The Moynihan Report “The Negro Family”
Distinguishing What it Said and What It Did Not Say
A faculty paper by
Dr. Arthur Garrison
Criminal Justice
at the
Kutztown University
The Frederick Douglass Institute
November 17, 2014

1945-1950
- Birth of the Cold War
- Democracy v Communism

1950’s
- May 1954-Brown v Board of Ed
- August 1955 - Emit Till
- December 1, 1955-December 20, 1956-The Montgomery Bus Boycott (381 days)
- September 1957-Central High School Little Rock Nine

1960-1963
- November 1960-Election of John F. Kennedy
- February 1960-Sit-ins begin
- October 1962-James Meredith and the Univ. of Miss
- February 1963-Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique*
- June 11, 1963-Kennedy’s Race Speech
- June 12, 1963-Medgar Evers Kille
- August 1963-March on Washington
- September 1963-Bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church
- April 1963-King’s letter from Birmingham Jail

January 1964
- President Johnson’s War on Poverty Speech

July 1964-Civil Rights Act

The Long Hot Summer of 1964
- July 18-23-Harlem Race riot
- July 24-25-Rochester, NY Race riot
- August 2-4-Jersey City, NJ Race Riot
- August 11-13-Elizebethtown, NJ Race Riot
- August 16-17-Chicago Race Riot
- August 28-30-Philadelphia Race Riot

1965
- February-Malcolm X Killed
- March-Selma Marches
- **March-Moynihan circulates his Report**
- March 7-The incident at the Edmund Pettus Bridge
- June 1965-President Johnson’s “Freedom is not Enough” speech at Howard University
- **July-Moynihan’s Report is leaked**
- August 6-Signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- **August 9-Newsweek published a two page summary of the Moynihan’s report**
- August 11-17-Los Angles, CA Watts Race Riot
- **Late August-Early September-Moynihan Report is publically available**
LBJ’s speech at Howard University, June 1965

“The voting rights bill will be the latest, and among the most important, in a long series of victories. But this victory—as Winston Churchill said of another triumph for freedom—‘is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.’ That beginning is freedom; and the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society—to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school. It is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.”
LBJ’s speech at Howard University, June 1965

“But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.”
LBJ’s speech at Howard University, June 1965

“For the task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities—physical, mental and spiritual, and to pursue their individual happiness. To this end, equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.”
LBJ’s speech at Howard University, June 1965
“Men are shaped by their world. When it is a world of decay, ringed by an invisible wall, when escape is arduous and uncertain, and the saving pressures of a more hopeful society are unknown, it can cripple the youth and it can desolate the men.

There is also the burden that a dark skin can add to the search for a productive place in our society. Unemployment strikes most swiftly and broadly at the Negro, and this burden erodes hope. Blighted hope breeds despair. Despair brings indifferences to the learning which offers a way out. And despair, coupled with indifferences, is often the source of destructive rebellion against the fabric of society.

Perhaps most important--its influence radiating to every part of life--is the breakdown of the Negro family structure. For this, most of all, white America must accept responsibility. It flows from centuries of oppression and persecution of the Negro man. It flows from the long years of degradation and discrimination, which have attacked his dignity and assaulted his ability to produce for his family.”
LBJ’s speech at Howard University, June 1965
The Moynihan Report (March 1965) was leaked in July 1965. The Press published selected sentences. It was publically released August 1965.

- The public critique
  - The Report was racists
  - The Report was sexist
- The political critique
  - The Black Power Movement rejection
  - Mainline civil rights organizations, leaders and academics rejection
  - The second wave of the feminist movement rejection
    - First wave (late 19th & early 20th centuries – voting and equal rights under the law)
  - The Vietnam War and its impact on federal funding
  - The 1964 and 1965 race riots

- LBJ’s speech at Howard University, June 1965
- The Moynihan Report (March 1965) was leaked in July 1965. The Press published selected sentences. It was publically released August 1965.
- The result:
  - The Report was politically shelved
    - White House Conference on Civil Rights (June 1966)
      - Housing, economic security, education integration/desegregation and the administration of justice
      - The focus on family stability as an issue to be discussed was rejected
  - The Report recommendations were abandoned
    - Federal employment programs for black males
    - Focus on family stability to enhance young black male education

