

ABSTRACT

When Problems Persist: The Making and Legacy of the Moynihan Report

Lucas M. Miller, M.A.

Thesis Chairperson: James M. SoRelle, Ph.D.

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Undersecretary of Labor for Social Statistics and Policy Planning in the Johnson Administration, drafted an intergovernmental position paper entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* which stirred a major controversy among government officials, Civil Rights leaders, and the general public for its alleged contention that the African American family structure in the United States was a dysfunctional “tangle of pathology.” This thesis examines the intentions, reactions to, and legacies of what became known as the Moynihan Report. By focusing on the social science research methodology employed by Moynihan, the media distortion of his conclusions, and the historical context within which the report appeared, this thesis concludes that the Moynihan Report initiated an often contentious conversation that influenced and changed the way we talk and act about race, poverty, the family, and the possibility of change in American Society.

When Problems Persist: the Making and Legacy of the Moynihan Report

by

Lucas M. Miller, B.A.

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Jeffrey S. Hamilton, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

James M. SoRelle, Ph.D., Chairperson

T. Michael Parrish, Ph.D.

Jerry Z. Park, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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CHAPTER ONE

Major Influences on the “Moynihan Report”

Introduction

Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s¹ life in public service was both unpredictable and accomplished. From a humble background, Moynihan rose to the highest echelons of political power in which he was involved for nearly half a century. Perhaps remembered most as a four-term Democratic Senator from New York from 1976 to 2001, Moynihan’s career stretched much farther into the fabric of post-World War II American culture and politics. During a career in which he served nine consecutive presidents, Daniel Patrick Moynihan aroused controversy, witnessed resounding legislative victories, and suffered crushing political defeats. This thesis examines the social and cultural impact of Moynihan’s career beginning with his 1965 Labor Department report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, known as the Moynihan Report, through his service in President Richard Nixon’s first administration from 1969-70. Major political, ideological and cultural changes in the United States are discussed through the lens of the Moynihan Report and its many legacies. Among these themes are changing attitudes concerning race relations and the family, the influence of the media on political discourse, the relationship of social science research and social policy, and the neoconservative movement. The Moynihan Report controversy serves as

¹ Two biographies of Moynihan provided the basic biographical details expressed in this paragraph. Douglas Schoen, *Pat: A Biography of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* (New York: Harper & Row 1979); and Godfrey Hodgson, *The Gentleman from New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

a starting point, and Moynihan's subsequent career in the 1960s and early 1970s, focusing on his own rhetoric and writing, provides a thematic and narrative arc allowing the subtle yet persistent influence of the Moynihan Report on larger historical processes to become apparent. Thus, this project argues that the Moynihan Report, the controversy surrounding it and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's subsequent actions represent an important, undervalued episode in United States history that encapsulates many of the political and intellectual struggles of a rapidly changing nation in the late 1960s.

An understanding of Moynihan's early career necessitates a brief note concerning his childhood, a subject about which he remained guarded in public throughout his career. Born in Indiana but soon brought to New York City, Daniel Patrick Moynihan grew up in a single-parent home from age eleven. His father, a troubled newspaper reporter, abandoned his mother a few years after the move to New York City. This biographical fact would play a major role in determining the causes Moynihan championed in his political career. An enduring concern for the family, the poor, and disadvantaged children arose from his memories of coming from a broken home. As he wrote in 1949, "I've lived much of my life in a jungle of broken families, watching them tear out each other's minds, watching them feasting on each other's hearts."² Even when controversy appeared to have destroyed his career, the advocacy of the nuclear family and the protection of children in poverty remained issues of grave importance to Moynihan. Aid to families living in poverty, welfare reform, full employment, and equality of opportunity in education, the major issues Moynihan wrote about and legislated for, are all colored by his personal history. Although he was one of the

² Quoted in Schoen, *Pat*, 1.

counterculture's and especially the New Left's fiercest critics, for him, the personal was political.

The immediacy of experience that shaped Moynihan's political identity allowed him to develop an outsider status during much of his early career in both Washington and academia. Although he held a Ph.D. in political science from Tufts University and had spent nearly two years studying at the London School of Economics, Moynihan, even as a tenured professor at Harvard, remained a politician among academics. His work as a domestic policy advisor during the Kennedy Administration, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy Planning and Research during the Johnson Administration, and later as chief domestic policy advisor during the Nixon Administration located Moynihan among the ranks of those intellectuals and technocrats who came to Washington calling themselves New Frontiersmen with the Kennedy Administration. The fleeting acceptance Moynihan felt can also be seen in the restlessness of his early career. Within the five years following the release of *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* in 1965, Moynihan served as Assistant Secretary of Labor, unsuccessfully ran for President of the City Council of New York City, spent a year researching at Wesleyan, became a tenured professor in the Education Department at Harvard, and worked as a domestic policy advisor for two years in the Nixon Administration. Following his service in the Nixon White House, Moynihan turned his attention increasingly towards international affairs, serving as Ambassador to India from 1973-75, United States Ambassador to the United Nations beginning in 1975, and finally Senator from New York from 1976 to 2001. It is easy then to see Moynihan's career in three distinct sections both in terms of policy and political tendency. He transitioned from domestic to foreign and back to domestic policy

concerns and also from liberal towards neoconservative back towards liberal. By focusing on the events of Moynihan's early career, particularly the writing of and the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report, these distinctions become more complicated and problematized. The standard narrative of Moynihan's career does not readily show many of the seemingly contradictory opinions and actions he held. A close examination of the Moynihan Report controversy reveals the impact of the study on many facets of American race relations throughout the following decades.

The Moynihan Report controversy has become a minor episode in the charged atmosphere of the Civil Rights Movement. The research that made the Report reveals its context within a long tradition of sociological research of American race relations and illuminates the controversy that erupted between the Johnson Administration and Civil Rights leaders in the immediate wake of the Voting Rights Bill and the Watts riots.

The Making of the Moynihan Report

Written while he served in the Johnson Administrations as Undersecretary of Labor for Policy Planning and Research, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*³ was a report written for government consumption only. During the summer of 1965, the report was leaked to the public and sparked a major controversy. At the intersection of the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and the role of the social sciences in the creation of public policy, the Moynihan Report

³ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, March, 1965), in Lee Rainwater, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report. Including the Full Text of The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967), 39-124.

controversy marked the end of an era. The structure of the African American family, the report's central concern, remains a controversial subject in American sociology and politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

To explain the nature of Moynihan's famous (or infamous) report, this thesis describes a number of the works of sociology and history that influenced Moynihan's thinking or figured in the research for the report. The studies discussed below are divided into two loose groupings. First, works of history and sociology provided empirical and methodological understanding for the report. These works from the early twentieth century through the 1940s provide much of the methodology employed by Moynihan as well as the basic historical understanding of African American family life. The next group was composed of books and monographs roughly contemporary with the Moynihan Report. Several sociological and historical studies published in the 1960s were heavily influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and articulated similar arguments as those underlying Moynihan's arguments. This group of social scientists played an important role during the subsequent controversy as well as providing an immediate influence on Moynihan.

This chapter is intended to be representative rather than exhaustive and focuses on a relatively small number of book-length studies. Lee Rainwater's 1967 study *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* provides a contemporary narrative history of the controversy as well as bringing together many of the earliest published reactions to the report. Geared largely towards social scientists, Rainwater is most interested in approaching Moynihan's study through the lens of the relationship between social science and public policy, which in 1967, was still in a state of flux. By presenting

Moynihan's report as "a dramatic and policy oriented, well established though not universally supported, view of the afflictions of Negro Americans,"⁴ Rainwater provides a level-headed and scientific view of the entire controversy. James T. Patterson's *Freedom is Not Enough*,⁵ published in 2010, examines the legacy of the Moynihan Report through the continuing controversy surrounding African American family life. In this respect, Patterson provides a history of the Moynihan Report focused on welfare policy from the time of the report's release up through the present day.

The Negro Family: A Case for National Action

The actual text of *The Negro Family* runs seventy-eight pages and includes twenty-five tables and graphs as well as an appendix containing an additional fifteen tables. Its tone is overwhelmingly alarmist and attention grabbing. The report intended to incite President Johnson to take action and create policy. Couched in the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, Moynihan ties the Black freedom struggle to the domestic goals of the Johnson Administration. "It is no less clear that carrying this revolution forward to a successful conclusion is a first priority confronting the great society."⁶ To reach a successful conclusion to the Civil Right Movement, Moynihan advances a paradigm of equality in America. "It is increasingly demanded that the distribution of success and

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle Over Black Family Life: From LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁶ Moynihan, *The Negro Family*, 1.

failure within one group be roughly comparable to that within another group.”⁷ To achieve this goal Moynihan focuses on the role poverty and unemployment in the African American population play in affecting family instability and the dire importance of family structure in determining success in the United States. “The role of the family in shaping character and ability is so pervasive as to be easily overlooked. The family is the basic social unit of American life; it is the basic socializing unit. By and large, adult conduct in society is learned as a child.”⁸ The report goes on to outline statistics for dissolved marriages, illegitimate births, and female-headed households among African Americans. These statistics are called upon to show a startling rise in welfare dependency. Moynihan then attempts to look for the “Roots of the Problem” by investigating African American history. Here, he points specifically to the experience of slavery and Reconstruction, urbanization, unemployment, and intergenerational poverty as the primary factors for African American family breakdown. The role that history and slavery served as an explanation of contemporary problems would become one of the most hotly contested aspects of the report. Moynihan then moves on to explain the “Tangle of Pathology” developing within poor Black communities that if not addressed by new social policy would compel the African American family to continue to crumble at an accelerating rate.

The basis for this alarming breakdown of the poor Black family comes largely from the statistics shown in the graph, “New Cases Opened under AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) compared with unemployment rates for nonwhite

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

males.”⁹ This graph, dubbed “Moynihan’s scissors” by political scientist James Q. Wilson, shows that unemployment and new AFDC cases traditionally rose and fell in a pattern of almost total correlation. In 1962, however, the number of new AFDC cases rose while the number of unemployed nonwhite males fell for the first time. The problem of instability within the Black family is not inherent. Moynihan devotes entire chapters to the root causes of the problem including the legacy of slavery, discrimination, and various economic factors. But what Moynihan proposes and what would be controversial about his study is that the instability of the black family had become independent of these factors and demanded attention as a separate and unique problem. Throughout *The Negro Family*, Moynihan’s language betrays a distinct sense of urgency concerning this matter. He concludes by stating a national case for action. “The policy of the United States is to bring the Negro American to full and equal sharing in the responsibilities and rewards of citizenship. To this end, the programs of the Federal government bearing on this objective shall be designed to have the effect, directly or indirectly, of enhancing the stability and resources of the Negro American Family.”¹⁰ Moynihan’s plan was bold and controversial but not entirely innovative. It attempted to outline a problem and to begin a discussion. The plan for national action did not include any specific policy recommendations. To understand better where this call for action originated it is necessary to return to the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

The Study of the African American Family

W. E. B. Du Bois provided a significant influence not only on the content of the Moynihan Report but also on its methodology and style. *On Sociology and the Black Community*¹¹ collects many of Du Bois' shorter works and displays the significant role he played in the development of sociology as an academic discipline. Du Bois' scientific writings inaugurated an empirical, history-centric sociology at odds with much of the sociological writing of the late nineteenth century. Each volume of the Atlanta Publications, a series of eighteen monographs published between 1896 and 1914, dealt with a unique aspect of the African American community and represented one of the first attempts to study the life and community of Black Americans scientifically.¹² The Moynihan Report utilized Du Bois' theories and legacy as an academic sociologist, rather than Du Bois' later career as a journalist and social activist. "Sociology, according to Du Bois, must be scientific and have 'but one simple aim: the discovery of truth.'"¹³ Du Bois believed that sociological study should not be undertaken for the explicit purpose of social reform, but that social change was a process that could be informed and shaped by social research. This became his major contribution to the methodology of sociology in the early twentieth century. This understanding of social science is echoed in *The Negro Family*. One of the major criticisms of the report was its lack of concrete programs and policy recommendations. Moynihan attempted to articulate a social problem and state it in language expressive enough to encourage the government to formulate action groups,

¹¹ Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver, eds., *W. E. B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

which could then create the needed social policies and programs. The role of social science remained empirical and declarative, much more in line with thinkers like Du Bois than Herbert Spencer or other early twentieth century American social philosophers.¹⁴

Beyond the influence on methodology and philosophy of sociology, Du Bois' work on the Black family also influenced the content of Moynihan's report. The "influence of the past" and the "custom of marriage and easy separation"¹⁵ form the basis for a historical view of African American family life that would be supported through most of the twentieth century and affirmed in *The Negro Family*. This view contends that the major problems seen in working-class African American family life – separation, illegitimacy and matriarchy – result from the devastating experience of slavery and the instability of family life under the peculiar institution. Du Bois' work *The Philadelphia Negro*,¹⁶ published originally in 1899, also provides some of the earliest empirical evidence on the structure of the African American family to be utilized by sociologists and historians. Stressing that the difficulties of underemployment and poverty had ill effects on the sexual morality of African Americans,¹⁷ Du Bois began a tradition of assessing the pathological family structure of African Americans as resulting from the dislocations of slavery and exacerbated by the movement from rural to urban areas; these causes begat a cultural predilection towards promiscuity, abandonment, and temporary

¹⁴ Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: a Social Study* (New York: B. Bloom, 1967) [1899].

¹⁷ Ibid., 166.

marriage. Moynihan's historical view of structural problems in Black family life and his economic causation owe largely to Du Bois' and his successor E. Franklin Frazier's work.

E. Franklin Frazier was one of the most significant African American sociologists of the twentieth century, publishing regularly from the 1930s and until the early 1960s. His indispensable work concerning the African American family, especially *The Negro Family in the United States*,¹⁸ originally published in 1939, played a major role in influencing Moynihan and other social scientists of the 1960s. This work would perhaps bear more heavily on the Moynihan Report than any other single source. Nathan Glazer points out one of the key factors of this influence in the forward to the 1966 reprint of *The Negro Family*: "Frazier insisted that the social characteristics of the Negro family were shaped by social conditions, not race or African survivals."¹⁹ Like Du Bois before him, Frazier's view of the Black family is largely pessimistic and moralizing, although his study maintains a largely scientific and empirical tone. Flatly denying African cultural survivals as influencing Black family life, Frazier stressed the disorganization and destruction of slavery and the dislocation of emancipation as the leading causes shaping the whole of the African American community.²⁰ These macro factors affecting the entire Black community are amplified in the family by the experience of migration from rural areas to the urban centers. Frazier explicitly linked the changes occurring in the structure of the Black family and urbanization: "Family desertion has been one of the inevitable

¹⁸ Edward Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) [1939].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 232.

consequences of the urbanization of the Negro population.”²¹ Frazier also hinted at the vicious cycle of family instability that became so central to Moynihan’s ideas. “Many of the unmarried Negro mothers in our cities have never known a normal family life.”²² Any social scientist writing about the African American community in the 1960s would necessarily have studied both Du Bois and Frazier, but these brief examples show that several of their specific ideas about Black families provided an important basis for Moynihan’s own understanding of Black family life. More prudish and less focused on employment as a definitive factor, both Du Bois and Frazier bear the marks of their own times, but remain vital sources of empirical data and sociological method concerning the study of African American families.

The effects of urbanization obviously had a major impact upon Moynihan’s report, which dealt with issues he claimed as unique to urban areas in the 1960s. The study of African Americans in the rural South, however, undergirded much of the study of urbanization. Charles S. Johnson’s 1934 book, *Shadow of the Plantation*,²³ is one of the most important of these studies. Johnson’s method takes cues from Du Bois when he describes himself as a sociologist “who conceives of his community rather as a statistical aggregate than as a cultural complex.”²⁴ Johnson also points to the experience of slavery as the germinal point of matriarchal family structure in the African American community

²¹ Ibid., 245.

²² Ibid., 261.

²³ Charles S. Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934).

²⁴ Ibid., xvi.

and states that this pattern has maintained a separateness about African Americans in general.²⁵ Johnson also claims that the postponement of marriage and tendency towards temporary marriage within the Black community is accentuated in urban communities.²⁶ This view of marriage reflects a matriarchal and extended model of family centered on children. The confused understanding of divorce furthers this loose family structure. Its definition lying within the community instead of the courts contributes to the added insecurity of African American marriage.²⁷ As Johnson states, “Desertions are frequent, and almost casual, growing out of various kinds of disharmony.”²⁸ Johnson’s study relies heavily on the isolation and folkic nature of African American life in the rural South, but many of his arguments help explain the background causes of many of the changes in African American family structure occurring during the increasing urbanization of African Americans following World War I. These changes from the early twentieth century mirrored many of the changes stimulated by the Great Migration²⁹ of African American’s into urban industrial areas from the 1940s to 1960s that was chronicled by the work of Moynihan and others in the 1960s.

²⁵ Ibid., xxi-xxii.

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁷ Ibid., 71-73.

²⁸ Ibid., 75.

²⁹ For a narrative history of the Great Migration and its broad impact on African American culture see Nicholas Lehman, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1991).

Hortense Powdermaker's notable 1939 study of African Americans in the rural South during the early twentieth century, *After Freedom*,³⁰ is similar to Johnson's work. Powdermaker's background in anthropology focuses *After Freedom* on the culture of African Americans rather than the social structure of African American communities. This approach, considered alongside Johnson's more sociological method, provides a fuller picture of African Americans communities in the South. Powdermaker intends her research to be descriptive rather than proscriptive, but is aware of how social science research may affect social policy. "I have not attempted to suggest solutions, but hope that to those engaged in practical applications some of the material presented may be of use."³¹ *After Freedom* is, however, hindered by certain methodological deficiencies. Drawing the majority of its data from interviews with women, *After Freedom's* focus on male/female relationships is weighted towards a female perspective. Powdermaker dedicated two central chapters of her study to the family. She states that "matriarchal and elastic" families are a "well-established generalization" amongst African Americans.³² Like Johnson, Powdermaker stressed the informal nature of marriage as a result of a truncated family life under slavery. Thus marriage licenses become "ornaments of rare glamour,"³³ and legal divorces are viewed as "something more than a luxury; it savors of pretention and extravagance."³⁴ Much like other social science committed to African

³⁰ Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom* (New York: Atheneum, 1939).

³¹ *Ibid.*, x.

³² *Ibid.*, 143.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

American culture at this time, Powdermaker furthers the idea that African American family structure results from slavery and isolation in the South, and many of these unique attributes of Black family life became more pronounced in the wake of urbanization. Thus, *After Slavery* presents another aspect of the historical background from which Moynihan was working.

Two studies published in the early 1940s sponsored by the American Council on Education also figured prominently in the research and sociological background of *The Negro Family*. Allison Davis and John Dollard's study³⁵ of personality development in the urban South helped introduce an important psychological element to the study of African American communities and families. The study focused on eight case studies in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Natchez, Mississippi, and attempted to recreate personality development through interviews. The issue of illegitimacy is importantly viewed as being "nurtured" by slavery and one of the major problems within the Black community. The psychological aspects of *Children of Bondage* rely on behavioristic psychology, still a burgeoning field in the 1940s. Consequently, much of the theory undergirding the study is derived from Freudian thought, but eschews its terminology.³⁶ This trend remained important to many studies of African American life throughout the 1940s and 1950s and would have informed Moynihan's research. Davis also identified a racial caste system and social classes within the Black caste as the most important tools of social

³⁵ Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (Washington D. C.: American Council on Education, 1940).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii, xxv, 4, 9.

organization in African American communities in the urban South.³⁷ The idea of caste and class continued to inform sociological study of African Americans for generations.

William Warner's study for the American Council on Education and the American Youth Commission, *Color and Human Nature*³⁸ deals with personality development among African Americans in Chicago. Published in 1941, this study serves in many ways as a companion piece to *Children of Bondage*. Focusing on divisions within the black community, Warner argued that educational, professional, and physical attributes caused a wide variety of adaptations to white society among African Americans. The emphasis on personal appearance in the African American community is meant to mirror a more general trend in American society that associates physical attributes with "getting ahead in the world."³⁹ This breaking of African Americans in Chicago into classes highlights the family structure of the lower class. Warner argued, "In the lower classes, to which the great mass of Chicago Negroes belong, the family is virtually matriarchal or presided over by the mother."⁴⁰ The views expressed and arguments raised by Warner also point to the increasingly public nature of what was becoming known by the 1940s as the "Negro Problem." As race relations changed following the First World War, the Great Depression, the urbanization of African Americans, and World War II, the tone of many sociological works dealing with race

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 12.

³⁸ William Warner, *Color and Human Nature: Negro Personality Development in a Northern City* (Washington D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

relations became increasingly prescriptive. Warner warned that American race relations were “fateful for the dominant race in the American social scene as well as for the Negro; it places an ominous question mark after the most cherished national ideas.”⁴¹

The publication of Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*⁴² in 1944 was a watershed moment in the research of race relations in the United States. Financed by the Carnegie Foundation, *An American Dilemma* follows in the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville as a grand statement on American life by a foreign observer, in this case from Sweden. Myrdal couched his discussion of American race relations on the eve of World War II in his idea of an “American Creed.” “Older and wider than America itself,”⁴³ the American Creed consists of the high ideas best embodied in America’s founding documents along with a culture that Myrdal describes as having “high ideas in some laws” and “low respect for all law.”⁴⁴ In this way race represents an American dilemma. The American Creed calls for equality, but American practice has not allowed these principles to be lived out. This basic thesis would come to inform the Civil Rights Movement in a deep and lasting way. Myrdal, a trained economist, also issued a clarion call for a more active role for the social sciences by bemoaning that “social scientists, particularly sociologists, have developed a defeatist attitude towards the possibility of

⁴¹ Ibid., 296.

