted by Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* can not be considered a doctrinaire proletarian book. *U.S.A.* is not a prose "Internationale." There is a vital heresy in the trilogy which keeps it from being Marxist propaganda. In *U.S.A.* there is no implication that a new, classless society in a blissful Utopia will soon arise. There is no implication that the international party shall soon take over and
lead the people to the dreamed-of condition. The only thing clearly brought out is the plight of society, and there is no visible end in sight or projected; it is a struggle leading nowhere. In the final Camera Eye, Dos Passos proclaims himself—rather conventionally—as being against all the forces of oppression in the country, the political bosses, the owners, and all their stooges, such as the deputy sheriffs. They have the guns, but he will fight them with words.

It is evident, however, that Dos Passos did subscribe to one part of the communistic theory, that the common people must unite and never cease their struggle with the other class. But the belief that such collective effort will be destined for success in the emergence of a socialist Utopia, Dos Passos does not indicate. As the situation is now, there is absolutely no hope for the masses and very little more if they should unite. What ultimately emerges in U.S.A. is simply a depiction of strife.

In 1959 a dramatic version of U.S.A. was staged by Paul Shyre in New York. The ambitious plan of condensing the long book into play length was a failure. Almost universally panned by the critics, the play had a very short run. By the time of the production, most of conflict seemed somewhat outmoded. Time had resolved much of the controversy.
While he was still in the midst of writing *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos published in 1934, a collection of essays and written impressions entitled *In All Countries*. The book covers a wide range of subject matter. In one of the first essays, he tells of the plight of the Mexican people whom he sees as engaged in a war against United States exploitation, "fifteen million Mexicans against a hundred and twenty millions." Of the fifteen million, ten are peasants and workmen, living in destitution but still "standing up in their fields against the Catholic Church, against two world groups of petroleum interests, against the inconceivably powerful financial bloody juggernaut of the Colos-sus of the North."  

Several of the essays are devoted to the problems of Spain as the country begins to awaken to the spur of industrialization. The weaknesses and faults in the new Republic of Spain are partially explained by the ineptness of the leadership, much of which is being furnished from academic circles. The professors, the holders of government sinecures, and the engaging theorists of the cafes have little training "in dealing with the grim coarse hard-to-classify and often deadly realities of the life of a country day by day. They never could span the distance between word and deed."  

The seeds of disaster are being sown by these
genial, well-intentioned gentlemen who talk so well and so wittily about such things as liberty, education, and farming. The Spain they have created is not the one they intended.

Dos Passos further criticizes the well-intentioned theorists as he speaks in praise of Pablo Iglesias, "a Spanish Gene Debs, who filled the more skilled section of the working class with the Debs tradition of orderly humane careful progress through idealist organizations." A fault of the Socialist Party was its disassociation from reality. "It gladly accepted the help of doctors and lawyers and professors who thought they were socialists because they didn't like to hear of children starving to death or to see men in blue workclothes ridden down in the street by the Civil Guard." These socialists, with their nineteenth century cultural values, were caught in the middle of the political struggle. They came to be more afraid of a new slogan in the mouths of the underdog people, Libertarian Communism, than they were of a monarchist restoration. Dos Passos could sense that the present chaos would probably lead to violence before a settled government could be installed.

The most significant of the essays contained In All Countries indicating the political position of Dos Passos during the early thirties are the four on the 1932 political
conventions which he attended. He reports that the Republi­cans marched around, tooting tin trumpets and waving little flags. The bands played, and the organ boisterously boomed out, "I'se Been Workin' on the Railroad." All did not go well, however, claims Dos Passos. "The grand climax, when His Master's Voice poured out of the loudspeakers and a moving picture of the rotund features of the Great Engineer flicked vaguely on two huge screens, was a flop, owing to bad lighting and stage management; or perhaps for other reasons. The Presence failed to materialize." 56

The sardonic tone is carried over into the report on the Democratic Convention. Outside, Dos Passos notices all the hungry, grimy bums lying around. He says, "Try to tell one of them that the gre-eat Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gover­nor of the gre-eat state of New York, has been nominated by the gre-eat Democratic party as its candidate for president." If you did, you would probably get a prolonged and enthusi­astic boo. "Hoover or Roosevelt, it'll be the same cops." 57 Dos Passos, like the majority of the leftist liberals of the period, had little faith in the high-sounding words of Roosevelt. They had heard them too often.

Dos Passos was not too enchanted with the Socialist Convention either. There was, he reports, little excite­ment, with everyone agreeing with everyone else. The lack­lustre affair dragged on until late in the night when
Norman Thomas began to speak. Handsome and dignified, with a naturally graceful manner of speaking, he always seemed on the verge of dropping into "Dearly beloved brethren." The reporters took their pictures of Thomas as he held a large red flag and leaned over the desk to look at the crowd. No rancor or disputation. "Everything was very agreeable." 58

In contrast to the derisive tone of the reports on the Democratic and Republican Conventions and to the polite report on the Socialist one is Dos Passos' enthusiastic description of the Communist gathering. There he finds life in the air, and the people are younger and livelier. They sing the "Internationale" as if they meant it. There are cheers for the Communist Party and for the Russian peasants and boos for Hoover and for Norman Thomas. The audience, which fills all the seats, is orderly, enthusiastic, and well-dressed. The encouraging results of the German elections are read and wildly acclaimed. Eleven seats in the Reichstag have been won, and over two million votes have been won by the German Communists. Dos Passos includes himself as he says, "We feel for a moment the tremendous intoxication with history that is the great achievement of communist solidarity." 59 Later, as a protest, he voted for the candidates chosen that night, Foster and Ford.
The cry of protest by Dos Passos against the society which doomed the common people to lives of stupor and squalor is also focused in the articles which he was writing for the liberal periodicals such as the New Republic and the Nation. In his articles we see more explicitly his goal of attaining individual freedom for everyone, not just the few, through a collective effort that would bring down the existent social structure.

Not only was he a writer, he was a joiner. Martin Kallich in "John Dos Passos Fellow Traveller: A Dossier with Commentary" compiled an impressive record of Dos Passos' social activities during the time when he was most closely associated with the Communist Party and its front-organizations. Excerpts from Kallich's report show that in 1926 Dos Passos helped found The New Masses; in 1927-1928 Dos Passos was a member of the New Playwrights' Theatre; in 1931 he was listed as a member of the advisory board of Literature of the World Revolution; in 1932 he was elected an honorary member of the John Reed Clubs; and in October, 1932, Dos Passos was in the "League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford" during the presidential campaign. Dos Passos was no literary maverick. Among the other members of the group which supported the Communists were such famous literary figures as Waldo Frank, Newton Arvin, Erskine Caldwell, Theodore Dreiser, Elmer Rice, Sherwood Anderson,
Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, Granville Hicks, and Lincoln Steffens. The manifesto signed by this group read as follows: "As responsible intellectual workers we have aligned ourselves with the frankly revolutionary Communist Party, the party of the workers." The degree to which some of the writers went to the left can be seen in the September, 1932, issue of The New Masses in which appeared a symposium, "How I Came to Communism," with contributions by Michael Gold, Clifton Fadiman, Granville Hicks, Sherwood Anderson, and Edmund Wilson among others. Dos Passos did not contribute.

Much of the time Dos Passos spent roaming about the country, picking up information about the condition of the people. Not only was he observing and learning about the poorer classes in the country, he also became directly involved with them in many instances. The sympathy he felt for them was reflected in the numerous requests for aid which he made in the liberal periodicals. He tried to arouse the conscience of the country with such appeals as the one made in the New Republic for help for the children of the starving miners of Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Dos Passos claimed that the American Red Cross would do nothing to help feed the starving infants because the plight of the children was considered neither a catastrophe nor an act of God. He wrote, "The National Committee to Aid
Striking Miners Fighting Starvation . . . does think that children starving in America, 'the richest country in the world,' is a serious catastrophe, and one that must be coped with."  

In another article written during the early thirties, Dos Passos tells of the hardships of the miners, how it feels to work surrounded by the guns of the owners. In 1932 Dos Passos was treasurer of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. On October 3, 1932, he wrote a letter to the Nation regarding the famous Scottsboro case. He pleaded for funds to aid the two Negro Alabama boys, Roy Wright and Eugene Williams--fifteen and fourteen respectively--who had been in jail a year and a half already. Money was needed for their defense.  

The desperation of the bonus marchers encamped in Anacostia Flats, Washington, D.C., and the men's bewilderment about the unseen forces which brought them there is the subject matter of another article. One speaker complains about the economic structure of this country, one based on all of the facilities and raw materials to give everyone a decent life, but now all broken down. He tells the other marchers:  

Give us the money and we'll buy their bread and their corn and beans and their electric iceboxes and their washing machines and their radios. We ain't holdin' out on 'em because we don't want those things. Can't get a job to make enough money to buy 'em that's all.
In Detroit Dos Passos found a group of radicals who had organized themselves into a communal group, living in an old brick building. Cots were upstairs; a social room in which pinochle and checkers were played was downstairs; in the basement was a well-organized kitchen dispensing meals for five and ten cents. The men had found that even in the middle of the depression there was no need to starve. By scrounging around the town, food was procured. One answer to the economic chaos was found in such collective action.66

It is not surprising to find that Dos Passos, writing from such a viewpoint, became the favorite of Russian readers. In a survey taken in 1932, Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer, 1919, and The 42nd Parallel were ranked one, two, three by Soviet writers in their choices of books by foreign authors. (The fourth, fifth, and sixth choices were Stendahl's The Red and the Black, Joyce's Ulysses, and Proust's Remembrance of Things Past.)67

Two of the Russian writers, Zelinski and Pavelenko, sent a letter to Living Age praising Dos Passos and urging him to continue his attacks on capitalism. They also wrote: "We count you as our friend, that is, a friend of our task. And we hope you will come forward at once in the press as Romain Rollard did against the new tactics of imperialism,
which is planning a new world war in the east [sic] and an attack on the Soviet Union."^68

Dos Passos was soon to disenchant the Communists. On March 6, 1934, the *New Masses* addressed a long letter to "Dear Comrade Dos Passos." The Periodical had previously received a letter signed by Dos Passos and several other prominent literary people, protesting the "disruptive action of the Communist Party" which had led to the breaking up of a Socialist Party meeting held in February, the Communists objective being to prevent the fragmentation of the working class movement and to unite all the dissident elements together under communist leadership. The letter to Dos Passos begins with a disclaimer that the *New Masses* speaks for the Communist Party, that it is just a co-worker in the revolutionary movement. The letter continues:

*We have often turned to you for sympathetic cooperation and support. Your books have helped mold a challenging attitude toward capitalism and its concomitant evils. For years you have been a contributor to THE NEW MASSES; the writers in and close to the revolutionary movement have, in many instances, regarded you as their literary guide and inspiration.*

*In view of this we were sorry to find you disagreeing with the Communist Party and criticizing, in a none too friendly tone, one of its efforts in the extremely difficult task of achieving American working-class unity.*^69

The reason for singling out Dos Passos as the addressee rather than the group as a whole is given in the concluding paragraph:
In the note requesting us to publish the protest we are addressed as "Dear Comrades." Here we must demur. Most of the signatures belong to individuals who cannot be recognized as ever having been comrades in the workers' struggle. We cannot remember ever having seen them on the revolutionary front. You are different.

To us you have been, and, we hope, still are, Dos Passos the revolutionary writer, the comrade.

The hopes of the New Masses were not to be realized. Dos Passos was in the process of re-examining his social and political position. The long association of the writer with leftist causes, beginning in the middle twenties, was coming to an end. He had left his rather selfish solitude, having felt the needs of the people. He had been somewhat captivated by the idea that some kind of collective action was necessary to overthrow the dictatorial powers of monopolistic capitalism which fed on the work of the people, stripping them of all chance for happiness and independence. During his days of leftist activities, he had marched with the people, fought with the people, and written of the people. Their causes became his causes, and their hurts were his hurts. He fought the power structure with the only weapon he had—words. As much as any other literary figure, Dos Passos, in his essays, in his articles, and in his books, had shaped and presented the cause of the workers to the American people. The Sacco-Vanzetti case had been the first major involvement of the author, and his injured sense of justice was horrified at the outcome of the case. He saw
the execution of the two men with a kind of unbelief; he seemed to feel that such things could not happen here in America—but they did. How could men be called free when they could suffer the fate of the two immigrants at any time? The state of the nation seemed to be one in which a man, should he be in any way different from his fellows or should he express opinions which radically differed from those of the majority, he would be summarily punished.

The only really effective group in opposition to the present state of society was that of the Left. It was the only one which seemed to have rational solution to once again restore dignity to the common man. Stalin had not yet clamped the iron hand of dictatorship over Russia. Soviet communism was still in a state of flux, and the Utopian dream of universal brotherhood to come after the dictatorship of the proletariat had served its purpose of weeding out the remnants of the bourgeoisie was still believed in by many intelligent people. The mass murder of the Georgian and Ukranian peasants was still to come. Beria and the OGPU had not yet become infamous.

An active participation in the Left, then, seemed the rational course for Dos Passos to take. He became one of them—to a degree and always with reservations. In 1932 he wrote: "It seems to me that Marxians who attempt to junk the American tradition, that I admit is full of dryrot
as well as sap, like any tradition, are just cutting themselves off from the continent. Somebody's got to have the size to Marxianize the American tradition before you can sell the American worker on the social revolution. Or else Americanize Marx."

Increasingly aware through the early thirties that there was a major flaw in communism—the naive faith that when all men are levelled to one plane of society, they would remain that way and a universal brotherhood would come into being—Dos Passos gradually came to a realization that the communists did not hold the answer to the problem of how best to achieve maximum freedom and dignity for the individual. During his long association with the leftists, he had learned much and had given Rosinante a long hard ride. Now, in the later thirties, he was going to have to re-examine his position once again.
Footnotes: Chapter Two


3 John Dos Passos, "The New Masses I'd Like," New Masses, I (June, 1926), 20.

4 Ibid., p. 20.


8 John Dos Passos, "Edison and Steinmetz: Medicine Men," New Republic, LXI (December 18, 1929), 105.


17 Ibid., p. 134.

18 Ibid., p. 561.


22 Granville Hicks, "John Dos Passos," Bookman, LXXV (April, 1932), 33.

23 Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 150.

24 Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 303.


27 Gelfant, p. 170.

28 Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 265.


31 Ibid., p. 171.
32 Ibid., p. 172.
33 Ibid., p. 244.
34 Dos Passos, 1919, p. 340.
36 Ibid., p. 340.
37 Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 532.
38 Dos Passos, 1919, p. 248.
39 Ibid., pp. 467-468.
40 Ibid., p. 468.
41 Ibid., p. 472.
42 Ibid., p. 473.
43 Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 368.
44 Dos Passos, 1919, p. 183.
46 Ibid., p. 422.
47 Ibid., pp. 460-461.
48 Dos Passos, The 42nd Parallel, p. 328.
49 Dos Passos, The Big Money, p. 25.
50 Ibid., p. 285.
51 Ibid., p. 432.


54 Ibid., pp. 135-136.

55 Ibid., p. 146.

56 Ibid., p. 231.

57 Ibid., p. 237.

58 Ibid., p. 241.

59 Ibid., pp. 244-245.


69 Anon., "To John Dos Passos," *New Masses*, X (March 6, 1934), 8.

70 Ibid., p. 9.

CHAPTER III
A PAUSE AND RECONSIDERATION

The disillusionment of Dos Passos with the methods of the Communist Party begins to show rather strongly in Journeys Between Wars, a travel book published in 1938. The proletarian viewpoint had been so much in evidence in Dos Passos' work during the early thirties that the criticism of the Communists in Journeys Between Wars came as an unpleasant surprise to many of those still committed to the revolutionary cause. In fact, the reviewers of the liberal periodicals were quite upset with Dos Passos and hoped that his dissatisfaction with the Communists was just a temporary aberration, that Dos Passos would again join the ranks of the workers in their march to freedom.

But one of his critics, George Weller, guessed accurately that Dos Passos might go off in a new direction because he had come to realize that his search for universal freedom could not be fulfilled by the Communists:

At the important risk of being wrong, however, one can hazard that Dos Passos, who here dares show the first pity for the innocent non-Marxist victims of the revolution that has appeared in an important writer of the left, may in his future chronicles of this sorry time, black as it now appears, include in his understanding all who
suffer innocently, whatever side they are on. Should totalitarianism in any form be victorious, his hatred like ours, will be unremitting. It is for the man of feeling to work for the liberation of the spirit, not to administer it, as some believe, but to spend it all again in terms of mercy.\(^1\)

**Journeys Between Wars** has much of the flavor of Dos Passos' previous travel book, *Rosinante to the Road Again*. He travels again to Spain and then goes on to Mexico and to Central America. The first part of the book is narrated by "an unknown man on a grey horse," obviously Don Quixote astride Rosinante once more. There is little doubt that this figure is also supposed to represent Dos Passos. In a reflective mood "the man on the grey horse" reveals the present state of Dos Passos' mind: "It is that I have brooded too much on the injustice done in the world—all society one great wrong. Many years ago I should have set out to right wrong—for no one but a man, an individual alone, can right a wrong; organization merely substitutes one wrong for another—but now . . . I am too old. You see, I go fishing instead."\(^2\)

Disillusionment with the Communist organization was leading Dos Passos toward a political limbo. Even so, his "fishing" time was short, for he soon spurred Rosinante into the middle of the political picture in Spain.

During the time covered in *Journeys Between Wars*, Spain was in a transitional state. The overthrow of the
monarchy had resulted in the establishment of an uneasy re-
public which was to have a relatively short life. The pre-
cipitation of Spain into twentieth century industrialism
presented innumerable problems to the Spanish, who had been
shielded both by their feudalistic society and the Pyrenees
from the full impact of the industrial revolution when it
had taken over most of the rest of western Europe during
the preceding century. One of the men whom Dos Passos talks
to is a syndicalist, who tells him that Spain is being
buried under industrialism like the rest of Europe and that
the Spanish, fast acquiring a bourgeois outlook, are in
danger of losing what freedom they have gained. The syndi-
calist speculates, "If we could only have captured the
means of production when the system was young and weak, we
could have developed it slowly for our benefit, made the
machine the slave of man. Every day we wait makes it more
difficult. It is a race as to whether this peninsula will
be captured by communism or capitalism. It is still neither
one nor the other, in its soul."³ Franco later proved the
syndicalist was correct: neither communism nor capitalism
was to control the soul of Spain. Fascism would.

The nostalgic wish for romantic primitivism, so
strong in the early work of Dos Passos, returns again in
Journeys Between Wars in the voice of a painter who com-
plains of the so-called progress now coming to Spain. The
painter sees progress as "merely an aping of the stupid commercialism of modern Europe." Peasants would be much better off left in their ignorance than being subjected to an education that would turn them into "puttyskinned merchants." Spain would be much better off in her old apathy than in an awakening to the brutality and "soulless trade-war of modern life."  

In Andalusia a man gives Dos Passos a roseate description of life in the old Spain, where people are free and independent:

On this coast, señor ingles, we don't work much, we are dirty and uninstructed, but by God we live. Why the poor people of the towns, d'you know what they do in summer? They hire a figtree and go and live under it with their dogs and their cats and their babies, and they eat the figs as they ripen and drink the cold water from the mountains, and man alive they are happy. They fear no one and they are dependent on no one; when they are old they tell stories and bring up their children. You have travelled much; I have travelled little--Madrid, never further,--but I swear to you that nowhere in the world are the women lovelier or is the land richer or is the cookery more perfect than in this vega of Almunecar.  

The responsibility for the destruction of this idyllic life can be placed on the invasion of industrialism and its new and upsetting political theories. After the overthrow of the Bourbon king, the Second Republic of Spain emerged. The government was placed in the hands of the theorists who, after stepping out of their "comfortable and gaudily decorated clubhouse," found themselves confronted
with all of the complex problems of running a complex society, a curious admixture of old and new. Dos Passos says that the new group, "steeped in that academic ignorance of life that besets the intellectual and professional class the world over," became panic stricken when faced with opposition. "Almost to a man they called for jails and Mausers and machineguns to protect the bureaucracy that was the source of the easy life and the hot milk and the coffee and Americanmade cars, and order, property, investments." All kinds of atrocities took place, and hundreds were killed. The well-intentioned theorists, the do-gooders, the professional reformers were scorned by Dos Passos. Too often they might better be labeled "do-harmers," for too often the results of their efforts at governing end in disaster. The confrontation with reality in the form of the needs and the desires of the common people (whom the academicians really know little about) leaves them bewildered, and their basic lack of practicality later led to the fiasco of the Spanish Civil War.

Leaving Spain, Dos Passos then travels on to Mexico. There he finds much the same situation. The peasants had once had great hope, but now their faith in bettering conditions was shaken. Their beloved leader of the agrarian reform movement, Zapata, had been killed by the Carranzestas. Leaderless, beaten, and hungry, the peasants labored once
again under the domination of dictatorship from Mexico City. There was, however, still a residue of hope left, for though Zapata was dead, his ghost still walks uneasily. Dos Passos versifies the peasants thoughts in a short poem:

    But his soul still perseveres
    In the will to liberate
    And his skull goes out in tears
    His dead bones walk . . .

From the plight of defeated Mexico—for so Dos Passos sees it—he turned his attention to Central America, the region in the world most dominated by what has come to be known as "Yankee Imperialism." Long the pawns of the United Fruit Company, the puppet governments of the "banana republics" had been a joke for many years. Revolts were a common occurrence, and one military junta was constantly supplanting a predecessor whose fall from power was usually caused by one of two things: (1) the government had become concerned for the welfare of the workers and attempted some kind of reforms; or (2) the government had become too greedy and had offended the fruit company.

That Dos Passos' feelings against rampant capitalism had not changed is shown in his comments on an aborted revolution in El Salvador which, unlike most Central American revolts, was not simply an attempt by one military group trying to succeed another. In his report Dos Passos claims that the victorious government could not understand the
revolutionists this time, for the leadership had come from men of education who were demanding higher wages for plantation workers, expropriation of coffee and banana lands for the Indians, and other reforms. Dos Passos sarcastically reports that undoubtedly Communist agents from Moscow were behind the revolution, but "Thank God, it was over now." The army had seized control and was in the process of cleaning up the situation. Two or three hundred people a week were being shot, many of them lawyers, students, doctors, educators, and others one would least expect to be mixed up in such a criminal business as revolution. Everything, nonetheless, was returning to normal now, and having succeeded in stamping out communism, the government was looking forward to recognition by the United States of America.  

Although Dos Passos had begun to question and to censure the Marxists, the major villains, he believed, were still industrialism, capitalism, and imperialism. His quest was unchanged. He still sought freedom for the people, but his political allegiance was beginning to shift. He was becoming non-aligned and only sure that his basic drive for freedom was right.

In 1939 he, along with Max Eastman, Dorothy Thompson, and others, signed a letter, "In Defense of Free Minds," which appeared in the American Mercury. The letter pleaded
for cultural freedom in a world of totalitarianism. A group had been formed called "The Committee for Cultural Freedom," whose purpose was to expose all kinds of repression of intellectual freedom, to defend individuals and groups victimized by totalitarianism in any form, and to propagate unhampered intellectual activity.

