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Nathan Glazer on Revisiting the Moynihan Report

FIFTY YEARS AGO the U.S. Department of Labor issued a report, titled “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” that identified a surprising rate of growth in the percentage of African American children born into single-parent families. The report was written at the instigation of an assistant secretary for labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who became a close adviser to both President Lyndon Johnson and President Richard Nixon and eventually one of the 20th century’s most distinguished members of the U.S. Senate. At the time the report was released, it was roundly condemned for having constructed racial stereotypes and misidentified “pathologies” that didn’t exist.

Revisiting this topic in 2015, the many contributors to this issue of *Education Next*, writing from a broad range of perspectives, reveal that single parenthood is no longer limited to one racial group but constitutes a problem, with serious consequences for children, that still needs to be addressed.

We asked Nathan Glazer, the Harvard sociologist and *Education Next*’s longtime book reviewer, if he would write an introduction to this issue. Professor Glazer was the senior author (writing with Moynihan) of *Beyond the Melting Pot*, the 1963 classic on ethnicity in New York City. He has kindly consented to let us publish these excerpts from his reply:

Moynihan collaborated with me on the book *Beyond the Melting Pot* in the early 1960s, an experience that may have done a good deal to orient him to family problems and family structure, which I emphasized to him in explaining the idea of the book. I was at that time strongly influenced by the culture-personality school of anthropology, which placed great weight on early family influences.

Subsequently, we remained close: we

discussed his earlier Labor Department report on “One-Third of a Nation,” in which he examined the significance of the fact that one-third of potential draftees for the armed forces were ineligible, among other reasons, because of deficient education, and which may be seen as a prelude to the “Family” report. And we remained close through his academic career at Harvard, his leaves from Harvard as adviser to President Nixon on urban affairs, his time as ambassador to India and representative of the United States to the United Nations, and during his tenure as senator from New York State.

But there is certainly nothing more I can say [than has been said in these essays] on “The Negro Family” report, the influences on it, how it was received, its influence or lack of it owing to its trashing, and how it was eventually justified and became a prophetic document. There will be nothing better on this 50th anniversary of the Moynihan Report. Under the circumstances, I have decided I really cannot weigh in, except to say “Bravo!”

I urge you to explore the many facets of an issue as compelling today as when the Moynihan Report was issued in 1965.

Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.
