

An Examination of Popular and Gendered Responses  
to the Moynihan Report

Presented to the faculty of Lycoming College in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Departmental Honors in  
History

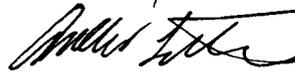
by  
Jennifer Melhorn  
Lycoming College  
April 2012

Approved by:



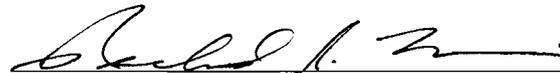
---

Dr. Sarah Silkey (Advisor)



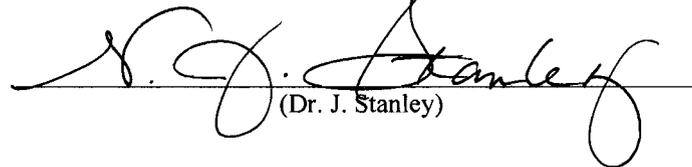
---

(Dr. Andrew Leiter)



---

(Dr. Richard Morris)



---

(Dr. J. Stanley)

# An Examination of Popular and Gendered Responses to the Moynihan Report

---

**Jennifer Melhorn**

Lycoming College

April 2012

Research for this project was funded by the Joanne and Arthur Haberberger Fellowship

“The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” otherwise known as the Moynihan Report, was a government document written by Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965. The report examined the effects of race, employment, gender roles, family organization, and social class on family interactions. The report concluded that the African American community had particular barriers in place, namely repeating patterns of fatherless and female-headed households, which prevented black families from flourishing in American society. Moynihan argued that the matriarchal system in place in many African American households, professedly stemming from more than two centuries of slavery within American society, served to provide worsening psychological, social, and economic problems for these families. The report further stated that despite recent civil rights legislation, very few African American families were progressing and acquiring middle class affluence due in part to what he saw as their matriarchal family structure. Additionally, Moynihan indicated that these female-headed households were producing more juvenile delinquents and less well-educated children. Overall, Moynihan firmly believed that family structure was a fundamental contributing factor for these prevalent issues in lower-class black families. Moynihan went so far as to state,

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. In a word, 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.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the report argued that in order to reverse these problems and for blacks to better assimilate to white middle-class social norms, African American men should reassert their

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, by Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1996), 93.

masculinity by reclaiming the role of head of the household.<sup>2</sup> To enable this process, Moynihan advocated the development of government programs to provide black men with stable job opportunities so that they could better provide for their families.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, African American women, once matriarchs within their families, were urged to step down and play a more subordinate role to their male counterparts in order to increase family stability.<sup>4</sup> Moynihan believed that women who worked outside of the home and also reared children could not fully succeed at either task, which inevitably hurt families as a whole. He argued that by raising children in such dysfunctional homes, black mothers deprived their children of the attention they needed to thrive to excel. Moynihan concluded that this lack of nurturance, coupled with the absence of the father within the home, is what ultimately produced delinquent children. Moynihan believed this cycle of delinquency and pathology was destined to repeat itself if changes were not made to the flawed family structure that existed within lower class black families. Furthermore, he argued that these changes could not be made unless black men were able to secure stable sources of gainful employment. Without gainful employment, men would not be able to hold onto the role of head of household and help end the system of matriarchy that currently dominated the lower class black community.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to remember that the Moynihan Report was never intended for public consumption. It was originally released as an internal document in March of 1965 and was not written as a comprehensive study of African American social dynamics. Essentially, the report

---

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, by Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1996), 45-94.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Meehan, "Moynihan of the Moynihan Report," *New York Times*, 31 July 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 93.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 142- 144; Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 93.

was created to simply draw attention of worsening conditions within lower-class African American communities despite all of the progress that was being made in regards to civil rights and to gain government support for Great Society programs to be expanded. The report was also written “to support the Labor Department’s adamant insistence that the problem of unemployment continued to be intolerable and the growing conviction of the Policy Planning Staff that something like a family allowance would be necessary to offset the effects of ‘the wage system.’”<sup>6</sup> Though Moynihan never intended for his report to be released to the public, the White House released the report to the public in the immediate aftermath of the 1965 Watts Riots. The report was used as a means to explain the events that had occurred in Los Angeles, California and to demonstrate to the public that simply fighting for Civil Rights was not enough to correct the problems that still existed in the urban ghetto.<sup>7</sup>

Following its public release in August of 1965, the Moynihan Report sparked a great deal of controversy amongst both black and white communities. Despite the challenge popular responses to the Moynihan Report raised against all black family models, *Ebony* magazine, a popular black magazine which catered to the middle-class, responded to Moynihan’s criticism by persistently celebrating and encouraging middle class women to remain powerful both in and out of the home. It is interesting to note that both black and white demographics generated some support for the report, however both possessed ardent critics to the report as well.<sup>8</sup> African Americans in particular were upset by Moynihan’s critique of the black community because, in their opinion, Moynihan wrongly attributed the source of black issues to a crumbling family structure. They claimed that such an argument or attribution served to de-emphasize the issue of

---

<sup>6</sup>“Moynihan and the Blacks- - To Clear the Record,” in Bayard Rustin Papers, ProQuest History Vault Accession Number: 001581-004-0265(accessed 14 February 2012), 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> “The Controversial Moynihan Report,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 21 December 1965.

contemporary discrimination within American society. To them, problems that existed within black communities and homes were not caused by individual failure, but rather long standing, systemic racism.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, African Americans were upset that Moynihan seemed to paint all black families with the same brush when he stated “the propositions put forth in this study may be thought of as having a more or less general application...At the center of the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the family structure.”<sup>10</sup> Though Moynihan acknowledged that there were differences between middle and lower-class black families, he still argued that his suggestions for improvement should apply to all African American families as a whole. However, during this time, the middle-class did not see itself as pathological, even if many middle-class black women did work to support their families. Just because they may have had family structures similar to those of the working class, they were not pathological. Rather, the middle-class argued it was working to advance itself and the African American race as a whole in any way possible. As a result, the middle-class, including both men and women, celebrated the strength and independence of black women in prominent articles published in *Ebony*, despite the challenges posed against them by the Moynihan Report.

Before examining the various reactions black and white Americans had to the report, it is important to understand what was taking place within black communities and America as a whole when Moynihan penned his report. When considering the time period in which the Moynihan Report was written, Moynihan’s arguments were not necessarily unfounded. The report was written during a period of immense change in American history. During this time

---

<sup>9</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 148. For additional examples see: Mortem Baker, “Nothing But A Man, Says Moynihan Foe,” *Afro-American*, 4 December 1965.; Whitney Young, “Broken Homes Result, Not Cause of Negro’s Denial of Rights,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 25 January 1966.; Whitney Young, “Real Message of Moynihan Report,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 January 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 76.

period, the Civil Rights Movement was making major strides in securing equality for African Americans in American society. The War on Poverty was launched, aiming to expand governmental intervention in education and health care as a means of reducing national poverty rates. However, through his report, Daniel Patrick Moynihan proposed that these changes were not enough. He argued,

In this new period the expectations of Negro Americans will go beyond civil rights. Being Americans, they will now expect that in the near future equal opportunities for them as a group will produce roughly equal rights, as compared with other groups. This is not going to happen. Nor will it happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made.<sup>11</sup>

Moynihan believed that African Americans would not receive equal rights and opportunities, not simply because of racist attitudes in America, though these were certainly still very present. Rather, he believed that African Americans would not be able to fully assimilate into American society because of the unique hardship they faced under what he perceived to be their corrupted family structures.<sup>12</sup>

To substantiate his arguments, Moynihan compiled various sociological reports and historical analyses to examine various aspects of African American communities. He believed that centuries of exploitation and injustice towards African Americans significantly contributed to the manifestation of poverty and associated problems being experienced by the black community in the 1960s. However, Moynihan noted that the more potent factor in African American struggles remained their flawed family structure, which prevented them from achieving “a high degree of stability and maintaining that stability.”<sup>13</sup> Through his sociological investigation, Moynihan determined that nearly a quarter of African American marriages were

---

<sup>11</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

dissolved per year, leaving a quarter of African American women to live on their own. He found that in some urban areas, such as New York City, divorce rates were as high as twenty-six percent and rates of absentee fathers soared at just over thirty percent. Moynihan noted that similar divorce rates were present in white communities as well; however, rates of absentee fathers never rose higher than about ten percent. He also discovered that nearly a quarter of African American births were illegitimate, occurring outside of a marriage relationship, while only three percent of white children were born illegitimately. Moynihan argued that twenty-five percent of all African American homes were headed by females, more than double the rate of households headed by white females.<sup>14</sup>

Moynihan believed that it was important to consider these statistics because they so significantly contributed to rates of welfare dependency amongst African Americans. Because of hardships faced by many African American families, fourteen percent of black children received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) assistance whereas only two percent of white children received aid. The AFDC was originally derived in 1935 from long-standing mother's aid programs. It was initially put into practice to help care for widows and orphans and had evolved to favor children from households with low levels of parental support because of the absence of one or both parents. Consequently, by the 1960s, two thirds of families receiving support from the AFDC had absent fathers. Moynihan believed that "the steady expansion of this welfare program, as of public assistance programs in general, could be taken as a measure of the steady disintegration of the Negro family structure over the past generation in the United

---

<sup>14</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 55. For additional information see: Michael L. Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

States.”<sup>15</sup> To Moynihan, this steady disintegration of African American families had resulted in what he deemed the “tangle of pathology.”<sup>16</sup>

Overall, Moynihan believed that several factors combined to create this “tangle of pathology” within African American families. He noted that during the period of slavery, Christian marriages were not promoted, and rarely permitted, amongst blacks held in bondage. Many couples, even those with children, were often separated at auctions. Consequently, slave households took on a system of matriarchy in the absence of fathers. Even during the period of Reconstruction, following the emancipation of slaves, life was not much better for African Americans. Jim Crow laws were put into effect to keep blacks “in their place.” Black men in particular were treated with intense hostility, especially throughout the South. They were denied equality and were forced to deal with segregation. All of these factors combined into an overwhelmingly negative effect for all African Americans, making it incredibly difficult, but not altogether impossible (Moynihan mentions that close to fifty percent of African Americans were middle-class<sup>17</sup>) to achieve success in ascribing to middle-class norms and ideals.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these long standing issues of racism, Moynihan pointed out that additional factors were present in African American communities that contributed to the “tangle of pathology.” He noted that, after the Great Migration of once rural African Americans to greater city centers, black slums were created in response to sudden and drastic transitions. These transitions had a very disruptive effect on traditional social patterns and rates of crime, delinquency, and family disorganization grew rapidly. Similarly, Moynihan argued

---

<sup>15</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>17</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 75.

