

BOOKS

John Dos Passos Becomes Angry Ex-Radical Scribe

Midcentury. By John Dos Passos. Houghton Mifflin. \$5.95.

For many years John Dos Passos has been a noted innovator in prose, and he also used to be something of a political radical. "Midcentury," his latest novel, continues a measure of technical experimentation but the temper now is strongly conservative.

It is a curiously constructed intermittently powerful and consistently angry book with straight fiction and current history, as the author sees it, in precarious coexistence.

Dos Passos concentrates on labor corruption as his central theme until at length an entire social order seems refracted in that unlovely prism. A kind of American inferno emerges, peopled by union racketeers, slayers, assassins and conspirators.

The older, medieval Inferno stood redeemed by an overarching beatific vision. Here the appalled voyager finds only occasional glimpses back to values lost, to a promised land denuded of its promise of freedom. (Some what oddly, film mogul Sam Goldwyn is invoked among the venerables of the earlier dispensation.)

There is a richly developed demonology, presided over by Marx and Freud and including a cluster of contemporary or near-contemporary politicians, labor leaders, and even a movie hero, flayed posthumously as the idol-symbol of the mixed-up teenager cult.

Profiles of such personages as Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Reuther, Jimmy Hoffa, John L. Lewis, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Harry Bridges provide a kind of backdrop to the narrative proceeding. Often the portraits are incisive and amusing, occasionally tedious, always controversial. They seem like billboards along a highway — part

of the scenery, sure enough, but extraneous all the same, and they impose certain strains on the fabric of illusion by which fiction creates its most moving effects.

Despite this, the novel comes abundantly to life in its episodic fictional parts. Three main characters are involved, though they bear no relationship to one another.

Blackie Bowman, old-time Wobblie, seaman, hobo and labor organizer whose life unrolls in flashbacks on a garrulous sickbed in a veterans' hospital, and whose stubborn independence of mind and high animal spirits make him an appealing person. Terry Bryant, a decent young veteran and minor union official broken by labor racketeers and later, while driving a cab for a new company fighting a tainted monopoly, killed by them; and Jasper Milliron, an incipient captain of industry squeezed out of his job by executive suite intrigue.

Milliron alone survives handily, in plush semi-retirement with the TV star he has wooed and married. Yet each of the heroes is in a sense defeated by a society out of tune with his simple virtues. And as the book closes, Milliron's stepson is off on a stolen credit card spree while his son-in-law, owner of the cab company Bryant drove for, is teetering on the verge of dishonorable compromise with the gang he opposed.

"Man drives in his own seum," says Dos Passos in a poetic epilogue, and the preceding would seem plain evidence. How far this savage canvas represents the full realities of midcentury America each reader will decide for himself.

To a large extent, his judgment will depend on his political orientation — a non-literary consideration which all polemical literature invites.

R. J. Cappon

Acoustic Ceiling Tile Improves Hi-Fi Sound

Installing expensive hi-fi equipment in a "home echo chamber" can be as unrewarding as hearing a symphony play in a tin shed.

Your listening pleasure can be marred if room dimensions, furnishings and location are not in acoustical harmony.

Some room dimensions permit sound to be distributed more quickly and evenly than others. Music lovers should avoid using rooms for music listening which are twice as long as they are wide or are perfectly square.

Engineers say good dimensions for music rooms with 8-foot ceilings are 10 x 12.5 feet, 12 x 14 or 18 feet, and 14 x 20 feet. For rooms with 10-foot ceilings, excellent dimensions are 12.5 x 16 feet.

Rooms with incorrect dimensions for music listening can be improved by irregular placement of heavy furniture. Large tables and sofas help break echoing sound waves.

Test the acoustical qualities of your proposed music room, by blowing over an open milk bottle. If the tone lingers, music will boom. To test for medium-high frequency quality, clap your hands. A ringing ping following the sound of impact is a sign of too much echo from medium-high tones.

If your room fails either or both of these tests, acoustical planning is in order before you install your hi-fi equipment. For as little as 18 cents a square foot, acoustical ceiling tile can be installed. This tile, which absorbs up to 75 per cent of the sound striking it, controls the echo

throughout the tonal range. Bulky wooden furniture helps absorb low frequency "boom," while high frequency echo can be further reduced by using more soft materials, such as drapes and rugs, in the room.

