

JFK Presidency Packet

The Other America (1962) By: Michael Harrington

Throughout the 1950s public attention was focused on the amazing affluence generated by the American economy. Yet as social analyst Michael Harrington revealed in *The Other America* (1962), forty to fifty million Americans, some 20 percent of the total population, were in fact mired in poverty. This "underclass" was largely hidden from view. They included the elderly and the "unseen" residents of urban slums and rural hovels. President Kennedy read several reviews of Harrington's book and was so stunned by its revelations that he created a task force to design federal programs to address the nation's chronic pockets of poverty. Kennedy was assassinated before the programs could be implemented, but under Lyndon B. Johnson the government initiated a comprehensive-and ultimately ineffective-"war on poverty."

There is a familiar America. It is celebrated in speeches and advertised on television and in the magazines. It has the highest mass standard of living the world has ever known.

In the 1950s this America worried about itself, yet even its anxieties were products of abundance. The title of a brilliant book was widely misinterpreted, and the familiar America began to call itself "the affluent society." There was introspection about Madison Avenue and tail fins; there was discussion of the emotional suffering taking place in the suburbs. In all this, there was an implicit assumption that the basic grinding economic problems had been solved in the United States. In this theory the nation's problems were no longer a matter of basic human needs, of food, shelter, and clothing. Now they were seen as qualitative, a question of learning to live decently amid luxury.

While this discussion was carried on, there existed another America. In it dwelt somewhere between 40,000,000 and 50,000,000 citizens of this land. They were poor. They still are.

To be sure, the other America is not impoverished in the same sense as those poor nations where millions cling to hunger as a defense against starvation. This country has escaped such extremes. That does not change the fact that tens of millions of Americans are, at this very moment, maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency. If these people are not starving, they are hungry, and sometimes fat with hunger, for that is what cheap foods do. They are without adequate housing and education and medical care.

The Government has documented what this means to the bodies of the poor, and the figures will be cited throughout this book. But even more basic, this poverty twists and deforms the spirit. The American poor are pessimistic and defeated, and they are victimized by mental suffering to a degree unknown in Suburbia.

This book is a description of the world in which these people live; it is about the other America. Here are the unskilled workers, the migrant farm workers, the aged, the minorities, and all the others who live in the economic underworld of American life. . . . I would ask the reader to respond critically to every assertion, but not to allow statistical quibbling to obscure the huge, enormous, and intolerable fact of poverty in America. For, when all is said and done, that fact is unmistakable, whatever its exact dimensions, and the truly human reaction can only be outrage. . . .

The millions who are poor in the United States tend to become increasingly invisible. Here is a great mass of people, yet it takes an effort of the intellect and will even to see them. . . .

The other America, the America of poverty, is hidden today in a way that it never was before. Its millions are socially invisible to the rest of us. No wonder that so many misinterpreted Galbraith's title and

assumed that "the affluent society" meant that everyone had a decent standard of life. The misinterpretation was true as far as the actual day-to-day lives of two-thirds of the nation were concerned. Thus, one must begin a description of the other America by understanding why we do not see it.

There are perennial reasons that make the other America an invisible land. Poverty is often off the beaten track. It always has been. The ordinary tourist never left the main highway, and today he rides interstate turnpikes. He does not go into the valleys of Pennsylvania where the towns look like movie sets of Wales in the thirties. He does not see the company houses in rows, the rutted roads (the poor always have bad roads whether they live in the city in towns, or on farms), and everything is black and dirty. And even if he were to pass through such a place by accident, the tourist would not meet the unemployed men in the bar or the women coming home from a runaway sweatshop. . . .

If the middle class never did like ugliness and poverty, it was at least aware of them. "Across the tracks" was not a very long way to go. There were forays into the slums at Christmas time; there were charitable organizations that brought contact with the poor. Occasionally, almost everyone passed through the Negro ghetto or the blocks of tenements, if only to get downtown to work or to entertainment.

Now the American city has been transformed. The poor still inhabit the miserable housing in the central area, but they are increasingly isolated from contact with, or sight of, anybody else. Middleclass women coming in from Suburbia on a rare trip may catch the merest glimpse of the other America on the way to an evening at the theater, but their children are segregated in suburban schools. The business or professional man may drive along the fringes of slums in a car or bus, but it is not an important experience to him. The failures, the unskilled, the disabled, the aged, and the minorities are right there, across the tracks, where they have always been. But hardly anyone else is.

