Racial Liberalism, the Moynihan Report & the *Dædalus* Project on "The Negro American"

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With the ultimate goal of "including [African Americans] in our society," President Lyndon Johnson called on Americans to combat "the inter-locking effects of deprivation" that resulted from centuries of oppression.[1] Johnson delivered these words not in a political speech but in his 1965 foreword to a two-part issue of *Dædalus*. It is not often that presidents write introductions for scholarly journals. But, from its inception, the *Dædalus* project on "The Negro American" (including two conferences, two journal issues, and the 1966 book based on them) was linked to mid-1960s liberal political efforts to address long-standing racial inequalities in the United States.[2] The *Dædalus* project became entangled with one of the period's most explosive liberal statements, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), better known as the Moynihan Report after its author, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then an Assistant Secretary of Labor, later a long-serving U.S. Senator from New York. The Moynihan Report argued that the damaged family structure of many poor African Americans would impede efforts to achieve economic equality between blacks and whites.

The Negro Family, written on Moynihan's own initiative with the hope of influencing government policy, was a political document that drew heavily on social-scientific ideas; rarely have politics and scholarship come so closely together. *The Negro Family*'s lesser known scholarly twin was

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Moynihan's contribution to the *Dædalus* special issue, "Employment, Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family," an article that he prepared simultaneously with the report. In 1964, Moynihan attended the first of the two *Dædalus* conferences held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, where he discovered an emerging social-scientific consensus on the need for new approaches to civil rights that focused on issues of socioeconomic equality. Conference participants agreed that black family structure formed a major part of this problem. At the 1965 *Dædalus* conference, Moynihan's "Employment, Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family" won approval from many of the assembled social scientists and civil rights leaders. However, others present voiced some of the criticisms that would later be leveled against the Moynihan Report. Thus, the *Dædalus* project was a key conduit for introducing social-scientific knowledge into government policy-making and, ultimately, public controversy.

The Moynihan Report is sometimes understood as a conservative document that emphasized the need for African Americans to adopt white middle-class family values. It is better seen as the last great statement of the racial liberalism that had accompanied mid-twentieth-century struggles for black freedom and had defined intellectual and political policies among liberal elites.[3] Moynihan and his interlocutors at the *Dædalus* conference held a set of assumptions common among mid-century liberals: that the main racial divide in the United States existed between whites and blacks, that the ultimate goal of racial policy was to integrate African Americans into American society, that this goal could be achieved within the established post–New Deal political and social order, and that social-scientific knowledge could enlighten the public and guide policy-

makers toward these ends. White liberals such as Moynihan viewed themselves as allies of the civil rights movement. But their commitment to racial liberalism had other roots as well, notably their concern for how racial strife undermined both domestic tranquillity and the image of the United States abroad. In his foreword, Johnson declared that "we must affect every dimension of the Negro's life for the better" not only for "our country to live with its conscience" but also to secure "peace at home" and "to speak with one honest voice in the world."[4] In *The Negro Family*, Moynihan suggested more ominously that if the nation failed to address the problems of poor African Americans, "there will be no social peace in the United States for generations."[5]

While the Moynihan Report emerged from an ideology of racial liberalism that had been well established for two decades, examining its origins in the *Dædalus* project reveals that the report developed during a particular mid-1960s moment in which liberals began to emphasize the socioeconomic dimensions of African American inequality. The often overlooked preface to the Moynihan Report declared that the civil rights movement was entering a new phase, one focused on achieving "equality of results." A "new and special effort," Moynihan contended, would be needed to secure this goal.[6] Even before the Watts riots of August 1965 focused national media attention on poor urban African Americans, liberals recognized that dismantling the legal edifice of segregation and discrimination would not ensure racial equality. Accordingly, liberal social scientists sought to complement the legal, moral, and psychological approaches they had stressed in the decades after World War II by incorporating sociological and economic perspectives. At the *Dædalus* conferences, economists

and, especially, sociologists predominated. At the 1965 conference, Thomas Pettigrew, himself a psychologist, expressed dissatisfaction with the disproportionate influence of psychological approaches: "[O]ne of the greatest fallacies we have had in the field of race relations for many, many decades has been to worry about attitudes rather than conditions."[7]

