“WE ONLY HAVE WORDS AGAINST/ POWER SUPERPOWER”: LITERARY POLITICS AND THE SUBVERSION OF IMPERIALISM IN DOS PASSOS’ U.S.A.

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Your two eyes are an accurate stereoscopic camera, sure enough…but the process by which the upsidedown image on the retina takes effect on the brain entails a certain amount of unconscious selection. What you see depends to a great extent on subjective distortion and elimination which determines the varied impacts on the nervous system of speed of line, emotions of color, touchvalues of form. Seeing is a process of imagination.

-- John Dos Passos

Iteration alters, something new takes its place.

-- Jacques Derrida
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Despite a history of territorial expansion, “In the United States it is almost heresy to describe the nation as an empire” (Van Alystne 6). Refuting such tendencies for historical revisionism, Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* portrays an America where both classical and neoteric imperialisms pervade American political, media, and economic systems during the first three decades of the twentieth century. While various foreign entanglements provide America with classical territorial expansion, World War I facilitates America’s transition towards a form of neoteric imperialism that necessitates the adoption of imperialistic systems of discipline in the domestic sphere. *U.S.A.* critiques America’s neoteric imperialism by demonstrating how such methods, and specifically the manipulation of discourse, categorize the vast majority of Americans as “non-authentic” Americans who are less “American” than political, industrial, and media elites. However, I argue Dos Passos counters such detrimental public discourse by appropriating imperialistic systems of control for subversion. By exposing the damaging effects of colonial mimicry and exploiting a linguistic interpretation of mimicry through language’s iterability, Dos Passos destabilizes imperialistically motivated fictions that oppress America’s majority. Therefore, *U.S.A.* empowers marginalized Americans through recognition, as the trilogy provides a model of ethical subversion that limits the continuation of America’s imperialistic discipline and control.
INTRODUCTION

To guide his reading of John Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.*, Jacques Rancière defines the politics of literature, where “Literature is the deployment and deciphering of…signs written on,” and also through, “things themselves” (15). Similarly aware of Dos Passos’ literary politics, Seth Moglen describes *U.S.A.* as a literary “attempt to mourn a political loss” of America’s divergence from its founding ideals (172). By framing the trilogy’s *The 42nd Parallel, 1919*, and *The Big Money* as acts of literary politics, the following chapters examine the various stylistic and structural forms in *U.S.A.* and how they express the political content of the novels. Such a reading will offer an opportunity to explore the text’s operative relationship to the domestic and international imperialist structures revealed in Dos Passos’ depiction of America, while also establishing a context for a discussion about the transformative powers of literature. Investigating Dos Passos’ use of form within the context of colonial mimicry and linguistic iterability explains how Dos Passos utilizes his text to counter the domestic imperialism of the first three decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, a poststructuralist, postcolonial reading of *U.S.A.* reveals the subversive potential implicit in the trilogy’s representation of subaltern voices. Consequently, reading *U.S.A.* in conjunction with Homi Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, as well as Judith Butler, establishes the ethical implications of a literature that is simultaneously a product of and a response to potentially oppressive American systems.

In the January 1920 issue of the *Dial*, Dos Passos wrote, “There never has been great art that did not beat with every beat of the life around it” (qtd. in Ludington 193). Written in 1920 and 1925 respectively, *Three Soldiers* and *Manhattan Transfer* both reveal this sentiment as Dos Passos recreates the mood and feel of American experience to make a political statement. Yet despite these early literary forays, critics of Dos Passos agree that *U.S.A.* most fully achieves successful representations of the “the mind of a generation” (Dos Passos qtd. in Béja). Not only does *U.S.A.*’s documentary montage and reproduction of the vernacular succeed in offering
literary realism, but Dos Passos’ ability to recreate “the speech of the people” also provides him the opportunity to synthesize his perception of Americanness with political satire of American classical and domestic imperialism (Dos Passos The 42nd Parallel xiv).

Depicting the events that occur in the decades surrounding Woodrow Wilson’s presidency, a period where “compliments [were] paid…for repudiating the ‘imperialism’” of the previous presidents, U.S.A. refutes the historical fallacy of America’s recovery from a brief imperialist “sickness” by exposing the modern application of imperialist techniques of the early twentieth century (Van Alystne 6). As Van Alystne describes and U.S.A. reflects, “In the United States, it is almost heresy to describe the nation as an empire” (6). Ian Tyrrell similarly notes, “The pre-historicist idea of the United States as a special case ‘outside’ the normal patterns and laws of history runs deep in American experience” (1031). America’s uniqueness as a political experiment in democracy frames the language of American exceptionalism, where, “In this liberal world view, the United States avoided the class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, and authoritarian governments of ‘Europe’ and presented to the world an example of liberty for others to emulate” (Tyrrell 1031). Yet despite denials of American empire and insistence on exceptionalism, Dos Passos’ trilogy reproduces the speech of the people to accentuate the prevalence of classical and neoteric imperialism in America. In other words, as Rancière describes the trilogy, U.S.A. “welcome[s] into its pages the standardized messages of the world” in order to expose such denials of empire and decipher the messages implicit to the language of American discourse (27). The banal speech of the people ceases to be mundane as Dos Passos uses public discourse’s diction to counter the imperialistic governance occurring in America.

In each novel of the U.S.A. trilogy, Dos Passos utilizes four distinct methods—documentary montage, biography, narrative, and autobiographical prose poetry—to represent the imperialist system that pervades American society in first three decades of the twentieth century. Though recent literary criticism of Dos Passos remains regrettably sparse, scholars have explored the complexities of each of these forms both as distinct literary components and in juxtaposition
with surrounding stylistic forms. Through this discourse, critics establish Dos Passos as an author who participates in high modernist techniques of cinematic montage as well as more conventional forms of narrative. However, due to his modernist style, critics commonly discuss Dos Passos in the context of his “Lost Generation” contemporaries, including Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James Joyce, or in the context of other forms of art such as motion picture and visual art. While these works of criticism tend to be flattering towards Dos Passos’ achievements as they frequently allude to Jean-Paul Sartre’s unhesitant praise of the trilogy, the uniqueness of Dos Passos’ literary intention fails to be fully addressed through such comparisons. 

U.S.A. undeniably reflects the literary atmosphere of its time, yet Dos Passos also diverges from his contemporaries in both content and style; consequently, additional literary examinations are necessary in order to avoid relegating Dos Passos’ text to a hierarchical comparison with his admittedly more widely read colleagues.

In addition to such comparisons, many critics focus on the overt Marxism of U.S.A. However, while Marxist leanings do inform Dos Passos’ novels, it is important to note that Dos Passos’ critique of imperialist discourse foreshadows his eventual rejection of Marxist ideology. In other words, while Dos Passos’ socialist sympathies are admittedly obvious, the literary politics in U.S.A. establish an unavoidable tension that suggests his leftist political leanings will eventually undergo scrutiny for similar manipulations of language—a process that ultimately led to Dos Passos’ abandonment of Marxist ideology. Unqualified Marxist readings of his texts fundamentally overemphasize the Marxist viewpoints expressed in the trilogy and misconstrue its political dynamics. Therefore, as a consequence of Dos Passos’ personal political activities, little scholarly writing exists on the prevalence of American imperialism even though this political structure pervades the novels. Relatedly, those critics who do succeed in recognizing Dos Passos’ interest in imperialism tend to concentrate on the most obvious satirical forms of the novel by largely restricting themselves to the Newsreels and biographies. These scholarly articles typically
focus on imperialism in its classical international sense and generally fail to recognize Dos Passos’ interpretation of imperialism’s neoteric domestic application.

By reading *U.S.A.* in conjunction with Bhabha, Derrida, Foucault, and Butler, the following chapters rectify the limitations of these critical scopes by exploring how America’s governing systems utilize imperialist techniques to defend the country’s foreign policies and to maintain domestic control; such a reading examines the role of language and literature in representing subaltern voices within a political system that traditionally excludes their voices. In *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos depicts an America where multiple modes of imperialism pervade foreign policy, the media, and public discourse. Identifying imperialism’s most classical form, Dos Passos describes American foreign policy as expansionist attempts to assert territorial and political control in the Philippines, the Caribbean, Mexico, and eventually Europe. However, in addition to such a classical understanding of imperialism, Dos Passos also documents America’s gradual transition to more neoteric expressions of imperialism. As portrayed in the trilogy’s chronological progression, the United States undergoes significant economic growth during the pre-WWI and WWI period that establishes its influence abroad. With such an emerging economic presence, America uses its control of capital to further its political influence.

Significantly, such transitions towards neoteric imperialism necessitate that America adopt stricter controls over its own population. Foucault’s explanation that the government must “make [its population] more obedient as it becomes more useful” manifests itself through America’s strict control of the general public’s actions as well as their opinions (Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 137). While the government does rely on traditional modes of control, the public discourse further fortifies the manipulation of the American population. Judith Butler explains, “One way a hegemonic understanding of politics is achieved is through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself” (Butler *Precarious Life* xx). Standardized public discourse allows for a unified portrayal of American policies, which in turn encourages homogeneity throughout the population;
the resulting consistency of public opinion then functions as a self-perpetuating mode of discipline for those who consider countering its content (Foucault Discipline 182). As Edward Said explains, blocking alternate narratives through censoring results in the language presented in the media becoming the only version of events that is considered true. Therefore, the public discourse becomes what Stuart Hall describes as “the selective construction of social knowledge,” by which the American public can compare themselves to others (Hall qtd. in Tomlinson 60). These comparisons further encourage homogeneity by relying on the psychological desire to share a similar “world-of-the-whole” as one’s peers (Hall qtd. in Tomlinson 60); the public adopts the message initially presented in the media and self-regulation becomes an additional mode of enforcing discipline.

The relationship between media portrayals of American policies and modes of Americanness dictate an “incredibly direct” relationship between imperial politics and expressions of national culture (Said Culture 8). To regulate the public’s perceptions concerning political policies, America’s powerful elites—including politicians, newspaper moguls, and industrialists—promote the language of American exceptionalism, altruism, and the “American dream” in both implicit and explicit expressions. As Said describes, these influential figures often focus on “American specialness, altruism, and opportunity” as foundational aspects of controlling the public’s perception of America’s past, present, and future (Said Culture 8). Emphasizing America’s exceptional nature justifies various foreign involvements through the invocation of altruistic intentions. Regardless of the true intent of America’s policies, such discourse “distorts, disfigures, and destroys” versions of history that can be considered critical of America’s unstated pursuit of empire (Fanon 210). Such standardized portrayals of American policies create an undemocratic, restricted America that contradicts the same language that the nation promotes. As Judith Butler explains, instead of equality and freedom of expression, such an atmosphere dictates that “criticism, which ought to be central to any democracy, becomes a fugitive and suspect activity” (Butler Precarious xx). The American population must accept the
versions of discourse promoted in the media and by America’s elites to avoid being deemed offensive, subversive, and even treasonous. Therefore, the public must consent to, or at least condone, the linguistic avoidance of empire even if they recognize the imperialism inherent to American policy.

While insistence on American exceptionalism and altruism effectively restricts public discourse concerning international policies, the country’s growing imperialistic influence results in the need to even further regulate the population. As Butler explains, the control of public discourse results in “the sphere of appearance… establish[ing] what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives will be marked as lives” (Butler Precarious xx). Those Americans who directly support American pursuit of empire, such as politicians, those who control media discourse, and those industrialists who contribute to American economic dominance, enjoy the recognition of lives that “count” within the public sphere, while the remainder of the American population finds itself marginalized (Butler Precarious xx). Using Bhabha’s terms, these powerful elites exist as “authentic” Americans who largely adopt the role of the colonizing power as they limit the actions of the vast majority of the “non-authentic” population (Bhabha “Of Mimicry and Man” 88). These non-authentic Americans only “count” to the degree by which they can be manipulated. If they continue the aims of American empire, they largely avoid “punishment” for their actions; nevertheless, they also fail to receive recognition as authentic lives that deserve equality.

To manage their imperialistic control, those who regulate public discourse largely rely on touting the American dream. Consistent with imperialistic methods of discipline, the foundational aspects of this narrative correspond with what Bhabha describes as colonial mimicry. The narrative of American dream celebrates Americans who achieve success through strenuous work and personal sacrifice. Although all Americans who undergo such hardship do not necessarily experience the promises of the American dream, its narrative nevertheless compels Americans to further its fictions and continue to imitate the behaviors of those who
prosper. As such, the American dream advances homogeneity in belief while simultaneously disregarding the disparity between narrative and reality. Those who fail to fully achieve the American dream may be similar to those who do in their actions and motivations, yet a crucial difference that assures separation between the powerful elite and the mimicking majority still exists. In the context of colonial mimicry, Bhabha similarly establishes, “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (“Mimicry” 86). Through this process, there remains “a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid” (Bhabha “Signs Taken for Wonders” 111). Authentic figures—the proverbial mother culture or colonizers—strive to restrain the actions of non-authentics—the bastardly colonized—by encouraging the non-authentic population to mimic the actions of those who enjoy power (Bhabha “Mimicry” 88, “Signs” 111). By promising potential equality yet simultaneously barring the opportunity for such marginalized figures to truly attain it, the controlling powers can maintain the contradictory presence of “father and the oppressor; just and unjust; moderate and rapacious; vigorous and despotic” (Bhabha “Sly Civility” 96). Non-authentic Americans strive to comply with the image of Americaness promoted in the American dream because authentic Americans insist upon its validity, regardless of the impossibility of achieving its fictions. The non-authentic majority therefore consents to the discipline of public discourse, accepts adversity with the hopes of eventual achievement, and unquestioningly reproduces the language of authentic Americans while idealistically believing in American exceptionalism, equality, and opportunity.

In his portrayal of these imperialistic methods before, during, and after WWI, Dos Passos’ acknowledges how the regulation of public discourse and the propagation of the American dream result in the marginalization of the vast majority of the American population. Additionally, however, Dos Passos also recognizes the potential for subversion within such systems. To most effectively convey his subversive intent, Dos Passos reappropriates what the
American elites consider a “safe space of subversion” for his own subversive ends (Greenblatt 30). As Stephen Greenblatt’s Bakhtin-esque approach to subversion conveys, hegemonic systems often provide outlets for dissent that function as “the very product of that power,” through which the marginalized public actually fortifies the government’s control over them in the “subversion and its containment” (Greenblatt 30, 35). America’s influential elites “thrive on vigilance” of dissenting voices, so they provide outlets for subversion that give the illusion of rebellion as they reinforce systems of discipline and punishment (Greenblatt 37); moreover, in their attempt to mimic authentic Americans, the general population adopts a regulating gaze towards their own peers. As a foundational aspect of such multifaceted discipline, America’s powerful elites use their extensive control of discourse to establish language and literature as one of the safe spaces of subversion that can be manipulated to further imperialistic aims. While formal censorship fundamentally obstructs non-standardized voices from circulating in public discourse, the public also adopts a self-disciplining approach to language that ultimately censors public discourse. Butler describes that, within a regulated media system, dissent is difficult “not only because mainstream media will not publish [dissenting voices]… but because to voice [such opinions] is to risk hystericization and censorship” (Butler Precarious 2). Dos Passos’ personal experience with censorship—including wartime censorship of correspondence as well as the threat of censorship during publication of his novels because the author would not “consent to paraphrases” of his literary work—indicates that the publication of subversive content often results in strict responses of governmental punishment (Ludington 150, 193). Additionally, more subtly enforced fear of retribution—such as “hystericization” and the realities of limited readership of controversial texts—also function as a form of informal discipline for those who challenge the accepted versions of public discourse (Butler Precarious 2). Through both formal and informal censorship, America’s influential elites offer the public theoretical freedom of speech while simultaneously limiting the ability to exercise such freedom. Even if dissenting voices succeed in getting published, such accounts largely fail to disseminate broadly enough to
subvert the control of the governing ideology. The widespread coercion for imitating elites and for homogeneity compels the American public to refute such voices and discourage others from pursuing insubordination that would lead to a more diverse public discourse.

To counter such a controlled space of dissent, Dos Passos appropriates the systems of imperialistic control by utilizing a linguistic form of colonial mimicry: language’s iterability. Derrida defines iterability as a function of language’s repeatable nature. Language, he explains, “begins with reproduction” as it requires repetition as a foundational aspect of its functionality (Derrida *Writing and Difference* 211). Therefore, just as non-authentics attempt to mimic authentic Americans’ actions, the diction of public discourse can also be precisely restated and repeated in order to comply with accepted language. Yet despite technically accurate duplication, like Bhabha’s description of a “difference that is almost the same, but not quite,” Derrida argues that the repetition of language creates différance, a “sameness which is not identical” (Bhabha “Mimicry” 86; Derrida *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* 129). Derrida further clarifies, “Iteration alters, something new takes its place” (Derrida *Limited Inc.* 40). Similar to the “mutation, hybrid” that results from mimicry, the iterability of language creates a hybrid utterance that both reflects its initial usage in public discourse as well as its alternate usage in its new context (Bhabha “Signs” 111). For Dos Passos, this ability to precisely mimic the language of public discourse while also maintaining a différance facilitates his reappropriation of the safe space of dissent. He technically retains safe subversion because he replicates public discourse and therefore cannot be accused of inaccuracies or opposition, yet his manipulation of its context “by inscribing or grafting” iterability into other chains of language results in “repetition with alterity” that critiques America’s imperialistic systems though the same language that the imperial systems uses to fortify control (Derrida “Signature Event Context” 9). The safe space of subversion ceases to be safe because Dos Passos repeats strictly controlled diction to expose the limitations as well as the formidable potential of language.
As a crucial aspect of such subversive différance, Dos Passos’ iterability destabilizes the public discourse by “decentering the narrative ‘I’” that fixates on authentic Americans and excludes non-authentic narratives (Butler Precarious 6-7). In U.S.A., Dos Passos’ recognition of the limitations of discourse is then employed in a manner similar to Butler’s approach to recognition and subaltern populations. Like Butler, U.S.A. questions “What can I do with the conditions that form me?” in order to rectify the “violence of derealization”—or in this case non-authentication—that already marginalizes non-authentic Americans (Butler Precarious 16, 33). Iterating the language of the hegemonic regime in order to expose its imperialistic fallacies, U.S.A. grants marginalized Americans agency through the “decentering” of public discourse’s fictions and through the very acknowledgment of their relegation to the peripheries (Butler Precarious 7). As such, even as Dos Passos replicates the language of the influential elites, the différance of iterability indicates the damaging effects of such limited discourse on the non-authentic population. Therefore, by providing public discourse with a supplement of marginalized voices, Dos Passos offers a model of simultaneity by which the recognition of a propagandistic public discourse becomes the very process of creating a more accurate representation of the American population. He repeats the language of public discourse, yet “meanwhile” he represents those who are traditionally excluded from such utterances (Bhabha “Dissemination” 144). In other words, like Bhabha’s approach to the supplemental reading of texts, Dos Passos emphasizes the significance of keeping public discourse open and “decentered” to what he considers equally important supplemental or subaltern presences (Bhabha “Dissemination” 144; Butler Precarious 18). His utilization of the politics of literature, including U.S.A.’s focus on “reproducing facts” as well as retaining “a new regime of appropriateness between the significance of words and the visibility of things,” therefore counters the disciplining control of America’s elites (Rancière 15). Dos Passos sustains a productive tension between the meaninglessness of public discourse’s diction and the meaning-making potential of his own iteration; resultantly, even though the language of American discourse temporarily marginalizes
its population, Dos Passos maintains the argument that “we only have words against / Power Superpower” (Dos Passos The Big Money 523).

The following chapters will examine Dos Passos’ “attempt to speak the other’s language without renouncing [his] own” by seeing in U.S.A. an effort to textualize the theoretical modes of subversion established here (Derrida “Racism’s Last Word” 294). To begin, Chapter One will examine how Dos Passos’ trilogy introduces multiple modes of imperialism occurring in the years before, during, and after WWI. This chapter not only reflects the history of America’s classical imperialistic pursuits, but also exposes the country’s transition to neoteric domestic applications of imperialist policies that rely on coercions of mimicry and, relatedly, the fiction of the American dream. Chapter Two will address Dos Passos’ most explicit practice of iterability in the Newsreels sections of the trilogy. In this chapter, I contend that Dos Passos’ precise iteration of newsprint and song remains within a safe space of dissent by subverting the intent of imperialistic systems through the replication of their very language. Chapter Three will then expand upon the pattern of subversion established in Chapter Two by examining the semi-factual biographies of the trilogy. This chapter contends that Dos Passos uses biographies of both authentic and non-authentic Americans to expose the fallacies of traditional public discourse and offer supplemental biographical narratives that represent subaltern voices. Chapter Four then focuses on the Eleanor Stoddard and the Joe Williams fictional narratives to exemplify Dos Passos’ most conventional literary form and to examine its subversive capabilities. As such, Chapter Four addresses more personalized manifestations of the American dream and the ways in which the pervasive control of discourse ultimately encourages the non-authentic American population to participate in the systems of control that oppress them. Finally, Chapter Five approaches the Camera Eyes’ prose poems as a documentation of personalized fluctuations resulting from exposure to imperialistic public discourse. Largely due to the Camera Eyes’ semi-autobiographical nature, Chapter Five also more explicitly addresses Dos Passos’ understanding of literary politics and the subversive power of language. I will then conclude by placing Dos
Passos’ representations of mimicry and his own use of iterability in an ethical context as I contend *U.S.A.* utilizes a method of ethical literary subversion that reimagines the ways in which subaltern voices can be represented under oppressive hegemonic systems.
Despite the consistency with which media-based and politically influenced mainstream discourse portrays America as exempt from political patterns of empire, America’s “‘uniqueness’ does have overtones of national superiority” that frequently translate into imperialist episodes (Tyrrell 1034). Edward Said clarifies, “American attitudes to American ‘greatness’…have remained constant, have dictated, have obscured, the realities of empire” (Culture 8). The methods of regulating discourse and language, including this insistence on American exceptionalism, historically establish America as a political system that utilizes imperialist control, even through the very denials of such tendencies. By recognizing these patterns in discourse, Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* exposes the lapses of validity in America’s claim to political exceptionalism. The novels utilize four distinct stylistic forms—documentary montage, biography, narrative, and prose poetry—to depict multiple modes of imperialistic technique endorsed by American politics and mainstream media during the periods surrounding World War I. By refuting the concession that this was a period when the country “suffered an unfortunate temporary ‘aberration’ from its hallowed traditions, from which it subsequently recovered as from a sickness,” *U.S.A.* portrays an American system that steadily progresses from a classical understanding of expanding the empire through the continuation of Manifest Destiny to equally imperial neoteric methods of control (Van Alystne 6). Throughout *The 42nd Parallel, 1919*, and *The Big Money*, Dos Passos presents these neoteric imperialist policies as precise systems of discourse and discipline that deliberately exploit America’s general population. Encouraged by their frequent exposure to manipulations of language, the public unwittingly perpetuates imperialist systems in the domestic sphere and the promotion of American economic empire in the international sphere. By repeating the language of discourse in order to accentuate alternate
interpretations of its diction, Dos Passos’ trilogy renders a critical portrayal of twentieth century America as an imperial country where a small group of political and financial elites contend to expand their influence over international territories, strive to assert control over both international and domestic economics arenas, and attempt to regulate the language of public opinion about these imperialistic systems.

Throughout the chronological progression of each of the *U.S.A.* novels, Dos Passos includes instances of territorial, political, and economic imperialist expansion under American foreign policy. Within the trilogy’s opening section, “Newsreel I” depicts America’s growing desire for a classical empire as an overt contradiction of the political isolationism that had defined America as an exception to imperial pursuits (Batchelor xix). This Newsreel cites President Benjamin Harrison’s response to “The Twentieth Century” toast, where he admits, “I have no argument to make here or anywhere against territorial expansion” (Dos Passos 42nd 2; “Benj. Harrison Talks of Isles”). This generalized political position is then confirmed by the integration of references to the Spanish-American War, a foreign engagement that verifies the reality of late nineteenth century territorial expansion and provides a basis for the continuation of such policies in the early twentieth century. Cursory references to “the battle of Manila Bay” and “BATTLE […] WEST OF LUZON” coincide with media references to the classical imperialism of other countries, such as Belgium’s colonial Congo Free State, the British empire’s Boer War, and to the “WORLD’S GREATEST SEA BATTLE” during the imperial clash between Russia and Japan (Dos Passos 42nd 9, 44, 67, 3, 42; “World’s Greatest Sea Battle Near”). While the inclusion of such headlines indicates Dos Passos’ awareness of the imperial nature of the Spanish-American War, they also suggest the public’s inability to recognize the similarities between America’s foreign entanglements and the colonial politics of other imperial countries. Casual, concise inclusions concerning American military pursuits contrast the tone of more sensational imperial involvements of Belgium, Britain, and Japan. The discrepancy in tone effectively minimizes America’s imperial nature while simultaneously suggesting America’s need to counter other
countries’ pursuit of empire. Thus, Dos Passos accentuates how the diction of the headlines restores America’s exceptional nature by distracting the public with garish imperialist pursuits that frame American foreign policy as comparably judicious.

