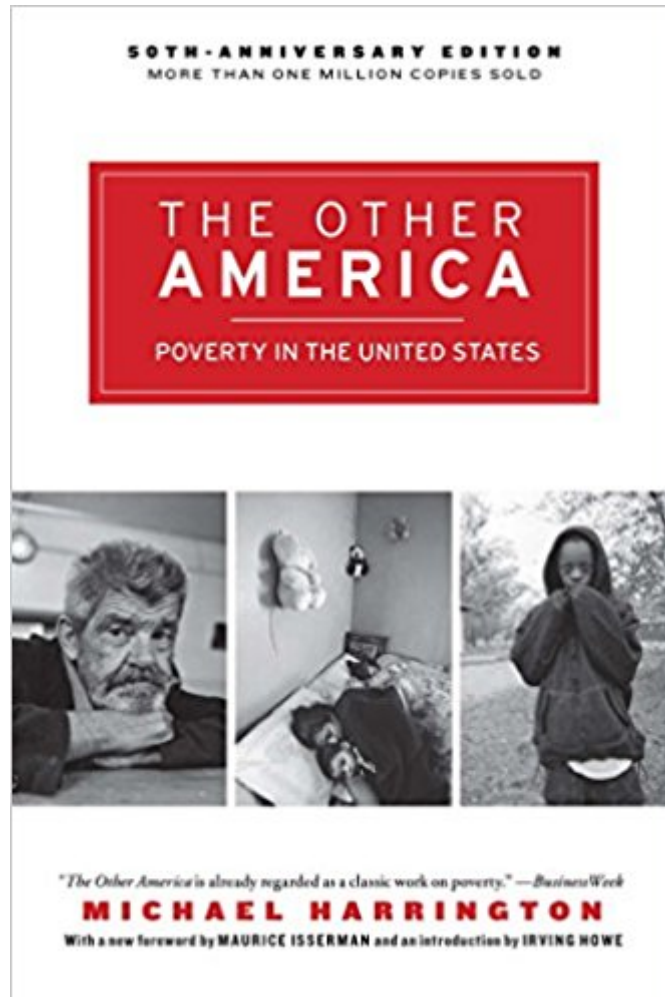


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# The Other America: Poverty In The United States



## Synopsis

In the fifty years since it was published, *The Other America* has been established as a seminal work of sociology. This anniversary edition includes Michael Harrington's essays on poverty in the 1970s and '80s as well as a new introduction by Harrington's biographer, Maurice Isserman. This illuminating, profoundly moving classic is still all too relevant for today's America. When Michael Harrington's masterpiece, *The Other America*, was first published in 1962, it was hailed as an explosive work and became a galvanizing force for the war on poverty. Harrington shed light on the lives of the poor "from farm to city" and the social forces that relegated them to their difficult situations. He was determined to make poverty in the United States visible and his observations and analyses have had a profound effect on our country, radically changing how we view the poor and the policies we employ to help them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Few works of contemporary non-fiction have had more lasting impact on the social consciousness of the overall society from which it arose than "The Other America", Michael Harrington's now classic tome on the egregious conditions under which what we would now call the "underclass" lived in mid-20th century American society. With an uncommon verve and uncanny precision, Harrington painstakingly detailed the disgusting and shocking realities of life for those many millions of Americans of both color and ethnicity living lives of desperate poverty in the midst of the affluent society. Millions of readers, myself included, were shocked to discover the extent to which this world

coexisted with our own, and many of the social action programs that arose in the 1960s and thereafter used this book as a kind of reference guide to the realities of poverty in contemporary society. Indeed, what is most disturbing about anyone re-reading the book is the discovery of how little conditions have changed for those who through the accident of birth, color, and ethnic origin, find themselves inexorably trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Sadly, for all the glad-handing of politicians and the proclamations by global corporations of the new and more widespread prosperity of the 1990s, the sobering truth is that very little progress has been made. Indeed, in more recent books such as William Finnegan's excellent "Cold New World", Harrington's basic thesis of the co-existence of a starker, poorer, and powerless populace left stranded to live lives of quiet desperation is reconfirmed, putting the lie to the many proclamations of universal opportunity and promise that politicians now ballyhoo.

The Other America was first published in 1962, before Johnson's "Great Society" and "War on Poverty," before Vietnam, before the urban riots of the late 60s, before the Civil Rights legislation, and before the formation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. As such, it may well seem a dinosaur to apply the revelations and ideas proposed by author Michael Harrington to a society that has advanced so far. Or has it? Harrington develops his thesis on the central premise that poverty in America is both there and widespread. More importantly, however, is the fact that it is hidden. People no longer have day-to-day contact with the urban poor. Before the mass exodus of the middle class, the majority of Americans lived in or near areas inhabited by the poor. Even if they did not, they walked through or drove through the rows of tenements on their way to work downtown. They saw the conditions the poor lived in and saw the faces of the poor. When Harrington wrote, as is true today, the "ghetto" is a place to avoid. We have successfully severed all economic use of the poor from our daily lives and are able to drive into downtown from the suburban fringe without even having to stop to see the lives of the poor. Even today's trend toward reconstructing highways below-grade so as to have less impact on the poor neighborhoods they divide further removes the lives of the poor from our daily routine-we don't even have to see the buildings pass by anymore. They are safely beyond the highway wall. Harrington differentiates between the poverty existing today and that of previous urban centers. The old ethnic ghettos were indeed permeated by poverty, had miserable living conditions, and were centers of disease and urban mischief.

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