⁴² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 20th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) [1944].

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

inducing social change by means of legislation.”⁴⁵ This call for the active involvement of the social sciences in the formation of social policy can be witnessed in the Moynihan Report and in much of his subsequent career. *An American Dilemma* cast a long shadow over the study of race relations, but much of its intent directly effected Moynihan’s *The Negro Family*.

New Trends in the 1960s

This first group of studies focused primarily on the history and social existence of African Americans. In the 1960s, several scholars and writers continued in this tradition, but also began to interweave more contemporary concerns into their work. This contemporary set of social scientists and authors that influenced and largely supported the thesis of *The Negro Family* drew upon problems dealing with African American life – ethnicity, poverty, and urban renewal, as well as the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and the role of social policy as they all began to coalesce in the American government and public’s mind.

One work in particular that had a lasting impact on the study of African American history and culture in the 1960s and 1970s was Stanley Elkins’ *Slavery*,⁴⁶ published in 1959. Nathan Glazer’s introduction to the 1963 reprint of *Slavery* testified to its contemporary impact: “if understanding is of any value in the solution of social problems this book may help us overcome the deepest flaw in our own society.”⁴⁷ In *Slavery*,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁶ Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) [1959].

⁴⁷ Nathan Glazer, Introduction to *Slavery*, xvi.

Elkins argued that the nature of American plantation slavery had deep and lasting impacts on African American personality, especially that of males. Elkins attempts to locate “elements in the very structures of the plantation system- its ‘closed system’- that could sustain infantilism as a normal feature of behavior.”⁴⁸ His distinction of a “closed system” derives from a comparative study of slavery in the United States and Brazil modeled on the research of Frank Tannenbaum.⁴⁹ Infantilism refers in this instance to the stereotypical character of “Sambo,” which Elkins views as a uniquely American creation.⁵⁰ The absence of African survivals and a system of psychological brutalization, according to Elkins, created a personality type that has had some lasting effect on African Americans. An extended analogy with German concentration camp survivors provides a counterpoint and a field rich with psychological studies for Elkins to elaborate his thesis. Of particular importance concerning the study of concentration camps is “the discovery of how elements of personality change could be brought about in masses of individuals.”⁵¹ Employing this comparative model and including elements of interpersonal theory and role psychology, Elkins constructed an argument that was contested throughout the 1960s and 1970s as a means of extending the negative influence of slavery into the twentieth century African American community. The description of the slave family in which “the ‘real’ father was virtually without authority over his child,

⁴⁸ Elkins, *Slavery*, 86.

⁴⁹ Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1947).

⁵⁰ Elkins, *Slavery*, 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

and control of rewards and punishments all rested in other hands,”⁵² carried much weight in the future formulations of many social scientists, including Daniel P. Moynihan.

Thomas F. Pettigrew published *A Profile of the Negro American*⁵³ in 1964. In its focus on personality development among African Americans, Pettigrew’s study resembles the work of Allison Davis and William Warner two decades earlier. All had attempted to study the effects of racism in the United States upon the personality development of African Americans, but 1940 and 1964 in America seemed farther apart than a mere twenty-four years. *Profile* begins by proclaiming racism and its “vulgarity, is simply not supported by the empirical findings of the biological and social sciences.”⁵⁴ Many of Pettigrew’s arguments are familiar. He cites the “long shadow” cast by slavery over African Americans and attributes both poverty and migration as factors that maintain the “old slave pattern of a mother centered family.”⁵⁵ The severe family disorganization in African American culture coupled with racism embodied in the social role of “Negro” that African Americans are forced to perform in American society are the two primary processes that lead to what Pettigrew refers to as “painful suffering,”⁵⁶ which often prevents healthy personality development in African American children. With Pettigrew’s study, a more activist voice begins to be seen among social scientists dealing with American race relations. With obvious debts to Myrdal and others, Pettigrew’s

⁵² Ibid., 130.

⁵³ Thomas F. Pettigrew, *A Profile of the American Negro* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964).

⁵⁴ Ibid., vii.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13, 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 25.

psychological profile of African Americans was a substantial contemporary influence on the view of race relations and the social psychology of African Americans as they engaged in the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s. Pettigrew's views specifically influenced Moynihan as they both published articles in the fall 1965 special issue of the academic journal *Daedalus*. Pettigrew's article⁵⁷ narrowed the focus of *A Profile of the American Negro* to a social psychological reading of race relations. Focusing on the complexity and seeming contradictions of changing race relations, Pettigrew claimed that "Attitudes and behavior need not always be congruent,"⁵⁸ and zeroed in on the hardening of residential segregation in northern cities as one of the major problems in race relations. This contention strongly supported Moynihan's thesis concerning African American family structure and poverty.

A few years earlier, in 1962, Michael Harrington had published a study of American poverty entitled *The Other America*.⁵⁹ This book signaled the advent of a new type of poverty studies in the United States and challenged the idea that postwar American prosperity had reached all corners of the nation. Harrington attempted to draw attention to the poor in the United States who were ignored by the middle classes and cut out of then current federal aid programs. "That the poor are invisible is one of the most important things about them."⁶⁰ Harrington also took pains to stress that the other

⁵⁷ Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Complexity and Change in American Racial Patterns: A Social Psychological View," *Daedalus* 94 (Fall, 1965): 974-1008.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 977.

⁵⁹ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

Americans are not poor by choice; they did not fail, rather they “were victims of an impersonal process that selected some for progress and discriminated against others.”⁶¹ From this idea Harrington outlined a “culture of poverty” that blocked many poor Americans from breaking out of poverty and bettering themselves. This culture of poverty was “radically different from the one that dominates the society”⁶² and had a negative lasting effect on family structure, according to Harrington. The African American poor experienced a lifestyle and culture set apart even from that of other Americans living in poverty. It is a “culture of poverty and fear that goes far deeper than any law for or against discrimination,”⁶³ that grows directly out of the long history of racial discrimination in the United States. This racial and economic injustice have combined to create a persistent African American culture of poverty existing in the ghettos of northern cities that can best be described as a “pathological condition in our society.”⁶⁴

Harrington’s study influenced social science and on the formulation of the Kennedy Administration’s poverty program, the Johnson Administration’s Great Society programs and, most of all, on the War on Poverty. It sought to connect the problem of race relations with the problem of poverty in the United States. “The real emancipation of the Negro waits upon a massive assault upon the entire culture of poverty in American

⁶¹ Ibid., 9.

⁶² Ibid., 18.

⁶³ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

society.”⁶⁵ Harrington’s voice even seems to become predict the future as he called for a “war on poverty,”⁶⁶ two full years before President Johnson announced just such a program, which the Moynihan Report attempted to integrate with the Civil Rights Movement.

The year before the publication of *The Other America*, Oscar Lewis’s, *The Children of Sanchez*,⁶⁷ had defined the “culture of poverty” that became instrumental in Harrington’s study. Lewis’s concept of a culture of poverty remained a contentious and controversial idea in social science research for generations to come. Lewis’s study contains detailed interviews with the members of a poor family living in the central district of Mexico City. In his introduction, Lewis described how the culture of poverty “has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members.”⁶⁸ This unique subculture imitates many of the dominant culture’s features, but can exist as a subculture within a community. Although Lewis described the culture of poverty specific to Mexico and more broadly Latin America, his conceptual framework of a culture of poverty influenced Harrington and continued to influence sociological studies of urban life and poverty.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 181.

⁶⁷ Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁶⁸ Ibid., xxiv.

In 1963 Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan published *Beyond the Melting Pot*,⁶⁹ a study of ethnicity and ethnic groups in New York City. Written mostly by Glazer (Moynihan wrote a chapter concerning Irish-Americans) the book stresses the importance of the ethnic group as “not a survival from the age of mass immigration but a new social form.”⁷⁰ By positing ethnic groups in New York City as a sociological lens through which to reevaluate how Americans interact on a larger scale, Glazer and Moynihan were considered near the cutting edge of sociological research in 1963, a position that garnered nearly as much criticism as praise. The popularity of this book not only established Moynihan’s idea of the “Wild Irish Slum”⁷¹ but also helped to establish him as a respected voice in social science circles. The chapter of *Beyond the Melting Pot* focusing on African Americans stresses the isolation of New York City blacks as a result of discrimination and poverty.⁷² The Black family was treated in much the same way as it would be in Moynihan’s report but remains more optimistic by concentrating on education as an avenue for advancement. Glazer focused on the difficulty of Black men to maintain employment⁷³ and the lack of extended clan networks strong enough to

⁶⁹ Nathan Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) [1963].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 230-58. In the wake of the Moynihan Report controversy Moynihan would compare the Irish violence in ethnic neighborhoods of New York City during the nineteenth century to the Watts riots. Cf. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “A Family Policy for the Nation” *America Magazine*, 18 September 1966, in Rainwater, *Politics of Controversy*, 385-94.

⁷² Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38.

compare to other ethnic groups in New York City.⁷⁴ The conclusion drawn from these examples was that “the strictly legal approach [to Civil Rights] will have to be supplemented.”⁷⁵ The final conclusion of *Beyond the Melting Pot* claims that the American nationality is still forming and that race and religion will play a major role in whatever “American” may finally come to mean. The views of the African American chapter show that some within the social sciences held views similar to those articulated by the Moynihan Report two years before the controversy. The tone of the Moynihan Report and the circumstances in which it was written and became public played a major role in the controversy that sprang up around it.

In addition to Moynihan’s reliance on the social sciences in preparing *The Negro Family*, several leading Civil Rights leaders, many who would later criticize the report, had a direct influence upon the study. One such person was Bayard Rustin. Rustin was known as one of the most prominent organizers of the Civil Rights Movement, often working behind the scenes of most major events within the Movement. Writing and publishing frequently in both academic and popular journals, Rustin wrote two articles that informed Moynihan’s thesis. In an article entitled “The Civil Rights Struggle,” Rustin compared the Black Freedom Struggle to the Jewish struggle for civil rights, reminding his audience that while Jewish Americans came from a long tradition of religious, familial, and cultural stability, “Negroes, on the other hand, are burdened with a

⁷⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 41.

heritage of slavery, disruption of family, and denial of rights.”⁷⁶ An even more influential Rustin article, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement,”⁷⁷ was quoted directly in the Moynihan Report. In this article Rustin emphatically called for increased government involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. To Rustin “what also becomes clear is that all these interrelated problems . . . are not soluble by private voluntary efforts but require government action – or politics.”⁷⁸ A significant aspect of these interrelated problems includes the fact that, “the Negro family structure was totally destroyed by slavery and with it the possibility of cultural transmission.”⁷⁹ Though focusing predominately on employment and the economic opportunity afforded to African Americans, Rustin recognized the role of social and cultural problems in the continuance of the Civil Rights Movement, including the thorny issue of family structure.

Another prominent Civil Rights leader who had a recognizable influence on the Moynihan Report was Whitney M. Young, the president of the National Urban League from 1961 until his death in 1971. An energetic leader, during his tenure Young formulated a national program to reinvent race relations. This plan first took shape in his book *To Be Free*,⁸⁰ published in 1964. It views the challenges of integration and goals of the Civil Rights Movement as far more difficult and complex than a merely legal

⁷⁶ Bayard Rustin, “The Civil Rights Struggle” *Jewish Social Studies* 27, (January 1965): 33.

⁷⁷ Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement” *Commentary* 39, (January 1965): 25-31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁰ Whitney M. Young, *To Be Free* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

solution. He explains, “The special effort we favor to improve materially the living conditions for American Negroes will inevitably raise the standard of living that all citizens enjoy.”⁸¹ Young was one of the first major Civil Rights leaders to propose preferential treatment of African Americans as a necessary step towards equality. This controversial position, first articulated in *To Be Free*, would continue to be much talked about and became increasingly central to Civil Rights debates following the Moynihan Report controversy. *To Be Free* was one of the first books to combine a more journalistic approach to the issue of race relations with many of the sociological studies that had similarly attempted to deal with the same problems. Several major Civil Rights leaders wrote about their experiences, but Whitney Young produced a work that not only related his experience but also drew upon that experience to present some of the same ideas being put forward by a broad cross section of social scientists and outside observers.

Another voice that took up the issue of preferential treatment was that of Charles Silberman in his 1964 book, *Crisis in Black and White*.⁸² A journalist for *Fortune* magazine, Silberman originally planned only an article concerning urban housing and the effects of urban renewal, but the project grew increasingly into a study of race relations in urban areas resulting in *Crisis*.⁸³ Covering a wide range of topics including personality development, self-esteem, family structure, and the failure of the Civil Rights Movement in much of the North, Silberman pointed increasingly towards a combination of Black

⁸¹ Ibid., 234.

⁸² Charles Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1964).

⁸³ Ibid., x.

self-help and positive discrimination as the best solution to continuing discrimination and poverty in the Black community. “There is every reason for Negro organizations to concentrate on an effort to expand Negro employment, quite apart from the overall problem of unemployment and economic growth.”⁸⁴ This self-help ethos among African Americans needed to be supplemented by positive discrimination or the “doctrine of the debt,” that would benefit the whole of American society in the long run. “It will be considerably cheaper for businesses to subsidize Negro employment for a time than to pay for it in welfare – or in the cost to the community of racial violence.”⁸⁵ Silberman’s prescriptions arose from a broad-based criticism of the welfare establishment in the United States. He especially attacked the AFDC for its failure to prevent worsening conditions in the Black ghetto communities of northern cities.⁸⁶ Although written in a journalistic and editorializing tone, *Crisis in Black and White* presented many of the concepts and proposed directions for the Civil Rights Movement that were controversial in 1964. It is not directly a forerunner to the Moynihan Report, but much of its tone and language portraying urban poverty and race relations as a national crisis echoes the direction in which the Moynihan Report would attempt to steer the Civil Rights Movement.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 246.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 311-15.

The most significant immediate influence on Moynihan in his preparation of *The Negro Family* was *Dark Ghetto*⁸⁷ by Kenneth C. Clark, who had advised Moynihan during his research for the report and had participated in several planning sessions concerning White House interaction with Civil Rights leaders.⁸⁸ Published in early 1965, *Dark Ghetto* is a work exceedingly difficult to characterize. Part sociological survey, part memoir, part treatise on the psychology of Harlem, it presents a moving portrait of the urban crisis developing in the mid-1960s. The personal tone of the work described as, “the anguished cry of its author”⁸⁹ does not detract from the objectivity of the study, but rather humanizes the many ugly truths about ghetto life revealed over its course. This personal, sympathetic characterization proved to be an important aspect of a work that treads upon such delicate sociological ground. Clark broadly defined dark (African American) ghettos as “social, political, educational, and –above all – economic colonies”⁹⁰ created, in part, by the privileged white community’s willful blindness to social problems. The multivalent difficulties experienced by the African American poor that reside in the ghettos created what Clark described as pathology. “The roots of the pathology of the ghetto communities lie in the menial, low-income jobs held by most ghetto residents.”⁹¹ Although the sources and problems of ghetto pathology feed off of

⁸⁷ Kenneth C. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

⁸⁸ See Rainwater, *Politics of Controversy*, 33-37.

⁸⁹ Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, xx.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

each other, Clark was adamant in naming underemployment as the central cause of the problems he reported. He described the situation of Black youth in the ghetto as a “vicious cycle” created by their parents’ inability to maintain steady employment, locking them into the ghetto culture.⁹² Family instability among the ghetto population was another “one of the inevitable results of the unemployment and menial jobs status of urban Negroes.”⁹³ Clark also attributed many characteristics of ghetto culture to the psychological damage of segregation, discrimination, and racism. “It is still the white man’s society that governs the Negro’s image of himself.”⁹⁴ This debased self-image of African Americans reflects the psychological studies by Dollard, Warner, and Pettigrew as well as the underlying thesis of Myrdal’s study.

The Moynihan Report was largely criticized for its reliance on a historical approach to African American family instability, in line with Elkins’ thesis, often called the slavery-specific thesis, but the many sociological works that dealt with the psychological affects of racism are often minimized. *Dark Ghetto* is perhaps the best example of this. A major consequence of this self-hatred among African Americans is the sexual hierarchy created in the ghetto. This “sexual hierarchy has played a crucial role in the structure and pathology of the Negro family.”⁹⁵ Clark proposed that the conditions of the ghetto have pushed the instability of the African American family to the point where it can be considered pathological. Moynihan used this language almost verbatim in his

⁹² See *ibid.*, 39.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

study, and yet Clark's study did not cause the uproar that Moynihan's subsequently did. It is important to recognize that the way in which Moynihan and Clark describe the "pathological" aspects of the African American family are different contextually, but it is equally significant to recognize that Moynihan's thesis was not so much original as more forcefully stated than any major study before it. The close similarities seen in *Dark Ghetto* and *The Negro Family* are thus important for understanding how the Moynihan Report fit into current trends in the social sciences.

The Howard Commencement Address

On 4 June 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered remarks at the commencement ceremony for the historically black institution Howard University, an early draft of which had been written by Moynihan himself. The remarks focused on "the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights." Johnson relied heavily on *The Negro Family* when he declared that the federal government would play a vital role in creating "not just freedom but opportunity – not just legal equality but human ability – not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result."⁹⁶ The Howard University address can easily be viewed as an affirmation of the Voting Rights Act, which had been introduced in Congress the month before and would be signed into law at the beginning of August. Johnson focused specifically on the problems of the African American family, stressing that it must come first or "all the rest: schools and playgrounds, public assistance and private concern, will never be enough to cut

⁹⁶ Lyndon Baines Johnson, "Remarks of the President at Howard University 4 June 1965," in Rainwater, *Politics of Controversy*, 126.

completely the cycle of despair and deprivation.”⁹⁷ To help deal with these problems Johnson proclaimed that there would be a White House conference “To Fulfill These Rights” during the next year. This address closely associated *The Negro Family* with the official stance on Civil Rights taken by the White House. In the wake of this received Civil Rights triumph for President Johnson, especially after the Watts riots in late August, the Moynihan Report would begin to generate more and more controversy.

Reduced to a planning session, “To Fulfill These Rights” became the high point of this controversy and the symbolic rejection and condemnation of the Moynihan Report, and thus the official government position on Civil Rights, by a plurality of Civil Rights leaders. The failure of the conference by no means marked an end to the controversy, but rather the starting point for a new wave of historical writing and social science research that called into question not only *The Negro Family*, but also many of the assumptions and arguments of the works discussed above. A detailed examination of the Moynihan Report controversy is necessary to explore the various impacts and legacies left behind by its arguments and proposals.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 130.

CHAPTER ONE

Major Influences on the “Moynihan Report”

Introduction

Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s¹ life in public service was both unpredictable and accomplished. From a humble background, Moynihan rose to the highest echelons of political power in which he was involved for nearly half a century. Perhaps remembered most as a four-term Democratic Senator from New York from 1976 to 2001, Moynihan’s career stretched much farther into the fabric of post-World War II American culture and politics. During a career in which he served nine consecutive presidents, Daniel Patrick Moynihan aroused controversy, witnessed resounding legislative victories, and suffered crushing political defeats. This thesis examines the social and cultural impact of Moynihan’s career beginning with his 1965 Labor Department report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, known as the Moynihan Report, through his service in President Richard Nixon’s first administration from 1969-70. Major political, ideological and cultural changes in the United States are discussed through the lens of the Moynihan Report and its many legacies. Among these themes are changing attitudes concerning race relations and the family, the influence of the media on political discourse, the relationship of social science research and social policy, and the neoconservative movement. The Moynihan Report controversy serves as

¹ Two biographies of Moynihan provided the basic biographical details expressed in this paragraph. Douglas Schoen, *Pat: A Biography of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* (New York: Harper & Row 1979); and Godfrey Hodgson, *The Gentleman from New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

a starting point, and Moynihan's subsequent career in the 1960s and early 1970s, focusing on his own rhetoric and writing, provides a thematic and narrative arc allowing the subtle yet persistent influence of the Moynihan Report on larger historical processes to become apparent. Thus, this project argues that the Moynihan Report, the controversy surrounding it and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's subsequent actions represent an important, undervalued episode in United States history that encapsulates many of the political and intellectual struggles of a rapidly changing nation in the late 1960s.

An understanding of Moynihan's early career necessitates a brief note concerning his childhood, a subject about which he remained guarded in public throughout his career. Born in Indiana but soon brought to New York City, Daniel Patrick Moynihan grew up in a single-parent home from age eleven. His father, a troubled newspaper reporter, abandoned his mother a few years after the move to New York City. This biographical fact would play a major role in determining the causes Moynihan championed in his political career. An enduring concern for the family, the poor, and disadvantaged children arose from his memories of coming from a broken home. As he wrote in 1949, "I've lived much of my life in a jungle of broken families, watching them tear out each other's minds, watching them feasting on each other's hearts."² Even when controversy appeared to have destroyed his career, the advocacy of the nuclear family and the protection of children in poverty remained issues of grave importance to Moynihan. Aid to families living in poverty, welfare reform, full employment, and equality of opportunity in education, the major issues Moynihan wrote about and legislated for, are all colored by his personal history. Although he was one of the

² Quoted in Schoen, *Pat*, 1.

counterculture's and especially the New Left's fiercest critics, for him, the personal was political.