<sup>18</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 61-73.

unemployment, and the subsequent poverty that followed, also significantly contributed to problems in family organization. Statistics indicated that over twenty-nine percent of African American males were unemployed in 1963. To Moynihan, the effects of this unemployment were devastating because low family income was associated with greater family instability, which only further perpetuated the “tangle of pathology”.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, Moynihan believed that many factors contributed to the so called “tangle of pathology,” but how exactly did he define this pathology? In essence, the tangle of pathology consisted of a flawed family structure that significantly contributed to negative outcomes such as delinquency, arrest, alienation, and failure of African American youth. The number one thing that Moynihan believed was flawed within African American families was their reliance on a system of matriarchy, or female-headed households. Moynihan noticed that this pattern had been reinforced through generations upon generations and even extended into the realm of education. Amongst black populations, women were more likely to graduate high school than men and by 1960 fifty-five percent of non-white individuals attending college were women. Consequently, African American women had better established themselves in white collar, professional positions and, while more black men than black women were technically in the workforce, black women dominated in professional positions over their males counterparts. For this reason, black women were more likely to be the primary wage earner within their households. While this may not necessarily seem like a negative concept, Moynihan argued that it was a major corrupting force. Because black women were more successful than black men in the professional world, black men began to feel inferior and emasculated. Black men simply could not measure up to the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 75-91.

ever present white, middle-class stereotype of what it meant to be a man. Within the report, Moynihan quotes Whitney Young, a civil rights leader, as stating:

The effect on family functioning and role performance of this historical experience is what you might predict. Both as a husband and as a father the Negro male is made to feel inadequate, not because he is unlovable or unaffectionate, lacks intelligence or even a gray flannel suit. But in a society that measures a man by the size of his paycheck, he doesn't stand very tall in comparison with his white counterpart.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, Moynihan concluded, many African American men sought a way out of the situation and deserted their families all together, leaving their children fatherless and women to fully run the household. Moynihan determined that this desertion was especially detrimental to the male children they left behind. Without a father, black male children had no strong, male role model to learn from and emulate. Moynihan argued that even in instances of absenteeism amongst white communities, white male children still saw the pattern of working males around them. With an unemployment rate of nearly thirty percent within the black community, black male children did not have successful men to look up to, placing them at a significant disadvantage. Moynihan noted that black children from broken homes or female headed households had significantly lower scores (a median IQ of about 87) on intelligence tests. Moreover, these children also demonstrated higher rates of delinquent behavior, making up at least one third of all juveniles in detention facilities.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to note that Moynihan did realize that issues of unemployment, delinquency, and father absenteeism also existed within white communities. However, based on

---

<sup>20</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 80.

\* However, it is worth noting that, though Moynihan includes this quote in his report, he is not necessarily using his sources well, as this quotation is more of a critique of the wage system and black men's unemployment, rather than black women's success.

<sup>21</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 81-84.

his research he determined that “one of the most striking differences between the Negro and white groups is the consistently higher frequency of broken homes and resulting family disorganization in the Negro group.”<sup>22</sup> Based on this, Moynihan determined that the major reason African Americans could not get ahead in American society and achieve the white, middle-class dream was because their family structure was so flawed and only served to perpetuate problems from generation to generation. Moynihan stressed that this cycle needed to be broken before anything could be fixed. In order to break this cycle, Moynihan argued that men should assume the role of primary breadwinner and women, once matriarchs, should assume a more subordinate role within the household. Additionally, Moynihan proposed that the federal government had a responsibility to “enhance the stability and resources of the Negro American family.”<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the government noticed these alarming trends in poverty and unemployment and as a result, President Lyndon Johnson launched the War on Poverty in 1964. In his State of the Union address, Johnson declared that the War on Poverty was to be a “joint Federal-local effort” to “pursue poverty, pursue it wherever it exists—in city slums and small reservations, among whites as well as Negroes, among the young as well as the aged, in the boom towns and in the depressed areas.”<sup>24</sup> Though Johnson claimed to wage a universal attack on poverty, many scholars have argued that the War on Poverty was really directed towards black, urban America. During Johnson’s presidency, African American were overrepresented in poverty and unemployment statistics compared to other racial groups. In 1963, almost eleven percent of African Americans were unemployed, over double the rate of white unemployment. In addition,

---

<sup>22</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 93.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 379.

African Americans who were employed only made about fifty-three percent as much as employed whites causing about fifty-five percent of African Americans to live below the poverty line. As a result, poverty was a daily reality for the majority of African Americans. The segregation that still persisted in the early 1960s meant that those blacks who lived in squalor co-existed with their more middle-class peers. Segregation meant that these individuals attended the same churches and schools, and frequented the same businesses. Consequently, any federal interventions used to eliminate poverty amongst lower-class African Americans would undoubtedly affect all African Americans.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, African Americans seemed to be in favor of government intervention to help relieve poverty. Polls conducted throughout the 1960s indicated that eighty-three percent of African Americans supported federal interventions.<sup>26</sup> It is easy to see why African Americans were likely to support federal interventions considering the major strides that had been made in the 1960s in terms of civil rights legislation. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, one of the most prominent pieces of civil rights legislation issued since Reconstruction. The Act prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. The act also granted the federal government the right to enforce desegregation practices.<sup>27</sup> The following year, Congress also passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This act officially outlawed the use of voting requirements, such as literacy tests and poll taxes that were used to restrict the voting rights of African Americans in many Southern states. Essentially, this act made it easier for African Americans to vote within the United States and exercise their

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 356-357.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 356-357.

<sup>27</sup> "Civil Rights Act," Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/119351/Civil-Rights-Act> (accessed 12 November 2011).

constitutional rights.<sup>28</sup> However, this support did not extend to state and local governments because many blacks saw these governments as a “subterfuge for maintaining Jim Crow.”<sup>29</sup> Local control had long been exerted in order to maintain housing and school segregation. For this reason, blacks favored the federal government which had been more successful in helping to gain rights for African Americans.

Just as critics argued that Moynihan did not accurately address the source of issues for lower-class African Americans, many also believed that War on Poverty failed to address the real economic issues behind poverty rates in the United State. Instead, it sought to change problems at a more surface level rather than altering their roots. Additionally, federal interventions proposed as a part of the War on Poverty never really took off or succeeded. Though the government aimed to create more job opportunities in order to decrease the unemployment rate, this idea remained just that, an idea rather than a real solution. Similarly, federal attempts to end racial discrimination were ineffective. However, the War on Poverty was effective in helping to shift the balance of power in more localized arenas. The federal government was able to ally itself with local activists to help “create alternative institutions to unresponsive local governments.”<sup>30</sup> These interventions allowed activists to have greater leverage in fighting battles on the local level. With this leverage, local black activists began to argue for increased representation in local governments in order to help ward off continuing discrimination. The consequence of this was that “blocks, wards, and city governments, not

---

<sup>28</sup> “Voting Rights Act,” Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/633044/Voting-Rights-Act> (accessed 12 November 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 357.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

Congress and the White House, became the primary battleground for the future of black America.”<sup>31</sup>

Following the publication of “The Negro Family,” scholars began to voice their criticisms of Moynihan’s findings. One group in particular argued that Moynihan placed too much emphasis on the detriments of matriarchal family systems while largely ignoring the impact of the greater problems of socioeconomic disadvantage (unemployment, male underemployment, lack of education, racial discrimination) that existed within poor, black communities. Ann Jennings and Dell Champlin argued that Moynihan’s evidence for his claims about the harmfulness of patriarchy was flawed in that it “could not be disaggregated from socioeconomic status.”<sup>32</sup> Namely, patriarchy could not solely be blamed for the problems of the African American community because it was only a symptom of lower economic status for that demographic. The duo further argued that Moynihan’s results reduced a series of systemic racial disadvantages into nothing more than reversed gender roles.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, Moynihan oversimplified the issues that existed within black families by arguing that patriarchy was the source of problems for the community. Although Moynihan briefly acknowledged the problem of systemic racism, his analysis focused primarily on sociological evidence of black family dysfunction, which served to minimize the significance of racial discrimination, particularly in the area of employment opportunities. As a result, the duo argued, targeting African American families for reform, separate from changing the socioeconomic structure of American society,

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>32</sup> Ann Jennings and Dell Champlin, “Cultural Contours of Race, Gender, and Class Distinctions: A Critique of Moynihan and Other Functionalist Views,” in *The Economic Status of Women Under Capitalism*, by Janice Peterson and Doug Brown (Bookfield, VT: Edward Elgar, 1994), 97.