During the summer of 1939, the Partisan Review published a series of questions and answers on the topic "The Situation in American Writing." Two of the questions asked, together with the answers given, are rather significant in an assessment of Dos Passos' literary and political views at this time. He was asked: "Do you find, in retrospect, that your writing reveals any allegiance to any group, class, organization, region, religion, or system of thought, or do you conceive of it mainly the expression of yourself as an individual?" He answered:

Isn't an individual just a variant in a group? The equipment belongs to the society you were brought up by. The individuality lies in how you use it. My sympathies, for some reason, lie with the private in the front line against the brass; with the hodcarrier against the strawboss, or the walking delegate for that matter; with the laboratory worker against the stuffed shirt in a mortar board, with the criminal against the cop. When I try to use my head, it's something different. People are you and me. As for allegiance; what I consider the good side of what's been going on among people on this continent since 1620 or thereabouts, has mine. And isn't there one of history's dusty attics called the Republic of Letters?
In all essentials, his answer was a truthful one. His association with various groups throughout his career always had been loose and had been made in an effort to achieve his goal of freedom. He was then asked: "How would you describe the political tendency of American writing as a whole since 1930? How do you feel about it yourself? Are you sympathetic to the current tendency towards what may be called "literary nationalism"--a renewed emphasis, largely uncritical, on the specifically "American elements in our culture?" He replied:

On the whole I'm all for the trend towards American self-consciousness in current writing. Of course any good thing gets run into the ground. I think there is enough real democracy in the very mixed American tradition to enable us, with courage and luck, to weather the social transformations that are now going on without losing all our liberties or the humane outlook that is the medium in which civilizations grow. The reaction to home-bred ways of thinking is a healthy defense against the total bankruptcy of Europe. As I have come to believe firmly that in politics the means tend to turn out to be more important than the ends, I think that the more our latent pragmatism and our cynicism in regard to ideas is stimulated the safer we will be.

The most significant statement made here is the one concerning means and ends. Heretofore, Dos Passos, in both his public activities and in his literary work, had seldom seemed to take into consideration the means employed to gain any desired end. The alleviation of a wrong, he seemed to feel, must be accomplished, and the means employed were of no great consequence as long as the end sought was
obtained. In the coal fields of Kentucky, he paid little
attention to the methods employed by the miners in their
attempt to remedy their grievances. In his early writings
about the Soviets, he tended to ignore excesses of brutality
because he seemed to feel (at the time) that the ends for
which the Soviets were striving justified all measures em­
ployed in an attempt to correct social ills. A new Dos
Passos was emerging now, a more thoughtful, a more reflec­
tive person, one whose heart would tend to be considerably
influenced by his mind.

Much of this new attitude is reflected in Dos Passos' 
second trilogy, District of Columbia, composed of three
novels: Adventures of a Young Man (1939), Number One (1943),
and The Grand Design (1949). Connected, though not tightly
bound, by the adventures of the Spotswood family, this 
trilogy deals with America during the 1930's and early
1940's. As in U.S.A., Dos Passos savagely attacks American 
life in District of Columbia, but the attack is narrower in 
scope. In the earlier trilogy all facets of American soci­
ety were assailed; now the attack is more or less limited 
to politics and political life.

Adventures of a Young Man is the story of Glenn
Spotswood, a young American radical who joins the Communist 
Party. He takes part in labor demonstrations and succeeds 
in getting beaten up by company thugs in the process.
Intellectual and sensitive, the more he learns about the common people themselves, the more he feels the necessity to help them. At the same time, the more he learns about the Communist Party, with its regimentation of opinion and its inner workings, the greater becomes his distaste for it. Always idealistic, Glenn ends up on the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War. Although his fate is not described explicitly in the book, Glenn is sent by the Communists on a suicidal mission. He has disagreed too often with the party leaders back in America, and an order has come across the ocean to liquidate him as a deviant.

This ending to the book further alienated the leftists in the country from Dos Passos. It was evident now that he had drifted from close association with the Communist Party, to tolerance for it, to revulsion and even attack against it during a period of ten years. One of the major reasons for his attack on the party was, furthermore, evidently quite similar to the one which had caused him to align himself with it originally. Dos Passos had broken with capitalism because of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. He broke with the Communists because of the execution during the Spanish Civil War of José Robles, a dedicated and idealistic freedom fighter. Robles, like Sacco and Vanzetti, was executed--Dos Passos was convinced--on filmsy, trumped-up evidence. Dos Passos fought back with his familiar
weapon—words—in Adventures of a Young Man.

Young Glenn Spotswood, the hero, is a composite character, containing elements of Robles, the early aesthetic Dos Passos, and the later politically conscious Don Passos. Reminiscent of Martin Howe of the earlier One Man's Initiation--1917, Glenn is an intellectual aesthete as the novel begins. Unable to commit himself to the world of business, he drifts about, lonely and alienated. At first he is purposeless, although full of indignation at the "system." Then he finds comfort and understanding with bohemian friends, two of whom are Boris and Gladys. She is a member of the Communist Party and is a zealous worker.

In a scene after supper one night, the three characters discuss the world situation and argue about the merits of communism. Atrocities like the Sacco-Vanzetti case, Gladys says, prove that capitalism is on its way out and that as soon as the economic problems get a little better in Russia, the American workers will turn more and more to the Party for leadership in a revolutionary movement.

Glenn doubts that the workers will revolt. He has gotten the impression from those he has talked to that they think the present system is great, and if they haven't become successful, they tend to feel it is their own fault. Gladys retorts that what Glenn has said is just propaganda. Glenn then claims that the real proletarian guys he has talked to
are leary of foreign ideas. Gladys calls this mere chauvinism. Then Boris breaks in and says that what worries him is that so little is actually known about human behavior. Marxism sounds good, but its plans for the future are too sketchy. If you are going to build a new bridge to take the place of an old bridge that is falling down, he says, you wouldn't start by tearing down the old bridge; you would build the new bridge beside the old one first, so that people could keep going across. Such observations as this one point up the growing dissatisfaction of Dos Passos with the Communists.

Later in the book, Glenn, embittered and disgusted with life and full of self-pity, nearly commits suicide by jumping from a bridge. Then he reconsiders:

Limping from his rubbed heel he walked on across the bridge. Inside his head he was standing on a platform in a great crowded hall hung with red bunting, making himself a speech: Wasn't it about time Glenn Spotswood stopped working himself up about his own private life, his own messy little five-and-ten-cent store pulpmagazine libido. Suppose it had jumped off the Manhattan bridge, a damn fool cum laude grind who'd broken down from overwork and sexfrustration, to hell with it, let it go out on the tide past Sandy Hook with the garbage barges, a good riddance like the upchuck when you've had too much to drink. The new Glenn Spotswood who was addressing this great meeting in this great hall was going on, without any private life, renouncing the capitalist world and its pomps, the new Glenn Spotswood had come there tonight to offer himself, his brain and his muscle. Everything he had in him, to the revolutionary working class. Hands clapped, throats roared out cheers.
Shortly afterwards Glenn commits himself to the Party.

Becoming enthusiastic about the cause, Glenn goes into the mining country as an agitator and organizer. He knows he has made the right choice when he looks about and sees the misery of the miners. At a meeting one night, an old man lifts his hand for silence and then prays: "An' ain't it gospel true, O Lawd, that if the 'Merican Miners was red Rooshians or the devil hisself, we'd do right to jine with them to git food for our chillun, an' stand up agin the oppresion of the Law with our guns in our hands, because nobody else in this world's ever come forward to help us." As Glenn passes out the literature, the thought strikes him that it is just like handing out the hymnbooks at a revival meeting.

His enthusiasm wanes when Glenn learns more and more about the Party and its methods and goals. Riding on a bus, he thinks back over his past actions and tries to account for his having been so misled: "He wondered what it was had put him off the track, maybe it was moral indignation; his father had studied for the ministry and ended up as a pacifist lecturer, he was in Geneva now helping anaesthetize the workers of the world with the League of Nations. Must be in the blood. Here he was now at loose ends like a methodist preacher without a call."
Completely disillusioned with the Communist Party, but still an idealist, Glenn volunteers and goes to Spain to fight for the Loyalists. There he goes to a party and sees one of his former comrades, Irving Silverstone, holding forth on the international situation. Explaining that the historic role of fascism is to prepare the way for communism by destroying the democratic camouflage of decaying capitalism, Irving claims that the chauvinistic and economic policies followed by fascism lead to war, and in the general confusion which follows, the masses will turn to the Party for leadership. As Irving finishes speaking, he looks at Glenn full in the face but turns away as if he did not know him. Shortly after this confrontation, Glenn is given his suicidal mission and dies.

The reaction to *Adventures of a Young Man* by the majority of the leftist-oriented critics was not unexpected. Louis Kronenberger in the *Nation* harshly criticizes the book for its lack of literary merit and then adds:

Another trouble with the book is that its crucial chapters rest on a factual rather than a fictional basis, yet create their effects as fiction and not as fact. My feeling is that since Mr. Dos Passos is writing about a real organization, and its conduct during a real war, he should attack it as an outright pamphleteer and not as a novelist; should make factual allegation rather than a fictional indictment. In treating of so intensely disputable a matter as the role of the Communists in the Spanish War, for the sake of historical truth one should name names and cite cases.
Malcolm Cowley in the New Republic found much he dis-liked in Adventures of a Young Man, which he described as Dos Passos' "weakest novel" since One Man's Initiation, published eighteen years before. "I make this statement with some diffidence, realizing that my judgment may have been affected by disagreement with his political ideas. On the other hand, if you subtract politics from his novel, there is not much left of it." This rather strange basis for judging a literary work is accompanied by an attack on Dos Passos for being factually wrong about Communists in the Harlan coal fields and in the Spanish Civil War. Cowley makes the accusation despite the fact that Dos Passos was one of the few leftist intellectuals who did participate in both places and did not just sit in New York writing from second-hand experience.

Shortly after the scathing reviews came out, James T. Farrell came to Dos Passos' defense pointing particularly to the injustice done to the author and his book by Kronenberger and Cowley, whom he named explicitly. Farrell said the major fault Cowley found with the book was Dos Passos' "disillusionment," and if this were the criterion by which books should be judged, much of the literature of the nineteenth century, not to mention Joyce, Proust, and others, would have to be thrown out. Farrell concludes that Cowley was only concerned with disillusionment as a
literary fault when the author becomes disillusioned "with the conduct of the Communist Party which Cowley consistently supports." Farrell continues: "His review is a political one calculated to discredit Dos Passos' novel. That is what he wants; and that is what he tries to do. And that, of course, is more or less what many of the other 'liberal' reviewers also tried to do." Then pointing out the danger inherent in such a critical attitude, Farrell concludes:

The reception given The Adventures of a Young Man reads like a warning to writers not to stray off the reservations of the Stalinist-controlled League of American Writers to which more than one of the critics belong. What renders these critics suspect is their striking tone of unanimity. The reasons which they offered for disliking the novel cannot be accepted as valid literary ones. They were political reasons. These critics either opposed Dos Passos' revelations concerning Stalinism or else they said these were unimportant and did not constitute proper material for fiction. They even raised the author's "disillusionment" with the Communist Party to the status of a general principle. Here we have the phenomenon of supposedly liberal critics turning themselves into advice-mongers and politico-literary legislators. We could respect them more had they disliked the book because of its binding.

Despite Farrell's plea for objectivity in reviewing books, most of the criticism of Dos Passos' books from Adventures of a Young Man to the present has been directed toward his shifting political alliances and to his "disillusionment" instead of to the intrinsic merit of the work under consideration.
Cowley and the others were correct in finding *Adventures of a Young Man* to be a relatively poor book, but it is weak for literary reasons, not political ones. There is, as in *U.S.A.*, a quality of pessimism in *Adventures of a Young Man*, but the well-controlled iron-hard savageness of *U.S.A.* is lacking. Glenn Spotswood, as Martin Howe in the callow first novel *One Man's Initiation*—1917, is inadequately developed. He lacks essential motivating power; Glenn is pathetic rather than tragic. Dos Passos retrogresses in *Adventures of a Young Man*, having turned almost full-circle and re-emphasizing the lonely idealist that dominated his thinking in his early works. Politically, Dos Passos has arrived at the intellectual impasse of how to achieve some kind of workable brotherhood without having to sacrifice the Bill of Rights guaranteeing each individual his freedom.

*Number One* (1943), the second volume of the trilogy *District of Columbia*, is tied to *Adventures of a Young Man* by one of central characters, Tyler Spotswood, older brother of Glenn. Like Warren's *All the King's Men*, which it preceded by three years, *Number One* is a thinly disguised story of someone very much like Huey P. Long of Louisiana. Warren's Willie Stark is comparable to Dos Passos' Homer (Chuck) Crawford, and Warren's Jack Burden is somewhat similar to Dos Passos' Tyler Spotswood.
Tyler becomes confidential secretary to Crawford, who rises to power in a southern state during the thirties, becoming governor and then senator. Chuck's slogan is "Every man a millionaire." Even though he loves Sue Ann, Chuck's wife, Tyler is a woman-chaser and a heavy drinker. Throughout the novel "Number One" (Crawford) keeps talking about the "common people." Each of the five chapters begins with a sketch of a person from a segment of society, all of them—a farmer, a boy of seventeen, a businessman, a mechanic, and a miner—representative of the common man. At the close of the fifth chapter, a final sketch, panoramic and Whitmanesque, is given of all of the people, all of whom are being exploited or in danger of being exploited by the "Number Ones."

An idealist at first, Crawford is bothered by the inequalities in society. Early in the book when he is asked why he is running for office, he replies by asking why one hundred and nineteen million have "to go naked an' hongry an' destitute," while the other million enjoy all the good things in life. He says this system is against all common sense and against the Bible, which tells us in Leviticus 25, verse 23, "to spread the good things of the land equally among the people of the land."

Crawford's altruistic motivation causes him to think of himself as a great crusader, one who will lead his
children out of the capitalistic wilderness into an egalitarian land of plenty. One morning at a lavish breakfast with some of his constituents, Church recalls the meager breakfasts of his childhood and says that if he had had such a breakfast back home when he was young, he would have thought he had died and gone to heaven. Continuing his comments on the sumptuous breakfast, he says, "An' this ain't nothing to the riches that could belong to the plain people that produce all the riches there is." He believes the people could better themselves "if they'd only jess git together an' freeze out of our government the bankers an' usurers an' predatory interests that never did a lick of real work in their lives . . . that crucify mankind, in the words of the Great Commoner, on a cross of gold." The first step to be taken to loosen the stranglehold of these interests is to drive their tools out of office.

His idealism tarnished and his view of politics rendered practical, Chuck later, after gaining political power, comments on reformers in general:

Men with brains an' plenty of spare time kin always show us what's wrong with the system, but where they always fail is on the constructive side. . . . I've laid awake nights thinkin' about this thing time an' again an' I've come to the conclusion that one reason they turn out such small potaters an' few in a hill is that they bend their erudite gaze on society from the outside . . . they are never on the inside where the plain or'nary run of the mill citizen is strugglin' with the day to day business of livin'. . . . Society's a plant . . . . It's changin' all the time . . . by the time
they've got their theories ready . . . the plant's
grown into somethin' quite different. Society's
got to be reformed by practical politicians who
keep track of it from day to day.  

Chuck's remarks are indicative of Dos Passos' own
political thinking at this time. He saw the injustices
under the American system as clearly as ever, but he had
come to realize no simple solution to the problem was to
be found. Dos Passos knew—as do all thinking men—that
there had to be a better way for men to live than in their
present condition. But the question remained of how to
achieve a solution. Reformers, such as Chuck, are not the
answer, for as soon as such men realize the power of power,
they inevitably succumb to it and desert the cause of uni-
versal freedom.

Eventually Chuck becomes so corrupt that he is
investigated by a Congressional committee. He defends
himself in a radio address, and his latent fascism is ex-
posed as he assails all those who disagree with him and
his practices. He sees himself as persecuted—despite all
of the irrefutable evidence—and attempts a defense by
condemning all those in the government "with their Jew
peddler's ragbag of panaceas an' snake tonics an' horse
liniments."  

Tyler, disowned by Chuck because of his damaging
testimony before the investigating committee, has little
left. At the end of the novel, he receives a letter from his brother, written just before Glenn is killed by the Communists in Spain. Glenn's letter, sentimental as it is, does foreshadow the direction in which Dos Passos would soon go in his search for the answer to individual freedom, a search into American history. Glenn writes:

   Tyler, what I'd started to write you about was not letting them sell out too much of the for the people and by the people part of the oldtime United States way. It has given us freedom to grow. Growing a great people is what the country's for, isn't it? So long as the growth of people to greater stature all around is what we want more than anything, it will keep on. But we've got to make more and more of the promises come true. If we let too few kinds of people find space to grow in our system, nobody will believe it any longer. If not enough people believe in a way of life, it comes to an end and is gone. 

Although Number One is a fairly interesting novel, it is not of the same quality as The Big Money or Nineteen-Nineteen; it lacks the depth of those books and something of their solidity. Dos Passos does, however, display again his keen ear for American speech and gives evidence of this in his brilliant portrait of Chuck Crawford, who speaks in two languages: one is used for garnering the votes of the hicks; the second is used among the educated people.

Number One illuminates the emergence of a demagogue. In this novel Dos Passos is concerned with the question of how best to pick the leaders of a democracy, the same
question which bothered Carlyle so much. Carlyle did not
know the answer, and neither does Dos Passos. Chuck
Crawford is a lively character--colorful, vital, and per­
suasive, but dangerous. The problem of how to prevent
other Chuck Crawfords from rising and gaining dictatorial
power over the common people remains unsolved. Dos Passos
has the satisfaction of raising it, not answering it. 27

The Grand Design, the last book of the trilogy,
District of Columbia, covers the New Deal years from 1932
to the beginning of the war between Russia and Germany.
This novel involves a multitude of characters, most of them
connected with the government. Some of the characters are
easily discernible as personifications of people of promi­
nence during the New Deal period. Walker Watson is ap­
parently a combination of Henry Wallace and Harry Hopkins;
Ed Graves bears a remarkable resemblance to Drew Pearson;
Judge Oppenheimer may be either Frankfurter or Byrnes.
Other characters are Paul Graves, an agronomist; Millard
Carroll, a businessman turned bureaucrat; Georgia Washing­
ton, a researcher; and various and sundry Communists,
parlor pinks, and hangers-on. Tyler Spotswood reappears
from Number One and, predictably, has become a ne're-do­
well. His father, Herb Spotswood, the old idealist, has
become a radio commentator, somewhat resembling Walter
Lippman.
The interplay among all of the characters as they bustle about Washington during the 1930's ends in making *The Grand Design* an angry exposure of the New Deal, emphasizing the idealistic but unrealistic planning of the new society. The infiltration of the Communists and their stooges into the Roosevelt government and the behind-the-scenes manipulations and machinations of the radical leftists who, if one accepts *The Grand Design* as factual, are pictured as playing an important and influential role in American government and its policies during the period.

Early in *The Grand Design*, Mack McConnell, one of the New Deal planners, gives the classic reasons for a governmental take-over after Hoover and the Republicans have been defeated. He claims that government has been forced to step in to restore confidence. This step has led a great many men ("from purely patriotic motives") to answer the call of public life, sacrificing thousands of dollars a year to do so. McConnell says that the capitalistic system has reached the point where it is impossible to operate it without governmental planning. "There were too many bottlenecks between production and distribution where robber barons could build their castles and levy tribute on the public. The question before the nation was whether the planning should be done by these robber barons
or by government in the interest of the people."28

Most of the time in The Grand Design Dos Passos' critical eye is directed toward the New Deal's most vulnerable program, the one dealing with the farmers and their problems. For this reason Walker Watson (Henry Wallace) and the young idealistic agronomist Paul Graves dominate much of the story. When he comes to Washington, Paul sees himself playing a role in getting the farmers a better life. He visualizes the day when each farmer shall have a good home "with a good enamelled sink and an electric stove and a washing machine and a cement walk leading out back to the barn and garage and implement shed." Nearby would be a small rural town, reached by a good paved road.29

Paul says he has become a bureaucrat because he feels there is a great waste of people in the country; people have not gotten the breaks (the poor farmers on submarginal farms, the hillbillies, and the migrant workers). Prosperity, Paul sees, is an express train that makes very few stops, and through no fault of their own, a great number of good people fail to catch the train. Paul feels that as long as the government is willing to spend "a few million dollars" giving these people a new deal, he will go along and see how it comes out.30

Paul finds the problems more complicated than he had first thought. Talking with his secretary, Paul explains
various problems of the agricultural program, the most dis-
tressing being a vast difference between what goes on in
the planners' offices and what takes place in the field.

He says:

We had in government today, at least that was
his guess, the most well intentioned crowd of people
since the very early days of Washington and Jeffer-
son. A man like Millard Carroll had sacrificed a
business and a very sizable income. There were hun-
dreds like him. . . . Grant 'em all a hundred percent
patriotism from the gentleman in the White House down
and the best possible plan of operations that could
be brain trusted out and you would still have the gap
between the plans at the policy level and the poor
devil in the field being moved around by forces too
big for him to understand.31

The lack of understanding by the farmers of the poli-
cies laid down in Washington is brought out by a lanky man
in overalls who pulls from his pocket a government check
which he got for not raising as many hogs as he wanted to.
He passes it around for the other farmers to see and drawls,
"I don't get it. Here's one-half the government payin' us
not to produce an' the other half telling us to get the
hell in and root. It makes for confusion. It's like havin'
a train with a locomotive at each end pullin' in a differ-
ent direction."32

Dos Passos had become aware that after all the
socialistic planning from Marx onward, the problem of what
to do with the farmers was still unresolved. When pointing
out the disadvantages of capitalism, social schemers usually
cited the plight of both worker and farmer, but socialistic
cures were generally directed toward the interests of the industrial worker. No one—including the New Dealers in Washington—had yet found a way to fit the farmer into the scheme of a planned economy.

Communists and their sympathizers, both in and out of the government, saw many of their programs, either whole or in part, being enacted into law. Everything was proceeding relatively smoothly for them. Capitalism was being ameliorated by central planning, and socialism of one sort or other seemed to be the destiny of the country. Then came the German-Soviet pact. During the Spanish Civil War, Communist sympathizers had done all they could do to persuade more American involvement on the side of the Loyalists. The Fascists were the enemy. When World War II began, the call to arms against the Fascists had issued again from the leftists. After the pact had been signed, the party line had been nonintervention.