To supplement the brief factual inclusions in the headlines and further reveal language representative of empire, *U.S.A.* incorporates songs that describe American involvement in the Spanish-American War through the diction of American exceptionalism. Although many of the songs included in *U.S.A.* initially catered to specific military audiences, Dos Passos’ duplication of song lyrics indicate the wide circulation of popular music’s versions of war (Trombold “Popular Songs” 289). *The 42nd Parallel*’s excerpt from “There’s Many a Man Been Murdered in Luzon,” a popular Navy song written during the Spanish-American War, establishes the exceptionalist yet arguably imperialist tone of American military participation in the Philippines:

*It was that emancipated race*

*That was chargin up the hill*

*Up to where them insurrectos*

*Was afightin fit to kill.* (*The Book of Navy Songs; Dos Passos 42nd 1*)

War songs such as this one vilify Spanish forces and obstruct potential resistance to political policy. The Newsreel continues, “Just like a trueborn soldier he / Of them bullets took no heed,” which denotes the simplification of America’s complex political entanglements into dichotomies between good and evil (Dos Passos 42nd 1). The “emancipated race” of Americans, who are willing to sacrifice themselves for a just cause, are presented as obvious heroes against “insurrectos” who seek death to American troops and destruction to America’s noble and altruistic pursuits abroad (Dos Passos 42nd 1). After exposure to such dichotomies, public hesitation about America’s involvement in the Spanish-American War would not only signify a questioning of a specific foreign policy, but would also imply a lack of trust in all that these songs invoke, including the honor of the military and the exceptionalist nature of America. Consequently, when considered in juxtaposition with Harrison’s expansionism and Senator
Beveridge’s insistence of America’s colonial “duty” towards the Philippines, America’s “emancipated” status functions as semantic justification for all American policies, even the future incorporation of territories (Dos Passos 42nd 2; “Claims Islands For All Time”; Dos Passos 42nd 1). As such, the song’s American exceptionalist diction ironically fortifies the resolve of the very people who must render the language meaningless; by fulfilling the role determined by exceptionalist discourse and fighting in the Spanish-American War, America ceases to be exceptional because its foreign policy follows the political trend of imperialism. Invocations of American exceptionalism nevertheless excuse this contradiction and mask the realities of American foreign policy during the Spanish-American War. Consequentially, by replicating the language of such songs, U.S.A. exposes how discourse encourages particular public responses to discourse, foreign policy, and even combat as a means of assuring support for the country’s territorial empire.

Although Dos Passos recognizes the irony inherent to this contradictory discourse, U.S.A. imagines an American public that not only blindly accepts the invocation of imperial language, but also condones the blatant continuation of American empire after the war. Upon Spanish defeat in 1898, America negotiated temporary control of Cuba and bought rights to permanent territorial annexation of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Hence, as Dos Passos’ trilogy suggests and Harry Magdoff confirms, American participation in the Spanish-American War actualized American involvement in classical imperialism while also foreshadowing America’s redirection of territorial control into spheres of political and economic influence (Magdoff 130). Magdoff expounds,

As for the United States, it was the Spanish-American War, of course, that placed it with both feet in the imperialist camp. And it was the success in this war, plus the subsequent pacification of the Cuban and Philippine ‘natives,’ which satisfied two long-term U.S. expansionist ambitions: a leading position in the Caribbean,
broadening the highway to the rest of Latin America, and a solid base in the Pacific for a greater stake in American business. (Magdoff 130)

While American control of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico established a classical colonial relationship based on ownership of land, America’s relationship to Cuba instituted America’s imperialist “influence if not outright acquisition” of territories (Tucker 310). Therefore, by increasing the country’s economic sphere of influence, the results of the Spanish-American War prefigured America’s eventual transition from classical territorial empire to a less formalized political and economic imperialism (Tucker 310). Said confirms this trend in American political influence, explaining, “Imperialism did not end, did not suddenly become ‘past,’ once decolonization had sent in motion the dismantling of the classical empires” (Culture 282); instead, American imperialism evolved into different expressions of asserting control. As an appropriate means of indicating this transition, “Newsreel I” concludes by returning to the newspaper article featuring Harrison’s statement on territorial expansion (“Benj. Harrison Talks of Isles”). Similarly responding to the toast of “The Twentieth Century,” Senator Beveridge reiterates Harrison’s appeal to utilize territorial expansion as a means of securing new forms of political and economic American control. While Harrison admits that territorial expansion fails to be “the safest and most attractive avenue of national development,” this policy has guided America to “[lead] by the nose the original and the greatest of the colonizing nations” (Dos Passos 42nd 2). Consequently, the transition from classical to economic imperialism allows, as Beveridge expresses, “The twentieth century [to be] American” (Dos Passos 42nd 3). By displaying such shifts in foreign policy and its discourse, Dos Passos demonstrates the diversification of America’s imperialist presence away from its classical role towards one where “American thought will dominate” global affairs through political and economic influence (Dos Passos 42nd 3).

In addition to these discourse-related indicators of American empire, Dos Passos’ inclusion of references to America’s post-war engagement with Cuba, to the procurement of the
Panama Canal, and to widespread involvement in the Mexican Revolution offer tangible examples of America’s progression from classical territorial imperialism towards more political and economic imperial control. As The 42nd Parallel notes, “TEDDY WIELDS BIG STICK” in foreign policy after the Spanish-American War (Dos Passos 42nd 63). Historically, this ideology appeals to the spirit of expansion established in the Monroe Doctrine while simultaneously applying newer understandings of control over economics and trade (“Milestones: 1899-1913”).

Yet as Dos Passos’ trilogy displays, Roosevelt’s “BIG STICK” invokes American exceptionalism as a means to justify American use of imperialist techniques in Latin America (Dos Passos 42nd 63; “Milestones”). By framing American presence as a preventative measure that limits European attempts at empire, the realities of American imperial influence are obscured in an effort to prevent public opposition to the policies. Nevertheless, Dos Passos recognizes the imperial nature of America’s involvement in the Caribbean. Temporary control over Cuba allows Roosevelt to “make Cuba cosy for the Sugar Trust / and the National City Bank,” both of which establish decisive American power over the island’s economy through widespread monopolies in these sectors (Dos Passos 1919 112). Even after Roosevelt “saw Boss Platt,” the politician responsible for transferring territorial sovereignty back to Cubans, Roosevelt “forgot about that afterwards” and continued to establish American power through economic means (Dos Passos 1919 113; “Milestones”). Through such historical renderings, U.S.A. emphasizes the political reality that, despite remitting official territorial control, American involvements in Cuba establish a relationship reminiscent of classical colonial states. America’s economic power translates into political control for, as James O’Connor explains, “Monopoly capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism are basically the same phenomena” (29). Thus, as the trilogy presents, the American dream of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion gradually transforms into the development of economic control through the Roosevelt Corollary, by which American expansion “westbound to Havana for the sugarboom” is framed as political altruism instead of what it really is, economic imperialism (Dos Passos The Big Money 253).
In addition to the American presence in Cuba, *U.S.A.* further exposes the transition from territorial to economic empire through its portrayal of America’s acquisition of the Panama Canal. Although Roosevelt “shook the Big Stick at malefactors of great wealth,” his desire to expand economic influence in Latin America reinforces the reality of America’s transition from classical territorial ownership to more capital-focused imperialism during the early twentieth century (Dos Passos *1919* 193). After the Spanish-American War, America’s growing foreign influence in the Caribbean results in an increased desire to build a trans-isthmian canal where “Old Glory [could float] over the Canal Zone” (“Milestones”; Dos Passos *1919* 193). *The 42nd Parallel’s* biography of Minor Keith—aptly titled the “Emperor of the Caribbean”—and Joe William’s recognition of the monopolistic practices of the United Fruit Company confirm the perception that the only way America could retain the economic power and political influence gained through increased international exchange is through substantial control over Latin American products and trade routes (Dos Passos *42nd* 192, *1919* 121). With the vast wealth of the United Fruit Company based in Central America, the “American empire in the Caribbean” must be maintained through proactive American foreign policy, including the “history […]of the Panama canal” (Dos Passos *42nd* 192). Dos Passos’ inclusion of the headline “ROOSEVELT TELLS FIRST TIME HOW US GOT PANAMA” confirms America’s pursuit of the Panama Canal as unapologetically imperial in nature (Dos Passos *42nd* 134). In the historical text following this caption, Roosevelt claims Colombia “Was Trying To Hold Up Uncle Sam” by rejecting the economic negotiations concerning land for a canal (“Roosevelt Tells First Time How U.S. Got Panama”; “Milestones”). According to Roosevelt, this justifies American intercessions that ultimately lead Roosevelt to brazenly declare, “I Took Isthmus and Started Canal” (“Roosevelt Tells”). While Dos Passos omits much of this article, the biography of Minor Keith confirms that such procurement of land for empire requires “the marines and the battleships and the bayonets,” all of which reflect America’s classical military approach to territorial expansion (Dos Passos *42nd* ‘92). Yet in conjunction with this imperial military force, the Panama Canal also entails “the
hocuspocus of juggling the old and new canal companies by which forty million dollars vanished into the pockets of international bankers” (Dos Passos 42nd 113). The Panama Canal fiscally benefits bankers, elites, and American monopolies like Minor Keith’s United Fruit Company through the management of trade throughout Latin America; thus, American control of the canal “engineered” not only physical territorial control, but also imperialistic control of economies that directly or indirectly engage with the Caribbean region (Dos Passos 42nd 113). In other words, the Panama Canal ultimately assured “the history of the American empire in the Caribbean” in both its classical and economic emergences (Dos Passos 42nd 192).

While decisive control over Cuban products and Panamanian land introduces America’s use of economics to garner influence in foreign policies, Dos Passos recognizes a similarly imperial relationship through America’s suitably named “Dollar Diplomacy” during the Mexican Revolution (“Milestones”). In the trilogy’s narratives, Mac’s attempt to engage with Mexican politics and Moorehouse’s frequent publicity trips reinforce America’s interest in the Mexican economy as a means to maintain less formal imperial control over the country. Americans travel southward for the Cuban sugarboom, but as these narratives and “Camera Eye (48)” illuminate, they also travel “westbound to Havana Puerto-Mexico Galveston” to acquire a monopoly on oil (Dos Passos The Big Money 252). By emphasizing the ways in which American involvement in the Mexican Revolution benefitted Americans economically and by demonstrating the manipulation of discourse surrounding these pursuits, Dos Passos further establishes American foreign policy as motivated by empire and supported by imperial techniques.

Although Mac claims he has honest revolutionary motives in his move to Mexico, his travels allow him to fulfill professional advancements commensurate with the American dream. His eventual progression out of unemployment to becoming a small-business owner superficially reflects the American exceptionalist will to succeed. However, Mac’s relationship to Mexico adopts a more colonial relationship as he begins benefitting from his American status. As an American in Mexico, he gains financial stability, a girlfriend in Concha, and multiple business
contacts as he begins associating with wealthy expatriates (Dos Passos 42nd 242-243). While his success continues, Mac notes “how much pleasanter this was” than his previous life, and he “began to think less often about going out to join Zapata” (Dos Passos 42nd 242). Put more critically, he temporarily concedes his political altruism in favor of personal satisfaction. Likewise, when Zapata and Villa threaten to invade Mexico City, Mac joins other Americans in his desire to leave Mexico, even if that means abandoning his promises to Concha and the life they shared at the bookstore (Dos Passos 42nd 253). In Concha’s words, this indicates Mac’s tendency to simulate support of Mexican revolution while still maintaining an American—and thus marginally imperial—attitude. She laments, “Every poor man socialista…a como no? But when you get rich, quick you all very much capitalista” (Dos Passos 42nd 243). Like a colonial power fulfilling the White Man’s Burden, Mac abandons his self-promoted honest motives in favor of exercising the benefits of his newfound privileges. However, when these privileges are depleted with the return of Zapata and Villa, he chooses to pursue alternate economic benefits over the political ideologies that he claimed to support. Thus, just as imperial powers extricate themselves when the colonial relationship ceases to be beneficial, Mac displays a willingness to forsake the Mexican Revolution when it no longer profits him.

In addition to demonstrating the American tendency to engage with Mexican politics only to abandon them when it is inconvenient, Mac’s frequent interactions with American oilmen, and particularly J. W. Moorehouse, emphasizes America’s attempt to obtain power over Mexican politics through economic monopoly (Dos Passos 42nd 240, 242). Due to Standard Oil’s extensive involvement in Mexican oil fields, Moorehouse strives to regulate the public discourse concerning America’s interests in Mexico. However, instead of manipulating perceptions of American military involvement, which would correspond with classical imperialistic technique, Moorehouse is primarily concerned with presenting a cohesive and favorable depiction of American foreign business. As such, he describes his trip as working “to find out what the situation was and just what there was behind Carranza’s stubborn opposition to American
investors” (Dos Passos 42nd 249). He frames American business as progressive and beneficial as he conveniently avoids the realities of Standard Oil’s monopolized control (Calvert 22). Moreover, to garner support, Moorehouse appeals to American exceptionalism and altruism as he immerses himself in Mexican oil business. He releases statements on exceptionalist “americanism” and “upholding American ideas,” while he simultaneously describes foreign policy as America’s misunderstood yet benevolent relationship with the Mexican Revolution (Dos Passos 42nd 231, 221). He insists, “The Mexican papers had been misinformed about the aims of American business in Mexico just as the American press was misinformed about the aims of Mexican politics” (Dos Passos 42nd 249). By phrasing the complex and occasionally hostile foreign relations as misinformation, Moorehouse seeks to control the discourse about the historical past in a manner that reflects America’s imperial power; Homi Bhabha explains, “The sign of the colonial government…is caught in the irredeemable act of writing” and maintaining the language of discourse (“Sly Civility” 93). Consequentially, Moorehouse conveniently eludes references to America’s imperial involvement in the Mexican-American War, the realities of Standard Oil’s monopoly, and the accusations that American oil companies bribe Mexican politicians in order to maintain economic control over the country (Calvert 75). In other words, when Moorehouse repurposes American business and military engagement in Mexico as a supportive and altruistic relationship, he acts in accordance with what Franz Fanon describes as the colonial tendency to “distort, disfigure, and destroy” the truth of the past in order to maintain imperialistic influence in the present (210). By controlling the discourse, Moorehouse—and more generally, America—can maintain the economic oil monopoly that largely determines the course of Mexican politics, all while simultaneously enjoying the economic benefits that make it so he has “a slick cream of millions all over him” (Dos Passos 42nd 250).

Even though Mac eventually aborts his plan to return to America and Moorehouse effectively fails at his attempt to control Mexican politics through propaganda, the characters’ tendencies to pursue selfish economic motives symbolizes America’s similarly selfish pursuits in
becoming engaged with the Mexican Revolution. Lee Stacy describes the economic significance of American involvement in Mexico, noting, “The [Mexican] rebellion…threatened the loss of a business-friendly environment for the United States” (348). Appropriately, Dos Passos portrays American politicians as seeking influence in Mexican affairs in order to protect business ventures that assure economic empire; however, similar to its presentation of the Spanish-American War, U.S.A. also reflects how the discourse surrounding such politics frames American foreign involvement as exceptionalism and altruism. 1919 depicts America’s increasing involvement and its justification of military deployment to Mexico: “Wilson flayed the interests and branded privilege refused to recognize Huerta and sent the militia to the Rio Grande / to assume a policy of watchful waiting” (Dos Passos 1919 194). The language of “watchful waiting” simulates America’s role as a protective figure while also maintaining a suitable political distance that largely counters any accusations of imperial motivation (Dos Passos 1919 194). Furthermore, to more substantially establish the ironic appeal to America’s altruistic exceptionalism, Dos Passos includes Wilson’s explicit denial of any American pursuit of empire. Wilson maintains, “I wish to take this occasion to say that the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest” (Dos Passos 1919 194). Yet as Dos Passos’ abrupt juxtapositions indicate, shortly after his insistence of American exception from imperialist methods, Wilson “landed the marines at Vera Cruz” in order to assert American control over Mexican politics (Dos Passos 1919 194). With “FIGHTING AT TORREON” and sailors “RIDING [THE NAVAL SUBMARINE NAMED] SEAWOLF IN MEXICAN WATERS,” “WILSON WILL TAKE ADVICE OF BUSINESS,” and not his own speech, in the determination of foreign policy (Dos Passos 42nd 133, 189; “Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships”; Dos Passos 42nd 188). Resultantly, just as with Mac’s and Moorehouse’s experiences in Mexico, the discourse of American foreign policy obstructs the reality of the country’s foreign involvements. Ultimately, America’s selfish economic interests supersede claims to exceptionalism and justify America’s imperialistic technique in determining foreign policy.
While *U.S.A.* acknowledges America’s growing empire in the Caribbean and in Mexico, Dos Passos further emphasizes America’s transition towards global economic imperialism by establishing parallels between America’s and J. P. Morgan’s involvement in WWI. Even before the United States officially declares war, *U.S.A.* describes the American economy and the Morgan family as benefiting significantly from military happenings elsewhere. Coming out of a “business depression” just previous to the war, American economics mirror the pattern of growth that established the Morgan family as a decisive global power (Dos Passos 42nd 224). “War and panics on the stock exchange, bankruptcies, warloans, [are] good growing weather for the House of Morgan” and for the United States, for they both use self-interest as a means of determining policy (Dos Passos 1919 268). Resultantly, while the Morgan “empire” controls “thirteen percent of the banking resources in the world” and monopolies in multiple business sectors, “America tends to become empire like in the days of the Caesars” through “PRAIS[ING] MONOPOLY AS BOON TO ALL” (Dos Passos 1919 268; 42nd 45, 63). By emphasizing these parallels, *U.S.A.* reveals how an increasing control of capital allows both the Morgans and the American government to experience expansion of political dominance just before the war. J. P. Morgan’s status as “the most powerful private citizen in the world” supplements American monopolies in oil, steel, and timber in order to establish America as a decisive economic resource for those countries fighting abroad (Dos Passos 42nd 45; 1919 124, 366). With such control of capital, WWI becomes an opportunity to further pursue global control of finance and therefore increase America’s imperial power. Representative of these imperial motives, Moorehouse realizes that once “American business recovers from the first shock” of worldwide war, “This war in Europe… Is America’s great opportunity” (Dos Passos 42nd 213). He reiterates, “The great executives and powerful interests in manufacturing and financial circles are watching these [war] developments with the deepest personal interests” (Dos Passos 42nd 227); WWI offers America the opportunity to expand America’s already existent economic empire beyond Latin America and into Europe. Accordingly, the “welltodo […] people” like the Morgans “carefully [plan] this war” and
America’s influential minority ultimately “dream empire” in their decision to engage the American public in WWI through economics and physical combat (Dos Passos 1919 77-78; 42nd 75). The opinions of the general population about war are deemed irrelevant as America’s elites, such as Wilson and Morgan, decide the course of American foreign policy.

Although America’s economic empire is established before the declaration of war, Dos Passos’ portrayal of American imperialism intensifies as the trilogy progresses from the pre-war period to the years of official American involvement in WWI. In 1919, Dos Passos validates Moorehouse’s premonitions about America’s expanding economic empire, recognizing, “By 1917 [when America officially entered the war,] the Allies had borrowed one billion, ninehundred million dollars” from the Morgan family alone (271). Moreover, once America declared war, profits continue to establish the United State’s economic power as one capable of imperial influence. After the declaration of war in 1917, American business improved dramatically: “The profits for the year were 259 per cent” and “capitalization grown 104% while business expands 520%” (Dos Passos 42nd 283; 1919 53). “Business was brisk on account of the war,” which allows America to send “BILLIONS FOR ALLIES” in both monetary loans and products like tobacco, food, and transportation (Dos Passos 42nd 285, 283, 207; The Big Money 73). Thomas Reeves confirms the historicity of this wartime economic growth, noting, “The gross national product soared from an average of $40 billion between 1912 and 1916 to more than $80 billion between 1917 and 1921” (69). Furthermore, David Lake establishes how such increases influenced America’s international presence, citing, “[America’s] share of world trade rose steadily from 8.8 percent in 1870 to a high of 13.9 percent in 1929,” only to decline after the post-war boom subsided (524). Therefore, as U.S.A. establishes, the “whole goddam war’s a gold brick” that establishes “the leading part in world trade which the U.S. is now confidently expected to take” (Dos Passos 1919 154, 168). As such, America’s economic involvement in WWI exists as a principally self-interested motivation. Lake describes, “The strongest and most advanced countries,” such as America, “reap a disproportinate share of the benefits” that result
from the economic stimulus of war (Lake 520). Therefore, as Dos Passos suggests, America exploits wartime economic growth, as well as the simultaneous decrease in the economic power of European countries, in order to establish its global imperial authority (Lake 524). Such widespread control of products and capital stimulates American expansion of empire by advancing the country’s dominance in relation to other influential nations, including the “original and greatest of the colonizing nations” of Great Britain, France, and Germany (Dos Passos 42nd 2). America’s ability to influence these powerful colonial countries through economic control establishes a political hierarchy that resituates America as the dominant power. “The gigantic area of expansion that would dawn for America after the war” consequentially includes American imperial control of any country that requires assistance during WWI (Dos Passos 1919 178).

*U.S.A.* finalizes its critical portrayal of WWI-era economic imperialism through its harsh depiction of the country’s involvement in negotiating peace through the Treaty of Versailles. As the trilogy conveys, just like war, peace entails fluctuations in politics, international influence, and economics. Thus, the literal “PEACE DOVE IN JEWELS GIVEN MRS. WILSON” symbolizes the more general entanglement of money in America’s contributions to war and peace (Dos Passos 1919 229). America’s newfound economic dominance determines the country’s authority in regulating the conditions of armistice. However, as Dos Passos establishes, America’s participation in the Peace Conference also indicates the imperialist nature of such resolutions, particularly because peace negotiations focused on postwar redistribution of territories (“Milestones”). The gradual reduction of the Peace Conference assembly from the Council of Ten to the “Big Four” and, finally,

then there were three:

Clemenceau,

Lloyd George,

Woodrow Wilson
displays the transition away from a “public” attempt at peace towards one that becomes more reflective of the implicitly imperial Berlin Conference (Dos Passos 1919 366, 196). The description of these “Three 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” implies the colonial nature of territorial and economic determinations occurring during the Peace Conference and establishes the extent of American imperial influence (Dos Passos 1919 197). Although the United States avoids classical annexation of territories after WWI, the country’s economic growth creates pseudo-colonial relationships with European countries that confirm America’s economic imperial presence abroad. Therefore, by examining America’s participation in the formal international politics of the Treaty of Versailles and by documenting the country’s growing control of capital, U.S.A. exposes America’s tendency to utilize WWI to expand economic and political—if not necessarily classically territorial—empire.

Significantly, Dos Passos’ trilogy moves beyond simply establishing the instances of classical and economic American imperialism. As Said describes in Culture and Imperialism, the increase in America’s international economic and political influence requires that “the empire must be maintained and it was maintained” through the regulation of the language of discourse (53). Similarly, Lisa Nanney argues, “U.S.A. is built around fictional and real characters who are master manipulators of language, whose business and belief is the distortion of language” (194-195). While Dos Passos ironically incorporates historical newspaper headlines as a literary strategy, U.S.A. depicts mass media as fundamentally incapable of representing accurate depictions of historical events. Dos Passos’ recurring references to censorship and the reproduction of governmentally prescribed discourse confirm Ludington’s observation that “all that is published in the press is propaganda” (author’s emphasis; Ludington 191). Throughout the trilogy, numerous journalists describe themselves as restricted by censors who force them to “send out prepared stuff that was all a pack of dirty lies every word of it” in order to maintain
public support of American policies (Dos Passos 1919 171). By accepting the control of the
governing elite—particularly politicians and businessmen—by printing “plain oldfashioned
bushwa,” those involved in media suppose “there can be no reason to believe these…news
organization[s] serving newspapers all over the country failed to realize their responsibilities at a
moment of supreme significance to the people of this country” (Dos Passos 1919 238, 229).
Importantly, disciplining the media in such a way results in increased control of the American
public. As Tomlinson argues, the control of discourse fortifies the relationship between the
public and the structures that govern them, including their interactions with the government, the
media, and their peers (59). He further explains, “[Media] explodes the scene formerly preserved
by the minimal separation of the public and private” (Tomlinson 59). Decreased separation of
these spheres allows discourse to become what Stuart Hall describes as “the first of the great
cultural functions… the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge, of social
imagery, through which [the public] perceive[s] the ‘worlds,’ the ‘lived realities’ of others, and
imaginarily reconstruct their lives…into some intelligible ‘world-of-the-whole’” (qtd. in
Tomlinson 60). This “world-of-the-whole,” or in U.S.A.’s case the nation-of-the-whole, is
constructed from the “old words” of America’s shared past, the insistence on American
exceptionalism, and the myth of the American dream (Hall qtd. in Tomlinson 60). The
pervasiveness with which America’s predetermined versions of self-defining discourse are
distributed creates a reality through its fictions. Alfred Kazin clarifies, “the cliché” of discourse,
which incorporates exceptionalism and the American dream, “finally becomes the voice of mass
opinion” (164). Despite the optimistic tone of these modes of discourse, widespread perpetuation
of such governing fictions establishes what Dos Passos later described as a “basic tragedy…[that
comes from] man’s struggle for life against the strangling institutions that he himself creates”
(qtd. in Nanney 177). The media’s perpetuation of American exceptionalist discourse restricts
non-elite Americans from altering the system that controls them. Consequentially, Dos Passos’
recognition of the ways in which governing forces regulate discourse surrounding the Spanish-
American War, WWI, and the American dream fundamentally supports his indictment of America’s neoteric imperial governing strategies.