<sup>33</sup> Jennings and Champlin, “Cultural Contours of Race, Gender, and Class Distinctions,” 98.

would be a futile effort at best because the situation of many poor black families was so deeply rooted in socioeconomic problems.<sup>34</sup>

One issue that is persistent throughout Moynihan's Report, is his misapplication of the term "matriarchy." Traditionally, the term matriarchy is used to imply female dominance; however, many of the families that Moynihan studied for his report were not female-dominated. Rather, they were simply headed by women in the absence of men. Consequently, using the term matriarchy to describe these family systems is misleading. Nonetheless, Moynihan's investigation into this system of "matriarchy" amongst the lower-class sparked other scholars to examine the reactions of male and female black community leaders to Moynihan's findings and recommendations following the report's publication. Largely, these leaders agreed with criticisms and arguments made by the above mentioned researchers in that the Moynihan Report placed too much emphasis on family structure and not enough on societal issues, such as job discrimination and male underemployment in urban centers.<sup>35</sup> Black female leaders in particular argued that black families did not necessarily possess a matriarchal structure by choice. On the contrary, most black families tried to adhere to a two-parent family structure; however, discrimination made it difficult for black men to solely provide for their families.<sup>36</sup> In general, scholars have found that black feminists took great offense to Moynihan's report. These women were especially put off by matriarchy being portrayed as "pathological" or as a flaw. They argued that "Black female strength should be considered a virtue that fostered more egalitarian

---

<sup>34</sup> Ludwig L. Geismar, and Ursula C. Gerhart, "Social Class, Ethnicity, and Family Functioning: Exploring Some Issues Raised by the Moynihan Report," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 30,3 (August 1968): 487. For additional examples, see: Alan S. Berger and William Simon, "Black Families and The Moynihan Report: A Research Evaluation," *Social Problems* 22, 2 (December 1974): 160-161.

<sup>35</sup> Premilla Nadasen, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights," *Feminist Studies* 28, 2 (Summer 2002): 281.

<sup>36</sup> Nadasen, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement," 281.

relations within the Black community.”<sup>37</sup> By criticizing matriarchs, Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women, believed that Moynihan completely discredited all the contributions made by black women within their communities. She believed that, rather than favoring patriarchy over matriarchy, a partnership should be built within the family with both mother and father working to provide for their households.<sup>38</sup> Scholars note that these opinions were largely influenced by the ever growing feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Patriarchy was more fiercely argued against as women gained a stronger political voice.

Despite their agreement on some key points regarding the Moynihan Report, scholars argue that black male and female community leaders did, in general, have very different reactions to the report. In his book *I Am a Man!*, Steve Estes argued that major civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., agreed with Moynihan that “progress in civil rights [could] be negated by the dissolving of family structure.”<sup>39</sup> King too favored the idea of increasing male dominance within black families. King urged men to demand recognition for their civil rights so that they might earn higher wages and thus be able to better provide for their families. According to Estes, in this way black men would be fighting not just for their rights, but for their manhood as well.<sup>40</sup>

Though many scholars focused on critically analyzing the Moynihan Report or evaluating the reactions of political activists to the report, other scholars evaluated the impact of the report on social reform, particularly in the area of welfare. During the 1960s many individuals opposed the existing welfare system, Aid for Families with Dependent Children. This long standing

---

<sup>37</sup> Nadasen, “Expanding the Boundaries of the Women’s Movement,” 281.

<sup>38</sup> Steve Estes, *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 120-121.

<sup>39</sup> Estes, *I Am a Man!*, 119.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

welfare system favored families where one or both parents were absent or somehow incapacitated. In his report, Moynihan claimed that this type of welfare system provided unemployed black men with incentive to desert their families so that the women and children they left behind could at least receive government assistance.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, researcher James T. Patterson highlights how President Richard Nixon worked closely with Moynihan to use his findings to produce a new welfare system that would not favor these types of family situations. Based on these findings, the resulting system, known as the Family Assistance Plan, which was eventually vetoed by Congress, was uniquely shaped by Moynihan's findings in "The Negro Family." Ultimately, Patterson argues, the Moynihan Report sparked much conversation about welfare following its publication and ultimately influenced future conversations regarding the state of the welfare system and reform.<sup>42</sup>

Through these various interpretations of and reactions to the Moynihan Report, we can clearly see that the Moynihan Report generated a substantial amount of commentary throughout American society. However, these commentaries serve only to show us how scholars and political activists reacted to this influential report or used it to push for reform. Overall, the reaction of the general public, especially among black communities specifically targeted by Moynihan's research, has largely been ignored in previous scholarship. Additionally, scholars have failed to analyze how gendered messages within African American magazines may have changed or not changed as a result of the publication of the Moynihan Report. In order to fill in this missing piece of the puzzle, it is necessary to investigate how the general public, including both white and black communities, reacted to this document in public domains such as

---

<sup>41</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 58-60.

<sup>42</sup> James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle Over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 109-120.

newspaper and magazine articles and editorials. By obtaining a clearer picture of how white and black communities reacted to the report, a better understanding of the broader impact of the Moynihan Report within these communities, throughout the 1960s, may be reached.

Overall, the contributing factors of the War on Poverty and those included in the Moynihan Report provided a very stark contrast to the white-middle class, especially in terms of white-middle class gender roles, that Moynihan was urging the black community as a whole to emulate. While the white community had significantly lower rates of poverty and unemployment when compared to the black community, they also had substantially different gender roles. Following the end of World War II, women were encouraged to relinquish their war-time jobs to returning soldiers. In fact popular polls of the time “showed that most Americans, men and women, still felt that, if the society were to regain stability and if the family were to remain cohesive, women had best go home. Men should be breadwinners, women homemakers.”<sup>43</sup> As a result, many white middle-class women returned to the home and focused their attention on being wives and homemakers rather than career women. This lifestyle was significantly reinforced by messages women received in popular women’s magazines even through the 1960s. By 1963, women were still encouraged to remain in the home rather than entering the workforce. For example, a monthly column in *Ladies Home Journal*, by popular parenting expert Dr. Benjamin Spock, even went so far as to tell women that having career could actually be detrimental to their children. If children were left in childcare facilities or did not have the opportunity to spend time with their mothers, they could feel “emotionally neglected and abused.”<sup>44</sup> Consequently, “when this happens- in infancy and early childhood particularly- the child’s personality is distorted in one way or another. He may become apathetic or demanding or

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Spock, “Should Mother’s Work?” *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1963, 16.

shallow or mean.”<sup>45</sup> Because of this, he urged women to enter the workforce only if they were certain it would not damage their children psychologically and only if having a career was absolutely vital to a woman’s personal fulfillment. He encouraged women who were considering returning to work to consult a variety of professional counselors to assess risk factors for the entire family before making a decision. Women were also supposed to find caretakers for their children who could essentially function as a mother figure and not just a babysitter as well. Overall, Dr. Spock discouraged women from leaving their roles as full-time homemakers. In fact he even went so far as to say, “I express the hope that we may rear our daughters with more delight in the career that only they can follow.”<sup>46</sup> This implies that Spock wanted mothers to raise their daughters in such a way that they may be more inclined to be stay at home mothers to their own future children, that, rather than having career goals outside of the home, they would prefer to and be content with staying in the household to raise their children.

Additionally, white middle-class women were inundated with the message that their husbands were their most valuable assets because husbands functioned as the breadwinners and decision makers within the households. An article published in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1963 stated: “there is nothing you can have around the house so useful as a husband. Besides being an efficient breadwinner, he owns a host of other amiable talents...Keeping him happy and extant would seem to be the most urgent self-interest to any sensible, affectionate housewife.”<sup>47</sup> As a result, women were encouraged to put their husbands before themselves. They should ultimately cater to the men in their lives before fulfilling their own needs or wants. By always putting their

---

<sup>45</sup> Spock, ‘Should Mothers Work?’ 16.

<sup>46</sup>Spock, “Should Mother’s Work?” 21.

<sup>47</sup> “10 Ways to Keep a Husband Young,” *Ladies Homes Journal*, January 1963, 87.

husbands first and keeping them in the best shape physically, mentally, and emotionally, women could ensure the overall health and success of the entire family.<sup>48</sup>

However, magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal* failed to recognize the reality of many white middle-class families. While many families were able to enjoy post-war prosperity in America, this “traditional” nuclear family was not experienced by the majority of middle-class families. Although women were expected to be fully absorbed in their home lives, many simply could not keep up with this demand because they had to work outside of the home in order to ensure their families could maintain the stereotypical middle-class lifestyle portrayed in the very magazines that sold them this ideal.<sup>49</sup> Because of images depicted in popular magazines, many came to believe that this type of middle-class structure, one in which the husband was the breadwinner and the wife was solely a homemaker, was the norm for much of America. Consequently, this became the model that was sought after and idealized by individuals such as Moynihan.

Overall, Moynihan pushed African American women to adopt a white-middle class family model similar to those portrayed in *Ladies Home Journal*. However, adopting this type of lifestyle was not a realistic goal for most black middle-class women. Even from the era of slavery, women had been manual laborers along with men. During this time, due to the instability of family life under slavery, black women tended to function as the head of household. Nonetheless, this system did not actually function as a true example of matriarchy, mostly because women were not actually exerting power over men.<sup>50</sup> They were simply leading their

---

<sup>48</sup> “10 Ways to Keep a Husband Young,” 87.

<sup>49</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trip*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Lucile Duberman, *Women and Sex in Society* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 161-162.

households in the absence of men. Even so, this period of chattel slavery ultimately “established the economic, political, and ideological framework for the treatment of Black people. The rudimentary form of the Black social class system was established under slavery, as were the gender-specific forms of its overall organization.”<sup>51</sup>

Emancipation brought about significant changes for African Americans, including in the area of gender roles. Now that black men were freed from slavery, they sought to assume the normative structure of patriarchy that was emulated by white American men. However, the color caste system and other forms of rampant racism that existed in the South made this task virtually impossible for African Americans. Instead they were forced to fall back on the heritage they had developed during the era of slavery, in which black women stood independently or work alongside men to support their families. However, with the end of slavery came increased economic opportunity for African Americans. Consequently, achieving economic success and greater family stability became the mark of higher status amongst black communities.<sup>52</sup>

This pattern of female independence within black communities remained in effect well into the twentieth century. African American males, who were faced with harsh discrimination, found it difficult to adequately provide for their families when they were kept from well-paying jobs. As a result, African American women assumed the role of breadwinner, especially in households where fathers remained conspicuously absent. Following World War II, black women were even put in the unique position of being encouraged to remain in the work force though their white counterparts were being urged to re-enter the home. Black women were told that by remaining in the workforce they would be fighting for equality and bettering the black

---

<sup>51</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 60.

