

broad cluster of issues that we group under the rubric of multiculturalism, there is an elite consensus whose content meets a prima facie test of disinterestedness. Every elite white heterosexual male who endorses wider opportunity for those who are not elite, not white, not heterosexual, or not male holds a disinterested view. Is it possible that what's new is not the absence of a disinterested elite, but the presence of a disinterested elite whose agenda differs from its predecessors' and can be pursued by means other than government service?

—Ralph Whitehead, Jr.

THE KINDER, GENTLER MILITARY.

By Stephanie Gutmann. Scribner.
300 pp. \$25

The latest sex-related scandal to afflict the Pentagon—the U.S. Army's first-ever female three-star general alleges that a fellow general groped her—provides further testimony, if any were needed, that gender remains a problem for the American military. For more than a quarter-century, the armed services have been engaged in an extraordinary effort to integrate women fully into their ranks, prompted by the military's demand for "manpower" in a post-conscription era, and urged on by powerful forces promoting

ness, and combat effectiveness, incorporating women into the force has exacted a heavy toll. She concludes that, short of a full-fledged assault on human nature, the project is likely to mean the end of the American military as a serious fighting force.

Although by no means the only book on women in the military, this may well be the first to consider the subject honestly. Unlike other writers, whether on the left or the right, for whom the issue serves as a proxy for scoring points related to a larger political agenda, Gutmann considers the subject on its own terms. Her approach is that of a journalist. While stronger on anecdote than on theory and analysis, the result is nonetheless compelling.

She empathizes with the women (and men) in the ranks who signed up to soldier and find themselves wrestling with the realities of gender-integrated ships and ready rooms. She is appropriately skeptical toward the activists innocent of military experience who airily dismiss ancient truths about military culture and unit cohesion. She is withering in her contempt for the senior military professionals who, succumbing to political correctness, foster a climate in which double standards become the norm and inconvenient data about female availability for duty and washout rates are ignored or selectively interpreted. The result, Gutmann writes, is an atmosphere within the services of "official avoidance, doublespeak, and euphemism"—and a loss of confidence in the integrity of senior leaders.

Yet one is left wondering whether gender is at the heart of the problems ailing today's military, or whether it is merely one manifestation of a much larger and more complex phenomenon. Gutmann notes in passing that the ongoing transformation of the military "parallels a general cultural drift in the United States." That cultural tendency—pointing toward a society that is shallow, self-absorbed, obsessed with material consumption—is hardly conducive to the nurturing of military virtues in men or women. If the American military has entered a period of decline, as now seems the case, the explanation goes beyond matters of gender. Responsibility for that decline rests squarely with a people who take



Male and female trainees at morning exercises at San Antonio's Lackland Air Force Base in 1998

full equality for women in American society. A project without precedent in all of military history, it rests on the premise that, in war as in other fields of human endeavor, men and women are interchangeable, or at least they ought to be.

Gutmann, a freelance writer, questions that premise and totes up the price paid in attempting to demonstrate its validity. In morale, readi-

for granted their claims to military preeminence but evince little interest in or commitment to actually sustaining it. Simply returning to

the days of a male-dominated military won't solve that problem.

—Andrew J. Bacevich

History

THE OTHER AMERICAN:
The Untold Life of Michael Harrington.
By Maurice Isserman. PublicAffairs.
449 pp. \$28.50

Books as well as individuals live in particular moments of history—and, often enough, they are “made” by those moments, or, conversely, rendered ineffective by the fads, fashions, and preoccupations of the time. We know Michael Harrington (1928–89) even today, more than a decade after his death, because his book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962) became a decisive resource for many Americans who wanted to take a searching look at their country, its social and economic possibilities, its moral lapses. Now we are offered a chance to know yet again, this time in retrospect, the person often described as “the man who discovered poverty.”

Among those who tried to change the United States in the name of justice, Harrington was a distinct moral leader. He was ever eager to put his mind's energy and his body's vigorously attentive presence on the line, even as he penned scores of essays, polemical or persuasive, and showed up at countless conferences where he tried to speak for those otherwise ignored, or, all too commonly, written off as psychologically flawed, culturally backward, or otherwise deficient.

For Harrington, the poor were not only fellow citizens but kindred souls. He came to understand them as a member of Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker community in the early 1950s, and, in the first words of *The Other America*, he acknowledged a substantial debt to those with whom he worked in that spiritually vigorous, communitarian effort, which has prodded so many, of various faiths and backgrounds, to take seriously the message of the Hebrew prophets and of their itinerant, preaching descendent, Jesus of Nazareth.

Isserman, a history professor at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, does well by that important side of Harrington—the bright, idealistic, Midwestern Catholic boy, who came

from a family of comfortable means, who went to good schools, but who first chose to embrace Day's “voluntary poverty,” and then aligned himself with political outsiders who struggled earnestly, though with scant success, to further socialist programs in a nation resistant to their ideals. The biography also brings to life America's midcentury reform struggles—all the time and energy that eventually got labeled the “civil rights movement” or the “War on Poverty.”

Isserman, who, like Harrington, has a wonderful way with words, tells a clear, straightforward story, rich with the details of a life lived fully, honorably, generously. Readers soon become absorbed, edified, and at times worn down by the hectic pace of activity chronicled—even as Harrington himself broke down physically from constantly moving about, writing away, exhorting audiences, urging comrades, standing up to opponents. No wonder (we learn) his two sons missed him sorely, as he did his idealistic wife, Stephanie. And no wonder he himself wrote that there was “not too much energy left over for the intimacy and personal love that is supposed to be the essence of my imagined future.”

So it goes, alas: Passion expended in behalf of others can bear a melancholy significance for those loved all too often at a distance. That irony makes this book a morally and psychologically instructive one, even as its central figure impresses us so very much by his goodness of heart, mind, and soul, constantly extended to others in word and deed.

—Robert Coles

MI6:
Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service.
By Stephen Dorril. Free Press. 907 pp.
\$40

When *MI6* was serialized in London's *Sunday Times* on the eve of its publication this spring, British authorities raided the publisher to seize files and computers, and sought by a series of legal maneuvers to suppress the book.