This intellectual shift toward socioeconomic perspectives paralleled political developments. The civil rights movement had long been a presence in Northern cities and had often drawn attention to economic issues; it had never defined equality solely in legal terms. Nevertheless, with the successes of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the movement shifted its focus away from fighting Southern segregation and legal discrimination and toward socioeconomic questions.[8] In January 1964, Lyndon Johnson announced ambitious plans for a War on Poverty as part of a Great Society program that would see the largest expansion of the American welfare state since the New Deal. (The expansion also attempted to correct the racial imbalances in benefits that characterized earlier programs.) This new attempt to address racial inequalities in socioeconomic terms was memorably captured in Lyndon Johnson's much-noted June 4, 1965, address at Howard University. Insisting that "freedom is not enough," Johnson declared that "the next and more profound stage in the battle for civil rights" would seek "not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and a result."[9] That this speech was based in part on the Moynihan Report and coauthored by Moynihan following his attendance at the two *Dædalus* conferences indicates the direct connections between

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the intellectual and political dimensions of racial liberalism's socioeconomic turn in the mid-1960s.

Understanding this shift within racial liberalism helps contextualize the Moynihan Report's emphasis on the "tangle of pathology" that he claimed afflicted poor African American communities. He borrowed this term from psychologist Kenneth Clark to refer to disproportionate levels among African Americans of female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, juvenile delinquency, and school dropouts. Here, too, Moynihan adopted what had become a common strategy for liberals. As historian Daryl Scott has argued, post–World War II liberals often employed the "damage thesis," an argument that black social life had been made pathological as a result of white oppression, in order to win sympathy for the broader cause of civil rights.[10] However, reflecting its origins in racial liberalism's socioeconomic turn, Moynihan's version of the damage thesis differed in a key respect from earlier arguments about psychological damage, such as those used to complement the NAACP's case in *Brown v. Board of Education*. While earlier arguments focused on individual psychological damage, Moynihan's concentrated on families and communities. As an investigation into Moynihan's role in the *Dædalus* project reveals, his approach was common among liberal social scientists of the mid-1960s.

Founded in 1780, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences had long functioned as an honorary society and intellectual center. In the post–World War II period, however, the Academy demonstrated a new ambition to shape public discourse on the national level. In an age of research specialization, Academy leaders believed they were particularly

well placed to bring scholars from different disciplines together with figures outside of academia to address contemporary problems. The Academy's direction was best represented by its new journal, *Dædalus*. Founded in 1955, *Dædalus* targeted not only Academy members, but also political decision-makers and a generally educated audience.[11]

Given the Academy's desire to bring scholarship to bear on pressing issues of the day, it was hardly surprising that it focused attention on African Americans at a time when the civil rights movement had pushed the question of racial equality to the forefront of national discussion. Academy officials and members, led by *Dædalus* editor Stephen Graubard, aimed to create a definitive scholarly work on the topic. They concluded that research on African Americans had stagnated since the publication of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944), the monumental study that, more than any other work, had defined racial liberalism in the postwar United States. Conference planners hoped they could do for their era what Myrdal had done for his. Indeed, the same organization that had sponsored Myrdal's study, the Carnegie Corporation, funded the Academy's project. Carnegie funds helped pay for a planning conference in 1964 as well as the 1965 conference that resulted in the two-part issue of *Dædalus*.[12]

The planning conference, held April 10 – 11, 1964, gathered some of the most prominent social scientists in the United States. Academy leaders invited the most distinguished scholars they could find, even though many were not known as experts on African Americans. Included among the seventeen participants were sociologists Daniel Bell, Everett Hughes, Robert Merton, and Talcott Parsons; psychologists Erik Erikson and Thomas Pettigrew; historian Oscar Handlin;

anthropologist Clifford Geertz; economists Rashi Fein and Carl Kaysen; and law professor Paul Freund. Remarkably, all participants were white.[13] As the Assistant Secretary of Labor, Moynihan gave the Academy its closest link to the policy-making circles that it hoped to influence. Moynihan had a Ph.D. in political science but at this point had demonstrated little expertise in African American issues. He likely was invited on the basis of his reputation as the co-author (with Nathan Glazer) of a widely noted book on New York City's ethnoracial groups, *Beyond the Melting Pot*.[14]

The transcript of the two full days of freewheeling discussion offers rare insight into the state of mid-1960s racial liberalism from which the Moynihan Report emerged. Both in its general orientation toward American race relations and its specific focus on the issue of family structure, the conference discussion strongly anticipated the main themes of the report. Following the event, Moynihan wrote to other participants: "I hope you found our weekend half as stimulating as I did."[15] Moynihan's participation in the 1964 conference strongly reinforced his belief that the civil rights movement was entering a new phase focused on issues of social and economic equality. Most of the social scientists present argued that both scholarship and politics needed to move beyond the moral, legal, and psychological aspects of African American equality to embrace socioeconomic issues.