The immediacy of experience that shaped Moynihan's political identity allowed him to develop an outsider status during much of his early career in both Washington and academia. Although he held a Ph.D. in political science from Tufts University and had spent nearly two years studying at the London School of Economics, Moynihan, even as a tenured professor at Harvard, remained a politician among academics. His work as a domestic policy advisor during the Kennedy Administration, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy Planning and Research during the Johnson Administration, and later as chief domestic policy advisor during the Nixon Administration located Moynihan among the ranks of those intellectuals and technocrats who came to Washington calling themselves New Frontiersmen with the Kennedy Administration. The fleeting acceptance Moynihan felt can also be seen in the restlessness of his early career. Within the five years following the release of *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* in 1965, Moynihan served as Assistant Secretary of Labor, unsuccessfully ran for President of the City Council of New York City, spent a year researching at Wesleyan, became a tenured professor in the Education Department at Harvard, and worked as a domestic policy advisor for two years in the Nixon Administration. Following his service in the Nixon White House, Moynihan turned his attention increasingly towards international affairs, serving as Ambassador to India from 1973-75, United States Ambassador to the United Nations beginning in 1975, and finally Senator from New York from 1976 to 2001. It is easy then to see Moynihan's career in three distinct sections both in terms of policy and political tendency. He transitioned from domestic to foreign and back to domestic policy

concerns and also from liberal towards neoconservative back towards liberal. By focusing on the events of Moynihan's early career, particularly the writing of and the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report, these distinctions become more complicated and problematized. The standard narrative of Moynihan's career does not readily show many of the seemingly contradictory opinions and actions he held. A close examination of the Moynihan Report controversy reveals the impact of the study on many facets of American race relations throughout the following decades.

The Moynihan Report controversy has become a minor episode in the charged atmosphere of the Civil Rights Movement. The research that made the Report reveals its context within a long tradition of sociological research of American race relations and illuminates the controversy that erupted between the Johnson Administration and Civil Rights leaders in the immediate wake of the Voting Rights Bill and the Watts riots.

The Making of the Moynihan Report

Written while he served in the Johnson Administrations as Undersecretary of Labor for Policy Planning and Research, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*³ was a report written for government consumption only. During the summer of 1965, the report was leaked to the public and sparked a major controversy. At the intersection of the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and the role of the social sciences in the creation of public policy, the Moynihan Report

³ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, March, 1965), in Lee Rainwater, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: A Transaction Social Science and Public Policy Report. Including the Full Text of The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967), 39-124.

controversy marked the end of an era. The structure of the African American family, the report's central concern, remains a controversial subject in American sociology and politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

To explain the nature of Moynihan's famous (or infamous) report, this thesis describes a number of the works of sociology and history that influenced Moynihan's thinking or figured in the research for the report. The studies discussed below are divided into two loose groupings. First, works of history and sociology provided empirical and methodological understanding for the report. These works from the early twentieth century through the 1940s provide much of the methodology employed by Moynihan as well as the basic historical understanding of African American family life. The next group was composed of books and monographs roughly contemporary with the Moynihan Report. Several sociological and historical studies published in the 1960s were heavily influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and articulated similar arguments as those underlying Moynihan's arguments. This group of social scientists played an important role during the subsequent controversy as well as providing an immediate influence on Moynihan.

This chapter is intended to be representative rather than exhaustive and focuses on a relatively small number of book-length studies. Lee Rainwater's 1967 study *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* provides a contemporary narrative history of the controversy as well as bringing together many of the earliest published reactions to the report. Geared largely towards social scientists, Rainwater is most interested in approaching Moynihan's study through the lens of the relationship between social science and public policy, which in 1967, was still in a state of flux. By presenting

Moynihan's report as "a dramatic and policy oriented, well established though not universally supported, view of the afflictions of Negro Americans,"⁴ Rainwater provides a level-headed and scientific view of the entire controversy. James T. Patterson's *Freedom is Not Enough*,⁵ published in 2010, examines the legacy of the Moynihan Report through the continuing controversy surrounding African American family life. In this respect, Patterson provides a history of the Moynihan Report focused on welfare policy from the time of the report's release up through the present day.

The Negro Family: A Case for National Action

The actual text of *The Negro Family* runs seventy-eight pages and includes twenty-five tables and graphs as well as an appendix containing an additional fifteen tables. Its tone is overwhelmingly alarmist and attention grabbing. The report intended to incite President Johnson to take action and create policy. Couched in the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, Moynihan ties the Black freedom struggle to the domestic goals of the Johnson Administration. "It is no less clear that carrying this revolution forward to a successful conclusion is a first priority confronting the great society."⁶ To reach a successful conclusion to the Civil Right Movement, Moynihan advances a paradigm of equality in America. "It is increasingly demanded that the distribution of success and

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle Over Black Family Life: From LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁶ Moynihan, *The Negro Family*, 1.

failure within one group be roughly comparable to that within another group.”⁷ To achieve this goal Moynihan focuses on the role poverty and unemployment in the African American population play in affecting family instability and the dire importance of family structure in determining success in the United States. “The role of the family in shaping character and ability is so pervasive as to be easily overlooked. The family is the basic social unit of American life; it is the basic socializing unit. By and large, adult conduct in society is learned as a child.”⁸ The report goes on to outline statistics for dissolved marriages, illegitimate births, and female-headed households among African Americans. These statistics are called upon to show a startling rise in welfare dependency. Moynihan then attempts to look for the “Roots of the Problem” by investigating African American history. Here, he points specifically to the experience of slavery and Reconstruction, urbanization, unemployment, and intergenerational poverty as the primary factors for African American family breakdown. The role that history and slavery served as an explanation of contemporary problems would become one of the most hotly contested aspects of the report. Moynihan then moves on to explain the “Tangle of Pathology” developing within poor Black communities that if not addressed by new social policy would compel the African American family to continue to crumble at an accelerating rate.

The basis for this alarming breakdown of the poor Black family comes largely from the statistics shown in the graph, “New Cases Opened under AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) compared with unemployment rates for nonwhite

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 5.

males.”⁹ This graph, dubbed “Moynihan’s scissors” by political scientist James Q. Wilson, shows that unemployment and new AFDC cases traditionally rose and fell in a pattern of almost total correlation. In 1962, however, the number of new AFDC cases rose while the number of unemployed nonwhite males fell for the first time. The problem of instability within the Black family is not inherent. Moynihan devotes entire chapters to the root causes of the problem including the legacy of slavery, discrimination, and various economic factors. But what Moynihan proposes and what would be controversial about his study is that the instability of the black family had become independent of these factors and demanded attention as a separate and unique problem. Throughout *The Negro Family*, Moynihan’s language betrays a distinct sense of urgency concerning this matter. He concludes by stating a national case for action. “The policy of the United States is to bring the Negro American to full and equal sharing in the responsibilities and rewards of citizenship. To this end, the programs of the Federal government bearing on this objective shall be designed to have the effect, directly or indirectly, of enhancing the stability and resources of the Negro American Family.”¹⁰ Moynihan’s plan was bold and controversial but not entirely innovative. It attempted to outline a problem and to begin a discussion. The plan for national action did not include any specific policy recommendations. To understand better where this call for action originated it is necessary to return to the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

The Study of the African American Family

W. E. B. Du Bois provided a significant influence not only on the content of the Moynihan Report but also on its methodology and style. *On Sociology and the Black Community*¹¹ collects many of Du Bois' shorter works and displays the significant role he played in the development of sociology as an academic discipline. Du Bois' scientific writings inaugurated an empirical, history-centric sociology at odds with much of the sociological writing of the late nineteenth century. Each volume of the Atlanta Publications, a series of eighteen monographs published between 1896 and 1914, dealt with a unique aspect of the African American community and represented one of the first attempts to study the life and community of Black Americans scientifically.¹² The Moynihan Report utilized Du Bois' theories and legacy as an academic sociologist, rather than Du Bois' later career as a journalist and social activist. "Sociology, according to Du Bois, must be scientific and have 'but one simple aim: the discovery of truth.'"¹³ Du Bois believed that sociological study should not be undertaken for the explicit purpose of social reform, but that social change was a process that could be informed and shaped by social research. This became his major contribution to the methodology of sociology in the early twentieth century. This understanding of social science is echoed in *The Negro Family*. One of the major criticisms of the report was its lack of concrete programs and policy recommendations. Moynihan attempted to articulate a social problem and state it in language expressive enough to encourage the government to formulate action groups,

¹¹ Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver, eds., *W. E. B. Du Bois on Sociology and the Black Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

which could then create the needed social policies and programs. The role of social science remained empirical and declarative, much more in line with thinkers like Du Bois than Herbert Spencer or other early twentieth century American social philosophers.¹⁴

Beyond the influence on methodology and philosophy of sociology, Du Bois' work on the Black family also influenced the content of Moynihan's report. The "influence of the past" and the "custom of marriage and easy separation"¹⁵ form the basis for a historical view of African American family life that would be supported through most of the twentieth century and affirmed in *The Negro Family*. This view contends that the major problems seen in working-class African American family life – separation, illegitimacy and matriarchy – result from the devastating experience of slavery and the instability of family life under the peculiar institution. Du Bois' work *The Philadelphia Negro*,¹⁶ published originally in 1899, also provides some of the earliest empirical evidence on the structure of the African American family to be utilized by sociologists and historians. Stressing that the difficulties of underemployment and poverty had ill effects on the sexual morality of African Americans,¹⁷ Du Bois began a tradition of assessing the pathological family structure of African Americans as resulting from the dislocations of slavery and exacerbated by the movement from rural to urban areas; these causes begat a cultural predilection towards promiscuity, abandonment, and temporary

¹⁴ Ibid., 37-38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: a Social Study* (New York: B. Bloom, 1967) [1899].

¹⁷ Ibid., 166.

marriage. Moynihan's historical view of structural problems in Black family life and his economic causation owe largely to Du Bois' and his successor E. Franklin Frazier's work.

E. Franklin Frazier was one of the most significant African American sociologists of the twentieth century, publishing regularly from the 1930s and until the early 1960s. His indispensable work concerning the African American family, especially *The Negro Family in the United States*,¹⁸ originally published in 1939, played a major role in influencing Moynihan and other social scientists of the 1960s. This work would perhaps bear more heavily on the Moynihan Report than any other single source. Nathan Glazer points out one of the key factors of this influence in the forward to the 1966 reprint of *The Negro Family*: "Frazier insisted that the social characteristics of the Negro family were shaped by social conditions, not race or African survivals."¹⁹ Like Du Bois before him, Frazier's view of the Black family is largely pessimistic and moralizing, although his study maintains a largely scientific and empirical tone. Flatly denying African cultural survivals as influencing Black family life, Frazier stressed the disorganization and destruction of slavery and the dislocation of emancipation as the leading causes shaping the whole of the African American community.²⁰ These macro factors affecting the entire Black community are amplified in the family by the experience of migration from rural areas to the urban centers. Frazier explicitly linked the changes occurring in the structure of the Black family and urbanization: "Family desertion has been one of the inevitable

¹⁸ Edward Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) [1939].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 232.

consequences of the urbanization of the Negro population.”²¹ Frazier also hinted at the vicious cycle of family instability that became so central to Moynihan’s ideas. “Many of the unmarried Negro mothers in our cities have never known a normal family life.”²² Any social scientist writing about the African American community in the 1960s would necessarily have studied both Du Bois and Frazier, but these brief examples show that several of their specific ideas about Black families provided an important basis for Moynihan’s own understanding of Black family life. More prudish and less focused on employment as a definitive factor, both Du Bois and Frazier bear the marks of their own times, but remain vital sources of empirical data and sociological method concerning the study of African American families.

The effects of urbanization obviously had a major impact upon Moynihan’s report, which dealt with issues he claimed as unique to urban areas in the 1960s. The study of African Americans in the rural South, however, undergirded much of the study of urbanization. Charles S. Johnson’s 1934 book, *Shadow of the Plantation*,²³ is one of the most important of these studies. Johnson’s method takes cues from Du Bois when he describes himself as a sociologist “who conceives of his community rather as a statistical aggregate than as a cultural complex.”²⁴ Johnson also points to the experience of slavery as the germinal point of matriarchal family structure in the African American community

²¹ Ibid., 245.

²² Ibid., 261.

²³ Charles S. Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934).

²⁴ Ibid., xvi.

and states that this pattern has maintained a separateness about African Americans in general.²⁵ Johnson also claims that the postponement of marriage and tendency towards temporary marriage within the Black community is accentuated in urban communities.²⁶ This view of marriage reflects a matriarchal and extended model of family centered on children. The confused understanding of divorce furthers this loose family structure. Its definition lying within the community instead of the courts contributes to the added insecurity of African American marriage.²⁷ As Johnson states, “Desertions are frequent, and almost casual, growing out of various kinds of disharmony.”²⁸ Johnson’s study relies heavily on the isolation and folkic nature of African American life in the rural South, but many of his arguments help explain the background causes of many of the changes in African American family structure occurring during the increasing urbanization of African Americans following World War I. These changes from the early twentieth century mirrored many of the changes stimulated by the Great Migration²⁹ of African American’s into urban industrial areas from the 1940s to 1960s that was chronicled by the work of Moynihan and others in the 1960s.

²⁵ Ibid., xxi-xxii.

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁷ Ibid., 71-73.

²⁸ Ibid., 75.

²⁹ For a narrative history of the Great Migration and its broad impact on African American culture see Nicholas Lehman, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1991).

Hortense Powdermaker's notable 1939 study of African Americans in the rural South during the early twentieth century, *After Freedom*,³⁰ is similar to Johnson's work. Powdermaker's background in anthropology focuses *After Freedom* on the culture of African Americans rather than the social structure of African American communities. This approach, considered alongside Johnson's more sociological method, provides a fuller picture of African Americans communities in the South. Powdermaker intends her research to be descriptive rather than proscriptive, but is aware of how social science research may affect social policy. "I have not attempted to suggest solutions, but hope that to those engaged in practical applications some of the material presented may be of use."³¹ *After Freedom* is, however, hindered by certain methodological deficiencies. Drawing the majority of its data from interviews with women, *After Freedom's* focus on male/female relationships is weighted towards a female perspective. Powdermaker dedicated two central chapters of her study to the family. She states that "matriarchal and elastic" families are a "well-established generalization" amongst African Americans.³² Like Johnson, Powdermaker stressed the informal nature of marriage as a result of a truncated family life under slavery. Thus marriage licenses become "ornaments of rare glamour,"³³ and legal divorces are viewed as "something more than a luxury; it savors of pretention and extravagance."³⁴ Much like other social science committed to African

³⁰ Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom* (New York: Atheneum, 1939).

³¹ *Ibid.*, x.

³² *Ibid.*, 143.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

American culture at this time, Powdermaker furthers the idea that African American family structure results from slavery and isolation in the South, and many of these unique attributes of Black family life became more pronounced in the wake of urbanization. Thus, *After Slavery* presents another aspect of the historical background from which Moynihan was working.

Two studies published in the early 1940s sponsored by the American Council on Education also figured prominently in the research and sociological background of *The Negro Family*. Allison Davis and John Dollard's study³⁵ of personality development in the urban South helped introduce an important psychological element to the study of African American communities and families. The study focused on eight case studies in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Natchez, Mississippi, and attempted to recreate personality development through interviews. The issue of illegitimacy is importantly viewed as being "nurtured" by slavery and one of the major problems within the Black community. The psychological aspects of *Children of Bondage* rely on behavioristic psychology, still a burgeoning field in the 1940s. Consequently, much of the theory undergirding the study is derived from Freudian thought, but eschews its terminology.³⁶ This trend remained important to many studies of African American life throughout the 1940s and 1950s and would have informed Moynihan's research. Davis also identified a racial caste system and social classes within the Black caste as the most important tools of social

³⁵ Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (Washington D. C.: American Council on Education, 1940).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii, xxv, 4, 9.

organization in African American communities in the urban South.³⁷ The idea of caste and class continued to inform sociological study of African Americans for generations.

William Warner's study for the American Council on Education and the American Youth Commission, *Color and Human Nature*³⁸ deals with personality development among African Americans in Chicago. Published in 1941, this study serves in many ways as a companion piece to *Children of Bondage*. Focusing on divisions within the black community, Warner argued that educational, professional, and physical attributes caused a wide variety of adaptations to white society among African Americans. The emphasis on personal appearance in the African American community is meant to mirror a more general trend in American society that associates physical attributes with "getting ahead in the world."³⁹ This breaking of African Americans in Chicago into classes highlights the family structure of the lower class. Warner argued, "In the lower classes, to which the great mass of Chicago Negroes belong, the family is virtually matriarchal or presided over by the mother."⁴⁰ The views expressed and arguments raised by Warner also point to the increasingly public nature of what was becoming known by the 1940s as the "Negro Problem." As race relations changed following the First World War, the Great Depression, the urbanization of African Americans, and World War II, the tone of many sociological works dealing with race

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 12.

³⁸ William Warner, *Color and Human Nature: Negro Personality Development in a Northern City* (Washington D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

relations became increasingly prescriptive. Warner warned that American race relations were “fateful for the dominant race in the American social scene as well as for the Negro; it places an ominous question mark after the most cherished national ideas.”⁴¹

The publication of Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*⁴² in 1944 was a watershed moment in the research of race relations in the United States. Financed by the Carnegie Foundation, *An American Dilemma* follows in the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville as a grand statement on American life by a foreign observer, in this case from Sweden. Myrdal couched his discussion of American race relations on the eve of World War II in his idea of an “American Creed.” “Older and wider than America itself,”⁴³ the American Creed consists of the high ideas best embodied in America’s founding documents along with a culture that Myrdal describes as having “high ideas in some laws” and “low respect for all law.”⁴⁴ In this way race represents an American dilemma. The American Creed calls for equality, but American practice has not allowed these principles to be lived out. This basic thesis would come to inform the Civil Rights Movement in a deep and lasting way. Myrdal, a trained economist, also issued a clarion call for a more active role for the social sciences by bemoaning that “social scientists, particularly sociologists, have developed a defeatist attitude towards the possibility of

⁴¹ Ibid., 296.

⁴² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 20th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) [1944].

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

inducing social change by means of legislation.”⁴⁵ This call for the active involvement of the social sciences in the formation of social policy can be witnessed in the Moynihan Report and in much of his subsequent career. *An American Dilemma* cast a long shadow over the study of race relations, but much of its intent directly effected Moynihan’s *The Negro Family*.

New Trends in the 1960s

This first group of studies focused primarily on the history and social existence of African Americans. In the 1960s, several scholars and writers continued in this tradition, but also began to interweave more contemporary concerns into their work. This contemporary set of social scientists and authors that influenced and largely supported the thesis of *The Negro Family* drew upon problems dealing with African American life – ethnicity, poverty, and urban renewal, as well as the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and the role of social policy as they all began to coalesce in the American government and public’s mind.

One work in particular that had a lasting impact on the study of African American history and culture in the 1960s and 1970s was Stanley Elkins’ *Slavery*,⁴⁶ published in 1959. Nathan Glazer’s introduction to the 1963 reprint of *Slavery* testified to its contemporary impact: “if understanding is of any value in the solution of social problems this book may help us overcome the deepest flaw in our own society.”⁴⁷ In *Slavery*,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁶ Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) [1959].

⁴⁷ Nathan Glazer, Introduction to *Slavery*, xvi.

Elkins argued that the nature of American plantation slavery had deep and lasting impacts on African American personality, especially that of males. Elkins attempts to locate “elements in the very structures of the plantation system- its ‘closed system’- that could sustain infantilism as a normal feature of behavior.”⁴⁸ His distinction of a “closed system” derives from a comparative study of slavery in the United States and Brazil modeled on the research of Frank Tannenbaum.⁴⁹ Infantilism refers in this instance to the stereotypical character of “Sambo,” which Elkins views as a uniquely American creation.⁵⁰ The absence of African survivals and a system of psychological brutalization, according to Elkins, created a personality type that has had some lasting effect on African Americans. An extended analogy with German concentration camp survivors provides a counterpoint and a field rich with psychological studies for Elkins to elaborate his thesis. Of particular importance concerning the study of concentration camps is “the discovery of how elements of personality change could be brought about in masses of individuals.”⁵¹ Employing this comparative model and including elements of interpersonal theory and role psychology, Elkins constructed an argument that was contested throughout the 1960s and 1970s as a means of extending the negative influence of slavery into the twentieth century African American community. The description of the slave family in which “the ‘real’ father was virtually without authority over his child,

⁴⁸ Elkins, *Slavery*, 86.

⁴⁹ Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1947).

⁵⁰ Elkins, *Slavery*, 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

and control of rewards and punishments all rested in other hands,”⁵² carried much weight in the future formulations of many social scientists, including Daniel P. Moynihan.