<sup>52</sup> Duberman, *Women and Sex in Society*, 163.

race as a whole.<sup>53</sup> This message persisted well into the 1960s.<sup>54</sup> Overall, black women tended to be better educated than black men, which enabled them to secure better work positions.<sup>55</sup>

However, as evidenced by articles published in *Ebony* in the early 1960s, black women who had achieved a more middle-class standing by securing an education and better jobs were not faulted for their efforts, rather they continued to be celebrated for all they were doing to advance the African American race.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning in the early 1960s, *Ebony* magazine published featured articles about women making a difference in their communities and in their job sectors. It was not uncommon to open an issue of *Ebony* from this time period and find articles with titles such as “Top Woman Civil Rights Leader,”<sup>57</sup> “Hawaii’s Top Woman Politician,”<sup>58</sup> and “Outstanding Woman Doctors.”<sup>59</sup> What is even more impressive about these articles is that they all chronicled the lives of *black* women in powerful positions. The women featured in these articles were used as shining examples for other black women. Not only were these women succeeding in their careers during a time period of intense racism and sexism, they were making strides for the black community and women as a whole. For example, in “Top Woman Civil Rights Leader” Constance Motley was lauded for her role as a black civil rights defense lawyer and for her position as associate counsel of the NAACP Legal and Educational Defense Fund. The six-page article focused on tracing Motley’s educational background (which included an undergraduate degree from New

---

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Smith, “The Impact of Media on Women of the Post War Era” (historical methods thesis, Lycoming College, 2010), 1-4.

<sup>54</sup> For examples see: “The Negro Woman,” *Ebony*, September 1963, 86-88.; Allan Morrison, “Top Woman Civil Rights Leader,” *Ebony*, January 1963.; “Hawaii’s Top Woman Politician,” *Ebony*, April 1963.; “Outstanding Woman Doctors,” *Ebony*, May 1964.

<sup>55</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 75-91.

<sup>56</sup> “The Negro Woman,” *Ebony*, September 1963, 86-88.

<sup>57</sup> Allan Morrison, “Top Woman Civil Rights Leader,” *Ebony*, January 1963.

<sup>58</sup> “Hawaii’s Top Woman Politician,” *Ebony*, April 1963.

<sup>59</sup> “Outstanding Woman Doctors,” *Ebony*, May 1964.

York University and a degree from Columbia Law School) as well as her professional career path. Though Motley fought legal cases encompassing various types of civil rights issues, she specifically focused on securing school desegregation throughout the United States. The article pointed out that Motley was a shining example, not simply because she was fighting for the rights of African Americans, but because she demonstrated to all African Americans, especially black women, that blacks could achieve great things and rise above oppression to secure top positions and careers.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, an article published in the April 1963 issue of *Ebony* entitled “Hawaii’s Top Woman Politician” chronicled Helene Hale’s political journey to become mayor of Hawaii. The housewife and mother of two was known for her belief in political equality for both sexes. In fact, the article even goes so far as state that Hale’s stance was that “a woman’s place need not be the confines of her home.”<sup>61</sup> The article goes on to describe the reversal of traditional white middle-class gender roles that was carried out in Hale’s own home as she was campaigning for her position. While Hale was busy promoting herself to voters, her husband remained at home to care for the couple’s six-year old son. In addition, Mr. Hale (who is never addressed by his first name in the article) worked to keep the family coffee farm afloat throughout the campaign. This article is interesting in that it demonstrates that African American women during this time period were willing to accept non-traditional gender roles. Women were not afraid of being powerful within their households.

In September of 1963, *Ebony* released a special issue in order to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Included in the issue was a featured

---

<sup>60</sup> Allan Morrison, “Top Woman Civil Rights Leader,” *Ebony*, January 1963.

<sup>61</sup> “Hawaii’s Top Woman Politician,” *Ebony*, April 1963.

article about the unique role of African American women in shaping African American life and culture. The article argues that African American women were distinguished in that they possessed strong spirits which stemmed from over a century of female dominance. The article notes that African American women in the 1960s inherited “the problems and possibilities inherent in a tradition of independence and self-reliance. The possibilities...are enormous. And so are the problems... In fact, some students claim that one result of the traditional independence of the Negro woman is that she is more in conflict with her innate biological role than the white woman.”<sup>62</sup> From this argument arose the question: what is the role of the African American woman? Overall, African American women were better educated than black men and were employed at greater rates than white females. Over the past twenty years, black women had made great strides in terms of employment especially in professional and technical sectors, however many remained employed in service oriented jobs. Though black men had, until this point, progressed economically, black women still undoubtedly held the financial power within the household. In fact, black women were more likely to make housing decisions, insurance, and other financial decisions than white women of the same status.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, black women believed that their role was not solely confined to the home. While black women did have an interest in home life, they also were interested in many things outside of it as well. Even those who did not have careers were very involved in civic and community affairs.<sup>64</sup>

This article is important not only in what it says about the role of African American women, but in how it depicts this role. In addition to three full pages of text, the article included a five page photographic display of the multitude of roles women served within the home and

---

<sup>62</sup> “The Negro Woman,” *Ebony* September 1963, 86-88.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-94.

society in general. Within the display, black women were first depicted as “Career Girls.” The pictures featured on this page followed Norma Lewis, a young psychiatric social worker in New York City. Though Norma enjoyed her life, she stated, “This is far from an ideal life; it has its drawbacks and lacks, but it does give one an opportunity to express oneself creatively and to experience personal freedom and growth in a responsible way.”<sup>65</sup> African American women were also depicted as housewives who carried out the daily activities required to maintain a home and a family, including grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, and spending time with her husband and children. Gwendolyn Williams, a housewife from Gary, Indiana, was quoted as saying, “A woman’s place is in the home, unless it is absolutely necessary to work. Trying to take care of a home and keeping your children and husband happy is a full-time job.”<sup>66</sup> In addition, African American women were depicted as possessing careers which required extensive education. Dr. Angella Ferguson, a pediatrician from Washington, D.C., was described not only as a high achieving professional, but a hard working housewife who did all of her family’s cooking, ironing, and laundry.<sup>67</sup> In addition, African American women were depicted as “the man of the house.” After her marriage fell apart, Almedia Hunt, a unit supervisor and mother of two, had to take on the responsibility of being a single mother. Almedia notes that this situation was undesirable and incredibly difficult, but she has been able to provide for her family without additional aid from ADC. The article notes that her situation is a very common one for many African American women.<sup>68</sup> Overall, this photographic series served to show the multitude of roles middle-class African American woman could play. But what is perhaps most important about this article, was that, according to *Ebony*, it was acceptable for middle-class women to

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 93.

wear a variety of hats. They were not strictly confined to either the workplace or the home. African American women were still accepted, and even celebrated, for playing a variety of roles. They were never criticized for spending too much time in the office and not enough in home, or vice versa.

The images of African American women, as portrayed by *Ebony* in 1963, persisted through the mid-1960s. Almost every issue of *Ebony* published in 1964 and 1965 contained at least one article about an African American woman in a leadership role or employed in a relatively prestigious field.<sup>69</sup> Throughout these issues, black women were depicted as hospital directors, ambassadors for police departments, doctors, and politicians. Like the women depicted in early *Ebony* articles, women such as Dr. Joycelyn Elders, a pediatrician at The University of Arkansas Medical Center, were also described as successful career women as well as loving wives and mothers.<sup>70</sup> When these women were not at work, they could be found at home with their families, preparing and eating meals, and taking care of other various household tasks. Not only did these women provide for their families financially while also achieving some sort of personal fulfillment, they were able to care for their husbands and children within the home. According to the descriptions included in *Ebony*, middle-class African American women were able to do it all and continued to be celebrated for all that they did do.

Overall, white-middle class women never received this same level of acceptance, even into the late 1960s. By 1969, white middle-class women began to receive some images of powerful, leading women in magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*. However, strong,

---

<sup>69</sup> “West Virginia’s Director of Mental Health,” *Ebony*, January 1964.; “Ambassador of Goodwill for Police Department,” *Ebony*, March 1964.; “New Day, New Doctor,” *Ebony*, April 1964.; “Outstanding Woman Doctor,” *Ebony*, May 1964.; “Woman Fills Man-Size Union Job,” *Ebony*, April 1965.; “Scientific Couple Finds Success in Albuquerque,” *Ebony*, June 1965.; “My Daughter, the Policeman,” *Ebony*, October 1965

<sup>70</sup> “New Day, New Doctor,” *Ebony*, March 1964, 27.

independent women were not as highly celebrated in white women's magazines as middle-class black women were celebrated in *Ebony*. In 1969, *Ladies Home Journal* began featuring an article titled "The Power of a Woman" which focused on highlighting middle-class women's social activism efforts in various arenas. Until this point, the magazine had not specifically published articles which focused on women's activism efforts. Nevertheless, even though women's activism was being recognized, women were still encouraged to stay within the home and primarily devote their time to their husbands and children. Articles published in 1970 encouraged women to work and contribute to their family's income, however, they were not necessarily encouraged to have meaningful careers. Rather, *Ladies Home Journal* gave middle-class women suggestions for how to earn money in their spare time by doing odd jobs such as house sitting, tailoring, or doing secretarial work.<sup>71</sup> One housewife is quoted as saying that she enjoyed doing this over having a career because "the business rarely interferes with being a housewife and a mother. My husband was happy for me to have something to do."<sup>72</sup> Additionally, a shift in terms of parenting advice began to occur. Instead of discouraging mothers from working because of the potentially negative side-effects for their children, women were being told that working may actually be beneficial for their children. By working, women could serve as role models for their children. Parenting articles emphasized that working outside of the home may even have stress relieving properties causing women to exhibit less stress over housekeeping and parenting tasks, which could ultimately make the household atmosphere more relaxed. Essentially, "having several hours a day for their own pursuits, these mothers will be more than ready to use time with their children for mutual pleasure and growth."<sup>73</sup> However, though women were encouraged to work, they were only encouraged to work part time so that they could still play a prominent

---

<sup>71</sup> "How to Make Money in Your Spare Time," *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1970, 132.