The predicament of the American Communist Party members in trying to reconcile Moscow directives with reality is given by Joe Yerkes, a Communist and labor organizer. Heretofore he had had success in organizing the workers, but now he was having difficulty. The rationalization of Stalin's action as being in the best interests of the workers by letting capitalism and fascism commit mutual suicide in the war did not set too well with the workers.
Yerkes complains, "But damn it I'm a labor skate . . . My job is to organize American workers. It's our great opportunity to get in on the ground floor with Mr. Big backing us up and here we are throwing it away . . . . The American workingman don't like those dictators." 33

When the Russians became involved in the war, another about face had to be taken by the Communists and their sympathizers in America; now they demanded aid for the heroic Soviets beset by Fascist hordes. The effectiveness of the propaganda on behalf of the Russians is told by Dos Passos as he speaks directly to the reader:

( . . . They said hate the Nazi, but they weren't telling us, nor even their catechumens between Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets in lower New York--they needed American planes and Lend Lease and the ships loaded to fall in line into that deadly convoy course to Murmansk--that we were the ones who they had discovered to be the enemies of the human race.)

Whenever we saw a Russian partisan in a fur cap shooting Nazis off the screen we always cheered like at the sight of the President's cigarette holder or the flag. 34

The pleas of the Communists for help fooled not only the American people but also fooled their leader says Dos Passos in another direct address to the reader:

At the desk in the White House in front of the brightlit globe sat an aging man, an ill man, a cripple who had no time to ponder history or to find the Danube or the Baltic or Vienna on the map: so many documents to sign, so many interviews
with Very Important Personages. . . . The decisions were his. He could play on a man like on a violin. Virtuso. By the modulations of his voice into the microphone he played on the American people. We danced to his tune. Third term. Fourth term. Indispensable.

War is a time of Caesars.

Dos Passos' depiction of Roosevelt is reminiscent of his vitriolic attack on Wilson as he continues:

The President of the United States was a man of great personal courage and supreme confidence in his powers of persuasion. He never spared himself for a moment, flew to Brazil and Casablanca, Cairo to negotiate at the level of the leaders; at Teheran the triumvirate without asking anybody's leave got to meddling with history; without consulting their constituents, revamped geography. divided up the bloody globe and left the freedoms out.

And the American People were supposed to say thank you for the century of the Common Man turned over for relocation behind barbed wire so help him God.36

Perhaps The Grand Design would not have been so roundly rejected by the critics had Dos Passos confined his attacks to the Communists and their sympathizers and had not included the diatribes against Roosevelt. To the liberal critics Dos Passos was meddling with God.

A typical reaction to The Grand Design was that of Maxwell Geismar, who wrote that despite "all its talent," The Grand Design is "distorted history," lacking in "essential literary and human values." Disclaiming the idea that a novelist should be judged primarily by his political bias,
Geismar goes on to say: "The point is that Dos Passos, as the historian of American society among the novelists, ought to have a specific responsibility to history, while his pictures of the New Deal is at the same time distorted to the point of being obsessed."37

In "Washington Wasn't Like That," Malcolm Cowley condemns the book, partially for what he claims are some factual errors, but mostly for "the doctrine that Dos Passos is advancing in the novel." Cowley says that Dos Passos argues "for anti-communism as a religious faith rising high above questions of fact." One of Dos Passos' dogmas seems to be "that all Communists are subhuman creatures, knaves, liars, cowards, pederasts or abortionists, monsters of selfishness and intriguing fools who, in spite of their foolishness, had achieved a sinister domination over the American government. Another dogma is that the New Dealers were evil, too . . . and that they tolerated and agreed at heart with the Communists."38

A month later Cowley, more objective and not so angry, wrote "Dos Passos and His Critics," in which he assesses the reviews of The Grand Design:

After reading all the comments one is left with two impressions. The first is that most of the critical judgments have corresponded with the political sympathies of the critics. I don't say that the judgments were determined by the sympathies, because several of the critics, including myself, tried to be fair to the book as a novel; but Dos Passos kept
obtruding his opinions as if he thought they were more important than the characters, and finally it was the opinions we had to review. Most but not all the conservatives liked the book, while even the mild liberals hated it. The second impression is that there must be something wrong with a work of fiction which calls forth such exclusively political reactions.

How hard Cowley had tried to be fair is questionable; in his review he had much more to say about the author than about the work supposedly under discussion. Cowley reviewed, as did most of the critics, the politics involved rather than the artistic merit of the book as literature. Cowley’s closing observation that there must be something wrong with the book because of the political reaction of the critics is mystifying. Since when has this been the criterion for judging literature? Cowley might better have said that something was wrong with literary criticism when the critics are unable to maintain objectivity and let political bias be the criterion for their judgments.

The political tone of The Grand Design was not too surprising to the critics, for the drift of Dos Passos away from the leftists had been indicated in two travel books and an unorthodox history book he had written during the 1940’s.

State of the Nation (1944) is a report on America as the country is preparing for the invasion of Europe. Dos Passos traveled around the country, visiting New England,
the Midwest, the Far West, and the Deep South. He traveled by train, bus, car, and plane, and talked with all kinds of people, setting down the conversations fully. The book is panoramic, detailed, and gives a broad picture of America at war.

Dos Passos interjects personal opinions and observations throughout the book. Commenting about the wartime restrictions placed upon the civilian populace, he says, "Regimentation means regimenters." The American government was based upon the premise that no man should have more than a limited power over his fellow men. The framers of the constitution had done their best to balance power with power. In a war the power was too centralized, and Dos Passos saw the inherent danger of this.

At a meeting in the North in a colored church, a Negro was protesting racial discrimination. His talk so stirred the mixed audience that a young, white labor organizer said the injustices made him ashamed of being a white man. Dos Passos' reaction to all this gives one indication of why he later supported Goldwater in 1964. He reports: "I was asking whether, perhaps, if only as a matter of tactics, it would not be better to work for fair play, equal wages, equal living conditions, first. Wasn't trying to break up segregation that way an infringement of the liberty of white men who didn't want to mix with
negroes [sic]? After all, white men had rights, too." 41

Unionism is a subject which often comes under dis­cussion by Dos Passos and the people he interviews. A laborer in a shipyard in New England brings out one fault he has found with unionism: "Having to think of the manage­ment as the enemy all the time kind of takes the pleasure in his work away from a man." 42 Hate as well as brotherly love furnished a cornerstone of unionism.

An interview with a unionized electrician presages some of the thought which Dos Passos will later develop in his anti-union novel, Midcentury. Asked how the unions are working out, the electrician replies:

'All right, I guess,' he said in a hurried pre­occupied tone. 'Don't quote me either way. Only . . . let's look at it this way. Up to 1929 or so the big business boys were in the saddle. They drove the old horse pretty hard, see? They went too far. Now we don't want to see labor make the same mistakes . . . we may be wrong but with this Adminis­tration we think they've got the upper hand. They'll take a licking just like business did if they make the same mistakes." 43

In an interview with a man in Washington who had been with the New Deal since the beginning, Dos Passos focused on a major failing of bureaucracy. The man tells Dos Passos that the New Dealers have lost their fighting spirit. The bright young men had come fresh from law school into the sinecure of government jobs. They soon found themselves relatively rich, powerful, and protected.
They lacked the experience of having to hustle a job, had never had much contact with the outside world, and "never had to take any course in the university of hard knocks." Now, with the war drawing to a close, they are afraid of losing out. Naturally they hold on to their jobs instead of to their principles. 44

A former liberal tells Dos Passos what happens to the idealist in Washington. Such a man comes to the capital devoted to the public interest. If he has any kind of mind, he probably has had theories he has talked about at some time or other. The Dies committee begins an investigation, and people conclude he is a red. The Kerr committee digs into his past and finds some strange thing he has done. Then the man either runs for cover or is placed in an insignificant position. Should he try to do something truly odd, like trying to save the taxpayers some money, out he goes. His only redress is a possible letter to the Nation. But if he is a real crook, he has important partners; if he is a real Communist, the party protects him. The loner is the one who suffers. "An unattached individual citizen has no more chance than a man trying to fight a tank with a croquet mallet. We live in a world of machines. Some machines are made of steel; others are made up of men." 45

In one of the last interviews in State of the Nation, Dos Passos talks with a Farm Bureau organizer who tells him
he had spent time in Sweden, France, and England just before the war started. He had stayed long enough to see the freedoms for which men fought gradually evaporate under the urgency of wartime government. He wondered how to prevent the deterioration of individual liberty in this country.

The organizer then goes on to pinpoint the great drawback of conservatism and the reason this political philosophy still had little attraction for Dos Passos. The organizer says: "Of one thing he was sure. No human institution ever stood still. It either grew and progressed or else it decayed. That was why the conservatives were always wrong because what they were trying to conserve was always spoiling on their hands."46

Tour of Duty (1946), the other travel book by Dos Passos, is a collection of impressions he recorded as he traveled in the Pacific war zone until the liberation of Manila and later in Europe during the last days of the war and the post war period. Much of the book is political.

Reactions to the book varied. Edmund Wilson praises it as "probably the best thing" Dos Passos has written since he finished 'U.S.A.'" Wilson says: "The whole story has the same kind of effectiveness as the life histories of 'U.S.A.': that of experience lived through by the reader without his being aware of the medium of prose that carries it."47 That Wilson's praise was justified and that Dos
Passos had lost none of his artistry can be shown in Dos Passos' portrait of the Nazis as they sit during the trials at Nuremburg:

There, crumpled and worn by defeat, are the faces that glared for years from the frontpages of the world. There's Goering in a pearlgray doublebreasted uniform with brass buttons and the weazening, leaky-balloon look of a fat man who has lost a great deal of weight. Hess's putty face has fallen away till it's nothing but a pinched nose and hollow eyes. Ribbentrop, in dark glasses, has the uneasy trapped expression of a defaulting bank cashier. Streicher's a horrible cartoon of a foxy grandpa. . . . Goering is very much the master of ceremonies. He looks around with appreciative interest at every detail of the courtroom. Sometimes his face wears the naughty-boy expression of a repentant drunkard. He is determined to be himself. He bows to an American lady he knows in the press seats. It's a spoiled, genial, outgoing, shrewdly selfsatisfied kind of a face, an actor's face. Not without charm. Nero must have had a face like that.48

A reviewer in the New Republic claims Dos Passos was objective in reporting the war in the Pacific but became a preacher against the Russians when he got to Europe.49 What the reviewer fails to consider was the time element. Dos Passos left the Pacific before the surrender of Japan. But he was in Europe during the immediate post-war period. In Europe there should have been peace now, but there was not. Dos Passos says: "It becomes clearer every day to the men on the ground that the British and Americans began their game in the privacy of the Big Three conclaves at Teheran and Yalta and Potsdam by dealing out all the trumps to the Russians." Continuing, he says that whoever thought
up the idea of quadripartite governments in Vienna and Berlin in Russian-controlled zones "certainly deserves a red star from the Kremlin. The fact that their allies were at a military disadvantage has given the Russians a method of applying gentle pressure that they have not been at all shy of using." In the Pacific the Americans had known the enemy was the Japanese; in Europe the Americans were just beginning to realize that the real enemy was the Soviet Union. In Europe Dos Passos simply switches from reporting one war to another one, from the hot war to the cold war.

The real tragedy and the threat to peace which Dos Passos sees in Europe is not so much the danger from totalitarian Russia but the confrontation of dictatorial communism with an aimless and uncertain American democracy which is failing in basic decencies in dealing with the prostrate people of the continent.

Although much of Tour of Duty deals with politics and political events, there is not much direct political exposition by Dos Passos. What one is struck with is the author's feeling for the dignity of all of the people everywhere. The horror which he brings out is the brutal stupidity which dominates the conquerors more than the conquered. The war itself is not so much the villain in the book as is the coming abortion of the peace. Although he could see what was happening and could report the defects in American
policy, Dos Passos offers little as a solution for what was taking place.

Near the end of *Tour of Duty*, a middle-aged man (a thinly disguised Dos Passos) is talking with a young reporter for the *Stars and Stripes*. The middle-aged man makes an attempt to defend the American system over the communistic one and accuses the younger man of losing faith in his country. The reporter replies: "Don't forget, sir, that we were products of the Depression. How can you have faith in Congress and the lynching politicians and the greedy monopoly of big business? Better make a clean sweep like the Russians did." The older man answers: "The trouble is we would find out as the Russians did that we had made a clean sweep of civilization, too. There are no short cuts to democracy. You've just got to go home and work it out little by little." Then the reporter asks: "Have you ever thought, sir, what you'd think of yourself? I mean your old self that was in Paris while they were making the Peace of Versailles would think of your new self that is here writing for the monopoly interests?" The man replies: "You mean I'd think I was an old reactionary... No, I don't think so... I have changed and so have the times. After all, we've got the sample of Communism to look at. In those days the Soviet Union was a dream. Now it's a reality."
The young reporter was wrong about the man in at least one respect. Even though he no longer felt that Russian socialism would be of any great benefit to his search for freedom, Dos Passos—despite what the critics had begun to claim—was no reactionary. Very little written by him during the period can be construed as being very favorable to capitalism. All is negation. Because he had once expediently joined forces with the extreme leftists in an effort to redress the grievances of the capitalistic system, Dos Passos was now considered a traitor by his former associates, and the vilifying cry of "reactionary" was to follow him from this time forward. The extreme leftists saw only two ways in which men could be governed, either by decadent capitalism or by enlightened socialism. What the leftists overlooked was the possibility that Dos Passos, who had heavily criticized both systems, might be striving, though gropingly, for another solution, one not founded upon the principles of either Karl Marx or Adam Smith.

During the last ten years Dos Passos had ridden Rosinante hard all over the country and over much of the world, during which time the unending search for individual freedom had come to seem to him an almost impossible quest. Any hope he had had that a socialistic brotherhood would eventually lead to universal freedom had been dispelled by the excesses of Stalin. The pleasant surprise of Roosevelt's
reforms had turned to distaste as Dos Passos saw bureau­
crats supplant capitalistic barons as oppressors of personal
freedom. Again he had seen a "he kept us out of the war
President" lead his country into a gigantic blood-bath to
make the world safe for democracy.

Rosinante and his rider were tired, but there was
still no thought of stabling Rosinante for good. What was
needed was a breathing spell for both horse and rider. It
was time to stop and dismount, a time, not for action but
for thought. It was a time to continue the thoughtful re­
examination of America's past, which he had already begun,
in the hope that hidden there somewhere might lie the seeds
from which the lost freedoms might once again grow tall and
strong.
Footnotes: Chapter Three


3. Ibid., p. 39.

4. Ibid., p. 257.

5. Ibid., p. 49.

6. Ibid., p. 314.

7. Ibid., p. 287.

8. Ibid., p. 302.


11. Ibid., p. 27.


15. Ibid., pp. 192-193.

16. Ibid., p. 266.
17 Ibid., p. 273.


21 Ibid., p. 494.


23 Ibid., p. 53.

24 Ibid., pp. 197-198.

25 Ibid., p. 294.

26 Ibid., p. 282.


29 Ibid., p. 141.

30 Ibid., p. 247.

31 Ibid., pp. 162-163.

32 Ibid., p. 288.

33 Ibid., pp. 178-179.
Ibid., p. 358.

Ibid., p. 417.

Ibid., pp. 417-418.


John Dos Passos, State of the Nation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1944), pp. 4-5.

Ibid., p. 99.

Ibid., p. 20-21.

Ibid., p. 132.

Ibid., p. 155.

Ibid., p. 225.

Ibid., p. 258.


CHAPTER IV

DOS PASSOS AS HISTORIAN: A SEARCH FOR MEANING*

The Living Thoughts of Tom Paine (1940) is the first work of Dos Passos as an historian. The book has a lengthy introductory biography of Paine and selections from Common Sense, American Crisis, Rights of Man, and other works which express the essence of Paine's thoughts.

That Dos Passos thinks well of Paine is not surprising, considering the number of similarities between the two men. Dos Passos writes: "If Paine had written in the language of scholarship, in the small print of theological debate, he would have been tolerated, but he wrote to be read by the people, and the people read him and the only protection British and American churchly institutions had was to turn Paine into the devil himself."

Paine, like so many others (including perhaps Dos Passos), was well ahead of his audience.

After this beginning in historical research with Paine, Dos Passos found this field to be rewarding and has

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*Dos Passos' latest historical work, The Shackles of Power (1966) is not considered in this dissertation.
since written several historical books. They are unorthodox histories, attempts to find the past, not in great events, but in the figures of men, some of whom are not well-known to other historians. At times somewhat gossipy and with an eye always open for the minute events which have altered history, Dos Passos bears some resemblance to Carlyle.

In the introductory remarks to The Ground We Stand On (1941), his first major effort as historian and as an interpreter of America's past, Dos Passos gives the reasons for his efforts. He says that each generation writes its own version of the past. When times are good, history is usually thought of as an ornamental art, but when danger rears up, necessity forces men to look to the past in a search for the answers to the pressing problems of today. There is a need to know what kind of firm ground other men found to stand on in times of trouble. That we are here today is living proof that somehow they conquered and made their hopes prevail, and we need to know how they succeeded. When time change and danger is present, men become unreasonable and delude themselves into thinking that the present is exceptional. The past, like a great lifeline stretching across the years, offers continuity, and that is the reason why, especially now, as old institutions are crumbling and giving way to new ones which are not really
in accord with the hopes of men, man must look backwards as well as forwards for his political thought.\(^2\)

Dos Passos did not think of the past in nostalgic terms; he does not desire to return to "the good old days." If he did so, he would be a reactionary. What he does seek in the past is the force which had once made men free, the force that might once again make them aware of the dangers to freedom which are accumulating. To Dos Passos history is full of answers about how to make self-government work. People have been, with more or less success, making independence work for centuries. History is vital and living when applied to the present. Our people, Dos Passos claims, "have never been told enough about the worldpicture [sic] which the founders of the American republic held up to the men who followed them."\(^3\)

Another world picture, that presented by Marx, has dominated and deluded much of the world in the twentieth century, and Dos Passos gives the reasons why so many intelligent Americans have been seduced by Marxism. Much of the blame, Dos Passos believes, lies with Woodrow Wilson, to whom the rebellious young men had listened as this politician talked first of reforming America and then of making the world safe for democracy. The next thing the young men knew, they were conscripted into the army, and when Wilson failed to fashion anything worthwhile out of the peace, they were through with him and, for that matter, through with
America, a place of sham and killing industrial exploitation. The men had seen the power of lies to kill and destroy. They had been suckers, and any chance at all seemed worth taking in order to frame a better world. Dos Passos states:

It was against this stale murk of massacre and plague and famine that, just as the early Christians had under somewhat similar circumstances painted in the mind's eye a shining City of God above the clouds, the social revolutionists began to project their magic lantern slides of a future of peaceful just brotherhood, if only the bosses of the present could be overthrown. While the bulk of the American population settled back to the wisecracks and the bootlegging and the cheerful moral disintegration of Normalcy and the New Era, angry young men whose careers lay outside of the world of buying cheap and selling dear, swallowed the millennial gospel of Marx in one great gulp.4

The seduction of the minds could be attributed to Marx's authenticity as a historical critic of social injustice as he spoke with all the assurance of a prophet in the Bible. The trouble with Marxism is that the high-sounding principles laid down by him as corrective measures had to be made operative here on earth. As soon as the Russians had attempted their great reform, it was easy to see how the new system was working either to bring happiness or misery to the people living under it. "The history of the political notions of American intellectuals during the past twenty years is largely a record of how far the fervor of their hopes of a better world could blind them to the realities under their noses."5 Sooner or later the converts became
disillusioned. Oddly enough, the trip was of value in turning formerly disinterested people into ones who now searched for an answer to the pressing problem of how to make industrial society a fit place for man to live.

In accounting for the traditions of American republicanism, which form a substantial portion of *The Ground We Stand On*, Dos Passos traces two main trails. One leads him back through the Low Church, through the plantation families of Virginia, where the "parvenu planters and the country lawyers of Virginia were quite unconsciously laying the foundations of Monticello and *The Federalist,*" to the country gentlemen republicans of the seventeenth century in England. The other trail takes him back to the Roundheads through the New England towns, "each one a little City of God," where town meetings, public schools, and libraries were developing and where came into being "that intense municipal organization that made it possible for the English-speaking settlements out in the great river system of the Mississippi and in the west to stick fast where the French and Spaniards who had preceded them lasted no longer than the buffalohide villages of the wandering Indians."^6

In his attempts to find the roots of American republican traditions, Dos Passos concentrates his attention on Roger Williams (freedom of conscience), on Jefferson (political freedom), and on Joel Barlow (the beginnings of an
American literary spirit). Intermingled with the sketches of the American men and American scenes are scenes from England and Europe as Dos Passos, through his major figures, traces events and movements that had some bearing on the traditions of America.

Of Roger Williams, Dos Passos writes: "If ever a man crossed the ocean bringing the seeds of a whole civilization in his head, like the culture heroes of the old legends, it was that preacher explorer trader negotiator linguist Roger Williams." In retrospect, he says, "It is impossible to see how toleration of religion and thought, or indeed self-government at all, could have taken root on this continent without the long life of fiery preaching and canny negotiating and the goodnatured hardihood of Roger Williams."8

The courage of Williams in establishing the principle of freedom of worship was matched in some of those who later followed him. Mrs. Hutchinson and her friends were later banished as Boston and Salem settled down into a strict oligarchy of prosperous men who yielded only to the theocracy. The leadership grew more narrow, and an intellectual shrinking occurred which culminated "in the raving madness of the witchcraft trials forty years later: the stamp of it is still on Boston to this day."9
In a humorous vein—a rarity in Dos Passos' writings—he speaks of the changes which Roger Williams found when he went back to England: "The theaters on Bankside were closed; old Ben Johnson who had held forth, huge, craggyfaced, jellybellied, and tart of tongue, over his sack in the Apollo room at the Devil Tavern across from St. Dunstan's for so long that people thought of him as perpetual laureate, was dead." In much the same vein, Dos Passos comments on Milton's reaction to the desertion of his wife, Mary Powell:

Immediately he generalized his hurt feelings into a set of tracts on divorce that caused enormous scandal, so that John Milton, the most ascetic of men, unsuited by his monastic life to deal with a woman in the house or the kitchen, or especially in bed, or in any other way than through complimentary verses or scholarly formal conversation in the library, got the reputation of being a sort of rakish Mormon elder.

Jefferson, is spoken of as one of those rare individuals whose primary concern is for the welfare of his fellow men. On Jefferson, who thwarted the ambitions of those who would have seized the infant government and turned it into the tool of the interests, Dos Passos comments: "Perhaps the survival of the race itself demands the occasional emergence of the type of mind that can't shake off a feeling of responsibility for other men, the type of mind in which the qualities grouped under the tag 'the parental bent' are dominant."
For the example of the literary spirit of liberty, Dos Passos chose Joel Barlow, author of The Vision of Columbus (1787), a widely read epic poem of the time. The long poem was praised by many of the reviewers, both English and American, but more for its sentiments and philosophical reasoning than for its poetic style. The liberals were especially taken with the ninth book which suggested a parliament of nations.  