Thomas F. Pettigrew published *A Profile of the Negro American*⁵³ in 1964. In its focus on personality development among African Americans, Pettigrew’s study resembles the work of Allison Davis and William Warner two decades earlier. All had attempted to study the effects of racism in the United States upon the personality development of African Americans, but 1940 and 1964 in America seemed farther apart than a mere twenty-four years. *Profile* begins by proclaiming racism and its “vulgarity, is simply not supported by the empirical findings of the biological and social sciences.”⁵⁴ Many of Pettigrew’s arguments are familiar. He cites the “long shadow” cast by slavery over African Americans and attributes both poverty and migration as factors that maintain the “old slave pattern of a mother centered family.”⁵⁵ The severe family disorganization in African American culture coupled with racism embodied in the social role of “Negro” that African Americans are forced to perform in American society are the two primary processes that lead to what Pettigrew refers to as “painful suffering,”⁵⁶ which often prevents healthy personality development in African American children. With Pettigrew’s study, a more activist voice begins to be seen among social scientists dealing with American race relations. With obvious debts to Myrdal and others, Pettigrew’s

⁵² Ibid., 130.

⁵³ Thomas F. Pettigrew, *A Profile of the American Negro* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964).

⁵⁴ Ibid., vii.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13, 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 25.

psychological profile of African Americans was a substantial contemporary influence on the view of race relations and the social psychology of African Americans as they engaged in the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s. Pettigrew's views specifically influenced Moynihan as they both published articles in the fall 1965 special issue of the academic journal *Daedalus*. Pettigrew's article⁵⁷ narrowed the focus of *A Profile of the American Negro* to a social psychological reading of race relations. Focusing on the complexity and seeming contradictions of changing race relations, Pettigrew claimed that "Attitudes and behavior need not always be congruent,"⁵⁸ and zeroed in on the hardening of residential segregation in northern cities as one of the major problems in race relations. This contention strongly supported Moynihan's thesis concerning African American family structure and poverty.

A few years earlier, in 1962, Michael Harrington had published a study of American poverty entitled *The Other America*.⁵⁹ This book signaled the advent of a new type of poverty studies in the United States and challenged the idea that postwar American prosperity had reached all corners of the nation. Harrington attempted to draw attention to the poor in the United States who were ignored by the middle classes and cut out of then current federal aid programs. "That the poor are invisible is one of the most important things about them."⁶⁰ Harrington also took pains to stress that the other

⁵⁷ Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Complexity and Change in American Racial Patterns: A Social Psychological View," *Daedalus* 94 (Fall, 1965): 974-1008.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 977.

⁵⁹ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

Americans are not poor by choice; they did not fail, rather they “were victims of an impersonal process that selected some for progress and discriminated against others.”⁶¹ From this idea Harrington outlined a “culture of poverty” that blocked many poor Americans from breaking out of poverty and bettering themselves. This culture of poverty was “radically different from the one that dominates the society”⁶² and had a negative lasting effect on family structure, according to Harrington. The African American poor experienced a lifestyle and culture set apart even from that of other Americans living in poverty. It is a “culture of poverty and fear that goes far deeper than any law for or against discrimination,”⁶³ that grows directly out of the long history of racial discrimination in the United States. This racial and economic injustice have combined to create a persistent African American culture of poverty existing in the ghettos of northern cities that can best be described as a “pathological condition in our society.”⁶⁴

Harrington’s study influenced social science and on the formulation of the Kennedy Administration’s poverty program, the Johnson Administration’s Great Society programs and, most of all, on the War on Poverty. It sought to connect the problem of race relations with the problem of poverty in the United States. “The real emancipation of the Negro waits upon a massive assault upon the entire culture of poverty in American

⁶¹ Ibid., 9.

⁶² Ibid., 18.

⁶³ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81.

society.”⁶⁵ Harrington’s voice even seems to become predict the future as he called for a “war on poverty,”⁶⁶ two full years before President Johnson announced just such a program, which the Moynihan Report attempted to integrate with the Civil Rights Movement.

The year before the publication of *The Other America*, Oscar Lewis’s, *The Children of Sanchez*,⁶⁷ had defined the “culture of poverty” that became instrumental in Harrington’s study. Lewis’s concept of a culture of poverty remained a contentious and controversial idea in social science research for generations to come. Lewis’s study contains detailed interviews with the members of a poor family living in the central district of Mexico City. In his introduction, Lewis described how the culture of poverty “has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members.”⁶⁸ This unique subculture imitates many of the dominant culture’s features, but can exist as a subculture within a community. Although Lewis described the culture of poverty specific to Mexico and more broadly Latin America, his conceptual framework of a culture of poverty influenced Harrington and continued to influence sociological studies of urban life and poverty.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 181.

⁶⁷ Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁶⁸ Ibid., xxiv.

In 1963 Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan published *Beyond the Melting Pot*,⁶⁹ a study of ethnicity and ethnic groups in New York City. Written mostly by Glazer (Moynihan wrote a chapter concerning Irish-Americans) the book stresses the importance of the ethnic group as “not a survival from the age of mass immigration but a new social form.”⁷⁰ By positing ethnic groups in New York City as a sociological lens through which to reevaluate how Americans interact on a larger scale, Glazer and Moynihan were considered near the cutting edge of sociological research in 1963, a position that garnered nearly as much criticism as praise. The popularity of this book not only established Moynihan’s idea of the “Wild Irish Slum”⁷¹ but also helped to establish him as a respected voice in social science circles. The chapter of *Beyond the Melting Pot* focusing on African Americans stresses the isolation of New York City blacks as a result of discrimination and poverty.⁷² The Black family was treated in much the same way as it would be in Moynihan’s report but remains more optimistic by concentrating on education as an avenue for advancement. Glazer focused on the difficulty of Black men to maintain employment⁷³ and the lack of extended clan networks strong enough to

⁶⁹ Nathan Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) [1963].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 230-58. In the wake of the Moynihan Report controversy Moynihan would compare the Irish violence in ethnic neighborhoods of New York City during the nineteenth century to the Watts riots. Cf. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “A Family Policy for the Nation” *America Magazine*, 18 September 1966, in Rainwater, *Politics of Controversy*, 385-94.

⁷² Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38.

compare to other ethnic groups in New York City.⁷⁴ The conclusion drawn from these examples was that “the strictly legal approach [to Civil Rights] will have to be supplemented.”⁷⁵ The final conclusion of *Beyond the Melting Pot* claims that the American nationality is still forming and that race and religion will play a major role in whatever “American” may finally come to mean. The views of the African American chapter show that some within the social sciences held views similar to those articulated by the Moynihan Report two years before the controversy. The tone of the Moynihan Report and the circumstances in which it was written and became public played a major role in the controversy that sprang up around it.

In addition to Moynihan’s reliance on the social sciences in preparing *The Negro Family*, several leading Civil Rights leaders, many who would later criticize the report, had a direct influence upon the study. One such person was Bayard Rustin. Rustin was known as one of the most prominent organizers of the Civil Rights Movement, often working behind the scenes of most major events within the Movement. Writing and publishing frequently in both academic and popular journals, Rustin wrote two articles that informed Moynihan’s thesis. In an article entitled “The Civil Rights Struggle,” Rustin compared the Black Freedom Struggle to the Jewish struggle for civil rights, reminding his audience that while Jewish Americans came from a long tradition of religious, familial, and cultural stability, “Negroes, on the other hand, are burdened with a

⁷⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 41.

heritage of slavery, disruption of family, and denial of rights.”⁷⁶ An even more influential Rustin article, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement,”⁷⁷ was quoted directly in the Moynihan Report. In this article Rustin emphatically called for increased government involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. To Rustin “what also becomes clear is that all these interrelated problems . . . are not soluble by private voluntary efforts but require government action – or politics.”⁷⁸ A significant aspect of these interrelated problems includes the fact that, “the Negro family structure was totally destroyed by slavery and with it the possibility of cultural transmission.”⁷⁹ Though focusing predominately on employment and the economic opportunity afforded to African Americans, Rustin recognized the role of social and cultural problems in the continuance of the Civil Rights Movement, including the thorny issue of family structure.

Another prominent Civil Rights leader who had a recognizable influence on the Moynihan Report was Whitney M. Young, the president of the National Urban League from 1961 until his death in 1971. An energetic leader, during his tenure Young formulated a national program to reinvent race relations. This plan first took shape in his book *To Be Free*,⁸⁰ published in 1964. It views the challenges of integration and goals of the Civil Rights Movement as far more difficult and complex than a merely legal

⁷⁶ Bayard Rustin, “The Civil Rights Struggle” *Jewish Social Studies* 27, (January 1965): 33.

⁷⁷ Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement” *Commentary* 39, (January 1965): 25-31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁰ Whitney M. Young, *To Be Free* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

solution. He explains, “The special effort we favor to improve materially the living conditions for American Negroes will inevitably raise the standard of living that all citizens enjoy.”⁸¹ Young was one of the first major Civil Rights leaders to propose preferential treatment of African Americans as a necessary step towards equality. This controversial position, first articulated in *To Be Free*, would continue to be much talked about and became increasingly central to Civil Rights debates following the Moynihan Report controversy. *To Be Free* was one of the first books to combine a more journalistic approach to the issue of race relations with many of the sociological studies that had similarly attempted to deal with the same problems. Several major Civil Rights leaders wrote about their experiences, but Whitney Young produced a work that not only related his experience but also drew upon that experience to present some of the same ideas being put forward by a broad cross section of social scientists and outside observers.

Another voice that took up the issue of preferential treatment was that of Charles Silberman in his 1964 book, *Crisis in Black and White*.⁸² A journalist for *Fortune* magazine, Silberman originally planned only an article concerning urban housing and the effects of urban renewal, but the project grew increasingly into a study of race relations in urban areas resulting in *Crisis*.⁸³ Covering a wide range of topics including personality development, self-esteem, family structure, and the failure of the Civil Rights Movement in much of the North, Silberman pointed increasingly towards a combination of Black

⁸¹ Ibid., 234.

⁸² Charles Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Random House, 1964).

⁸³ Ibid., x.

self-help and positive discrimination as the best solution to continuing discrimination and poverty in the Black community. “There is every reason for Negro organizations to concentrate on an effort to expand Negro employment, quite apart from the overall problem of unemployment and economic growth.”⁸⁴ This self-help ethos among African Americans needed to be supplemented by positive discrimination or the “doctrine of the debt,” that would benefit the whole of American society in the long run. “It will be considerably cheaper for businesses to subsidize Negro employment for a time than to pay for it in welfare – or in the cost to the community of racial violence.”⁸⁵ Silberman’s prescriptions arose from a broad-based criticism of the welfare establishment in the United States. He especially attacked the AFDC for its failure to prevent worsening conditions in the Black ghetto communities of northern cities.⁸⁶ Although written in a journalistic and editorializing tone, *Crisis in Black and White* presented many of the concepts and proposed directions for the Civil Rights Movement that were controversial in 1964. It is not directly a forerunner to the Moynihan Report, but much of its tone and language portraying urban poverty and race relations as a national crisis echoes the direction in which the Moynihan Report would attempt to steer the Civil Rights Movement.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 246.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 311-15.

The most significant immediate influence on Moynihan in his preparation of *The Negro Family* was *Dark Ghetto*⁸⁷ by Kenneth C. Clark, who had advised Moynihan during his research for the report and had participated in several planning sessions concerning White House interaction with Civil Rights leaders.⁸⁸ Published in early 1965, *Dark Ghetto* is a work exceedingly difficult to characterize. Part sociological survey, part memoir, part treatise on the psychology of Harlem, it presents a moving portrait of the urban crisis developing in the mid-1960s. The personal tone of the work described as, “the anguished cry of its author”⁸⁹ does not detract from the objectivity of the study, but rather humanizes the many ugly truths about ghetto life revealed over its course. This personal, sympathetic characterization proved to be an important aspect of a work that treads upon such delicate sociological ground. Clark broadly defined dark (African American) ghettos as “social, political, educational, and –above all – economic colonies”⁹⁰ created, in part, by the privileged white community’s willful blindness to social problems. The multivalent difficulties experienced by the African American poor that reside in the ghettos created what Clark described as pathology. “The roots of the pathology of the ghetto communities lie in the menial, low-income jobs held by most ghetto residents.”⁹¹ Although the sources and problems of ghetto pathology feed off of

⁸⁷ Kenneth C. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

⁸⁸ See Rainwater, *Politics of Controversy*, 33-37.

⁸⁹ Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, xx.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

each other, Clark was adamant in naming underemployment as the central cause of the problems he reported. He described the situation of Black youth in the ghetto as a “vicious cycle” created by their parents’ inability to maintain steady employment, locking them into the ghetto culture.⁹² Family instability among the ghetto population was another “one of the inevitable results of the unemployment and menial jobs status of urban Negroes.”⁹³ Clark also attributed many characteristics of ghetto culture to the psychological damage of segregation, discrimination, and racism. “It is still the white man’s society that governs the Negro’s image of himself.”⁹⁴ This debased self-image of African Americans reflects the psychological studies by Dollard, Warner, and Pettigrew as well as the underlying thesis of Myrdal’s study.

The Moynihan Report was largely criticized for its reliance on a historical approach to African American family instability, in line with Elkins’ thesis, often called the slavery-specific thesis, but the many sociological works that dealt with the psychological affects of racism are often minimized. *Dark Ghetto* is perhaps the best example of this. A major consequence of this self-hatred among African Americans is the sexual hierarchy created in the ghetto. This “sexual hierarchy has played a crucial role in the structure and pathology of the Negro family.”⁹⁵ Clark proposed that the conditions of the ghetto have pushed the instability of the African American family to the point where it can be considered pathological. Moynihan used this language almost verbatim in his

⁹² See *ibid.*, 39.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

study, and yet Clark's study did not cause the uproar that Moynihan's subsequently did. It is important to recognize that the way in which Moynihan and Clark describe the "pathological" aspects of the African American family are different contextually, but it is equally significant to recognize that Moynihan's thesis was not so much original as more forcefully stated than any major study before it. The close similarities seen in *Dark Ghetto* and *The Negro Family* are thus important for understanding how the Moynihan Report fit into current trends in the social sciences.

The Howard Commencement Address

On 4 June 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered remarks at the commencement ceremony for the historically black institution Howard University, an early draft of which had been written by Moynihan himself. The remarks focused on "the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights." Johnson relied heavily on *The Negro Family* when he declared that the federal government would play a vital role in creating "not just freedom but opportunity – not just legal equality but human ability – not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result."⁹⁶ The Howard University address can easily be viewed as an affirmation of the Voting Rights Act, which had been introduced in Congress the month before and would be signed into law at the beginning of August. Johnson focused specifically on the problems of the African American family, stressing that it must come first or "all the rest: schools and playgrounds, public assistance and private concern, will never be enough to cut

⁹⁶ Lyndon Baines Johnson, "Remarks of the President at Howard University 4 June 1965," in Rainwater, *Politics of Controversy*, 126.

completely the cycle of despair and deprivation.”⁹⁷ To help deal with these problems Johnson proclaimed that there would be a White House conference “To Fulfill These Rights” during the next year. This address closely associated *The Negro Family* with the official stance on Civil Rights taken by the White House. In the wake of this received Civil Rights triumph for President Johnson, especially after the Watts riots in late August, the Moynihan Report would begin to generate more and more controversy.

Reduced to a planning session, “To Fulfill These Rights” became the high point of this controversy and the symbolic rejection and condemnation of the Moynihan Report, and thus the official government position on Civil Rights, by a plurality of Civil Rights leaders. The failure of the conference by no means marked an end to the controversy, but rather the starting point for a new wave of historical writing and social science research that called into question not only *The Negro Family*, but also many of the assumptions and arguments of the works discussed above. A detailed examination of the Moynihan Report controversy is necessary to explore the various impacts and legacies left behind by its arguments and proposals.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 130.

CHAPTER THREE

The Continuation of Controversy by Other Means: The Moynihan Report in the Decade after 1966

Although the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report largely subsided by the end of 1966 as the war in South East Asia increasingly trumped domestic policy in the media, the issues raised by the controversy did not simply disappear. Throughout the decade that followed 1966 and beyond, the issues thrust into the spotlight by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and his critics continued to shape discussions of the Black family, African American culture, and poverty in the United States. The Moynihan Report did not result in a new wave of legislation dealing with urban poverty or the stability of the family as it intended. It did, however, create a new impetus to reexamine issues of race relations and family structure in several intellectual and cultural mediums. Three fields of thought and expression are representative of the continuing importance of the Moynihan Report.

During the late sixties and early seventies major changes occurred in the historiography of American slavery. In the wake of the Moynihan Report controversy, many of the trends already emerging among historians found a renewed impetus to expand and alter the way the peculiar institution was studied and understood. Beginning with Stanley M. Elkins' *Slavery* published in 1959 and running through the publication of Herbert G. Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* in 1976, the emergence of the "slave community" school of thought and new emphases on domestic adaptation and slave rebellion owe much to the contentious political and intellectual environment

created by the Moynihan Report. As this shift in the historiography of slavery blossomed, representations of the Black family in more popular media also began to change. In novels, plays, movies and especially television shows, the stories being told about the Black family were made and remade again and again. From the lauded portrayals of Black family life and its struggles in the work of Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin in the late 1950s and early 1960s through the “ghetto” sitcoms of the 1970s and Alex Haley’s landmark novel *Roots* published in 1976, the narratives about Black culture and especially family life hinged upon many of the issues central to the Moynihan Report controversy. Finally, the burgeoning discipline of urban studies of which Moynihan was an early proponent continued to deal with the arguments of the Moynihan Report controversy throughout the 1970s and beyond. Many models for understanding the Black family were produced, but during the decade or so after 1966, the Moynihan Report remained the initial point of departure for many of these new trends in the social sciences. By briefly examining these trends the subtle but durable legacy of the Moynihan Report comes into sharper focus and sets the parameters for a discussion of the legacy of Moynihan’s early work for race relations down to the present.

Historiography of American Slavery

The historiography of American slavery has a long and complex history in American scholarship. One of the earliest and most important scholarly treatments of slavery was Ulrich B. Phillips’s *American Negro Slavery*¹ published in 1918. Although

¹ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1918).

marred by racist ideology, Phillips's often rose-tinted portrayal of Old South plantation life uncovered and utilized a vast body of primary source material that sustained the study of slavery for the next several generations of historians. It was not until 1956 that a major work of historical scholarship effectively challenged the primacy of Phillips' works. Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution*² pushed back against the paternalism and benevolence assigned to the slave owning class by Phillips. While attributing many forms of day-to-day rebellion to slaves, Stampp maintained a perspective of slavery drawn almost entirely from documentation of slave owners rather than their bondsmen. Although dismissing Phillips' racial justification of slavery, Stampp affirmed many of the attributes of slave culture identified by Phillips. This included sexual mores and marital patterns as Stampp attested "the typical slave family was matriarchal in form."³ The major shift in the historiography did not come from allowing the slaves agency, but from highlighting the harshness of the slave regime. It was the severity of bondage that allowed Stampp to argue against the happy-go-lucky slaves described by Phillips. Examining the actual treatment of slaves in the American South, and more importantly the affect that treatment had upon slaves' personality and development, emerged as a theme that would be writ large by historians and serve as the central feature of the historiographical debate the Moynihan Report so powerfully influenced.

The publication of *Slavery* by Stanley Elkins in 1959 was met with relatively little fanfare. Viewed as an original and innovative view of the degradations of the slave regime, it was not until the mid-1960s that Elkins' thesis came under increasingly severe

² Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956).

³ *Ibid.*, 344.

attack. A major part of this delayed reaction stems from the cooption of the psychological aspects of Elkins' thesis by social scientists. In many ways Elkins argued that the "Sambo" personality described by Ulrich Phillips actually did exist during slavery. He then argued that using psychological and social scientific techniques showed that the cruelty of the American slave regime was the cause of this infantilization. The implications of this argument proved to be highly contentious during the decades after its appearance. As Ann J. Lane points out in the preface to a collection of essays, many written during the 1960s and 1970s, discussing Elkins' work, "Although Elkins emphatically states that he is not relating the Sambo personality of slavery to the current Afro-American population, others, Black and white, have made such contentions."⁴ Of the many who utilized the Elkins' thesis to comment on the current role of race relations in the United States, Daniel Patrick Moynihan was the chief example.⁵ It was Moynihan's perceived contention that the psychic damage visited upon African Americans, particularly males, during slavery as described by Elkins contributed to the modern breakdown of Black families in the northern ghettos of the United States that inspired many historians to reevaluate Elkins by way of affirming the critical attacks on the Moynihan Report. This led to a new generation of historians of American slavery beginning in the early 1970s.

John Blassingame's *The Slave Community* published in 1972 did not attract the popular attention given major historical works on American slavery published later in the decade. Despite the lack of fanfare, it provided a new paradigm for understanding

⁴ Ann J. Lane, "Introduction," in Ann J. Lane, ed., *The Debate Over Slavery: Elkins and his Critics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 13.

⁵ See Chapter 1, 17-19.