Through each of the trilogy’s novels, Dos Passos displays the systematic manipulations of language that America’s elites use to further the country’s global imperial influence. *U.S.A.* presents multiple methods of linguistic manipulations, yet in accordance with Said’s interpretation of imperialist discourse, “Appeals to the past are among the commonest strategies” to do so (Tomlinson 3; Said *Culture* 3). *U.S.A.*’s frequent inclusion of references to American altruism and exceptionalism—both of which work in conjunction with the diction of America’s past—demonstrates an attempt to authorize a particular version of American history that would justify the country’s contemporary imperial policies (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 469). Standardizing the image of America through practically sacred diction of the past effectively requires the public to “satisf[y] certain conditions” to be considered American while simultaneously allowing America’s powerful elite to maintain imperialistic control over what these conditions are (Foucault *Archaeology* 224-225). With increased regulation of language, the majority becomes “more obedient as it becomes more useful,” for limiting the variations in discourse creates a productive tension between those who are considered “authentic” participants in the American dream and those who are, in Bhabha’s terms, “partial” presences (Foucault *Discipline* 137; Bhabha “Mimicry” 86). By recognizing discourse’s transference of discipline from primarily foreign “enemies” of nationalism to those “un-American undesirables in America,” *U.S.A.* exposes tensions of authenticity that result in further relegating the majority to be “docile that it may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” to propagate American international and domestic imperial aims (Anderson 142; Trombold “Ethnicity” 144; Foucault *Discipline* 136). In other words, as Standard Oil engineer Mr. Rasmussen describes, the establishment of standardized discourse requires that “The public’ll damn well do what it’s told” in order to feel they are accepted by the governing regime (Dos Passos *1919* 242). Relatedly, consistent with Bhabha’s pattern of colonial mimicry, *U.S.A.* depicts the American majority as
striving to imitate those whom the public discourse frames as authentic—figures such as J. P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, or Henry Ford—in hopes of gaining recognition and authenticity for themselves (Bhabha 88). However, through these acts of mimicry, the public inherently endorses the very discourse that subjugates them as partial presences. Their attempt to conform to an approved version of Americanness unintentionally fortifies America’s imperial control over the population. Accordingly, through the trilogy’s portrayal of the way in which accepted discourse formulations what emotional responses to American pursuits of empire are deemed acceptable and which figures are celebrated as true Americans, Dos Passos ultimately presents America’s system of domestic governance as neoteric applications of traditional colonial methods of discipline and control.

By referencing America’s tradition of exceptionalist discourse, *U.S.A.* documents how twentieth century discourse avoids accusations of imperialism by framing American involvement in international affairs as a necessary expression of political altruism. American involvement abroad qualifies as philanthropic particularly due to the country’s unique nature and its claim to serve as a replicable model for other countries. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said establishes this tendency as a pattern of American politics that cultivates the language of American exceptionalism. He observes, “Apologists for overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom” (Said *Culture* 8). For instance, Theodore Roosevelt’s insistence that the Spanish-American War “was the Rubicon, the Fight, the Old Glory, the Just Cause” resonates with his father’s seemingly selfless appeal that “An American gentleman should do his best to uplift those not so fortunately situated” (Dos Passos 112, 110). Roosevelt utilizes his interpretation of the old words of America’s founding fathers—the “pat phrases” of an American dream achievable through “the doctrine of strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife”—as a manner of regulating the public’s actions (Dos Passos 1919 111). Similarly, Wilson incorporates sacred intonations with language of the American dream in order to appeal to the public’s exceptionalist view of America’s past and to justify the
continuation of America’s expanding influence in the present (Dos Passos 1919 193). Through the use of such sacred patriotic diction, the publicly promoted discourse encourages Americans to respond to international involvement with acceptance and encouragement during the country’s continuation of hallowed political pursuits. Moreover, while those who perform their Americanness enjoy the approval of public discourse and of those around them, those who withhold support are deemed unpatriotic and are consequentially punished for their dissent, whether formally through arrest or implicitly through economic disadvantages and damaged reputations. Ultimately, by establishing this pattern of discipline and punishment through U.S.A.’s presentation of the Spanish-American War, WWI, as well as more quotidian determinations of socioeconomic divisions, Dos Passos denounces America’s regulation of discourse as requiring particular versions of Americanness from the public in order to maintain its fundamentally undemocratic system of imperialism.

Dos Passos uses young J. W. Moorehouse’s narrative, and more specifically the obsession Americans have with Roosevelt’s involvement at San Juan Hill, to reveal the way discourse regulates the public’s response to the Spanish-American War. Though expressed through a childlike tone, Moorehouse remembers, “When the Spanish War came on everybody in Wilmington was filled with martial enthusiasm” (Dos Passos 42nd 138). Moorehouse’s naivety reflects the way media markets political propaganda; as a youth, he is particularly susceptible to the absorption and repetition of information he becomes exposed to. Thus, as Moorehouse and his young peers “bothered their parents to buy them Rough Rider suits and played filibusters and Pawnee Indian wars and Colonel Roosevelt and Remember the Maine and the White Fleet and the Oregon steaming through the Straits of Magellan,” Dos Passos establishes an America where enthusiasm—even childish enthusiasm—for America’s involvement in foreign affairs exists as the promoted response (Dos Passos 42nd 138). By integrating wartime rhetoric in the performance of play, Moorehouse’s childhood reiterates the patriotic aspects of war while also reflecting the media’s convenient disregard of the overt imperialist overtones of American
involvement. Similar to the media’s tendency to favor concision as a means of averting possible negative response, Moorehouse’s remembrances of the Spanish-American War center on rhetorical “pat phrases” that evoke patriotic emotions and avoid unappealing factual distractions (Dos Passos 42nd 111).

Similarly, the media’s establishment of Roosevelt as a patriotic celebrity exemplifies how “public discourse often falsifies truth” in an effort to promote a unified public opinion of American political policies (Pizer 78). Although the “dirtywork…[of] the regulars” fighting the war remain unmentioned in the public domain, “The American public was not kept in ignorance of the Colonel’s bravery when the bullets sang” (Dos Passos 42nd 112). Accounts of Roosevelt’s bravery and patriotism develop a persona that ultimately distracts from the less favorable details of war as it implies America’s heroic altruism during times of conflict. Public displays of this persona then reinforce the image of dignity and provide the general population with more intimate interactions with the American discourse. Resultantly, pairing media portrayals of wartime valor with personalized heroic performances fortifies control over the population through a performative repetition of the original discourse. For instance, Roosevelt represents an authentic American whose characteristics can be replicated through similarly public displays of patriotism. Even the young speaker of the Camera Eye, who later develops a more cynical view of American media representations, publically participates in the approved emotive association with Roosevelt. The speaker nostalgically reflects, “and sometimes we’d see President Roosevelt ride by all alone on a bay horse and once we were very proud because when we took off our hats we were very proud because he smiled and showed his teeth like in the newspaper and touched his hat and we were very proud” (Dos Passos 42nd 102). The speaker’s personal encounter with Roosevelt certifies the image already created by the media; consequentially, because Roosevelt performs “like in the newspaper,” the parades and public appearances implicitly affirm discourse’s positive portrayal of the Spanish-American War, a war that established Roosevelt as a revered figure (Dos Passos 42nd 102). Accordingly, the media’s ability to favor anecdotal,
narrative versions of the war over more factual representations encourages a sympathetic approach to those political figures that enact America’s foreign policy.

_**U.S.A.** presents similar patterns of disciplining discourse through its description of America’s engagement in WWI. In discussions of America’s involvement before, during, and after the war, public discourse employs references to the diction of American sacrifice and to invocations of American unity as means of inciting emotional responses to the Allies’ supposedly villainous enemies. “Civilization demands a sacrifice” from Americans who retain additional responsibilities due to their exceptionalist natures (Dos Passos 42nd 181). Through such inclusions of discourse’s appeal to American national identity, Dos Passos recognizes the ways in which media constructs a version of authentic Americanness that requires public support of American involvement abroad. This united nationalism, which Benedict Anderson describes as “fraternity,” encourages “so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginings” (Anderson 7). Therefore, to contrast discourse that describes the enemies as brutally mutilating “spitted Belgian babies and Canadian officers crucified and elderly nuns raped,” the American public find themselves encouraged to consider America as altruistically countering the adversaries by “being patriotic and saving civilization” through unified national sacrifice (Dos Passos 1919 73; 42nd 262). As Anne Elizabeth “Daughter” Trent is told by her friend Joe, in this wartime context, “Individual lives don’t matter, this isn’t the time for lettin’ your personal feelin’s get away with you” (Dos Passos 1919 224). Americans are expected to abandon any actions or emotions that are considered selfish, including expressions of grief, questions about American policy, and even the natural instinct for bodily preservation. “Camera Eye (14)” further exemplifies this rhetoric of self-sacrifice as its narrator poses as a fallen soldier. Elevating the American cause over his own life, the speaker recollects,

> Americans shouldn’t cry he should look kind and grave and very sorry when they wrapped me in the stars and stripes and brought me home on a frigate to be
buried I was so sorry I never remembered whether they brought me home or
buried me at sea but anyway I was wrapped in Old Glory. (Dos Passos 42nd 117)

Despite heavy-handed irony, the speaker’s dual return to the American flag as justification for
death emphasizes discourse’s ability to manipulate the public perception of sacrifice through
combat. “Newsreel XVIII” corroborates the dissemination of such discourse as it describes
America’s decision to enter the war:

to such a task we can dedicate our lives
and our fortunes, everything that we are
and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know
that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her
blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth
and happiness and the peace that she has treasured. God
helping her she can do no other. (Dos Passos 42nd 274)

The juxtaposition of sacred phrases borrowed from The Declaration of Independence, including
the emotional appeals to public sacrifice through “dedication” and “God helping her,” reinforce
the way in which discourse invokes the language of the past to “separate America from other
nations,… define [the] national purpose,… establish [the] claim as the most noble experiment”
while also justifying America’s contemporary decision to intervene in war (Vanderwerken 213).
Discourse then supplements sacrificial terminology with examples of celebrated Americans of the
past who responded to conflict heroically, including George Washington, Robert E. Lee, and
Abraham Lincoln, as a means of fortifying its emotional appeal to America’s exceptional history
(Dos Passos 42nd 275; 1919 192). These persistent portrayals of American altruism and sacrifice
discipline the American public by limiting the potential responses to American foreign policy
through the reinforcement of strict dichotomies between the evils of the war and America’s noble
response to conflict. Consequentially, as with the Spanish-American War, those who disapprove
of America’s involvement in WWI can be portrayed as not only objecting to contemporary
foreign policy but also the characteristics of America’s founding fathers and the symbols of the country’s exceptional past. The approved, unhesitant acceptance of the exceptional, altruistic, and sacrificial language concerning American discourse therefore establishes a version of Americanness that effectively justifies America’s imperial policies abroad.

Significantly, unlike the public’s limited physical involvement in the Spanish-American War, the magnitude of WWI necessitates that American support for the war moves beyond the simple performance of public approval towards the actual implementation of America’s policies. Foucault explains that governing systems need to “make [the public] more obedient as it becomes more useful” (Discipline 137). Therefore, once deciding upon a public draft for the war, America finds itself required to engage with the “useful” public in a manner that allows the country to continue its imperial aims abroad (Foucault Discipline 137). To accommodate such an expansion of WWI’s scope, American public discourse adopts stricter interpretations of imperially inspired methods of discipline, control, and punishment in the discussion of wartime events. While it still utilizes the imperial method of invoking the shared language of America’s exceptional past, discourse also creates a system of addressing the range of public response to the promoted modes of Americanness. Expressions of Americanness that are most conducive to the promotion of imperial policies—such as figures who expand empire through economic and political means or those who implicitly consent to participate in the imperialist structures established for them—allow these figures to benefit from the determination of their authenticity. Similar to the colonial model of mimicry Bhabha describes, the elites who further imperialism serve as models that discourse’s impressionable audience can strive to mimic (Bhabha “Mimicry” 85). Whether willingly or elsewise, these influential “authentic” Americans participate in the perpetuation of imperialism and therefore largely avoid negative attention and punishment such as imprisonment or damage to their reputation.

In U.S.A., Moorehouse exemplifies the effects of such discipline by representing those Americans who most fully absorb the promoted version of Americanness. Moorehouse’s
effortless transition from advertising agent to wartime volunteer in the “Public Information Committee” allows him to perpetuate the altruistic message he personifies (Dos Passos 42nd 280). Eveline notices that Moorehouse frequently “talked about the gigantic era of expansion that would dawn for America after the war” through America’s being “the good Samaritan healing the wounds of wartorn Europe” (Dos Passos 1919 178). His description of America’s foreign policy “was as if he was rehearsing a speech” because he so fluently reflects the language of public discourse that he becomes a virtually unbelievable, idealized version of the American citizen (Dos Passos 1919 178). Nevertheless, “When he got to the end of it he looked at Eveline with a funny deprecatory smile and said, ‘And the joke of it is, it’s true’” (Dos Passos 1919 178); Moorehouse’s belief in the discourse that he both creates and repeats absolves him of any possible sarcasm concerning America’s use of discourse and the country’s involvements abroad. In other words, he confirms his Americanness by performing the role that he himself establishes in the media and in public discourse. By including a character that consciously accepts performing his role as an authentic America, U.S.A. presents public discourse as so powerful that it maintains imperially inspired discipline among all levels of its audience, including those who fully understand its manipulative qualities.

While Moorehouse represents one of America’s more elite versions of Americanness due to his direct engagement with disciplining discourse, many of U.S.A.’s female characters exist as similarly acceptable versions of Americanness due to their perpetuation of that discourse’s diction. Janey Williams, Joe Williams’ wife Del, and Eleanor Stoddard all absorb the media rhetoric of war and reiterate its language during their daily activities. As Joe notices, Janey “talked like everybody else did” about the war as she reiterates the importance of American sacrifice and the brutality of the enemy (Dos Passos 1919 133). Similarly, like the methods of discourse itself, Del repeats the language of American exceptionalism while simultaneously denying Joe the opportunity to talk about actual realities of the war: “The Belgian war pictures were awful exciting and Del said wasn’t it terrible and Joe started to tell her about what a guy he
knew had told him about being in an air raid in London but she didn’t listen” (Dos Passos 1919 49). Both Janey and Del believe the media’s version of WWI and resist Joe’s less romantic account of America’s international relations. In doing so, each of these women occupies an approved version of Americanness; they benefit from the perpetuation of discourse, even if the benefits are primarily social in nature (Dos Passos 1919 128). Eleanor’s decision to become involved in the war effort is a further example of how the discourse of American exceptionalism compels compliance. Exacerbated by her extensive interactions with Moorehouse, Eleanor’s already romanticized worldview becomes more emblematic of public discourse after the declaration of war. In accordance with the media’s insistence of American sacrifice, she views Moorehouse’s volunteering as a beautifully tragic inspiration for her own participation in the war. She reiterates his language of “We must all make our sacrifices” while also thinking, “How little people understood a man like [Moorehouse], how beautiful the room was, like a play, like a Whistler, like Sarah Bernhardt” (Dos Passos 42nd 281, 282). By fully absorbing this romanticized version of the wartime hero, the rhetoric of WWI compels Eleanor to fulfill her own prescribed wartime role: “Emotion misted her eyes. ‘I’ll join the Red Cross,’ she said, ‘I can’t wait to get to France’” (Dos Passos 42nd 282). She accepts the language of discourse and attempts to fulfill—or mimic—the idealized version of Americanness that Moorehouse represents for her; moreover, she believes that she exercises choice in her decision, which fortifies the fiction of American democracy that ironically allows American imperialism to continue.

While characters like Moorehouse and Eleanor fully subscribe to the version of Americanness endorsed by public discourse, U.S.A. recognizes that not all Americans are as willing to accept the media’s rhetoric without question. However, just as imperial powers impose constraints on their colonial subjects, U.S.A. depicts the negative consequences for Americans who fail to comply with the version of America presented in the default mode of discourse. Whether these figures’ objections take the form of offhanded critical remarks, organized ideological dissent, or more physical confrontations, those who stray from promoted versions of
Americanness find themselves subjected to discipline and ridicule through both formal and informal means. Such discipline generally succeeds in establishing acquiescence with the approved role of the American citizen through the incessant repetition of exceptionalist rhetoric; nevertheless, those who fail to respond to discourse are still restrained as they face harsh treatment and punishment through dismissal from their jobs, arrest, or even death. In each of these circumstances, America’s hegemonic discourse successfully contains dissent and assures the continuation of its imperial ideology. To apply Stephen Greenblatt’s Bakhtin-esque interpretation of subversion to U.S.A.’s wartime America, the country’s ability to regulate these dissenting versions of Americanness actually fortifies its imperialistic control. He explains,

But why…should power record other voices, permit subversive inquiries, register at its very center the transgression that will ultimately violate it? The answer may be in part that power, even in a colonial situation, is not monolithic and hence may encounter and record in one of its functions materials that can threaten another of its functions; in part that power thrives on vigilance, and human beings are vigilant if they sense a threat; in part that power defines itself in relation to such threats or simply to that which is not identical with it.

(Greenblatt 37)

As the discipline and punishment of dissenting voices in U.S.A. displays, American imperial control ironically intensifies when responding to characters that fail to adopt prescribed versions of Americanness. Initially, dissenting voices are less directly compelled to conform, such as with Ned Wigglesworth or Joe Williams, in order to establish a “reformed, recognizable other” that can still function within imperial systems of control (Bhabha “Mimicry” 86); they are disciplined through their desire to be authentic and to be unified with their compatriots (Foucault Discipline 182). However, when such methods of encouraging mimicry fail, the imperialistic systems of governance eliminate the effects of dissenting voice through punishment. As the biographies and Ben Compton’s narratives display, such treatment succeeds twofold. Firstly, the dissenting
voice is eliminated, and secondly, the visibility of such punishment discourages others from resisting the modes of Americanness that contribute to the continuation of America’s imperial system of governance.

Dos Passos exposes the pervasiveness of discourse’s imperialistic system of control by exposing the various ways that the American system disciplines those who fail to fully accept the version of Americanness presented in the media. Neither Ned Wigglesworth nor Joe Williams believes the standard discourse’s version of WWI; nevertheless, due to almost constant repetitions of discourse that insist upon America’s exceptionalist altruism, both of these characters eventually act in accordance with what the standard discourse determines is an acceptable version of Americanness, even if it is solely a performance. When confronted with standardized versions of American policy abroad, Ned “had a way of closing his eyes and throwing back his head and saying Blahblahblahblah” (Dos Passos 1919 70). He disagrees with America’s involvement in war, which qualiﬁes him as a dissenting voice, yet wartime enthusiasm eventually has its effect on him. He continues to disagree with America’s policies on a personal level, yet he nevertheless performs an acceptable version of Americanness by enlisting. Thus, even though he maintains “it was all a lot of Blah,” he tells Dick, “What the hell he’d join the Navy” (Dos Passos 1919 72). With this decision, Ned chooses to comply with the same version of Americanness as his peers, largely because his pacifism becomes too problematic to maintain during the fervor of war. Thus, his dissent is stifled through the continuation of the same imperial methods that discipline characters like Moorehouse and Eleanor—the promotion of a singular version of discourse.

Similarly, the contrast between Joe’s wartime experiences and Janey and Del’s wartime enthusiasm offers an additional model of how the repetition of discourse disciplines citizens who resist their prescribed roles. Joe’s negative experiences in the military and his knowledge of American imperialism through his time in the merchant marine contribute to his distrust of media portrayals of WWI. Nevertheless, Joe gradually succumbs to the power of discourse and accepts
the version of Americanness that it presents. Initially, he merely mimics its language and performs this role half-heartedly. When his friends ask him about “the war and the submarines and all that,” Joe relies on versions of the war that he experienced through discourse, not personal experience (Dos Passos 1919 131). “He didn’t know what to tell ‘em so he kinder kidded them along” in order to maintain the image that they have of him (Dos Passos 1919 131). However, as his mimicry continues, his reluctance gradually disappears and Joe begins to perform his Americanness with increasing enthusiasm. When conversing with other dissenters at the bar, Joe qualifies his condemnation of America’s involvement in WWI. “Joe said they were goddam right” about America’s less than altruistic intentions during the war, but he also admits, “look at the big money you made” (Dos Passos 1919 132). His resignation about the unfavorable aspects of war eventually diminish as he accepts the version promoted by discourse through the media and even his sister. After hearing the language of American altruism enough times, Joe “began to think that maybe [Janey] was right […] After all as Janey kept writing civilization had to be saved and it was up to us to do it” (Dos Passos 1919 187). The majority discourse’s ability to curb his dissenting voice then transforms into a power to affect his actions. With the repetition of discourse encouraging him to comply, “Joe started a savings account and bought him a Liberty bond” like other patriotic, authentic Americans would (Dos Passos 1919 187). His dissent about the war is therefore contained through his incessant interactions with prescribed discourse, regardless of whether through newspapers, advertising campaigns, or mundane conversations with his sister Janey.

When discourse-related discipline fails, the hegemonic regime implements more direct methods of compliance. Dissenting voices such as Ben Compton face formal and informal means of retribution that effectively silence any opposition. Initially, Ben frequently expresses his resistance to WWI in both public and private arenas. He rejects America’s altruistic motives and instead contends, “We’re in this war to defend the Morgan loans” (Dos Passos 42nd 321). Additionally, he resists the way American discourse determines who is an authentic or non-
authentic American by denying his own categorization as a Jew and insisting upon the unity of America’s population (Dos Passos 1919 339). However, Ben’s overt criticism of discourse eventually attracts negative attention. When linguistic appeals to his nationality fail, more strict methods of punishment result. For instance, his noncompliance in the workplace eventually silences an opportunity for dissent: “At the end of the week, Ben found he was fired; no reason given” (1919 354). Refusing to accept the language of American altruism and patriotism exposes him to punishment that affects not only his reputation but also his financial stability. When Ben continues to his dissenting position, he eventually finds himself facing imprisonment (Dos Passos 1919 359). Nevertheless, even as he experiences tangible effects of America’s control, Ben wavers under discourse’s discipline:

    Lower Broadway was all streaked red, white and blue with flags; […] Everybody looked flushed and happy. It was hard to keep from walking in step to the music […] He had to keep telling himself: those are the people who sent Debs to jail, those are the people who shot Joe Hill, who murdered Frank Little, those are the people who beat us up in Everett, who want me to rot for ten years in jail. (Dos Passos 1919 359)

He must employ active resistance against the nationalistic discourse and performative patriotism in order to sustain his dissenting opinion. Yet despite his composure in this situation, the systems of discipline and punishment eventually contain Ben’s disobedience. While he retains his ability to refute the discipline of discourse, his firing and eventual imprisonment effectively distance Ben from his audience. By doing so, the visibility of his punishment not only silences Ben’s dissenting voice in its literal sense, but also serves as a warning for those around him who may be considering opposition. The American public is coerced to comply with America’s discourse in order to avoid the formal and informal methods of punishment they witness Ben being subjected to.
The ways in which the Spanish-American War and WWI determine which responses to American politics are considered acceptable ultimately represent an accessible and tangible display of how public discourse delineates between authentic and non-authentic versions of Americanness. Nevertheless, Dos Passos presents more quotidian versions of this tension of authenticity through the pervasiveness of the American dream. Said notes that within the colonial schema, “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism” (Culture xiii). As a regulating discourse, the myth of the American dream blocks alternate narratives as it functions within the principles of colonial mimicry. Americans such as Andrew Carnegie, William Randolph Hearst, and Henry Ford are portrayed as achieving success through their commitment to the American method of advancement, a method that Roosevelt explicitly defines as “the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife” (Dos Passos 1919 111). Such success stories selectively validate the fiction of the American dream and define these publicly admired figures as authentic versions of Americanness. By encouraging average Americans who are considered less authentic Americans to strive to be like those Americans who are deemed successful, the American dream creates a “reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject that is almost the same but not quite” the same as those Americans who attain power (Bhabha “Mimicry” 86). This Other, the non-authentic American, constantly strives for recognition through the replication of the actions of Americans who are celebrated by discourse. In doing so, America’s imperialistic elites enjoy “a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha “Mimicry” 86).

Significantly, those Americans who strive to be recognized as authentic implicitly support the imperial system that excludes and contains them to begin with (Butler and Spivak 34); though they do so unintentionally, these Americans validate their marginality by accepting the conditions of American discourse. For example, in U.S.A., characters such as Janey Williams and Charley Anderson continuously return to the language of American progress in the hopes of
mirroring the success they see in figures like Moorehouse and Henry Ford. Janey expresses a desire to “break into” the American dream, she revels in the “americanism[s]” J.W. Moorehouse tells her, and she happily fulfills her role as patriotic American as she quits her job because she “didn't like to be working for a Hun” (Dos Passos 42nd 120, 231, 223). Effectively, through her personal and professional pursuits, Janey attempts to fulfill the American dream by accepting her role as a modern American women and escaping from the “poky and oldfashioned” life of her parents (Dos Passos 42nd 119). Yet in spite of her attempts, Janey remains relatively unsuccessful. Instead of achieving tangible success, she remains merely another American who repeats the language of the American dream without enjoying the stability it promises. Similarly, Charley interprets his life as a naturally unfolding attainment of the American dream. Instead of being a realist, he interprets his numerous failures as indications that “The whole world was laid out in front of him like a map” (Dos Passos 42nd 306). Like the depiction of Carnegie promoted in standard discourse, Charley believes tribulations equate to eventual accomplishment. Resultantly, once he achieves professional success, Charley frequently describes his past through the diction of the rags to riches American dream (Dos Passos The Big Money 324, 368). As a common war hero making it big in the business world, he sees himself as someone who has attained the privileges he shares with businessmen like Ford; however, unlike those “authentic” Americans he compares himself to, Charley’s success is fleeting. He fails to understand the limitations and conditions of the American dream and therefore falls into patterns of irresponsibility, alcoholism, and destruction (Dos Passos The Big Money 363, 384). Nevertheless, although each of these characters fails to achieve the American dream they propagate, they continue to trust in its fiction. In other words, despite attempting to “satisf[y] certain conditions” to enter into authenticity, both Janey and Charley remain only “partial” presences that are both “incomplete” and “virtual” (Foucault Archaeology 224-225; Bhabha “Mimicry” 86). Their attempt at mimicry reinforces the initial separation between those who are considered authentic and those who are not; they remain “almost the same, but not quite” and
therefore find themselves unsuccessful and unhappy regardless of their conformity to the regulations of discourse (Bhabha “Mimicry” 85). The unattainability of the American dream fails to discourage Dos Passos’ characters endorsement and performance of its language. Moreover, through their passive acceptance of its language, they stabilize the governing discourse by returning to the “zones of dependency and peripherality” that initially define them as non-authentic (Said Reflections on Exile and Other Essays 295). Consequently, as Dos Passos suggests, the governing discourse of the American dream functions so effectively that even those who suffer under its fiction continue to promote the discipline that it offers.