Location of hi-fi set or stereo speakers in a corner of the room will reinforce the sound at its source.

To reduce the interference of exterior noise with listening enjoyment, the room chosen should be away from the street and out of the normal traffic pattern of the house.

With a minimum of money, planning and experimentation, you can make your music room an acoustically excellent home concert hall for you and your family.

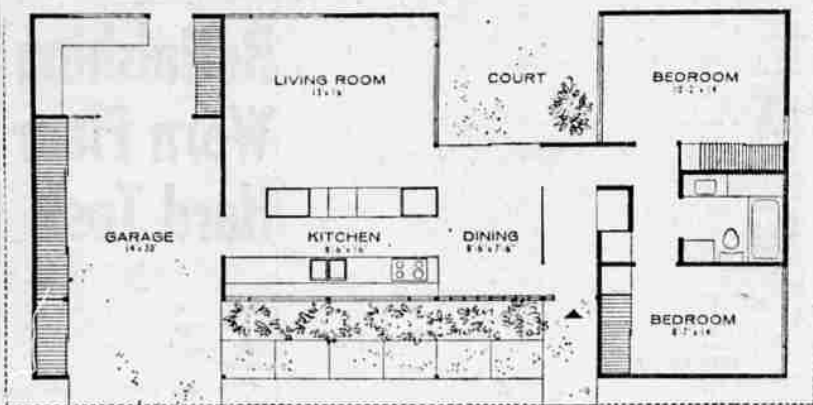
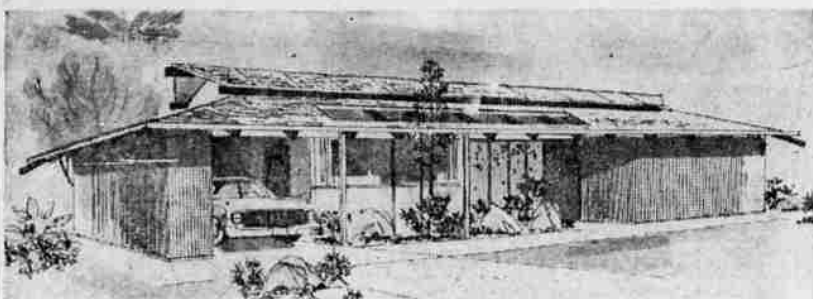
Who's He, Anyway?

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (UPI)—Blonde Eastern Air Lines Stewardess Rowena Powers peeked into the pilot's cabin, and then made a red-faced run for the door she had just closed.

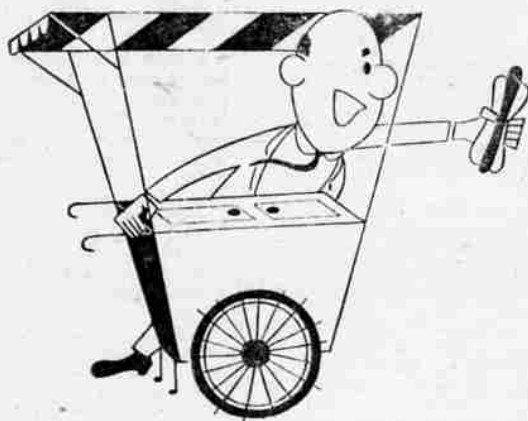
"Oh, I'm so sorry," she apologized to the pilot.

Miss Powers said she had greeted her passengers as they boarded the plane for the Memphis trip from Atlanta, and then carefully locked the entrance door, leaving the pilot outside.

In the seven years spanning World War II—mid-1939 to mid-1946—the American Red Cross spent \$302,100,000, 69 per cent of its grand total expenditures, on services to the Armed Forces and veterans.



A HOME FOR RETIREMENT, displayed at the White House Conference on Aging, designed by architect Robert B. Waring under sponsorship of the American Association of Retired Persons and the Douglas Fir Plywood Association, has many special features, such as sitting-level shelves and cabinets, and would build at low cost.



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Herald and News

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