- **The Moynihan Report**
  - The public critique
    - The Report was racist
      - Placed blame on Black males and the black community
    - The Report was sexist
      - Placed the blame on Black women
  - The political critique
    - The Black Power Movement rejection
    - Mainline civil rights organizations, leaders and academics rejection
    - The second wave of the feminist movement rejection
      - Second wave (1960 thought the end of the 1970s – birth control, sexual liberation, reproduction rights)
    - The Vietnam War and its impact on federal funding
    - The 1964 and 1965 race riots
- So what did the Report actually say?
Two propositions regarding the state of the Negro Family:

- Racism Had a Direct Structural Impact of the Negro Family
  - “First, the racist virus in the American blood stream”

- “Second, three centuries of sometimes unimaginable mistreatment have taken their toll on the Negro people.”

- “The Negro situation is commonly perceived by whites in terms of the visible manifestation of discrimination and poverty . . . . It is more difficult, however, for whites to perceive the effect that three centuries of exploitation have had on the fabric of Negro society itself. Here the consequences of the historic injustices done to Negro Americans are silent and hidden from view. But here is where the true injury has occurred: unless this damage is repaired, all the effort to end discrimination and poverty and injustice will come to little.”
Two propositions regarding the state of the Negro Family:

- The Negro Family Structure Suffers from a Tangle of Pathology
  - “The fundamental problem. . . . is that of family structure.”
  - “[F]or vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated city working class[,] the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated. . . . So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself.”
  - “[A]t the center of the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the family structure.”

- The pathology was
  - A matriarchal family structure in a patriarchal society
  - Black male absent from the home as both provider and father figure
  - Black male unemployment with comparatively higher black female employment
  - Failure of black youth in school and juvenile delinquency
The stats:
- In 1960 - 25% of Black families not in tact (divorce / never been married)
- In 1963 - 24% of Black children born illegitimate
- In 1960 – 25% of Black families were single female headed households
- “The majority of Negro children receive public assistance under AFDC program at one point or another in their Childhood.”
- “In the beginning, the number of AFDC families in which the father was absent because of desertion was less than a third of the total. Today it is two-thirds.”
The stats:

- Black male unemployment
  - “From 1951 to 1963, the level of the Negro male unemployment was on a long-run rising trend, while at the same time following the short-run ups and downs of the business cycle. During the same period, the number of broken families in the Negro world was also on a long-run rise, with intermediate ups and downs.”
  - “[U]nemployment peaks 1 year before broken families . . .”
  - Unemployment and broken families are directly correlated variables.
His conclusion:

- "The conclusion from these and similar data is difficult to avoid: During times when jobs were reasonably plentiful . . . the Negro family became stronger and more stable. As jobs became more and more difficult to find, the stability of the family became more and more difficult to maintain."

- "There would seem to be an American tradition . . . higher family incomes are unmistakably associated with greater family stability -- which comes first may be a matter for conjecture, but the conjunction of the two characteristics is unmistakable."

- "The Negro family is no exception."
His conclusion:

- “The steady expansion of this welfare program, as of public assistance programs in general, can be taken as a measure of the steady disintegration of the Negro family structure over the past generation in the United States.”

- The Use of welfare programs are directly correlated with family pathology/insecurity
Moynihan’s Tangle of Pathology:

- Matriarchal structure in a patriarchal society
  - Male is not the principal wage earner
- Lack of male leadership / role models in the home
- Children not raised by fathers
- Single motherhood
- Early marriage to uneducated / undereducated males
  - Discrimination and disproportionate number of black women receiving higher education and employment
- Exposure to crime
- Unemployment / segregation / poor schooling
- Juvenile delinquency / poor school performance
- Correlation of juvenile delinquency, truancy and the lack of presence of a father in the home
- Economic, social, political and educational segregation
  - General separation from the larger American society
Moynihan’s Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- Slavery
- Racism
- Reconstruction and Jim Crow
- Racial policies that made distinctions in treatment between Black men and Black women

- “Keeping the Negro ‘in his place’ can be translated as keeping the Negro male in his place: the female was not a threat to anyone.”