Summing up the discussion, Graubard noted that "the problem of jobs emerges as primary." The Academy, he concluded, should promote scholarship in the "study of indirect victimization, not simply the exercise of prejudice or discrimination, but the institutional processes, the changing social and economic structures which militate against equal treatment."[16] Many

participants emphasized the economic obstacles to racial integration in the United States. Even Parsons, who was known for shifting postwar sociology away from economic issues and toward psychological and cultural ones, stressed the class dimensions of racial inequality. "I would even go so far as to suggest," declared Parsons, "that perhaps a really radical solution of the race problem is not likely to occur until we can virtually eliminate … a lower class from our society, regardless of color."[17] Moynihan readily appreciated the policy implications of this discussion and sought to enlist the participants to provide ideological justification for new government policies. Raising the "question of unequal treatment," Moynihan suggested that "[t]he Academy might do a great service if it … were to come to a conclusion that if you are ever going to have anything like an equal Negro community, you are for the next 30 years going to have to give them unequal treatment. I think the possibilities of thus legitimizing such treatment might have some relevance to public policy right now."[18]

Conference participants discussed how a lack of economic opportunity for black men affected African American families. They also expressed concern about the extent to which "damaged" family structure would impede African Americans' ability to take advantage of new opportunities. Geertz first raised the topic of family structure, but Moynihan quickly latched onto it. When Graubard asked Moynihan what kind of research would most aid the White House, he responded: "I think that the problem of the Negro family is practically the property of American government.… [I]f we knew something about the dynamics of that … then there is a possibility of public policy reacting to it."[19] Summarizing the conference,

Graubard concluded that "of first importance [is] a study of the family structure of the Negro, of what happens to urbanizing families, the peculiar nature of Negro family and kinship patterns, the sexual roles resulting from Negro matriarchalism, the psychological effects of father-absence, etc., etc."[20] At the very least, attending the conference confirmed Moynihan's sense that African American family structure was a central issue for racial liberals. Considering that prior to *The Negro Family* and his *Dædalus* article Moynihan had written little on African Americans, his attendance at the conference may have played an even greater role in the origins of the Moynihan Report.

Graubard invited Moynihan to write a paper for the 1965 conference that would consider "the Negro's position in American society [and] the economic, social, and personal handicaps under which he presently lives" with specific reference to unemployment.[21] Moynihan drafted the paper at the same time that he wrote *The Negro Family*, using many of the same ideas and facts. Meeting on May 14–15, 1965, the conference occured just weeks before Johnson's Howard University address. It would not be until the end of that summer that the Moynihan Report, originally intended as an internal policy document, was widely reported in the press. Therefore, the 1965 conference provided the first opportunity for discussion of Moynihan's ideas outside of the White House.

The 1965 conference was approximately twice the size of the 1964 planning conference and had a broader range of participants, including several African Americans and many figures from outside academia. In addition to those who attended the 1964 planning conference, among those at the 1965 meeting were Edwin C.

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Berry and John B. Turner of the National Urban League; psychologist Robert Coles; literary critic Saunders Redding; sociologists Philip Hauser, Lee Rainwater, and Peter Rossi; economist James Tobin; historian C. Vann Woodward; journalist Max Lerner; and writer Ralph Ellison. The conference was closed to the public; yet a full transcript was kept, and the Academy deemed the discussion to be so important that it published an edited version in *Dædalus*. Pre-circulated papers provided the basis for a wide-ranging and often contentious discussion. Just after the event, Moynihan reflected, "We all go to a lot of meetings, but this last one was worth it. I came away beat, but convinced we had got somewhere."[22]