American slavery. Its argument is succinctly summarized by Al-Tony Gilmore: “The pressures of slavery with its accompanying planter power was not, in most instances strong enough to infantilize slaves to the point of becoming Sambos; to force slaves into total identification with their master; or to prevent slaves from developing and sustaining their own cultural norms, value systems and world views.”⁶ This summation clearly defines Blassingame’s argument as a refutation of Elkins, a point shared by many of the reviews and critics of Blassingame’s work.⁷

Rather than characterize slavery as the cause of the destruction of the slave family, Blassingame claimed that the southern plantation was “unique in the New World because it permitted the development of a monogamous slave family.”⁸ Discounting Elkins’ use of differences between the legal structure of slavery in North America and Latin America, Blassingame pointed to the near sexual parity of slaves in North America as opposed to the massive gender imbalance in Latin America. Furthermore, Blassingame assigned practical motivation to the encouragement of stable slave family life to slave owners: “Planters were generally more interested in encouraging monogamy because it was conducive to discipline.”⁹ In this way the slave family served the ends of both the slave owner, because the threat of family separation served as a powerful incentive for discipline, and the slaves, as a survival mechanism which allowed them limited space to

⁶ Al-Tony Gilmore, “Introduction,” in Al-Tony Gilmore, ed., *Revisiting Blassingame’s Slave Community* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), ix.

⁷ See Gilmore, *Revisiting Blassingame’s Slave Community*, xii.

⁸ John Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

create authority within the oppressions of slavery. Blassingame attacked, then, the idea that slavery produced matriarchal or matrifocal families through the subordination and emasculation of males under slavery. This attack was tempered, however, by Blassingame's assertion that "under such a regime slave fathers had little or no authority."¹⁰ While patriarchal, nuclear families were the norm among slaves; they were under constant threat from the vagaries of the slave regime. This led the author to claim that the slave family was "an extremely precarious institution."¹¹

Blassingame focused on the slave family as a survival mechanism. He did not pursue any continuity between the slave family and the modern Black family as the Moynihan Report does. His work is vital because it represents the one of the earliest and most influential major historical works to view slavery from the perspective of the slaves.¹² Blassingame articulated a duality within the personality of the slave family. Men were emasculated in a general way by the harshness of the slave regime, but were able to develop respect and power in the slave quarters. Although this argument was viewed as an attack on Elkins' theory of slavery as a closed system, Blassingame lingered on the sexual abuse of Black women by masters and its negative affect on the psychology of male slaves. This led to Blassingame's discussion of the family to be geared largely towards the role played by the father as an authority figure. This often downplayed the

¹⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² Historian George P. Rawick compiled and edited multiple volumes of North American Slave narratives and autobiographies during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Along with these volumes, he provides a similar historical view of slavery as Blassingame's work. See George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: the Making of the Black Community* (Westport: Greenwood, 1972).

role of mother's themselves, sometimes even to the point of criticizing slave mothers maternal instincts¹³ In this way, Blassingame presented the slave family as an institution riddled with weaknesses, but garnering extremely high respect among slaves.

The year 1974 proved a turning point in the historiography of American slavery. Two studies published during this year captured the national spotlight and quickly established themselves as enduring contributions to the study of American slavery. Robert Fogel's and Stanley Engerman's controversial *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* attempted to revise the history of slavery and provide a resounding defense of quantitative, scientific methodology in historical study. The authors went so far as to include a second volume of *Time on the Cross* containing detailed data sets, mathematical equations, and models used in the first volume. In light of the impact of *Time on the Cross*, it is amazing that another historical study of American slavery could garner as much attention and praise in the same year as Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. Genovese's Marxist-inflected history of the creation of slave culture was a wide-ranging work that built upon Blassingame's study and solidified the "slave community" model as an enduring historical framework for the study of American slavery.

From its first pages, *Time on the Cross* clearly meant to provide a revisionist view of American slavery. As part of a growing group of historians and economists known as cliometricians, both Fogel and Engerman were engaged in rewriting the entire history of

¹³ Blassingame's treatment of women raised the ire of many feminist historians who believed that his focus on the psyche of male slave was overwhelmingly one-sided and his portrait of female slaves one-dimensional. For an example of a detailed scholarly treatment of different roles played by slave women see Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985).

the United States from a scientific, quantitative, and economic standpoint. This goal was to be achieved through the use of large data sets, complex mathematical formulas, and computer-generated economic models. This allowed the authors to argue that “the belief that slave-breeding, sexual exploitation and promiscuity destroyed the slave family is a myth.”¹⁴ The strength of the slave family under the plantation slavery regime is only one of the aspects of slavery dealt with by the authors. The cumulative effect of these various economic attributes of slavery created a system that for the most part was economically viable for both slave owners and their slaves. In terms of family life, the authors claimed, “By permitting families to have de facto ownership of houses, furniture, clothing, garden plots, and small livestock planters created on economic stake for slaves in the system.”¹⁵ This claim goes far beyond Blassingame’s that masters often encouraged stable slave families so as to maintain discipline. Rather than merely establishing authority through the threat of family separation, Fogel and Engerman argue that masters actively encouraged slave marriage outside of the legal system due to its direct economic benefit to the slave regime. Though the authors’ claim that these encouragements of stable nuclear families among slaves “does not mean that the black family was merely a copy of the white family,”¹⁶ the economic grounding for the conscious promotion of stable unions suggested a somewhat mimetic model for sexual mores and marriage patterns among slaves. This theory of slave marriage also suffered from the authors’ reliance on large plantations for their quantitative sources. This use of unrepresentative data was one of the

¹⁴ Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time On the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery, vol. 1* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 139

central criticisms of Herbert G. Gutman's lengthy essay critiquing *Time on the Cross*.¹⁷ Gutman questioned the methods of the cliometricians in general though, reiterating many other historians' criticisms of *Time on the Cross* and generally accusing the authors' of using faulty calculations throughout their study.

Fogel and Engerman claimed that the exaggeration of miscegenation in the South also contributed greatly to the traditional view of Black family breakdown during slavery. The majority of biracial people in the antebellum South were concentrated in urban centers and populations of free Blacks. This serves as proof that while slave women were occasionally taken advantage of sexually by their masters, it did not occur frequently enough to contribute significantly to the emasculation of male slaves or the disruption of slave families. All of the topics covered in *Time of the Cross* built towards dethroning the traditional economic view of slavery that claimed Southern slavery was economically moribund due to the ineffective labor produced by slaves. The authors' claim that "by whatever path they moved, writers on slavery returned to the theme of this inferiority."¹⁸

The argument that slavery was in fact not as harsh as previously recorded by historians and had, in fact, been beneficial to enslaved African Americans met with great hostility. Fogel and Engerman stated emphatically that they did not in any way endorse slavery, but they only wished to correct the distortions common to slavery's history and to explore the implications of this new historical understanding. "By exaggerating the severity of slavery, all that has come after it has been made to appear as an improvement

¹⁷ Herbert G. Gutman, "The World Two Cliometricians Made: A Review-Essay of F+E=T/C," *The Journal of Negro History*, 60 (Jan. 1975): 53-227.

¹⁸ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 231.

over previous conditions.”¹⁹ *Time on the Cross*, like many of the innovative economic histories produced by the cliometricians during the 1970s, has largely been superseded. Still it provided a sharp break from both the Elkins thesis and the “slave community” school of thought.

Eugene Genovese’s monumental work *Roll, Jordan, Roll* did not share Fogel’s and Engerman’s methodological innovations. Quickly garnering great support and adulation from other historians,²⁰ Genovese’s study affirmed and expanded upon the work of Blassingame and other historians of the “slave community” school. Navigating the waters between Marxist historiography, social history, and traditional studies of American slavery, Genovese sought to show how “slaves, as an objective social class, laid the foundation for a separate black national culture while enormously enriching American culture as a whole.”²¹ As with the other histories of slavery discussed above, Genovese covered a myriad of topics in his history of slaves creating their own culture. Among these topics, Genovese’s discussion of the slave family was particularly pertinent. Recognizing the cultural importance attached to the African American family by the “ill fated Moynihan Report,” Genovese criticized historians and social scientists that “have read the story of twentieth century black ghettos backward in time and have assigned

¹⁹ Ibid., 260.

²⁰ Willie Lee Rose believed that *Roll, Jordan, Roll* would deservedly become the standard historical work on slavery. See “The New Slave Studies: An Old Reaction or a New Maturity?” in Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, William W. Freehling ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 172.

²¹ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), xv.

historical continuity with slavery days.”²² Genovese did not wholly dismiss the findings of social scientists such as Moynihan, but rather argued that there existed a normative slave family that was as close to the traditional nuclear family as conditions allowed. Elsewhere Genovese even praised historians for making meaningful connections between the twentieth century and slavery days. Writing about Elkins’ *Slavery* he wrote, “It has brought to the surface the relationship between the slave past and a wide range of current problems flowing from the past.”²³ Genovese willingly admitted that the dislocations and barbarities of slavery necessarily impacted African American culture in the sixties and seventies, but he feared that the problems that existed in the twentieth century urban poor Black family were confused with the same problems faced by American slaves. Genovese questioned Moynihan and others’ conclusions based on their reliance on the slaveholders’ perspective and legal documents. Rather than argue that slavery destroyed the Black family, Genovese claimed that slavery created a family that was unfamiliar to slaveholders. “The slaves fashioned their own standards of morality and sexual propriety, which deviated from prevailing white standards but not necessarily in ways our own age would judge negatively.”²⁴

Genovese also attacked what he viewed as the “legends of the matriarchy” and “the emasculated but brutal male.” Rather than merely dismissing these enduring facets of the historiography of slavery, he put forth a more nuanced view. “These legends do not

²² Ibid., 450.

²³ Eugene D. Genovese, “Slave Rebelliousness and Docility,” in *The Debate over Slavery*, 73.

²⁴ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 471.

merely rise from the ethnocentricity of later historians and social scientists; they rest on unquestionable evidence which, being partial, has misled its interpreters.”²⁵

Genovese went on to discuss in detail the issues of emasculation in a paternalistic society, the duality of resistance and demoralization evident in the truncated workings of the slave family, and the mistake of so many scholars to judge the slave family by middle-class norms of the mid-twentieth century. One of the significant attributes of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* is its willingness to engage with the then current issues surrounding the Black family. Having established that the slave family existed outside the mores of southern white society, Genovese claimed that “the slave children, like the ghetto children of later decades, saw a pattern of behavior that implied clear sexual differentiation and a notion of masculinity with its own strengths and weakness.”²⁶ This may seem to transgress the author’s own warning against establishing continuity between slavery days and the twentieth century ghetto, but Genovese’s comment attempted to propose a similar method of cultural dissemination rather than a common masculinity. He also hedged this proposed slave masculinity by affirming the maternal instincts of slave women and asserting their importance in the family. “In view of how much conspired to thwart the maternal instincts of these black women, their achievement reached heroic proportions.”²⁷ Thus, the author completed a portrait of a vibrant slave culture centered on family life that existed under extreme pressure. The parameters within which the slave family existed contributed to its unique configuration, sexual mores, and cultural norms,

²⁵ Ibid., 491.

²⁶ Ibid., 493-94.

²⁷ Ibid., 500.

which have been mistaken by historians as proof of family disorganization. As Genovese would later claim, “The social norm that Black people carried from slavery to freedom was that of the nuclear family.”²⁸

The historiographical shift instigated by the Moynihan Report’s renewed focus on the controversial theses of Stanley Elkins culminated with the publication of Herbert G. Gutman’s study, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, in 1976. According to George M. Frederickson, this work showed that Elkins’ view of the plantation as a total system “had one significant shortcoming: it failed to take into account that slaves, unlike institutional inmates, lived in family groups.”²⁹ Gutman’s work, then, amounted to a refutation of the Elkins thesis by focusing on the history of the Black family. More importantly, Gutman claimed that the “controversy between Moynihan and his critics sparked a primary study in 1967-68.”³⁰ The author sought to correct a deficiency in the historiography of slavery by his study of the family, but also provided a rebuttal to Moynihan’s use of that history, capping a decade of influence of the Moynihan Report controversy upon the academic study of slavery.

Gutman’s study, ten years in the making, employed a wide variety of primary sources and historical methodology, which the author claimed could be extended beyond

²⁸ Eugene D. Genovese, “American Slaves and Their History,” in Lane, ed., *The Debate over Slavery*, 305.

²⁹ George M. Frederickson, “The Historiography of Slavery: Stanly Elkins to Herbert Gutman,” in *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 113.

³⁰ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), xvii.

slavery to “all exploited and dependent social classes.”³¹ *The Black Family* focused on “a neglected cumulative slave experience.”³² Gutman asserted throughout his study that much of the misrepresentation of the slave family stemmed from a static perception of slavery found in many historical works. An understanding of the slave family must take into account the ways the slave regime changed over time. Gutman claimed that other historical models “usually greatly minimize and sometimes entirely ignore the adaptive capacities of African slaves and several generations of Afro-American slaves.”³³

These aspects of Gutman’s work make it unique and thoroughly applicable to the sociological debate surrounding the Black family as well as the historical one. The author’s goal then was to show that a developed moral understanding of marriage, sexual mores, and familial ties developed independently among African slaves and their Afro-American descendants across generations and throughout the various locales of the American slave regime. Largely through plantation birth and death registers and census data, Gutman uncovered similar experiences of exogamous marriage patterns and cohesive nuclear families among slaves. These tendencies allowed, according to Gutman, “the slaves of one generation to absorb changing experiences and pass their meaning onto the next so that cumulative experiences rooted in generational slave familial connections became the primary – not the only – source of an adaptive Afro-American culture.”³⁴ *The Black Family* located this adaptive culture across geography and time during the slave

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Ibid., 45.

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Ibid., 86.

regime and in the aftermath of the general emancipation. This led Gutman to forcefully argue that the Black family was not destroyed by slavery and survived the general emancipation and the initial migration of African Americans to the urban North at the turn of the twentieth century.

In a brief afterword, Gutman turned from his chosen historical period to briefly comment on the contemporary state of the African American family and the then decade old Moynihan Report. He explained that he did not want to be taken to claim that slavery was any less harsh than Moynihan described, but that the problems of the 1960s simply did not arise from a “three century cycle of self-perpetuating pathology.”³⁵ Gutman recognized that Moynihan made the point that the employment differential served as the major factor of Black urban poverty, but claimed that the fact was “buried in the dispute over an alleged tangle of pathology.”³⁶ In a major historical study, Gutman elevated the Black family to the center of a historical process that created an adaptive Afro-American culture and positioned this historiographical innovation as an answer to and extension of the influence and legacy of the Moynihan Report controversy.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan was never a historian. In the decade following the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report, Moynihan himself did not participate in the historiographical shifts that took place among historians of American slavery. The visceral and powerful reaction occasioned by the Moynihan Report had a lasting impact on the nature of studies of American slavery during this time. By providing renewed impetus to challenge the thesis put forward by Stanley Elkins in *Slavery* and bringing the

³⁵ Ibid., 463.

³⁶ Ibid., 467.

family to the forefront of the study of American slavery history, the Moynihan Report controversy became one of the major intellectual launching pads for the changing discussions and new generations of major historical works.

The Black Family in American Media and Culture

The influence of the Moynihan Report controversy did not solely influence intellectual circles in the decade following 1966. Throughout American history, African Americans had figured prominently in various forms of American popular culture. These various and changing representations in culture powerfully reflect opinions and beliefs among a broad cross-section of the American people. As Woll and Miller have written: “Commercially successful movies and television shows sense the public mood, and especially perceptive or timely ones capitalize on shifts in that mood.”³⁷ This ability of television to sense and shift the public mood can be extended to cultural mediums such as creative writing and news coverage as well. Beginning in the years of growing liberal consensus following World War II, African Americans began attempting to change their own representations in American culture. The Moynihan Report did not speak to this desire directly, but the controversy concerning the Black family and especially the accompanying discussions of gender roles within the Black community became recurring themes in changing cultural products, texts, and images during the years following the Moynihan Report controversy. By examining these different representations of the Black family across time, genre, and medium the tertiary impact of the Moynihan Report becomes clear. The differing opinions and views, praise and criticism aroused by the

³⁷ Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television: Historical Essays and Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 5.

accomplishments and controversies of the increased number of representations of African Americans in culture often had a common starting point in the arguments that swirled around the Moynihan Report. Here, then is another legacy of Moynihan's study.

The technological advances of the twentieth century had profound and lasting effects on the way African Americans were perceived in American culture. The birth of the film industry played perhaps the most vital role in changing the ways Blacks were depicted in American culture. From the production of the first filmed version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1903, a new set of African American stereotypes and archetypes began to pervade their cultural representation both on and off screen. Donald Bogle has identified several stereotypes created during the early twentieth century and describes how they "all were reproductions of Black stereotypes that had existed since the days of slavery and were already popularized in American life and arts."³⁸

During 1966, the year of the Moynihan controversy, another controversy concerning a White man's depiction of Black life occasioned much virulent comment and attack. Except it was not the publication of any government report, but that of an award winning novel. William Styron published his fourth novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, generating equally passionate praise and denunciation. Although it did not focus closely on the Black family, Styron's novel depicted a legacy of slavery largely indebted to Stanley Elkins' formulations and theories found in *Slavery*.³⁹ Styron's retelling of the 1831 slave rebellion also hinged upon issues dealing with Nat Turner's personality and

³⁸ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 4.

³⁹ See Frederickson, "The Historiography of Slavery," 113.

sexuality. These aspects led to some notable criticism of the novel and its author. The most pronounced, articulate and virulent of these criticisms were collected in *William Styron's The Confessions of Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*.⁴⁰

The parallels between the Moynihan Report controversy and the controversy surrounding Styron's novel can best be seen in the writings of those critics who defended the novel. As sociologist Robert Coles wrote in his review essay, "Again and again we choose to ignore exactly what a given man is doing, and when and where and in the face of what professional resistance and prejudice."⁴¹ Coles argued that the criticism of the novel's depiction of Nat Turner's inner life confused the fictional and historical elements of the novel and the larger purpose of Styron's writing generally. Eugene Genovese also defended the novel. He claimed Styron's more controversial decisions were meritorious and not meant to distort history. Styron had not mentioned Nat Turner's wife, whose existence many historians doubted. He also invented an adolescent homosexual experience between Turner and another slave as well as characterizing one of Turner's lieutenants as harboring a near obsession with raping white women. Many critics singled out these aspects of the novel, calling them inaccurate and damaging. Genovese argued that Styron's novel did not attack Black masculinity, sexuality, and history, but made creative choices that humanized a historical figure about which little is known. Genovese argued, "*Ten Black Writers Respond* shows the extent to which the American

⁴⁰ John Henrik Clarke, ed., *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

⁴¹ Robert Coles, "Blacklash," in Arthur D. Casciato and James L. West III, ed. *Critical Essays on William Styron* (Boston: G. K. Hill & Co., 1982), 181.

intelligentsia is splitting along racial rather than ideological lines.”⁴² This was unacceptable to Genovese, who stressed that, like the opponents of the Moynihan Report, Black history should not be transformed merely into a succession of heroes, but that the good, the bad, and the ambiguous must be brought to the fore. “Until a people can and will face its own past, it has no future,”⁴³ he concluded.

These comments show that before and during the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report representations of Black family life and sexuality could be varied and contentious. The mediums of film and especially television proved even more influential during the late 1960s and 1970s in reshaping the cultural representations of African Americans. As Woll and Miller note, “After 1965, Blacks appeared frequently and regularly in prime-time television comedy and drama series.”⁴⁴ J. Frank MacDonald goes even further claiming that, “Video matured in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement.”⁴⁵ In this era of expanding opportunities for African Americans on television, many of the popular television shows served, to an extent, as a continuation of the debate over the black family given so much attention by the Moynihan Report. Discussing the roles of Black actresses in television, three historians point out, “What is usually remembered is the negative stereotypical side of hefty, domineering mammies who rule their home and husbands with an iron glove.” Here is the matriarchal family in part described by and

⁴² Eugene D. Genovese, “William Styron Before the People’s Court,” Casciato and West, eds., *Critical Essays on William Styron*, 211.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴⁴ Woll and Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images*, 77.

⁴⁵ J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: Afro-Americans in Television Since 1948* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983), ix.

ascribed to Moynihan study. “White males create these images,” claimed the writers. “These are the people who should be brought to task, not the performers they hired.”⁴⁶

Television shows during these years brought the issues of the Moynihan Report controversy, often with little intention, into Americans’ living rooms. One such program was *Julia*, which aired for three seasons on NBC from 1969-1971. This show was the “great professional coup,” of actress Diahann Carroll and marked the first time a black woman was the star of her own weekly network series.⁴⁷ In the show Carroll portrayed a nurse and mother whose husband had been killed in Vietnam. Although popular, *Julia* quickly became the target of sustained criticism from the African American and Civil Rights communities. The comfortable middle-class surroundings, the fully integrated work place and the absence of a male head of the family all consistently drew the ire of critics of the show. J. Fred Macdonald attributes some of this criticism to the fact that “in effect, in the late 1960s, whenever a Black entertainer appeared, he or she was expected to represent all Afro-Americans, embodying the panorama of Black life from the slum to the suburb.”⁴⁸ Carroll’s light complexion, the total absence of any noticeable Black slang, and the reliance of Julia upon her white employers all struck a note that was increasingly out of sync with the times. “During the late 1960s, the integrationist theme still ran strong among liberal whites and many blacks even in the face of urban race riots and calls for

⁴⁶ George Hill, Lorraine Raglin and Chas Floyd Johnson, *Black Women in Television: An Illustrated History and Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 4.