_U.S.A._ selectively mirrors the diction of public discourse in order to demonstrate how certain “authentic” Americans verify the fiction of the American dream. For example, like many of the “small-figured masses” who compose America’s population, Andrew Carnegie “came over to the States in an immigrant / ship” in hopes of pursuing the American dream (Doctorow 100; Dos Passos 42nd 207). Hard work, sacrifice, and Carnegie’s “confidence” and “believe[f]” in America’s destiny, epitomize the major contributors to his success (Dos Passos 42nd 207-208). During his gradual socioeconomic ascent, Carnegie tangibly expresses his faith in the technologies that allow America to extend its sphere of influence. He evokes “confidence” in railroads, communications, transportation, while he “believe[s]” in domestic production of iron, oil, and steel (Dos Passos 42nd 208). Yet equally as significant, throughout his life, Carnegie also evokes confidence in the American dream that will allow him to realize his personal goals. He unhesitantly accepts the terms of the American dream—the toil, sacrifice, dedication, and risk—in the hopes of eventual success. As the audience for such discourse is encouraged to recognize, Carnegie’s confidence in the language of American progress allows him to achieve the American dream; his story supplants the numerous instances of failure as it exemplifies what makes America exceptional. Carnegie raises himself out of poverty and “became the richest man in the world,” who could bequeath millions of dollars for the causes all Americans share confidence and belief in: “peace/ and libraries and scientific institutes and endowments and thrift” (Dos Passos
Therefore, by fulfilling both the struggles and the glories of the American dream, Carnegie’s eventual success verifies the positive results of consenting to the American dream. Just as Carnegie’s humble beginnings and hardships ultimately contribute to the attainment of his fortune, those who share such modest histories are encouraged to mimic Carnegie by overcoming adversity in order to allow America to achieve its greatness.

Dos Passos further displays the pervasive domination of the American dream by demonstrating how average Americans accept its discourse regardless of whether they attain success through its model of advancement. Through their individual struggles and occasional successes, Margo Dowling and J.W. Moorehouse both immerse themselves in the language of the American dream and find themselves consenting to the selective nature of its discourse. Reflective of the American dream and Carnegie’s personal success through faith, Agnes advises Margo, “If you believe you’re going to succeed you can’t fail” (Dos Passos The Big Money 407). Margo adopts this attitude throughout her professional pursuits and achieves some success. However, in order to further improve her socioeconomic standing, she purposefully revises her past to dramatize her progression from rags to riches (Dos Passos The Big Money 275). She recognizes the possibility of invoking the American dream and willingly uses its language for her own self-interest. Similarly, Moorehouse gradually improves his socioeconomic position and takes pleasure in accentuating his resemblance to the narrative of the American dream. When Moorehouse finds himself described as “just an adventurer…from plowboy to president, you know… that sort of thing,” he revels in his ability to respond, “But I am” (42nd 199). Once he has escaped the immediate realities of his past, he delights in the more romanticized version of his strife because it corresponds with the discourse of the American dream. As such, both he and Margo deem themselves authentic Americans based on their resemblance to the pattern of success established in discourse.

While the language of the American dream ostensibly promotes the inclusion of the masses through its optimistic narrative, its exceptionalist intonations betray the system of
exclusion and containment that correspond with determinations of authentic and non-authentic versions of Americanness. Despite its positive representations in stories of success, the manner by which the American dream champions heterogeneity of histories, ancestries, and socioeconomic status actually functions as an alternate means of creating homogeneity. Adversity becomes sentimentalized if it is a temporary condition that leads to advancement; however, those mired in more permanent misfortunes contradict the language of the American dream and must therefore be excluded from its discourse. The resulting tension between the authentic recipients of the American dream and the non-authentic subalterns creates “a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different” (Bhabha “Signs” 111). Within this context, non-authentic Americans are not ignored, but denounced as destructively different; they face scorn, not apathy, as their peers strive to increase the distance between themselves and those excluded from the framework of the American dream. In *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos establishes these exclusionary aspects of the American dream throughout multiple narrative inclusions, ranging from minor conversations to more ingrained character motivations. For instance, when Mr. Wheatley introduces Charley Anderson to his daughter Gladys, he expounds, “Mr. Anderson […] was one of our most prominent war aces; he won his spurs fightin’ for the flag, […] an’ his whole career seems to me to be an example…now I’m going to make you blush, ma boy…of how American democracy works at its very best pushin’ forward to success the most intelligent and bestfitted and weedin’ out the weaklin’s” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 313). Wheatley compliments Charley by aligning him with the American dream; however, his invocation of the language of the American dream necessarily requires an Other—“the weaklin’s”—by which he can define Charley against (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 313). In other words, Wheatley’s understanding of the American dream necessarily implies that there are non-authentic Americans who either fail to pursue or are unworthy of the dream’s fundamental progression. Unlike authentic Americans who persevere after hardship, these weaklings are
deemed not the “most intelligent and bestfitted” for the current demands of American production (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 313).

Through his critical examination of American foreign policy and discourse, Dos Passos counters the pervasive fiction of America’s exceptionalist and altruistic nature. Moreover, by exploring the manipulations of language present in American discourse, *U.S.A.* exposes America’s neoteric imperialist policies as precise systems of discipline that exploit America’s general population in order to expand the country’s territorial and economic influence. While *U.S.A.*’s critique of the America’s imperial system emphasizes various imperial techniques employed by America’s governing elites, Dos Passos’ extensive understanding of these techniques also establishes his ability to reappropriate their methods for subversive purposes. As such, the following chapters will further textualize this neoteric imperialism established in this chapter by exploring the effects of Dos Passos’ subversive use of satire, parody, and replication in each of narrative inventions. Transitioning from textual instances of subversion to broader implications of the politics of literature, the following chapters will also expand upon patterns of imperialist control to explicate how Dos Passos himself functions within the constraints of domestic American imperialism. Through this discussion, the following chapters will contend that *U.S.A.* succeeds not only in acknowledging the language of imperialism inherent to American discourse, but also in its use of recognition as means of diminishing neoteric imperialistic governance of the American public. Thus, the following chapters will apply interpretations of Bhabha’s colonial mimicry and Derrida’s linguistic iterability as a means of demonstrating Dos Passos’ awareness of the potentially subversive politics of literature.
CHAPTER TWO

MEDIA DISCIPLINE AND SUBVERSIVE MIMICRY: A DESTABILIZING APPROPRIATION OF IMPERIAL TECHNIQUES IN THE NEWSREELS

Reported speech is speech within speech, utterance within utterance, and at the same time also speech about speech, utterance about utterance.

--Valentin Volshinov

In *U.S.A.*’s Newsreels, Dos Passos reproduces and juxtaposes historical newspaper headlines and popular song lyrics that situate his trilogy historically. Throughout these sections, Dos Passos replicates tangible public discourse as a method of demonstrating the imperial nature of America’s international and domestic pursuits. Appeals to the past, American exceptionalism, and American altruism occur through both direct references as well as more subtle expressions of public discourse that encourage homogeneity in public opinion and in displays of Americanness. In accordance with colonial disciplinary techniques, both *U.S.A.*’s print and musical media sources subtly encourage the general public to absorb such presentations and mimic their messages in everyday American life. Significantly, however, Dos Passos’ Newsreels emphasize the “menace of mimicry” and iterability as the possibility of exploiting what the hegemonic regime considers a safe space that is easily controlled: language (Bhabha “Mimicry” 88). Despite the prevalence of censorship by the hegemonic regime, the Newsreels retain opportunities for linguistic political subversion. Dos Passos acknowledges the ways in which the American government places constraints upon literature and discourse as a means of containing its subversive possibilities, yet the Newsreels ultimately frustrate the attempt to make language a containable space of dissent. Approximating a Derridian understanding of language, *U.S.A.*’s Newsreels accentuate the power of iterability as means to subvert the imperial discourse it imitates. The duplication of historical discourse in the Newsreels reflects the power of
différance—a “sameness which is not identical”—as they function as a model of subversion that Dos Passos replicates elsewhere in his text (Derrida *Speech* 129).

In order to exploit the safe space of subversion, the trilogy incorporates the Newsreels as predominantly objective as Dos Passos painstakingly reproduces them from their original publications; therefore, the Newsreels fulfill the colonial appeal for mimicry in its most literal sense by exactly duplicating various mediums of media discourse repeated throughout American society. Nevertheless, these media inclusions can also be approached as subjective and argumentative, as their placements and their content offer the reader perspectives of a disjointed American system. They utilize absurdity, omissions, selectivity, and juxtaposition to depict a more critical representation of America. Instead of promoting the ideology of American exceptionalism inherent to the media portrayals, Dos Passos discloses the absurdity of such propaganda by offering precise reproductions within alternate contexts. Through this simultaneity of the objective and the subjective, the Newsreels’ reiteration of others’ voices vitally changes the meaning of the original utterance. Moreover, the hegemonic power’s safe space of cultural mimicry and regulated literature fails to contain Dos Passos’ invocation of its own vocabulary; by recognizing the systems of control invoked by the cultural and political elite, Dos Passos utilizes mimicry and iterability as means of subversion, not a perpetuation of power.

Discussing the power of hegemonic regimes, Foucault compels, “We must cease…to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals’” (*Discipline* 194). Alternatively, he argues, “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (*Foucault Discipline* 194). During the early twentieth century, such power and truths often manifest themselves through the production of discourse, or more particularly, through print media and song. As historian Michael Schudson notes, this period’s media incorporated “truth value news” as well as “aesthetic” news that emphasize the “consummatory value” of information over the factual representation of historical events (89). Following the practices of advertising, America’s
powerful figures such as Woodrow Wilson and William Randolph Hearst determine which representations exude the most influence on the behaviors of the American public (Schudson 89). Dos Passos offers impressions of this trend throughout the trilogy, yet the Newsreels’ historical allusions to such a control of discourse blatantly confirm the reality of an advertising system in media. Throughout the various stylistic forms, newspapermen appeal to the “geewhizz emotion” and “proper cheerful attitude[s]” to garner general support (Dos Passos The Big Money 475; 1919 177); however, this joviality ironically betrays a more stark reality of America’s fallacies. Instead of fulfilling commitments to objectivity, newspapers are forced to propagate the discourse determined by the elites who control the media sector, even if the prescribed content contradicts the fundamental objectives of news reporting. “Newsreel XLIV” rhetorically questions, “has not the time come for newspaper proprietors to join in a wholesome movement for the purpose of calming troubled minds, giving all the news but laying less stress on prospective calamities [?]” (Dos Passos The Big Money 35). Akin to advertising, the emphases on the factual decreases as newspapers cater to emotion; the media must “[calm] troubled minds,” not represent reality (Dos Passos The Big Money 35). As a result, like George Creel, the leader of United States’ Committee of Public Information recalls in his memoir, the media of this period is less a news organization than “the world’s greatest adventure in advertising” (qtd. in Stratton 427). The consumer value of reporting appropriately benefits those already possessing control in America, including power over discourse. Moreover, by functioning as an advertising method that encourages homogeneity in public opinion, it reinforces imperially motivated discipline. Resultantly, as Foucault explains, “The relations of discourse are of the nature of warfare” (qtd. in Moore-Gilbert 139). The media ensures the perpetuation of America’s imperial control through their public propagation of homogeneous versions of Americanness and their simultaneous containment of discourse’s subversive capacities.

Foucault argues that a fundamental aspect of discipline lies in compelling the public to desire homogeneity within its own population (Discipline 182). Butler and Spivak corroborate,
describing a nation’s desire to maintain power over the majority through population consistency: “The nation must be purified of its heterogeneity except in those cases where a certain pluralism allows for the reproduction of homogeneity on another basis” (32). As Schudson elucidates, popular media such as newspapers and music serve as a catalyst by which the public can compare themselves to others and reinforce such a desire for sameness. He explains, “The News serves primarily to create, for readers, satisfying aesthetic experiences which help them to interpret their own lives and relate them to the nation, town, or class to which they belong” (Schudson 89). Tomlinson concurs, “The Mass media thus becomes the primary way in which people in massified, ‘anomic,’ socially fragmented societies gain a sense of the social ‘totality’ and their relation to it” (60). Through exposure to the collective wants of the whole, to headlines that provide a singular understanding of Americanness, and to the unified versions of historical events, the American public shares a cohesive representation of what is considered an “authentic” life (Bhabha “Mimicry” 88). In the Newsreels, such homogeneity accentuates the pervasive imperial control that elites enforce upon the general population; moving beyond the inherently disciplining nature of media-driven social consciousness, formally and informally endorsed methods of censorship regulate the versions of Americanness imposed on the public and ultimately limit the potential for linguistic subversion.

In the trilogy, instances of direct censorship appear before, during, and after WWI. Mary French “spent hours trying to wheedle A.P. and U.P. men into sending straight stories” and cannot publish her own factual reports because her superiors consider it a “firstrate,” yet ultimately subversive, “propaganda piece” (Dos Passos The Big Money 154, 153). Her boss, newspaperman Ted Healy, chooses self-censorship instead of risking official restrictions from the government. Similarly, as is further reflected in the Newsreel’s generally optimistic representations of events, agreeable news trumps more accurate portrayals because they appeal to the pervasive fictions about America’s exceptionalist and altruistic nature. The trilogy establishes a more formal indictment of censorship, however, as Jerry Burnham describes how “a
correspondent couldn’t get to see anything anymore” because they have “three or four censorship on his neck all the time and had to send out a pack of prepared stuff that was all a pack of dirty lies every word of it” (Dos Passos 1919 171). Ironically, the Newsreels confirm these restrictions by including headlines that establish the prevalence of censorship through the very media that is itself censored. References to “BURLESON ORDERS ALL POSTAL TELEGRAPH NEWS SUPPRESSED” and governmental actions that “MAY GAG PRESS” demonstrate the austerity by which censorship functions (Dos Passos 1919 363; The Big Money 36). The media undergoes censoring so frequently that references to such imperialistic discipline can be presented cursorily with limited opposition. Even Jerry Burnham, who believes “a newspaperman had been little better than a skunk…but that now there wasn’t anything low enough you could call him,” continues his professional role as a promoter of approved versions of discourse in spite of his distaste for his profession (Dos Passos 1919 171). Like the factual events he experiences, his discontent fails to influence public opinion because censorship fundamentally suppresses any dissent that may threaten the stability of the controlling elites.

Such extensive systems of censorship fortify America’s imperial control over the general population. By regulating the content of American discourse, influential elites also establish a homogenous version of Americanness that requires discipline from the general population. In the trilogy, Dos Passos ultimately utilizes the censored and superficial portrayal of Americanness to subvert the imperialistic discourse that creates it. Nevertheless, Dos Passos initially uses the historical nature of the Newsreels to present a more rudimentary argument concerning the imperial nature of American policy in both its recognizable and subtler articulations. Reflecting an explicitly imperial diction, the Newsreels divulge the continuation of American empire through the documentation of America’s “extraordinary growth…since the Civil War, the opening up of new territory, the development of resources” (Dos Passos 1919 273). However, as described in the previous chapter, American discourse also employs colonial methods of appealing to a shared past, to American exceptionalism, and to American altruism as it
supplements more negative approaches to ensuring public discipline, such as the vilification of the Other and tensions of authenticity. Representations of America wanting the “WORLD’S GREATEST FLEET” and “AIR SUPREMACY” in order to become “INVULNERABLE” offer fragments of media presentations that are unambiguously reflective of American empire (Dos Passos 1919 321; The Big Money 441, 1919 365). These succinct indicators of empire then incorporate a more advertising tone as they reinforce the homogeneity of American popular opinion; according to the newspapers, all Americans “UPHOLD NATION CITY’S CRY” by “WANT[ING] BIG WAR OR NONE” (Dos Passos 42nd 283, 206). Furthermore, subtler manifestations of imperial propaganda—such as the song “Over There,” in which American altruism justifies foreign involvement, and the emphasis on sacred language in wartime descriptions of the “blessed” men fighting abroad—indicate the extent of the imperialistic motivations inherent to the media (Dos Passos 42nd 283; 1919 77). Admittedly, the public ultimately retains the ability to choose which songs to sing; nevertheless, already-established media discourse promotes a particular form of Americanness from its audience that ultimately encourages the public to popularize certain songs in the future. The censoring of newspapers and songs establishes homogeneity through advertisement-like appeals to emotion, history, and sensationalism, in addition to warnings of punishment if discipline fails (Dos Passos 42nd 274; 1919 169).

By employing this colonial system of discipline and control through homogenous discourse, those elites who regulate the language of the media ultimately expect the public to consent to American imperial pursuits. Discourse wields substantial influence over its audience; therefore, the control of language, either through withholding narratives or demanding narratives, functions as a critical system of discipline and punishment that preserves political power. Moreover, in the context of U.S.A., such methodologies not only exist as promotions of American imperial politics, but as tangible extensions of America’s imperial system of governance. Bhabha succinctly explains, “The sign of the colonial government…is caught in the irredeemable act of writing” and public discourse (Bhabha “Sly Civility” 93). Accordingly, U.S.A.’s America not
only adopts imperial policies abroad, but also domestically through the regulation of discourse. Significantly, the influential elites who control the language of American media not only regulate their own relation to newspapers, songs, and literature, but also the ways in which the public engages with these forms of communication. For the imperialistic government and financial magnates, the assurance offered by censorship and homogenous discourse delimits these linguistic sources as “safe spaces of subversion” that result from potential “subversion and its containment” (Greenblatt 35). Should the occasion arise where members of the American public stray from discipline and attempt to voice dissent, whether it is through editorials, song, or even literature like Dos Passos’ trilogy, the hegemonic regime suppresses their ability to publically disseminate their message in order to reestablish control over the population. Therefore, by utilizing the disciplining forces of censorship and the established public desire for homogeneity, those who control the media also control the accepted response to such subversion.

As a result of the regulation of discourse, language becomes both powerful and powerless; in Foucault’s diction, it works through both destruction and production as it emphasizes language’s complex yet formidable potential to determine political authority. In a method of control reminiscent of colonial strategies, the regulation of the media allows influential elites to dominate discourse and to suppress marginal voices in a manner that “avert[s] [the American government’s] powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” (Foucault Archeology 216). Finding himself in such a regulated space of language, “[P]erhaps the central dilemma of [Dos Passos’] time [is] how both to chronicle and resist a disintegrating world” (Marz qtd. in Packer 218). However, despite the ways in which censorship and homogeneous discourse establish the media as a controlled space that obstructs the expression of marginal voices, Dos Passos’ stylistic method in the Newsreels

1 Dos Passos biographer Townsend Ludington explains that even Dos Passos found himself constrained by the regulation of discourse. While in the process of publishing U.S.A., the author was forced to alter its content in order to meet publishing standards (Ludington 193).
appropriates America’s imperial strategies, and particularly the encouragement for mimicry, in order to undermine their intent. In other words, by applying what Derrida refers to as the “repeatability” or “iterability” of language, Dos Passos exploits the “menace” of this colonial strategy to subvert its message (Bhabha “Mimicry” 88; Derrida “Signature” 9). The Newsreels’ composition through linguistic absurdity, ambiguity, and juxtaposition transforms the precise duplications of media’s language into subversive facsimiles that emphasize the subversive potential of linguistic mimicry.

Throughout the Newsreels, Dos Passos includes lyrics to both popular and military songs. These musical citations not only establish the general popularity of sung music in American culture, but also provide Dos Passos with a model of mimicry and différence as possibilities for political subversion. During the early twentieth century, the U.S. government incorporated musical selections in their military training (Dolph 80). “World War I convinced a wide range of government officials that recorded music of some sort was a necessity and not just a secondary or tertiary diversion,” so the military often required soldiers to mimic the language of songs in order to improve morale (Howland Kenny 194; Trombold 292). U.S. Major-General Leonard Wood reflects upon the compelling nature of war songs, contending, “It is just as essential that a soldier know how to sing as that he should carry rifles and know how to shoot them” (qtd. in Dolph 79-80). As with other modes of discourse, adherence to the language of songs reinforces domestic imperial discipline and provides ideological encouragement for the perpetuation of American empire. However, John Trombold observes that soldiers often repurposed these songs as a means of “voic[ing] the discontent that officials screened out of their writing” (Trombold 292-293). While recognizably expressing dissent, many songs overemphasize the comedic nature of soldier’s unhappiness; as Trombold notes, the humorous and often smutty nature of these songs dictated that they “remain in the trenches, where they are marginalized” enough to establish them as a contained expression of subversion (Trombold 306). With much of their dissent stifled by formal and informal versions censorship, soldiers attempted to “assert some independence of
mind by not always singing the approved martial songs, and—somewhat more daringly—by singing approved songs in parody” (Trombold 294). By utilizing the relatively innovative approach of reappropriating endorsed songs, soldiers’ parodic lyrics “speak in and against” the discourse promoted by the imperial American government (Butler Antigone 28). Their repetition of authentic lyrics fulfills the requests for mimicry, yet the emphasis on the changes in the music—those lines which alter the fundamental objectives of the songs—subverts the system of mimicry imposed upon those Americans unknowingly implementing the expansion of America’s empire.

Largely due to their dissatisfaction with the government controlling every aspect of their lives, American soldiers resisted the disciplining force of military-endorsed songs through both obvious, comedic lyrics as well as more minimalist manipulations of music. “Newsreel XXV” and “Newsreel XXXII” each incorporate WWI era songs that purposefully embrace humor as a means of expressing discontent. Irving Berlin’s “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning” caricatures the everyday routine in the military before arriving at the conclusion presented in U.S.A.:

Some day I’m going to murder the bugler
Some day they’re going to find him dead
I’ll dislocate his reveille
And step upon it heavily
And spend
the rest of my life in bed. (Dos Passos 1919 138)

While incorporating admissions of wartime dissatisfaction, the hyperbole inherent to the song minimizes its subversive capabilities. In a similarly comic tone, “Newsreel XXXII” duplicates the lyrics to “Oh, It’s a Lovely War!,” a song that sarcastically describes the banalities of wartime life. Descriptions of “the sergeant / Bring[ing soldiers] a cup of tea in bed” that may or may not include “lumps of onion / Floatin’ around in the tea” purposefully lampoon misconceptions of
soldier’s daily lifestyles in what Trombold describes as “a rift between desire and duty, between the idea of reality that the officials promoted and what soldiers regarded as real life” (Dos Passos 1919 228, 229; Trombold 296). Nevertheless, the humorous tone of WWI being “a lovely war” curtails the reality of dissent in the military (Dos Passos 1919 228). Although this song incorporates America’s enthusiastic language surround WWI, the exaggerated humor of the lyrics prevents the songs from fully mimicking officially sanctioned discourse. In other words, the song’s humor prevents its message from disrupting the perpetuation of American empire; these overtly comical inclusions remain contained by public discourse and therefore fail to function as influential expressions of dissent.

To supplement these humorous expressions of general military restlessness, soldiers also added lyrics to governmentally endorsed songs in order to counter the music’s sentimental depiction of wartime life. As musical historian Edward Dolph explains, “El Soldado Americano [The American Soldier]” repurposes the tune of “Son of a Gambolier,” a mid-1800s song that laments a man’s impoverished lifestyle (Dolph 203). Similar to “Son of a Gambolier” in its lyrical despondency, “El Soldado Americano” addresses the daily anguish of the soldiers fighting abroad while it establishes a romantic portrayal life at home in America.² Mirroring the way in which soldiers used the song, “Newsreel XX” reproduces the more palatable lines, “Oh the oak and the ash and the weeping willow tree / And green grows the grass in North Amerikee,” before exposing the crass parodic addendum, “Oh we’ll nail Old Glory to the top of the pole / And we’ll all reenlist in the pig’s a—h—“ (Dos Passos 1919 2, 3). Contrary to the exaggerated humor of “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning” and “Oh, It’s a Lovely War!,” “El Soldado Americano” retains a majority of the language approved by governmental discourse; the soldiers predominantly consent to mimicry and therefore remain “authentic” and largely avoid negative attention from the government (Bhabha “Mimicry” 88). However, largely due to the minimalism

² Initially rewritten to reflect America’s imperial pursuits in the Philippines, “El Soldado Americano” reappeared during the Mexican-American War before emerging with its most critical lyrical alterations during WWI (Dolph 203).
of unendorsed lyrics, the altered lines gain emphasis. As a result, the duplicated lyrics also
function as différance. By only slightly altering the context of the repetition through a
supplemental lyric, Dos Passos “rupture[s]” the discourse” and therefore succeeds in subverting
the song’s initially sentimental message (Bhabha “Mimicry” 86). Both the soldiers and Dos
Passos exploit the “sameness which is not identical” that results from altering the context of lines
that originally sentimentalize war, such as “green grows the grass in North Amerikee” (Derrida
Speech 129; Dos Passos 1919 2). The overly romanticized version of military despondency is
supplanted by a more accurate, indignant version of enlistment; meanwhile, the soldiers
technically fulfill the government’s request for musical mimicry by precisely reproducing all of
the song’s words before they add the parodic line. This lyrical iterability, or in other words the
soldier’s “repetition with alterity,” unsettles the military discipline administered by America’s
imperially motivated control of discourse (Derrida “Signature” 9). Admittedly, both the soldiers’
and Dos Passos’ use of the vulgar lyrics for “El Soldado Americano” remain rare documentations
of musical alterations in the military. Nevertheless, by refining the methods of dissent that are
gradually introduced through these comical and crass songs, the Newsreels include nuanced
instances of lyrical duplication that effectively subvert the imperial technique of discipline
through mimicry and iterability.