<sup>72</sup> "How to Make Money in Your Spare Time," 132.

<sup>73</sup> "Why Working Mothers Have Happier Children," *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1970, 87.

role within the household: “it will require a shorter working day for mothers and flexibility in working hours to permit them to leave when their children need them.”<sup>74</sup> Articles such as these demonstrated to middle-class white women that the family was still supposed to be their primary concern before anything else. While they were encouraged to seek more personal fulfillment and to be socially active, they were never encouraged to reach the same level of independence that middle-class African American women were being celebrated for.

Considering all of this, it is interesting that Moynihan advocated for a reversal of gender roles for the African American community. By adopting white middle-class gender roles and family models, African Americans almost would have been regressing, in some aspects, rather than advancing forward. Many African Americans realized that the Moynihan Report failed to recognize their unique position, and, as a result, the Moynihan Report was heavily criticized by the African American community. Black feminists in particular were outraged by the claims Moynihan included in his document. Overall, African American women disagreed with Moynihan because they believed the report demonized black women and devalued their roles and accomplishments within society. One black female journalist, Frances Beale, claimed that Moynihan’s flawed theory essentially stated “in order for the Black man to be strong, the Black woman has to be weak.”<sup>75</sup> She argued that, although black men had historically been emasculated within American society, it was not through the fault of black women. Other black feminists rejected Moynihan’s view on matriarchy. Moynihan believed that black matriarchs only served to further perpetuate the “tangle of pathology” which black families continued to

---

<sup>74</sup> “Why Working Mothers Have Happier Children,” *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1970, 87.

<sup>75</sup> Frances Beale, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 150.

struggle with.<sup>76</sup> Black feminists argued that women did not choose to be matriarchs but rather were forced to live with abandonment and abuse. Matriarchy was more of a coping mechanism than a conscious choice on the part of black women. Linda La Rue argued that, as a result of “belief in the myth of matriarchy, [the] black woman has been made to feel ashamed of her strength, and so to redeem herself she has adopted from whites the belief that superiority and dominance of the male is the most natural and normal relationship.”<sup>77</sup> Overall, black women were offended that Moynihan seemed to place the blame for issues within the black community solely on the shoulders of women. In addition to casting matriarchy in a negative light, black women argued that Moynihan blamed the entry of more black women into the work force as one of the sources of crumbling family structure within black families. Black women argued that this was simply not true, that rather than cause the family to crumble, women’s employment made education for their children possible, by keeping them in school instead of forcing them to enter the workforce to help provide for the family. Black women were upset that they were being blamed for harming their families, when in reality they were doing everything in their power to help their families succeed in the absence of the father. Most likely, black women were also shocked that they were now being criticized so harshly for their independence when this independence had been celebrated for so long within the black community and even within the pages of popular magazines such *Ebony*.

When examining the reactions of black women and black feminists to the Moynihan Report, it is important to consider how the feminist movement had been evolving through 1965. Second wave feminism began to take hold in 1963 with the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. Within the text, Friedan scathingly critiqued long standing Freudian views

---

<sup>76</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 142.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

of femininity which she believed were oppressive to women. She argued that women should be viewed “in terms of their humanity as opposed to their femininity and sexuality.”<sup>78</sup> Friedan disliked Freudian theory for the fact that, within it, “the mother could be blamed for almost everything.”<sup>79</sup> *The Feminine Mystique* essentially rejected the glorification of motherhood as “the quintessential expression of femininity.”<sup>80</sup> In fact, she viewed the family as a source of oppression for women, one which limited them and prevented them from achieving their true potential. Friedan urged women to seek out wage work as a means of achieving more independence and to have something other than motherhood to occupy their time. She further believed that if women achieved this independence, they would actually be better mothers. To not do so would mean producing mothers “who stop their growth and education short of identity, without a strong core of human values to pass on to their children.”<sup>81</sup> If this happened, Friedan argued, “we [would be] committing, quite simply, genocide, starting with the mass burial of American women and ending with the progressive dehumanization of their sons and daughters.”<sup>82</sup> Overall, Friedan argued that by achieving more independence women would be more successful mothers by being able to provide their children with an image of a strong female role model. Consequently, she believed that it was time for women to step outside of the house and the more traditional roles of motherhood found in middle-class America.

Though Moynihan and Friedan may not have agreed in their interpretation of the role of women within their separate works, their writings are similar in that they both ignore the specific dilemmas of women in the poor black community. While Moynihan largely ignored the broader

---

<sup>78</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 152.

<sup>79</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963), 60, 180.

<sup>80</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 152.

<sup>81</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 351.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

issues of systemic racism that had prevented lower class African Americans from flourishing in American society, Friedan also ignored unique social realities for working class black women. As journalist Frances Beale pointed out in subsequent years, Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* disregarded the "extreme economic exploitation that most Black women were subjected to day by day."<sup>83</sup> Other black female activists went on to argue that the feminist text only "actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women – housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life."<sup>84</sup> Friedan failed to consider how African American women, or poor white women, who did not have equal access to higher education and well-paid jobs, would factor into this model of feminism.

Just as black women expressed their frustration with the Moynihan Report, black men also expressed their disagreement with Moynihan's claims. They were incredibly offended by Moynihan's portrayal of African American males as "psychologically impotent and castrated."<sup>85</sup> Black men argued that this exact depiction caused American society to view African American men as inferior to their white male peers. By depicting African American males as weak and incapable of handling their own households, the stereotypes expressed in the Moynihan Report only set the black community up for threats of white male superiority and control. Moynihan painted the picture that black males were incapable of standing up for themselves and improving their own communities. Rather, black men were more notorious for deserting their families and leaving their women and children alone and left to fend for themselves. Essentially, Moynihan's

---

<sup>83</sup> Beale, "Double Jeopardy," 98.

<sup>84</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 154.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Staples, "Myth," *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*, 1971. In Estes, *I Am a Man!*, 126.

report only served to further perpetuate racist stereotypes, which had historically kept black men from being able to fully succeed within American society in the first place.<sup>86</sup>

Additionally, many blacks felt that Moynihan seemed to disregard the long history of the African American community. For centuries the African American community had embraced gender roles that differed from those of white Americans. Moynihan failed to realize that many African Americans had been able to progress in society and achieve a more middle-class standing despite the fact that they functioned under what Moynihan deemed a “pathological” family structure. Through his report, Moynihan actually served to reinforce long held stereotypes against the African American community. He emphasized the negatives rather than the positives, choosing instead to place all African Americans into the same “pathological” category. In his report, Moynihan states that “it might be estimated that as much as half of the Negro community falls into the middle class.”<sup>87</sup> However, Moynihan does not pay much attention to the fact that nearly fifty percent of African Americans had been able to achieve to a middle-class standing even though they operated under long standing, “pathological” family structures. Through his report, Moynihan focused more on what was wrong with the African American community as a whole rather than focusing on what it had been able to achieve thus far. Additionally, Moynihan states, that “because of housing segregation it is immensely difficult for the stable half to escape from the cultural influences of the unstable one.”<sup>88</sup> Because of this, Moynihan generalized his findings and suggestions to encompass the entire African American community. As a result, African Americans were all lumped into the same pathological category.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>87</sup> Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” 75.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 76.

Reactions from the white community served to emphasize the fact that Moynihan simply reinforced long held stereotypes against African Americans. In light of the recent introduction of civil rights legislation, such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, many whites came to the conclusion that the civil rights movement had accomplished what it set out to do. These same individuals believed that, now that Moynihan had identified the cause of issues within poor black communities (i.e. crumbling family structure); it was time for blacks to assume responsibility for their own problems and work to fix these problems themselves. Several of Moynihan's supporters even went so far as to argue "having reacted to the movement's demands for a decade, the government had learned that it was impossible to satiate the Negro American."<sup>90</sup> They believed that passing civil rights legislation should have appeased African Americans. However, frustratingly enough, African Americans still seemed to be displeased with their place in American society. In addition, many white conservatives of the time used the Moynihan Report as evidence of their long held beliefs that African Americans possessed a certain inherent pathology that only served to worsen their conditions. White reporters, such as Mary McGrory, claimed that Moynihan's Report implied that "the time had come for them [Negroes] to come to grips with their own worst problem."<sup>91</sup> Essentially, these individuals argued that African Americans needed to take a self-help approach to fixing their own problems, meaning that "only the Negro can save his family."<sup>92</sup> Other Moynihan supporters, such as Benjamin Peyton, a prominent member of the Protestant Council, argued that Moynihan was correct in claiming that pathological family structure was the source of problems within poor black communities.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 147-148.

<sup>91</sup> Mary McGrory, "President Talks Frankly to Negroes (June 6, 1965)," in Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 148.

<sup>92</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, "The Absent Father Haunts the Negro Family," *New York Times Magazine*, 28 November 1965, 177.

<sup>93</sup> "The Moynihan Report: Reader's Response," *The Christian Century*, February 9, 1966, 180-182.

