

QUICK READ SYNOPSIS

The Moynihan Report Revisited: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades

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The Labor Market and Young Black Men: Updating Moynihan's Perspective

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Background

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan referred to the employment situation of young black men as an “unconcealable crisis.”

- He identified this as a primary cause of the instability of black families and as a priority in seeking to stabilize black families.
- Moynihan's views in 1965 were very prescient, as the employment situation of young black men has steadily deteriorated since then.
- Moynihan noted the effects of employer characteristics and behavior in the broader labor market as well as those of the young men themselves in accounting for employment trends over time.

NOTE: A range of additional behaviors seem to characterize these young men as they withdraw—such as a growing participation in illegal activities, a declining tendency to marry, and even a tendency to “disconnect” from school and other mainstream behaviors at a relatively early age.

Employers and Young Black Men

Moynihan understood that observed employment outcomes of young blacks represent a range of factors and trends on the demand side of the labor market, those involving employers and their hiring patterns. They also reflect the skills and behaviors of the young men themselves and how they responded to these demand trends.

- He correctly noted the effects of growing employer skill needs (and continuing racial gaps in skills), persisting discrimination, urban segregation, and informal networks on black male employment.

- He correctly foresaw growing participation in crime and noncustodial fatherhood in this population, as well as a tendency for young black men to withdraw from the labor market altogether.
- On the other hand, no one of that time could foresee the extent to which legitimate labor markets would deteriorate for all less-educated young men, and especially black men, in the 1970s and beyond.
- He also did not foresee the booming of illegal activities, especially the crack cocaine trade, in the 1980s and the enormous growth of the offender population it would generate.

New Policies

What is needed is a more comprehensive set of policies to counter the negative trends in labor force opportunities and behaviors.

- These policies should enhance both the perceptions and the reality of greater opportunity for young people, especially through a range of improvements in education and training/labor market options for young people.
- In addition, the kinds of efforts needed to help ex-offenders and noncustodial fathers include policy changes to reduce the labor market barriers they face and greater funding for programs that seek to overcome these barriers, such as “prisoner reentry” and “fatherhood” programs.
- Improving the incentives of less educated men to stay in the labor force, through extensions of the Earned Income Tax Credit to this population, is also important.

Bayesian Bigot? Statistical Discrimination, Stereotypes, and Employer Decision Making

Devah Pager, Princeton University; and Diana Karafin, Ohio State University

Background

In this study, the authors examine the nature of employer attitudes about black and white workers and the extent to which these views are calibrated against their direct experiences with workers from each group.

- Interviews with employers reveal the persistence of strong negative associations with minority workers, with particularly negative characteristics attributed to African American men.
- Studies of hiring likewise suggest that employers strongly prefer white (and Latino) workers to otherwise similar African Americans.

NOTE: Have employers had negative experiences with African American employees in the past that have led them to shy away from hiring blacks? Or do other factors shape employer decision making?

Race as a Proxy

Employers are clearly using race as a proxy for employment-relevant characteristics, but the degree to which the use of this proxy is informed by empirical realities remains uncertain.

- Moss and Tilly (2001) found that employers readily refer to negative characteristics among African American workers, with pervasive concerns about dependability, motivation, attitude, and skill.

- Some of these employers cite concrete experiences with their own black employees as the basis of their attitudes, though a “silent majority” claim not to notice racial differences among their employees.

Findings

The findings of this research suggest that, while most employers expressed strong views about the negative characteristics of African American men, fewer than half of these employers reported observations of their own applicants or employees that were consistent with these general perceptions.

- While employers may update their expectations regarding individual workers, these experiences do not seem to have noticeable effects on their attitudes about the group as a whole.
- Rather, employer attitudes suggest a process of subtyping, whereby individuals who do not conform to a stereotype are viewed as exceptions whose characteristics have little bearing on the larger group.
- Employers surely receive relevant information about various groups from sources other than direct workplace experience.
- At the same time, it is surprising that the experiences employers report from their own direct observations do not carry greater weight in their general attitude formation.

NOTE: The results of this analysis have potentially troubling implications for hiring behavior. The majority of employers who report positive experiences with black workers (or no differences between black and white workers) nevertheless maintain strong negative attitudes about black men generally.