During the French Revolution, Barlow, a peregrinating statesman as well as a poet, spent much time in France and England, championing the cause of republicanism. In England the excesses of the revolution in France turned many of the formerly friendly English liberals away in disgust. "In London Edmund Burke, with that faithfulness to British institutions that has often characterized brilliant Irishmen who have made their careers in England, was beginning to sniff danger in the air and suddenly like a good watchdog, gave tongue." Barlow's rebuttal to Burke's Reflections came out in a pamphlet, Advice to the Privileged Orders (1792), a "carefully reasoned argument for popular self-government" and an excellent picture of the Old World as seen through the eyes of an American liberal.  

Dos Passos views as surprisingly modern Barlow's treatment of the inevitable conflict in democratic society between human and property rights. Barlow, asserts that if
the aim of the state is the free development of the individual as far as possible without infringement on the rights of others, then necessarily, when property rights conflict with human rights, property rights must give way. This postulate of a free society has become the standard of liberal democrats up to and including the present. The first real use of Barlow's theory was in the campaign of Jefferson, the campaign which built up the movement for democratic self-government.  

Relating the past to the present in *The Ground We Stand On*, Dos Passos draws parallels between older revolutions and the one which took place in modern Russia. A striking similarity is shown between the French and Russian Revolutions in their beginning idealism, in their support by liberals in other countries, in their bloody executions of the aristocracies ostensibly to prepare the way for full democracy, in their internecine struggle for power among the leaders, in the ultimate emergence of a dictator who seized control of the government, and in the reversal of international public opinion, including most of those who initially had had high hopes for the revolutionary experiment. The American liberal, Barlow, even with his knowledge of French politics, "couldn't foresee what sort of consolidation of power Bonaparte was brewing, any more than American sympathizers during the twenties with the Soviet
experiment could imagine that a new czar was hatching in
the Kremlin."^{17}

The major figures of The Ground We Stand On, Barlow, Samuel Adams, Franklin, Williams, and Jefferson, all men of vision and dedication, give a rather loose continuity to the book in their individual contributions to the American tradition. Quite obviously, the list of men could have been expanded, but then the book would have been a work of several volumes. What Dos Passos attempts is successful. He succeeds in presenting an interesting, historical panorama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and fulfills his mission of casting new light on the present through the use of the past, which is, Dos Passos believes, the fundamental purpose of history.

The rather brief treatment given Jefferson in The Ground We Stand On was expanded several years later into a full length study in The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson (1954) in which the redheaded violin player, architect, horseman, and philosopher seems to come to life. The book is not dry either as a biography or as a history of the period. Dos Passos uses a style which resembles the lectures of a good professor. The book is replete with interesting, little-known incidents of the past, like the fact that Jefferson's teacher, Dr. William Small, was responsible for bringing together James Watts, the inventor, and Mathew
Boulton, the manufacturer, who collaborated in creating the steam engine.

Dos Passos, who had once planned to be an architect, comments on Jefferson's considerable ability in the architectural field and tells of Jefferson's anonymous submission of plans for the White House. They were rejected. The clash between Jefferson and Hamilton is given considerable space. Although Dos Passos' political sympathies rest with Jefferson, he finds Hamilton a fascinating figure and goes into detail about the Reynolds case. Mrs. Reynolds was thrown into the arms of gullible Hamilton for purposes of blackmail and scandal.

Jefferson's vision of the new country as "a company of farmers" rested in the belief that only men who owned and farmed their own lands, men of maximum independence and integrity, could preserve a truly republican government. Dos Passos observes that throughout history prophets and legislators have tried to enlighten mankind on how to cope with inherent evil. Some, like Confucious and the Greek and Roman Stoics, appealed to an inner sense of what was right; the teachings of Jesus appealed to the love of God to cause men to live by the Golden Rule. Jefferson, given his nation of independent farmers, felt that the inherent evil could be suppressed, if not eradicated, by education: "A proper education could teach him how to defend his own
rights to the life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness which the new government would insure; and, when necessary, to merge them in the common good." \(^{18}\)

A large part of Jefferson's agrarian philosophy was based in his mistrust of manufactures. Dos Passos says: "Particularly in Hamilton's mouth the word 'manufacturers' rasped on his ears. He felt that Hamilton's projects were preparing boots and spurs, as he put it, for the rich to ride on the backs of the poor. In England and France he had caught glimpses of the factory system. He wanted none of it for America." \(^{19}\) Dos Passos does point out, however, that Jefferson often spoke and wrote about the mechanical marvels coming into being in England, but the consequent stratification of society filled him with concern. "His mind was in the best sense of the word political. That is, he always saw society in terms of human relations. He understood the dreadful price the people in England would pay for their primacy in manufacturing in the century to come." \(^{20}\) In Jefferson, Dos Passos found a man who reflected much of his own thought concerning the problem of mechanized and stratified society.

Although praised by some critics, The Head and Heart of Thomas Jefferson was not too well received by the majority of critics, some of whom picked away at the author for his political position. Irving Howel says in his review in
As a biographer Dos Passos suffers not merely from a weakness of irrelevant specification but also from the need felt by many ex-radicals... to immerse themselves in a fatiguing maze of local detail, there to find, amid the glory and trivia and the bunting, a substitute for a point of view. At first I was alert to the danger that my antipathy to Dos Passos' present politics might prejudice me against his book, but soon it became clear that The Head and Heart is not colored but what is worse, bleached. 21

The next historical effort of Dos Passos was The Men Made the Nation (1957), one of Doubleday's "Mainstream of America" series. The book looks to the genesis of the republic from 1782 to 1802. From little-known diaries and journals, he filled it with anecdotes and stories about the fascinating and picturesque figures of the period—Thomas Paine, Burr, Lafayette, and others who made contributions of one sort or another to the American heritage. The book is devoted more to the "behind-the-scenes" events in the lives of the men rather than to the well-known public deeds of most of them.

Beginning with the last battles of the Revolution, the book presents much of the inner workings of the political life of the period. A great deal of space is given to the struggle between Jefferson and others against Hamilton and the Federalists, whose policies were efforts to restrict democracy. Jefferson again is the hero. Hamilton is the villain until near the end of his abbreviated life when he
realizes, in the presidential election of 1802, that Burr is a greater danger to his conception of a free government than is Jefferson. The book concludes with the duel between Burr and Hamilton.

Washington is not treated too gently nor with much reverence by Dos Passos, who depicts him as having no great intelligence and as being something of a tool of Hamilton. When Washington is on the scene, he is usually being shown as a kind of buffer between the two camps.

The great glory of the period, as Dos Passos sees it, is the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia in 1787. Against almost impossible odds—the factional disputes, the regional jealousies, and the machinations of some power-hungry men—the delegates fashioned the document which has been able to survive in war and peace and in prosperity and depression. Dos Passos describes the drama of the convention:

Through the hot summer days the work dragged on while the bluebottle flies buzzed in the tall windows. The afternoon sun broiled the delegates stooping over their desks. Madison's informed and logical mind hummed steady as a dynamo under the babel of contention. Persistent George Mason kept patiently reminding the delegates that their business was to establish a government, not for the benefit of officeholders or of this or that special interest, but for the people at large. James Wilson backed him up weaving his steely web of Scottish logic round the central proposition that sovereignty stemmed from the people.
Despite the extreme readability of *The Men Who Made the Nation* and the general praise given the book, the sniping attack by the liberal reviewers continued. Stanley Elkins in the *New Republic* admits Dos Passos is fair in his presentation of the Hamilton-Jefferson struggle, but then adds that Dos Passos finds it impossible to free himself from the conviction that the "reality" in history, as it is in his novels, is connected with plots and sinister struggles for influence and power, and the unifying agent of all of his work is the use of "conspiracy" as a synonym for "reality." "The schemes and manipulations in *The Men Who Made the Nation* are infinitely less evil than those of the tycoons of *U.S.A.* or the Moscow-oriented New Dealers of the *District of Columbia,* but they are there again as always."  

In 1959, Dos Passos once again turned back to the Founding Fathers for material for a book, *Prospects of a Golden Age,* written in three parts: "The Generation of 1776"; "George Washington: Pater Patriae"; and "The Rising Glory of America." The stress is on the wide diversity of background of the early leaders of the country, surveyors, seafarers, lawyers, people of the pen and press, explorers and travelers, craftsmen and mechanics, plantation owners, and builders. These were the men of vision, the doers, the ones who had had the spirit to set the country on a course of government which was superior to anything which had
preceded it.

In the foreword Dos Passos presents the reasons for the writing of the book. He has an intense admiration for the founders, a tough and agile group of various intellectual skills, combining shrewdness and efficiency with public spirit. They considered government the noblest preoccupation of man, and for them, the aim of government was the happiness of the governed, with happiness meaning dignity, independence, and self-government as well as an improved standard of living. The book is an attempt "to illustrate some snatches and samples" of the lives of some of these dedicated men. "It was their skills, coupled with a profound belief in themselves and in man's capacity, that made their achievements possible. Refreshing our schoolbook knowledge of their adventures and of their aspirations may help us not to forget what great things men are capable of." 24

The theme of the book is not, as one reviewer claimed, "that we should give up the aspirations of the Thirties for a 'liberty' defined according to the needs of almost two centuries ago." 25 What Dos Passos emphasizes is the sense of dedication and concern for the common welfare of America's founders, rather than their policies and programs which obviously would have to be re-examined and altered
for use in a constantly changing society.

Most critics praised the latest historical offering by Dos Passos, *Mr. Wilson's War* (1962). Despite the somewhat ominous title, Dos Passos did not let his own bias toward Wilson distort the facts of history. There is much of the same diligent research displayed in the book as in the previous histories by Dos Passos. Anecdotes, little-known letters, and political backrooms are all explored and given life by Dos Passos.

One example comes from the time in 1915, when the Republicans were in desperate need of a candidate, and tremendous pressure was put on Hughes to run by various political leaders, former President Taft in particular, who convinced Hughes that the decision to run against the popular Wilson was Hughes's moral duty. "Taft knew that Hughes was a conscientious party man in much the same spirit as he was a conscientious member of the Baptist church." In one of his letters to Hughes, Taft wrote that the Democratic Party "is what it has always shown itself to be—the organized incapacity of the country."

After Wilson's election and the subsequent entry of the United States into the war to make the world safe for democracy, the conflict between Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt (the old reformer and one of Dos Passos' great men) is given detailed treatment. Disappointed over the failure of
Wilson to award him a position of leadership in the war, Roosevelt began attacking the administration. The culmination of the quarrel came in 1918, shortly before Roosevelt's death, when he thundered his denunciation at Wilson for asking for a Democratic Congress to assure approval of the peace programs which he had proposed. Roosevelt, Dos Passos contends, knew that though the President had been able to drive a wedge between the people of the central empires and their governments, he had allowed himself to become alienated from large segments of his own American people, even though the cleavage was not yet altogether apparent.

Wilson was caught in a tide of change. The reform movements which had smoothed the path to Wilson's elections were losing strength or splitting off in new directions. "During the years of the century's youth the American people hungered and thirsted for righteousness. T.R. and Bryan and Woodrow Wilson built their political careers on popular faith in self-governing institutions, and on belief in the eventual triumph of Christian ethics." Reforms had taken place, but the great aims and passions for civic virtue degenerated into a series of narrow-minded manias.

In his desire to rouse the nation to a maximum war effort, Wilson unleashed a Pandora's box of blind hatreds and suspicions against anything foreign, especially ideas. And because of the oppressive forces, the enthusiasts for
political reform became fragmented and lost their national character. The young idealists found it impossible to reconcile the grand Wilsonian slogans with the actions of his Department of Justice which conducted something like two thousand prosecutions of various kinds of dissenters.

The young, who had earlier followed the great reformers in their cries against the wealthy malefactors and who had succeeded in practical efforts to refurbish the governing process, now looked elsewhere for guidance and found it in the Russian Revolution. "John Reed, whose Ten Days that Shook the World made the October days real to thousands of Americans, became an archetype of the indignant youth of the time who failed to find any idealism in massacres at the fighting fronts or in the repression of workingclass movements by the Department of Justice." 29

With the defeat of his peace plans and the death of Wilson, the book ends. What finally emerges from Mr. Wilson's War is a kind of grand Sophoclean tragedy in which the hero Wilson constantly works in bringing about his own destruction. One reviewer justly commented on the book: "For sheer craftsmanship this volume unquestionably rates among Dos Passos' best, and in other respects this reader rates it--but not unquestionably--above his previous high-water mark. It is less didactic, more evenly balanced, broader in its philosophic aspects and sounder in its
psychological judgments."\(^30\)

What Dos Passos had begun some twenty years earlier was now coming to an end. The study of history had served its purpose. Quite obviously, his original intention had been to go back to the beginnings of the republic in an effort to find some values and guidance for a course of action. The search was caused, in part, by his drift away from his former comrades coupled with his inability yet to identify himself with their opponents whom he had fought for so long. Limbo was no place for Dos Passos.

What he found in his study of history was not what he seemed to have hoped for. He had gone back into the past to find a "ground to stand on." The venture was doomed from the start, for today is different from yesterday, and the solutions of the past are hardly applicable to the complex equations of modern social problems. It was a rather naive hope of his, based partially on desperation, that somewhere in the beginnings of the republic lay a key to the dilemma in which he found himself when he rejected his old associates.

What he did find operative in getting the American tradition started was a force, a force such as Henry Adams found which raised the grand cathedrals of stone in Europe to the glory of the Virgin Mary. In this instance the force, which annealed and welded visionary men of the
eighteenth century together, had resulted in raising magnificent cathedrals of parchment, dedicated to the glory of the freedom of man. How to get a like force in motion again was beyond the power of Dos Passos to answer; therefore he found no solution to his quandary.

Realizing at last that the answers which he sought were not to be found in the past, he became interested in history for itself, as a record of man and his achievements, and the later histories, such as Mr. Wilson's War, tend to reflect this more objective attitude in which Dos Passos, in a very interesting manner, reports his findings but does not do as much editorializing.

The lonely ride on Rosinante back into the past had not been, however, without benefit to the rider. At some time during the long journey, he began to realize that his political alignment during the future would have to be with the conservatives, rather than with the liberals. By nature a joiner, Dos Passos did not like to ride alone. It was not that he agreed with all that the conservatives stood for, but for him, the conservatives now best represented the idealistic freedom for which he consistently had fought.

Drawing rein on Rosinante in a full half turn, Dos Passos ceased looking back to the past; gently nudging his well-traveled nag in the ribs, he began trotting forward once more.
Footnotes: Chapter Four

1 John Dos Passos, *The Living Thoughts of Tom Paine* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1940), p. 44.


3 Ibid., p. 11.

4 Ibid., p. 5.

5 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

6 Ibid., p. 16.

7 Ibid., p. 19.

8 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

9 Ibid., pp. 66-67.

10 Ibid., p. 85.

11 Ibid., p. 97.

12 Ibid., p. 254.

13 Ibid., p. 273.

14 Ibid., p. 305.

15 Ibid., p. 306.

16 Ibid., p. 307.

17 Ibid., p. 358.

19 Ibid., p. 380.

20 Ibid., p. 288.


27 Ibid., p. 168.

28 Ibid., p. 433.

29 Ibid., p. 434.

No particular date can be set for the political alignment of Dos Passos with the conservatives. Sometime during the late forties he found himself agreeing more and more with the group he had quarreled so violently with twenty years before. Times had changed and so had the political picture of the country. To Dos Passos those liberals with whom he had once been joined in a crusade to free the workers from the hands of capitalists had now become stagnated in their thinking, interested only in preserving the gains which they had made and refusing to admit that some of the programs they had begun in their efforts to free the people had not worked out in practice. To remain neutral was unnatural for Dos Passos; he was never meant to be an impartial observer. He was, is, and probably always will be a political activist. Eventually a realization gradually came to him that what he was most interested in--individual freedom--was and had been the battle cry of the conservatives throughout their long history.

In 1959 Dos Passos was asked in an interview how he could explain the fact that he had been an ardent radical
in the thirties and was now an ardent conservative. Was his not the old story of the young radical grown successful, then became weary and cynical? Such was not the case replied Dos Passos: "I've always been sharpshooting from the edges . . . I think the only people who have any fresh ideas today are the conservatives. Of course, I don't agree entirely with the conservatives. But I'm glad they're operating. They are interested in individual liberty. This has always been my main interest."  

As early as 1948 Dos Passos had published a lengthy article in _Life_, "The Failure of Marxism." In this he deprecates the liberals, contending that the "public mind" has changed greatly during the past twenty years. It once abruptly dismissed anything that smacked of socialism; now it accepts socialistic notions. Dos Passos asserts that the change has been brought about by the success of some of the socialistic measures of the New Deal and also "from the unthinking acceptance of the vocabulary of 'liberal' propaganda that spread out in ripples from New Deal Washington, becoming vaguer and more confused and more destructive of clear thinking as the ideas that engendered it lost their vitality at the source." The confusion thus generated in the public mind enabled the Communists to carry on successful propaganda. Then, too, he says, the liberals calcified their thinking about twenty years ago and have shown little
curiosity in assessing the socialistic programs which have come into being in the last twenty years.\textsuperscript{3}

In the same article Dos Passos comments on his own beliefs in the past. In the twenties he and a number of others were sure the end of capitalism, as predicted by Marx a hundred years before, was at hand, and that ownership of industry would be taken from the hands of the capitalists and invested in the community. Eventually, peaceful cooperation would replace capitalistic warfare in international affairs. "Of course it must be admitted that we were caught by the illusory belief that revolutions would install utopia," as Dos Passos observes. "We were carried away by the blind enthusiasm for a new dispensation at hand that was sweeping the masses of the Western World."\textsuperscript{4} By 1948 he had learned better:

Enough socialized systems and institutions have been going concerns over a long enough period of time for us at least to begin to get some idea of how they are working out. It's a most curious comment on the blindness induced by dogmatically held beliefs that in all the avalanches of print for and against socialism and free enterprise there's so little comparative examination of capitalist and socialist organizations; there's so little effort to try to discover how they work out for the men and women directly involved.\textsuperscript{5}

Dos Passos points to Russia. At first the Russians distributed land to the peasants, set up soviets (like New England town meetings) and local self-government, but this system did not last long. "By the early '30s the social
organization of the Soviet Union resembled much more the slave-run military autocracy of the Ottoman Turks than it did any of the European blueprints for a socialist utopia.\textsuperscript{6} The suppression of anything like individual freedom "was accompanied by the building up of one of the most extraordinary propaganda facades in history. A constitution was promulgated on the Western model. The entire vocabulary of Western self-government was borrowed and applied to the machinery of despotism."\textsuperscript{7}

Although critical of much of the New Deal—and he implies much of it is borrowed Russian socialism—Dos Passos is not in opposition to programs simply because of a socialistic label. As an example, he assesses the value of public owned, cooperative rural electrification and finds it beneficial. It forces private power companies out of their lethargy and encourages collective action through local self-government in a very important industry.

Summing up his views towards the workings of our government at this time, Dos Passos stresses the point that whether a program is tagged socialistic or capitalistic should be of little importance. The criterion for judging a program should be the effect it has upon the well-being of men and women and whether it stimulates growth or it fastens either bureaucratic leeches or suckers of vested
interests on the body of society. He states, "We haven't solved the problem of defending every man's freedom against domination by other men, but we have made a little bit of a beginning."

This cautious optimism is carried forward into The Prospect Before Us (1950), written in the form of five lectures given by the "Lecturer" (Dos Passos), with audience participation by people representative of various social groups. The Young Man, Eddy Jones, is an educational director for a retail workers' union. The Elderly Lady, Miss Smithers, is a retired schoolteacher. The Young Woman, Mrs. Ethel Edwards, the mother of twins, is a career woman, and is divorced. The Middle-aged Man, Fred Rufus, is a retired manufacturer. Jake Jeffries is an Iowa farmer. Also appearing are A Man in Army Uniform and The Very Young Man, the last representing the youth of today. Each of the characters engages in an exchange with the Lecturer whenever he makes statements about or questions the institutions which affect the way of life he represents.

The first portion of The Prospect Before Us is devoted to an examination of the post-war labor government in Britain. Dos Passos finds many faults with the new power structure, primarily because of its restrictions on individual liberty and initiative, which have been enacted under the guise of broadening the base of participation by the
common man in economic and political affairs. He claims, "The labor government offers great opportunity to the limited elite of the working class and trade unions, but the danger to the future of Britain lies in the fact that it doesn't offer freedom and opportunity to a large enough segment of the whole population." Dos Passos is opposed to the top-heavy bureaucracy of the labor government, feeling it is oppressive and stifles free enterprise and incentive. The real tragedy lies in the fact that the bureaucrats are killing off the chances of middle class people for useful and active careers. The only career open is government.

After the examination of the British government, the Lecturer turns his attention to the United States and contrasts the political situation of thirty years ago with that of today. Most Americans then held political notions consistent with Brisbane's editorials and Lorimer's editing of the Saturday Evening Post. The minority held diverse, astringent views--stemming from Marx, Henry George, Veblen, the Federalist Papers, and other sources--on how to reform the social structure.

Today, contends the Lecturer, it seems as if the fads and theories of those Greenwich rebels have become the coin-age in which unthinking and stereotyped judgments on events are being dealt out. Continuing, he says:
The heresies of thirty years ago are dogmas now. This state of mind strikes you particularly when you talk to newspaper reporters or literary critics, or editorial writers or almost any professional moulder of public opinion. Most of the younger men and women who work for newspapers were trained in schools of journalism instead of in that harsh school of realities that surrounded the old-fashioned printing press. Even if the policies of their newspapers are rankest Republican the stereotypes that rise in their minds are those which were cut out by the old time radicals in Greenwich Village. The general drift of social thinking is toward approval of administrative government and apathy towards individual effort. The nonconformist conscience seems to be extinct in the right-thinkers of today.\textsuperscript{12}

One of the major problems which the Lecturer sees confronting society is the lack of comprehension by the public of the basic problem of liberty. The well of incomprehension is as deep today as it was thirty years ago, when only the minority argued for the right of the workers to join unions and to strike for better working conditions or urged that a sympathetic interest be shown in the social experiments being conducted in the Soviet Union. "Today the stencils of Socialism are charged with a virtuous aura in the public mind. Public ownership, planned economy, controls and even the dreaded word Socialism itself have grown heavy with virtue, while profits, free-enterprise, investment and dividends have taken on an evil context that needs to be explained away."\textsuperscript{13} The result of all this is a deluded people, thinking themselves free, but actually restricted more and more by so-called liberal legislation.
In the eyes of the Lecturer, the common people are dominated not only by bureaucracy, but by a tangle of pyramiding corporations which do the work of the country. The industrial giants are run by a small group of powerful men in much the same way as the Communist Party is run from the top. Opposing the corporations is a tangle of pyramiding labor unions, ostensibly representing the best interests of the workers. Some unions are tolerably self-governing, and some are run by bumptious czars. From the welter of corporate and labor activity comes the goods and services of the nation. Small business struggles along, but like the Indian and the buffalo, always oscillating on the edge of extinction.14

In the fifth lecture, "Two Corporate Organizations," the Lecturer favorably criticizes two industrial giants: a large milling corporation (probably General Mills), and the Rubber Workers Union. He praises the milling company for its enlightened policy of profit sharing between management and labor and sees this kind of cooperation as one way of solving the dilemma of the industrial machine. Make the production of goods a mutual undertaking, with production being stimulated by self-interest on the part of both management and labor. Too often they are in open war with each other. In this particular company, management and labor share in the profits, and the directors take an active
interest in labor relations and try to visualize their employees as men rather than mere numbers.

