
PROLETARIAN ROAD TO MINORITY STATUS: A REREADING OF JOHN DOS PASSOS' *U. S. A*

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Abstract: The proletariats in the society are a minority group since they disproportionately occupy poorer jobs, earn less income, live in less desirable areas, receive an inferior education and exercise less political power. The working class characters of John Dos Passos' *U. S. A.* trilogy are all part of a minority group since they are alienated, oppressed and live in less desirable areas and they lack the power to negate or counteract this unequal treatment. The paper traces out the socioeconomic elements that give the proletariats a minority status in the society with reference to the trilogy. It also analyses how urban arena treats the lower class in terms of power, prestige and wages.

Keywords: proletariats, minority, marginalised, awful conditions.

Introduction: Minority groups receive fewer of the society's rewards and are subjected to various social indignities on the basis of their physical or cultural traits in a multiethnic society. They remain in lower positions in terms of wealth, prestige and power. The sociological meaning of minority is not the same as the mathematical definition. Numbers have no necessary relation to the minority status. Minority is a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group. Rather than relative size, it is a group's marginal location in the social order that defines it as a minority. The proletariats in the society are thus a minority group since they disproportionately occupy poorer jobs, earn less income, live in less desirable areas, receive an inferior education and exercise less political power. By the term 'proletarian' one denotes, among other attributes, work for wages, usually lifelong and usually manual work. If we take the working class as a labour market category it may be a very large section of society but more significantly, marked by internal hierarchical differences, skill, pay, employment security and status, it has become more disadvantaged relative to other groups.

The monumental *U. S. A.* trilogy by John Dos Passos gives a multidimensional portrait of the lives of the proletariats. The proletarian characters of the trilogy Fenian O'Hara McCreary, Joe Williams and Ben Compton are all part of a minority group since they are alienated, oppressed and live in less desirable areas. They are afforded unequal treatment because they lack the power to negate or counteract that treatment. They belong to a dwindling, increasingly marginalized and homogeneous minority.

The Road to Minority Status: With the coming of the large manufacturing factories to northern cities during the Industrialisation, workers were needed and wages were unprecedented. Immigrant workers flocked to the United States from Europe, Asia and

every other part of the world. Fenian O'Hara McCreary arrives into Chicago looking for better life but life becomes a sequence of temporary accommodations and struggles for him. Shifts in market demand and changes in the organisation or technology of production give him a bad time. Dos Passos correctly captures those who can be regarded as an ethnic minority: the working class immigrants who have not assimilated to natives. Thousands of poor people like Mac lived in the cities lured by the promise of prosperity and it is estimated that 33 percent of the total population of the cities was close to starving to death in the early twentieth century America. For many of them living in the city resulted in a decreased quality of life. The proletariats lived daily with overcrowding, inadequate water facilities, unpaved streets and disease. Lagging far behind the middle class, working class wages provided little more than subsistence living and very few opportunities for movement out of the city slums.

Joe William's fate is never to have a good time: he is badly treated like a servant or a slave. Joe struggles in his confused, instinctual way but he can never shift the burden that pressed him down. A quarrel with the captain of the ship, on the way to England during the war time without a passport, puts Joe in irons on account of the suspicion that he might be a German spy. It can be read that obedience, both at sea and ashore, is the keystone of the working class' security. Joe's life shows how working-class differs significantly from the white-collar group. Joe is discriminated against the upper class on a range of different fronts, including his accent, style, the food he eats and the clothes he wears.

When Ben was thirteen he lost his house and went to live in a flat on Myrtle Avenue with his family. What all other family members expected from Ben was the use of all his learning and getting a job in the country. By all means Ben belongs to the working class. In the Paterson Strike Ben also joined the

others. Everybody went back to work when the strike turned to be a failure except Ben and his friend Nick. The working conditions in factories were often harsh. Hours were long, typically ten to twelve hours a day. Working conditions were frequently unsafe and led to deadly accidents. Ben Compton spoke at rallies in New Jersey and was arrested several times and finally he was sent to the country jail for being a social agitator. He was a living example of the injustice and brutality of the capitalist system. His story says that some minorities have, by custom or force, come to occupy distinctive economic niches in a society. They are socially separated or segregated from the dominant forces of a society. Members of a minority group usually are cut off from a full involvement in the workings of the society and from an equal share in the society's rewards.

The personality and humanity of all these working class men are neglected by others due to the lack of socio-economic status. Their occupational pay is undeservedly low compared to that of the white-collar men who receive undeservedly high incomes. U. S. A. includes the struggle of all the underprivileged. It simply admits to a greater extent the pressure of economic forces and has thereby

become an espousal of the underprivileged. Dos Passos' anti-materialism has developed into a criticism of the profit system, and turned into a desire for a radical action against social injustice. He portrays the theme of the individual against institutions on the realistic social canvas in this tragedy of the economic system and the failure of dispossessed.

Conclusion: Working class minorities are often insufficiently covered by empirical research and comparisons of economic conditions at a cross-country level become uninformative and biased. Matters are further complicated by countries using different empirical definitions of what it means to be a minority. Dos Passos' proletarian characters possess a minority status as they are all deprived of social rewards and experience rejection and denial in their social life. They head to different cities, get jobs with awful wages and conditions, participate in chaotic rallies, lose their jobs, and exercise less power. The trilogy undoubtedly proves that the status of minority groups varies from society to society depending on the structure of the social system and the relative power they enjoy.

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