

Excerpt from “The Other America”

By Martin Luther King Jr. (April 14, 1967)

There are literally two Americas. One America is beautiful for situation. And, in a sense, this America is overflowing with the milk of prosperity and the honey of opportunity. This America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies; and culture and education for their minds; and freedom and human dignity for their spirits. In this America, millions of people experience every day the opportunity of having life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in all of their dimensions. And in this America millions of young people grow up in the sunlight of opportunity.

But tragically and unfortunately, there is another America. This other America has a daily ugliness about it that constantly transforms the ebullience of hope into the fatigue of despair. In this America millions of work-starved men walk the streets daily in search for jobs that do not exist. In this America millions of people find themselves living in rat-infested, vermin-filled slums. In this America people are poor by the millions. They find themselves perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.

In a sense, the greatest tragedy of this other America is what it does to little children. Little children in this other America are forced to grow up with clouds of inferiority forming every day in their little mental skies. As we look at this other America, we see it as an arena of blasted hopes and shattered dreams. Many people of various backgrounds live in this other America. Some are Mexican Americans, some are Puerto Ricans, some are Indians, some happen to be from other groups. Millions of them are Appalachian whites. But probably the largest group in this other America in proportion to its size in the Population is the American Negro.

The American Negro finds himself living in a triple ghetto. A ghetto of race, a ghetto of poverty, a ghetto of human misery. So what we are seeking to do in the Civil Rights Movement is to deal with this problem. To deal with this problem of the two Americas. We are seeking to make America one nation, Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.