In short, the very development of the American city has removed poverty from the living, emotional experience of millions upon millions of middle-class Americans. Living out in the suburbs, it is easy to assume that ours is, indeed, an affluent society.

This new segregation of poverty is compounded by a well-meaning ignorance. A good many concerned and sympathetic Americans are aware that there is much discussion of urban renewal. Suddenly, driving through the city, they notice that a familiar slum has been torn down and that there are towering, modern buildings where once there had been tenements or hovels. There is a warm feeling of satisfaction, of pride in the way things are working out: the poor, it is obvious, are being taken care of.

The irony in this . . . is that the truth is nearly the exact opposite to the impression. The total impact of the various housing programs in postwar America has been to squeeze more and more people into existing slums. More often than not, the modern apartment in a towering building rents at \$40 a room or more. For, during the past decade and a half, there has been more subsidization of middle- and upper-income housing than there has been for the poor. . . .

And finally, the poor are politically invisible. It is one of the cruelest ironies of social life in advanced countries that the dispossessed at the bottom of society are unable to speak for themselves. The people of the other America do not, by far and large, belong to unions or fraternal organizations, or to political parties. They are without lobbies of their own; they put forward no legislative program. As a group, they are atomized. They have no face; they have no voice.

Thus, there is not even a cynical political motive for caring about the poor as in the old days. Because the slums are no longer centers of powerful political organizations, the politicians need not really care

about their inhabitants. The slums are no longer visible to the middle class, so much of the idealistic urge to fight for those who need help is gone. Only social agencies have a really direct involvement with the other America.

That the poor are invisible is one of the most important things about them. They are not simply neglected and forgotten as in the old rhetoric of reform; what is much worse, they are not seen.

1. According to Harrington, America was commonly described as an 'affluent society.' What was implied by this phrase, and why did Harrington deny its validity?
2. Why were the poor so invisible to middle-class Americans?
3. Did the poor have political power? Why or why not?
4. How is the situation in the passage similar or different to the Gilded Age or Progressive Era?

The Space Race

One of the most symbolic representations of the Cold War was the competition between the USSR and the USA as they raced each other into space. How did this "space race" get started? How did it end?

On October 4th, 1957, the Soviet Union became the first nation to launch an artificial satellite into orbit around the planet. This satellite, a large metal sphere about the size of a beach ball, was known as Sputnik 1. With the successful launch of Sputnik, the "space race" had begun.

America quickly responded. Within four months, the first US satellite, Explorer 1, achieved orbit around the Earth.

However, the US had always thought of itself as the leader in rocket development and space technology. Therefore, the fact that the Soviets had achieved this feat first greatly disturbed many Americans. In fact, many citizens panicked, viewing this as proof that the American education system was far behind that of the Soviets. School curriculum was carefully examined, placing a stronger emphasis on science and mathematics courses.

The following year, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was created to help the United States more effectively achieve its goals in space.

In April of 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to orbit the planet. Once again, the United States had been beaten into space. One month later, Alan Shepard became the first American in space, but, the US did not have a man orbit the planet until nearly a year later, when John Glenn accomplished the feat.

On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy made a bold announcement that the United States would make it a goal to land a man on the moon before the end of the decade. Needless to say, since the US had stated this as their goal, the USSR also began making plans to put a man on the moon.

Throughout the decade of the 1960s, both the Americans and the Soviets experienced many successes and failures in their efforts to reach the moon. The most tragic event occurred in 1967. In January of that year, three American astronauts were killed in a fire while onboard the Apollo 1 spacecraft. In April of 1967, the Soviets also lost their first cosmonaut who died while attempting re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

Finally, in 1969, the Apollo 11 mission saw the US win the race to the moon. The craft was commanded by Neil Armstrong, along with crewmates Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins. On July 20th, 1969,

Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the surface of the moon. As he did so, he spoke his famous line, "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind."

With the astronauts' arrival on the moon, the space race effectively came to an end. Both the Soviet Union and the United States would continue their space programs, but many of the early goals had already been achieved.

1. Starting in 1957 and ending in 1969, create a timeline of the Space Race with seven (7) key events.

Cuban Revolution Timeline

August 1958 – Fidel Castro's armies launched an attack on President Fulgencio Batista's government, surrounding major cities and cutting off railways and supply lines.

December 31, 1958 – Batista fled Havana, the capital of Cuba, and Castro took power. President Dwight Eisenhower recognized the new Cuban government soon after.

April 1959 – Castro visited the United States and met with Vice President Richard Nixon. He was greeted by cheering crowds in many cities.