The Rubber Workers Union is praised for the interest it takes in the workers' welfare and for its active participation in community affairs. The main trouble with the union is the lack of participation in it by the members. Their apathy could lead them into a dictatorship, possibly a benevolent one but possibly one which could become tyrannical.

Analogous to union member apathy is the apathy of citizens in a democracy. If apathy among union members can lead to dictatorship in the unions, apathy among the general populace can lead to dictatorial government; for a dictatorship rises from the combination of a disinterested electorate and power hungry individuals who are always ready to climb, booted and spurred, on the backs of the people. A cure for apathy would go far towards curing the weaknesses found in self-government. And there is hope, says the Lecturer. "There are a great many people in this country, in the trade unions, in the corporations, in local and national politics, sincerely sweating day by day to make self-government work. Something must be done to make them feel they are all working for the same common cause if they are to have the courage to stand up against club rule and machine rule."
If increased participation is the answer, the problem is how to achieve it. The Lecturer sees some hopeful signs: management labor committees, suggestions systems, profit-sharing plans, and the general growth of the cooperative idea in industry. Admittedly these may be the last vestiges of a vanishing habit of self-government, but they could be the new budding of its renewal. The Lecturer doesn't really know which it is, but he still says: "There comes a point in every man's life when he must take the risk of believing. I believe that our salvation depends on our making a stand and recklessly investing all our hopes and energies in these vestiges and renewals."¹⁶

Concluding his lectures with an inspirational message, the Lecturer tells his audience:

The prospect before us, ladies and gentlemen, is not all black. There is no security. The life of a nation, like the life of a man, is a gamble against the odds. It takes courage and persistence and skill to swim against the current that runs so fast towards destruction. Once we have chosen our aim we must expend ourselves recklessly upon it. With all its faults and weaknesses our society has the best chance any society ever had to mitigate the domination of man by men, but only by the expenditure of all our brains and all our work in the service of the underlying proposition upon which the Republic was founded.¹⁷

The Very Young Man then asks, "Tell me, Mr. Lecturer, is this on the level?" The Lecturer replies, "I believe so."¹⁸

**Chosen Country** (1951), Dos Passos' next novel, is
a minor work. For the most part it is a thinly disguised autobiography, with Jay Pignatelli representing Dos Passos. The book extends in time back to the middle of the nineteenth century and reaches to 1930, covering three generations of the family involved. Evidently the author intends to explain the actions of the contemporary characters by welding the past to the present. Dos Passos, unlike Faulkner, does not do this well. A multitude of characters are introduced in *Chosen Country*, most of whom have interesting stories; but herein lies the major fault of the novel—it seems like a collection of short stories, and continuity suffers.

Undoubtedly Jay Pignatelli is Dos Passos. At one point Jay compares himself to Ishmael and to Cain and tells how he cried when he read *A Man Without a Country*. Jay reflects: "Was it the bar sinister or the nearsighted eyes that made him always fumble the ball—what a terrible tennis-player, no good at football or even at soccer—or the foreign speech or the lack of a home that made him so awkward, tongue-tied... All his life he'd hated everything but Petite Mere."

Like Dos Passos, Jay served in the ambulance corps during World War I, had a father who was a lawyer, and had become involved in a murder trial (the Sabatini case) which is very similar to the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Jay tries to
point out to everyone that the crux of the trial was whether we were to preserve the free institutions upon which the republic had been built or whether we were to make meaningless the framework of our liberties. The case involved much more than just the lives of the two men. Other than this one episode, relatively little of Chosen Country is political in nature.

Following Chosen Country, Dos Passos published Most Likely to Succeed (1954). This book is a variation on the Hollywood success story and bears a great deal of resemblance to Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run. It tells the story of J. E. D. Morris (Jed), a Jewish proletarian playwright who advances from a twenty-five-dollar-a-week job as director of a small experimental Greenwich Village theatre to a position of prominence as a Hollywood writer. During his rise to prominence, Jed runs through three marriages and has a goodly number of casual affairs with women, who are incredibly easy for Jed to get.

Jed eventually realizes his greatest ambition: to become a member of the Communist Party. His first love—and his only true love—Marlowe, returns to Jed near the end of the story, but the Party, finding her politically unacceptable, forces Jed to give her up. He is left with emptiness.
Most Likely to Succeed, is an expose of the Communist Party and its intrigues and machinations in New York and Hollywood. It shows how the Jeds are duped into following Party directives. Moreover, it satirizes savagely gullible people who fall for the Party's line of propaganda. Dos Passos' anger with the Communists is apparent, and his anger got him into trouble, again with the critics of the liberal periodicals. In a review in the Nation Harold Clurman explains how innocent and misunderstood those who had been duped by the Communists, those like Jed, are. Clurman sees their actions this way:

The men whom Dos Passos has pasted together into his J. E. D. Morris were real people, in some cases genuinely gifted, worthwhile people. That they were confused and neurotic was not the most serious of their faults; they suffered chiefly from spiritual and cultural immaturity which made some of them Communists—and others professional anti-Communists. The American Communist movement among the intelligentsia always betrayed a singular lack of intelligence. And though its adherents never realized it, which was one symptom of its obtuseness, it hardly ever had any political meaning or weight... The disoriented, lonely, and wounded people who felt deceived by most of their customary beliefs... were seeking a spiritual home, a faith... In this respect they were good people in the soundest American tradition. That they were usually political boobs and cultural babies did not make them any less pathetic and human than hundreds of thousands of non-Communist Americans... That so sensitive a man as Dos Passos should have missed the point only means that, after all those years, this is where we came in.

Evidently, Clurman felt Dos Passos should have been more understanding of people like Jed Morris and not so vitriolic.
But, Dos Passos, like the widow celebrated by Sut Lovingood, "had been there."

Dos Passos' own explanation of why he had once joined hands with the "gullibles and dupes" during the twenties is found in *The Theme Is Freedom* (1956). Here again he speaks of the Sacco-Vanzetti case and of the effect it had on his future course of action. This time Dos Passos goes into detail, telling of the Mexican experiment in anarchism by the two immigrants and some thirty others. In Mexico, all held everything in common, and it was share and share alike. Then the seductive call of high wages lured most of them back across the border, and Sacco and Vanzetti went back to Massachusetts and death. Dos Passos says the year 1927 is remembered as for the battle for the lives of the two men. He declares he saw white where other men saw black, but even now, he says, he still remains unconvinced of the guilt of the pair. "Any man, I suppose, is capable of any crime, but having talked to Sacco and Vanzetti themselves it's impossible for me to believe they could have committed that particular crime."21

Dos Passos, recalls how together with other writers, he took up his pen in behalf of the working man and his efforts to unionize. In strike meetings, Dos Passos saw new methods of self-government, and he felt the need to report the class war. The *New Masses* came into being. Who
put up the money he has forgotten, says Dos Passos; money was easy in those days of the twenties. Although the Communist Party gradually came into complete control of the New Masses, Dos Passos kept getting pieces published in it on the theory that as long as the material was published intact, it made no difference where it appeared. Even then, says Dos Passos, "I'd ceased getting much nourishment from the discussions of the comrades." 22

In the summer of 1928, Dos Passos went to the Soviet Union to see for himself how communism was working out. His writings that summer describe Russia in rather glowing terms. He felt that the violent phase of the revolution was over--a notion which Stalin almost immediately proved false--and that the energies of the Russian people would soon be set to work to make life worth living.

In retrospect, looking over the reports which he had sent home from Russia, Dos Passos observes how hard it is to write truthfully. He asks himself why he forgot to put in his articles the appearance of Lenin's baby pictures instead of the Christ Child in the ikon corners of the peasants' houses. Why did he not report the people's hints about Stalin? The answer is obvious: "Of course in 1928 Stalin had not shown himself yet. He was working behind the scenes. The terror that English journalist was trying to tell me about still lurked in the shadows. It was not
yet walking the streets."\textsuperscript{23}

Despite his admiration for the energy and breadth of the Russian mind—and his feeling that the Russians, even with the faults of their system, were nearer than his countrymen to finding a solution to the industrial problem—Dos Passos claims, that like Goethe, he tried to remain neutral, above the battle. He kept telling himself that it was not necessary to make a decision yet, but as Communist power grew, he found his position untenable.\textsuperscript{24}

Shortly after returning to America, he witnessed the stockmarket collapse of 1929 and the threatened breakdown of the American free enterprise system. The event did nothing to bolster his faith in capitalism. Things like that did not happen in Russia, and it wasn't necessary to be a Communist to see that the blame for the ensuing misery should be placed on the greediness of the capitalists. Even from the perspective of today, says Dos Passos, it still seems to him that the businessmen were conspicuous failures in responsibility; despite all the "feeding at the government trough," they had not been able to develop into the responsible ruling class which Alexander Hamilton had envisioned. What stood out most was the businessmen's panicky abdication during the crisis.\textsuperscript{25}

As the depression deepened in intensity, Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, and others were drawn into the Harlan
County, Kentucky, labor war in an effort to help the miners. Dos Passos recalls a rather humorous incident. Characteristically, Dreiser had brought along with him a beautiful young woman, obviously not his wife. After she had entered Dreiser's room late one night, some sheriff's deputies amused themselves by stacking toothpicks against the door. The next morning they found the toothpicks undisturbed and arrested Dreiser on a morals charge. Dreiser, recalls Dos Passos, looking like an aged pachyderm, confounded everyone with his defense by announcing that he was an old man and impotent; therefore, nothing immoral could have taken place. The climax to the whole proceedings came some time later after Dos Passos and Dreiser had left the area and gone back to New York. The two were indicted under a Kentucky criminal syndicalism law by the Harlan County grand jury. Dos Passos refused to go back to stand trial, and he was never extradited.26

Regarding the presidential elections which took place later the same year (1932), Dos Passos reflects: "As the literal-minded young men of the F.B.I. have occasionally reminded me, I let my name be used in a list of literary people who said they were going to vote for Foster and Ford in that election. I actually did vote for them."

Dos Passos says his reason for voting for them was not that he wanted the Communists to conduct the revolution
in American government which he felt was needed at the time. The reason he gives is that his ballot was simply a protest vote, marked with the full knowledge that the Communists had no chance of winning. In this manner his voting was in the American tradition. He had also once voted for Debs after Debs had died, and, Dos Passos claims, it was much the same principle that accounted for his vote for Dewey in later years. It seemed highly improbable to Dos Passos in 1932 that "the revolution I was wanting, some of it at least, was going to be carried through under the leadership of a sweet talking crippled man whose origins lay in Groton and Harvard and in the Hudson River [sic] aristocracy." Roosevelt seemed like the most unlikeliest man in the world to assume such a function. There seemed to be little to choose between Hoover and Roosevelt; the only recourse for Dos Passos was to vote for the Communists, not through dedication to their principles but as a protest against the two major parties.

Continuing in The Theme Is Freedom, Dos Passos writes that sometime during Roosevelt's first administration he rejoined the United States from which he had privately seceded the night Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. Dos Passos emphasizes that he had not joined the Communists during the interval; the more he saw of the Party, the more he knew that the kind of world they had programmed was not
the kind of world he wanted. He hadn't joined anybody, and his attitude was that of a plague on both your houses towards the two conflicting systems. In 1932 he felt the chances for individual freedom were about equal under communism and capitalism. Of course, that was before the bloody excesses of Stalin and before the success of the moderate revolution which occurred during Roosevelt's first administration in the United States.  

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Dos Passos and other well-intentioned liberals did what they could to persuade the Roosevelt administration to help the legally constituted republican government of Spain, and if nothing else, allow the Spanish government the right to buy arms from the United States. Because of the nonintervention policy of this country, Dos Passos—who always had a warm feeling for the Spanish—went to Spain to make a documentary movie in an effort to arouse the Americans to come to the aid of the Spanish government. The movie idea collapsed because of the interference of the Communists who were the power behind the Loyalist forces.

While in Spain, Dos Passos met and talked with George Orwell, who had been wounded. This was an honest man, says Dos Passos, one for whom he feels more respect with each passing year. The two men had only a short talk, but Orwell made a deep impression on the other writer. Dos Passos says
of him: "This man Orwell referred without overemphasis [sic] to things we both knew to be true. He passed over them lightly. He knew everything. Perhaps he was still a little afraid of how much he knew. . . . Orwell spoke with simple honesty of a man about to die." 30

After the Spanish fiasco, Dos Passos returned to the United States and committed the political act he has most regretted in his life, voting for Franklin D. Roosevelt for a third term. Had Roosevelt retired after his second term as he should, says Dos Passos, he would have been remembered as one of our greatest presidents. In 1936 Dos Passos voted for him with enthusiasm, for it was the year of his greatest glamour as the New Deal rejuvenated the country. Dos Passos praises those early years:

The financial regulators of the economy had been shifted from Wall Street to Washington without anybody's firing a shot. To counterbalance the excessive weight of the great corporations Roosevelt had built up the great labor unions. However one might quarrel with the details, a fairly dispassionate observer had to admit that the democratic process had been put to work with amazing skill to remedy the dislocation produced in society by the too rapid growth of the industrial machine. Under Franklin Roosevelt the poorest immigrant, the most neglected sharecropper in the eroded hills came to feel he was a citizen again. 31

Then came the third term and then the war. Dos Passos' feelings toward Roosevelt changed. War is a time of dictators. Too, Dos Passos felt that the administration had completely dropped its guard against the Communists
after the Nazis had attacked the Soviets. The feeling in Washington seemed to be that the Communists were just another brand of New Dealer, and that after all, they were our allies in the fight against Hitler's Germany. But, says Dos Passos, some of those people who, like himself, had had experience with their mighty organization thought differently. Later events such as the Hiss and Greenberg cases proved him to be correct in his warnings.

In looking at post-war America, Dos Passos sees the country as having "run mad for government ownership." Many of the things for which he and others had argued for had become established institutions, with all the vested interest the term implies. When some of us, he says, started looking with critical but not necessarily unfriendly eyes at these new institutions, we got a good licking from the established order. How times change. The businessman, who had once defended himself so staunchly, had become apologetic and was now fair game. On the other hand, if one now criticized a socialized institution, it was done with some risk: "If some of us, who had seen the abominable Snowmen, pointed out that the Communist Party was a greater danger to individual liberty than all the old power mad bankers and industrialists from hell to breakfast, we were promptly written down in the bad books as reactionaries."
In speaking of the dubious failure of Marxism in America, Dos Passos questions whether it is a total failure. It seems to him that Marxism has retained some kind of negative hold on the educated classes of the country by their reluctance to examine any divergent ideas. He claims that though the college population isn't exactly socialistic, its hackles rise if one tries to discuss industrial society from any point of view which conflicts with socialistic preconceptions. Forty years ago the educated people the colleges turned out identified their own interest with the business class. The professors took a dim view of criticism of laissez faire. When one stepped on a businessman's toes, the professors' corns ached. Yesterday the wisecrack was that colleges turned out football players and bond salesmen; today one could say they turn out football players and bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{34}

Such is the United States as Dos Passos sees and records it in \textit{The Theme Is Freedom}. The book is in no way an apology for his past actions; it is an explanation—and a logical one—for his participation in and cooperation with various associative forces during a thirty year span, a period in which he outwardly gravitated from one political pole to another. But behind every action of his, Dos Passos always had the one goal of individual freedom uppermost in his mind.
The Great Days (1958), Dos Passos' next novel, is once again partly an autobiographical work. The hero Roland Lancaster (Dos Passos) is a once famous journalist whose career has steadily declined. At the beginning of the story, Roland has lost his wife, has run out of money, is out of a job, and has decided to take a trip to Cuba with a young tart, thinking that a trip would in some way alleviate his problems. The trip turns out badly. The girl is frigid and rebuffs all of Roland's advances. She is interested only in having "fun." Roland steadily disintegrates into a drunken bum.

In many respects The Great Days is quite similar to Hemingway's Across the River and Into the Trees. Dos Passos' aging Roland Lancaster with his young Elsa are much like Hemingway's Colonel Richard Cantwell with his Renata. Both novels serve as platforms for pontifical judgments by the authors either on famous people they have known or on past events of importance. Hemingway gives opinions on World War II generals, battle strategy, and his former wives. It is as if Hemingway were being interviewed, with Renata and others acting as straight men.

In The Great Days, Elsa will not stay still long enough for Roland to tell her of "the great days" of the past; consequently, much of the book is devoted to a series of flashbacks as Roland engages in drunken reveries. The
flashbacks are told in the first person and are really just recapitulations of Dos Passos' own journalistic reporting during the forties.

Roland's present misfortunes have been caused by his peculiar penchant for telling the truth—he feels. The flashbacks reveal this fact as he recalls the days of the New Deal, World War II, and the immediate post-war years. The only other person in bureaucratic Washington who understands the "real truth" of what is happening to the country—the Communists have infiltrated the government and the country is well on the road to a socialized regimentation—is Secretary of the Navy Roger Thurloe (obviously representing the former Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal). When Thurloe leaps to his death from a hospital window, Roland loses his one real friend.

The novel is ruthless in its attack on Roosevelt. At one time Roland, thinking at his typewriter, tries to imagine what it must have been like to have been either Roosevelt or Churchill during World War II. Roland says he sensed at that time a certain exaltation about them as they pondered decisions and pored over maps bearing strange names like Attu, Tobruk, Murmansk, and Kiska. Although responsibility was a weight, it was a tonic too, the job of being helmsman. There was the gambler's delight of hazarding fleets and armies.
Part way around the wobbling world were the two men's opposite numbers, the Austrian paperhanger, hissing and sputtering into a microphone, and the swarthy bandit from the Caucasus, silent behind his mustache. For these two, who spelled out death for millions, signing death warrants was a daily treat. Yet, oddly enough, millions were ready to die for them. None had ever had such power since the Roman three stood astride the world. Hitler and Stalin—Roland says he wrote them off as outrageous monsters, incapable of being understood. But what of Roosevelt, the graduate of Groton and Harvard, with his fondness for sailing, vacationing down East, public service, and the gracious life at Hyde Park—"These were all things I knew: the friendly fireside voice. Yet when the time came to run up a butcher's bill our Hudson River gentleman would sit there drinking blood with the best of them. Not a word against the President." Thirty-five Roosevelt ("Our boys will not go overseas") and Wilson ("He kept us out of war"), are similar to Dos Passos, who feels both blundered the United States into war. Later Roland wonders what would have happened at the Nuremberg trials if the Nazis had won and Roosevelt stood accused.

Such a savage attack was not to go unpublished by the critics. Maxwell Geismar brutally reviewed the book and sarcastically concluded:
But Moscow dominated the Nuremberg Trials, of course, just as it stole the fruits of our victory, and perverted our gullible humanitarian principles—though Dos Passos does not quite follow out this standard line of reactionary logic, and add that F. D. R. should be dug up and impeached. Roosevelt was dead anyway "from the neck up" long before his stroke, the present hero does say; and the Washington scene of the novel is peopled by the familiar personages of the reversionary Dos Passos.36

What is really wrong with The Great Days and what will always keep it a minor novel is not the politics and personalities involved—for time will lessen their importance—but the slightly distasteful note of self-pity and plea for sympathy by Dos Passos. Near the beginning of the novel he says that "every time he publishes anything the critics tear down his poor old name."37 At the end of the book he sadly recalls his Blueprint for the Future (The Prospect Before Us). He complains:

Nobody read it. What's the use of writing things nobody reads? I guess I couldn't find the right words, the words Roger used to ask me for so pitifully. . . . In my dream I was tacking a small sailboat against an ebbing tide. In my dream I was tacking in a light breeze against a tide that poured around a spit of white sand. Beyond the sandspit was the harbor and other boats luffing up to their anchorage. . . . Smartly I come about, no matter how carefully I trim the mainsail and the jib—look she's making speed, she has a bone in her teeth, she's leaving a straight wake behind her—every time I come abreast of the sandspit I'm further out to sea. Tack and tack again. Gulls shriek derision overhead. Not enough wind. Can't beat to windward against this ebbing tide. The whole implacable ocean pours out past that sandpit, sweeping me away, sweeping me to oblivion.38
Dos Passos becomes much too personal in *The Great Days*, and he is never at his best in novels when he intrudes himself into his writing. He succeeds in the better novels by taking an invisible position above the action, looking down at the scene below, and angrily condemning the follies of men. *The Great Days* is petulant, lacking the broadness of scope, the range, and the vision of his major novels.

As some critics contended, *The Great Days* seemed to be the last gasp of a worn out writer, grown old and given to repetitious condemnation of a controversial period of American history. *Midcentury* burst as a complete surprise on the literary world. In the New York *Times Book Review* for February 26, 1961, Harry T. Moore writes:

Seldom does a writer retrieve a long-lost reputation at a single stroke, but John Dos Passos has probably done just that with "Midcentury," by far his best novel since he completed the "U.S.A." trilogy with "The Big Money" in 1936. It is written with a mastery of narrative styles, a grasp of character and a sense of the American scene. In its fictional passages this panoramic novel recaptures the verve and intensity of a quarter-century ago, while the background sections, made up of sociological tidbits and pertinent biographical sketches show the same Dos Passos skill at manipulating the devices which helped to give "U.S.A." originality and force.39

Toward the end of the review Moore adds: "As a story, it has enough power to lift it above the imperatives of the moment and into consideration as serious literature, certainly as one of the few genuinely good American novels of
Despite such well-deserved high praise from Moore, not all of the reviewers found *Midcentury* to their liking. Neither the *New Republic* nor the *Nation* published a review of it. In the *New Statesman*, John Gross panned the book:

Old is good, new is bad, and the unions are worst of all—for what purports to be a panoramic 'novel of our time' proves little more than a crotchety attack on labour [sic] racketeering as the root of all un-American evil, most of it at the same level as *Time* magazine denouncing Jimmy Hoffa. This is the most controversial work from Mr. Dos Passos for a long time, and it would be exciting to report that the volcano given up for extinct had started rumbling dangerously again. But it's only the growl of any bilious reactionary down at the country-club. The old Dos Passos devices—press-cuttings, pocket biographies, words run together without benefit of hyphen—are trotted out, and they give the book a surface liveliness.

An examination of the controversial book reveals that for the third time Dos Passos attempts a large-scale, highly organized panoramic novel. *Midcentury* attempts to give a composite view of what life is like in America at the mid-point of the twentieth century, but most of the emphasis in the book is on a concentrated exposure of what is wrong with the labor unions.