Lerner later reported that even among this prominent group of scholars, writers, and activists, Moynihan "stood out with his flair for a kindling persuasiveness."[23] Indeed, Moynihan's paper was among the first to be discussed, and it provoked some of the conference's most spirited exchanges. Like the Moynihan Report, "Employment, Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family" was premised on the assumption that the "civil rights revolution" was entering a new phase concerned with economic equality.[24] Drawing from the same data that he used in the report, Moynihan detailed the problem of black unemployment, which he traced to structural economic shifts. He identified unemployment as the "master problem" affecting African Americans and argued, "[T]he linkage between problems of employment and the range of social pathology that afflicts the Negro community is unmistakable."[25] He proceeded to detail the "social pathology" of the black community, focusing on the "ordeal of the Negro family" and drawing a link between unemployment and marital separation. Coming to the same conclusion as he did in *The Negro Family*, Moynihan contended, "The fundamental problem is the position of the Negro male."[26]

When Moynihan returned to the White House, he wrote a memorandum summarizing the conference to Bill Moyers, an advisor to President Johnson: "This past weekend we met to read and criticize our various papers. I was impressed to find out how much my conviction of the importance of family structure and the relation of unemployment to that problem was shared by the Negro participants. They did not have the data, but they knew all about the problem."[27] Indeed, at the conference, John B. Turner of the National Urban League agreed with Moynihan that a crucial issue was "whether or not [a] family is able to provide protection, able to provide the socialization functions, and able to provide the basic necessities of life which people need to cope with the system."[28]

One of Moynihan's most emphatic supporters at the conference was Edwin C. Berry of the Chicago Urban League. Like Moynihan, Berry insisted that the United States would have to be "affirmatively color-conscious" in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a color-blind society.[29] Speaking directly in favor of Moynihan's thesis, Berry declared that "there is no way to strengthen family life among Negroes … until we find a way to give the father his rightful role as breadwinner and protector of his family. … We have a very strong matriarchal situation in the Negro community."[30] However, when Berry stated that black families would have to play by "the white middle-class rules" he also hinted at dissatisfaction with expectations that African Americans had to conform to white values.[31] Furthermore, Berry remained skeptical that white Americans would accept the kinds of drastic measures needed to ad-

dress the social and economic inequalities of African Americans. He even implicated the conference's participants when he concluded that the success of any such program would require not only educating African Americans in marketable skills but also educating the "so-called white culturally overprivileged" group to committ to the extensive changes required to adequately redress racial inequalities.[32]

Like Berry, most conference participants interpreted Moynihan's paper as an argument for new government policies that would advance the cause of racial liberalism by adopting race-conscious measures to address socioeconomic inequalities. Many attendees agreed with Moynihan that the central policy challenge was to find well-paying jobs for unemployed black men so that they could support their families. Clifford Geertz, for example, concurred with Moynihan that "[i]t is income that flows through the occupational system that will change the status of the family....I can...think of no other way in which one could directly affect the family....In the long run, unless the Negro male's position in the occupational structure changes, nothing much is going to change."[33]

However, some aspects of the conference discussion anticipated later criticisms of the Moynihan Report and foreshadowed emerging criticisms of postwar racial liberalism. One challenge to racial liberalism came from a line of argument in Moynihan's own paper. Moynihan noted that in the early 1960s the number of welfare (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) cases continued to rise despite a drop in the unemployment of non-white men. Moynihan interpreted this evidence as an indication that improvements in black male unemployment might no longer be adequate to ensure family stability. Though

he noted this phenomenon in *The Negro Family*, he expanded on the finding in his *Dædalus* article, wondering "whether a reversal in the course of economic events will no longer produce the expected response in social areas" and questioning whether "measures which once would have worked will henceforth not work so well, or not at all."[34] This skeptical note undercut Moynihan's call for action by placing doubt on whether government economic policies could reverse the effects of damage to African American families; it implied that the problems Moynihan highlighted were either insoluble or could be addressed only by African Americans themselves. This line of argument threatened to undermine the entire project of racial liberalism by questioning not only whether government policy could sufficiently attenuate racial inequality but also whether social-scientific knowledge could effectively inform government policy. In this sense, it anticipated a neoconservative critique of liberalism that would become associated with the journal *The Public Interest*, founded by Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell in 1965, to which Moynihan would frequently contribute. However, at the 1965 *Dædalus* conference, Moynihan's concerns were primarily interpreted in liberal terms, as a call for urgent action before the situation grew out of control.[35] Indeed, Moynihan concluded his article by declaring that a "crisis of commitment is at hand."[36]