Others also agreed with Moynihan's claim that matriarchy was a destructive force within black communities and households as a whole. These supporters applauded Moynihan for correctly identifying the negative psychological impact of matriarchy on African American men. Consequently, they argued that, because matriarchy was so detrimental to black men and black families as a whole, African American men should have been urged to assume a more dominant role within their families in order to begin to rectify the problems within the black community.<sup>94</sup> Overall, many white Americans argued that Moynihan's Report had successfully identified the source of trouble within the poor black communities of America and that it was now up to these African Americans to fix their problems themselves.

However, even though many African Americans were frustrated with the Moynihan Report for its reinforcement of negative stereotypes about the black community, some African Americans themselves agreed with several of Moynihan's arguments. These African Americans were growing increasingly frustrated with the lower-class because they prevented middle-class blacks from actually achieving the middle-class lifestyle that they were working towards. These individuals believed that, through his report, Moynihan was able to highlight some of the deficits of the lower-class black community, including high unemployment, high father desertion rates, poorer education, and higher crime rates. Through his report, Moynihan also highlighted that housing segregation forced many middle-class black families to remain in impoverished ghettos alongside the lower-class.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, it was difficult to fully distinguish the black middle-class from the lower-class because of their close physical proximity to one another. Ultimately, these deficits and housing discrimination affected how America as a whole viewed all African

---

<sup>94</sup> Lincoln, "The Absent Father Haunts the Negro Family, *New York Times Magazine*, 28 November 1965, 177.

<sup>95</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 75-76.

Americans, including those of the middle-class. Additionally, riots such as the Watts Riots made the African American community seem violent and unstable.

In August of 1965, explosive racial violence erupted in the predominately African American Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. On August 11, 1965, Marquette Frye and his brother, both African American, were pulled over for suspicion of drunk driving during a routine traffic stop by white Highway Patrol officer Lee Minikus. Onlookers gathered, including Frye's mother, after a second squad car pulled up to the scene. The crowd soon began to berate the police officers, which sparked tension between the spectators and officers. The incident fueled what would become an eight day period of looting and violence which would ultimately result in the death of thirty-four people and an estimated two hundred million dollars-worth of property damage.<sup>96</sup> The riots were largely fueled by long standing economic distress. Many blacks in Los Angeles argued that the uprising was not so much a riot as it was "a long overdue rebellion against police brutality and systematic racism that had deprived black people of decent job opportunities, schools, and housing."<sup>97</sup> However, white Americans downplayed these claims in favor of attributing the riots to purely delinquent behavior. Soon after the event, the California governor's commission investigated the uprising and attributed it to unrest amongst unstable minority families, fatherlessness, and problems within the welfare system, rather than to issues of systemic racism. But however the riots were interpreted, there was no denying that they changed the face of civil rights from that summer onward. As stated by James T. Patterson, the Watts riots indicated that "masses of black people..., were no longer willing to forgo violence or trust whites

---

<sup>96</sup> Estes, *I Am a Man!*, 116.

<sup>97</sup> Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough*, 68.

as leaders – or (as in Moynihan’s case), messengers. Freedom was indeed not enough- beyond legal protections, black Americans demanded jobs and social equality.”<sup>98</sup>

Many whites who observed these protests, either in person or through the national media attention they received, assumed that African Americans were simply violent in nature and could not be civilized in the same way whites could. As a result, whites were adamantly against African Americans moving into their suburban, middle-class neighborhoods. They felt that having African Americans in their neighborhoods would make for an unsafe environment. Ultimately, whites thought that African Americans would bring their violent tendencies into middle-class neighborhoods.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, many whites misinterpreted the chaos of urban ghettos to mean that blacks themselves were inherently unstable and unclean. As a result, whites felt that if blacks moved into suburban neighborhoods, they would bring their chaos and filth with them. This would eventually depreciate the value of the homes many middle-class whites had worked so hard to procure. Whites believed that, because African Americans were so innately violent, chaotic, and unclean, any neighborhood they moved into would transform into a ghetto.<sup>100</sup> Many whites argued that they moved to the suburbs to get away from the trouble of urban life. They felt if African Americans made their way into the suburbs, trouble was sure to follow.<sup>101</sup> Because of the negative connotation their race held with many whites, middle-class African Americans felt that deficits, including unemployment, unstable living situations, and poverty, needed to be corrected in the lower-class black community, so that the middle-class could be able to fully enjoy the benefits of the lifestyle they had worked to achieve. Until these

---

<sup>98</sup> Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough*, 69.

<sup>99</sup> CBS News, “Black Power, White Backlash,” CBS News Web site, Adobe Flash Player video file, 37:00-44:03, <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2906180n> (accessed April 15, 2012).

<sup>100</sup> CBS News, “Black Power, White Backlash.”

<sup>101</sup> “The Typical White Suburbanite,” *Ebony*, August 1965, 128.

deficits could be eradicated, all African Americans would continue to be discriminated against, even middle-class African Americans.

Because so many middle-class African Americans did want to eradicate issues within the lower-class, articles expressing support amongst the African American community for Moynihan's findings could be found in *Ebony*. A prominent feature article in the magazine, "A Man Around the House," expressed concern over the issue of matriarchy and the upbringing of African American male children. The article, published in 1966, agreed with Moynihan in stating that matriarchy was perhaps the most destructive force within African American families living in urban ghettos. The article also points out that approximately forty-four percent of African American families living in these urban ghettos had no father living within the household. This statistic was particularly concerning in regards to male children being reared in these homes. Without fathers present within the home, black male children had very little strong male influence in their lives especially because most of their elementary school teachers and even social workers were most likely female. The article expressed concern that black male children may be confronted with the vilification of men on a daily basis, especially in households where the father had essentially abandoned the family for whatever reason. If this occurred, male children would grow up hearing that all men were "shiftless, lazy, hard-drinking, wasteful, and a deserter."<sup>102</sup> The article argued that male children who were inundated with these notions early and consistently might be permanently affected in a negative manner. The lack of a strong male influence coupled with negative depictions of black males meant that children would most likely grow up to model these negative stereotypes of black men. While the article did not make concrete suggestions on how to completely rectify problems within African American families, it

---

<sup>102</sup> "A Man Around the House," *Ebony Magazine*, January 1966, 92.

argued that several measures could be taken to improve quality of life for black male children. Firstly, black male children should be encouraged to receive as much education as possible, something that had previously been encouraged for female children more so than male children. Secondly, male children should have frequent contact with strong black, male adults who could serve as a father figure for them and provide a positive image for children to model later in life. The article argued that men should assume the role of elementary school teacher, even though these roles had historically belonged to women. The article stressed that black male teachers could “work wonders”<sup>103</sup> for children with absentee fathers. Also in agreement with Moynihan, the article contended that more job opportunities should be made available for African American men. If this happened, black males could once again assume the role of breadwinner within their households. In a line that seems taken directly from the Moynihan Report, the article closes by stating “Every family deserves to have a man around the house. He should be given every encouragement and help to stay there.”<sup>104</sup>

In addition to expressing support for the Moynihan Report in traditionally black publications, African Americans showed their support for the report’s claims in an article titled “A Mother Can’t Do a Man’s Job,” featured in *Newsweek*, a more mainstream news publication. To complete this article, journalists traveled to urban communities and interviewed single, black mothers directly. Though the article as a whole does not support the arguments made within the Moynihan Report, statements issued by individual mothers did indicate that the experiences of some African Americans supported Moynihan’s claims. For example, one black single mother from Louisville, Kentucky, is quoted as saying “a mother can’t do a man’s job,” a sentiment that

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 92.

was apparently expressed by many other single mothers interviewed for the article.<sup>105</sup> Based on this evidence and information included in the *Ebony* article, some African Americans clearly agreed with Moynihan that absentee fathers and unstable family homes did have a negative impact on black families or, at the very least, were not desirable conditions especially amongst those living within the urban ghettos.

Similarly, some African American males, most of whom maintained a middle-class social-status, agreed with Moynihan's findings and arguments. They, like Moynihan, believed that men should be heads of household as well as the main breadwinner and if this did not occur, African American families would likely experience a collapse in family stability. However, African American men noted that it was almost impossible for them to achieve the role of head of household without proper education or employment. A. Philip Randolph, an African American labor leader summed this opinion up by stating: "the man of the family is supposed to be the protector and support of the family. But if he is denied education and employment, if he cannot play his role as a husband or a father, the family breaks down."<sup>106</sup> African American men also raised concern about the welfare system that so many poor black families relied on to survive. They found it difficult to remain within their households when they were not adequately providing for their wives and children because if they simply left, their families could receive more government assistance. One member of a lower class black family articulated this viewpoint by saying: "a man doesn't want to feel he is going to take bread out of his child's mouth if he is really a man... [so] if he is not able to support his family adequately, he usually leaves."<sup>107</sup> These African American men agreed with Moynihan that more should be done to

---

<sup>105</sup> "A Mother Can't Do a Man's Job," *Newsweek*, 22 August 1966, 41-44.

<sup>106</sup> Estes, *I Am a Man!*, 123.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

enable black men to assume the role of head of household and, therefore, better provide for their families.