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If Moynihan Had Only Known: Race, Class, and Family Change in the Late Twentieth Century

Frank F. Furstenberg, University of Pennsylvania

Background

Had Moynihan been more attentive to research that focused simultaneously on social class and race, his report might have had far different political and social consequences, leading to alternative policy directions.

- By updating some of the trends, it is clear that many of the pressures on marriage and family formation that seemed uniquely relevant to blacks have been felt by low-income populations more generally.
- Moynihan was greatly influenced by the then cultural template in his analysis of the breakdown of the black family.
- Moynihan noted how matriarchal practices fostered by slavery, economic exclusion, and racial discrimination were weakening the position of men and boys in black families.
- Moynihan concluded that economic pressures and racial segregation in the postwar period were creating undue stresses on the black family.

Conclusion

Even conceding that the family circumstances of blacks and whites looked very different when Moynihan published his report, he might have been able to do a better job of unpacking the racial differences that he observed in the

family had he paid closer attention to the qualitative research produced by social scientists in the decades leading up to his report.

- As more and more lower-income whites have faced the same set of precarious economic conditions, they have begun to exhibit the same patterns of family formation behavior as African Americans.
- The advantages that marriage ostensibly confers become more apparent than real in an era of great inequality, when fewer are willing to commit or able to maintain stable unions whether they take the form of marriage or de facto marriage.
- As a result, efforts to promote marriage without changing the economic and social conditions that foster stable unions are destined to be ineffective.
- There is growing evidence that the Latino population is also experiencing a change from a marriage-oriented population among the foreign-born to an American pattern of family formation among the second generation and among those born abroad but reared in the United States.

NOTE: The patterns suggest that it is insufficient to have strong cultural values about marriage if the economic and social conditions that foster marriage are not maintained. To be sure, the story of change over the past forty years is not strictly an economic one. Gender relationships, premarital sexual practices, and social and cultural influences have all played a part in reshaping the family.

Fragile Families and the Reproduction of Poverty

Sara McLanahan, Princeton University

Background In 1965, Moynihan argued that a self-reinforcing “tangle of pathology,” consisting of nonmarital childbearing, high male unemployment, and welfare dependence, was undermining the progress of African Americans and contributing to the perpetuation of poverty.

- Since the publication of the Moynihan Report, the proportion of African American children born outside marriage has grown dramatically, from 24 percent in 1965 to 69 percent in 2000.
- After four decades, analysts continue to debate whether nonmarital childbearing is a consequence or a cause of poverty.

Family Study The author uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to address the following questions:

- To what extent does poverty and economic disadvantage increase the chances of nonmarital childbearing?
- To what extent does nonmarital childbearing contribute to the perpetuation of poverty and economic disadvantage?

Conclusion The study indicates that nonmarital childbearing is both a consequence and a cause of poverty. It also indicates that to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, we need to find a way to persuade young women from disadvantaged backgrounds that delaying fertility while they search for a suitable partner will have a payoff that is large enough to offset the loss of time spent as a mother or the possibility of forgoing motherhood entirely.

Romantic Unions in an Era of Uncertainty: A Post-Moynihan Perspective on African American Women and Marriage

Linda M. Burton, Duke University; and M. Belinda Tucker,
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Background

This article provides a brief overview of how African American women are situated in and around the thesis of the Moynihan Report.

- It discusses uncertainty in the temporal organization of poor women's lives and in the new terrains of gender relationships and how these both influence African American women's thoughts and behaviors.
- The authors argue that much is to be learned from focusing the lens in this way, as it allows us to view African American women's romantic and marital behavior in the context of broader societal trends.
- An unmarried woman's uncertainty is closely tied to her life course experiences with poverty but also is rooted in broader societal transformations that have reconfigured the temporal dimensions of everyday life and gender relations for all individuals.
- Temporal uncertainty involves women's presumed infractions against socially prescribed moral codes of time use, their beliefs and behaviors around life expectancy, and how they synchronize the daily rhythms of their family's needs with institutional timetables.
- Although the restructuring of gender relationships in society more broadly has created uncertainty about what constitutes appropriate behavior, there is even greater ambiguity surrounding African American family roles, as structural forces and sociocultural tendencies have driven new attitudinal and behavioral patterns.