Some conference participants' challenges to Moynihan prefigured later criticisms of the Moynihan Report by liberals. One exchange characterized the internal policy disagreements in the Johnson White House over the direction of the War on Poverty. Moynihan and the Department of Labor had argued vigorously (and unsuccessfully) for direct job creation against others in the government who based their anti-poverty strat-

egies on promoting economic growth.[37] At the conference, when James Tobin, who served on the Council of Economic Advisors, upheld the latter argument, Moynihan forcefully disagreed, going so far as to state, "[Y]ou can blame Mr. Tobin for our present dilemma." For Moynihan, the government's sole focus on overall economic growth was inadeqaute to address the specific nature of black male unemployment.[38] Instead, he asserted, targeted measures were needed: "[I]n order to do anything about Negro Americans on the scale that our data would indicate, we have to declare that we are doing it for *everybody*. I think, however, that the problem of the Negro American *is* now a special one, and is not just an intense case of the problem of all poor people."[39]

Other liberals at the conference questioned Moynihan's emphasis on black pathology. Howard University sociologist G. Franklin Edwards agreed that matriarchal family structure was a problem but felt that Moynihan overrated its significance since women headed only 21 percent of black families. Psychologist Robert Coles questioned Moynihan's undifferentiated depiction of black family structure. He also wondered whether poor African American families were truly "damaged" and questioned the assumption made by Moynihan and his supporters that middle-class values were superior in practice: "We tend to think of the Negro community at times as a kind of undifferentiated alternative to the white community; but I think there were possibilities within the hard-core, most-difficult-to-work-with groups that are perhaps more hopeful than the established Negro community."[40] Basing his comments on experience working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in McComb, Mississippi, Coles maintained that involve-

ment in political activism was a crucial means for African Americans to attain psychological well-being. He thereby questioned the unstated assumption of Moynihan and other racial liberals that change could best be effected by social engineering from above. Similarly, historian C. Vann Woodward wondered whether the participation of so many African Americans in political action revealed that social scientists had overrated the extent to which they and their communities were truly damaged.[41]

While not directed specifically toward Moynihan's paper, Ralph Ellison's comments offered perhaps the most far-reaching criticism of the ideas Moynihan voiced at the conference. Ellison questioned the goal of assimilation, wondering why so many at the conference assumed that African Americans wanted to "lose our identity as quickly as possible."[42] Ellison also challenged the unexamined value biases of social science itself, suggesting it could not truly understand African American culture: "The sociology is loaded.... The concepts which are brought to bear are usually based on those of white, middle-class, Protestant values and life style."[43] Though not addressing the question of family structure per se, Ellison's remarks anticipated an alternative interpretation of African American family structure that would be counterposed to Moynihan's: that matriarchal black families should be understood anthropologically rather than sociologically; they were not pathological variants of white norms, but the products of deliberate choices with inherent cultural value.

What would become one of the major criticisms of the Moynihan Report – the challenge to its patriarchal assumptions – was not voiced at the *Dædalus* conference. In part, the absence of this critique reflected the gender makeup of the group,

which was almost exclusively male. More important, as Ruth Feldstein has argued, many mid-century racial liberals shared what we would describe today as "conservative" gender norms that stressed the man's role as family breadwinner and the woman's role as mother.[44] In 1965, most liberals and many civil rights leaders still thought within a family-wage framework that had yet to meet major opposition from second-wave feminism. Indeed, discussion at the conference revolved almost entirely around what could be done for black *men*, who, because of their higher rate of unemployment and the difficulties many faced in supporting their families, were seen as suffering the brunt of economic and psychological oppression. Conference participants frequently used the pronoun "he" to refer to "the Negro." When African American women were discussed, their relative economic success in comparison with black men was depicted as a threat to the restoration of black manhood and hence to progress toward racial equality. For example, Moynihan recounted that efforts to hire African Americans in his own government department in recent years had benefited black women to the detriment of black men: "You can stand in front of the Department of Labor any morning at eight-thirty, and it is a sight: spectacularly well-dressed, competent, beautiful [black] young women…spending the day on the phone with the Attorney General and seeing ambassadors, then coming home and asking the old man, what did you do today?"[45]

The group that gathered at the Academy in May 1965 had much in common in terms of ideology and background. No conservatives or radicals were invited, only liberal social scientists and moderate civil rights leaders. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that for the most part they received Moynihan's paper posi-

tively. Yet the fact that it also came under some heavy criticism even in this relatively sympathetic environment presaged the controversial reaction the report would receive when it became widely publicized later that year.

