

CHAPTER
19

GUIDED READING *The Other America*

Section 4

A. As you read about problems faced by the “other” America of the 1950s, note some causes of each problem, solutions that were offered, and some effects of those solutions. (Notice that two answers have been provided for you.)

Problem: Decaying Cities		
1. Causes:	Solution offered: <i>Urban renewal</i>	2. Effects of solution:
Problem: Discrimination Against Mexican Americans		
Causes: <i>Prejudice against Hispanics; hard feelings toward braceros who stayed to work in the U.S. after World War II; illegal aliens escaping poor conditions in Mexico</i>	3. Solutions offered:	
Problem: Economic Hardship for Native Americans		
4. Causes:	5. Solutions offered:	6. Effects of solutions:

B. On the back of this paper, explain the terms **bracero** and **termination policy**.

CHAPTER
19**Section 4****RETEACHING ACTIVITY** *The Other America***Reading Comprehension**

Choose the best answer for each item. Write the letter of your answer in the blank.

- _____ 1. "White flight" involved the mass exodus of white Americans from the nation's
- cities.
 - suburbs.
 - farms.
 - coast lines.
- _____ 2. The author of the influential book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* was
- James Dean.
 - Jack Kerouac.
 - Michael Harrington.
 - Felix Longoria.
- _____ 3. *Braceros* were workers who came to the United States from
- Europe.
 - Asia.
 - Mexico.
 - Africa.
- _____ 4. The Longoria incident involved the refusal by town officials to provide funeral services for a World War II veteran because he was
- African American.
 - Mexican-American.
 - Japanese-American.
 - Native American.
- _____ 5. The unsuccessful effort to assimilate Native Americans by moving them off their reservations and into the nation's cities was known as the
- termination policy.
 - Dawes Act.
 - bracero* program.
 - Indian Reorganization Act.
- _____ 6. The nation's poor in the 1950s were found in large numbers in every group except
- the elderly.
 - single women.
 - minorities.
 - suburban residents.

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PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Other America*

Sociologist Michael Harrington studied the plight of the “invisible” poor. His shocking report spurred Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson to fight the War on Poverty. As you read this excerpt from Harrington’s study, compare “other” Americans with those who realized the American dream in the 1950s.

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 [John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society*] 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. In all this, there will be statistics, and that offers the opportunity for disagreement among honest and sincere men. 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. . . .

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 the 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 run-away sweatshop.

from Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), 9–11.

Research Options

1. According to Harrington’s study, 40 to 50 million Americans were poor in the 1950s. Use a resource such as *The World Almanac and Book of Facts* to find out how many Americans are poor today. Has the number of poor people in the United States increased or decreased since the 1950s?
2. Research the government programs that were initiated under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to help the poor in the United States. Then make a chart to share your findings.

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The Voluntary Relocation Program

During the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government's Bureau of Indian Affairs subsidized the resettlement of some 35,000 rural Native Americans in urban areas. This voluntary relocation program, begun in response to the federal government's plan to "terminate" the tribes, ultimately failed. Native Americans encountered discrimination and a lack of adequate housing and jobs. As Watt Spade and Willard Walker indicate in their account of a visit to Chicago in this period, many of those who moved to the cities did not choose to stay.

One time I went up there to Chicago where my brother lives. Rabbit is his name. He was right there when I got off the bus. We were a little hungry so we stopped to eat on the way across town. This restaurant we stopped at was all glass on the outside, like one big window. You could see all the people eating inside. They weren't sitting down either; they were all standing up at a counter that wound all around through the place. They were standing along both sides of this counter, but they didn't seem to be talking to each other or looking at each other. It was like they were all looking at the wall.

My brother and I decided to eat at a place called Wally's Bar over near where he lives at Fullerton and Green. There were a lot of people in that place and they were all very friendly. They all seemed to know my brother too, but they called him "Indian Joe." I hadn't ever heard him called that.

Rabbit told me he didn't have any place where I could stay. He had an apartment, but they'd had a fire there a few days before. We went over to look at it, and I guess he hadn't been there for a few days because there was a letter from Momma on the stairs right where you come in. There was black soot on the stairs all the way up to the fourth floor, where his apartment was; and there were some Puerto Rican guys up there cleaning the place up. They had the radio turned on real loud playing some kind of Puerto Rican music. The whole place smelled like charcoal and burnt furniture.

We went back to that place where they all called Rabbit "Indian Joe" and I told him about the news from home. Then he told me all about the

city and about Chicago Rawhide, where he works. Finally I said I didn't think I was ready to settle down there just yet. We went on back to the bus station and waited around for the bus back to Oklahoma. There were a couple of Indian guys there, and they were telling this story. They said the government wanted to put a man on the moon and it could be done alright, but nobody knew how to get the guy home again after he landed on the moon. These guys said all the government had to do was put an Indian in that rocket ship and tell him he was being relocated and then, after he got to the moon, that Indian would find his own way home again and the government wouldn't have to figure that part out at all.

Rabbit and I sure liked that story. I wonder what ever happened to those two Indian guys.

from "Relocation" in Cherokee Stories by the Reverend Watt Spade and Willard Walker (Middletown: Wesleyan University Laboratory of Anthropology, 1966).

Discussion Questions

1. What were the narrator's first impressions of Chicago after he arrived by bus from Oklahoma?
2. What kind of life did Rabbit lead in Chicago?
3. Why do you think the narrator decided not to stay in Chicago with his brother?
4. Think about the story that the two Native Americans told at the bus station. Does the story reflect the success or the failure of the voluntary relocation program? Explain your response.

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