Much of the material concerning the plight of workers today was taken from the letter by workers sent to Senator McClellan's committee which was investigating labor racketeering during the fifties. Dos Passos had previously
reported on what workers had been writing to McClellan in the Reader's Digest (September, 1958). The letters had come to the committee from all sections of the country, from workers in all trades and occupations. The letters were written in fear, fear of violence and fear of the loss of a job. Dos Passos says he read thousands of them and found the task an awakening experience. The letters were not part of an organized campaign; they came from the hearts of the people and were written spontaneously. Dos Passos says of these people: "It took great courage--and bitter experience--to write them. How many hundreds of thousands more disillusioned people are represented by these letters?"^42

The dominant thread tying the novel together is the growth of the American labor movement from its beginning to the present. Dos Passos traces the movement from the early idealism of the first organizers to the cynical corruption of some contemporary labor bosses.

Like U.S.A., Midcentury is more than a straight narrative. Interspersed throughout the novel are biographies of famous people, documentaries, investigator notes, and the memories of an old bed-ridden labor organizer of the old school. In putting all this together, Dos Passos is able to give a comprehensive view of the labor movement--as he sees it.
The most important fictional character is Terry Bryant, a war hero who has been so shaken by what he has seen and been through that it is necessary for him to have psychiatric treatment. He regains his balance and marries Natalie Stepanich. He goes to work for a company which is unionized, gets into trouble, and leaves. Eventually he settles down in a small city, becomes a cabby, becomes involved in a labor war between union and non-union companies, and is murdered. The rival cab company is run by corrupt union officials in league with the management.

Helping Terry in his fight to preserve his freedom by refusing to join a bad union is Will Jenks, a rich young man who sees the justice of Terry's fight. The adventures of Will's father-in-law, Jasper Milliron, furnish a secondary plot for the novel. Milliron is a production engineer for a large milling concern. He comes up with a revolutionary new idea in the milling process and becomes part of the management. But ideas are too radical, and he is not competent in his new position. Finally squeezed out of the company by large financial interests, he ends up in Mexico.

One of the financiers is Judge Lewis, who represents all that is wrong with capitalists. A mathematician, completely objective, and inhuman in his dealings with people, he is one of the shadowy financiers who control the holding companies which in turn control the corporations. He spends
his time wrapped up in figures, coldly calculating, closing big business deals affecting the lives of thousands of men, never giving a passing thought to the fact that he is controlling the lives and destinies of so many people in his financial manipulations. He sits above the people like a Colossus, like Fate, casually making and breaking the spirits of men. The Judge is not cruel; he is impersonal.

Another character in Midcentury is Sam Goodspeed, Jaspar Milliron's nephew. Sam is representative of the teenager of today, bewildered, with no sense of values, and with no purpose in life. At the end of the novel, Sam has stolen his uncle's credit cards and is off on a spree. He doesn't know nor care where he is going nor what he will do when he gets there.

Scattered throughout Midcentury are the musings of Blackie Bowman, who is sixty-seven years old and is confined to a hospital bed in a veteran's hospital. The Bowman portions of the book are like the "Camera Eyes" of U.S.A. Blackie is a former Wobbly and anarchist who hates Communists, especially for taking over of some of the unions, to serve their own ends with no regard for the welfare of the workers. This story of the perversion of the goals of good union principles by Blackie Bowman gives Dos Passos a platform from which to try to awaken the workers in the union out of their apathy and into an awareness of the Communist dangers.
Much of the same purpose is served in the "Investigator's Notes." They too are scattered at random throughout the novel. Purportedly they are notes taken by an investigator as he interviews workers around the country. The workers cautiously tell the investigator of the wrongs that they have found in the unions: farcical elections; the betrayal of some union officials who work for their own benefit in cooperation with management; Communist infiltration of some of the unions; lack of financial accounting by the labor officials to their members; and, above everything else, a constant threat of violence, blacklisting, and loss of a job should a member have the audacity to question the actions of the officials.

The capsule biographies are much like those of U.S.A., terse, brilliantly written, and opinionated. There is one of Longshoreman president Harry Bridges in which Dos Passos flays Bridges for his communism; one of John L. Lewis in which the man with the fierce eyebrows is praised for his actions in behalf of the workers; one on Walter Reuther in which Dos Passos speaks of Reuther's Communist pals and of his unwarranted fight against the Kohler concern in Wisconsin whose workers didn't want Reuther or his union. There is a biography of Eleanor Roosevelt which is extremely unflattering; and a multiple one of the Teamster Union officials, Tobin, Beck, and Hoffa, who represent—to Dos Passos—
the most despicable kind of union leadership. Another biography is of John McClellan, who is seen favorably for his fight against corruption in the unions; another is a sympathetic biography of Dr. Robert J. Oppenheimer. There are contrasting short portraits of two men named Dean: Major William Dean, hero of the Pacific Theatre in World War II; and James Dean, the movie actor, whose abbreviated life was nothing but a tragic waste.

What emerges from this pastiche of material in _Mid-century_ is not an outright anti-union thesis as has been contended by some critics. Balance is given to the book by Dos Passos' praise of various unions and officials. What Dos Passos does do in the book is to point out the faults with which the labor unions are afflicted—and no one can deny that there are no instances of coercion and corruption in labor circles. But for pointing his finger at one of the "sacred cows" of the liberals, Dos Passos has been labelled an old, tired reactionary.

To him, labor without a voice, as it was some fifty years ago, is intolerable. What he seems to see in _Mid-century_ is that labor has made progress, and working conditions are much better than they were. But under unionism they are by no means perfect. There is a great deal of room for improvement. Some workers are working under dictatorial leadership. Bombings, violence, and killings today
can be laid at the door of unionism. Some unions, such as the Longshoremen's Union, are controlled by Communists. Some engage in political activities for one party or another without consulting their membership. And there is the problem of the right to work versus compulsory unionism. None of these problems relating to unionism have been solved. In *Midcentury* Dos Passos parades these problems out into the open where the people could see them, and by recognizing their existence, possibly do something to redress the wrongs.

In his review of *Midcentury*, Granville Hicks grudgingly praises its artistry and the "complete honesty" of Dos Passos. Then he adds:

The passion has ebbed away, but the other virtues remain, and they make Dos Passos an admirable figure. He cannot now reach the height he reached in "USA" but "Midcentury" shows how much there is that he can still do well. The biographies, for instance, are terse and revealing, even when one quarrels with some of their judgments. The narratives are based on a knowledge of industrial life few novelists have. And, tired and hopeless as he may be, Dos Passos is still a man of solid integrity, saying exactly what he thinks.43

Dos Passos' next book, *Brazil on the Move* (1963) attracted little critical notice. It is a journal of his thoughts and experiences as he traveled around the large South American country. He sees Brazil as a country in a state of political flux, with two opportunities open to the
people. One is to follow the general trend of the Spanish-speaking Latin American countries toward some kind of dictatorship, fascist or communist—it wouldn't make much difference to the general populace. The other course open to the Brazilians, having thrown off the hated yoke of dictatorship, would be to go to fulfill their destiny as free men in a living, working, practicing democracy. Dos Passos views today's Brazil as the Europeans used to view America, a land in which men can start afresh, unhampered by the corruption of restrictive institutions. Brazil represents an underdeveloped Eden, with all kinds of valuable resources, not the least of which are the people themselves, although the majority are ignorant and primitive. Brazil is in a crisis. If the people choose wisely, they can set up a system under men can be free and happy.

Many factions are at war with one another and are striving for supreme power in Brazil. In the Northeast section the landlords, trying desperately to preserve their feudalistic domains, "would rather die than give their tenants a break." Opposing the landlords are the belligerent peasant leagues, controlled by Castro's Communists and seeking to gain the support of the populace through dreams of a Communist Utopia. A third force is in the field. It is the cooperatives that are really accomplishing things by raising the standard of living of the peasants. The
propagation of these cooperatives, Dos Passos implies, would be best.

One problem Dos Passos finds throughout the country is the great gulf between the illiterate masses and their bureaucratic leadership. The Brazilian bureaucracy is a special kind because of the literate Brazilians' horror of productive work. This is partly to be accounted for by their Portuguese heritage. The bureaucrats beget bureaucrats, bringing them up to be public servants but with no knowledge of the processes of production. There used to be an old custom among the educated classes of wearing a long fingernail on the little finger as a symbol of the educated class that had never done any physical work nor intended to do any. In Brazil there is enough social democracy occasionally to narrow the gulf between the man at the desk and the worker, but it is still wide. Brazilian bureaucracy differs from that in the United States. A bureaucrat in the United States might have worked as a section hand at some time or other, or at least, he might have mowed his own lawn. This is not true in Brazil, "where you came out of school belonging to a different race from the man who hoed your garden."45

In academic circles Dos Passos finds communism to be a problem, "an obsession of the intellectuals." Because politics has been found to be the surest way of rising on
the ladder of success, university students have been devoting more time to politics than to academic study or technical training. Scholarship has been almost forgotten, and student strikes have been paralyzing higher education. A great many students, Communists or anti-Communists, are throwing all of their energies into political activities. Being a student has become a profession. 46

On a visit to an academy, Dos Passos was hosted by several students, one of whom told him that at eighteen he had been a Communist, like everyone else. "We thought communism was a cure for poverty. It seemed to open new careers for young men of brains. Now I am twenty-seven and I have discovered that communism is just another way of dominating the masses. Instead of curing poverty it makes poverty universal." 47 The student believes that other alternatives have to be found. The Communists have quit making propaganda for communism. Now they are engaged in making propaganda against North America, against the rich, against anyone who is successful. They tell the poor people that the Communists will throw out the landlords, and then the poor shall live in the luxury homes and hotels. "It is simple. It works. Many of our most intelligent men, particularly poets, artists, architects are subject to this illusion. They have not thought the thing through to the end." 48
During his peregrinations about Brazil, Dos Passos went to Brasilia, the controversial new capital, a whole city being constructed at one time out of the virgin jungle, four hundred miles from the sea. What is unique about the city is that it is completely planned and will have none of the frustrating problems of other cities: slums, decay, and unsightliness. After looking over the incipient metropolis, Dos Passos expresses his opinions about it:

Though the long horizontal of the apartment buildings suit the city plan better than the occasional outbreak of New York style skyscrapers, the routine monotony of their design becomes depressing. The apartments themselves, seen from the inside, show little interest on the part of the designers for the needs of the people who have to live in them. The rows of identical concrete hutches for lower income renters express, even more perfectly than some federal housing in the United States, the twentieth century bureaucrat's disdain of the faceless multitudes to whose interest he is supposed to be devoted and whose exploitation furnishes his keep. The worst shack in the adjacent shantytowns of Cidade Livre or Taguatinga would be a better place to live.49

What Dos Passos finds and reports on in Brazil on the Move is a large country which, during the next few years is sure to have a major political upheaval. The three hundred year period of feudalism is coming to an end, and the old caste system is going to fall. Brazil is awakening to twentieth-century life. The question remains as to what type of political system will prevail. Dos Passos sees several possibilities. There may arise a Communist government similar to that under Fidel Castro in Cuba. There may
come into being a Fascist system like Peron's was in Argentina. There may come a democracy copied after that in the United States and bringing with it all the bad as well as the good. But Dos Passos wishfully hopes that out of all the chaos and confusion that must come to Brazil, a new kind of government will emerge, based on the best principles of our democracy but shed of those restrictive institutions with which his countrymen have bound themselves.

Written in much the same spirit of awakening America to problems that do exist, Occasions and Protests (1964) is a collection of twenty-four essays and portraits. Two date back to the thirties, four to the forties, and the others to the fifties and sixties. Significantly, they are grouped in three divisions. The first collection is "Certain Fundamentals," six thoughtful essays on basic principles of freedom, with bits taken from Dos Passos' own past, giving them a personal flavor. The second division is "The Leaders and the Led," reports on his visits and interviews with some very important people--presidents, would-be-presidents, and others in positions of power. The third grouping is "That Something More Than Common," which contains meaningful social criticism, biting but not savage. They are thought-provoking reports from "one of the best reporters in the world on the present state of the world."
Near the beginning of *Occasions and Protests*, Dos Passos, in a reflective mood, recalls the spring of 1919 when Lenin was alive: "We thought the Soviets were New England townmeetings on a larger scale. Socialism seemed a radiant dawn. The Seattle general strike seemed the beginning of a flood instead of the beginning of an ebb. Americans in Paris were groggy with new things in theatre and painting and music. Picasso was to rebuild the eye. Stravinski was cramming the Russian steppes into our ears."\(^{51}\)

Energy was breaking out everywhere as young men climbed out of their uniforms.

A little later Dos Passos says that he and other idealists like him knew in 1919 that the world was "a lousy pesthouse of idiocy and corruption, but it was spring." They knew that in the grand old buildings the politicians and diplomats were brewing poison, but the young men still had hope. Dos Passos says they subscribed to two dogmas that most of them had to modify or scrap later:

We knew that life in the militarized industrial nations had become a chamber of horrors, and we believed that plain men, the underdogs we rubbed shoulders with, were not such a bad lot as they might be. They wouldn't go out of their way to harm each other as often as you might expect. They had a passive courage towards the common good. Loafing around in little old bars full of the teasing fragrances of history, dodging into alleys to keep out of sight of the M.P.'s, seeing the dawn from Montmartre, talking bad French with taxidrivers, riverbank loafers, workmen, petites gemmes, keepers of
bistros, poilus on leave, we young hopefuls eagerly collected intimations of the urge towards the common good.52

In one section of the book Dos Passos attempts to define the role and duties of the writer. Today, more than ever, he claims, writers need bold and original thought. This they should supply and not become mere figureheads in political conflicts. He adds: "I don't mean that a writer hasn't an obligation, like any other citizen, to take part if he can in the struggle against oppression, but his function as a citizen and his function as a technician are different, although the eventual end aimed at may in both cases be the same."53 It is plain that Dos Passos wishes his literary work be thought of and judged on that basis and that basis alone. Too often his works were reviewed as if he were a political figurehead of some group rather than a writer.

In another essay Dos Passos attempts to define the terms "individuality" and "individual," two words which constantly creep into his writing:

When we speak commonly, without exaggerated precision, of an individual, don't we perhaps mean a person who has grown up in an environment sufficiently free from outside pressures and restraints to develop his own private evaluations of men and events? He has been able to make himself enough elbow room in society to exhibit unashamed the little eccentricities and oddities that differentiate one man from another man. From within his separate hide he can look out at the world with that certain aloofness which we call dignity. No two men are alike any
more than two snowflakes are alike. However a man develops, under conditions of freedom or conditions of servitude, he will differ from other men. The man in jail will be different from his cellmates but his differences will tend to develop in frustration and hatred. Freedom to develop individuality is inseparable from the attainment of what all the traditions of the race have taught us to consider to be the true human stature.\(^4\)

All of this was common knowledge fifty years ago, but it needs repeating now, for we live in an age when the official directors of opinion through the pulpits and the schools are stressing so heavily the need for conformity in a society based on mass production in industry that the preservation and defense of individuality has become supremely important.

In the early days of the republic, most of our prominent men knew something about almost everything. They were not so specialized in their education as most of the educated class today. One of the things the founders knew by personal experience was the kind of men who made up their society. They took a realistic view of people. As Dos Passos puts it: "They took human cussedness for granted." They had no illusions about how men behaved politically, and even Jefferson, the idealist, allowed for the vanity, greed, and ambition of officeholders and for the self-interest of the average voter. Jefferson believed that under proper institutions people could be improved, and like Adam Smith, he believed improvement could be accomplished by enlightened self-interest. The founders
allowed for the common man's short-sightedness, his abomina-
ble apathy, his timidity, his selfishness, and his intermit-
tent public spirit. They used this knowledge in the service
of their building of the state, and using men as they found
them, they managed to set up a balanced government which,
made possible the tremendous growth of the country. Today,
Dos Passos feels, society in general has adopted an unreal
and dangerous conception of what a man actually is, presup-
posing that men are naturally good and will act intelligent-
ly. Such a thesis can only lead to disaster. Like it or
not, a stable society can only be built when a realistic
appraisal of the constituents of that society has been made.

As might be expected, Dos Passos also has a few words
to say about the New Deal in Occasions and Protests. He is
not as caustic as usual toward Roosevelt and his policies.
At one point Dos Passos talks of the changes that have come
about since the New Deal. There has been a tremendous spread
of electric power, great improvement in road systems, in
schools, in the health of children, in housing, in all the
facilities for comfortable living. "The people of this
country are immensely richer in material goods than they
were thirty years ago and that wealth is much more evenly
distributed."56

At the Liberal Convention in 1956, Dos Passos found
many of the New Dealers in attendance. He gives a good
description of the scene:

They are all such nice people. Nice people on platform. Nice people in the gallery. The audience is made up of just about the nicest people in New York, kind good plump jowly people, well-heeled but not rich, people who in their day have made sacrifices for worthy causes. Looking them over, by the way, it doesn't look as if they had suffered great losses by their liberalism. The good cause has triumphed. Many of them are incrusted in the bureaucracy of labor unions, colleges, foundations. Many of them have built up lucrative practices in the law, in publicity, in labor relations. Even so some of them can remember the old days when the cops were beating them on the head with their nightsticks. It's a reminiscent audience; they first banded together as liberals a couple of decades ago to support the idealistic aspects of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. It has all come to pass. They have grown gray in the liberal faith. Here is a man who expresses for them its fulfillment. At the sight of Adlai Stevenson smiling from behind the microphone the whole audience purrs like a gigantic cat.57

Despite the kind words, the "liberals" were not to go unscathed. Having read Whittaker Chambers' autobiography, Dos Passos was outraged by the "moral Lynching" of the man by the "right-thinking" people of this country. He asks if it is possible that the "liberals" who control the communications in the country "have already crawled under the yoke of the Communist Party," not as members but in spirit. What especially irks Dos Passos is that since it is to be expected that the Communists will discredit those people who have turned against them and slander is a convenient weapon—why should the "right-thinkers," those people of education and position, repeat the slanders without investigation and
worse yet, refuse to recognize, despite all of the evidence piled up, the existence of a conspiracy designed for the destruction of these same "right-thinking" liberals as for the rest of us? There is, of course, no sensible answer to that question.

A somewhat similar instance had occurred in 1947 when Dos Passos felt it necessary to write the New York Times because a reviewer, Lawrence Lee, had attacked Godfrey Blunden's A Room on the Route, a book about the condition of the common people of Russia under the iron fist of the Communists. Dos Passos wrote the Times that surely the editor was not unaware of the fact that there had existed for some time a kind of invisible censorship of books that attempted to tell the truth about communism. Dos Passos says in the letter that he doesn't mean to imply that the editor is enthusiastic about communism, but Dos Passos does imply that perhaps the editor and others have been the victims of subtle and diligent propaganda; therefore, Dos Passos says the time has come to impress upon the minds of those in authority the need for an open mind on the subject of the Soviet Union. In closing, Dos Passos states: "Obviously I would not be taking up your time and mine with this letter if I did not consider this issue of Russophile censorship one of paramount importance. . . . At this moment above all others the people of this country need to know the truth
about the people of the Soviet Union. To most Americans Russia is beginning to look more like an enemy than an ally."59

In one of the last essays, a somewhat amusing one, in Occasions and Protests, Dos Passos comments on Edmund Wilson's book, The Cold War and the Income Tax: A Protest. It seems that Wilson had neglected to file income tax returns for nine years, and the federal government had taken a dim view of his forgetfulness. Dos Passos begins with high praise for Wilson's abilities: "The author has one of the best literary minds of our generation. He has developed a limpid and casual prose in the great tradition of essay-writing in English. His criticism exhibits a rare combination of qualities. He has humor and a very personal sensitivity to whimsical human nuances."60

Wilson, in his book, tells the sad tale of his troubles with the bureaucratic state and of the retribution which followed. Dos Passos finds the work uncloyed with self-pity and told clearly and briefly but thinks what a waste of time and energy for such a man. He goes on: "Perhaps I was influenced by personal affection for the author, whom I have known off and on for many years. Knowing and admiring the man I found the wrecking of his odd little ivory tower extremely poignant. There are times when one is reminded of the adventures of the nearsighted Mr. Magoo."
There's a charm to such heedless innocence."\(^{61}\)

Wilson blames the United States as he criticizes the enormous income tax rate of the federal government. Dos Passos contends Wilson should have looked more deeply into the problem and would have found that the high tax rate was caused by the tremendous amount of money needed to finance the Cold War being waged against the Communists. Donald Davidson, in his review of *Occasions and Protests*, took particular notice of the article on Edmund Wilson and wrote:

Articles like this are not written, of course, to convert the Edmund Wilsons of America. Impossible! So deeply committed and in these matters, so obtuse are most Ivy League liberals of Wilson's generation that they can only rarely be expected to learn from their shocks of disillusionment, as Dos Passos long ago did. They cannot bear to say mea culpa, and to yield up positions that they have so many times loudly and ignorantly affirmed. Dos Passos is writing, I would suppose, for recent and present generations of college students and their middle-aged parents—and for anybody else whose ears are open, whose eyes can actually see what is before them, instead of what they may be told by newspaper, magazine, or T-V that they are supposed to see. For such readers *Occasions and Protests* will be a morale-booster, a Golden Book of insights into contemporary gains and losses, and, when the author looks at the American past, a sober reassurance about the firmness of our ancient foundations.\(^{62}\)

Other reviewers were not so perceptive—nor in some cases honest. The "review" in the *Christian Century*, all two hundred and five words of it, is devoted to "the fall of Dos Passos," with not one word about the book itself.\(^{63}\) H. J. Bresler in *Commonweal* devotes less than two hundred
words of his review to *Occasions and Protests* and uses the remainder to vilify the author. Bresler writes that Dos Passos is "to the far right" politically and is "a doctrinaire conservative" with "an almost compulsive hatred of Soviet Communism." Bresler charges that Dos Passos is "politically unsophisticated," that he has shifted from an "ardent proletarian writer" to a writer for the right, and in the process has lost his thunder and verve, becoming merely crotchety. Bresler claims Dos Passos has lost his "creative vitality" because of disillusion and has retreated "back to the ivory tower." Bresler's solution for Dos Passos' defects is for him to become involved in some worthwhile cause, like the civil rights struggle, and then there might be a "rebirth of his once formidable talent." 64

Such an attack on Dos Passos did not go unanswered. In a review which appeared some six weeks later in the *National Review*, an anonymous critic lashes out at the liberal reviewers for their unfairness in their condemnations of the book. On the matter of a worthwhile cause for Dos Passos to be interested in, something like the civil rights movement, the reviewer says that Dos Passos has had a cause for some time, devoting his attention to the growth of the octopus state and its effect on free people, to the exposure of the Soviet state with its murderous acts as it seeks to deceive people with idealistic principles, to the
iron-fisted union bureaucrats with their insistence on conformity, and to the recapture of all that Jefferson dreamed of in his conception of a free society. The review ends: "If he chose to write about the Heavenly Kingdom, that would not be an inspiring subject, if it has not been listed among the objectives of the New Frontier and the Great Society."65

Every one of the problems—the growth of bureaucratic government, the danger of communism, the abuses of the union bosses—have been topics of concern for Dos Passos during the past two decades. As he has probed into each of them, his primary purpose has been to find how each of them affects the free way of life of the common people. This is sole criterion by which Dos Passos judges. On the surface the condition of the people has been greatly improved in material things in the last twenty years, but underneath Dos Passos still finds ills which call for remedies. The United States is not yet Utopia. All is not well, and the roots of the diseases lie in some of the institutions dear to the hearts of the liberals who refuse to reexamine opinions and beliefs adopted thirty years ago and who refuse to look objectively at the institutions which they helped set up, to see how some of them have actually worked out in practice, not just in theory.