Accompanying military songs like “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” popular
songs such as George Cohen’s “Over There” were incorporated in the soldier’s daily routine with
the hopes of “song mak[ing] a good soldier, a better soldier; a tired soldier, a rested soldier; a
depressed soldier, a cheery soldier” (Committee on Public Information qtd. in Howland Kenney
194). However, by utilizing the menace of context, both the soldiers and U.S.A. manipulate their
fulfillment of prescribed colonial mimicry to undermine public discourse. By doing so, the
popular songs included in the Newsreels refute the notion that language exists as a safe space of
subversion. For example, in compliance with the government’s encouragement to repeat songs
endorsed by public discourse, “Newsreel XIX” precisely reproduces the lyrics for George Cohen’s popular WWI song “Over There”:

Over there

Over there

[...]

The Yanks are coming

We’re coming o-o-o-ver

[...]

And we won’t come home

Till it’s over over there. (Dos Passos 42nd 282; Cohen)

Dos Passos avoids any lyrical alterations in this representation, which consequently defends him from formal and informal modes of censorship. Nevertheless, while the lyrics are precisely duplicated, the repetition of language creates alternate contexts that modify the meaning of the original utterance. As Foucault explains, “the novelty lies no longer in what is said, but in its reappearance” and what provides the context for its reappearance (Foucault Archaeology 221). “Newsreel XIX” utilizes the potentially subversive “spacing” of repetition to expose the fallacies of mimicry’s imperialistic discipline (Derrida “Signature” 9). Despite precise duplication, the originally patriotic lyrics belie a more sinister tone when paired with other equally accurate replications of discourse. Juxtaposed with messages that allude to American dominance, the originally blithe lyrics adopt a more threatening tone that implies America’s aggressive imperial nature. America forces its citizens to go “over there” and refuses them any opportunity of return until political aims are met (Dos Passos 42nd 282). Thus, as the inclusion of “Over There” indicates, the Newsreels alter the context of soldiering songs in order to repurpose wartime mimicry of public discourse into a more cynical representation of America’s control over its population.
As an extension of soldiers’ subversive tactics, Dos Passos’ replication of military lyrics provides a model by which *U.S.A.* reappropriates imperial techniques in order to destabilize their power. Through both songs and newspaper headlines, the Newsreels utilize the “birth of something new at the moment of repetition” in order to utilize a linguistic interpretation of the imperial technique of mimicry as a method of subversion (Bazargan 272). Like his accurate reproductions of song lyrics, Dos Passos replicates historical headlines as printed in public discourse (Ludington 351). He strives to reproduce discourse in an act of literary mimicry, yet Dos Passos’ headlines also operate within the context of their subversive iterability. By emphasizing “the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of [their] inscription,” Dos Passos’ Newsreels emphasize the importance of context in reproduction (Derrida “Signature” 9). The spacing of duplication allows Dos Passos to remain in a safe space of subversion—for he replicates the language of public discourse—while simultaneously using ambiguity and juxtaposition to portray the irony of newspaper discourse’s justification of America’s neoteric imperialist discipline. As they reproduce discourse, the Newsreels’ mimicry exposes the self-fulfilling pursuit of America’s discipline. Because the headlines suggest perceived threats from non-authentic Americans who have strayed from America’s shared identity, the newspapers establish a need for the government’s disciplining response to such threats. Ironically, however, it is this same discourse that establishes the threats to begin with; the media constructs what it means to be an authentic version of Americanness, of which discipline is an assumed characteristic. The Newsreels’ ability to break the cyclical nature of discipline through the iterability of language undermines the power of discourse through the process of recognition. Consequently, even though imperial mimicry typically designates marginalized literary voices to “partial” presences, its actualization also allows *U.S.A.* to destabilize its colonial technique.

Largely due to the America’s control of discourse, newspapers report incidents where dissent is met with swift discipline and punishment. “Newsreel XXII” explicitly demonstrates the necessity of complying to be considered an authentic American. The headline asserts,
“AGITATORS CAN’T GET AMERICAN PASSPORTS” (Dos Passos 1919 77). Without passports, those who voice their dissent barely qualify as American citizens. They are more akin to “TRAITORS” who should “BEWARE” America’s ability to maintain a homogenously patriotic public (Dos Passos 1919 77; 42nd 274). U.S.A.’s incorporation of these threats exposes how the media perpetuates the perception that America must remain diligent concerning who constitutes its population. As such, newspapers encourage the continuation of a traditional understanding of mimicry, where the public strives to fulfill the image of Americanness adopted by the influential American elites. Ironically, however, the Newsreels’ repetition of such insistences of mimicry ultimately subverts these imperial techniques. For example, “Newsreel XXVII” informs its readers, “LAWHATING GATHERINGS NOT TO BE ALLOWED IN CRITICAL TIME THREATENING SOCIAL UPHEAVAL” (Dos Passos 1919 169). The patriotic tone of the period prompts public acceptance of such regulations, yet Dos Passos’ repetition exposes its contradictory content. In order to safeguard the freedoms symbolized in the Newsreel’s later inclusion, “that statue of Liberte,” Americans undergo violations of the same rights they are attempting to defend (Dos Passos 1919 169). U.S.A.’s ability to alter the context of these headlines therefore exposes the inherent contradictions of such discourse, as it accentuates self-fulfilling fictions that justify imperial control.

Dos Passos further utilizes the potentially subversive iterability of newspapers by selectively editing portions of discourse to obscure their meaning. Ostensibly chronicling America’s altruistic involvement in WWI and the impending Peace Conference, “Newsreel XXV” depicts, “after a long conference with a secretary of war and the secretary of state President Wilson returned to the White House this afternoon apparently highly pleased that events are steadily pursuing the course which he had felt they would take” (Dos Passos 1919 136). The President is “highly pleased” with America fulfilling its noble wartime pursuits (Dos Passos 1919 136); nevertheless, the ambiguity of “the course which he had felt they would take” facilitates the potentially subversive iterability of the phrase (Dos Passos 1919 136).
“course” America has chosen to take includes imperialistic disciplining of the general population as a means of expanding America’s empire abroad (Dos Passos 1919 136). Significantly, by accentuating the multiple interpretations of this news article, Dos Passos empowers his reader. Although the text remains within the safe space of subversion because it replicates the discourse accurately, the repetition of such imprecise phraseology invites alternate interpretations from its audience.

Dos Passos continues to imitate this vague language of the press as his trilogy transitions from the fictions surrounding American’s involvement in WWI to the similarly elusive rhetoric of the American Dream. In *The Big Money*, “Newsreel LXIII” begins, “but a few minutes later this false land disappeared as quickly and as mysteriously as it had come and I found before me the long stretch of the silent sea with not a single sign of life in sight” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 435). In its implied context, this “false land” appears as a deceptive mirage that the seafarer quickly recovers from (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 435). However, although the trilogy mimics the newspaper article meticulously, its vague language acts subversively. The abstraction of “false land” also allows the reader to interpret the mimicked utterance as a commentary on the pervasive fiction that establishes America as land of opportunity. In this new context, the falsity of the land translates into the falsity of the American dream. Thus, for both the seafarer and those non-authentic Americans struggling under imperial domestic control, “not a single sign” of a prosperous life remains when the fictions turn into reality (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 435). Thus, by exploiting the inherent ambiguity of metaphoric discourse, the replications of these expressions allow the Newsreels to remain in the safe space of mimicry while simultaneously subverting their meanings.

To supplement his mimicry of vague language in news reporting, Dos Passos’ juxtaposition of multiple media sources allows him the freedom to relate dissimilar, yet still precisely accurate, excerpts of discourse in order to generate alternate interpretations of each. Consistent with the other Newsreels, “Newsreel XXIX” utilizes differing formatting techniques to
indicate distinct media sources. However, Dos Passos’ collocation of different excerpts of discourse alters the iteration of the articles. For example, Dos Passos reports in “Newsreel XXIX,” “the soldiers and sailors gave the only touch of color to the celebration. They went in wholeheartedly for having a good time […] Some of these returned fighters nearly caused a riot when they took an armful of stones and attempted to break an electric sign at Broadway and Forty-second Street reading:” (Dos Passos 1919 190). The news article abruptly ceases without Dos Passos informing the audience of the content of the damaged sign. Nevertheless, the headline that follows this article simply reads, “WELCOME HOME TO OUR HEROES” (Dos Passos 1919 190). When examined individually, each of these media inclusions offer positive intonations. Soldiers and sailors offer a “touch of color to the celebration” and “have a good time” as they are commended for being America’s “HEROES” who saved civilization from destruction (Dos Passos 1919 190). Yet the juxtaposition of these newspaper excerpts belies a more subversive message. Collectively, they convey, “these returned fighters nearly caused a riot when they took an armful of stones and attempted to break an electric sign at Broadway and Forty-second Street reading: / WELCOME HOME TO OUR HEROES” (Dos Passos 1919 190). Despite the media’s insistence that soldiers enjoy a convivial return, they actually suffer from an inability to reassimilate into American life, particularly in their pursuit of employment (Trombold 291). Taken together, the soldiers’ dissatisfaction with the rhetoric of return prompts them to “nearly cause a riot” (Dos Passos 1919 190). Therefore, while the juxtaposition of these distinct media articles reflects such dissatisfaction with the falsity of America’s heroic return, Dos Passos subverts the meaning of official reports without technically altering their content.

Despite Dos Passos’ acknowledgement that imperially controlled discourse restricts dissent, the Newsreels’ use of mimicry transforms the containable space of language into a method of subversion that even “non-authentic” Americans can use against imperial systems of governance. Dos Passos’ ability to manipulate the iterability of language establishes a pattern whereby the lyrics and headlines “speak in and against” the hegemonic discourse, “delivering and
defying imperatives at the same time, inhabiting the language of sovereignty at the very moment in which [they oppose] sovereign power and [are] excluded from its terms” (Butler Antigone 28). For non-authentic Americans who find themselves constrained by cycles of discourse that exclude them, the Newsreels’ establishment of the menace of mimicry therefore allows for a safe yet subversive mode of discourse that can reestablish the American public as having agency. This results because, as Foucault’s describes, “truth” relies on the institutions that define it (Archaeology 219). By empowering the general public to reexamine the truths presented in the media, the Newsreels subvert the disciplining force of promoted discourse. Significantly, however, the subversive utilization of mimicry and iterability established in the Newsreels provides Dos Passos with a method of dissent that applies to U.S.A.’s other stylistic forms. Just like the soldiers’ use of song, Dos Passos ultimately refines his interpretation of mimicry and iterability throughout the biographies, narratives, and Camera Eyes in order to assert the politics of literature and destabilize the control of America’s imperialistic governance. Therefore, the following chapters will explore Dos Passos’ progressive invocation of mimicry and iterability as each of his stylistic forms offer unique opportunities to counter neoteric imperialism through the very methods of colonial discipline.
Expanding upon the mimicry of the Newsreels, Dos Passos exploits the menace of mimicry as a method of subversion in the other narrative sections of *U.S.A.* Similarly situating his narratives in historical fact, *U.S.A.* incorporates biographical representations that employ what Donald Pizer has labeled “psychography…the condensed, essential, artistic presentation of character” instead of traditional chronological profiles (Pizer 76). To situate his trilogy historically as well as emphasize the imperialism often present in biographical discourse, Dos Passos’ biographies include both celebrated and notorious figures that “embody so well the quality of soil in which Americans of this generation grew” (Nanney 191). In addition to their “representative” characteristics, Dos Passos chooses these historical figures because their personal histories were widely available to the American public (Maine “Representative Men in Dos Passos’s *The 42nd Parallel* 31; Nanney 191). Conventional depictions of these Americans circulated within public discourse and influenced the ways in which the American population viewed each figure’s accomplishments. In accordance with colonial mimicry, *U.S.A.*’s biographical sections display how the discourse surrounding celebrated figures reinforces particular versions of Americanness. The public is encouraged to mimic the actions presented in particular biographies endorsed by standard discourse, which includes their consenting to discipline. However, despite the public discourse’s promotion of these “authentic” figures, Dos Passos presents an alternate group of Americans most deserving of the public’s esteem.

In order to disrupt this controlling discipline over the public and communicate subversive depictions of America’s celebrated figures, Dos Passos makes use of his audience’s shared awareness of famous Americans; he selectively replicates biographies while simultaneously maintaining an alternate interpretation of the figures’ historical contributions. Barry Maine recognizes this tendency for historical revisionism as he explains, “Often [Dos Passos] would
read a biography of one of these figures in preparation for a sketch and then use the material to support an entirely different set of conclusions” (Maine “Representative Men in Dos Passos’s *The 42nd Parallel*” 31). The biographical alterity that results from such repetition and différance demonstrates Dos Passos’ understanding of the varying modes of compliance facing those Americans subjected to the discipline of imperial governance. Celebrated Americans propagate the country’s imperial modes of discipline and punishment and dissenting voices are ultimately stifled through both informal and tangible methods of exclusion. However, through his inclusion of a wider range of Americans, Dos Passos adopts historical mimicry to destabilize the distinctions between those Americans who are considered authentically American and those marginal voices that remain unrepresented in standard discourse. By replicating the biographies of America’s influential elite and pairing them with these marginalized figures, *U.S.A.* explores how mimicry can resolve the practical and ethical difficulties in representing subaltern voices, including those that fundamentally conflict with the regulated American discourse.

To expose the imperial fallacies inherent to America’s collective understanding of notable Americans, *U.S.A.* invokes the public’s knowledge of powerful “authentic” Americans, such as Andrew Carnegie and Samuel Insull, to exemplify the disparity between the altruistic rendering of American’s governing elites and the undemocratic reality of their self-interested motivations. Although each of these men experience changes in reputation as their lives continue, public discourse surrounding Carnegie and Insull continues to be largely laudatory concerning their contributions to America. Bernard Alderson, author of one of Carnegie’s earliest biographies in 1909, borrows from John Ruskin describing the wealthy steel magnate as being, “the richest who, having perfected the function of his own life, also has the widest helpful interest” (Ruskin qtd. in Alderson vii). Alderson continues, praising “His life [as] a record of high aims and strenuous endeavor, disclosing constant indications of a master mind” (vii). In *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos duplicates the approving sentiments that surround the billionaire. Andrew Carnegie’s success in fulfilling the American dream results in his contributions of “millions for
peace / and libraries and scientific institutions and endowments and thrift/ whenever he made a billion dollars he endowed an institution to promote peace” (Dos Passos 42nd 208). Through this depiction, Dos Passos acknowledges the potential for such encomiums to influence the American public’s understanding of what constitutes success. Carnegie’s philanthropy acts as the signifier of his authentic status; the public is encouraged to admire Carnegie as a philanthropist without considering the benefits the steel magnate receives from his actions or how he earned his fortune. As Dos Passos suggests, Carnegie’s version of Americanness becomes the standard by which Americans judge themselves; moreover, Dos Passos’ suspicions are not unfounded. Biographers such as Alderson implicitly and explicitly encourage their readers to use Carnegie’s personal history as a model of successful Americanness:

The rising generation, as they follow the gradual growth of his fortunes, and the development of his character, may gather from an account of the winning of his wealth a strong incentive to encourage enterprise, and also appreciate the intention of his pithy paradox, ‘A man who dies rich dies disgraced. Who can fail to admire that firm purpose to complete his duties as he interprets them, which has reached a noble climax[?]’ (Alderson vii).

Carnegie’s acquisitiveness, confidence in the American system, and philanthropy all contribute to the continuance of the American empire and therefore must be supported by the public. As a means of garnering support, the American population is encouraged to share his approach to business and development.

In U.S.A., however, Dos Passos’ repetition of such philanthropic actions incorporate a subversive différance—a “sameness which is not identical”—in their biographical representation (Derrida Speech 129). Unlike Alderson’s biography, which acknowledges counterviews of Carnegie as a means of refuting the controversy surrounding him, Dos Passos purposefully
excludes representations of Carnegie’s less popular actions (Alderson 77). Instead, he incorporates a single comment about Carnegie’s altruism occurring, “always / except in time of war” (Dos Passos 42nd 208). Dos Passos’ succinct inclusion of this criticism accommodates his readers’ exposure to public discourse, as it predominantly corresponds with Carnegie’s other portrayals, yet the slight difference also ironically emphasizes the selectivity of public discourse’s portrayal of Carnegie. Without specifically citing the benefits the steel industry experienced during war, Dos Passos implies Carnegie abandons his purportedly altruistic ideology and condones war because he enjoys significant profits from its conflicts; resultantly, U.S.A. accentuates the contrast between the reality of Carnegie’s intentions and the persona depicted in public discourse.

Dos Passos’ repetition of the electricity innovator Samuel Insull’s personal history reemphasizes the imperialistic disparity between propagandistic endorsement of particular Americans and the less favorable reality of how these celebrated elites are motivated by self-interest. By emphasizing Insull’s ability to transform the language of the American dream into a method of advancement that controls the public’s response to his own actions, Dos Passos illustrates how imperialistic control of discourse determines which American figures are considered mimic-worthy figures. Like many Americans, Insull initially absorbs the language of the American dream and continues its diction. He is “fiercely determined to rise” and, as a foreigner, “To get a job with an American firm was to put a foot on the rung of a ladder that led up into the blue” (Dos Passos The Big Money 524). However, Insull’s interpretation of the American dream and his ability to mimic the actual actions of other authentic American figures gradually leads him to believe he “can do anything [he’d] like” as he “began to use the public’s money to spread his empire” (Dos Passos The Big Money 525). Therefore, similar to Americans

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3 For instance, Dos Passos avoids incorporating descriptions of Carnegie’s involvement in controversial labor disputes like the Homestead Strike.
such as Carnegie, Ford, and Wilson, Insull understands that the American dream fosters “the perpetual spotlight, the purple taste of empire” (Dos Passos The Big Money 525).

To acquire such success, Insull recognizes he must mimic an imperialistic ideology. He “bought” “hired men” in business, labor, and government, yet it is his control of discourse that largely dictates how “Incredibly his power grew” (Dos Passos The Big Money 524). As historian Schudson describes it, Insull’s background in wartime publicity allows him to control the language surrounding him in both tangible and intangible ways. After the war ends, he “borrow[s] the propaganda machinery he had used during the war” and manages the persona presented in the media, while he also silenced opposition through methods of discipline and punishment (Schudson 143). Just like the American systems Insull participates in, such control of discourse allows him to manipulate public perception of his actions: “If anybody didn’t like what Samuel Insull did he was a traitor” and therefore “Chicago damn well kept its mouth shut” (Dos Passos The Big Money 525). Resultantly, just like other powerful elites in America, Insull becomes a “Power Superpower” (Dos Passos The Big Money 523).

When Insull’s financial support of the media dwindles and he loses control of his narrative, the realities of his professional self-interest are exposed in a way that causes Insull to temporarily lose his status as an authentic American (Dos Passos The Big Money 526). Yet in spite of his prosecution and the public’s temporary condemnation for his mistreatment of funds, Insull eventually regains control of his public image and personal narrative (Dos Passos The Big Money 527). He bribes his way back into the public’s good graces by performing the version of Americanness that could reestablish his position as an authentic American (Dos Passos The Big Money 527). Invoking the rhetoric of the American dream, he “told his lifestory: from officeboy to powermagnate, his struggle to make good, his love for his home and the kiddies” (Dos Passos The Big Money 528). Moreover, while his performance technically occurs in court, the media documentation of his utterances results in the reality that “The Insulls stole the show” (Dos Passos The Big Money 528). Insull manipulates language in the present in order to reconstruct
perceptions of his past by adopting the language of the American dream, mimicking the authentic figures that were more consistent with their public personas, and insisting upon his own contributions to America’s greatness. As a result, he regains newspaper support in a way that effectively reestablishes Insull as an authentic American who now has “an odor of sanctity” about his “deposed monarch[y]” (Dos Passos The Big Money 528). Ultimately, by depicting the public’s fluctuating perceptions of Insull as both authentic and non-authentic, Dos Passos’ portrayal of Insull’s celebrated and notorious media personas ultimately exposes how the media adopts the rhetoric of the American dream in order to justify the exploitation of the American public. In other words, Dos Passos’ repetition of the language surrounding Insull’s mediated persona provides U.S.A. the opportunity to use the traditionally safe space of language for more subversive purposes.

In addition to his inclusion of powerful Americans who purposefully manipulate the discourse to mask their self-interests, Dos Passos then furthers his critique of America’s imperial nature by including biographies of Americans who forsake their ethics, such as Henry Ford, in order to more fully achieve the markers of success formulated by public discourse’s portrayal of valued Americans. As with Carnegie, early biographies of Henry Ford portray him as embodying the way in which the American dream reflects the transformation of a once-average American into his fundamentally exceptional self. For instance, R. W. Lane’s 1917 biography carries the subtitle, “How a Farmer Boy Rose to the Power That Goes With Many Millions Yet Never Lost Touch With Humanity” (Lane). Correspondingly, in Dos Passos’ mimicking text, Ford is both “like plenty of other Americans” as well as a celebrated, wealthy elite that enjoys significant influence in American affairs (Dos Passos The Big Money 71). However, Dos Passos’ portrayal of Ford’s actions maintains a différance that demonstrates the industrialist’s fundamental self-interest. Despite biographer Lane’s insistence that Ford “Cling[s] to [his] Principle” of peace, morality, and equality, Dos Passos illustrates how Ford gradually forsook his association with the American public in order to expedite his financial successes (Lane 117).
Like any boss, he encourages his workers to work efficiently; nevertheless, he soon manipulates them as if they were easily replaceable parts (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 72). He simulates support for the average American by allowing them “a cut (a very small cut) in the profits,” but “it turned out there were strings to it” that allow Ford to unnecessarily exploit his employees for his own advantage (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 72). Like other so-called authentic Americans who participate in the hegemonic regime’s control of the general population, Ford disregards the plight of average workers, those who had “every ounce of life[…] sucked off into production,” in order to further his own success (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 75). In a manner that both reifies the American dream and establishes its fictional nature, Ford’s initial insistence on his own averageness conveniently lessens as he manipulates average American workers to further his material gains.

Furthermore, like the imperialist regime he expands, Ford requires his workers to mimic an acceptable form of Americanness. They have to be “good, clean American workmen / who didn’t smoke or read” and most importantly did not “think” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 73). By indicating Ford’s control of these factors, Dos Passos presents Ford as promoting the mimicry sanctioned by public discourse. Trombold historicizes Dos Passos’ depiction of Ford, noting that Ford refused to tolerate diversity; rather, like the media’s attempt to compel sameness in the population, he “Americanized” workers as a system of discipline (Trombold “Constructed Image of Ethnicity in U.S.A. and Chosen Country” 146-147). Through the adoption of such imperialistic methods, Ford attains a formalized authenticity, as his management of workers allows him to become “The great American of his time” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 73). Moreover, as Dos Passos contends, Ford accomplishes this authenticity through this imperialistic manipulation of language and the insistence on discipline and control of his employees.

In addition to generalized descriptions of the Ford Motor Company, Dos Passos’ reproduction of Ford’s response to WWI reinforces the patterns of behavior established in his professional life. More specifically, Ford’s response to WWI demonstrates willingness to
abandon his initially held altruistic beliefs in favor of financial success. During WWI, Ford adopts a pacifist stance only to equivocate when he realizes the gains the Ford Motor Company would experience under wartime production. Interestingly, biographers such as Lane describe Ford’s pacifism as honorable and unselfish, yet they ironically describe his transition to wartime production in similar terms. Published in 1917, Lane’s biography only briefly mentions the possibility of Ford’s support for the war (Lane 182); nevertheless, in its brief concession, Ford’s inconsistent opinion about the Ford Motor Company’s involvement in war is justified as an additional form of American altruism. He uses his “practical ideals” to create an American “preparedness” that will benefit all Americans and assure the country can continue in its exceptional history (Lane 180). However, in contrast to these approving portrayals of Ford’s involvement in war, Dos Passos’ depiction of Ford’s wartime efforts convey an alternate tone: “Two years later Ford was manufacturing munitions, Eagle boats; Henry Ford was planning oneman tanks, and oneman submarines” (Dos Passos The Big Money 73). As Dos Passos’ chronicling implies, Ford not only adopts an attitude of patriotic compliance, which would satisfy public discourse’s desire for nationalistic mimicry, but actually immerses himself in the pursuit of furthering the war effort (Dos Passos The Big Money 73). His pacifism diminishes due to the financial gains he achieves through wartime production (Dos Passos The Big Money 74).

While such a subversive critique of Ford is certainly present in U.S.A., Dos Passos’ critique largely remains implicit as Dos Passos maintains the language of traditional biographies. Interestingly, Dos Passos’ ability to sustain less overtly critical linguistic repetition actually accentuates the self-interestedness of Ford’s actions and therefore more effectively conveys a dissenting voice that avoids possible censoring. From the perspective of the American public, Ford fulfills the promise of the American dream and reinforces public discourse’s appeals for mimicry. He achieves authenticity and enjoys financial success by complying with patriotic wartime appeals. Appropriately, then, Ford’s actions evoke complimentary and patriotic language both in traditional biographies as well as Dos Passos’ mimicking text because, in both
versions of his biography, Ford performs the role of the authentic American. Within the trilogy, however, that very authenticity explains why Ford is so willing to exploit the American public and take advantage of American foreign policy. Ford controls the discourse around him, disallows accusations of self-motivated interestedness, and implicitly justifies his imperialistic governance of his workers in the name of free enterprise. Dos Passos’ iterability of the language of authenticity therefore demonstrates how the discourse describing Ford’s actions functions as a method of discipline for the American public while it promotes the continuation of America’s imperialistic governance. Although Ford admittedly questions the long-term impact of his inventions before his death, he nevertheless directly contributes to the “effects industrialization had on human beings” that develops into a dangerous ideology that oppresses working Americans (Ludington 281).