⁴⁷ Donald Bogle, *Brown Sugar: Eighty Years of America’s Black Female Superstars* (New York: De Capo Press, 1980), 150.

⁴⁸ MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*, 115.

black nationalism coming from militants,” asserted Woll and Miller.⁴⁹ *Julia* presented a female-headed family, but not the dysfunctional or “pathological” slum family described by Moynihan. Rather, Julia was solidly middle class, widowed, and fully integrated. Carroll went so far as to refer to her character as a “white Negro.”⁵⁰ This seeming compromise over the representation of the Black family fell largely upon deaf ears, as race relations in the United States remained extremely contentious. What only a few years earlier would have struck audiences as the very idea of integrationist success, *Julia* in 1968 increasingly resembled the “tragic mulatto” stereotype of the Black woman who is accepted by white society, but never able to transcend her own racial heritage.⁵¹ MacDonald describes the poor timing and failure of *Julia* in plainer terms: “The comfortable image of Black success was in stark juxtaposition to the images seen on local and national newscasts.”⁵²

Julia represents a failed attempt to present a compromise of the differing views of the Black family circulating throughout American culture by the end of the 1960s. Her family was female-headed, but not matriarchal. Julia’s husband had died in Vietnam serving his country. Julia had black boyfriends, but she lived in a middle-class, integrated setting. She spoke perfect English and interacted easily with her white co-workers. Her son relied on his mother but was influenced by an array of successful, mostly white men.

⁴⁹ Woll and Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images*, 78.

⁵⁰ Richard Warren Lewis, “The Importance of Being Julia” *TV Guide*, 14 December 1968, 28.

⁵¹ For a definition and brief discussion of the tragic mulatto archetype see Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks*, 9-10.

⁵² MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*, 116.

This show was stubbornly apolitical. Despite its popularity, *Julia's* determined avoidance of social issues, white and Black, sealed its demise. Its premise also shows that one of the effects of the Moynihan Report was increasingly to see any representation of African American families without a present male head critically. Even though Julia had been married and had a traditional nuclear family, by only its third season *Julia* was unable to sustain an audience.

Racial humor did have a place on television in the 1970s, however, primarily in the television sitcoms produced by Norman Lear. Beginning with the premiere of *All in the Family* on CBS in January 1971, the production team of Lear and Bud Yorkin firmly entrenched racial humor in the DNA of American television. Centered on the bigoted, working class Archie Bunker, “the first racial bigot to be taken to the collective heart of America,”⁵³ the show featured a working-class white backlash persona who pushed back against almost every liberal cause so celebrated during the 1960s. Often appearing foolish and being proven wrong, Bunker was satirized for his racist and reactionary opinions. This did not prevent many from taking offense to the seemingly racist doggerel coming from *All in the Family's* patriarch. As journalist Dorothy Rabinowitz noted, “Civil rights leaders have charged that the show disseminates racially and religiously biased attitudes, despite its clearly stated hostility to Archie’s prejudices.”⁵⁴

All in the Family and its numerous spin-offs introduced a new type of socially and racially-conscious situation comedy, which presented new and often controversial images of the Black family. Black characters matched Archie Bunker’s reductive racial attitude

⁵³ MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*, 179.

⁵⁴ Dorothy Rabinowitz, “Watching the Sit-Coms,” *Commentary* 60 (October 1975), 69.

on Lear sitcoms as well. The popular show *Sanford and Son* featured Redd Foxx's portrayal of Fred Sanford, "an irascible and bullying Black man – often with only the sound track and the vaudeville mugging to tell that the show is a comedy." In the course of a single episode Foxx's character refers to his sister's new husband (a white man) as "Snow-Whitey," "Mr. Intermarry," "Paleface," "Honky," "Colorblind," and "the White Tornado."⁵⁵ Rather than merely portraying whites as stupid and bigoted, Lear allowed African Americans with equally questionable opinions to become the object of satire. This became especially true with Lear's shows dealing with the Black family.

Of the many shows produced by Lear, two spin-offs of *All in the Family*, *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons* dealt most directly with issues of the Black family. Premiering in 1974 on CBS, *Good Times* told the story of a struggling lower-middle-class/working class family living in the Cabrini Green public housing project in Chicago, Illinois. *The Jeffersons*, centered on the African American couple, George and Louise Jefferson, after their move from a working-class neighborhood in Queens to a luxury apartment in Manhattan. Thus, *The Jeffersons* focused upon the middle-class strivings of a Black Family, while *Good Times* centered upon the problems of the working and lower class Black family.

One of the most striking elements of the *Good Times* family dynamic was the portrayal of James Evans, Sr., the patriarch of the family, by John Amos. MacDonald describes this character as "a proud, strong and determined image of Afro-American fatherhood." Esther Rolle's lead female character, Florida Evans, complemented Amos as

⁵⁵ Michael J. Arlen, "The Media Dreams of Norman Lear," *New Yorker*, 10 March 1975, 90.

“a loving mother respectful of her husband’s familial prerogatives, a sympathetic parent but still not intimidated by her spouse’s gruff manner.”⁵⁶ This strong, if frustrated father figure can be weighed against George Jefferson, who journalist Lance Morrow described as: “entrepreneur, Black bigot, a splenetic little whip of a man who bullies like a demented overseer, seldom speaks below a shriek, and worships at the church of ostentation.”⁵⁷ This strong nuclear family dynamic, especially, in the case of *Good Times*, in a lower-class Black family quickly became a distinctive feature that earned substantial critical and popular praise for the show.

This familial stability was challenged, however, by the popularity of the character of J. J., the Evans’ oldest son, portrayed by comedian Jimmie Walker. Womanizing, out of work, and poorly educated, J. J. quickly became known for his trademark catch phrase “Dy-no-mite,” and his endless schemes. His laziness matched his tendency to roll his eyes, smile wide, and mug for a laugh brought to mind the classic “coon” stereotype of Black males from the minstrel tradition, as well as early twentieth century film. The foolishness of J. J. received sustained criticism, but quickly became an increasingly focal point of the show. John Amos became increasingly vocal about his discomfort with the characterization of J. J. and eventually left the show. In the episode “The Big Move,” as the Evans family prepare to move to Mississippi, where James, Sr., had just been offered a job, the character is killed in a car accident.⁵⁸ The decision to continue the show without

⁵⁶ MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*, 186.

⁵⁷ Lance Morrow, “Blacks on TV: A Disturbing Image,” *Time*, 27 March 1978, 101.

⁵⁸ Joel Eisner and David Krinsky, *Television Comedy Series: An Episode Guide to 153 TV Sitcoms in Syndication* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1984), 318.

a male parent generated substantial critical backlash.⁵⁹ As journalist Lance Morrow stated, “It was a strange and destructive message that *Good Times* sent out when its producers eliminated the family’s strong, if frustrated husband (John Amos).”⁶⁰ This change also led to the eventual departure of Esther Rolle from the show. Despite its continuation for another two seasons, *Good Times* began to sink in popularity and critical appreciation as the strong family dynamic apparent in the earlier seasons became increasingly absent.

What *Julia*, *Good Times*, *The Jeffersons* and many of the Norman Lear-produced sitcoms represent is that the conflicting views of the Black family encountered in the Moynihan Report controversy were very much vying for the affections of the American public during the 1970s. Although many of the programs featuring Black stars during the 1970s reconstituted stereotypes as often as they dispelled them, they remained extremely popular among African American viewers.⁶¹ Even when these shows depicted female-headed families, they consistently put forth what Angela Nelson has called middle-class ideology. “The middle-class ideology in popular arts is represented with affluence, unlimited consumerism, conspicuous consumption, individualism, social and economic mobility, heterosexual love relationships and/or marriage, and nuclear family.” Even though a show such as *Good Times* depicted a low-income family, the idea structure of

⁵⁹ See Les Brown, “*Good Times* will Drop Male Parent; Black Media Coalition Protest Move,” *New York Times*, 7 June 1978, 18.

⁶⁰ Morrow, “Blacks on TV,” 101.

⁶¹ Woll and Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images*, 84, “In the summer of 1976 Abitron Market Research Organization found that the top three shows among Black audiences were *Sanford and Son*, *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times*.” MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*, 184.

that family and the cessation of the discrimination it faced became symbolized by an entrance into middle-class society. This is how the middle-class ideology transformed “middle-classness into racial equality and harmony.”⁶²

In both *Good Times* and *Julia* before it, the female-headed family was created by widowhood, the oppression of outside forces, and in the case of *Julia* the white power structure that had sent her husband to the Vietnam War. The middle-class striving of *The Jefferson's* bears the marks of the middle-class ideology even more. After making it to the luxury apartment in Manhattan and firmly into the middle-class, George Jefferson remains as obstinate as ever. In the logic of the Norman Lear produced sitcom universe this serves as an affirmation of Jefferson's values and success at “making it.” As Rabinowitz pointed out, “Rarely in popular entertainment, in fact, have negative aspects of character played so heroic a role as in the sit-coms.”⁶³ These shows clearly demonstrate that the Black family remained a contentious and controversial subject even as it became regularly represented in American popular culture.

The most significant cultural event concerning the Black family in the post-Moynihan Report era came with the publication of Alex Haley's novel *Roots* in 1976. *Roots* is an epic story of six generations of African Americans beginning with Kunta Kinte, a Gambian man stolen from a pastoral African setting and forced into bondage in eighteenth-century America. One reviewer described the “thematic flow” of Haley's

⁶² Angela Nelson “The Repertoire of Black Popular Culture,” *American: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)* 8, (Spring 2009).

⁶³ Rabinowitz, “Watching the Sit-Coms,” 71.

work as “family and love.”⁶⁴ Combining elements of history, genealogy, and fiction to “examine the impact of slavery on black family life and uncover pre-slavery family patterns,”⁶⁵ *Roots* forced the Black experience into the broader sweep of the American experience. Like Herbert Gutman’s historical work, Haley portrayed a lasting, strong and constantly expanding family and kin network under the dislocations of slavery and the racism of the Jim Crow era. The importance of marriage was established early in the story as Kunta Kinte reacted to his marriage: “He just couldn’t believe how different things were, how much better life was.”⁶⁶ Each succeeding generation passed down the story of this first African descendant and thus established a lasting line of patriarchal family control. Throughout *Roots* there are many notable strong female characters, especially Kizzy, Kunta’s daughter. The story, however, quickly switches to the perspective of her young son Chicken George. While Kizzy’s experiences highlight the brutality suffered by female slaves in the South, it is her son who carries forward the family history. Alex Haley’s powerful work combining genealogy and fiction dispelled ideas of a Black family destroyed by slavery, matriarchal and dysfunctional. In this way, along with Gutman’s *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, *Roots* revealed that a decade after the Moynihan Report controversy, representations of the Black family were still unsettled, and the terms of the debate were still being set by the Moynihan controversy.

⁶⁴ Nancy L. Arnez, “His Story and Ours: A Review of *Roots*,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 46 (Summer, 1977): 370.

⁶⁵ Doris Wilkinson, “The Black Family: Past and Present: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 40, (Nov. 1978), 832.

⁶⁶ Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family, The 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Vanguard Press, 2007), 420.

The Black Family in Social Science Research

At the same time cultural and media representations of Black family life underwent drastic changes during the decade following 1966, a more pointed debate stemming from the Moynihan Report controversy existed within the field of sociology. Studies of the family, urban life, women and other social science topics throughout this period took the Moynihan Report as a starting point to argue various new and familiar theses about the lives of African Americans in poverty. The examination of a few illustrative works illuminates the continuing relevance of Moynihan's work to sociology and urban studies. By no means exhaustive, these few works more reveal the diverse ways the controversial findings and the media distortion of the Moynihan Report affected the ways in which those in the social sciences discussed issues concerning African American family life.

Andrew Billingsley's 1968 study *Black Families in White America* provides perhaps the most complete sociological treatment of the Black family from a decidedly anti-Moynihan perspective. Drawing on the work of sociologist and community studies pioneer Hylan Lewis, Billingsley's book was heartily endorsed by psychologist and Civil Rights activist William Ryan upon its publication. Beginning from the premise that Black families had been "mistreated, ignored and distorted in American scholarship,"⁶⁷ Billingsley endeavored to create a typology of Black families encompassing African origins, the effects of slavery, the century of discrimination during the Jim-Crow era and contemporary obstacles. This sweeping approach amounted to an attempt to totally re-envision the way in which the African American family was viewed and studied. To do

⁶⁷ Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families in White America* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 3.

this the author highlighted the diversity of family structures among African Americans and claimed “this range and variety does not suggest, as some commentaries hold, that the Negro family is falling apart, but rather that these families are fully capable of surviving by adapting to the historical and contemporary social and economic conditions facing the Negro people.”⁶⁸ A focus on adaptation to adverse circumstances pervades Billingsley’s work. These adaptations are confused by many who “often assume that what is required of the Negro families is essentially the same as what is required of white families.” This false assumption led many Black families to be judged as dysfunctional, not as a product of “the demands made on the family, but the ability of the family to meet those demands which distinguish Negro family life.”⁶⁹ The author’s argument pointed directly at the failings of white-authored studies of the Black family (particularly Moynihan), and merely attempted to shift the focus of study toward the way that Black families survive, rather than why they do sometimes fail. The author went so far as to claim that he largely agreed with the Moynihan Report’s recommendations, but not with the characterization of the Black family.⁷⁰

This leads to some confusion within Billingsley’s argument. He at times seems to affirm and deny the lasting impact of slavery on contemporary issues within the Black community. At one point he claims, “that many of these social forces contain within them the legacy of slavery,” these contemporary social forces “reach into every aspect of Negro life, but have a particular impact on family organization, stability and

⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 33.

achievement.”⁷¹ The author is attempting to characterize the legacy of slavery as incredibly harsh and even to associate the racial oppression of twentieth-century America with that of the plantation. Doing this necessarily forces him to admit the immense and lingering damage done to the Black family by slavery, but at the same time constantly point to the adaptive resilience seen in the diversity of Black family structures. He finally comes to the contention that “it’s slavery and current discrimination which provide obstacles to Black family stability.”⁷² What this sometimes-contradictory thesis amounts to is an argument for the existence of instability within the Black family and an effort to go to great lengths to locate the reasons for this instability outside of the Black community itself. This answer to the Moynihan Report engaged with the Report itself but served the distorted attacks of the controversy foremost.

Lee Rainwater’s case studies of families living in the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, *Behind Ghetto Walls*, published in 1970, presented a different strand of thought coursing through sociology and urban studies in the wake of the Moynihan Report controversy. First, he is very sensitive to the persistence and importance of family life, sexual mores and lifestyle in the study of race relations, stating, “For as long as Negroes have been in America, their marital and family patterns have been the subject of curiosity and amusement, moral indignation and self congratulation, puzzlement and frustration, concern and guilt on the part of white Americans.”⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid., 72.

⁷² Ibid., 195.

⁷³ Lee Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls: Black Families in a Federal Slum* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970), 2.

Rainwater also manages to express a compromise position between white oppression and problems native to the Black community. “In short, whites, by their greater power have created a situation in which Negroes do the dirty work of caste victimization for them.”⁷⁴ Rainwater here is able to show that Black families locked in ghetto poverty are not the source of their own problems, but rather the main artery through which the affects of racial oppression are expressed.

This idea strikes a more workable model for the problems recognized by sociologists than the sweeping historical argument of Billingsley. It also echoes many of Moynihan’s ideas stripped of much of the media distortion that followed the Moynihan Report well into the 1970s. Despite the fact that much of the victimization of African American life expresses itself through the breakdown of the family, the author also points out that “still, Negro adaptation in this area has been much less constrained by whites... and this freedom has been used to create an institutional variant more distinctive perhaps to the Negro subculture than any other.”⁷⁵ What this research method amounts to is an attempt, through a case study, to recognize and explain the way in which white oppression expressed itself and was perpetuated within Black culture, especially family life, and how adaptations to counter these effects came about. Rainwater was not attempting simply to refute Moynihan, as Billingsley wanted to, but rather to expand both authors’ visions, by focusing on specific communities.

Other sociological works did not attempt such a balanced synthesis of differing opinions as *Behind Ghetto Walls*, however. Robert Staples’ study, *The Black Woman in*

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.

America, attacked “Moynihan’s analysis of the Black family as a “matriarchal’ society” as “highly erroneous.”⁷⁶ Staples’ goal was to examine the public image of Black women in American society in light of the distance between perceived myths versus reality. At times this study, particularly in its early chapters, seemingly devolved into a screed against Moynihan’s eight-year-old report. Many of these criticisms and attacks were aimed generically at sociological studies in general, but the Moynihan Report remained close to the surface of the argument throughout. Focusing on the myth of matriarchy, Staples claimed, “sociological studies find the matriarchal structure of the Black family a primary deterrent to black progress.”⁷⁷ Sweeping statements such as this recall the most virulent criticism and distortions of the Moynihan Report from the heart of the controversy in 1966. Staples countered claims made by Moynihan and others that Black women in poverty had been extended greater educational and employment opportunities than many Black men in poverty. He reiterated the role that the Moynihan Report played in creating a supposed false consensus between social and behavioral scientists that Black society is matriarchal. While the author claimed that the prevalence of the female-headed family was patently false, he also claimed that “the Black woman’s adoption of the role of provider for her family deserves praise, not commendation, compassion, not opprobrium.”⁷⁸ Here then, is another sociological work grappling with the argument sparked by the Moynihan Report controversy. All three of the works briefly described above take the positions of the debate aroused by the controversy as their starting point

⁷⁶ Robert Staples, *The Black Woman in America* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1973), ix.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

and proceed along different paths. Billingsley's sweeping historical treatment attempting to overshadow and supersede, Rainwater's attempting to expand and refine through case study, and Staples' attempting to refute outright the distorted image of matriarchal Black culture he views as a direct result of the Moynihan Report.

Across several disciplines and mediums, it is clear that though the Moynihan Report controversy faded from headlines in 1966 it remained the primary framework through which the Black family was discussed and represented. In the historiography of American slavery, the Moynihan Report acted as a new impetus for answering the controversial thesis of Stanley M. Elkins' *Slavery*. Moynihan's view of slavery's effect on the modern Black family would shade many of the historical treatments of slavery, culminating in Herbert G. Gutman's study *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* in 1976. The decade following 1966 proved to be one of incredible change for African American images in popular culture. From the controversy over William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which mirrored the Moynihan Report controversy itself, to the difficult runs of television situation comedies such as *Julia* and *Good Times*, issues of familial structure and sexual mores remained controversial and public issues. In the social sciences, the waves first made by the Moynihan Report continued to roll into the early 1970s. The impact and legacy of the Moynihan Report controversy became at times subtle and indirect, but remained dense, complex and vital in the decade after 1966.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tales of Brave Ulysses: The Moynihan Report and Neoconservatism, 1966-1976

Introduction

The reverberations radiating from the Moynihan Report controversy were felt throughout American culture in the decade following 1966. As diffuse and various as these continued reactions were, they influenced and conditioned the way Americans wrote, watched and talked about the Black family in the United States. Attempting to discover these often hidden and unintended consequences of the Moynihan Report controversy engenders the possibility of forgetting the impact the entire affair had upon the man most at its center. As one biographer of Moynihan said of the many charges of racism resulting from the controversy, “The charges stung Moynihan. He could accept substantive criticism of the Report, even if it was hostile, but to be charged with racism was galling.”¹ This author goes on to assert that it “was a bitter Pat Moynihan”² who wrote of the controversy in 1967. This was indeed true. By that point, a shift in Moynihan’s tone and style were clearly evident. He called the entire controversy, “preposterous and fruitless” and claimed that “an era of bad manners is certainly begun.”

³ It was becoming clear that the New Frontiersman who had first come to Washington in 1961 claiming that President Kennedy “had been ‘my’ president in a way that happens

¹ Douglas Schoen, *Pat: A Biography of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 112.

² *Ibid.*, 116.

³ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The President and the Negro: The Moment Lost,” *Commentary* (Feb., 1967), 34, 45.

only once,”⁴ no longer existed. This period witnessed many changes in Moynihan’s career. First, it saw his return to writing and publishing. Whether in the guise of social scientist, political commentator, urban studies professor, or merely public intellectual, an eclectic mixture of articles, essays, and speeches came into being during the decade following 1966. This time also witnessed Moynihan’s increasing interest in foreign affairs, an interest that would culminate with his appointment By President Nixon as Ambassador to India in 1973 and Ambassador to the United Nations in 1975. Perhaps most importantly though, this decade straddling the 1960s and 1970s witnessed what has been widely perceived as a major ideological and political shift in Moynihan’s thought. It was during this time that Peter Steinfels would describe Moynihan as “the most widely known Neoconservative.”⁵

This strange new moniker was not always the simplest term to define. Steinfels noted that this group emerged from the liberal establishment and that many of its members had been heavily involved in the Great Society programs. They now, as a group, became its most forceful critics. “In some instances they go beyond the boundaries of liberalism, certainly to Burkean conservatism and sometimes even to socialism, in their critique of current reality – and current liberalism.”⁶ Neoconservatism developed almost parallel to the maturation and fracturing of the New Left. These developments of a new American radicalism and conservatism both saw the need to go beyond liberalism,

⁴ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Introduction,” in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Coping: Essays on the Practice of Government* (New York: Random House, 1973), 5

⁵ Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America’s Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

the former to fulfill the promises of liberalism, the latter to preserve its heritage. For a life long liberal Democrat, this transformation was not one that Moynihan easily accepted. “Right through 1968,” Steinfels argues, “Moynihan would think of himself as speaking strictly within Liberalism... He simply had interests that were not prominent in this liberal world.” These interests emanated from the Moynihan Report controversy: “One was ethnicity, another was the family.”⁷ Moynihan wrote in 1973 of this supposed transformation following the Moynihan Report controversy, “I emerged changed. I was no longer in thrall to a doctrine I had scarcely been aware of, and I came to view the thralldom of others with a distance and lack of sympathy that frankly surprised me.”⁸ Godfrey Hodgson, in his biography of Moynihan, explains further, “the experience of 1965 left lasting emotional scars. The effect on his political and intellectual orientation was like that of a force-nine gale on an explorer’s ship in mid-ocean. He was blown right off course.” Although Hodgson argues that Moynihan would eventually return to the liberal fold, he first had to go through many trials and tribulations. “Like Odysseus, he was doomed to wander for ten years and more before coming home.”⁹

This journey is well documented, but often told in partisan and political fashion. It is a story told in academic and political journals. By examining Moynihan’s writings from this decade, it becomes clear that although his style and rhetoric did change and develop a decidedly conservative hue, his ideas and goals stated in *The Negro Family* in 1965 remained a consistent and valuable lens through which he surveyed and understood

⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸ Moynihan, *Coping*, 21.