In the effect on the worker and his family, Dos Passos sees both the good and the evil of modern unionism
which has prospered so well since the Wagner Act. He finds some workers who thought of themselves as free men living under dictatorships as strong as any forged in Europe. Somehow or other the idealistic principles upon which unionism was based have, in many cases, become perverted. The cost to the workers of material well-being in terms of freedoms is too high for Dos Passos to sit idly by and do nothing. Is freedom the price of security?

Much the same thing he found to be true when he looked at the interference of the federal government into the lives of the people. Tremendous power is being amassed in Washington, and local power (the kind Dos Passos favors) is rapidly evaporating. He feels the situation is potentially dangerous, and thoughtful consideration of what is taking place is needed.

Much of Dos Passos' writing during the past two decades is an effort to rouse the American people to the dangers of communism, both here and abroad, and he, through his past associations with communism, surely knows what he is talking about. Without hysteria he spells out the aims and purposes of the Communists, not once but many times, and like the little boy who cried, "Wolf!" his attempts to warn the people have kept falling on deaf ears.

Rosinante has had a long hard ride during the past twenty years. Both he and his rider have been growing old,
but both heads are still high. In *The Theme Is Freedom* and other works of the period, the rider has tried to explain as best he could the purpose of his efforts, but to too many he had just been tilting at windmills. He was jeered and scoffed at and pelted with literary garbage. His ride has been costly. Sooner or later Rosinante would have to be stabled. Has the long journey been made in vain? With his lance he has opened the sores of society in an effort to cleanse them, but the credentials of a knight-errant for the diagnosis have not been acceptable to those in power, who have never really understood the writer or what lies behind his writings.
Footnotes: Chapter Five


3 Ibid., pp. 96-97.

4 Ibid., p. 97.

5 Ibid., p. 97.

6 Ibid., p. 102.

7 Ibid., p. 102.

8 Ibid., pp. 97-98.

9 Ibid., p. 98.


11 Ibid., pp. 100-101.

12 Ibid., pp. 114-115.

13 Ibid., p. 116.

14 Ibid., p. 362.

15 Ibid., p. 358.

16 Ibid., pp. 363-364.

17 Ibid., pp. 372-373.

18 Ibid., p. 372.


22. Ibid., p. 40.


24. Ibid., p. 68.

25. Ibid., p. 73.

26. Ibid., p. 86.

27. Ibid., p. 101.


29. Ibid., p. 103.

30. Ibid., pp. 145-146.

31. Ibid., pp. 161-162.

32. Ibid., p. 173.

33. Ibid., p. 236.

34. Ibid., pp. 245-246.


38. Ibid., pp. 296-297.


40. Ibid., p. 51.


44. John Dos Passos, *Brazil on the Move* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 188.

45. Ibid., p. 19.

46. Ibid., pp. 183-184.

47. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

48. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

49. Ibid., p. 130.


52. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

53. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

54. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

55. Ibid., pp. 61-62.

56. Ibid., pp. 69-70.

57. Ibid., pp. 166-167.

58. Ibid., pp. 244-245.


60. Ibid., p. 291.

61. Ibid., p. 292.


John Dos Passos is one of the most important writers of our time. If there is such a thing as "a man of letters" living in America today, he comes closer to fulfilling the qualifications than any other living American author. He is an historian, a poet, an essayist, a journalist, and a novelist. In the field of fiction he writes with imagination and is an innovator. He has made several contributions to the art of writing the novel, and has been influential on the work of others, such as Mailer and Sartre. His non-fictional writings are on topics of importance, and he is always well-informed about his subject-matter. He has had thirty-eight books published. His brilliant short biographies are included in most anthologies of American literature. Yet, Dos Passos stands neglected by the literary and academic world. Many people, familiar with Hemingway, Faulkner, and Steinbeck have scarcely heard of him, although he has been engaged for forty years in a fight for the dignity and freedom of the individual. This being so, there must be some explanation for a strange state of affairs in which a really good writer is relatively unknown, unread,
and unhonored.

The consensus of the literary world—with a few exceptions—is that Dos Passos was a great writer at one time but no longer is one, that for some reason or other he had a falling off of power after the publication of U.S.A., and that his subsequent writing has been mediocre at best. Various theories have been advanced by critics to explain the apparent decline of Dos Passos' work, most of them based on erroneous assumptions about his political life. Recently Walter Borenstein found similarities between the Spanish writer Baroja and Dos Passos and concluded that Baroja was rather influential in the work of Dos Passos. Attempting to explain Dos Passos' political attitude, this critic says that Dos Passos, like Baroja, "was to find himself in eternal agony," that he was "a victim of lonely despair," that he felt a psychological need to belong, "to be a participant in the activities of men, to find new roots in something with a purpose, to give some sense of meaning to aimless life. This desire for roots, for some ground on which to stand, may have turned the disenchanted radical of the twenties into the modern conservative Republican."

What Borenstein implies is that Dos Passos was at one time a member in good standing of the radical left and became a conservative only for companionship. But Dos Passos' tenure as a respectable radical was brief; he was
always ahead of the crowd, not in it. Malcolm Cowley, speaking of Dos Passos in Exile's Return, says: "When he appeared in Paris he was always on his way to Spain or Russia or Istanbul or the Syrian desert. But his chief point of exception was to be a radical in the 1920's, when most of his friends were indifferent to politics, and to become increasingly conservative in the following decade, when many of his friends were becoming radical."²

The most prevalent misconception about Dos Passos is the belief that at one time he was a Communist or at least an advocate of Marxism, hoping for the millenium which was to be brought about by a Marxist revolution. In 1956 Maxwell Geismar in a review of Dos Passos' The Theme Is Freedom wrote:

The collapse of his belief in the Russian Revolution, the disillusionment with the methods of the Communist Party, led not only to a major revision of his thinking, but, apparently, to a complete cessation of his creative energy and his human emotions. There was a psychic wound that has never stopped bleeding.

It is a familiar wound—the stigma of contemporary literature.

... It is a central factor in the paralysis of the American intellectuals during the last decade. Bitter ex-radicals like Sidney Hook, or constrained liberals like Lionel Trilling, or romantic reactionaries like Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, have set the tone; which is, I think, no tone at all.³

The notion that Dos Passos is a disenchanted Marxist was caused in part by some of the comments about him by Communists which appeared in the thirties. Michael Gold
praised Dos Passos for having written "collective novels" (Manhattan Transfer and The 42nd Parallel) and spoke of Dos Passos' achievement as being greater than that of Joyce. Gold said Dos Passos "has hewed out at least one path" for the new writers of the Communist movement, "which is building the new collective society, where men will be brothers, instead of bitter, futile, competitive individuals." In 1931 Granville Hicks (who has since recanted his communism) spoke admiringly of the gifts of Dos Passos: "His communist theories give him a definite and advantageous attitude toward the material he works with--since the Communist, unlike the liberal, wholeheartedly accepts industry and all its natural consequences, rejecting only those features of our order that derive from the private ownership of property." 

From statements such as these, a mythical John Dos Passos emerged, Dos Passos the Communist, who wrote stories about the proletariat, even though, as Edmund Wilson pointed out, at that time Dos Passos was writing a long novel (U.S.A.) about the effect of the capitalistic system on the American middle class and had announced in the New Republic in 1930 that politically he was a middle class liberal. The myth persevered until the Communist critics were forced to repudiate it, not because they saw they had been wrong in evaluating Dos Passos' previous work, but because of his
attitude toward events in the Soviet Union. 6

Even though the Communists had adopted and claimed Dos Passos as their own during the thirties, there was a discordant note; they were never really satisfied with his orthodoxy. In 1932 Hicks hailed the 1919 as a book of major importance, but then added: "He has yet to master the whole body of revolutionary theory, which can render him even more extraordinary service than it thus far has. He very much needs to expose himself more fully to the proletarian point of view, so that he can reveal the chaos of industrialism as searchingly as he reveals the chaos of war, and so that he can present the ordinary worker as convincingly as he presents the bourgeois intellectual or the radical labor leader." 7

Hicks was right. Dos Passos never did "master the whole body of revolutionary theory" (Marxist), because Marx was not then, nor ever really had been the major guiding force behind his political thinking. The man whose political, economic, and social writings furnished the dominant social philosophy of Dos Passos was Thorstein Veblen. Not only did Veblen's philosophy dominate Dos Passos' early work (when he supposedly was a Marxist), it is the major force behind his present work (when he supposedly is a far-right conservative). Lately, this significant fact has been casually mentioned, but there has been no full exploration
of the relationship between Veblen and Dos Passos.

To begin with, Dos Passos did not read Marx until the late 1920's, and then he didn't read him completely. Much earlier, during his years at college or very soon afterwards, attracted by Veblen's elaborate irony, he read and absorbed the man's "destructive attack on capitalism's institutional facade." As early as 1936, Max Lerner, speaking of U.S.A. pointed out the similarity between Veblen's thought and Dos Passos' writing: "His social analysis owes much to Marx, but essentially he is the Veblen of American fiction, sharing Veblen's rebelliousness, his restless questing mind, his hatred of the standardized middle class culture and of the leisure class aesthete, his insight into American traits, his divided feeling about the underlying population." 

B. H. Gelfant in American City Novel arrived at the same conclusion. He calls Veblen "Dos Passos' key figure" because Veblen represents specific social ideals that Dos Passos finds admirable and because Veblen, "with rare perspicuity," described the alternative forms that America can take: a warlike society strangled by the bureaucracies of the monopolies or a sensible society dominated by the needs of the workers with vast possibilities for peace and plenty brought about by the progress of technology.
In American Fiction Joseph Warren Beach calls U.S.A. "the fictional counterpart of Veblen's theoretic study of the leisure class." Henry Commager in The American Mind calls Dos Passos "the Veblen of American fiction, his business to strip the veils of illusion from institutions. . . . In him we find again something of that indignation against social injustice, the exploitation of the workers, the corruption of a commercialized civilization, that seared the pages of books like The Octopus, The Jungle, or The Thirteenth District." Not only is Veblen the philosophical force behind Dos Passos' writing, but his political life closely parallels that of Dos Passos. Veblen had some things in common with the Marxists, such as the indictment of capitalism, the linking of war with property, and an economic interpretation of history. Because of his rapier thrusts at capitalism, he was hailed with delight by the American Socialists, but they misunderstood Veblen, much as they later did Dos Passos, for he never did fit the pattern of a true Marxist. Commenting on the Marxism in Veblen, Harold Lassman might just as well been speaking about Dos Passos when he wrote that Veblen was an outlyer of disgruntlement, "who avoided the political implications of a responsible Marxism, and contributed to the undertone of
disapproval and alienation that characterized the posture of the well-turned-out intellectual in this country whenever our leading economic, political, and social institutions were referred to.\textsuperscript{13}

The major difference between Veblen (Dos Passos, too) and the Marxists is in the conception of the common man. Veblen had few illusions about him and did not feel, as the Marxists did, that the common man was either revolutionary or heroic material. He disagreed with the Marxist theory of the class struggle which assumed that the common people would act wisely in their own interests. He thought, as did Dos Passos, that the American farmer, clinging to animistic ways and still somewhat immune to the machine process was one of the mainstays of existing society. Veblen was contemptuous of the "business unionism" of the American Federation of Labor and "saw it as simply another facet of the price system and pecuniary calculus."\textsuperscript{14} Dos Passos echoes this same attitude in \textit{Midcentury}.

Although Veblen never actually joined any political group, throughout his career he had, like Dos Passos, a compelling sympathy for the underdogs of society, with immigrants, workers, farmers, the embattled Soviets, and the wobblies. Veblen fought the powerful and entrenched captains of state and finance with his sarcasm and irony. At the same time his faith in the common people often shows in
his disdain and impatience with them. Even so, "he was never tempted to betray the common man, or any of the weak and vulnerable people to their quondam rulers."  

Veblen continuously sought to detach himself from Marx and the Marxists and stressed more his differences from them than the areas of agreement. He refused to identify himself with them even after the first World War when he was patently writing articles favorable to the Marxists for The Dial. Veblen held caustic views of business and political leaders, views which coincided with the views of the Marxists. Much the same thing happened in Dos Passos' association with the New Masses and the Marxists in the early 1930's.

World War I and its aftermath aroused in Veblen a bellicose anti-Wilson and anti-American feeling, with much of his hope transferred to the Soviets as they were coming to power. Much the same attitude was taken by Dos Passos.

In the introduction to The Portable Veblen, Max Lerner comments on some of Veblen's fundamental beliefs:

Much of the key to Veblen's embittered intellectual life lies in the conflict between his essential belief in men and the desolate wasteland he saw all about. He called himself a skeptic. But he was a skeptic only about institutions, not about man himself. His faith—and it is not wholly grotesque to use such a word about him—was that the instinctive core of man is sound, and only the institutional husks are rotten. He seemed to have an almost Rousseauist belief in man's natural goodness.
Like the creator of the noble savage, who believed that man is born free yet is everywhere in chains, Veblen believed that man is born peaceful yet is everywhere in turmoil, that he is born with the instinct to shape things for human ends, yet is everywhere surrounded by waste and futility. However much he wished to believe that the instincts would triumph, he was too honest an observer not to give historical odds to the institutions.  

Lerner might just as well have been speaking of Dos Passos. Reading Veblen is much like reading Dos Passos. It is much more clear what they are against than what they are in favor of. At one time both praised the Bolsheviks, not so much for any new ideals or institutions coming forth, but for the destruction of old and obsolete ones. Veblen felt that all the parasitic occupations—those which do not figure in actual production—should be destroyed and the parasites given useful employment. He wanted to abolish the superstructure of society, that portion which is engaged in non-mechanical employment. The conversion of drones into workers would keep the hive of society buzzing with increased production.

Much of Veblen's work is devoted to belittling those he called "captains of industry," those who felt that they were the ones responsible for keeping the wheels of industry turning, whereas these so-called "captains" used only what Veblen refers to as "the instinct of workmanship" in the people for their own ends. These "captains" then wasted in a frenzy of extravagant and usually vicarious display what
the workers produced.\textsuperscript{19} Veblen defines the "captains of industry" as those who grew from former merchant princes. In the beginning they were also captains of workmanship, business managers, and foremen of works. By degrees, as the volume of industry grew larger, personal supervision by owners became impractical and the employer-owner became disassociated from actual production. His interests shifted to a footing based on accountancy, and production passed into the hands of technical experts. "Captains of industry" became parasitic "captains of business," and technicians took over actual production.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite all their claims to the contrary, Veblen allows no constructive role to the financiers. If they happened to have done something not altogether predatory, he attributes it to some vestige of the repressed instinct of workmanship in them. He thought the financiers were good only for persiflage and sabotage. At heart Veblen, like Dos Passos was an anti-truster and looked with a jaundiced eye on the great corporations. He took a similar view when he examined the American Federation of Labor, which he saw as another vested interest, copying the tactics of the other vested interests. He exempted the rank and file from his condemnation and laid the blame on the leadership, the "aristocrats of labor."
Veblen distrusted the central government and its bureaucracy; he resented the income tax and the national debt, and "hankered, in spite of his cosmopolitanism and his belief in mechanization," for a Jeffersonian America, "for a handicraft age of small affairs."^21

At the core Veblen was pessimistic as he looked at society. The only real hope he had for a radical change in existing conditions was in the class he designated as "the technicians," those in the upper middle class who actually made the wheels of industry move, the engineers and production people. In "The Technicians and Revolution" he says that the technicians constitute the General Staff of the industrial system, despite the pretensions of the captains of industry. For any revolution to succeed in America or any other highly industrialized country, the cooperation of the guild of technicians would be imperative. But Veblen thinks such a development is highly unlikely: "By settled habit the technicians, the engineers and industrial experts, are a harmless and docile sort, well fed on the whole, and somewhat placidly content with the "full dinner-pail" which the lieutenants of the Vested Interests habitually allow them."^22 He disallows the possibility of the proletariat being able to shake off their shackles, and therefore, the chances of anything like a Soviet in America are the chances of a Soviet of technicians, but "to the due comfort of the
Guardians of the Vested Interests and the good citizens who make up their background, it can be shown that anything like a Soviet of Technicians is at the most a remote contingency in America."

In his writing Veblen bears some resemblance to the early naturalist writers in that he has a fundamental impulse of sympathy for the underlying population, coupled with a feeling of helplessness for them. He swings back and forth from sympathy to a kind of apotheosis of strength in writing about the common people. The whole structure of his thought is more that of an epic novelist rather than a rigidly scientific theorist.

He peopled his works with well-defined symbolic types. One of these is the Peaceful Savage, living before property and war had corrupted his Eden, and richly endowed with the instinct of workmanship. In contrast to him is the Preadatory Barbarian, who appears in many guises. At times he is a war chieftain, a member of the priestly class, a gentleman of the leisure class, or a dynastic ruler. Close-ly related is the Captain of Industry, who started out well as a useful and working member of society but became specialized and degenerate and evolved into the parasitical Captain of Finance. Also there is the Modern Scientist, who trans-mutes "idle curiosity" into new industrial uses. Associated with him is the Engineer, the top worker of society and the
one on whom the faint hopes of revolution fall. In the later books of Veblen, the propertyless Common Man is frequently met, "caught between the discipline of the machine and the lure of the values of a business civilization."

Like so many of Dos Passos' characters, many of Veblen's type-figures are symbols of alienation. The Peaceful Savage is often thrust into a complex of war and waste, a world to which he is not suited by native endowment. The Scientist finds himself opposed by the pragmatic and the predatory interests, and he, with his idle curiosity, is an outsider in such a world. The propertyless Common Man stands on the outside, looking with both longing and criticism in at the windows of business civilization. The Engineer, who has not yet learned that he holds the key to the whole industrial complex and that he can run the machine for himself and his fellows rather than for masters, remains just a hireling.

These same type-figures are found in much of the work of Dos Passos. To illustrate the force of Veblen in Dos Passos' work, a comparative study can be made between U.S.A., the best of his early production, written while he was a "left-wing liberal," with Midcentury, the best of his recent novels, written after he became a "right-wing reactionary." U.S.A. was hailed by those on the political left, and the publication of Midcentury delighted those on
the right. None of the critics seemed to realize the basic similarity between the two books, written some twenty-five years apart. Neither the Communist Manifesto nor the Conscience of a Conservative was the major force behind either book.

It takes no great stretch of imagination to see that U.S.A. owes much to Veblen. It is almost as though the book was a novelistic form of presenting Veblen's major premises, with the focus of the opposition in the book being between "business" and "production," the two-fold division of function which is so fundamental in Veblen's thinking.

The most clearly Veblenian fictional character is Charley Anderson, an automobile mechanic who enlists in the army and becomes an aviator. After the war is over, Charley, struck with the vast possibilities of aviation, launches a small aeronautics business. He does well, becomes successful, and is a "good" man (in Veblenian terms) as long as he remains an engineer, a production man. But then the lure of the big money seduces him. Leaving production in the hands of others, he tries to become a "captain of business" rather than a "captain of industry." The new life is hollow and a sham. Charley becomes a speculator on the stock market, has an empty affair with movie star Margo Dowling,
and eventually is killed in an auto accident. Charley's usefulness as a member of society had terminated when he left the camp of industry as a technician for the camp of business. His life and career seem to be almost a fictional footnote to Veblen's *The Engineers and the Price System*.

Some of the characters in *U.S.A.* personify the theory of the leisure class. J. Ward Moorehouse starts out as an idealistic American lad, but soon finds he is a born promoter and steadily rises up the ladder of success in such parasitical occupations as public relations counsellor, publicity director, and lobbyist. He becomes rich and unhappy. Dick Savage, a young idealist who has shown promise as a writer, becomes Moorehouse's flunky and abandons his integrity. He ends up as a parasite on a parasite. Beautiful Margo Dowling steadily climbs her way in and out of bed to the pinnacle of Hollywood success, becoming a living legend, and at the same time a prime example of Veblen's ideas of conspicuous consumption. None of these people contribute anything of real worth to society, and each ends up badly.

Many of Veblen's type-figures have their counterparts in *U.S.A.* Joe Williams is a good example of the peaceful Savage. He never amounts to anything and is at a complete loss in trying to deal with living in twentieth-century living. Knowing that he does not want to go into the army,
he avoids the draft by taking a berth on a merchant ship, but then, easily swayed by emotion, in a burst of patriotic fervor, he buys a liberty bond. Janey, Joe's sister is his female counterpart.

A representative of the propertyless Common Man is Mac McCreary, who wanders about the country becoming involved with many of the old labor causes. A man of many occupations, his political beliefs keep him on the run. He is always on the outskirts of society, never amounting to much, and eventually ends up as rather ironically as the proprietor of a small book store in Mexico.

Even more obvious than his influence on Dos Passos' fictional characters is Veblen's influence on the manner in which Dos Passos selects and presents his capsule biographies. These supply numerous illustrations of pure Veblenian figures.

There are portraits which fit Veblen's category of the "Common Man," those men of the masses on the outside of society, who look in and see the abundant wealth which industrialization has brought, but also that somehow or other they and their fellows have been denied a fair share of the industrial production. These men are fighters, but their efforts usually end in defeat and their lives in obscurity. They have two enemies to fight. One is the business interests which are determined to hold on to the status quo.
The other is the sheer stupidity and indomitable apathy of those of their own class. Sometimes it is hard to figure out which of the enemies is the most formidable opponent to the frustrated fighters for freedom.

One such man was Big Bill Haywood, who began as a miner and was instrumental in the formation of the Western Federation of Miners. When that organization became too conservative for him, he worked with the IWW and got into trouble during World War I. Sentenced to twenty years in prison during the "Red scare," he jumped bail, went to Russia, was dissatisfied with what he saw there, but died in Russia, a broken old man. Another such "Common Man" was Wesley Everest, "Paul Bunyan," who began as a lumber jack in the Northwest. He joined the Wobblies and became an active member. The lumber owners fought. A group from the American Legion decided to raid the Wobbly hall on Armistice day, "to lynch a few reds." Everest met them with gunfire, eventually was cornered and caught, then jailed, castrated, hanged, and shot full of holes.

The portraits of Luther Burbank and Thomas Alva Edison are representative of the "Scientists." They are full of Veblen's "idle curiosity." Burbank dreamed of green grain in the winter, ever-blooming flowers, and ever-blooming berries. He was a sunny old man, but the churches found out that he was an infidel and read Darwin. They
hounded him until his death. Edison fared better at the hands of society for he never worried about the social system or philosophical concepts. His "idle curiosity" never left him as he hatched invention after invention which proved useful to industrial society. He worked sixteen-hour days at the age of eighty-two. He was a Scientist.