While Dos Passos portrays Americans such as Carnegie, Insull, and Ford as more calculating in their acceptance of America’s imperialistic tendencies, he also includes biographies of Americans who less deliberately continue such control. Figures like Charles Proteus Steinmetz fail to recognize how influential Americans exploit the population’s naïve belief in the integrity of the country’s supposed commitment to freedom and equality. While these naïve Americans are not wholly unsympathetic, for their focus on invention dictates they remain largely oblivious to outside forces, they ultimately fail to recognize and to prevent their own exploitation. As a result, these unsuspecting Americans unintentionally contribute to the perpetuation of America’s imperialistic governance. For example, Dos Passos portrays mathematician and engineer Charles Steinmetz as one of many well-intentioned immigrants who subscribe to the myth of the American dream (Dos Passos 42nd 254-255). Yet despite good intentions, Steinmetz fails to recognize how General Electric “humored him” in order to benefit the already wealthy elites who encourage distance between themselves and the American public (Dos Passos 42nd 256). Just as the hegemonic regime approaches the average population, General Electric considers Steinmetz...

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4 Later in life, Ford planned on reconstructing a village that celebrated American life before the automobile.
“a piece of apparatus” that can be manipulated and controlled through discourse (Dos Passos 42\textsuperscript{nd} 256, 257). Both Steinmetz and the American public are therefore placated through a system of selective recognition that grants them the potential for authenticity while simultaneously relegating them to the peripheries of American discourse (Dos Passos 42\textsuperscript{nd} 257). Like Ford’s workers, they remain “valuable piece[s] of apparatus[es]” as long as they fulfill the roles prescribed them, which only lasts until they “wore out” and ceased to be valuable (Dos Passos 42\textsuperscript{nd} 257). As a result of such exploitation, Steinmetz’s ability to feel “the topheavy weight of society” ultimately fails to positively change the dominant culture (Dos Passos 42\textsuperscript{nd} 255). America’s influential elites—represented by General Electric—successfully contain Steinmetz’s subversive potential in a manner that not only obstructs his agency, but also perpetuates the power of governing systems by disallowing him “human relations that affect the stockholders’ money and the directors’ salaries” (Dos Passos 42\textsuperscript{nd} 256). He allows General Electric to perpetuate a disparity between the productive worker and the wealthy businessmen, concedes to the selective freedoms the company gives him, and allows his own image to continue the monopolistic control the company has over the economy (Dos Passos 42\textsuperscript{nd} 456). As such, Steinmetz unintentionally preserves America’s imperialistic methods of discipline and containment through his lack of resistance.

*U.S.A.* also includes biographies of Americans who recognize America’s imperial modes of governance in a way that Steinmetz’s naivety disallows. Biographies of people like Fred Taylor display how a distrust of American’s imperialistic techniques does not necessarily result in a rectification of the disparaging realities of American imperialism. Like Henry Ford, Fred Winslow Taylor sought to improve industrial efficiency and “scientific management” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 46). Displaying his belief in the America presented in public discourse, Fred Taylor translates his belief in the American dream into what he calls “the American plan” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 44). Citing Taylor’s own descriptions, Dos Passos’ biography conveys that this system works through “the right way,” which “means increased production,
lower costs, higher wages, bigger profits” (Dos Passos The Big Money 44). The average worker not only participates in the progress of American production, but also receives its benefits; thus, the American plan functions via the same ideology as the American dream because it equates hard work and sacrifice with personal advancement. However, as Dos Passos notes and Ford’s biography foreshadows, “Fred Taylor never saw the working of the American plan” (Dos Passos The Big Money 48). He failed to recognize his endorsement of the common American upset the influential elites, and “that’s where he began to get in trouble with the owners” (Dos Passos The Big Money 46). Dos Passos literally reproduces Taylor’s responding premise that “any improvement is not only opposed but aggressively and bitterly opposed by the majority of men” (Dos Passos The Big Money 47). Paired with the reality that “Fred Taylor / inventor of efficiency / … / was unceremoniously fired” for his endorsement of the average American worker, Dos Passos’ iteration demonstrates the effects of Taylor’s realization of America’s imperialistic methods of governance (Dos Passos The Big Money 47).

By eventually coming to realize that businessmen desire a worker “who’d do what he was told” but did not demand “firstclass pay” for “firstclass work” and more importantly did not “think,” Taylor recognizes America is controlled by a powerful minority that largely discounts the potential and integrity of the American public (Dos Passos The Big Money 46, 48). Nevertheless, as Dos Passos’ reproduction of his biography indicates, Taylor fails to counter the system of American governance that conflicts with his vision of the American plan. U.S.A.’s iteration of Taylor’s life incorporates a différance through its ironic juxtaposition of Taylor’s commitment to “the cutting down waste and idleness” and the facts of Taylor’s eventual adoption of prolonged leisure after his dismissal from Bethlehem Steel because “he couldn’t afford” to work for money (Dos Passos The Big Money 47). The inclusion of such details—and not just his professional accomplishments—indicates the ways in which the American hegemonic regime can influence the possible responses to recognition of America’s systems of discipline and enforcement. Even though Taylor realizes the disparity between the common American worker
and the powerful bosses, he passively accepts his own disciplinary silencing; therefore, he implicitly allows for the continuation of imperialistic American control over the American public. Dos Passos remains within the safe space of non-subversive diction, for he largely avoids direct political statements, yet *U.S.A.*’s supplement functions as a subversive irony that questions the figure’s response to the neoteric imperialism he experiences.

Alternatively, those who adopt more outspoken repudiations of American empire, such as Jack Reed and Randolph Bourne, allow Dos Passos to reemphasize the pervasive control of the American system. Although they believe in American ideals of freedom and equality, America’s dissenting voices fail to infiltrate public discourse because they are restricted through the country’s imperial systems of discipline and punishment. For instance, Jack Reed’s initially unquestioning acceptance of the “broad [Harvard] a and those contacts so useful in later life and good English prose” eventually changes as Reed struggles to reconcile the language he learns as a youth with the disparities in wealth and status he sees in America (Dos Passos 1919 8). Dos Passos mimics his internal dialogue, reflecting, “in school hadnt he learned the Declaration of Independence by heart?” and then adding, “Reed was a westerner and words meant what they said; […] Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Dos Passos 1919 9). As Dos Passos implies, Reed recognizes a disconnect between the rhetoric of America’s founding documents and the realities of the imperialistic control of the American public. He knows that “textile workers parading [were] beaten up by cops, the strikers in jail,” even though the Bill of Rights specifies the right to peacefully assemble (Dos Passos 1919 9). However, unlike Taylor, Reed’s consciousness of such un-American actions in America inspires him to adopt a dissenting voice. More specifically, in response to his realization of the constraints placed upon the American public, Reed attempts to subvert the imperialistic system of governance through one of its primary systems of control: media discourse. He “ducked under censorships and risked [his] skins for a story” that would convey the truth of America’s involvement in war, not the propagandistic depictions circulated in the media (Dos Passos 1919 10). As Dos Passos’
biography suggests, Reed strives to give voice to the marginalized Americans who find themselves fighting at home and abroad. He attempts to utilize his elite education, his contacts, and his writing to subversively engage with the system that he must counter.

Yet although Dos Passos describes Reed as “the best American writer of his time” and “if anyone had wanted to know about the war they could have read about it in the articles he wrote,” U.S.A. also indicates that Reed faced formal and informal censorship of his writing (Dos Passos 1919 10). In addition to the governmental censors, “If anyone had wanted to know” and “could have” suggest the possibility that the public chooses not to acknowledge what it does not want to (Dos Passos 1919 10); by consenting to such limited media reports, the public implicitly condones the media’s practices. Therefore, Reed’s alternate narratives perspectives, which emphasize “machinegunfire and arson / starvation lice bedbugs cholera typhus / no lint for bandages no chloroform or ether thousands dead of gangrene wounds cordon sanitaire and everywhere spies,” fail to be incorporated into the public discourse of war (Dos Passos 1919 11). Without an audience for his claims that the war was an imperialist attempt to “mak[e] the world safe for the Morgan-Baker-Stillman combination of banks,” Reed undergoes both formal and informal discipline (Dos Passos 1919 11). In response, “A man has to do many things in his life,” and Reed’s struggle to give voice to the fallacies of the American system ultimately compels him to leave the country and focus on a struggle he sees potential in enacting change through (Dos Passos 1919 12). In other words, the freedom of speech promised under the American system presents itself in reality as a fiction that silences Reed in the United States media.

Similar to Jack Reed, Randolph Bourne also suffers from formal and informal systems of discipline and punishment due to his recognition of America’s imperialistic governance. Furthermore, Dos Passos’ iteration of Bourne’s biographical facts, including excerpts from his writings, exploits a différence in Bourne’s language that repurposes his dictum “War is the health of the state” to make it applicable not only to WWI but also to America’s more general adherence to imperialistic policies (Dos Passos 1919 80). Utilizing America’s response to WWI as a
paradigm of America’s policies, Randolph Bourne examines American governance and recognizes the fiction behind its rhetoric. As Dos Passos describes, Bourne longs to believe in “Wilson’s New Freedom,” yet “he was too good a mathematician; he had to work the equations out” (Dos Passos 1919 80). Through his philosophical examinations, Bourne understands the fictional nature of America’s purported ideals:

for New Freedom read Conscription, for Democracy, Win the War, for Reform, Safeguard the Morgan Loans,

for Progress Civilization Education Service
Buy a Liberty Bond,
Straff the Hun,
Jail the Objectors. (Dos Passos 1919 80)

Once Bourne begins to voice his dissent, however, “he began to get unpopular” in a manner that eventually contained his subversive pronouncements (Dos Passos 1919 80). In accordance with Wilson’s commitment to responding to dissent with “Force to the utmost,” Dos Passos details how Bourne “was cartooned, shadowed by the espionage service and the counter-espionage service; taking a walk with two girl friends at Wood’s Hole he was arrested, a trunk full of manuscripts was stolen from him in Connecticut” (Dos Passos 1919 81). Dos Passos purposefully excludes certain details in these repetitions of facts, such as what charges Bourne faced at arrest and who stole his manuscripts, yet they nevertheless convey a subversive message. In other words, Dos Passos remains in what could be considered a safe space of dissent even while condemning the hegemonic regime’s response to Bourne. Although U.S.A.’s biography of Bourne avoids openly critical condemnation of Wilson, war, and America as a nation, expressions of neoteric imperialism in America are clearly documented. Consequently, by utilizing the menace of iterability through repetition and ultimately through omission, Dos Passos similarly adopts the “shrill” yet paradoxically “soundless” repetitions that parallel the mannerisms of “a ghost / […] / crying out” to condemn the American government for its imperialistic discipline
(Dos Passos 1919 81). The différance of Dos Passos’ repetitions and omissions “organiz[e]” the “collectivity of presences” in a way that allows Dos Passos to remain largely uncensored in his critique (Derrida “Signature” 9).

By utilizing the différance of iterability in his arrangement of accepted fact, U.S.A.’s biographies allege that admired figures frequently endorse and thrive upon imperial systems of control, including the control of discourse that initially establishes their position as authentic Americans. Moreover, Dos Passos’ depictions of Americans who resist the forces upon them reveal the power by which such influential Americans can contain dissent among the general population. Yet beyond the effectiveness of this biographical repetitions, Dos Passos’ politically subversive and painfully graphic biography of the Unknown Soldier in “The Body of an American” uses the power of anonymity as a means of accentuating the imperialistic themes established throughout the trilogy. Largely because this deceased soldier represents any and all of America’s silent non-authentic members, Dos Passos uses this unnamed American to mimic the publically endorsed discourse, to expose the disparity between such rhetoric and reality, and to provide illustrations of the stark consequences of the continuance of America’s neoteric imperialistic gestures and policies.

In reference to memorials like WWI’s Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Benedict Anderson opines that “No more arresting emblems of modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of unknown soldiers,” for they are fundamentally “saturated with ghostly national imaginings” (Anderson 9). Dos Passos’ trilogy mimics these public imaginings, openly mocking the repetition of discourse surrounding the Tomb’s dedication, while simultaneously incorporating a différance that documents the imperialistic process through which the government developed the project. Purposefully adopting distorted language of the public address, “The Body of an American” replicates events as heard by the American public at the dedicatory service: “theunitedstatesthe body of an American whowasamemberoftheamericanexpeditionary-forcesineuropewholosthis lifeduringtheworldwarandwhosidentityhasnot beenestablished” (Dos
Yet in spite of Dos Passos’ literal repetition of this official ceremony, *U.S.A.*’s replication of the public dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier utilizes mimicry to effectively convey a subversive tone. Dos Passos consolidates the language about America’s involvement in the war into lengthy portmanteau-like words, yet the phrase “body of an American” retains its conventional coherence (Dos Passos 1919 375). Resultantly, the normalcy of the phrase accentuates the abnormalcy of the scene Dos Passos portrays. Presidents Wilson and Harding’s appeals to American exceptionalism and altruism have resulted in the sacrifice of non-authentic Americans who have been reduced to bodies as they are denied discourse’s promise of active participation in American government (Dos Passos 1919 377, 375). In this context, President Harding’s dedicatory speech, with its references to America’s exceptional “*representative democracy*” and the encouragement of American sacrifice during “*the indisputable justice of his country’s cause,*” belies how the American public is fundamentally unable to truly engage with the messages presented in discourse (Dos Passos 1919 377). They are promised equality, but deemed more suitable for sacrifice than America’s financial elites. Therefore, although the rhetoric of public discourse reflects the government’s propagated version of war, it remains contradictory and absurd as it does so.

Dos Passos similarly dispels the controlling fiction of American discourse through the mimicry and integration of newsprint media depictions of the event that largely treat the ceremony as a performance (Dos Passos 1919 376). *U.S.A.* replicates the descriptions of the “*day […] too meaningful and tragic for applause*”:

> Though this was a time of mourning, such an assemblage necessarily has about it a touch of color. In the boxes are seen the court uniforms of foreign diplomats, the gold braid of our own and foreign fleets and armies, the black of the conventional morning dress of American statesmen, the varicolored furs and outdoor wrapping garments of mothers and sisters come to mourn, the drab and
blue of soldiers and sailors, the glitter of musical instruments and the white and black of vested choir. (Dos Passos 1919 376)

While both the original media source and Dos Passos address the ceremonious and performative characteristics of the event, Dos Passos’ mimicry also suggests the performative nature of all American discourse, including such speeches, memorials, and media sources. The glorification of the sacrifice of an unknown American soldier through flowers and arbitrary medals—“the Congressional Medal, the D.S.C., the Medaille Miltaire, the Belgian Croix de Guerre,” etc.—serves to fundamentally distract the American public from recognizing America’s imperialistic governance (Dos Passos 1919 379-380). In other words, the American government grants an Unknown Soldier authenticity in his death and his anonymity dictates the possibility for all Americans to achieve this status. Consequently, like the government’s physical control of the deceased soldier’s body, the American public is encouraged to relinquish their individual integrity for the benefit of the nation. The selective recognition America’s influential elites grant the American public therefore functions as a means of fortifying the imperialistic control of the population.

While Dos Passos’ mimicry of state discourse establishes the absurdities and dangers inherent to the rhetoric surrounding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Dos Passos also hypothesizes what language was spoken during the planning of the memorial in order to accentuate the disparity between rhetoric and reality concerning America’s supposedly egalitarian population. In the search for a “hundredpercent” average American, the government applies concepts of authenticity that exclude the majority of the population (Dos Passos 1919 375). Not only must the government “Make sure he aint a dinge, boys, / make sure he aint a guinea or a kike,” but they must also project a narrative onto the unknown man that will further discipline and control (Dos Passos 1919 375). Simultaneously average and exceptional, the Unknown Soldier must appeal to all Americans in order to effectively compel mimicry and validate the American dream, even as its protagonist lies dead. To replicate the imposition of such a narrative
upon the public, Dos Passos locates the soldier’s home “in Brooklyn, in Memphis, near the lakefront in Cleveland, Ohio, in the stench of the stockyards in Chi, on Beacon Hill, in an old brick house in Alexandria Virginia, on Telegraph Hill, in a halftimbered Tudor cottage in Portland the city of roses” (Dos Passos 1919 376). Similarly, the soldier works as “busboy harveststiff hogcaller boyscout champeen cornshucker of Western Kansas bellhop at the United States Hotel at Saratoga Springs office boy callboy fruiter telephone lineman longshoreman lumberjack plumber’s helper” before he pursued “a service record for the future (imperishable soul)” (Dos Passos 1919 377). As Dos Passos’ portrayal signifies, anonymous man exists both nowhere and everywhere and his anonymity facilitates the public’s personal associations with his sacrifice.

Nevertheless, despite the sentimentality of the “beautifully sad” narrative and the somber image of Wilson’s “bouquet of poppies,” Dos Passos recognizes that the search for “John Doe” more accurately evokes the government’s impersonal approach to the average American and “the reel of chloride of lime and the dead” (Dos Passos 1919 379, 380, 375). The American mode of governance only strays from its perfunctory treatment of people, where “they weighed you, measured you, looked for flat feet, squeezed your penis to see if you have clap, looked up your anus to see if you had piles, counted your teeth [etc.]” after the government asserted strict imperialistic control over the population (Dos Passos 1919 377). They indoctrinate the public with “Thou shalt not” and “My country right or wrong” only to ignore the stark realities of when “The blood ran into the ground” (Dos Passos 1919 378, 379). By emphasizing these disparities, Dos Passos’ iteration of the language surrounding the Unknown Soldier—as a real person and not a nationalistic imagining—ultimately establishes the consequences of the continuation of America’s imperialistic governance and control of discourse. The government’s rhetoric of authenticity destructively encourages other Americans to participate in its imperialistic system of nationalizing discipline. As such, the conclusions drawn from the biography of the Unknown
As Dos Passos reflects in his journals and *U.S.A.*’s biographies demonstrate, historical writing provides a critical method of exposing the “daydream”-like disparity between public discourse and reality: “It seems to me that history is always more alive and more interesting than fiction. I suppose that is because a story is the daydream of a single man, while history is a mass-invention, the daydream of a race” (qtd. in Pizer 74). By critiquing the daydream of the American hegemonic system through *U.S.A.*’s biographical mimicry, Dos Passos denounces the imperialistically inspired rhetoric that pervades the discourse surrounding so-called authentic Americans while also recognizing the exclusion of dissenting voices from public discourse. Just as importantly, however, Dos Passos’ subversive critiques of America’s governance mimic biographical form in order to remain in a safe space of dissent. Thus, similar to the Newsreels’ “only seemingly documentary” nature, Dos Passos paradoxically situates his biographical representations in the repetition of historical fact as well as in the context of literary fiction (Pizer 83). The biographies adopt an exaggerated approach to mimicry’s différance that results in *U.S.A.* countering what is considered an easily contained space of subversion through two distinct methods. Precise historical citations allow Dos Passos to present seemingly objective facts—those which grant him the safety of mimicry—while alternate contexts and juxtapositions expose the menace of such duplication. Alternatively, when the text strays from the factual and presents openly critical and complimentary depictions, which traditionally subjects authors to censorship, the fictive nature of the trilogy provides a qualification that counters those who deem Dos Passos’ text dangerously political. The dexterity by which Dos Passos transitions from the fictional to the factual allows the trilogy to achieve subversion through a typically regulated linguistic space.\(^5\) In

\(^5\) Admittedly, Dos Passos experienced censorship issues when he attempted to have *U.S.A.* published; however, as the author’s biographer Townsend Ludington notes, these publication difficulties largely occurred due to the publisher’s personal and professional relationship with J. P. Morgan, a figure that *U.S.A.*’s mimicry effectively disparages.
other words, Dos Passos denounces the very form of discourse he employs as he depicts the imperial natures inherent to America’s revered figures and gives voice to those traditionally excluded from sanctioned authenticity and biography. Therefore, as with the other narrative forms of the trilogy, Dos Passos’ biographies utilize the space of dissent to resolve the practical and ethical difficulties in representing subaltern voices, especially those that fundamentally conflict with the publicly endorsed American discourse.
CHAPTER FOUR
SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURES: RECOGNIZING FICTIONS AND DECENTERING REGULATORY DISCOURSE IN THE NARRATIVES

While both the Newsreels and the biographies engage with direct versions of mimicry in their reproductions of established public discourse, *U.S.A.* also incorporates traditional narrative form to enact mimicry and simultaneously expose the damaging realities of imperialist discourse. Discourse’s insistence on mimicry claims to provide a method of achieving authenticity, yet the powerful illusion of the American dream actually contributes to the widespread utilization of imperialistic methods of discipline and control. However, despite the pervasiveness of such discipline, Dos Passos’ use of a traditional literary form allows *U.S.A.*’s content to function in conjunction with its form in order to expose a neoteric American imperialism and to offer a politically subversive work of literature. With both classical and neoteric imperialist methods of control restricting what discourse can be reproduced and endorsed, Dos Passos repeats the accepted and safe literary form while he maintains a différance that ultimately grants subaltern figures a voice that, in Judith Butler’s terms, can be recognized and “centered” (Butler *Precarious* 18). The iterability of the literary narratives therefore engages in an act of recognition that subverts the oppressive power of discourse. While it controls responses to failure and minimizes the production of subalter narratives, Dos Passos equally privileges the voices of “non-authentic” Americans, exemplified by Eleanor Stoddard and Joe Williams, and the “authentic” characters found elsewhere in the trilogy and public discourse. By portraying these non-authentic characters’ reliance on the American dream, Dos Passos demonstrates the American public’s detrimental adherence to the fictions propagated by America’s imperialistic system of governance. In other words, through mimicry and recognition, the narratives counter the very constraints and conventions that Dos Passos’ form employs by acknowledging the public’s adherence to public discourse, by depicting the fluctuations in their belief in mimicry and its fictions, and by exposing the destructive consequences of America’s imperialistic domestic
Dos Passos’ repetition of domestic imperialism disrupts America’s imperialistic system of control by utilizing the menace inherent to the mimicry that public discourse encourages non-authentic Americans to adopt.

The form of U.S.A.’s narratives reflects the trilogy’s content as they critique the fundamental imperialism inherent to American discourse. The mundane realities and ingrained desperation experienced by U.S.A.’s characters are reinforced and emphasized through the somewhat monotonous and conventional prose. Dos Passos channels the imperialist methods of discipline within his narratives as he exposes the vacuity of the general public that directly results from neoteric imperial control; the reader experiences a literary experience that simulates the emptiness that the characters feel. Undeniably, Dos Passos’ use of such a conventional narrative technique frequently garners criticism from those who applaud the modernist approach and radical politics of the other sections of the trilogy. Pizer expresses this critical trend by noting Dos Passos’ narratives are frequently considered “flat, colorless,” and uninspired compared to the other literary methods of the trilogy (Pizer 64). Admittedly, the narratives progress within the traditional conventions of literature; they are primarily linear, offer relatively static characters, and frequently revert to cliché as the characters attempt to reclaim their already fated lives. Accordingly, Pizer further recognizes the narratives as “remarkably similar in characterization and plotting to those conventional novels” (Pizer 64). While numerous critics critique Dos Passos’ narratives as archaic, Pizer suggests that “the jaded and worn language of the narratives” convey “the underlying failure...of those who approach life without independent vision” (Pizer 69). To further Pizer’s claim, the narratives not only critique those without independent vision, but also condemn the governing discourse that makes such individuality impossible. Consequently, although Dos Passos mimics the orthodox novel form in all its unoriginality and cliché, he uses these traditional methods to show the stagnancy that pervades American life and, equally importantly, American discourse. U.S.A. emphasizes the despondency that results from overly imperialistic methods of control in the lives of the general American public. Moreover, by
examining singular events through different characters’ perspectives, Dos Passos develops and accentuates the différence inherent to iterability as he provides a model for the fundamental subversiveness of his literary project.