President Johnson, in his Howard University speech of June 1965, called for a White House conference that would include movement leaders and top intellectuals in order to facilitate a transition to a new phase of civil rights, one that focused on socioeconomic topics including family structure. The very idea that such issues could best be solved by holding a conference fit nicely with the social engineering ideal of racial liberalism. Moynihan himself must have considered the Academy conference as a model for the one Johnson proposed; indeed, many of the figures who gathered at the Academy in May played a prominent role in planning the White House conference.[46] Johnson described essays from the *Dædalus* issue as "invaluable source materials for the White House Conference."[47] Yet the White House conference, the planning for which was held in November, ultimately failed to establish any consensus on new policies, in large part because of the controversy surrounding the Moynihan Report, which was widely reported in the press following the Watts riot in August 1965.[48]

Given the Moynihan Report's origins in racial liberalism's socioeconomic turn, it is ironic that its liberal critics often attacked it for shifting focus *away* from economic issues. Writing in *The Nation*, sociologist William Ryan famously accused Moynihan of blaming the victim – ignoring the effects of white racism and implying that African Americans were responsible for their own poverty.[49] This criticism gained currency from the manner in which the report became public,

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as critics responded to distorted and sensationalist media descriptions rather than the report itself.[50] Yet it also resulted from Moynihan's attempt to address socioeconomic inequality primarily through family structure. Focusing on the family led many to conclude that Moynihan believed that the government could do little to resolve social inequalities and that solutions would have to come from African American themselves. This conclusion ran contrary to the main thrust of Moynihan's ideas and how they were understood throughout the *Dædalus* project. Yet it was hardly a complete misunderstanding, since Moynihan had hinted at the limitations of government policies in his contribution.

Most important, public criticism of the Moynihan Report emerged from an increasing disenchantment with the core assumptions of racial liberalism. In particular, along the lines of Ellison's comments at the conference, many critics came to reject the common sociological view that African American culture was a pathological distortion of white American culture and that blacks should have to conform to white values in order to achieve equality. Many critics also questioned the manner in which whites dominated the production of social-scientific ideas about African Americans. Moynihan drew on an interracial tradition of sociology; his most important influences were E. Franklin Frazier and Kenneth Clark. Nevertheless, the *Dædalus* project demonstrated that whites held positions of intellectual and political power that allowed them to control the formulation of social-scientific ideas about African Americans. Though Kenneth Clark ultimately coedited with Parsons the book based on the *Dædalus* issue, the project had been developed by an organization that was almost entirely white and included no African Americans in its ini-

tial planning conference. Finally, by the late 1960s, feminists, especially African American feminists, added to Moynihan's chorus of critics, questioning the report's patriarchal assumptions, which had been widely shared by racial liberals.

When Moynihan came under fire, the conference attendees and the Academy itself provided a crucial source of support. In 1966, James Q. Wilson stepped down as director of the Harvard-MIT Joint Center for Urban Studies so that Moynihan could fill the post. The Academy continued its project by funding an ongoing "Seminar on Race and Poverty" that Moynihan organized. The Academy took full advantage of the Moynihan controversy to promote the *Dædalus* issue and the book; it chose Moynihan's to be the lead article of the special issue. Writing in the *Afro-American*, conference participant Saunders Redding praised the *Dædalus* issue: "Not since the publication of [*An American Dilemma*] have so many knowledgeable men brought their combined intellects and experiences to bear on the American colored man.... [I]t is rumored that the papers are the source of certain government programs and plans."[51] Yet the *Dædalus* project ultimately failed to match *An American Dilemma* in its influence on public opinion and government policy, largely because of the growing dissatisfaction with racial liberalism evident in the controversy over the Moynihan Report.