NOTE: Moynihan argued that female economic dominance in and of itself was not necessarily problematic, but since the male breadwinner model was the prevailing paradigm, any marriage pattern that deviated from that model was troublesome for families and society.

Conclusion

The authors have attempted to provide an alternate lens through which to view past and current patterns of intimate union formation and maintenance by African American women.

- Uncertainty frames perceptions, attitudes, assessments, decision making, and behaviors about marriage and intimate unions for African Americans and frames how it renders contextually relevant interpretations that were sorely missing from the Moynihan discourse.
- The tasks for reducing poverty, reconciling time binds, and recalibrating gender-linked behavioral expectations is an urgent challenge for many groups and nations.

NOTE: At the height of the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report, Eleanor Holmes Norton observed that without children as the prime reason for marriage, the institution would now have to stand on its own "inherent

qualities." It may be that marriage as we have known it in contemporary times will not survive "on its own terms," but as the need for human companionship and love remains intrinsic to the human condition, serious community-wide conversations to address the current dilemma are essential.

Claiming Fatherhood: Race and the Dynamics of Paternal Involvement among Unmarried Men

Kathryn Edin and Laura Tach, Harvard University;
and Ronald Mincy, Columbia University

Background

Moynihan claimed that owing to increasing out-of-wedlock childbearing—a condition affecting only a small fraction of white children but one in five African Americans at the time—the black family was nearing what he called “complete breakdown,” particularly in America’s inner cities.

- Studies offered much about the lives of unmarried mothers and their progeny, yet they told us next to nothing about the fathers of these children.
- Unwed fathers’ often tenuous connections to households made them hard to find, and many refused to admit they had fathered children.
- Unwed fatherhood, seen as a hit-and-run encounter, plays a dominant role in the public discourse about poverty, family structure, and race—yet these encounters are much rarer than the public assumes.

Fatherhood Involvement

More than half of nonmarital children reside with their father at the time of their first birthday, but this figure declines to 35 percent by their fifth.

- Father involvement drops dramatically after a “breakup” and after parents enter into new relationships and parenting roles.
- There is a willingness on the part of the father to remain involved regardless of his other familial commitments but less willingness by the mother to facilitate that involvement once she establishes a new family.
- All fathers, but particularly African American fathers, typically reject the “package deal” notion—that a father’s parental relationship is contingent upon his relationship with the mother—although many end up living by it nonetheless.

Conclusion

Among U.S. couples, cohabiting unions among parents with children are extraordinarily fragile—far more fragile than marital unions and far more fragile than unmarried parental unions in other industrialized countries.

- While the conventional wisdom might assume that unmarried fathers are uninvolved because they are eager to evade responsibility for their progeny, the authors’ results suggest a different story.
- As both the mother and the father of a child born outside of marriage move further from their failed partnership and enter new partnerships, the qualitative data show that new normative expectations are often set into motion that are in sharp competition with the old.

- Especially for mothers, new partnerships seem to provide a strong motivation to give the new partner the role of father, particularly once the mother has a child with that partner.
- In addition, African American fathers are more likely to remain in regular contact with their children even after entering into relationships with new partners and having children with them.

NOTE: As stability is critical for child well-being, the shifting cast of fathers and father figures in children's lives likely detracts from, not adds to, their well-being.

Welfare Reform in the Mid-2000s: How African American and Hispanic Families in Three Cities Are Faring

Andrew Cherlin and Bianca Frogner, Johns Hopkins University;
David Ribar, University of North Carolina at Greensboro;
and Robert Moffitt, Johns Hopkins University

- Background* The authors find at best a modest decline in the average poverty rate among African American welfare leavers between 1999 and 2005.
- Hispanic leavers showed larger average declines in poverty.
 - Employed leavers in 2005 showed increases in household income and declines in poverty.
 - Among nonemployed leavers, African Americans had experienced a decline in household income and were further below the poverty line than in 1999, whereas Hispanic women had experienced modest declines or slight increases in their household incomes.
- Outcomes* Despite predictions that PRWORA (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) would be disastrous, the labor force participation rate of single mothers rose sharply, and their poverty rate fell.
- The authors present information on African American and Hispanic women in the Three-City Study, one of the longest panel surveys of low-income families in the post-PRWORA era (1999-2005).
 - By 2005, when none of the women were receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), the household income of African Americans in the study was less than that of the two Hispanic groups.
- Conclusion* Nine years after the passage of PRWORA and six years after the study began, the economic circumstances of the women who were receiving welfare at the start of the study had diverged by their subsequent TANF receipt, employment status, and race-ethnicity.