*U.S.A.* includes formal narratives for twelve principle characters. Although characters from later narratives are incorporated in the text, *The 42nd Parallel* introduces the reader to Fenian “Mac” McCreary, Janey Williams, Eleanor Stoddard, J. W. Moorehouse, and Charley Anderson. The novel presents Fenian “Mac” McCreary as a working class printer who eventually becomes involved in radical politics, introduces both Janey Williams and Eleanor Stoddard as women who desperately long for material success and social refinement, and establishes both J. W. Moorehouse and Charley Anderson as ambitious businessmen who gradually advance by disregarding the damage they do to others. While *1919* includes these figures in its narratives, *U.S.A.*’s second text also grants Joe Williams, Richard Ellsworth “Dick” Savage, Eveline Hutchins, Anne Elizabeth “Daughter” Trent, and Ben Compton their own individual sections. Throughout the trilogy, Joe Williams, Janey Williams’ brother, seeks advancement from his lower middle class upbringing through adventure, yet he is ultimately disillusioned by his experience. Unlike Joe, Dick Savage revels in the advancements that his own class provides him; nevertheless, his actions similarly result in a “lack of moral rigor” (Nanney 183). Analogous to Dick’s gradual moral decline, Anne Elizabeth Trent and Eveline Hutchins find their initially wholesome personal values corrupted; however, it is their naivety, and less so their ambition, that largely contributes to such moral deterioration. *1919* also reintroduces its readers to Ben Compton, a political radical whose narrative is fundamentally interwoven with the narratives of Mary French in *The Big Money*. Despite adopting different methods and somewhat different intentions in their pursuit of social and political change, both of these characters engage with radical activism in a way that the other figures avoid. Finally, *The Big Money* also introduces Margo Dowling as having similar characteristics as Charley Anderson and J. W. Moorehouse, in that she consciously manipulates others to advance her own career.
In spite of their stark differences, as Nanney contends, the narrative characters all “establish an overarching theme that extends to the lives of all the other characters in the novel” (Nanney 179). Although Dos Passos organizes their narratives by character, many figures reappear in other sections as Dos Passos “interlaces” narratives to demonstrate what the author later described as “the basic tragedy… [that comes from] man’s struggle for life against the strangling institutions he himself creates” (Nanney 180, 177). They find themselves susceptible to the power of public discourse, and particularly the myth of the American dream, as they struggle to live under the “overpowering weight of social and industrial institutions in modern life” (Nanney 186). These characters share the American experience of “blood [that] tingles with wants; mind is a beehive of hopes buzzing and stinging,” yet they also share the fundamental unattainability of these hopes and desires (Dos Passos 42nd xiii). By exploring “A contemporary commentary on history’s changes, always as seen by some individual’s eyes, heard by some individual’s ears, felt through some individual’s nerves and tissues,” the trilogy’s interlacing technique ultimately maintains a cohesive commentary on American ideology (Dos Passos qtd. in Nanney 178). As a result, the reader experiences “the novel as mural, with society’s heroes standing out from the flames of history while the small-figured masses toil at their feet” (Doctorow 100).

E. L. Doctorow describes U.S.A.’s characters as “ordinaries” that “liv[e] below the headlines” of public discourse (Doctorow 102); however, while they do experience alternate realities the media fails to report, Dos Passos’ narratives demonstrate the ways in which public discourse directly produces the despondency of their lives. By inviting imperialistic mimicry and encouraging the public to consent to systems of governance that promise them authenticity, public discourse establishes a fictive, idyllic version of America that remains fundamentally inaccessible to the vast majority of the American population. Even though Americans retain the belief in their freedoms and their ability to achieve success, imperialistic discipline and control ultimately obstruct the majority’s capacity to “exercise their freedom,” a hindrance that relegates
them to the peripheries of society and marginalizes their ability to enact change within the imperialistic American system (Butler and Spivak 20). Consequently lacking agency, U.S.A.’s characters subscribe to public discourse’s version of the American dream and unintentionally fortify the controlling fiction, even during moments when they recognize the futility of its fulfillment.

With the realities of her own life contrasting the depiction of the American dream in public discourse, Eleanor Stoddard literally and figuratively “used to dream” that she had the life of “real” Americans (Dos Passos 42nd 165). As a child, she recurrently dreamt,

She used to live alone with her mother in a big clean white house in Oak Park in winter when there was snow on the ground and she’d been setting a white linen tablecloth with bright white silver and she’d set white flowers and a white meat of chicken before her mother who was a society lady in a dress of white samite. (Dos Passos 42nd 165)

While Eleanor’s frequent returns to whiteness can be understood in its traditional interpretation as a symbol of her desire to maintain purity, the emphasis on white also indicates more contentious, subliminal effects of the fiction of the American dream. As a product of a childhood exposed to discourse but not entirely conscious of its ramifications, Eleanor’s dream reflects the requirements for authentic Americanness she sees exhibited in public discourse. The recurrence of white objects—snow, linens, flowers, meat, and dress—suggests the dominance of purity and, quite literally, whiteness in its cultural and racial sense. Dos Passos’ personal correspondence confirms such an emphasis on cultural purity and whiteness, conveying, “They stupidly hate so many people here. They hate the Jews, the Irish, the Bolsheviks, the Catholics, the Negroes, the Italians, the Poles” (qtd. in Ludington 204); essentially, ethnicity contradicts the “singular and homogenous” image that is necessary to enforce colonial mimicry (Butler and Spivak 30). Therefore, similar to the racial purification alluded to in the Newsreels and in Gus Moscowski’s lecturing striking miners about “how the ‘Mericans they think everybody’s a bum ‘cept you an’
me,” Eleanor’s dream suggests that the public discourse’s demand for a uniform Americanness largely requires its citizens to reject ethnicity in favor of racial, social, economic, and political sameness (Dos Passos 42nd 283; The Big Money 154; 1919 82). Those non-authentic Americans who cannot fulfill this pure version of Americanness, including Eleanor, find themselves only capable of mimicking the implied ideal. Moreover, in addition to the dream’s allusions to American purity, Mrs. Stoddard’s status as “a society lady” reflects Eleanor’s acknowledgement of the requirement of wealth to be happy in America. Public discourse claims America retains the egalitarian nature of its founding, yet even a child understands the power of affluence. Mrs. Stoddard’s luxurious “white samite” gown not only implies wealth, but also recalls the fabric’s imperial legacy and subtly indicates authentic American’s imperialistically acquired bounties (Dos Passos 42nd 165). Thus, while reflecting her own desires, Eleanor’s childhood American dream also incorporates the aspects of the American dream implicit in discourse, including racial purity, wealth, and imperialistic control over the non-authentic population.

However, although Eleanor yearns for the childhood fulfillment of the American dream, even her subconscious expression of this longing reflects a disparity between desire and reality. Her dream continues,

There’d suddenly be a tiny red speck on the table and it would grow and grow and her mother would make helpless fluttering motions with her hands and she’d try to brush it off but it would grow a spot of blood welling into a bloody blot spreading over the tablecloth and she’d wake up out of the nightmare smelling the stockyards and screaming. (Dos Passos 42nd 165)

No longer a dream but a nightmarish reality, her real life gradually infiltrates Eleanor’s scene through the blood from her father’s stockyard. In addition to this scene’s sexual overtones, which foreshadow Eleanor’s fear of her own sexuality, the blood’s spread towards Mrs. Savage’s dress

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6 Samite was a major commodity of the Silk Road, a system of trade that helped numerous empires expand, including China, Ancient Rome, and Persia.
also symbolizes the blemish of American imperialism—the violent discipline and punishment of the American population to maintain international and domestic control. In the context of Eleanor’s dream, the pleasures of pure white samite intrinsically involve the blood and sacrifice of those who weave its silks, while the blood on the table represents the blood of those who butcher the meat before it is enjoyed at the table. Subconsciously aware that purity only exists in her dream and she is one of the non-authentic Americans who are frequently forced to make such sacrifices, Eleanor not only hates the blood of the stockyard, but also “hated everything” about her life when she compares it to the standards of authenticity presented in discourse (Dos Passos 42nd 165). Her dream temporarily grants her nightly release from her working class background, yet it also reinforces the roles of authentic and non-authentic participants in its narrative. In other words, public discourse ironically provides her solace as it reinforces her pain; like the red overcoming her white, the temporary reliefs offered by the American dream are ultimately overwhelmed by the unfavorable realities of Eleanor’s daily existence.

Despite the emblematic failure of sustaining the American dream in her childhood fantasy, Eleanor continues to accept public discourse and model her life on its fictions. She desperately desires a romantic lifestyle filled with social prominence and wealth so she mimics the stereotypical behaviors of authentic Americans who enjoy such status. In accordance with the fear of sexuality alluded to in her childhood fantasy, her early attempts at mimicry focus on sentimental women. Eleanor admires Miss Oliphant for her elitist approach to art as “something ivory white and very pure and noble and distant and sad” and even mimics the behaviors of Eveline Hutchins, whom Eleanor perceives as wealthy and socially established (Dos Passos 42nd 166, 169). Additionally, Eleanor frequently relies on homosexual and asexual men to fortify her pursuit of the American dream. When her homosexual French tutor Maurice describes, “How he’d come to America because it was the land of youth and the future and skyscrapers,” Eleanor

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7 Eleanor later notices the tutor’s homosexual tendencies without recognizing what they mean. She describes, “Maurice didn’t like Eveline the way Eveline liked him […] but Maurice and Eric seemed to be thoroughly happy. They slept in the same bed and were always together” (Dos Passos 42nd 174).
only briefly hesitates before affirming his version of the American dream and accepting it as her own (Dos Passos 42nd 173). After this experience, she adopts a more enthusiastic pursuit of mimicking the behaviors of authentic Americans. Her eagerness provides her with temporary social success—“News got around that she was a society girl and didn’t really have to earn a living at all”—regardless of the less than romantic realities of her strenuous quotidian life (Dos Passos 42nd 176). She represses her intrinsic dissatisfaction with life by avoiding her father’s communications, deceiving herself into viewing her decrepit lifestyle as “worn […] but very refined,” and maintaining fantasies about her eventual success: “She could see it in the headlines MARSHALL FIELD EMPLOYEE INHERITS MILLIONS” (Dos Passos 42nd 177, 178, 180).

Despite her fantasies, Eleanor remains dissatisfied with her life. However, when Eleanor finally admits to Eveline “She hated [her current situation] like poison,” she does not refute the American dream, but instead supplants it with an alternate version of its fictions (Dos Passos 42nd 183). Eleanor once again immerses herself in the performance of authenticity by adopting the artistic lifestyle, and she moves to New York with the hopes of discovering the America dream previously described by Maurice (Dos Passos 42nd 184-185). Admittedly, her move to New York parallels the narrative of the American dream and temporarily offers her potential fulfillment of its promises; nonetheless, Eleanor’s fantasy soon succumbs to reality. She achieves little success upon arrival as she fails at her first job, Eveline returns to Chicago, and Eleanor once again finds herself fantasying about social advancement through her attachments to strong women and nonthreatening men (Dos Passos 42nd 220). Significantly, her insistence on mimicking the rhetoric of the American dream manifests itself symbolically through her attachment to Moorehouse, whom Pizer aptly describes as “asexual” (Pizer 130). Interestingly, Moorehouse directly contributes to the rhetoric of discourse in his profession; thus, Eleanor’s affection towards Moorehouse not only indicates her reliance on others’ opinions for validation, but more importantly, her desire to authenticate her life through the language approved by public discourse. She seeks Moorehouse’s approval, mimics his beliefs, and willingly performs the roles public
discourse grants her regardless if she finds them fundamentally dissatisfying. (Dos Passos 42nd 221, 277, 282).

Although she eventually achieves societal status and wealth through her performance of these roles, a disparity between the fiction of the American dream and Eleanor’s reality remains. Eleanor labels herself as successful due to her engagement to the conveniently homosexual Archimandrite, yet Dos Passos indicates her deep-rooted unhappiness through the degeneration of her previously pleasant demeanor into a “screechy,” “shrill and rasping” voice that irritates her friends (Dos Passos The Big Money 490, 488). Yet even in spite of her own disintegration, as her actions at her final dinner party demonstrate, Eleanor consistently returns to mimicking the fictions of the American dream in spite of unfavorable outcomes (Dos Passos The Big Money 490). In other words, she ignores the actual unattainability of discourse’s version of success as she fools herself into believing she is happy through its model. However, by doing so, Eleanor reinforces the very language that obstructs her fulfillment of the American dream. In a parallel of her childhood fantasy, America’s imperialistic control of language of the American dream offers Eleanor fleeting satisfaction only to eventually reinforce the system of discipline that initially creates her discontent.

While Eleanor represses her sporadic recognition of the debilitating power of public norms, Joe Williams frequently fixates on the fictional nature of America’s rhetoric. Nevertheless, as his final moments capture, Dos Passos’ narratives indicate that recognition without action does not necessarily liberate Americans from the destructive power of public discourse’s fictions. Raised in a relatively prosperous but occasionally abusive family, Joe’s hope for a life that reflects the American dream steadily diminishes as he matures (Dos Passos 42nd 114). Upon the death of his best friend Alec, Joe’s devastation provokes him to pursue the narrative of the American dream. He explains to his sister Janey that he “don’t want to hang round this lousy dump” anymore, and that joining the navy will allow him the opportunity to “see the world” (Dos Passos 42nd 116). Unsurprisingly, Joe’s desperate attempt at happiness through
the model of the American dream is short-lived. Soon thereafter, Joe deserts from the navy and forges paperwork to work for the merchant marine (Dos Passos 1919 2, 3). During this time, his experience working for the monopolistic United Fruit Company and illegally transporting ammunition both contribute to Joe’s growing disdain for America’s international and domestic policies (Dos Passos 1919 20, 123). He criticizes Janey for repeating the propagandistic language of discourse and “talk[ing] just like everybody else did” about the war in Europe, while he also recognizes the imperialistic inequities that result from America’s involvement abroad: “Somebody musta been making money” (Dos Passos 1919 133, 123). Consequently, Joe frequently assures himself he’s “goin’ to get out of this life,” even though each of his attempts results in different form of dissatisfaction (Dos Passos 1919 19).

Significantly, in spite of his frequent disillusionment, Joe’s dependence on what he acknowledges as an elusive American dream intermittently reappears throughout his narrative. Joe recurrently pursues the lifestyle promised in the American dream through his adventures in the Caribbean, in Europe, in New York, and, as Pizer mentions, when he briefly abandons his romantically vagabond lifestyle “to fulfill the working-class version of the American dream” by marrying Del (Pizer 139; Dos Passos 1919 48). However, Joe’s most symbolic expression of his indoctrination by the American dream manifests itself through the cigarbox he carries with him on his travels. Within the opening lines of Joe’s narrative, Dos Passos chronicles its contents as a means of indicating the tensions between Joe’s performative resistance and his intrinsic acceptance of the American dream:

In the box under the goldpaper lace were Janey’s high school graduation picture, a snapshot of Alec with his motorcycle, a picture with the signatures of the coach and all the players of the whole highschool junior team that he was captain of all in baseball clothes, an old pink almost faded snapshot of his Dad’s tug, the Mary B. Sullivan, taken off the Virginia Capes with a fullrigged ship in tow, an undressed postcard picture of a girl named Antoinette he’d been with in
Villefranche, some safetyrazor blades, a postcard photo of himself and two other guys, all gobs in white suits, taken against the background of a Moorish arch in Malaga, a bunch of foreign stamps, a package of Merry Widows, and ten little pink and red shells he’d picked up on the beach at Santiago. (Dos Passos 1919 2).

These objects express Joe’s desire to enjoy the archetypal life that would allow him to live the American dream and potentially gain authenticity. Like Eleanor, Joe covets the image of the happy American family. Janey’s photograph and the picture of the Mary B. Sullivan tugboat represent Joe’s longing for positive familial relationships that counter the strained interactions he and his father share. The tugboat also provides Joe a feeling of pride in his own quest for adventure, as his travels on various ships parallel his father’s lifestyle and therefore promise Joe the possibility of achieving his father’s financial stability. The photograph of Alec on a motorcycle and the signatures of his baseball teammates further indicate Joe’s desire for the American pastoral lifestyle, as the nostalgic photographs idealize the pastimes of his youth and provide him elusive and temporary proof of his own happiness. Nevertheless, aware that his illusion of such happiness vanished with Alec’s death, Joe’s inclusion of the postcard of naked Antoinette, the pack of condoms, and the box itself represent Joe’s realization that the American dream integrates youthful adventure into its narrative. These souvenirs from Joe’s travels and lewd adventures denote Joe’s adoption of a conventional masculinity that aligns him with the masculine narratives reproduced in public discourse. As such, even his supposed resistance to the language of the American dream—his abandonment of his past life in Washington, DC and expatriate travels around the world—manifests itself through the prototypes of action presented in public discourse. His mimicry of a romanticized version of the American dream is further confirmed through his attachment to the foreign stamp and seashells gathered while he was in the service as well as the postcard of himself with other enlisted sailors. Joe still places significance on his experience in the Navy because, as seen through his later desire to “save” civilization and
buy a Liberty bond, he innately wants to fulfill expectations of patriotism (Dos Passos 1919 133-134, 187).

Significantly, while the cigarbox offers tangible representations of Joe’s ideological indoctrination, his recurring expressions of such indoctrination fundamentally fortify the language of discourse. These instances of mimicry and reproduction counteract his temporary moments of dissenting recognition and ultimately reinforce the controlling fictions presented in public discourse. While in the Caribbean and in Europe, Joe speaks the language of American exceptionalism and utilizes his American status to assert his superiority over the surrounding populations. He describes interacting with other Americans as “like coming home to God’s country” and adopts a more imperialistic attitude towards the natives in the Caribbean and in Europe (Dos Passos 1919 32). He uses the diction of American exceptionalism and thinks to himself, “They were four of them Americans and wasn’t he a Freeborn American Citizen and there wasn’t a damn thing they could do to ‘em” (Dos Passos 1919 33). In the context of American discourse, his nationality provides him authenticity over non-Americans, even if he is out of the country. Furthermore, once in the United States, Joe relies on the others’ responses to war in order to answer questions about his experiences abroad. “He didn’t know what to tell ‘em” about war, so he returns to conventional language in order to “kinder [kid] them along” and absolve his anxieties about representation (Dos Passos 1919 131). Through this mimicry, he authorizes the language he claims to resist. Similarly, his xenophobic attitudes about domestic affairs reinforce the disparity between authentic and non-authentic versions of Americanness that the public discourse initially establishes and he alleges he detests (Dos Passos 1919 132). Even as he voices dissent against the American system of governance and inequality, he ironically maintains concerns about “that stuff [being] only for foreigners” and contends he could only support “a white man’s party to fight the profiteers and the goddam bankers” that relegate him to the peripheries of American society (Dos Passos 1919 132).
With such pervasive repetitions of the diction of public discourse, Joe unsurprisingly concedes to its language and concludes, “civilization had to be saved and it was up to [Americans like himself] to do it” (Dos Passos *1919* 187). Through its emphasis on the American dream, American exceptionalism, and authentic versions of Americanness, the language of public discourse influences Joe so extensively that even his frequent dismissals of its validity fail to fully counteract its disciplining control over him. Moreover, as the conclusion of Joe’s narrative demonstrates, Dos Passos’ mimicry of such patterns of recognition, inaction, and discipline exposes the austere consequences of such fluctuations. After arguing over a prostitute and engaging in a fight at a bar on Armistice Day, Joe achieves what Pizer describes as “tragic self-recognition” that epitomizes the senselessness of violence (Pizer 139). However, Joe’s final moments of self-recognition also reflect the fatal significance of his previous inability to sustain his dissent against the system that constrains him. Although he could “[see] in the mirror that a big guy in a blouse was bringing down a bottle on his head held with both hands,” Joe “tried to swing around but he didn’t have time” to prevent his own death (Dos Passos *1919* 188). Correspondingly, throughout his life, Joe metaphorically sees the damaging affects of a looming public discourse. While he sporadically attempts to counteract such threats, he ultimately fails to respond in a manner that prevents future harm. In other words, despite his recognition of the farcical and restrictive nature of the American dream, his conditioned repetition of its language, and his repeated inaction during times of recognition ultimately contribute to his eventual demise.

Dos Passos’ characters are never either totally sympathetic or unsympathetic. Although they invite critique by failing to advance their selective recognition of the dominant ideology into subversive action, the narratives’ juxtaposition with the Newsreels, biographies, and Camera Eyes qualify the characters’ inaction by reemphasizing the pervasive control of the public discourse. Instead of relying solely on his characters to demonstrate possibilities for subversion, Dos Passos utilizes his own act of authoring and recognition to raise a dissenting voice against America’s imperialistic systems. To satisfy discourse’s encouragement of mimicry, Dos Passos replicates
the systems of control adopted for America’s neoteric imperialism; Eleanor and Joe attempt to conform to the modes of Americanness presented in discourse and experience informal and formal modes of discipline at times when their actions suggest subversive intent. As such, Dos Passos illustrates the systems of control endorsed by America’s influential elites and therefore writes within the safe space of literature. However, as Butler explains, “Our acts are not self-generated, but conditioned. We are at once acted upon and acting, and our ‘responsibility’ lies in the juncture between the two” (Precarious 16). In this context, Dos Passos responds to his responsibility subversively. U.S.A.’s representation of the absurdities inherent to Eleanor’s and Joe’s fluctuations of belief and disillusionment counter the imperialistic system of control in a manner that the characters’ temporary recognition fails to do. In the trilogy, the public discourse retains power over its audience and imposes demands upon the characters, yet it also fails to deliver the authenticity it promises. As such, the discourse renders itself a fabricated system of control instead of a meaningful representation of American’s potential to gain the status as a “real” American.

Dos Passos subversively uses his characters’ failures to acknowledge language’s contradictory meaning-making and potential for meaninglessness (Precarious 16). Paradoxically, by recognizing language’s powerlessness through a literary invocation of language, Dos Passos restores language’s subversive capabilities. Language’s farcical nature ironically becomes the most meaningful aspect of Dos Passos’ narratives because, dissimilar from Eleanor’s and Joe’s experience with promoted discourse, Dos Passos’ recognition of the fallacies of the American dream avoids reassimilation in accepted public discourse. By adopting the language of public discourse and manipulating its simultaneously meaningless and meaning-making capabilities, Dos Passos’ linguistic representation of marginalized figures grants Americans—both fictional and otherwise—the potential to regain agency through recognition. To invoke Butler’s and Bhabha’s terms, Dos Passos incorporates the narratives of such non-authentic “unreal” Americans as a means of recognizing their vulnerability under the current system of governance (Butler
Instead of allowing a singular representation of Americanness to dominate discourse, Dos Passos’ inclusion of such non-authentic narratives “decenter[s] the narrative ‘I’” and provides public discourse with what Bhabha describes as the “meanwhile” (Butler Precarious 6-7; Bhabha The Location of Culture 158). As Bhabha explains, “From the place of the ‘meanwhile,’…there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people [or the text], minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places” (Location 158). Dos Passos’ text does not deny powerful Americans their voice, yet “meanwhile” his narration “decenters…supremacy” and disrupts the singularity of discourse (Bhabha Location 158; Butler Precarious 18). This recognition and decentering allows his readers to make America’s non-authentic citizens “count” as Americans, it establishes “whose lives will be marked as lives,” and it mourns the “loss”—both in its abstract and literal sense—of the vast majority of Americans in the periods surrounding WWI (Butler Precarious xx). As such, by equally privileging alternate non-authentic voices like Eleanor’s and Joe’s respective narratives, U.S.A.’s iteration of America’s controlling discourse exploits the menace of mimicry as it subverts the imperialistic system of control through the same patterns of language that America’s elites uses to maintain their power.
CHAPTER FIVE
DEVELOPING A LITERARY MODE OF SUBVERSION IN THE CAMERA EYES

Though he principally remains unnamed throughout *U.S.A.*, the trilogy’s early Camera Eyes establish the speaker as a loosely autobiographical representation of Dos Passos. Like the author, the speaker travels to Europe as a child, lives in various American cities, participates in the mundane realities of WWI, immerses himself in political causes, and eventually adopts a literary lifestyle. Yet in addition to providing Dos Passos an outlet for his “semi-fictional” autobiography, the Camera Eyes also contribute to Dos Passos’ subversive use of literary mimicry and iterability (Ludington 387). Because the Camera Eyes chronicle[s] the maturation of a single speaker instead of multiple American figures as in the Newsreels, biographies, and narratives, these prose poems provide a more detailed and emotionally-laden illustration of one American’s fluctuations of belief in the public discourse’s representations of America. Moreover, the Camera Eyes’ frequent returns to language and authorship also expose the ethical implications of various forms of discourse. Paradoxically, by admitting language has been made “slimy and foul,” Dos Passos reinstates language’s subversive and meaning-making potentials and disrupts the cycles of discipline by providing traditionally ignored voices an outlet for dissent (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 468).

Though presumably the same person, Dos Passos repeats the speech of the Camera Eyes’ speaker in order to emphasize the naivety and irony inherent to the young American’s speech; in other words, Dos Passos adopts a différence in the repetition of his own voice in order to be politically subversive. Beginning with a juvenile point of view, the early Camera Eyes demonstrate the young speaker’s exposure to the language of American exceptionalism, sacrifice, and the American dream. His father reflects public discourse’s diction, asking, “Why Lucy if it were necessary for the cause of humanity I would walk out and be shot any day you would Jack wouldn’t you?” (Dos Passos 42nd 9). Not only does his father adopt mimicry in his own speech,
but he also compels “Jack”—the speaker—to fulfill such roles as well. America’s exceptional nature requires its citizens to contribute to its expanding presence abroad, so it encourages compliance through the repetition of altruistic diction favoring “the cause of humanity” (Dos Passos 42nd 9). Certainly, as a child, the speaker is not expected to “walk out and be shot” for America’s values (Dos Passos 42nd 9); nevertheless, as the speaker’s reflections on Theodore Roosevelt and the short story “The Man Without a Country” demonstrate, discourse requires the fulfillment of certain roles for each demographic of the American population. Childish remembrances of Rough Rider suits, pictures of Roosevelt in the newspaper, and the excitement of being “very proud” of interacting with Roosevelt combine with the speaker’s romantic interpretation of American sacrifice as a means of portraying the indoctrination of discourse America’s children undergo (Dos Passos 42nd 102). As Dos Passos indicates in the Camera Eyes and elsewhere in the trilogy, such propagandistic language manifests itself throughout the media, in personal interactions, as well as in linguistic representations. In “Camera Eye (14),” the speaker attempts to mimic such language by summarizing “The Man Without a Country”8:

Americans shouldn’t cry he should look kind and grave and very sorry when they wrapped me in the stars and stripes and brought me home on a frigate to be buried I was so sorry I never remembered whether they brought me home or buried me at sea but anyway I was wrapped in Old Glory. (Dos Passos 42nd 117)

The speaker’s effort retains its childish imprecision, as he “never remembered” the details of the story, yet the essential patriotic and altruistic message make their impression on his young perspective (Dos Passos 42nd 117). Through the language of his peers, the media, and stories such as this one, the speaker is encouraged to accept the versions of Americanness presented in discourse and mimic the representations they convey. Consequently, by regulating his childhood

8 Written by Edward Everett Hale in 1863, this short story depicts a young Army lieutenant who befriends Aaron Burr and is subsequently tried as an accomplice to treason. During sentencing, the lieutenant renounces his association with the United States and is condemned to exile aboard Navy warships for the remainder of his life. Despite the rejection of his nationality, the lieutenant’s inherent patriotism gradually displaces his anger and he becomes a celebrated example of noble nationalism.
experiences, his familial upbringing and education contribute to models of compliance that are replicated throughout the other stages of his life.