The Technicians and Engineers are well-represented by Dos Passos in U.S.A. Among them are the Wright brothers, Frederick Winslow Taylor, and Steinmetz. Orville and Wilbur Wright, after their successful flights in North Carolina, became the toast of Europe and were decorated once by a society for universal peace. Adulation and money failed to change them; they remained practical mechanics, not dreaming that man in his mad folly was soon to take their invention and use it to rain destruction down on his own head. But even now, nothing can take away the meaning of that chilly December day when the two bicycle mechanics soared into the air at Kitty Hawk.

Providing the technical framework of the ideas and inventions that made the crazy industrial expansion of the twentieth century possible are those like Taylor and Steinmetz, both illustrative of the technicians, capable of running the industrial system themselves—in fact doing so—but whose abilities and talents are used by the Captains of Business. Taylor, the efficiency expert, began as a
machinist and went on to become a consulting engineer. He worked hard and managed to get production doubled at Bethlehem Steel, but when new ownership came in, he was unceremoniously fired and thrown out with the rest of the slag. Steinmetz was a German immigrant and politically always was a Socialist. When he came to America, he went to work for the Eichemeyer Company, which later sold out everything, including Steinmetz, to what was to become the General Electric Corporation. There, he became the most valuable piece of apparatus General Electric had until he wore out and died.

Veblen's most villainous class, the "Captains of Business," are also found in Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* Two of the worst of them, J. P. Morgan and Minor Keith, furnish a couple of the most virulent but at the same time the most brilliant of the biographies. Morgan was the financier of financiers and held such power over wealth that he helped save the United States treasury in the panic of 1893. He had raw power. Cold and ruthless, he was fond of talking about the principles of liberty. At the end of World War I, he controlled the power of seventy-four billion dollars. War was one of the elements which was good growing weather for the House of Morgan. Keith, though not so wealthy as Morgan, represented the worst sort of absentee ownership as he carved out his banana empire in the Caribbean, building the United Fruit Company out of the exploited population of
Central America.

Analogous to the portraits and fictional characters in *U.S.A.* which are Veblenian, are many of those in *Midcentury*. As he reminisces from his bed in a veteran's hospital about the old days when he was involved with the syndicalists and the Wobblies, Blackie Bowman seems to be a further expansion of the character Mac McCreary, the Common Man, his dreams now ground down into dust as freedom stripping institutions perverted his goals. Terry Bryant is another Common Man, a contemporary Wesley Everest or Joe Hill, fighting for what he feels to the right thing, the freedom of the workers. Every place he works there is either no union or a corrupt one. Never willing to keep still and be satisfied with what he has, Terry valiantly challenges the crookedness of officials, always idealistically striving to make unions what they should be—representative democracies of the workers. His efforts are futile and wasted, caused partially by the power of the institutions he has challenged and partially by the apathy of his fellow workers. Terry is ultimately beaten to death in a taxicab war.

The same sympathetic tone used by Dos Passos in his portrait of Luther Burbank is used in his short biography of Dr. Robert J. Oppenheimer in *Midcentury*. Dr. Oppenheimer is a "Scientist," whose "idle curiosity" led him to Los Alamos where his scientific success resulted in the shot
heard 'round the universe. Disassociated by his profession from mankind in general and finding his life as a scientist not wholly fulfilling, Oppenheimer became interested in the Communist Party through the do-gooding efforts of his charming wife. No one in the government cared about what kind of friends he had until the war was over. Then came the public inquisition, and he was branded a security risk, his reputation ruined.

Jasper Milliron is one of the most valuable men at Abington Mills, a large milling concern owned by a Mr. Allardyce, who recognized Milliron's worth and brought him into the company early. The company prospers through the imagination, inventiveness, and drive of the two men. When Allardyce dies, Jaspar is elevated to a top position as one of the five men controlling the company. Jaspar, who has heretofore shown a real interest in both people and production degenerates. He takes a mistress and later is squeezed out of the company by a financial syndicate which includes Judge Lewin. Finally, Jaspar flees to Mexico with his mistress. His career has parallels with that of Charley Anderson as Jaspar leaves production for business. When Allardyce died, the command of the company shifted from that of a "Captain of Industry" to that of "Captains of Business."
Judge Lewin, who helped squeeze Jaspar out of the company, is a modern counterpart of J. P. Morgan and Samuel Insull, but he is more subtle, operating behind holding companies controlling vast corporations. Few people know him, but he is there, a complete "Captain of Business."

One time at a gathering in his home he comments on his role in industry: "When I assume control of a corporation through my private skills, I have to consider it as a problem in pure finance. I can't be bothered with what it takes or what it sells. I can't be distracted by worrying about administration, who gets fire from what job, all the little grubby lives involved. . . . I'm softhearted as mush. I'd never sleep a wink."

Somewhat similar to the career of Jaspar Milliron, only in a different field, is that of Frank Worthington. Frank starts out as an honest union man, interested in the problems and welfare of the workers. He engineers some labor triumphs and gradually climbs up the ladder of the labor hierarchy. He becomes increasingly important as he sits behind a desk or dashes off to meetings with others of the labor elite. In the process he loses contact with the workers whom he is supposed to be serving. When Terry Bryant's letter comes, complaining of the racketeering in the union, Frank doesn't have time to take notice of it. He has become the labor counterpart of Judge Lewin.
Veblen died in 1929. Had he lived for another twenty years and seen the growth of monopolistic labor unions, he would probably have added another category to his list of classes, that of "Captains of Labor," meaning those who took the dreams of the old Wobblies and early labor idealists to forge the chains which bind the workingman and make him do the bidding of this new obligarchy. Living in high style with fat salaries and fat expense accounts paid for by the sweat of the workers, these new "captains" have accumulated money and power, the same two things which are the marks of the "Captains of Business," whom the labor leaders have come to resemble more and more. Mouthing pious platitudes about the "rights of labor" in much the same fashion as the Morgans used to speak of the "rights of property," terror, death, intimidation, and destruction have given birth to the new horsemen riding high on the backs of the workers. Dos Passos gives several examples of this new type of "captain" in the portraits in Midcentury: Harry Bridges of the Longshoremen's union; John L. Lewis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations; Walter Reuther of the United Automobile Workers; and Dan Tobin, Dabe Beck, and Jimmy Hoffa of the Teamsters. The attitude of the labor "captains" toward their membership is shown by Dos Passos as he speaks of Dave Beck: "Dave Beck knew what was best for them all. He was proud of the Teamsters' record. In 1943 truckdrivers' wages
were two hundred dollars a year less than the industrial average. By 1955 they averaged eight hundred more. Dave knew what was best. Local autonomy was all right so long as the locals did what they were told. Dave didn't like back talk. 'Unions are Big Business,' he was quoted as saying. 'Why should truckdrivers and bottlewashers be allowed to make big decisions affecting union policy? Would any corporation allow it?'

Beck is right, Dos Passos believes. Big unions have become big business, bearing many similarities to their corporate opponents including their faults such as the small regard in which the employees are held. The workers have just exchanged one set of masters for another, and true freedom remains a dream.

That Veblen, not Marx or Goldwater, has been the most influential in shaping the thought of Dos Passos can be even more readily seen when the whole of Dos Passos' output is examined collectively in an effort to see what he has been for, what he has been against, and what hope he expresses for the future. By far, the prevailing mood in all of his work is pessimism, the same kind of dark outlook which permeated Veblen's writing. Veblen had little faith in the common people in an industrialized society to make any drastic changes in their own condition. The only solution he
saw—and he rejected it as almost an impossibility—was for
the technicians, who were responsible for the production of
goods, to join with the common people in establishing a new
order. Veblen showed little hope for the future, and nei­
ther does Dos Passos.

There are no success stories in U.S.A. Those such
as J. Ward Moorehouse and Margo Dowling, who do achieve fi­
nancial success, find nothing but emptiness in their lives.
Others, who start out well like Charley Anderson, are cor­
ruped by society and also find life to be futile and mean­
ingless. Even those like Mary French and Ben Compton, two
of the workers for social justice, are portrayed as bumbling
and inept and ending up in prison. The picture which Dos
Passos paints in U.S.A. is a bleak one.

Much the same thing can be said of Midcentury. Again
there are no success stories. Some characters, like Frank
Worthington and Will Jenks, are going to be financially
well-off, but it is obvious that their lives are going to
be sterile. The fighters like Terry Bryant are crushed by
the omnipotence of the forces that they challenge. The
workers bringing their complaints to the "investigator" in
the "Investigator's Notes" are only voices crying in the
wilderness. Dos Passos' feeling toward big business is the
same in Midcentury as in U.S.A. There is nothing in Mid­
century to gladden the hearts of the industrialists except
the exposure of their labor counterparts. Dos Passos' attitude is one of "a plague on both your houses." He has simply added big labor to the list of institutions that he feels limit the freedom of the people. The picture he paints of America in the middle of the twentieth century is every bit as bleak as the one he drew a quarter of a century before.

One strong tie binding Veblen and Dos Passos together is their constant sniping attack on the institutions of society which men blindly insist on building. Veblen died still exposing the folly of men's actions, and Dos Passos perseveres in his rather hopeless task. Neither one of them ever offered much in the way of constructive criticism; nearly all of their output has been negative in nature.

Veblen once wrote that Marx did not bring any new ideals into the world, his major contribution being the destruction of old institutions. It was these attacks on ideals and institutions by the Marxists that led Dos Passos into a temporary alliance with them during the late 1920's and early 1930's, but, as he so often stated, he never swallowed Marxism whole. Even while the Marxists were claiming him as their own, they never were fully satisfied with his performance, and with good reason. There is a vital difference between Marx and Dos Passos, one that always was there in Dos Passos' writing. Marx was an optimist,
holding to a vision that the common mass of men, once they had stripped off their shackles, and after a brief period of adjustment had taken place, would rise to make the world become a place of peace, plenty, and brotherhood. Except for a brief period, neither Dos Passos nor Veblen ever accepted this premise. They were too realistic in their evaluation of the people.

To the destruction of freedom-robbing institutions, both Veblen and Dos Passos dedicated themselves. Basically they were of one mind, even though there were differences in their approaches. Where Veblen dealt in abstract characterization, Dos Passos was concrete, and where Veblen was ironical, Dos Passos often was savage and bitter.

In "Bitter Drink," one of the longest portraits in *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos pays his respects to Thorstein Veblen. (Of some significance is the fact that Dos Passos does not include a biography of Marx.) Dos Passos sees Veblen as a modern Socrates. He begins:

Veblen,
a grayfaced shambling man lolling resentful at his desk with his cheek on his hand, in a low sarcastic mumble of intricate phrases subtly paying out the logical inescapable rope of matter-of-fact for a society to hang itself by, dissecting out the century with a scalpel so keen, so comical, so exact that the professors and students ninetenths of the time didn't know it was there, and the magnates and the respected windbags and the applauded loudspeakers never knew it was there.
Veblen asked too many questions, suffered from a constitutional inability to say yes. Socrates asked questions, drank down the bitter drink one night when the first cock crowed, but Veblen drank it in little sips through a long life in the stuffiness of classrooms, the dust of libraries, the staleness of cheap flats such as a poor instructor could afford. He fought the bogey all right, pedantry, routine, timeservers at office desks, trustees, college presidents, the plump flunkies of the ruling businessmen, all the good jobs kept for the yesmen, never enough money, every broadening hope thwarted. Veblen drank the bitter drink all right. 28

Dos Passos goes on to tell of Veblen's Norwegian background, his upbringing, and his education at Carleton College. When Veblen went back to the farm, he talked about the new ideas he had picked up at college. His father's "elaborated built-up season by season knowledge" was "a tough whetstone for the sharpening steel of young Thorstein's wits." 29 Veblen went on to Yale and took his Ph.D. there but couldn't get a job. "Try as he would he couldn't get his mouth round the essential yes." 30 (Dos Passos had the same impediment.)

Eventually Veblen turned up in the economics department at the University of Chicago. There, "he was a man without smalltalk. When he lectured he put his cheek on his hand and mumbled out his long spiral sentences, reiterative, like the eddas." 31 Later, at the University of Missouri, he did most of his writing, trying out his ideas
on the students and writing at night. But, Dos Passos points out, his writing was not well-received:

Whenever he published a book, he had to put up a guarantee with the publishers. In *The Theory of Business Enterprise, The Instinct of Workmanship, The Vested Interests and the Common Man*, he established a new diagram of a society dominated by monopoly capital, etched in irony:
- the sabotage of production by business
- the sabotage of life by blind need for money profits,
pointed out the alternatives: a warlike society strangled by the bureaucracies of the monopolies forced by the law of diminishing returns to grind down more and more the common man for profits,
or a new matter-of-fact commonsense society dominated by the needs of the men and women who did the work and the incredibly vast possibilities for peace and plenty offered by the progress of technology.  

32

After the armistice Veblen saw what was being done to the world by the old men at Versailles, and he began writing for the *Dial* and lecturing at the New School for Social Research, for "he still had a hope that the engineers, the technicians, the non-profiteers whose hands were on the switchboard might take up the fight where the workingclass had failed. He helped form the Technical Alliance." He wondered, "was there no group of men bold enough to take charge of the magnificent machine before the pig-eyed speculators and the yesmen at office desks ruined it and with the hopes of four hundred years."  

33

Veblen died on August 3, 1929, and among his papers a note was found forbidding any kind of monument being
raised to his memory. But none was necessary claims Dos Passos as he concludes his tribute with:

but his memorial remains riveted into the language:
the sharp clear prism of his mind.  

The significance of the recognition that Veblen's thought and philosophy have been the dominant force behind most of Dos Passos' writing is that, shown that Dos Passos has not been a changeling, has not been a traitor to the masses, and has been relatively consistent in his political philosophy from *One Man's Initiation* to *Occasions and Protests*, we see the possibility that at long last he may be judged on his literary ability alone. No one likes a turncoat, and that stigma has been awarded to Dos Passos. Consistency, whether in a good cause or bad, commands respect.

Many of those today who are influential in establishing the reputation of a writer, which in turn affects the number of readers of him, came to maturity and prominence during the 1930's and 1940's. With a few exceptions the political leanings of the literary establishment were and are liberal or left of liberal. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was and is their idol. With many of these people like Hicks and Cowley, Dos Passos was friendly during the early days of the New Deal. They supported and Dos Passos supported the programs which were hatched in Washington that were to lead to greater freedom for the masses of the people.
Everything was amicable. But when Dos Passos later suggested that the programs should be examined to see how they were turning out—for there is always the possibility of a cuckoo dropping an extra egg in the nest—Dos Passos was branded a traitor for his questioning attitude, and his former friends turned on him.

Because Dos Passos chose political topics as subject matter, he seldom has had his works judged objectively as literature. Most of the comments and reviews have been based on the political attitude he took, rather than how well done was the effort. Most of the critics have failed to grant him his donnée. Too often, using their own political positions as guidelines, the books of Dos Passos have been judged on how well they conformed to the political opinions of the reviewers. This has held true for the critics on both the left and the right. What they have exercised is a kind of literary political censorship. Should they ever decide to discard their blinders and thoroughly examine what Dos Passos has written, they will find there a consistent fight for individual freedom—something which they ostensibly are all for—which has been going on for forty years. Surely such a cause is worthy of attention.

In 1958 James T. Farrell, one of the defenders of Dos Passos, summed up this problem in an article, "How Should We Rate Dos Passos?" He called attention to the
fact that Dos Passos is one of the few American writers who is a world figure. "Abroad, his books are sometimes cited as criticisms of American capitalism and as novels which expose American claims and propaganda. At home, Dos Passos is now regarded by some of his former admirers as a man who has made a complete turn, and has abandoned liberalism for the extreme right; he has gone from The New Republic to The National Review." Because of this supposed change, he is regretfully considered to be writing in a stage of rigor mortis, and tears—mostly the crocodile variety—flow for him. No longer can he be cited "as a novelist of the liberal spirit, fighting reaction and perpetrating the New Deal spirit. Therefore, he is a good man gone wrong. And a good man gone wrong is, ipso facto, unworthy of consideration as a man of letters." His liberalism has so decayed "that his lifetime of work is not as important as two short stories and one wooden novel by Lionel Trilling. His credentials as a writer might just as well be taken from him, and he might best be forgotten. He is no longer one of us." He must not be a good writer anyway because the new critics do not read him, and it is doubtful if Mark Shorer would approve of him. Continuing in the same vein, Farrell concludes his article with more criticism of the critics: "Thus the level of concern for a writer in this Republic after it has come of age, lost its innocence, become a world
leader. . . . After some decades of trying, we have failed in convincing our friends that a novelist does not necessarily have to be for, that a writer should not be judged in terms of immediate political considerations. It is in vain. Philistinism and self-righteousness are too numerous to be destroyed."  

Much of the criticism of Dos Passos has been unjust. Viewed in one perspective, he has not gone from one political pole to another and has been relatively stable in his political position. What has happened is that there have been great changes in America in the last forty years as the country has moved from a relative far-right position to one somewhere on the left. A recapitulation of Dos Passos political activities reveals that he was dissatisfied with rampant capitalism as it was found under Coolidge and Hoover. So he fought. Then, for a brief period during the early days of the New Deal, as social reforms aimed at correcting the abusive power of the industrialists, came about, he was relatively content. Then, as the government and its stifling bureaucracy grew larger and larger and as it kept drifting more and more to the left, Dos Passos rose to fight again. His only concern during the whole period has been to try in some manner to achieve for all Americans an independent life, one in which the common people could live without being oppressed or exploited by others, no matter what
their label. Paul Graves, the idealist in *The Grand Design*, worked in the department of agriculture. He thinks one time about what kind of life people should have:

It was the basic structure of people's lives lives that counted, the houses they lived in, the way they made their living. It was their daily control over their destinies that counted. The oldtime American farmer had lived a hard life fighting weather and prices but he was the master of his destiny. It was that feeling of being master of your own destiny that was frittered away in largescale organizations, in city life, in industrial plants, and labor unions. If you could make a man a little more independent at the source of his livelihood he would be able to make over all these organizations into organs for selfgovernment instead of organs for slavery. That was what he meant by stature, that was what he must explain to the people in the agency. America must mean stature for its citizens. It was only if these kids grew up to some extent master of their destiny that they could grow up free men.

What Graves says has been the credo of Dos Passos.

The consistency and dedication of Dos Passos to this one goal of freedom was once pointed out by Edmund Wilson in his review in the *New Yorker* of *State of the Nation*. Wilson wrote: "That his convictions have not changed as to the only sound basis on which modern society can be built is proved by the plain-speaking prefatory 'Letter to a Friend in the Theatres' (of war), in which he defends against some angry service men the rights of labor in wartime as a vital part of American liberties." Wilson showed that Dos Passos' interest in the cooperatives of the
farmers is inspired "by the belief he has always held that the value of collective enterprise is to be tested by the extent to which it has been originated and developed by the producers themselves." Coupled with this belief is a watchful eye on power, for "the instinct that made him the antagonist of those groups in the capitalist economy who were divorced from and indifferent to the producers sounds a warning when he finds himself in the presence of those top layers of the administration which seem out of touch with the people." Freedom is the theme that underlies all others in Dos Passos' work. It can be seen that the necessity of freedom, from its constant repetition in both his fiction and his non-fiction, is a kind of unchanging monomania, giving unity to the whole of his creative work. It is the lovers of liberty, and only them, who are treated with sympathy, respect, and understanding in all of his writing. And the reverse holds true. No man or institution which he considered detrimental to the free way of life escaped his wrath.

The America that Dos Passos depicts in some thirty-odd books and numerous articles is not a lovely one. It could not be and still be a truthful portrayal, and Dos Passos writes the truth as he sees it. He is also one of the truly literate novelists writing today. He knows things.
He knows the ways and speech of the common people. He knows the force of institutions and ideas. He knows how people are moved. He knows which things in a social system are primary and which are derivative. He is part of that America he writes about, and he bestows upon that picture a kind of desperate tenderness which can come only from love and solicitude turned into satire. He has always been rebellious. With his restless questing mind, he has developed an insight into American traits granted to few authors. His literary craftsmanship excels many of those who are the favorites of the moment. Yet he stands neglected.

Perhaps fifty years from now, after the political antagonisms have disappeared and Dos Passos can be judged solely on his literary ability, a new Raymond Weaver will come along, and the critics and readers of that day will "rediscover" Dos Passos, wondering why he has been neglected for so long. Irionically enough for his present detractors, there is no way to keep such books as U.S.A. and Midcentury in obscurity forever. It is probably upon these two books that his reputation will eventually rest. But they are enough for his place in the sun. The highly praised reputations of many writers are based on lesser efforts than these.

In words that would require only a minor change or two to be applicable to himself, Dos Passos, in his introduction to his book on Tom Paine, describes Paine's life
after the publication of Common Sense. Substituting U.S.A. for Common Sense and America for western Europe, the description might well be what will be written of Dos Passos in the future:

At that moment Paine's temper and train of thought exactly matched popular needs. The moment was not to last very long. For the rest of his life he was to go on, with complete disregard of the consequences to himself, fervently explaining his doctrines and checking them with complete candor to meet transforming events. He had the best nose of any man who ever lived for the political happenings of the moment. He never let himself drift with the tide. His journalistic pieces and letters urging this or that cause form one of the most acute critical descriptions we have of the great changes in the life of western Europe he lived through. The extraordinary courage and steadfastness with which he held to his basic conceptions, in favor and out of favor, makes his career of the greatest interest to generations like our own who are living through a similar period of changing institutions.

In the meantime, like Veblen who showed him the way, the rider of Rosinante will continue his lonely ride, searching out the windmills which stifle the winds of freedom, those winds which the rider finds so elusive. It is an almost hopeless quest. Oppressive and ignorant men keep erecting the whirling edifices, each group trying to harness the breezes for their own purpose. No matter. Even though both the rider and the steed are now grown old and gray, the eyes remain fiery. With his lance at the level and with his spurs in the old nag's side, the rider canters on to give battle, the winds of freedom still whispering in his ears.
Footnotes: Chapter Six


5. Granville Hicks, "Dos Passos's Gifts," *New Republic*, LXVIII (June 24, 1931), 157-158.


7. Granville Hicks, "John Dos Passos," *Bookman*, LXXV (April, 1932), 42.


15 Riesman, pp. 138-139.

16 Ibid., pp. 25-26.

17 Ibid., p. 36.

18 Lerner, p. 42.

19 Riesman, p. 70.

20 Lerner, pp. 378-383.

21 Riesman, p. 77.

22 Lerner, p. 441.

23 Ibid., p. 441.

24 Ibid., pp. 46-47.

25 Ibid., p. 48.


27 Ibid., p. 219.


29 Ibid., p. 86.

30 Ibid., p. 87.
31. Ibid., p. 88.
32. Ibid., p. 89.
33. Ibid., p. 90.
34. Ibid., p. 91.
36. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
37. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
38. Ibid., p. 18.
40. Edmund Wilson, "Dos Passos Reporting," New Yorker, XX (July 29, 1944), 57.
41. Ibid., p. 57.
42. Ibid., p. 58.
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Date of Examination:

January 7, 1967