The New U.S. Immigrants: How Do They Affect Our Understanding of the African American Experience?

Frank D. Bean, Cynthia Feliciano, and Jennifer Lee, University of California, Irvine; and Jennifer Van Hook, Pennsylvania State University

Background Today the intensity of negative feeling about immigration seems to derive from fears that contemporary newcomers, because they are non-European, threaten national identity more than did early-twentieth-century immigrants.

- About two-thirds of those arriving since 1965 come from Asian, African, or Latino countries.
- Immigration trends since 1965 have clearly resulted in a recent nonwhite minority that is larger than the native black minority.

NOTE: This article argues that yesterday's color line has been transformed into a black/nonblack demarcation that undergirds racial/ethnic divisions, not a more complex tripartite structure.

A Racial Divide A black-nonblack divide appears to be taking shape in the United States, in which Asians and Latinos are closer to whites than are blacks to whites.

- America's color lines are moving toward a new demarcation that places many blacks in a position of disadvantage similar to that resulting from the traditional black-white divide.
- The country is simply reinventing a color line that continues to separate blacks from other racial/ethnic groups.
- Asians and Latinos may be moving closer and closer to a "white" category, with multiracial Asian-whites and Latino-whites standing at the head of the queue. This could indicate the reemergence of a black-white color line.
- Regardless of whether a divide were to fall along black-nonblack or black-white lines, the position of blacks could remain severely disadvantaged.
- Because boundaries are loosening for *some* nonwhite groups, this could lead to the erroneous conclusion that race is declining in significance for all groups.
- It appears that Asians and Latinos are simultaneously more actively pursuing entry into the majority group and that whites are more willing to accept their entry compared to blacks.

NOTE: The fact that boundary dissolution is neither uniform nor unconditional indicates that the United States cannot be complacent about the degree to which opportunities are improving for all racial/ethnic groups, particularly when a deep and persistent divide continues to separate blacks from all other groups.

The Black Family and Mass Incarceration

Bruce Western, Harvard University; and Christopher Wildeman,
University of Michigan

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Background This article documents the emergence of mass incarceration and describes its significance for African American family life.

- The era of mass incarceration can be understood as a new stage in the history of American racial inequality.
- Because of its recent arrival, the social impact of mass incarceration remains poorly understood.
- Emerging only in the closing years of the 1990s, mass incarceration has routinely drawn young noncollege black men and their families into the orbit of the penal system.

Worsening Situation Many of the social problems Moynihan identified have subsequently worsened.

- Joblessness among young, black, noncollege men climbed through the 1960s and 1970s.
- Crime rates and rates of single-parenthood also escalated.
- Public policy turned in a punitive direction, massively expanding the role of the criminal justice system.
- Now, more than a third of young black noncollege men are incarcerated.

NOTE: The mass imprisonment of the late 1990s can be traced to two basic shifts in politics and economics—the growth of harsh sentencing policies and a punitive approach to drug control. The urban deindustrialization that produced the raw material for the prison boom was as much a failure of institutions as a failure of markets.

Unanswered Questions There are several unanswered questions needing research.

- How does incarceration affect family violence and other victimization?
- What are the financial consequences of incarceration for poor families?
- What are the effects of incarceration on the supervision and socialization of children?

NOTE: Under current circumstances, the inequalities of mass incarceration will be sustained not just over a lifetime, but from one generation to the next.

Race in the American Mind: From the Moynihan Report to the Obama Candidacy

Lawrence D. Bobo, Harvard University; and
Camille Z. Charles, University of Pennsylvania

Background This article assesses the tenor of racial attitudes in white and black America since 1965.

- On one hand, a massive positive change in social norms regarding race calls for integration and equality as the rules that should guide black-white interaction.
- On the other hand, there is an ongoing legacy of tension and division.
- The authors link these trends in attitudes to broader changes in society (i.e., racial segregation, job discrimination, rates of intermarriage), patterns of intergroup and interpersonal behavior, and national political dynamics.
 - Moynihan wrote, “The racist virus in the American blood stream still afflicts us: Negroes will encounter serious personal prejudice for at least another generation.”