As a child, the speaker primarily complies with the role expected of him and mimics the dominant discourse; nevertheless, his narrative account progressively incorporates a différance that implicates the imperialistic tone of the promoted image of America. Although the speaker is initially enthusiastic and jocund about his experiences, “Camera Eye (10)” depicts the speaker touring Washington, DC’s political landmarks. He enjoys the “old major” who “had very beautiful manners” and happily visits the Capitol, the Botanical Gardens, and the Supreme Court (Dos Passos 42nd 76). However, while such eagerness initially aligns him with the authentic Americans, the speaker’s admiring impressions gradually diminish as he transitions from myth to reality. Overcome by the contrast between the symbols of American power and the subjugated condition of its subjects, the speaker’s fixation on the “dead air” of the American government qualifies his impressions of the buildings (Dos Passos 42nd 77). The speaker becomes aware of his own discontent, yet incapable of identifying its cause. However, in spite of a lack of recognition, Dos Passos approaches such a failure of awareness as purposeful. The speaker’s youthful uncertainty allows Dos Passos to emphasize the difficulty of recognizing America’s imperialistic policies. Because informal and formal censorship restricts opportunities to express alternate perspectives of such common expressions of nationalism, even a limited awareness of their fallacies is potentially subversive. As such, the young speaker’s subconscious association of the political chambers and the “big picture at the Corcoran Art Gallery” functions as a promising supplement to his earlier repetition of the complimentary impressions of the capital city (Dos Passos 42nd 77). Though his conscious self remains uncertain of why the American government reminds him of “columns and steps and conspirators and Caesar in purple fallen flat called Caesar dead,” Dos Passos’ inclusion of such a youthful connotation suggests that the différance of the speaker’s impressions accurately reflect America’s true tendencies (Dos Passos 42nd 77).
While the speaker fails to fully comprehend his subconscious associations in “Camera Eye (10),” he progressively gains awareness of the significance of his observations as he matures. He is increasingly disillusioned by the language that shaped his youth and struggles with the significance of the newfound discrepancies between American discourse and reality. Instead of an American pastoral, he increasingly finds himself confronted with America’s “goddam exhausted land” that is “drained of all strength” (Dos Passos 42nd 205). Faced with such unpromising realities in the land of American promises, the speaker’s ideological growth parallels his earlier experience travelling on a train. Expectant and excited by his arrival in a magnificent city, the speaker’s first view of the skyline offers him “black rumbling dark ranked with squat chimneys…the black smoke and the puffs of flame […] Workingmen and people like that laborers travailleurs greasers” (Dos Passos 42nd 18-19). The authentic versions of Americanness personified by Carnegie, Ford, and Morgan succumb to the realities of those “laborers travailleurs greasers” that frighten the speaker by destabilizing his romantic perspective of America. Thus, both on the train and after the speaker’s graduation from Harvard, the public discourse surrounding the speaker in his adolescence fails to achieve its promise of an idyllic nation where dreams are fulfilled. Therefore, even though the speaker contends he “[Hasn’t] got the nerve to break out of the bellglass” that these fictions create for him, he gradually counters such propaganda by recognizing that his childhood, his education, and the myths he adopts all provide him “the ethercone” necessary to “be a good boy” and accept the promoted version of Americanness (Dos Passos 42nd 236). In other words, he admittedly

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,

but the speaker nevertheless gains agency as he begins to question the systems that define his role in society (Dos Passos 42nd 236).
To supplement his personal struggle concerning political and social reality and discourse, the speaker’s exposure to the forceful control of the population immediately preceding WWI provides him with additional verifications of the inconsistencies of representation and reality. Knowledgeable of his rights, the speaker recognizes a stark contrast between the right to peaceful assembly and the “forbidden” socialist meeting he attends (Dos Passos 42nd 272). Although the rally is peaceful and therefore technically avoids malfeasance, the discourse of the gathering counters the language propagated in the media. The attendees “clapped and yelled for the revolution,” which is subversive in and of itself, while they also counter the altruistic depiction of America’s potential involvement in WWI by interpreting America’s motivations as solely benefiting “Morgan and the capitalist war” (Dos Passos 42nd 272). The dissenters attempt to repeat the language of American discourse as they appeal to “civil liberty freedom of speech” and “Washington and Jefferson and Patrick Henry,” yet the police deem their iteration of such terms and figures subversive (Dos Passos 42nd 272, 273). While this episode portrays the eventual development of the speaker’s subversive voice, Dos Passos does not deny the potential violence inherent to his dissent. In accordance with the imperialistic tendencies of the government, the speaker experiences discipline and punishment for his attendance. The meeting attracts significant police attention and “occasionally somebody got into the way of a cop and was beaten up” (Dos Passos 42nd 273). Although Dos Passos does not condone the police’s reaction, the speaker’s post-rally actions confirm the effectiveness of the government’s response. Instead of further protests, he and the main objectors “had several drinks and welsh rabbits and paid our bill and went home, and opened the door with a latchkey and put on our pajamas and went to bed and it was comfortable in bed” (Dos Passos 42nd 273). He briefly abandons his dissention as he returns to an acceptable mode of Americanness.

In addition to such pre-war instances of dissent, the speaker’s eventual recognition of the duplicitous nature of America’s involvement in WWI acts as a catalyst for his growing cynicism towards America’s imperialistic system of governance. He recognizes the economic benefits of
war and how rhetoric portrays America’s involvement as altruistic and adventurous while it avoids the mention of atrocities inherent to conflict. He describes the enthusiasm of wartime participation as “We must come in We must come in,” noting that the media and the influential elite talked “as if the war were a swimming pool” and not a violent and dangerous engagement (Dos Passos 42nd 284). The speaker understands that “up north they were dying in the mud and the trenches” even though the propaganda of war frames participation as an opportunity (Dos Passos 42nd 285). Similarly, while the media emphasizes “business was good” and that those fighting were “very brave” heroes of civilization’s cause, the soldiers doing the fighting offer an alternate perspective of the risks and benefits of conflict (Dos Passos 42nd 284). Analogously, the Camera Eyes’ speaker replicates the language of martial discourse only to critique its propagandistic and limited perspective. With the death of his parents, he admits, “Grief isn’t a uniform,” but at this point in his life the speaker still struggles to reconcile his patriotic upbringing with his growing critique of America’s military engagement. Further verbalizing this internal struggle, the speaker rhetorically asks, “(have you ever never been able to sleep for a week in April?) […] April enough to shock the world” (Dos Passos 1919 6). Despite his knowledge of the true nature of America’s involvement in WWI, the discourse of the speaker’s youth resurfaces during his instability and ultimately compels him to comply with the version of Americanness his parents expected of him. He eventually consents to the war effort in spite of his growing apprehension about the validity of America’s political ideology.

After his decision to mimic the Americanness presented in public discourse, the speaker once again experiences disparities between language and reality. Instead of adventure and opportunity, the mundane actualities of war—“washing those windows / K. P. / cleaning the sparkplugs with a pocketknife”—overwhelm his experience abroad (Dos Passos 1919 7). Additionally, when he finally participates in the conflict as an ambulance driver, the gruesome unnaturalness of war presents an antithesis to the diction of public discourse: “Remembering the grey crooked fingers the thick drip of blood off the canvas the bubbling when the lungcases try to
breath the muddy scraps of flesh you put in the ambulance alive and haul out dead (Dos Passos 1919 78). Returning to the language of his youth, the speaker notices the contrast between the depictions of America and its current circumstances, and laments, “No there must be some way they taught us Land of the Free conscience Give me liberty or give me” until he realizes the foundational truth behind America’s current system: “Well they give us death” (Dos Passos 1919 78). The sacrifice of America’s non-authentic majority is deemed unimportant in comparison to the benefits of the “welltodo […] people” who “carefully planned this war” (Dos Passos 1919 79). “Theirs is the power and the glory” because authentic Americans retain control while the American public finds itself marginalized and incapable of truly participating in the theoretically egalitarian nation (Dos Passos 1919 79). Thus, through his attempt to fulfill the promises of mimicry and adopt the role presented for him in the public discourse about the war, the speaker solidifies his perspective of the disparity between America’s language and reality.

An examination of discourse during WWI further provides the speaker with a method of addressing the fictions of American identity and authenticity inherent to public and martial discourse. With the government no longer addressing wartime volunteers as “gentlemen” because a consent to enlist fortifies the government’s power over the majority, the soldiers are forced to be “more obedient as [they become] more useful” in the continuation of America’s imperialistic pursuits (Dos Passos 1919 110; Foucault Discipline 137). From the perspective of the government, the language used to garner patriotism can be discontinued once politicians achieve the support necessary for war. Consequently, those who were previously encouraged to mimic discourse to gain authenticity instead find themselves largely unwanted and unrecognized by the government that previously requested their service; they cease to be simply “American” and are instead approached as foreigners who live in America. The speaker experiences such discrepancies as he notes the wartime discrimination facing “four hunkies a couple wops a bohunk dagoes guineas two little dark guys with blue chings nobody can talk to” (Dos Passos 1919 363). The actualities of ethnic Americans’ wartime experiences relegate them
to being “spare parts no outfit wanted to use” instead of allowing them to become war heroes celebrated in public discourse (Dos Passos 1919 363). Ethnic discrimination lacks the honor, inclusion, and nationalistic fervor presented in public discourse, yet similar to the ethnic Americans forced into homogeneity at home, the enlisted soldier has little means of resistance against such disparities.

The speaker gradually recognizes that the indoctrination of American discourse pervades the WWI experience so extensively that non-authentic Americans actually learn to speak the language that subjects them to the dangers of war. For example, the speaker interacts with a pneumonia patient mumbling, “christohsweetjesus cant you tell me how to get back to the outfit haveaheart” (Dos Passos 1919 136). Even as the soldier lies on his deathbed, he returns to the language of martial discourse that fundamentally contributes to his current desperate situation. Like the speaker’s return to normative discourse at his own time of crisis, the sick soldier’s repetition of military diction ironically offers him temporary comfort; he longs for the fulfillment of the promises of his own mimicry, including the fictions of war that elide death. However, the speaker recognizes that America’s non-authentic soldiers fail to understand the limitations of their own discourse. Alternatively, unlike the sick patient, the speaker gradually recognizes that the “two cold index fingers” that tap out the names of the deceased exists as the main form of recognition the government grants them for their service (Dos Passos 1919 200). Thus, as the speaker’s experience during war indicates, gaining recognition as an authentic American remains elusive even if the public complies with mimicry through enlistment.

Unlike many of the figures presented in the Newsreels, biographies, and narratives, Dos Passos’ Camera Eye speaker not only recognizes the imperialistic tendencies inherent to the American system, but also actively resists its discipline and control. He recognizes how the power of assimilation to public discourse censors his own narrative, admitting to himself, “It turned out he was not writing what he felt he wanted to be writing What can you tell them at home about the war? it turned out he was not wanting what he wrote he wanted to be feeling”
(Dos Passos 1919 116). Ultimately, the speaker “wanted to tell ‘em they lied” (Dos Passos 1919 116). He understands the imperialistic motivations of war, including the “roulettewheel that spins round the Tour Eiffel” during the Treaty of Versailles, and further recognizes the systems of control working within America’s domestic sphere (Dos Passos 1919 274). America’s influential elites “climb slogan by slogan to applause,” and the speaker seeks to counter such controlling use of discourse—“to pry the owners loose from power and bring back (I too Walt Whitman) our storybook democracy”—through his own appropriation of mimicry and recognition (Dos Passos The Big Money 167). He purposefully returns to the language of America’s founding fathers in order to repeat its intent and contrast its current application. The speaker discovers the mangling and self-serving exploitation of America’s previously egalitarian but now “ruined words worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers district-attorneys collegepresidents Judges” (Dos Passos The Big Money 444). Thus, paired with his critical examination of public discourse during WWI, the speaker uses the Sacco-Vanzetti case to exemplify America’s abandonment of its ideals. He ultimately concedes, “all right you have won,” “all right we are two nations,” and “America our nation has been beaten” (Dos Passos The Big Money 469).

Instead of accepting his defeat and complying with discourse, the speaker realizes literary iteration with a différance offers an effective means of recreating meaning for America’s “old words” and countering the “conquering nation” that has made the majority of Americans “foreigners in the land where we were born” (Dos Passos The Big Money 444, 523). Through a method that resonates with Judith Butler’s approach to marginalized peoples, the speaker attempts to use this différance as a mode of recognition that subverts systems of imperialistic discipline. As the speaker describes, “To rebuild yesterday,” he strives to “[string] words into wires the search for stinging words to make you feel who are your oppressors America” (Dos Passos The Big Money 468). Americans must understand the cause of their disillusionment before they can subvert its influence. As the speaker already recognizes the imperialistic governance in America, he develops a mode of subversion that counters the debilitating fictions
of American exceptionalism and the American dream—a mode that eventually takes the form of Dos Passos’ authoring of *U.S.A.* Moreover, because the speaker understands America’s oppressors as those who are controlling discourse—those “who have turned our language inside out”—the Camera Eye speaker adopts the menace of iterability as a means of repurposing language for his own subversive intent (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 468). His ability “to clip out paper figures” and “warp newsprint” signifies his adherence to repetition that will allow him to remain in the safe space of mimicry, yet this approach to language also represents Dos Passos’ larger aim in incorporating a différance in such iterations (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 211). Although the speaker duplicates the media, his commitment to writing also acknowledges “the downcast eyes of the beaten” that results from public discourse (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 211, 469). As the juxtaposition of the final Camera Eye and the biography of Samuel Insull reflect, the speaker therefore realizes what *U.S.A.* ultimately contends: “we only have words against / Power Superpower” (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 523). By exposing the farcicality of American public discourse and repeating its language with a différance that emphasizes the detrimental disillusionment that results from its diction, the speaker utilizes iterability and recognition to make discourse’s meaningless language meaningful again.

Through these self-referential allusions to writing and iterability, the speaker of the Camera Eyes foreshadows Dos Passos’ own authorial agency and ultimately provides what elites view as non-authentic Americans with an accessible approach to countering the systems that constrain them. By emphasizing America’s imperialistic tendencies, the speaker encourages recognition as a means of destabilizing disciplining discourse that marginalizes the vast majority of the American public and promotes American empire. In a paradox that allows him to remain in a safe space of dissent, the speaker renders language simultaneously meaningless and meaningful; however, this tension is productive as the speaker repurposes misleading language to make it meaningful again. Both the speaker and ultimately Dos Passos utilize language’s iterability—its both backwards-looking and forward-looking potential—as a means of ethically reinstating
America’s founding claims of equality, freedom, and opportunity. Therefore, while Dos Passos describes the Camera Eyes as “indicat[ing] the position of the observer,” a position that marginalized populations share along with artists, Dos Passos’ interpretation of this observer status does not diminish the role of such a perspective (qtd. in Ludington 257). As a witness, the speaker’s experience of the fluctuations of discourse does not signify his detachment and inability to refute such power, but instead establishes him as most suitable to counter the fallacies of the American system.

Furthermore, in addition to empowering writers, Dos Passos’ literary approach to destabilization extends a model of subversion—the menace of mimicry and iterability—to provide marginalized communities a nonviolent, ethical means of subverting the detrimentally restrictive discourse that excludes them. As Foucault describes, texts provide “an activity of writing in the first case, of reading in the second, and exchange in the third” (Archaeology 228). By providing its readers an opportunity for subversive exchange, U.S.A. empowers its readers by inserting subaltern voices in public discourse and allowing all readers, “authentic” and “non-authentic” alike, to further counter the limitations of language. Therefore, Dos Passos’ approach to language dually empowers his audience. Firstly, the physical textuality of U.S.A. provides his readers the opportunity to repeat the trilogy’s politically subversive content. More importantly, however, Dos Passos’ approach to language allows his readers to further advance iterability and différance as they apply its methods to future expressions of public discourse in order to disrupt the domestic imperialism that relegates America’s majority to the peripheries of national belonging.
CONCLUSION

By addressing Dos Passos’ representation of the disparity between the diction of American discourse and the realities of American life, the previous chapters have attempted to display Dos Passos’ subversive intent in utilizing iterability as a means of disrupting the systems of domestic imperialism oppressing America’s “non-authentic” majority. Through Dos Passos’ control of each of the trilogy’s literary forms—the montage of Newsreels, the historical method of biographies, the traditional conventions of the narratives, and the prose poetry of the Camera Eyes—U.S.A. exposes both the classical and neoteric manifestations of American imperialistic discourse. Moreover, Dos Passos portrays America’s elites as controlling public discourse in a manner that is ultimately reflective of Foucault’s claim that “The relations of discourse are of the nature of warfare” (qtd. in Gilbert-Moore 139). The regulation of public discourse provides legitimacy to the image of the authentic American and simultaneously oppresses the majority of the American population. Significantly, however, Dos Passos’ ability to reproduce these controlled narratives with a différance provides him the opportunity to expose the damaging absurdity of this promoted American discourse. By working in accordance with the constraints of convention—the trilogy’s replication of various print and music media, the reflections of celebrated biographies, and the use of traditional narrative structures—the trilogy dismantles the same literary constraints that it utilizes as it adopts what Orvell Miles describes as “a spirit of irreverence” in its repetition (266). In other words, Dos Passos’ text ultimately works through, yet not necessarily in accordance with, the constraints established by public discourse. To use Bhabha’s terms, U.S.A. takes advantage of the “menace… [the] double vision” of mimicry and iterability in order to disrupt systems of control and grant unrecognized power to the subaltern voice (“Mimicry” 88). Moreover, as Dos Passos recreates the diction of public discourse, his repetition counters the imperialist notion of a safe space of resistance. Dos Passos writes within the constraints of imperialism’s approved spaces of discourse by precisely recreating public
discourse, yet his awareness of imperialistic techniques transforms the trilogy’s iterations into methods of subversion. Through repetition and différance, *U.S.A.* ethically represents marginalized Americans who were previously treated as partial and inauthentic.

Dos Passos’ portrayals of such subaltern figures—ranging from radical activists like Eugene Debs and Ben Compton to more average Americans who face marginalization like Joe Williams and Anne Elizabeth “Daughter” Trent—fundamentally destabilize the imperialist system of control and return agency to those excluded from its discourse by disrupting cycles of language and redefining “whose lives will be marked as lives” (Butler *Precarious* xx). As such, iterability in the trilogy functions as an ethical act of literary politics. Dos Passos’ “upsidedown image” of America repurposes imperialistic diction to emphasize inequities and provide a productive “distortion” that ironically counters the same governing modes of discourse it repeats (Dos Passos qtd. in Orvell 268). Resultantly, *U.S.A.* responds to the control of the American government with a “narration that decenters… supremacy” (Butler *Precarious* 18). Dos Passos supplements public discourse with additional narrative voices that qualify the authenticity typically reserved for the politicians, media moguls, and industrialists that dominate public discourse.

Importantly, Butler maintains the use of supplemental narratives is a crucial response to oppression (Butler *Precarious* 16). She acknowledges the constraints imposed by disciplining systems, yet still advocates for ethical interrogations of control. Butler further claims that, “Our acts are not self-generated, but conditioned. We are at once acted upon and acting, and our ‘responsibility’ lies in the juncture between the two. What can I do with the conditions that form me? What do they constrain me to do? What can I do to transform them?” (Butler *Precarious* 16). The experience of such confusion and oppression demands a response to their detrimental causes. In other words, resonating with the voice of Dos Passos’ Camera Eye speaker, Butler recognizes that the very involvement with physical and psychological “violence” from the government dictates who is most capable of countering its control (Butler *Precarious* 16). She
further explains, “Being acted upon is not fully continuous with acting, and in this way the forces that act upon us are not finally responsible for what we do. In a certain way, and paradoxically, our responsibility is heightened once we have been subjected to the violence of others” (Precarious 16). Appropriately, like Butler, Dos Passos not only identifies the systems acting upon him and his fellow Americans, but also accepts the responsibility to avert its damaging effects. Dos Passos’ model of ethical literary politics provides a medium to address the fallacies of the American system; he adopts the role, as he later stated, of the “second-class historian of the age he lives in” in order to reproduce the “raw material” necessary to enact change (Dos Passos “Statement of Belief”). Moreover, Butler argues that such an ethical response to oppression can offer tangible benefits for marginalized populations. Similar to Dos Passos’ approach to non-authentics under America’s domestic imperialism, Butler believes marginalized people can reclaim agency under such systems. Consequently, by applying Butler’s argument to Dos Passos’ text, the trilogy’s representation of supplemental voices fundamentally reduces the likelihood of future malfeasance; marginalized voices become less vulnerable to mistreatment when granted recognition, even if the recognition occurs in a fictional literary realm (Butler Precarious 33).

To provide such ethical recognition, the Newsreels, biographies, narratives, and Camera Eyes each utilize the particularities of form to further Dos Passos’ critique of imperialism. Orvell describes the trilogy’s structure as “Each segment qualify[ing] the previous one” in order to allow the reader “a jolt” that reinforces the overlying themes (263). However, I argue that this “jolt” requires a practical diligence from its audience—as the trilogy simultaneously relies on shifts in the linguistic and the visual as it maintains correlations in its thematic message—in order to encourage additional ethical diligence from its readers (Orvell 263). As Walter Benjamin has argued, the tension of literary fragments “follow[ing] one another” while simultaneously “not be[ing exactly] like one another” establishes a tentative unity to the text that forces its readers to question what certain variations of structure allow for the author’s literary intent (qtd. in Bhabha
In a reflection yet critical advancement of E. L. Doctorow’s and Townsend Ludington’s analyses of *U.S.A.*’s form, I contend that Dos Passos grants his audience moral agency by providing a literal and a figurative space for all Americans, even those that his own trilogy fails to include. As I have argued, the structures of Dos Passos’ text supplement public discourse through their very literary politics. However, similar to Derrida’s understanding that writing has a continual tension between its independence from audience and its constant need for one, the trilogy simultaneously acknowledges the need for an audience in order to make its message most effective (Derrida “Signature” 8). Therefore, although *U.S.A.* tentatively unifies America through its representations of a vast array of Americans, Dos Passos recognizes the limitations of textual representation and provides the trilogy’s fragmented form as a means of the reader engaging with the text to empower both Dos Passos’ voice and the voice of his audience. Dos Passos provides a literal space between his sections where his readers have the moral agency to “both engagé and dégagé” as they become both passive audiences and active agents who can insert their own subjectivities and narratives into the text (Nanney 178). As such, I contend that Dos Passos’ promotion of both authorial and readerly supplements resonate with Bhabha’s understanding that multiple narratives “[add to] but [do] not ‘add up’” to complete representation (“Dissemination” 163). By acknowledging the necessity for additional American voices through the inclusion of spaces, Dos Passos authorizes his readers to repeat his own text with yet another différance— their own voice. Moreover, this interpretation also implies that the space for supplemental representations of Americanness will always remain necessary (“Dissemination” 163). Consequently, I argue that Dos Passos uses structure and iterability to transform the practical limitations of the trilogy’s scope into a more encompassing and more effective participation in literary politics. *U.S.A.*’s interval silences allow Dos Passos “to underscore his moral commitment to the act of writing” while also providing “an education in political and moral
sensibility” that expands who can participate in future acts of recognition (Doctorow 103; Orvell 269). The intermittent “jolt” of structural variation resonates with Dos Passos’ thematic portrayals, while the trilogy encourages its readers to absorb “the speech of the people” and measure their own voice against the cacophony of voices that pervade *U.S.A.* (Dos Passos 42nd xiv). The trilogy inspires its readers to determine which voices genuinely resonate with the America’s ideals of equality, freedom, and democracy and which voices should be critiqued for their manipulative invocation of such terms. Readers therefore can participate in Dos Passos’ desire to “bring back […] our storybook democracy” by “rebuild[ing] the ruined words” that have corrupted America’s founding ideals (Dos Passos *The Big Money* 168, 444).

To conclude, the preceding chapters have attempted to rectify the deficiencies of contemporary Dos Passos criticism that overemphasize the author’s youthful leftist beliefs but largely avoid *U.S.A.*’s critique of America’s imperialistic systems. Additionally, by using a post-colonial, post-structuralist approach to Dos Passos’ trilogy, I have attempted to emphasize the ethical potential of repurposing imperialist manipulations of language. “The act of articulation, of making sense of arriving at an ethical point of view” through such a theoretical reading of Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* therefore advances Dos Passos’ political intent by using recognition to disrupt the systems of oppression that relegate the vast majority of the American public to the peripheries of discourse and society (Orvell 269). Engaging the trilogy’s readers in restoring language’s meaning-making potential offers both previously and contemporarily marginalized populations an opportunity to destabilize the systems that oppress them. Dos Passos’ critique of American discourse preceding, during, and after WWI not only engages in a political commentary concerning the country’s foreign and domestic policies, but also presents literature as a viable option for ethical subversion (Orvell 269).
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