- “Unquestionably, these events worked against the emergence of a strong father figure. The very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut. Indeed, in 19th century America, a particular type of exaggerated male boastfulness became almost a national style. Not for the Negro male. The ‘sassy nigger’ was lynched.”

- “In this situation, the Negro family made but little progress toward the middle-class pattern of the present time.”
Moynihan’s Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- Urbanization – 1920s-1950s
  - The First and Second Great Migrations
  - Breakdown of rural social norms and systems of support
- Racial policies that clustered blacks into cities
- Racial policies that prevented blacks from post-WWII programs

- “Keeping the Negro ‘in his place’ can be translated as keeping the Negro male in his place: the female was not a threat to anyone.”

- “Unquestionably, these events worked against the emergence of a strong father figure. The very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut. Indeed, in 19th century America, a particular type of exaggerated male boastfulness became almost a national style. Not for the Negro male. The ‘sassy nigger’ was lynched.”

- “In this situation, the Negro family made but little progress toward the middle-class pattern of the present time.”
Moynihan’s Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- Urbanization – 1920s-1950s
  - The First and Second Great Migrations
    - “During the 1950-60 decade of heavy Negro migration to the cities of the North and West, the ratio of nonwhite to white family income in cities increased from 57 to 63 percent. Corresponding declines in the ratio in the rural nonfarm and farm areas kept the national ratio virtually unchanged. But between 1960 and 1963, median nonwhite family income slipped from 55 percent to 53 percent of white income. The drop occurred in three regions, with only the South, where a larger proportion of Negro families have more than one earner, showing a slight improvement.”

- “Unquestionably, these events worked against the emergence of a strong father figure. The very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut. Indeed, in 19th century America, a particular type of exaggerated male boastfulness became almost a national style. Not for the Negro male. The ‘sassy nigger’ was lynched.”

- “In this situation, the Negro family made but little progress toward the middle-class pattern of the present time.”
Moynihan's Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- Urbanization – 1960s
  - Rise of the suburbs/white flight
  - Impact of unemployment on the family

“The impact of unemployment on the Negro family, and particularly on the Negro male, is the least understood of all the developments that have contributed to the present crisis. There is little analysis because there has been almost no inquiry.”

“Unemployment, for whites and nonwhites alike, has on the whole been treated as an economic phenomenon, with almost no attention paid for at least a quarter-century to social and personal consequences.”
Moynihan's Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- Urbanization – 1960s
  - Rise of the suburbs/white flight
  - Impact of unemployment on the family
    - Family disruption – “[T]he entry of the wife into the labor force. The father is no longer the provider and the elder children become resentful.”
    - Male demasculinization – “Consider the fact that relief investigators or case workers are normally women and deal with the housewife. Already suffering a loss in prestige and authority in the family because of his failure to be the chief bread winner, the male head of the family feels deeply this obvious transfer of planning for the family's well-being to two women, one of them an outsider. His role is reduced to that of errand boy to and from the relief office.”
Moynihan's Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- Urbanization – 1960s
  - Rise of the suburbs/white flight
  - Impact of unemployment on the family
    - Family disruption
    - Male demasculinization

- “Because in general terms Negro families have the largest number of children and the lowest incomes, many Negro fathers literally cannot support their families. Because the father is either not present, is unemployed, or makes such a low wage, the Negro woman goes to work. Fifty-six percent of Negro women, age 25 to 64, are in the work force, against 42 percent of white women. This dependence on the mother's income undermines the position of the father and deprives the children of the kind of attention, particularly in school matters, which is now a standard feature of middle-class upbringing.”
Moynihan's Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- The wage system
  - The fall of the ideal and the practical availability of a living wage for working and middle class families.