NOTE: The authors assert that dynamics, conditions, and patterns of belief and behavior remain that should trouble us as a nation and that continue to make the terms *prejudice* and *racism* important and deeply meaningful facets of the American social, cultural, and political landscape.

Black-White Relations

What fundamental principles do Americans expect will guide black-white relations?

- Most white Americans not only no longer endorse segregation, white privilege, and antiblack discrimination as rules that should guide black-white relations, but in fact endorse broad goals of integration, equality, and equal treatment without regard to race.
- The authors are convinced that this shift cuts much deeper for most people than mere lip service about what “one is supposed to say.”
- Public policy greatly tests the readiness of many whites to incur potential costs or burdens of social change consistent with new norms.

Barack Obama Example

Nothing brings home the complexity of the current moment more than the candidacy of Barack Obama for president of the United States.

- First, some white voters appear to tell pollsters one thing but do another once in the voting booth.
- Second, it is clear that a nontrivial number of white voters openly rejected Obama largely on the basis of race.

NOTE: While the racial virus is not yet defeated or fully eradicated from the body politic, the authors can find a number of encouraging indicators, including the Obama candidacy, which can be thought of as part of an effort to push the healing process to its next stage.

Racial Stratification and the Durable Tangle of Neighborhood Inequality

Robert J. Sampson, Harvard University

Background

Many of the underlying facts Moynihan confronted remain stubbornly alike to this day, which compels us to address the world as it is, not as we wish it to be.

- Moynihan wanted social policy to focus primarily on the “tangle”—the knot of inequality in the American city that resides at the structural and social-ecological level, not just the individual or family.
- The author’s thesis is that Moynihan identified a “neighborhood” tangle of inequality—one inextricably tied to race—and that he emphasized its *durability of influence* absent *government intervention*.
- Moynihan was right to warn about the differential exposure to risk imposed by racial stratification.
- Although joblessness was always high on the agenda, Moynihan emphasized interconnections, not single variables.
- He noted how family stability, joblessness, poor health, substance abuse, poverty, welfare dependency, and crime were intertwined.

NOTE: More than forty years later, the pattern of ecological concentration and racial stratification remains.

Moynihan’s Theses

Moynihan’s logic implies three broad ideas or theses that are themselves interlinked.

- The “tangle of pathology” has a deep neighborhood or ecological structure, as does socioeconomic disadvantage.
- The tangle of neighborhood inequality is durable and generates self-reinforcing properties.
- The “poverty trap” cycle can ultimately only be broken with structural interventions.

Conclusion

The message of the article is that poverty and its correlates are stubbornly persistent in terms of neighborhood concentration, especially for black areas.

- There is an enduring poverty vulnerability of neighborhoods that is not simply a matter of the current income of residents.
- Neighborhoods’ reputations, both positive and negative, when coupled with the residential mobility decisions of residents of all race and income groups, tend to reproduce existing patterns of inequality.
- The consequences of durable and increasing poverty appear to be long-lasting, at least with respect to predicting key social processes.

NOTE: There is hope that cycles of poverty can be broken, shown in the examples of poor communities that are radically repositioning themselves to an upward trajectory. Questions of stability and change in concentrated poverty should remain at the top of our agenda.

Moynihan Was Right: Now What?

Ron Haskins, Brookings Institution

Background

Since 1965, the problems that so worried Moynihan grew rapidly, festered, and proved his concerns and predictions to be correct.

Strategies

- Employment problems are the single most important cause of both the problems experienced by black families and, in turn, the entire self-perpetuating pathology of the black ghetto.
- We need to analyze what holds so many back and why so many, especially males, have fulfilled the Moynihan prediction and turned their back on routine achievement, separated from their children and their children's mothers, and joined a criminal subculture.
- There are four continuing problems: family dissolution, educational failure, falling labor force participation, and high rates of incarceration.

The author presents four problem-solving strategies:

- increasing and rewarding work,
- reducing nonmarital births and increasing marriage rates,
- expanding preschool education, and
- reducing incarceration and helping to reintegrate ex-felons.

NOTE: Family composition, education, and employment are intertwined, virtually requiring us to initiate programs on all three fronts simultaneously.