Racial discourse has changed considerably in the nearly half-century since the *Dædalus* project. After the mid-1960s, racial liberalism no longer defined a consensus shared by elite academics and national policy-makers. But it did not disappear. In the 1970s and beyond, a transformed racial liberalism was defined in large part by support for affirmative action and multiculturalism. The

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Dædalus project of the mid-1960s laid the groundwork for a liberal defense of affirmative action by indicating the need for policies to move beyond a color-blind commitment to legal rights. Introduced by white elites in part as a way of restoring social order following a series of urban riots and the radicalization of the black freedom movement, affirmative action can also be viewed as a continuation of social engineering.[52] However, affirmative action policies, as they took hold in the late 1960s – focusing on preferential hiring, college admissions, and set-aside contracts for minorities – were less far-reaching than the measures Moynihan and other participants in the American Academy project had considered, which had centered around providing full employment. Affirmative action benefited middle-class and working-class African Americans more than the group racial liberals such as Moynihan were most worried about: unemployed black men. Moreover, as it developed, affirmative action was applied not just to African Americans but also to white women and other ethnoracial minorities, including many new immigrants. As a result, it lost its specificity as a measure for redressing African American inequality.[53]

After it was established, affirmative action was often defended as a means to enhance cultural diversity. Indeed, the rise of multiculturalism, anticipated by Ellison's comments at the 1965 *Dædalus* conference, indicated another transition in racial liberalism. Racial discourse in the United States shifted from questions of law, economics, and society and toward ones of culture and identity. Culture is now understood as fundamental to racial questions in a way that it was not in the mid-1960s. Ellison aside, most participants at the *Dædalus* conference viewed African American culture much

as Myrdal had two decades earlier: as a pathological variant of white middle-class culture. By the 1970s, most liberals accepted that there are distinctive African American cultures of inherent value. However, to the extent that racial liberals came to emphasize cultural issues at the expense of socioeconomic ones, they neglected questions about the persistent structural inequalities faced by African Americans.[54] Such questions were increasingly silenced as Great Society liberalism gave way to a new market fundamentalism that shifted the entire American political spectrum to the right.

The issue of *Dædalus* in which this essay appears treats race in very different terms than did the issues whose history I have discussed above. Ellison's argument about the value and autonomy of African American cultures is now widely accepted by liberals. (It is striking to note the differences between the contributors to the 1965 and 1966 issues of *Dædalus* devoted to "The Negro American" and the contributors for this present issue: whereas all contributors to the earlier issues were social scientists, this issue has significant contributions from scholars whose expertise lies in the domain of culture, most notably literary scholars.) Scholars today resist seeing American race relations as simply a black-white problem and stand wary of assimilationist assumptions lurking behind calls for racial integration. They are skeptical that centuries of racism can easily be overcome within the existing social structure and doubt that social science has all the solutions. Feminism's influence has led them to question the patriarchal assumptions once shared by Moynihan and other liberals. However, the once-close connection between academic work and policy-making, evident in the earlier *Dædalus* project, no longer exists. At present, it seems incredible

that an academic conference could be so closely connected to government policy discussions at the highest level. Perhaps most remarkable, the Moynihan Report and the *Dædalus* project marked a moment when American elites considered extensive measures to redress the social and economic inequalities produced by the historic and ongoing oppression of African Americans. That they addressed such issues more seriously than most mainstream liberals in our own time hardly means that intellectuals today should seek to recuperate mid-1960s racial liberalism. The solutions Moynihan and others involved with the *Dædalus* project offered were flawed by patriarchal assumptions, a misinterpretation of African American culture as pathological, and an overemphasis on family structure as central to social inequality. Nevertheless, the questions they raised about the socioeconomic dimensions of racial inequality remain to be answered.

ENDNOTES

[1] Lyndon Johnson, "Foreword to the Issue," *Dædalus* 94 (Fall 1965): 744.

[2] Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark, *The Negro American* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

[3] Most historians of the subject now consider the Moynihan Report a liberal document, at least by the standards of its time. See James Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); a special issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, "The Moynihan Report Revisited: Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades" 621 (2009); and Daryl Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 137–159. For an alternate reading, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 203–210. On racial liberalism generally, see Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940–1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) and Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938–1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

[4] Johnson, "Foreword," 744.

[5] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965), 3.

[6] Ibid., unpaginated introduction.

[7] "Transcript of the American Academy Conference on the Negro American – May 14–15, 1965," *Dædalus* 95 (Winter 1966): 312.

[8] Dona C. Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton, *The Dual Agenda: Race and Social Welfare Policies of Civil Rights Organizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). The Civil Rights Act was enacted in July 1964; the Voting Rights Act in August 1965. However, by early 1964, their enactment was anticipated by many within and outside the movement and taken for granted by the participants in the *Dædalus* project.