Even in light of the support some African Americans expressed for the Moynihan Report, rather than changing gender roles within the African American community, as Moynihan advised, middle-class African Americans adopted a philosophy of “lifting as we climb,” a slogan that had historically belonged to the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC). As noted, the concept of “lifting as we climb” was not a new philosophy for African Americans. Since its inception in 1896, the NACWC, a national umbrella group for black women’s organizations, challenged African American women in particular to uplift the black race as a whole.<sup>108</sup> The organization believed that middle-class black women were in a unique position to help encourage and guide all African Americans because of their status and success. This philosophy persisted into the 1960s. Over time, the income and status gap between lower and middle-class African Americans began to grow. By 1960, middle-class blacks began to feel disassociated from lower-class blacks, not only because they were beginning to physically distance themselves from the ghettos in which many lower-class blacks still lived, but because they wanted to psychologically distance themselves from all that the ghetto represented. According to one *Ebony* article, written with respect to the role of the middle-class African American, middle-class blacks regarded the ghetto as a reminder of long standing discrimination and humiliation. At the same time, lower-class African Americans felt distanced from middle-class blacks because they felt as if middle-class blacks wanted to distance themselves from the

---

<sup>108</sup> “National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, Inc.,” Blackpast.org, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/national-association-colored-women-s-clubs-inc-1896> (accessed April 15,2012).

lower-class, otherwise they would not have left the ghetto in the first place.<sup>109</sup> As a result, tensions mounted between lower and middle-class black communities. This tension was especially problematic to the “lifting as we climb” model. Sensing this mounting tension, *Ebony* stressed that it was important for the middle-class to encourage and lead the lower-class in order that they too might one day achieve a middle-class lifestyle.<sup>110</sup> This same concept extended to gendered messages that were printed in the magazine as well. Successful, middle-class black women were encouraged to act as role models for the lower-class. Though *Ebony* believed its goal was to help lift the lower-class and lead by example, the gap between the classes still continued to grow. While many African Americans benefited from civil-rights advancements, by 1967 many lower-class African Americans were still left behind, and, according to news reports, their situation was worsening. According to an article published in *Ebony* in 1967, race riots were escalating in frequency as more lower-class African Americans were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the conditions they faced on a daily basis.<sup>111</sup> The article notes that some lower-class African Americans were frustrated that the middle-class seemed to flaunt their wealth as a way to make the lower-class feel even more inferior. The frustration for the lower-class manifested itself in the form of violent riots, some of which were waged against middle-class, black business owners who reportedly discriminated against African Americans living in ghettos. As tensions were rising between African Americans, *Ebony* encouraged the middle-class not to lose sight of their objective and their obligation to help lift the lower-class out of their worsening position: “Black Americans of all walks of life must pull together or face the possibility of slipping back,” and “this is no time for a clash between classes. True and honest

---

<sup>109</sup> Whitney M. Young, “The Role of the Middle-Class Negro,” *Ebony*, September 1963, 67.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-71.

<sup>111</sup> “A Time for Cooperation,” *Ebony*, October 1967, 150.

cooperation will mean progress for all.”<sup>112</sup> Only through full cooperation between the classes, could African Americans continue to succeed in America. And, if African Americans could continue to succeed, then it might be possible to eventually raise all African Americans out of the ghetto.<sup>113</sup>

By the late 1960s, however, articles published in *Ebony* indicated that the divide between lower and middle-class communities was indeed growing. While some middle-class African Americans felt obligated to help lower-class African Americans out of poverty, lower-class communities were beginning to take matters into their own hands. Not only did they organize riots to express their dissatisfaction with the discrimination they still faced, but they began to organize their own anti-poverty leagues as well. Lower-class blacks wanted to be their own spokespeople for a change, in order to “present their own demands to white people who can do something about their needs.”<sup>114</sup> It is possible that lower-class African Americans were more willing to take a stand for their own rights, independent from middle-class interventions, because they felt distanced from the middle-class. They most likely felt that the middle-class could not accurately relate to the conditions they faced on a daily basis. In addition, the middle-class seemed to regard the lower-class as their own personal project of sorts, which may have seemed condescending to many lower-class blacks who were trying to do the best they could. Even so, *Ebony* still encouraged the middle-class to continue supporting the lower-class by acting as positive role models for the lower class. *Ebony* stressed that now, more so than ever, “the ghettos need black doctors, lawyers, dentists, ministers, restaurant owners, and insurance men,”<sup>115</sup> because of the strong examples they could provide for the lower-class. *Ebony* argued that, simply

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>114</sup> Ponchitta Pierce, “The Ghetto: New Challenge for the Urban League,” *Ebony*, July 1968, 160.

<sup>115</sup> “A Time for Cooperation,” 150.

by seeing the success of other blacks, the middle-class could encourage lower-class blacks to chase after the same kind of success. Consequently, this would help to improve situations for all African Americans. If lower-class blacks could help disprove the stereotypes commonly held by white Americans, the situation for middle-class African Americans might improve too. They might no longer be considered “guilty by association” if lower-class blacks could finally start to step up and prove that they were more than these long-held stereotypes. However, as stated by *Ebony*, this was unlikely to occur if lower-class blacks did not have strong, black role models to look up to. Essentially, the black middle-class had a responsibility to help the lower-class that would ultimately benefit the middle-class itself.<sup>116</sup>

The articles published in *Ebony* were interesting because although they expressed the underlying responsibility of the middle-class, their concept of what the middle-class was did not necessarily align with Moynihan’s concept of the patriarchal middle-class. Moynihan urged African Americans to adopt more traditional, white middle-class ideals by arguing that black women should devote their attention solely to the home while black men acted as breadwinners, however, middle-class African Americans were not as willing to adopt this system for themselves. Instead they celebrated African American women for their strength, independence, and all they had done to help raise up the middle-class as a whole. In August of 1966, *Ebony* released an entire issue dedicated to celebrating the unique position of African American women. In an opening statement from the magazine’s publisher, John Johnson, African American women were lauded for the strength and resilience they had demonstrated throughout their time in American history. Overall, Johnson stated that African American women had long been the backbone of the African American community. As their role had evolved over the centuries, the

---

<sup>116</sup> “A Time for Cooperation,” 150.

fact still remained that African American women were an overwhelming source of strength for all African Americans. Johnson argued that it was the work and tenacity of black women that had brought “the Negro to the position he is in today—a minority on the threshold of finally becoming full and equal citizens of these United States.”<sup>117</sup> Johnson also acknowledged the variety of roles African American women encompassed, from occupying lower paying service positions to filling prestigious positions as ambassadors and doctors to being wives and mothers. According to Johnson, black women did it all and they should be praised for doing so.<sup>118</sup>

An additional article, entitled “A Look Beyond the Matriarchy,” included in this special issue of *Ebony* focused on the changing dynamics of the middle-class African American family. The article argued that it was inevitable that, as African Americans achieved a better middle-class standing, they would more fully assimilate to middle-class family norms. Essentially, matriarchy would fade out over time in favor of a patriarchal family structure. However, though the article emphasized that black women may no longer hold the title of head of household, they were not discouraged from working outside of the home and achieving their own personal fulfillment and independence. Additionally, the article stressed that it was important that women continue to share equal authority with their husbands within the home. And though this article acknowledged that gender roles may shift over time for African American families, it did not discount all that African American women had done to help their families and to help progress their race as a whole. Ultimately, they were still celebrated for their strength and persistence even in the face of hardship and changing dynamics, “we glory in their (women’s) strength, for the Negro’s lot has been difficult; and when the burden of circumstances has overwhelmed out men, our women have carried on with a determination and effectiveness which has been crucial

---

<sup>117</sup> John Johnson, “Negro Woman,” *Ebony*, August 1966, 25.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

to our common advancement.”<sup>119</sup> Additionally, the article emphasized that if gender roles did indeed change over time, it would be as a result of a conscious choice on the part of middle-class African Americans. They would not adopt new gender roles because they were forced to do so, but rather because they wanted to. Women were still ultimately given some choice in the matter, a luxury not often afforded to white middle-class women.<sup>120</sup>

What is especially interesting about this particular issue of *Ebony* is that it was published less than a year after the public release of the Moynihan Report. Despite the arguments made by Moynihan, the African American community, as it was portrayed through *Ebony*, was still willing to accept the image of the strong, independent, black woman that had historically been embraced by the African American community. Though Moynihan argued that women should return to the home to allow African American men a greater chance of securing employment and income, and thus, enabling black families to adopt a more traditional family structure, the articles published in *Ebony* indicate that the black community was not keen to denounce the strength of black women. Rather, the magazine showed that many believed black women should be further recognized for all they had done for the greater African American community, not demonized for their actions.

These same messages persisted well into the late 1960s and into 1970. By 1969, *Ebony* still published articles celebrating the successes of African American women. Just as in the pre-Moynihan Report early 1960s, African American women were still described as carrying out many roles. In an article entitled “Crime Solver in Science Lab,” Mary Jarrett, a hematologist for the Detroit Police Department, was described as a successful, well-educated career woman who

---

<sup>119</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, “A Look Beyond the Matriarchy,” *Ebony*, August 1966, 114.

<sup>120</sup> Lincoln, “A Look Beyond the Matriarchy,” 111-116.

was also able to function as a loving mother to two shy children. Overall, the article celebrated Jarrett for all that she had been able to accomplish in her field of work, while still being a caring mother and wife.<sup>121</sup> In December of 1970, *Ebony* published an additional article celebrating and encouraging the success of black women. The article followed Mrs. Saint Charles Lockett, president of Ethnic Enterprises, an industrial plant in Milwaukee. Not only was Ethnic Enterprises headed by a black, female president, the company was also known for hiring black mothers who relied on welfare. Lockett noted that she hired these women, not only to give them an opportunity to progress financially, but also because she believed that these independent women, who were able to head their own households, “could do nothing but succeed,”<sup>122</sup> and, in Lockett’s opinion, should have been given the opportunity to do so. Lockett also stressed that her company was developed “to be a means rather than an end for the women who worked there.”<sup>123</sup> Lockett wanted Ethnic Enterprises to be a company where women could learn important skills which would make them more marketable to other employers. In fact, after women demonstrated on the job success, Lockett would try to put them in contact with other companies who could potentially provide them with even better paying jobs. In addition to running a company that focused on empowering and enabling lower-class women, Lockett was able to care for her four children and keep up with her domestic obligations. In a sense, Lockett, as portrayed by *Ebony*, was the quintessential middle-class black woman. Not only was she a successful career woman and mother, but she devoted herself to raising up the lower-class by employing black women who may not have had the same opportunities for success elsewhere.