⁹ Godfrey Hodgson, *The Gentleman From New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 120.

the dramatically shifting political terrain of the United States during this turbulent time. This is not to claim that Moynihan was not a neoconservative, but to recognize the importance the Moynihan Report controversy played in keeping alive the dream of the liberal shores of Ithaca in his mind as he navigated his way back towards a more recognizable and traditional liberalism.

A Story Told in Journals

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, Moynihan published articles in numerous journals and magazines. Two of these publications, *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, to most frequently feature his writing were also closely associated with the burgeoning group of intellectuals identified as neoconservative. Moynihan contributed an article, “The Professionalization of Reform,” to the inaugural issue of *The Public Interest* and laid much of the groundwork for his changing rhetoric. By professionalization of reform, Moynihan referred to the growing influence of professional persons and organizations that had created and managed the War on Poverty. “The main pressure for a massive government assault on poverty developed within the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations among officials whose responsibilities were to think about just such matters. These men now exist, they are well paid, have competent staffs, and have access to the president.”¹⁰ Exist they did, and one of the members of this emergent group was telling the public so. Moynihan then outlined three reasons that allowed this new class of reformers to take charge in the 1960s. First, Moynihan claimed, “Men are

¹⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Professionalization of Reform,” *The Public Interest* 1 (Fall 1965): 9.

learning how to make an industrial economy work.”¹¹ This amounted to an “Economic Revolution,” and allowed governments to refocus on social problems, just as the social sciences move towards a scientific understanding of these same social ills. Second, Moynihan cited the “Professionalization of the Middle Class” as altering the nature of reform in the United States. As the middle class moved toward the affluence so lauded during the first half of the 1960s, they came to enter into professions and had as a result placed increasing faith in experts in a number of fields. Finally, Moynihan saw an “exponential growth of knowledge,” as being the final element of the professional reform. Consequently Moynihan placed his faith in the social sciences. “The nation is on the verge of developing a system of social statistics comparable to the now highly developed system of economic statistics.”¹² This faith caused him to underestimate the explosive second half of the 1960s. “The day when mile-long petitions and mass rallies required to persuade a government that a popular demand existed that things be done differently is clearly drawing to a close.”¹³ Here then, just as the Moynihan Report controversy was emerging, Moynihan presented a positive to ambivalent portrait of the culture he was a part of. This ability to define, explain, contextualize and critique the failure or success of his own political endeavors along with an emphasis on the ability of social science research to illuminate, if not solve, social problems became trademarks of Moynihan’s style and rhetoric during his “neoconservative” period.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Ibid., 15-16.

This attitude can be seen clearly in the *Commentary* article “The President and the Negro: The Moment Lost” in February 1967. Basically this article allowed Moynihan to tell the story of the Moynihan Report controversy and to answer his critics. The tone, however, was drastically different from Moynihan’s article “A Family Policy for the Nation,” from September 1966, which had similar goals.¹⁴ Moynihan first noted the changing political reality of the Civil Rights Movement in the wake of the 1966-midterm elections. “The Republican resurgence in part almost certainly reflects a feeling that enough new things are underway for the time being; and there is some truth in this.”¹⁵ This reform fatigue stemmed from the controversy surrounding the Report and the derailing of the new Civil Rights platform proposed by President Johnson in the Howard University address. Moynihan did not merely point the finger at Republicans for this disruption; rather, he offered a somewhat surprising list of culprits: “Negro leaders unable to comprehend their opportunity; from civil rights militants, Negro and white, caught up in a frenzy of arrogance and nihilism; and from white liberals unwilling to expend a jot of prestige to do a difficult but dangerous job.”¹⁶ Moynihan focused on the Howard Speech and claimed that the controversy around his Report distracted from it and contributed to the profound problems in the Civil Rights Movement. “The essential fact is that neither the government nor the Civil Rights movement had the resources to prepare a program in response to the Howard address. This was the point of unparalleled opportunity for the liberal community and it was exactly the point where that community

¹⁴ See Chapter 2, 26-28.

¹⁵ Moynihan, “The President and the Negro,” 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

collapsed.”¹⁷ Here Moynihan attacked the liberal politicians and activists he had earlier chastised in “The Professionalization of Reform” for causing the collapse of the Civil Rights Movement because of the controversy they ignited over his Report. “For the record let it be said that such new information has come to light since the report was written that has substantially confirmed the thesis that the prevalence of family disruption among lower class Negroes has been on the increase.”¹⁸ Moynihan meant to refute his critics and to fully identify them with those same liberals who had been the engine of the Civil Rights Movement within the federal government. “With its virtues as a secular conscience,” he wrote, “the liberal Left can be as rigid and destructive as any force in American life.”¹⁹ This entire article signaled a turning point in the way that Moynihan discussed the controversy. He had been right, his critics wrong, and the liberal establishment had sided with the critics.

This theme is expanded beyond the parameters of the Moynihan Report controversy in a brief article in *The Public Interest* written by Moynihan a few months after “The President and the Negro.” In “A Crisis of Confidence?” Moynihan turned to the continuing urban crisis that remained unresolved in almost all major American cities. The persistence of these problems stemmed, in some respect, from the inaction of the white majority. “It is a vicious but persisting fact of American life that white Americans blandly accept as almost natural the fact that Negro Americans are mistreated and that in response they misbehave.” In large measure, Moynihan pointed to the nearly complete

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

residential segregation in American cities as the major factor, which caused such serious problems in housing, safety, and family to continue unabated. But this critique was only preliminary. The crisis of confidence resulted in a pattern established with the federal programs of the 1930s and 1940s to aid urban areas. These programs and the many federal urban initiatives in the intervening years had “been anything but spectacular, while the official rhetoric about them has remained altogether too glowing.”²⁰

By focusing on urban problems from an urban studies perspective, Moynihan was able to criticize the programs of domestic intervention by the federal government up to and including the War on Poverty. In this way he continued to position himself as a critical voice within liberalism. Rather than attacking the critics of the Moynihan Report for missing the point of his research, he attempted to identify the general tendency of government that allowed this to happen: “Even more deplored than our tendency to ignore the results of research and evaluation in shaping public policy,” he wrote, “is our tendency to undertake great and promising enterprises only to forget about them.” Rather than propose specific policies with which to correct the failures of the War on Poverty, Moynihan called for a renewed reliance on the funding of social science research into domestic social problems and the increased valuation of such research. It was not only the reliance on fact that would allow social policy to correct social ills in urban America, but also a new understanding of how this research must be approached. He wrote, “in the area of social policy, facts are simply not neutral – they are inescapably political.”²¹

²⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Comment: A Crisis of Confidence?” *The Public Interest* 7 (Spring 1967): 5.

²¹ *Ibid*, 8.

Although speaking in general terms, Moynihan unmistakably was calling for a new era of social policy that would not allow a media controversy like the one surrounding the Moynihan Report to happen. Moynihan invoked the need to avoid these political attacks on social science research elsewhere in 1967. In a review essay of James S. Coleman's massive study *The Equality of Educational Opportunity*, Moynihan decried the probable reaction of the liberal establishment to the more unpalatable aspects of the report's findings. "Typically the charge is not that the facts are wrong, but that they will be misused by persons whose motives are wrong." These are the very charges so often raised against the Moynihan Report. Moynihan wished to show that it was those who researched controversial topics suffered from type of thinking, it "raises doubts about the motives of the person who was so ill-advised as to present the facts in the first instance."²² The Coleman Report was a major influence on Moynihan's thinking on the relationship between social science research and public policy. This shaped a renewed interest in focusing on research and his continuing attempts to vindicate his own report from 1965.

Moynihan's writing in 1967 found other ways of subtle and not so subtle critique of the liberal left and traditional liberal establishment in the United States. The Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard University in June 1967 presented Moynihan's views on the New Left and counterculture, but also provided a venue to speak of the needs of the American liberal establishment. In an extended metaphor comparing different strains of

²² Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Education of the Urban Poor," in *Coping*, 177.

protest in America (“the first heresies of liberalism,”²³ according to Moynihan) to the early Christian heresies, Moynihan utilized the Victorian scholar Froude’s essay “Origen and Celsus,” as a basis for discussing what the protests meant to American liberalism. This literate, wordy, and overly clever presentation encapsulated much of what is best and most frustrating about Moynihan’s writing style. Moynihan did, however, make several salient points about the protest movements. Speaking of the beginnings of the New Left and the Port Huron Statement (1962), Moynihan recognized the ways its message was directed entirely at middle-class college students and professors. “The world about them was so content as to suppose it had attained stability, where in truthfulness was only stagnation.”²⁴ The New Left, then, were incorrect from the very core of their mission statement. The world they looked out upon simply did not appear the same way to many Americans, but Moynihan contended that this did not mean the young people in the movement were wholly at fault. “In the first place these persons matter; they number some of the fine spirits of the age. A liberal must regret the loss of belief in another as much as a decent churchman would.”²⁵ Something was deeply amiss in American liberalism, and the protest movements did not have the answer. But if American liberalism was to survive, it must attempt to deal with them honestly. “What we must do first is listen. Young people are trying to tell us something. They are probably right in much of what they say; however wrong their prescriptions for righting matters.

²³ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Nirvana Now,” in *Coping*, 117.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

Then we must respond. American liberalism needs to bring its commitments in balance with its resources – overseas and at home.”²⁶

Moynihan continued to call for a new direction in both domestic and foreign liberal policies in his article “The Politics of Stability,” published in October 1967. Here he made a point to draw parallels between domestic and foreign policy, noting it had been American liberals “who have been in office and presided over the onset of both the war in Vietnam and the violence in American cities.”²⁷ Moynihan had already made his opposition to the Vietnam War evident stating “Liberals have simply got to restrain their enthusiasm for civilizing others.”²⁸ To correct the devastation sweeping through both domestic and foreign policy, Moynihan stressed that the government must rely on stability and seek out alliances with conservatives. He also emphasized the importance of allowing state and city governments to become more actively involved in the management of American cities. But perhaps most important was Moynihan’s call for the government to stop accepting or apologizing for Black violence. “The time for confronting the realities of Black and white has come in America,” writes Moynihan. “It will not be pretty.”²⁹ This ugly business could be handled affectively by merely accepting its necessity, however. Moynihan voiced his increasingly characteristic call for reliance on research: “we have got to become more rigorous in the assessment of not only the

²⁶ Ibid, 132.

²⁷ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Politics of Stability,” *The New Leader*, 9 October 1967 in Moynihan, *Coping*, 186.

²⁸ Moynihan, “Nirvana Now,” 128.

²⁹ Moynihan, “The Politics of Stability,” 193.

reality of problems, but of the nature of proposed solutions.”³⁰ In this essay, Moynihan added another dimension to his new political attitude, calling for stability and alliance between liberals and conservatives as well as concentrating domestic policy on the more thorough assessment of social problems and their attendant solutions. Here, at the end of 1967, Moynihan was beginning to position his criticism of liberalism to allow for increased interaction with and acceptance of conservative political ideas. His political preoccupations and goals, however, remained firmly in what could be considered the liberal camp. Although he would remain a self-identified Democrat throughout this period, after the 1968 election this dichotomy would continue to develop in Moynihan’s writing and establish him as a leading neoconservative thinker.

1968 and after

The year 1968 saw major disruptions in American political and cultural life. It would also prove to be a turning point for Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He would begin the year as a supporter of Robert F. Kennedy and would end the year being approached by President-elect Richard Nixon to join his Administration as an advisor on urban affairs. If there existed a moment at which Moynihan switched sides from that of liberal Democrat to neoconservative, it occurred during the course of this watershed year.

Moynihan’s article in *Commentary* “The Democrats, Kennedy & the Murder of Dr. King,” published in May, served as a summary of his views and opinions of the political atmosphere at the time. The article was one in a series dedicated to helping the liberal voter make sense of the 1968 presidential election. Although Moynihan chose to support Robert F. Kennedy, the article represented as much of an indictment and

³⁰ Ibid.

challenge to the liberal establishment as it did an endorsement. Moynihan made no mistake about his identity, opening the article “I speak here as a member of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.”³¹ As with the “Politics of Stability,” he meant to stress that despite the unprecedented shake-up of President Johnson not seeking the 1968 nomination, the Democratic Party had continued on and had in fact turned, in Eugene McCarthy and Robert F. Kennedy, to an established democratic tradition: “Irish, Catholic, Northern, Democratic politics.”³² By establishing the turn towards Democratic tradition so as to move forward, Moynihan went on to question the failures of liberal foreign policy in Vietnam and domestic policy in the War on Poverty. In the coming election it would be the challenge of the Democratic Party to remake itself. Moynihan claimed that during the fallout, “evaluation of existing programs is as much a measure of competence as the ability to propose new ones.” This statement does not serve as a full repudiation of government interventionism, which must be, “reappraised, not discarded.” Rather, Moynihan was merely calling for Democrats and liberals to recognize their faults, their “disposition to underestimate and misinterpret the forces in American society that are resistant to meaningful change and which limit the power of the federal government to bring about such change.”³³

Moynihan supported the Democrats; they were his party. His prescription for the liberal wing of his party in 1968, however, was anything but cheery. Throughout his

³¹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Democrats, Kennedy & the Murder of Dr. King,” *Commentary* (May 1968), 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

article, and many others from the late 1960s, Moynihan commented on the similarity between the failed liberal policies of the mid-19th century British Liberal Party and the triumphs of the reform-minded Tory government of the 1870s. Lyndon Johnson was, perhaps, no William Gladstone and Nixon no Benjamin Disraeli, but Moynihan's characteristically historical and literary allusions show that his political temperament increasingly sought to include those who he saw as part of the growing "conservative majority" in the government. It would be the challenge of the 1968 election and after for Democrats to overcome that "source of Democratic difficulties in recent years... a too rigid, too automatic rejection of Republican ideas, and especially in the form of conservative criticism of liberal ideas."³⁴ One of the sources of Moynihan's growing openness to conservative ideas was the liberal tendency of the 1960s to over-promise and thus, underperform. This was the underlying problem of the War on Poverty and more importantly, in terms of Moynihan's own career, the dissolution of the Civil Rights/liberal coalition. By attempting to translate the vocabulary and methods of the southern Civil Rights crusade to the problems in the Black urban North, liberals "make fewer and fewer distinctions between those issues which are correctly defined as having to do with race, and those much more accurately, and usefully, defined as matters of social class."³⁵ Although this appears to be Moynihan supporting one of the most stringent criticisms of his own 1965 report, it rather points to the fact that the federal government, in Moynihan's estimation, was capable of taking action to alleviate problems originating from issues concerning social class. This ability had been

³⁴ Ibid, 24.

³⁵ Ibid, 26.

sabotaged, however, by liberal white guilt, which mindlessly associated the urban violence of the late sixties solely with racism. “Once again attention is diverted from the Negro community, where the problem and the need are both located, to the white community where it came from.”³⁶ Here, Moynihan was recalling the Moynihan Report that did not seek to blame the Black community for its problems, but sought to fix the circumstances within the black community which allowed those problems to persist.

Moynihan’s prescription for the liberal voter in 1968 amounted to a decidedly bitter pill. He endeavored to toe the party line, and viewed Robert F. Kennedy as a legitimate savior from the liberal morass of the federal government in 1968, but it is undeniably clear that, to correct the course of the American government, Moynihan believed that coalition with conservative Republicans would become a necessity. This belief in coalition was witnessed by Moynihan’s appearance in the pages of *The Republican Papers*, edited by Representative Melvin R. Laird and published in 1968. These papers drew together a collection of thinkers, not to create a new Republican platform for 1968, but to help foster a growing coalition between the parties. Along with contributor G. Robert Blakey, Moynihan was the only contributor to identify himself as a liberal Democrat. In his introduction to the volume, Laird singled out Moynihan as the prime representative of this new coalition. He is one of several “thoughtful men who seek meaningful answers to thorny problems.” He may be aligned with a differing political

³⁶ Ibid.

affiliation but “his questing search for true causes makes dialogue possible and welcome.”³⁷

Moynihan’s essay, “Poverty, Welfare and Jobs,” lived up to the ringing endorsement of Laird’s introduction. It is here where the criticisms of the liberal establishment spill over more fully into corrections. Where Moynihan had previously hedged his assessments of the War on Poverty and other liberal initiatives, here he rather bluntly expressed his dismay at their failure. This is especially true in terms of the failure of the federal government to continue initiatives in the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. “The streets of the Negro slums contain the wreckage of a generation of good intentions on the part of American liberals,” he wrote.³⁸ This wreckage seemed to begin with the dismissal of the Howard platform and the Moynihan Report. The desire to see results had blinded liberal policy makers, thus according to Moynihan, “we have paid too little heed to the limited capacities of government to bring about social change.”³⁹ Turning to the race riots in Newark and Detroit, Moynihan showed how the last vestiges of liberal progress in terms of race relations and the eradication of poverty had turned out to be bankrupt. This provided the basis for explaining how a Black urban underclass had been able to grow and persist despite the numerous attempts by the federal government to attack the very same problems.

³⁷ Melvin R. Laird, “Introduction,” in Melvin R. Laird, ed., *Republican Papers* (New York: Praeger, 1968), xi.

³⁸ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Poverty, Welfare, and Jobs, “ in Laird, ed., *Republican Papers*, 130.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

This isolation of African Americans and the development of an underclass was the focus of another essay published in August 1968 in which Moynihan argued, “The essential symbol... of Black exclusion from white America is that the Negro is not permitted to move about freely and live where he will.”⁴⁰ Moynihan pointed to several causes for the deteriorated state of race relations in the United States, one of which was “the steady deterioration of family structure in low-income neighborhoods.” Moynihan remained persistent in mentioning statistics for family breakdown among poor African Americans but had expanded his argument to include family breakdown as a barometer for the growth of an urban underclass, generally, black and white. He also noted that some would claim utilizing family breakdown statistics blames the poor for their own problems. Not so, argued Moynihan; rather, family breakdown “is the best evidence of what is happening to the poor.”⁴¹ His confidence in the arguments he made in his 1965 report remained, but he had learned to temper his language and to expect critical reactions to them. “As I am almost certain to be misunderstood – that appears to be an occupational hazard in this field,”⁴² writes Moynihan in a later essay similarly dealing with the Black urban underclass. In the midst of his litany of liberal woes, Moynihan was unchanging and confident in the views that he first voiced in the Moynihan Report three years earlier.

⁴⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The New Racialism,” *Atlantic Monthly* (August, 1968) in Moynihan, *Coping*, 196.

⁴¹ Moynihan, “Poverty, Welfare and Jobs,” 135.

⁴² Moynihan, “The New Racialism,” 203

Rather than repudiating his liberal roots (despite his increasingly harsh criticism), Moynihan was attempting to create a bridge to Republican elements in the U. S. government that, after Robert F. Kennedy's assassination, seemed primed to take over the executive branch in 1968. Moynihan's purpose for this was to enact the liberal platform he had envisioned and seen cut down by the liberal establishment. Now it seemed that the Republicans could possibly succeed where liberals had failed. "Somehow liberals have been unable to acquire from life what conservatives seem to be endowed with at birth, namely, a healthy skepticism of the powers of government agencies to do good."⁴³

One of Daniel Moynihan's last published articles before entering the Nixon Administration encapsulated many of the domestic issues he had written about during 1968. "The Crisis in Welfare," took many of the race relations and urban crisis issues he had focused on and placed them in the context of the ongoing debate surrounding welfare reform in the wake of the election. Moynihan called for deep structural changes in the American welfare system to save the program from joining the "social history of the 1960s... already littered with wreckage of crash programs that were going to change everything."⁴⁴ The reforms that Moynihan proposed included income supplements for families, greater dissemination of birth control knowledge, increased social service for female-headed households and a curtailment of government incentive for men to abandon their families.⁴⁵ Although presented in a different political context, these suggestions look

⁴³ Moynihan, "Poverty, Welfare and Jobs," 138.