[9] For a recent account of the politics of this period that complements my account of its intellectual developments, see David C. Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965–1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[10] Scott, *Contempt and Pity*.

11 Stephen Graubard, "'Dædalus': Forty Years On," *Dædalus* 128 (1999): 1–12. *Dædalus* was founded in 1955, when the Academy renamed its *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, but it was not until 1958 that it adopted a quarterly format and aimed to reach an audience outside its own membership.

12 While research on the psychology of white prejudice thrived in the postwar period, the very success of Myrdal's statement had discouraged scholars and foundations from pursuing further research on African American topics. On this point, see Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience*, 231–271. For a reappraisal of *An American Dilemma*, see the special issue of *Dædalus*, "An American Dilemma Revisited" 124 (Winter 1995), especially the preface by Stephen Graubard, which includes his recollections of how the mid-1960s *Dædalus* project on "The Negro American" compared to Myrdal's effort.

13 Graubard had invited three African American scholars: Allison Davis, John Hope Franklin, and Whitney Young.

14 Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963). Glazer was the lead author and wrote the chapter on African Americans.

15 See, for example, Moynihan to Everett Hughes, April 16, 1964, Part I: Box 27, Daniel P. Moynihan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

16 "Transcript of *The Negro in America* Planning Committee," Part I: Box 38, Moynihan Papers, ii, iii.

17 Ibid., 7.

18 Ibid., 47.

19 Ibid., 114.

20 Ibid., iii.

21 Graubard to Moynihan, December 10, 1964, Part I: Box 38, Moynihan Papers.

22 Moynihan to Hughes, May 25, 1965, Box 42, Everett Cherrington Hughes Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

23 Max Lerner, "Moynihan," *New York Post*, July 25, 1965.

24 Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Employment, Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family," *Dædalus* 94 (Fall 1965): 745.

25 Ibid., 746.

26 Ibid., 760.

27 Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Memorandum to Mr. Bill Moyers," May 19, 1965, Part I: Box 38, Moynihan Papers.

28 "Transcript of the American Academy Conference on the Negro American," 303.

29 Ibid., 351.

30 Ibid., 291.

31 Ibid., 300.

32 Ibid., 351.

33 Ibid., 304.

34 Moynihan, "Employment, Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family," 755.

35 The only conference participant who subjected Moynihan's ideas to this more conservative interpretation was James Q. Wilson, who commented: "[O]ne of the crucial aspects of the gap . . . is the nature of the family. This I take it to be the reason that Mr. Moynihan suggests pessimistically – and I think with good reason – that poverty may be feeding on

itself; in some sense it may be a cultural, as well as economic, phenomenon and a cultural phenomenon that can be inherited to a very depressing degree"; "Transcript of the American Academy Conference on the Negro American," 289.

36 Moynihan, "Employment, Income, and the Ordeal of the Negro Family," 769.

37 See Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Welfare to the War on Poverty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 93–94.

38 "Transcript of the American Academy Conference on the Negro American," 308.

39 Ibid., 288.

40 Ibid., 318.

41 Ibid., 366.

42 Ibid., 308.

43 Ibid., 438. Ellison's comments echoed his famous criticisms of Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* in a review he wrote in 1944 but did not publish until 1964. See Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 303–317.

44 Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930–1965* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

45 "Transcript of the American Academy Conference on the Negro American," 295.

46 The July meetings held to plan the White House conference included Parsons, Erikson, Clark, Coles, Pettigrew, and Wilson. See Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), 33.

47 Johnson, "Foreword," 744.

48 Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement*, 75–101; Kevin L. Yuill, "The 1966 White House Conference on Civil Rights," *The Historical Journal* 41 (March 1998): 259–282.

49 The actual phrase "blaming the victim" comes from Ryan's 1971 book of the same name, but he first put forth his critique of the Moynihan Report in a 1965 article in *The Nation*, based on an influential unpublished memorandum that he circulated to civil rights organizations in October 1965.

50 Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*.

51 Saunders Redding, "Review of *The Negro American*," *Afro-American*, February 26, 1966.

52 John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

53 Hugh Davis Graham, *Collision Course: The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

54 This cultural shift in racial discourse is noted by King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals* and David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).