

**THE GROUND WE STAND ON**

By John Dos Passos

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John Dos Passos has a quarrel with those who ever lightly dismiss the wellsprings of American democracy. If we are to progress, it must be by means of a better knowledge of the path our forebears have trod; if we are to march forward, we must know the ground we stand on, and how we got here. With the help of a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation he has prepared a study of the uprising of the American ideal. There is this to be said for him: he has eschewed the use of conventional history. He has little to say about generals and presidents. Instead, he has chosen the technique of the artist who, by a few bold strokes that look only remotely like any part of a cow, manages to convey to the beholder the idea of the very Aristotelian Cow-concept. He has undertaken to picture the birth of Democracy by describing a handful of the midwives who presided—Franklin, Jefferson, Sam Adams, Joel Barlow, Roger Williams.

These men fought for what they obtained. If we want to keep it, we must fight too. "The side they fought and worked for hasn't won by a long shot. Perhaps it never can win. But to let the other side win we know means death. It has been the struggle between privileged men who have managed to get hold of the levers of power and the people in general with their vague and changing aspirations for equality, for justice, for some kind of gentler brotherhood and peace, which has kept that balance of forces we call our system of government in equilibrium."