

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.

They failed, thanks less to the robust state of civil liberties in Britain than to the fact that the author was able to show that he had used open and public sources. The fearsome Official Secrets Act has been largely outflanked by the U.S. Freedom of Information Act and the opening of once secret files in Eastern Europe (and to a lesser degree in Moscow). Moreover, by carefully cross-referencing these open sources with the published memoirs and diaries of senior politicians and civil servants and then with the crudely sanitized British cabinet papers, the careful researcher can piece together far more than the spymasters ever thought possible. After 15 years of research, Dorril, a don at the University of Huddersfield, has produced a book that amounts to a genuine breakthrough.

Naturally, the headlines were grabbed by the sensational revelations that African leaders, including Nelson Mandela, Kenneth Kaunda, and Thomas Mboya, were “agents of influence,” and that Mandela, on a recent trip to Britain, made a discreet trip to MI6 to thank the agency for its work in foiling two assassination attempts against him. (Mandela denies being an agent.) The claims of MI6 plots to kill Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, Libya’s Muammar al-Qaddafi, and Serbia’s Slobodan Milosevic also won much more publicity than the manifest incompetence of the agency in failing (like the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) to foresee the invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982 or that of Kuwait in 1990. Again like the CIA, British intelligence in the mid-1980s underestimated both the weakness of the Soviet Union and Mikhail Gorbachev’s determination to reform it.

To the historian, however, the deeper interest in Dorril’s book (apart from his impressive research methods) lies in his well-documented argument that British intelligence helped bring about the Cold War by starting hostile operations against the Soviets in 1943, almost as soon as Stalingrad had shown that the Soviet Union would survive. “Now that the tide had turned, it was in our interest to let Germany and Russia bleed each other white,” wrote Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Where possible, British intelligence and guerrilla assets recruited to fight Hitler were redirected against the Soviet threat. In Greece, MI6 even joined the Nazi occupiers in funding the right-wing *gendarmerie* to crush the procommunist guerrillas.

Not that MI6 can be held wholly to blame; Soviet intelligence had been running hostile operations against both Britain and the United States before and during the war. But it is ironic that British agents in the European communist parties were reporting by 1947 that Stalin had ordered them onto the defensive and that there was no expansionist Soviet threat. MI6 and the CIA responded with tragic attempts to roll back Soviet power, sending hundreds of brave emigrés (and a lot of old Nazi supporters) to their doom, betrayed by Soviet moles such as Kim Philby.

—Martin Walker

**SECRET MESSAGES:
*Codebreaking and American
Diplomacy, 1930–1945.***

By David Alvarez. University Press of Kansas. 292 pp. \$35

Even more than the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency (NSA) suffers from a schizophrenic attitude toward disclosure. On the one hand, even a public hint of its supersecret work intercepting and decrypting signals has always been anathema. On the other hand, success stories are vital PR for any bureaucracy dependent on congressional funding. In 1996 the proponents of disclosure briefly gained the upper hand, and NSA declassified some 5,000 files on America’s code-breaking activities during World War II. (If you’ve got to have a success story, it’s hard to beat World War II.) Pieces of the story had come out earlier, but many gaps remained.

In this lucid, comprehensive, and frequently entertaining account, Alvarez, a professor of politics at St. Mary’s College in California, helps fill two of the largest gaps. One is the human story of decoding hundreds of thousands of messages a month sent by enemies, neutrals, and allies alike. The new archival records and other sources (including declassified NSA oral histories and the author’s own interviews with veterans) permit the first reconstruction of day-to-day life at Arlington Hall, the U.S. Army’s wartime code-breaking headquarters in Arlington, Virginia—the mind-boggling work, the frustrations, the strokes of incredible luck, and the cast of extraordinary characters, including the cryptanalyst who sat with his feet in a wastebasket to protect himself from the imagined ill effects of drafty offices.

The other gap Alvarez fills is the effect of this intelligence on American foreign policy