May 1959 – Castro signed the Agrarian Reform Act, which banned foreign ownership of land in Cuba and limited landholdings to 1,000 acres. The government took over any amount over 1,000 acres owned by a single family or company, broke it up, and gave it to peasants or turned it into state-run communes.

February 1960 – Cuba and the USSR agreed to begin trading sugar, oil, and grain.

March 1960 – Eisenhower approved funding and training for a plan to overthrow Castro. He also approved an embargo of sugar, oil, and guns, banning Americans from trading these items with Cuba.

July 1960 – Castro began nationalizing U.S. companies operating in Cuba.

January 3, 1961 – The U.S. ended diplomatic relations with Cuba.

January 20, 1961 – John F. Kennedy became president. He defeated Nixon, who had been Eisenhower's Vice President. During the campaign, Kennedy accused Eisenhower and Nixon of not doing enough to stop Castro, asking in one campaign speech, "How did we permit the Communists to establish this foothold 90 miles away?"

April 17, 1961 – A CIA-funded invasion of Cuba, known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion, was launched with the goal of overthrowing Castro. Castro's army defeated the invasion within a few days.

Document A: Source: Fidel Castro, Interview with U.S. Society of Editors, February 28, 1959. (Modified)

In February 1959, Castro was interviewed in Havana by members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, an organization that represents the editors of U.S. newspapers. These are excerpts from the interview.

Question: Are the electoral laws going to be changed?

Answer: Of course, we will try to improve the system so that democracy will be here in politics. People used to buy votes, spend money, using power to win the election. We want to improve our electoral system.

Question: What is your opinion of the U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba since you came?

Answer: I am not an American citizen. I have no right to speak about the political situation. But if you ask me about Cuba, I think now it is not a bad policy. This time I think the U.S. government sent a good Ambassador. Everybody says he is a good Ambassador and I feel the attitude is not against us politically. Really the official policies as I think now and observe is of friendship.

Question: Can you estimate when the elections will be held?

Answer: Yes, in about two years. People want this.

Question: Do you have a plan to work with Eisenhower to solve any difficulties?

Answer: As you know there are some interests of a few people, that are a small percentage of the U.S. . . . But really there are no serious difficulties. . . . I do say we are a small country and a small people working here too much to solve our difficulties. The U.S. is a big country and big people working to solve the difficulties. . . . Then I am here in my place, working in my small country and working for my small people, and we want to be in friendship with all the countries of America. If President Eisenhower has time—and if I have time, too, I would gladly speak with him as I speak with you and as I speak the same with the most small citizen and the most big citizen of the U.S. I would gladly salute and shake hands.

Document B: Source: Fidel Castro, Speech in Havana, Cuba, on May 1, 1961 (Modified)

Castro gave this speech in Havana, Cuba, on May 1, 1961. May 1st is International Workers' Day, a celebration of the working class promoted by labor advocates and leftists.

The Americans spoke of elections. What elections did they want? A revolution expressing the will of the people is an election everyday, not every four years; it is a constant meeting with the people, like this meeting. The old politicians could never have gathered as many votes as there are people here tonight to support the revolution.

If Mr. Kennedy does not like socialism, well we do not like imperialism! We do not like capitalism! We have as much right to protest over the existence of an imperialist-capitalist regime 90 miles from our coast as he feels he has to protest over the existence of a socialist regime 90 miles from his coast. We would not think of protesting over that, because that is the business of the people of the United States. It would be absurd for us to try to tell the people of the United States what system of government they must have.

Rights do not come from size. Right does not come from one country being bigger than another. That does not matter. We have only limited territory, a small nation, but our right is as respectable as that of any country, regardless of its size. It is absurd for Mr. Kennedy . . . to tell us what kind of government he wants us to have. It occurs to Mr. Kennedy to do that only because he does not have a clear concept of international law or sovereignty. Who had those ideas before Kennedy? Hitler and Mussolini!

We do not endanger the security of a single North American. We, making agrarian reform, people's ranches, houses, schools, literacy campaigns, building hospitals, sending doctors, giving scholarships, building factories, increasing the productive capacity of our country, creating public beaches, converting schools, and giving the people the right to a better future—we do not endanger a single U.S. family or a single U.S. citizen.

	Document A	Document B
According to this document, how did Fidel Castro view the United States?		
Overall, do you think this is a credible document to help you answer the question, How did Fidel Castro view the United States?		
How did Fidel Castro view the United States?		