⁴⁴ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Crisis in Welfare," *The Public Interest* 10 (Winter, 1968): 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

amazingly similar to the proposed solutions extrapolated from the Moynihan Report. Moynihan actually went on to discuss the similarity mentioning the work of E. Franklin Frazier, calling family breakdown an “extremely sensitive subject,” and clarifying that the issues of family breakdown affected all lower-class urban families with “perhaps some reinforcement from Negro family patterns.”⁴⁶ These qualifiers signified an increased sensitivity in light of the prospect of returning to government service, but also showed a continued commitment to the program envisioned by the Moynihan Report, even in a revised form.

This new formulation of the Report’s general thesis was especially significant in Moynihan’s movement away from a slavery-specific thesis of Black family pathology. It is the tradition of southern Protestant fundamentalism, which so permeates the Black community in the United States that had kept issues relating to sexuality and the family taboo. “In truth, the inheritance of slavery... may be of relatively minor consideration in this matter when compared with the inheritance of Bible Belt Fundamentalism,” Moynihan wrote.⁴⁷ Although this represented a major concession to the Moynihan Report’s critics, its author still affirmed his thesis, his findings, and his proposed solutions. In fact, many of the liberal critics of the Report who attacked Moynihan as a bourgeois, repressed and altogether irrelevant view of family relations and sexuality received no quarter from Moynihan. “Somehow or other,” he wrote, “the idea that sexual repression is bad has gotten mixed up with the idea that illegitimacy, or whatever, is

⁴⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 18.

good.”⁴⁸ Moynihan went on at some length to describe how structural changes to the welfare system would affect New York. The important fact though remained that on the eve of his entrance into the Nixon Administration, Moynihan remained vigilant and reform-minded in at least this one area of domestic policy.

During 1969 and 1970, Moynihan turned much of his published writing away from specific domestic issues (as he was again involved in policy formation) and focused on broader themes for the coming decade. One theme that continued to be a central focus was the need for more deep social scientific research. The number of domestic programs of the federal government had jumped from 45 to 435 between 1960 and 1968.⁴⁹ This near mania for new programs had been inaugurated, according to Moynihan, when President Johnson, “moved matters... from phrase making to vote-trading, with ominous little attention paid in between to the question of what exactly was the problem to be solved.”⁵⁰ Moynihan viewed this reliance on program over more coherent policy as one of the major failings of the liberal leadership during the 1960s, and the War on Poverty had been the prime example, “less a choice of policies and more of a collection of them.”⁵¹ Because “there are no social interests about which the national government does not have some policy or other,” the government had unintentionally ignored the unintended effects or “hidden policies” of this drastic upswing of government

⁴⁸ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁹ See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Toward an National Urban Policy,” *The Public Interest* 17 (Fall, 1969): 5.

⁵⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Professors and the Poor,” in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, ed. *On Understanding Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1969): 10.

⁵¹ Ibid, 12.

intervention into domestic social problems.⁵² This phenomenon in domestic policy had been learned largely from the adventuresome policies implemented during the Vietnam War.⁵³ One suggestion to correct these missteps is for the government to encourage and “sponsor extensive and sustained research into urban problems.”⁵⁴ This only accounts for one suggestion in ten, but adequately illustrates the continuity in Moynihan’s thought upon his entrance into the Nixon Administration.

Nixon, Moynihan and the Family Assistance Plan

As Daniel Patrick Moynihan was redefining himself to the public through his writing, he also made stark changes in his professional life. The claim that Moynihan became a Neoconservative in the decade following the Moynihan Report controversy finds its most concrete support in Moynihan’s two years of service in the Nixon Administration. Moynihan had risen only to sub-cabinet posts in both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, but would become a member of President Nixon’s cabinet and one of his main advisors on social policy and urban affairs. Although Moynihan never claimed to be anything but a Democrat, it became increasingly difficult for many Democrats to understand his seeming change of allegiance. Biographer Godfrey Hodgson attempts to reveal Moynihan’s understanding of his service to President Nixon: “He explained it to himself, in terms not of a conversion or a change of heart, but of his

⁵² Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Policy vs. Program in the ‘70s,” *The Public Interest* 20 (Summer 1970): 93.

⁵³ See Moynihan, “Toward a National,” 11; Moynihan, “The Professors and the Poor,” 17; Moynihan, “Policy vs. Program,” 92.

⁵⁴ Moynihan, “Towards a National,” 17.

pragmatic desire to achieve certain policy outcomes he believed the nation needed.”⁵⁵ The policy outcomes stemmed directly from the problems first discovered by Moynihan in his 1965 report and would serve in many ways as their final stand in his political career. The history and eventual legislative failure of the Family Assistance Plan (FAP) closed five years of Moynihan’s reacting to and moving beyond the controversy of 1965-66.

Although the issues appear different, the breakdown of the Black family and welfare reform, the underlying issues are indistinguishable and show a streak of continuity throughout Moynihan’s “neoconservative” phase.

The Moynihan Report itself had not offered concrete policy recommendations but had been geared towards the policy outcomes of full employment and an overhaul of the AFDC program, which Moynihan believed was damaging to Black poor and other poverty-stricken families. Beginning in 1967, Moynihan increasingly adopted the establishment of national family allowances or some policy based upon income as opposed to social services as the best solution to the increasingly thorny issue of welfare reform.⁵⁶ A Negative Income Tax⁵⁷ or a guaranteed income, both programs that would

⁵⁵ Hodgson, *The Gentleman From New York*, 156.

⁵⁶ See Moynihan, “The President and the Negro,” 36; Moynihan, “The Crisis of Confidence,” 8; Moynihan, “The Democrats, Kennedy and the Murder of Dr. King,” 24; Moynihan, “Poverty, Welfare and Jobs,” 141; Moynihan, “The Crisis in Welfare,” 9; Moynihan, “Toward a National Urban Policy,” 16; Moynihan, “Policy vs. Program,” 99.

⁵⁷ Conservative economist Milton Friedman had suggested a Negative Income Tax as early as 1962. Although Moynihan preferred a system of family allowances (basically a standardized tax credit for all families with a child in the home), he had shown increasing support for Friedman’s ideas. This perception was greatly strengthened in 1968 when Friedman published a chapter in *Republican Papers*, to which Moynihan was also a contributor. See Milton Friedman, “The Case for the Negative Income Tax,” in Laird, ed. *Republican Papers*, 202-20.

help remove the stigma associated with welfare and lower costs, Moynihan believed, could replace the failed programs of the War on Poverty, the epitome of which was the Community Action Programs.⁵⁸ The FAP, then, married Moynihan's criticisms of the Great Society programs and his own contention that the Moynihan Report had been correct.

The issue of welfare reform was Richard Nixon's first major domestic issue as President. From January 1969, the exploding welfare rolls in New York State and increasingly across the nation became the main topic of discussion among the new president's domestic advisors. The issue of welfare reform had strong racial overtones and also dredged up the issue of family structure, something about which Daniel Moynihan knew a great deal. As he wrote later in a book-length study of the FAP: "The subject under consideration was family structure, and this was a subject which American public men had avoided with a diligence rare in the affairs of any nation, singular in ours."⁵⁹ The discussions of welfare reform hinged upon a constellation of interconnected "subsystems" which kept people dependent upon welfare and halted their rise out of that dependency. Using this vocabulary, Moynihan was able to reconnect the issue of welfare reform to those issues first advanced in *The Negro Family*. "Of these private subsystems, none, presumably, was as powerful as family. There lay the heart of the matter, and, as on

⁵⁸ Moynihan had been opposed to Community action since his service in the Kennedy Administration. See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "What is 'Community Action'?" *The Public Interest* 5, (Fall 1966), 3-8; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

⁵⁹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Random House, 1973), 21.

issues of policy, it presented itself to the president as a crisis in welfare.”⁶⁰ In fact, it was the very same graphical representation comparing nonwhite male unemployment and newly opened AFDC cases, “Moynihan’s Scissors,” which the Urban Affairs Council used to explain the issues at hand to President Nixon.⁶¹ Thus, Moynihan’s major contribution to the Nixon Administration amounted to a final attempt to push forward the policy outcomes envisioned by the Moynihan Report. The FAP was groundbreaking because it sought to change radically the underlying principles of social welfare in the United States. Rather than providing services to allow the poor access to social services, the FAP, attempted something more ambitious. Historian James T. Patterson articulates the goal of the FAP, “to build floors under the incomes of large groups of people, thereby moving toward the goal Johnson (coached by Moynihan) had outlined at Howard in 1965: *greater equality of result.*”⁶²

Only allowed a two-year absence from his professorship at Harvard, Moynihan left the Nixon Administration in 1970. He would, however, remain active in discussions concerning social policy. 1972, then, signaled an end for Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He had been out of the Nixon Administration for a year and chose not to support a candidate in the presidential election. In another year he would be appointed Ambassador to India and a year later Ambassador to the United Nations. Until the senatorial campaign in

⁶⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁶¹ See Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income*, 83, Hodgson, *The Gentleman From New York*, 163. The updated Moynihan scissors chart “caught the eye,” of President Nixon in the Urban Affairs Council’s report in support of the Family Assistance Plan.

⁶² James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America’s Struggle over Black Family Life: From LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 117.

1976, his other interests, namely those concerning foreign policy, would largely absorb Moynihan. “The Schism in Black America,” published in the spring of 1972, stands as one of his last major pronouncements on race relations during his “neoconservative” period. Moynihan stated directly his view of Black America, “things are going in two directions at once. Some things are getting better, others worse.” And he also pointed out a second important reality, “considerable energy is devoted to denying either trend.”⁶³ Moynihan also quickly asserted several things about the legacy of the Moynihan Report. First that it had anticipated “that the real Problem was going to be that of social class.” Second, that in the near decade since its composition, “it would seem to have stood up.” And, finally, that the family structure was “the best ‘all-purpose’ indicator of social distress.”⁶⁴ Moynihan was through apologizing. Although he had absorbed many of the Report’s initial criticisms, he had also taken its legacy into his own hands. Some ground exists to claim that the Report focused on social class, but the family dominated its language. Moynihan steamrolled forward, however, asserting that “poverty is now inextricably associated with family structure.”⁶⁵ Although the Moynihan Report had focused on female-headed households locked into urban poverty, it had also implied a growing Black middle-class, according to Moynihan. In 1972, both groups had grown faster than could have been imagined. Here again, Moynihan was bending new

⁶³ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Schism in Black America,” *The Public Interest* 27 (Spring 1972), 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

information, research, and social scientific facts to his theory while largely maintaining his original position.

After proving that he had predicted the growing division within Black America, Moynihan then turned to the second trend he mentioned. Not only had it “proved impossible to establish a reasoned discussion on family structure,”⁶⁶ there had developed a “literature of denial,” especially following the Watts riots, which had catapulted the Moynihan Report toward public controversy and had witnessed a transformation in which “victims became aggressors.”⁶⁷ This had led to a dearth of inquiry, research, and dialogue about a problem that remains extremely pertinent in American society. Moynihan claimed that the “upper class lying” done by liberal and radical left activists which made claims that “men in jail are political prisoners,” “the fatherless child is happier,” and “the welfare system is a conspiracy,”⁶⁸ were destroying dialogue and inhibiting discourse rather than uncovering racial oppression or injustice.

In his journal articles Moynihan again and again affirmed the connection between poverty and family breakdown, the main thesis of the Moynihan Report, and increasingly supported an income strategy as the bedrock of any national family or urban policy. The FAP combined these threads of thought and became a radically liberal piece of legislation proposed by a perceived conservative Republican president. Moynihan had been scarred

⁶⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 19.

by the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report. His criticisms of the liberal establishment in the United States became increasingly filled with vitriol as he came to blame liberals for the folly of the Vietnam War, the failure to continue the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement beyond the impasse of 1965, and the adversarial culture of the youth, peace, and antiwar movements. As he began to be increasingly associated with neoconservatives, especially through his connection with the journal *The Public Interest*, it seemed evident that Moynihan had strayed far from home; but as an advisor close to President Nixon, Moynihan came incredibly close to achieving the very same goals he had said needed to be achieved in 1965. Was this then a betrayal of liberalism? It is difficult to dismiss Daniel P. Moynihan's association with the neoconservatives based solely on his writings on race, family and welfare, but it is crucial to recognize that these issues dominated much of his public life and they provide a constant connection to the goals of social reform, which Moynihan had first championed in the Moynihan Report.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Despite the initial controversy that surrounded it and a diverse legacy, the Moynihan Report is little remembered in the United States today. Often mentioned briefly in connection with President Johnson's Howard University address, the Report and its consequences have been largely relegated to the footnotes of the Civil Rights Movement. This despite some historians' assertions, such as Ronald Berman, who compared the Moynihan Report to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, "If the great event of the Fifties was the decision of the Supreme Court," Berman wrote, "the great event of the Sixties was, I think, the publication of the Moynihan Report (*The Negro Family*). The former defined the external political limits of the problem – the latter defined its inherent character."¹ The immediate impact of the Moynihan Report was to shake up the way people in the government and in society thought about and talked about Civil Rights. There is no parcel of legislation resulting from the Report's publication. Rather there is an extensive, if sometimes diffuse, intellectual and cultural legacy that deserves more attention than it has received.

If ever there was an inopportune moment for a government document with the style and content of the Moynihan Report to reach the public, it was in the summer of 1965. At a moment when, for Civil Rights leaders and the leaders of the federal government, the way forward suddenly seemed unclear, the Moynihan

¹ Ronald Berman, *America in the Sixties: An Intellectual History* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 73.

Report focused attention on unpleasant truths about the Black community. The controversy that followed the Report's publication showed new ways in which the media could affect government policy and distort the words of men like Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The slew of articles, appraisals and denunciations that flooded media outlets during 1965 and 1966 is evidence of a mass media focused on the immediacy of American politics that had not existed only a few years before, a point that Moynihan himself reflected on in 1969 saying, "Moreover, before the mass media, or the Kennedys, or whatever it was understood that things took time."² On the eve of the Vietnam War and only half a decade before the Watergate scandal, the Moynihan Report controversy served as a prelude to the depths this new political media would plunge. In many ways, the distorted view of the Moynihan Report created by the media in the throes of the controversy created as much of a legacy for the Report as Moynihan's actual arguments did.

There were more subtle and lasting consequences of the Moynihan Report as well. The professorial tone of Moynihan's writing, his social science credentials, and his broad use of historical and literary sources sparked anew debates about African American history and media representation. This is most clearly seen in the historiography of American slavery. The way historians talked about the experience of American slavery was already changing in 1965, but the Moynihan Report controversy provided a new impetus to refute some of the ideas of Stanley M. Elkins' *Slavery* and to reevaluate the role that African American families played in American history. A steady stream of historical monographs throughout the late 1960s and

² Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Professors and the Poor," in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, ed., *On Understanding Poverty* (New York: Basic, 1969), 25.

1970s constituted a major shift in the historiography of American slavery. While Moynihan's influence was often indirect at best, a few historians, such as Eugene D. Genovese, had commented at length on the Moynihan Report. Others, such as Herbert G. Gutman, attempted directly to refute Moynihan's findings.

The Moynihan Report also exerted an impact on ways in which the Black family was represented in American media. From the controversy over William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, which ran almost parallel to the Moynihan Report controversy, to the success of sitcoms such as *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times*, Americans proved to be sensitive to and fascinated by the representation of African Americans by white artists and the presentation of Black family dynamics in popular media. Moynihan himself was never a consultant for any sitcoms, but the issues he brought to the fore in 1965 remained in the psyche of American culture thereafter. A growing sensitivity to the portrayal of African American family dynamics became increasingly evident in the 1970s and led to a reevaluation of many of the stereotypical ways African Americans had been portrayed in American culture for over a century. To claim that the Moynihan Report was the sole cause of this change would be reductive, but to ignore how the Moynihan Report controversy put a premium on accentuating the positive adaptations of Black family structure in poverty would be equally irresponsible. The legacies of the Moynihan Report on its author's own field of social science research is more complex and more lasting. After the Moynihan Report controversy, Moynihan's argument became the standard position social scientists argued against. This vilification of the Moynihan Report's

arguments would color the way social science research of the Black family was conducted well into the final quarter of the twentieth century.

The Moynihan Report also had drastic consequences upon Moynihan himself. In what proved to be a long and celebrated career in public service, the disruptions of 1965-66 proved to be instrumental in the political course that Moynihan would take. An examination of Moynihan's own writing from 1966-1972 shows two seemingly contradictory trends, the movement towards neoconservative rhetoric and a renewed emphasis on the social policy outcomes extrapolated from the Moynihan Report. These two trends are evident in the torrent of journal articles written and speeches made by Moynihan during this time, in which his insider criticism of the liberal domestic and foreign policy initiatives of the 1960s grew closer to indictment. This perceived shift in allegiance was cemented in 1969 when Moynihan accepted a post in the Nixon Administration as an advisor to the President on urban affairs. Despite this close association with a Republican Administration disdained by liberals throughout the country, Moynihan always claimed he remained a Democrat. A rather unusual Democrat though, as *Time Magazine* described him in 1970: "Moynihan is a very undoctrinaire liberal who wants to get things done – and is willing to pay a certain ideological price to do so."³

Despite his close association with neoconservatives and his lasting support of Richard Nixon, Moynihan's major accomplishment within the Nixon Administration revealed his continuing commitment to liberal social change and the problems outlined in the Moynihan Report. The Family Assistance Plan went to the Congress

³ "A Whig in the White House: Daniel P. Moynihan," *Time*, 16 March 1970, 32.

as a product of compromise. It combined liberal ideas, such as Moynihan's call for family allowances, with conservative ideas such as economist Milton Friedman's negative income tax, and represented a radical new direction for American welfare. Although it eventually failed, FAP legitimized, to Moynihan at least, the idea that poverty and family breakdown were intimately involved, and these problems affected African Americans in ways unique among Americans. The Moynihan Report had guided Moynihan through unfamiliar waters and would eventually lead him home following his election to the Senate in 1976.

When Problems Persist

In the late 1980s changes in social science research of race relations began to pave the way for a renewed interest in the Moynihan Report. By the time of the thirtieth anniversary of the Report in 1995, commentator Joseph H. Brown could insist, "The problems that Moynihan identified 30 years ago have more than tripled in severity."⁴ In many ways historian David Steigerwald's statement that the Moynihan Report was "not a report on the historical maldevelopment of the black family. It was not a very good study of a contemporary crisis. Rather, it was a prediction of the future,"⁵ had been borne out. The conversation continues in the present. In 2009, the papers from a conference focused on the lasting impact of the Moynihan Report, organized by Princeton sociologist Douglas Massey and Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson, was published as a special volume of the *Annals of the*

⁴ Joseph H. Brown, "Time to Admit that Moynihan was Right" *Headway* 7 (Feb., 28, 1995): 24.

⁵ David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 262.

American Association for Political and Social Science.⁶ This volume drew together voices from a broad range of political and social science backgrounds and shows “that conversations about race – and about class and also about fragmented families – are more complex than ever.”⁷ Removed from the hothouse atmosphere of the late 1960s has allowed a reappraisal of the Moynihan Report to begin as the problems and prognostications of its author have proven to be persistently accurate in the early twenty-first century.

One of the first essays in *The Moynihan Report Revisited* by Harvard sociologist and political scientist William Julius Wilson is particularly perceptive regarding the Moynihan Report’s complex legacy. He argues that one of the major legacies of the Report was the creation of taboos in social science research. “Indeed, in the aftermath of the controversy and in an effort to protect their work from the charge of racism, or of blaming the victim, many liberal social scientists tended to avoid describing any behavior that could be construed as unflattering or stigmatizing to people of color.”⁸ This trend has led to a dearth of research on the black community from any perspective that attributed social problems to causes within the Black community itself. Wilson has been one of the leading social scientists to help reverse this trend. His well-received study of African American poverty from 1987, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Under Class and*

⁶ See Kate Ledger, “The Moynihan Report, a Retrospective,” *Contexts* (Fall 2009), 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸ William Julius Wilson, “The Moynihan Report and Research on the Black Community,” in Douglas Massey and Robert Sampson, eds., *The Moynihan Report Revisited* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009), 37.

Public Policy brought to the spotlight many problems within the African American community that deserved and needed particular attention. His more recent work, *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City*, articulates a new framework for understanding racial and social inequality that echoes many of the sentiments of now over fifty-year-old Moynihan Report. Other sociologists and writers have begun to acknowledge the truth and the base of the Moynihan Report and have begun to reintegrate its findings into the continuing study of race relations, poverty, and family structure in the United States. Decades after the controversy that made the Report famous, the distortion of the media wiped away, the Moynihan Report's legacy is beginning a new chapter. The problems the Moynihan Report brought to the sudden attention of the American people have faded sometimes from national discussions, but have been persistent in their affects on large numbers of Americans.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan passed away in 2003, and a major voice on American social policy was silenced. Moynihan is now mostly remembered for his long and celebrated career as a professorial, jovial, and lively New York Senator. It was in the first phase of his career, however, that he made his greatest contribution to American politics and culture. His thoughts and writings about race, poverty, and the family, embodied in the Moynihan Report, started a conversation in government and culture that has impacted, influenced, and changed the way we talk and act about race, poverty, and the possibility of change in our society. And the conversation continues.

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