- “The American wage system is conspicuous in the degree to which it provides high incomes for individuals, but is rarely adjusted to insure that family, as well as individual needs are met. Almost without exception, the social welfare and social insurance systems of other industrial democracies provide for some adjustment or supplement of a worker's income to provide for the extra expenses of those with families.”
Moynihan’s Tangle of Pathology: Why:

- The wage system
  - The fall of the ideal and the practical availability of a living wage for working and middle class families.
  - “The American wage system is conspicuous in the degree to which it provides high incomes for individuals, but is rarely adjusted to insure that family, as well as individual needs are met. . . .
  - The Federal minimum wage of $1.25 per hour provides a basic income for an individual, but an income well below the poverty line for a couple, much less a family with children.”
His conclusion:

“Work relief is the only type of assistance which can restore the strained bonds of family relationship in a way which promises the continued functioning of that family in meeting the responsibilities imposed upon it by our culture.”

“Work is precisely the one thing the Negro family head in such circumstances has not received over the past generation.”

“The fundamental, overwhelming fact is that Negro unemployment, with the exception of a few years during World War II and the Korean War, has continued at disaster levels for 35 years.”
“Three centuries of injustice have brought about deep-seated structural distortions in the life of the Negro American. At this point, the present tangle of pathology is capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world. The cycle can be broken only if these distortions are set right.”

His bottom line:

- **A political determination that government action is needed**
  - “First, there are many persons [who] feel that, with the legal obstacles to assimilation out of the way, matters will take care of themselves in the normal course of events. This is a fundamental issue, and requires a decision within the government.”

- **Family structure is at the base of the solution**
  - “Second,... We have shown a clear relation between male employment, for example, and the number of welfare dependent children. Employment in turn reflects educational achievement, which depends in large part on family stability, which reflects employment.

- **[A] national effort towards the problems of Negro Americans must be directed towards the question of family structure. The object should be to strengthen the Negro family so as to enable it to raise and support its members as do other families.”

- **Employment forms the foundation for the base of the solution**
  - “During times when jobs were reasonably plentiful ... the Negro family became stronger and more stable.”

What he said

- Social structure was at the heart of the problems with the Negro family
- The problem is historical
- Employment was the key
- Living wage was the key
- Family structure influences all other social dynamics

What he did not say

- The Black women were the cause of the problem
- The pathology was internally created
- That Blacks were inherently criminal or socially inferior
Figure 1. More Children across Racial Groups Are Born Outside Marriage Now Than in the 1960s

Percentage of live births to unmarried mothers


Notes: Before 1980, the race shown is the child’s; from 1980 onward, the race shown is the mother’s. Marital status is estimated before 1980.
Figure 2: More Children Live without Their Fathers Now Than in the 1960s

Source: Authors’ analysis of Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data (see Ruggles et al. 2010).
Note: Percentages shown are of children living with their biological mothers and without their biological fathers.
Figure 13. Black Men Have Spent Time in Prison at Disproportionately High Rates

Note: Rates are for men ever incarcerated in state or federal prison.
Figure 3. Share of Women Who Are Married Has Been Declining since the 1960s

Source: Authors’ analysis of Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data (see Ruggles et al. 2010).
Note: Percentages shown are of women age 18 and older who are married and living with their spouse.
Figure 4. Child Poverty Rates Declined Markedly in the 1960s but Have Varied in a Narrow Band Since

Source: Authors’ analysis of Integrated Public Use Microdata Series data (see Ruggles et al. 2010).
Figure 6. Unemployment Rate for Black Men Remains Persistently High

Unemployment rate for men age 20 and older

Figure 9. Blacks Still behind Whites in College Completion

Share of people age 25–29 with four or more years of college completed

Figure 10. Public School Students’ Experiences Differ Sharply by Race

Share Who Have Ever Repeated a Grade, 2007

- White males: 11%
- White females: 6%
- Black males: 26%
- Black females: 15%

Share of Grade 6–12 Students Who Have Been Suspended, 2007

- White males: 21%
- White females: 10%
- Black males: 50%
- Black females: 35%

Source: Aud, Fox, and Ramani (2010), tables 17a and b.
Figure 12. Blacks Live in Higher-Poverty Neighborhoods Than Whites

Average neighborhood poverty rate