

A Shocking Report on White Families

Craig Cantoni

A sobering and shocking report has been written about the state of white families. It has striking similarities to the famous Moynihan report about black families, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

In 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a sociologist by profession, published his controversial and prescient report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action."¹ The report detailed how the history of slavery, Jim Crow, poverty, and the massive movement of rural blacks to cities had created severe social pathologies among American blacks, most notably the marginalization of black men, the development of a matriarchal culture, and a high rate of out-of-wedlock births and broken families.

Moynihan predicted that the pathologies would worsen if not addressed and would have profound social, political, and economic repercussions.

Now a report details similar pathologies among white families of today, with similar social, political, and economic repercussions.

Actually, it is the same report, the Moynihan report.

Well, not exactly the same. To make it nearly the same, one just has to substitute the outdated and politically incorrect word "Negro" in the old Moynihan report with the word "white." By doing so, the report will then describe the current situation among a growing number of white families (and white or brown Hispanic families).

By some measures, the situation is even worse today for white families than it was in 1965 for black families.

Take out-of-wedlock births. The rate of such births is higher now for whites than it was in 1965 for blacks. It's a similar story for divorce rates and the incidence of single-mother families.

Moynihan wrote in 1965 that "21 percent of Negro women who have ever married are separated, divorced, or their husbands are absent for other reasons." Today, by contrast, about a third of first marriages for white women end in divorce or separation. For black women, the figure is 47%, or more than twice as high as in 1965.

"The white family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability," said Moynihan. Unfortunately, the stability was short-lived.

In 1965, 25% of black families were headed by a woman, versus about 12% for white families. Today, nearly 70% of black children and 25% of white children are now raised by a single parent (or grandparent), typically a female.²

As in Moynihan's day, such children are twice as likely to live in poverty and much more likely to drop out of school and to have disciplinary and behavioral problems. Less directly noticeable are the insidious effects on the male psyche and on the economic prospects for men.

In writing about the problems experienced by men in a matriarchal culture, Moynihan said that there were really two women in charge in many black families. He quoted another sociologist, Edward Wight Bakke:

Consider the fact that relief investigators or case workers are normally women and deal with the housewife. Already suffering a loss in prestige and authority in the family because of his failure to be the chief bread winner, the male head of the family feels deeply this obvious transfer of planning for the family's well being to two women, one of

them an outsider. His role is reduced to that of errand boy to and from the relief office.

Left without a traditional societal role and not having male role models, young men don't do as well as women in school and work. This was true in Moynihan's time, as he had observed, and it is true today, although you wouldn't know it from feminist rhetoric then and now. In Moynihan's time, a significantly higher percentage of black girls than black boys made the honor roll in school. Today, black and white girls tend to outperform their male counterparts academically, including higher high school and college graduation rates.

Many of today's young white men are the stereotypical "losers," the guys with backward caps, tattoos, few career prospects, and little likelihood of finding an industrious, careerist woman to marry. Such women would rather stay single than hitch their future and the future of their children to a man who is going nowhere.

It was no accident that of the blacks who made it to the middle class in 1965, most were employed and married. Like whites, they had fewer children than unmarried blacks, because they understood that if they concentrated their resources in a smaller family, their offspring would have a better chance of success.

Moynihan saw work as the salvation for black men, a way to restore their self-worth and role in the family. He lamented, though, that the average monthly unemployment rate for black men in 1964 was 9%. However, as he pointed out, that figure was misleading, because some 29% of black males were unemployed at one time or another.

In 2011, the unemployment rate for black men was about 18%, depending on the source and how the rate is calculated; but that increased to 26% for black men without a high school diploma. By contrast, the rate for white men was about 8%, rising to 12% for white men without a high school diploma.³

To summarize: Today, on average, white families and white men have similar or worse pathologies than black families and black men had in 1965 when Moynihan wrote his report. And a case can be made that it is even more difficult for white men (and black men) of today to be productive members of society and contributing husbands and fathers, given that the welfare state has grown since 1965 and made men even less necessary, important, and valued.

The original Moynihan report was mostly ignored or vilified. My updated version will no doubt have the same fate.

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