

Brown Brothers

This cartoon was first published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in 1933, during the Depression.

An Old Idea



[1933]

Read

1. This cartoon was titled “An Old Idea.” What does that suggest about the cartoonist’s feeling about the issue the cartoon characterizes?
2. How does the dress and movement of the Employer (and the location identification) suggest the cartoonist’s perspective on the issue?
3. What is the cliché that fits this cartoon’s message?
4. What are other details that seem significant to you in reading the cartoonist’s aim?

Write

1. Write a paragraph describing the situation as the picture reveals it.
2. Identify each of the players in the scene and describe the part each of them plays in the design of the cartoon.
3. How would you describe the wrong-headedness of the solution the Employer seems to be offering?

- Connect**
1. How does the solution proposed by the Employer link to the “solution” offered by internment of the Japanese during World War II?
 2. Can you draw connections to the situation of Native Americans as described by writers in Units 1–4?

John Dos Passos

John Dos Passos (1896–1970) was born to a wealthy New York family, attended Harvard, and joined the Army when the country entered World War I in 1917. His shock at the violence and waste he witnessed stayed with him throughout his life, and he became a vocal critic of war and a crusader for social justice. His novels, especially *U.S.A.*, are written in an experimental style that combined newsreels, biography, narratives, and descriptive scenes. *U.S.A.* attempts to characterize the history of the country and its need for change.

From *U.S.A.*

Preface

The young man walks fast by himself through the crowd that thins into the night streets; feet are tired from hours of walking; eyes greedy for warm curve of faces, answering flicker of eyes, the set of a head, the lift of a shoulder; the way hands spread and clench; blood tingles with wants; mind is a beehive of hopes buzzing and stinging; muscles ache for the knowledge of jobs, for the roadmender’s pick and shovel work, the fisherman’s knack with a hook when he hauls on the slibery net from the rail of the lurching trawler, the swing of the bridgeman’s arm as he slings down the white-hot rivet, the engineer’s slow grip wise on the throttle, the dirtfarmer’s use of his whole body when, whoaing the mules, he yanks the plow from the furrow. The young man walks by himself searching through the crowd with greedy eyes, greedy ears taut to hear, by himself, alone.

The streets are empty. People have packed into subways, climbed into streetcars and buses; in the stations they’ve scampered for suburban trains; they’ve filtered into lodgings and tenements, gone up in elevators into apartment-houses. In a show-window two sallow window-dressers in their shirtsleeves are bringing out a dummy girl in a red evening dress, at a corner welders in masks lean into sheets of

flow: of an unhealthy pale or yellow complexion

blue flame repairing a cartrack, a few drunk burns shamble along, a sad streetwalker fidgets under an arc-light. From the river comes the deep rumbling whistle of a steamboat leaving dock. A tug^o hoots far away.

The young man walks by himself, fast but not fast enough, far but not far enough (faces slide out of sight, talk trails into tattered scraps, footsteps tap fainter in alleys); he must catch the last subway, the street-car, the bus, run up the gangplanks of all the steamboats, register at all the hotels, work in the cities, answer the want-ads, learn the trades, take up the jobs, live in all the boardinghouses, sleep in all the beds. One bed is not enough, one job is not enough, one life is not enough. At night, head swimming with wants, he walks by himself alone.

No job, no woman, no house, no city.

Only the ears busy to catch the speech are not alone; the ears are caught tight, linked tight by the tendrils^o of phrased words, the turn of a joke, the singsong fade of a story, the gruff fall of a sentence; linking tendrils of speech twine through the city blocks, spread over pavements, grow out along broad packed avenues, speed with the trucks leaving on their long night runs over roaring highways, whisper down sandy byroads past wornout farms, joining up cities and fillingstations, roundhouses, steamboats, planes groping along airways; words call out on mountain pastures, drift slow down rivers widening to the sea and the hushed beaches.

It was not in the long walks through jostling crowds at night that he was less alone, or in the training camp at Allentown, or in the day on the docks at Seattle, or in the empty reek of Washington City hot boyhood summer nights, or in the meal on Market Street, or in the swim off the red rocks at San Diego, or in the bed full of fleas in New Orleans, or in the cold razor-wind off the lake, or in the gray faces trembling in the grind of gears in the street under Michigan Avenue, or in the smokers^o of limited express-trains, or walking across country, or riding up the dry mountain canyons, or the night without a sleepingbag among frozen bear-tracks in the Yellowstone, or canoeing Sundays in the Quinnipiac.^o

cartrack: for a streetcar

tug: tugboat

tendrils: threadlike parts by which twinning plants and vines attach themselves to other objects

roundhouses: large buildings where locomotives are serviced and repaired

Allentown: A volunteer ambulance driver during World War I, Dos Passos was stationed for a time at Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Market Street: name of a major street in both Philadelphia and San Francisco

Michigan Avenue: in Chicago

smokers: smoking cars

Quinnipiac: a river in Connecticut

but in his mother's words telling about long ago, in his father's telling about when I was a boy, in the kidding stories of uncles, in the lies the kids told at school, the hired man's yarns, the tall tales the doughboys told after taps:

it was the speech that clung to the ears, the link that tingled in the blood; U.S.A.

U.S.A. is the slice of a continent. U.S.A. is a group of holding companies, some aggregations^o of trade unions, a set of laws bound in call, 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 dog-eared^o historybooks 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 bigmouthed officials with too many bank accounts. 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.

[1938]

Read

1. What is the effect of the first paragraph on your reading? What do you think its aim might be?
2. How does Dos Passos use jargon and other word choice to convey a message about Americans?
3. Who is John Doe?
4. How does arrangement help convey Dos Passos's argument?
5. What is the effect of the violent imagery near the end of the passage?

Write

1. Using any topic from current events, imitate Dos Passos's style: punctuation, arrangement, typeface, syntax, or other elements that seem significant to you.
2. Write a paragraph that analyzes the irony you find in the passage, quoting lines of words that seem especially important to the ironic message.

Connect

1. Find other characters in earlier literature (Huck Finn, Samson Occom are two) that you find similar to John Doe. Consider how they might be alike. Is there a female character who is like John Doe?
2. Consider one visual that provokes the ironic response evoked by this piece and compare the two.

holding companies: companies that hold silent controlling stock in other companies

aggregations: groups

dog-eared: with corners of pages turned down

call: calkskin, the customary binding of lawbooks