---

<sup>121</sup> “Crime-Solver in Science Lab,” *Ebony*, April 1969, 72-78.

<sup>122</sup> “Woman Power,” *Ebony*, December 1970, 89.

<sup>123</sup> “Woman Power,” 91.

It is important to note that images of strong, independent women persisted into 1970. While it was significant that *Ebony* countered the messages of the Moynihan Report soon after the report was released publically in 1966, it is even more important to know that *Ebony* continued to express this same sentiment for years to come. The consistency of these messages indicates that *Ebony*, as well as the black middle-class as a whole, was not willing to denounce its long standing female independence and success even in light of the controversy that followed the publication of the report and even despite the rise of the Black Power Movement which was often criticized for its hyper-masculinity.

Overall, though the Moynihan report challenged black, middle-class family models and generated substantial controversy, the middle-class, as represented by *Ebony*, responded by celebrating middle-class women and encouraging them to be powerful both in and out of the home. In fact, in 1966, a year after the Moynihan Report was released, the publisher of *Ebony* even went so far as to state “no one will ever be able to assess the value of the good done, nor the extent of the pain suffered by the Negro woman... And no one seems to appreciate the tremendous task she has accomplished in bringing the Negro to the position he is in today—a minority on the threshold of finally becoming a full and equal citizen of these United States.”<sup>124</sup> As evidenced by quotes such as these, the middle-class was not willing to discount its long history of strong, black women in favor of adopting Moynihan’s and white, middle-class America’s version of acceptable family structures. After all, why would black women want to adopt more traditional middle-class roles when white women were beginning to adamantly express their dissatisfaction with their position? At precisely the same time that white middle class women were speaking out against the unhappiness they experienced in their limited

---

<sup>124</sup> Johnson, “Negro Woman,” 25.

middle-class gender roles, black middle-class women were being praised for their roles both in and out of the home. They were encouraged to be mothers, but to also be strong career women, seeking not only personal fulfillment, but the advancement of the entire black race.

Additionally, many African Americans did not agree with Moynihan's arguments not only because they limited the independence of black women, but because he seemed to negate the issues of discrimination and long standing, systemic racism, by blaming all issues of the black community on "pathological" family structures. Throughout his Report, Moynihan alluded to the issues of employment and wage discrimination,<sup>125</sup> but he ultimately stated that a national effort had to be put forth in order to counter the negative effects of pathological family structure. Until pathological family structures could be eradicated, the African American community would never be able to achieve full equality in American society.<sup>126</sup> These same critics also disliked the Moynihan Report for the simple fact that the report lumped all African Americans into one pathological category. Though Moynihan noted that there was a black middle-class, he argued that it was still affected by the same pathological structures and deficits as the lower-class. By painting all African Americans with the same brush, Moynihan was arguably holding all African Americans back by reinforcing long-held stereotypes. By largely ignoring the accomplishments of the middle-class and lumping them with the lower-class, Moynihan made it seem as if all African Americans possessed the same inadequacies and were incapable of actually getting ahead.

Though many middle-class African Americans were upset that Moynihan ignored their success and largely lumped them in with the lower-class, they did believe that more needed to be

---

<sup>125</sup> Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 67-71.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

done to help the lower-class. By uplifting the lower-class, middle-class African Americans believed they might be able to fight back against the negative stereotypes that many white Americans still held against them. Essentially, middle-class blacks felt they had an obligation to the entire race to uplift the lower-class so that conditions within America could improve for all African Americans, including the middle-class itself. As a result, middle-class African Americans made use of one of their greatest assets: strong, independent African American women. These women served as effective role-models for the lower-class. They gave the lower-class something to strive for and demonstrated that success was possible for African Americans.

Essentially, rather than giving into the arguments made by Moynihan in 1965, middle-class African Americans rejected conformity to Moynihan's definition of middle-class success. They rejected the belief that success could only come in the form of patriarchal family structures. The black community chose instead to celebrate its long-heritage of female strength and independence. This point was made abundantly clear through the publication of articles that consistently praised the role of African American middle-class women both before and after the publication of the Moynihan Report. Even though outside forces, such as the Moynihan Report, encouraged the middle-class to abandon their traditional family structures, the middle-class did not give into this prodding. Instead they chose to embrace the land standing role of African American women because, with the support of these strong women, the African American community had been able to advance so significantly. In addition, black women were not only to be celebrated for all that they had done, but for all they could continue to do to help embrace the African American race as a whole.

## Bibliography

- “10 Ways to Keep a Husband Young.” *Ladies Homes Journal*. January 1963.
- “Ambassador of Goodwill for Police Department.” *Ebony*. March 1964.
- Baker, Mortem. “Nothing But A Man, Says Moynihan Foe.” *Afro-American*. 4 December 1965.
- Beale, Frances. “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female.” In Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Berger, Alan S. and William Simon. “Black Families and The Moynihan Report: A Research Evaluation.” *Social Problems* 22, 2 (December 1974): 145-161.
- CBS News. “Black Power, White Backlash.” CBS News Web site, Adobe Flash Player video file. <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2906180n> (accessed April 15, 2012).
- “Civil Rights Act.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/119351/Civil-Rights-Act> (accessed November 12, 2011).
- “Civil Rights Movement.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/119368/civil-rights-movement/288198/Montgomery-bus-boycott-to-the-Voting-Rights-Act> (accessed November 12, 2011).
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trip*. (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- “Crime-Solver in Science Lab.” *Ebony*. April 1969.
- Duberman, Lucile. *Women and Sex in Society*. New York: Praegar Publishers, 1975.
- Duigan, Brian. “Plessy v. Ferguson.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Version. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/464679/Plessy-v-Ferguson> (accessed November 12, 2011).
- Estes, Steve. *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Feldstein, Ruth. *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Freidan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1963.

Geismar, Ludwig L. and Ursula C. Gerhart. "Social Class, Ethnicity, and Family Functioning: Exploring Some Issues Raised by the Moynihan Report." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 30, 3 (August 1968): 480- 487.

Gillette, Michael L. *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

"Hawaii's Top Woman Politician." *Ebony*. April 1963.

Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

"How to Make Money in Your Spare Time." *Ladies Home Journal*. March 1970.

Jennings, Ann and Dell Champlin. "Cultural Contours of Race, Gender, and Class Distinctions: A Critique of Moynihan and Other Functionalist Views." In *The Economic Status of Women Under Capitalism*. By Janice Peterson and Doug Brown. Bookfield, VT: Edward Elgar, 1994.

Johnson, John. "Negro Woman." *Ebony*. August 1966.

Lincoln, C. Eric. "The Absent Father Haunts the Negro Family." *New York Times Magazine*. 28 November 1965.

Lincoln, C. Eric. "A Look Beyond the Matriarchy." *Ebony*. August 1966.

"A Man Around the House." *Ebony Magazine*. January 1966.

McGrory, Mary. "President Talks Frankly to Negroes (June, 6, 1965)." In Ruth Feldstein, 148. *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930- 1965*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Meehan, Thomas. "Moynihan of the Moynihan Report." *New York Times*, 31 July 1966.

Morrison, Allan. "Top Woman Civil Rights Leader." *Ebony*. January 1963.

"A Mother Can't Do a Man's Job." *Newsweek*. August 22, 1966.

Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. "The Negro Family: A Case for National Action." In *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, by Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, 45-124. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1967.

“The Moynihan Report: Reader’s Response.” *The Christian Century*. February 9, 1966.

“My Daughter, the Policeman.” *Ebony*. October 1965.

Nadasen, Premilla. “Expanding the Boundaries of the Women’s Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights.” *Feminist Studies* 28, 2 (Summer 2002): 270-301.

“National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, Inc.” Blackpast.org.  
<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/national-association-colored-women-s-clubs-inc-1896>  
(accessed April 15, 2012).

“The Negro Woman.” *Ebony*. September 1963.

“New Day, New Doctor.” *Ebony*. April 1964.

“Outstanding Woman Doctors.” *Ebony*. May 1964.

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

Pierce, Ponchitta. “The Ghetto: New Challenge for the Urban League.” *Ebony*. July 1968.

Rustin, Bayard. “Moynihan and the Blacks- - To Clear the Record.” In Bayard Rustin Papers, ProQuest History Vault (accessed 14 February 2012).

“Scientific Couple Finds Success in Albuquerque.” *Ebony*. June 1965.

Smith, Sarah. “The Impact of Media on Women of the Post War Era.” Historical Methods thesis, Lycoming College, 2010.

Spock, Benjamin. “Should Mother’s Work?” *Ladies Home Journal*. January 1963

Staples, Robert. “Myth,” *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*, 1971. In Steve Estes, 126. *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Sugrue, Thomas J. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*. New York: Random House, 2008.

“A Time for Cooperation.” *Ebony*. October 1967.

“The Typical White Suburbanite.” *Ebony*. August 1965.

- “Voting Rights Act.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition.  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/633044/Voting-Rights-Act> (accessed November 12, 2011).
- “West Virginia’s Director of Mental Health.” *Ebony*. January 1964.
- “Why Working Mothers Have Happier Children.” *Ladies Home Journal*. June 1970.
- “Woman Fills Man-Size Union Job.” *Ebony*. April 1965.
- “Woman Power.” *Ebony*. December 1970.
- Young, Whitney M. “The Role of the Middle-Class Negro.” *Ebony*. September 1963.
- Young, Whitney. “Broken Homes Result, Not Cause of Negro’s Denial of Rights.” *Philadelphia Tribune*. 25 January 1966.
- Young, Whitney. “Real Message of Moynihan Report.” *New York Amsterdam News*. 29 January 1966.

