

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.