



All This Marvelous Potential: Robert Kennedy's 1968 Tour of Appalachia

Matthew Algeo

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Matthew Algeo's *All This Marvelous Potential* is a broad study of Robert Kennedy's 1968 two-day trip to Kentucky and its lasting effects on both the Appalachian people and on the greater national conversation regarding poverty. This detailed narrative revives the struggles and successes of the people of Kentucky's coal country, as well as Kennedy's endless passion for empowering America's poor.

Using the two-day visit as an analytical framework, the text paints a vibrant picture of life in Kentucky's east in the late 1960s. Observations are placed in their political and social context; the book shows how events like the Vietnam War, the assassination of President Kennedy, the Space Race, the election against President Johnson, and the Civil Rights Movement impacted the region. The specter of the coal industry looms; it is shown to be both Appalachia's savior and its destroyer.

Kennedy's travels are presented in chronological order, but its the Appalachian people's stories that are their backbone. Kennedy visited their schoolhouses, homes, and neighborhoods to gather information for the Senate, and the people he spoke with, inspired, and angered all have room in the text. The book follows their lives beyond Kennedy's short visit, too, showing how that tour impacted their futures. Further, Algeo's text humanizes Kennedy, presenting him as genuine in his concern for solving poverty in America, but also showing that he was intent on crafting a narrative around which he could enter the presidential race.

All This Marvelous Potential is a concise historical analysis through which stories of Appalachia's coal country, and its residents' poverty, make clear the challenges of the past and the legacies that shaped a more hopeful future.

HOLLY JORDAN (March / April 2020)

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