

To Understand Today's America, Read Yesteryear's Sociology

Craig J. Cantoni

A half-century ago, two progressive social commentators detailed the failures of anti-poverty programs and predicted the divisiveness of today's "wokeness." To understand American society today, it is more enlightening to read the sociology of yesteryear than the sociology of today.

Duke University Professor John Staddon would probably agree. A professor of psychology, neuroscience, and biology, he has warned that science is being driven out of the social sciences by political correctness and its new variant, "wokeness."

This curious new word form derives from "woke," which refers to a perceived awareness of issues of so-called social and racial justice, and derives from the African-American vernacular expression, "Stay woke."

The thesis of Staddon's forthcoming book, *Fact vs. Passion: Science in the Age of Unreason*, is that many social scientists have difficulty distinguishing between reality and their personal wish for how the world should be, especially in matters of race, gender, and class.

That wasn't the case previously, when two notable commentators on social issues admitted their mistakes, went against some of the progressive tenets of the times, and took a balanced view of conservative tenets, seeing some as good and some as bad.

In other words, the two followed the facts, even if the facts went against their ideology.

That's a rarity in today's divided America, where, on both the left and right, journalists, commentators, intellectuals, academics, politicians, and the public in general tend to stay within their respective echo chambers.

The two notables of yesteryear were Nathan Glazer and New York's Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan. A trip through the twists and turns of their thinking will jostle you out of your comfort zone, whether you are on the right or the left.

Glazer and Moynihan co-published a book in 1963 with an N-word in the subtitle, a word that is now seen as outdated, insensitive, and inflammatory: *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. A second edition of the book was published in 1970, and a Leopold Classic Library edition appeared in 2016. Glazer published an insightful book on his own in 1988: *The Limits of Social Policy*.

And in 1965, while serving as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Lyndon B. Johnson, Moynihan wrote his controversial report on black poverty, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action."¹ He would go on to represent New York in the U.S. Senate as a Democrat.

The main thesis of the Moynihan report continues to trigger howls of denial. The thesis was that anti-poverty

programs would have limited success in black communities in the face of the rising numbers of single-parent families.

The 1960s and '70s saw an explosion of social theories and programs in the U.S., so much so that Europe looked to America for ideas on how to achieve a better society. There were heated debates back then, as there are today, about how to provide a welfare safety net to the poor without creating a disincentive to work, and how to assist single mothers and fatherless children without creating a disincentive for dads to support their children and be present in the household.

In *The Limits of Social Policy*, Glazer detailed the mind-blowing number of social-welfare programs in the form of income support, free medical care, housing subsidies, jobs programs, and increased education spending. He explained both sides of the raging debate on incentives and disincentives, and discussed the downsides of the idea of a universal income, an idea that has been resurrected today as universal basic income or UBI.

A firm believer in social welfare for the poor and disadvantaged, Glazer was forthright about the failure of progressive theorists to accept two glaring realities. He wrote:

In our social policies we are trying to deal with the breakdown of traditional ways of handling distress. These traditional ways are located in the family primarily, but also in the ethnic group, the neighborhood, the church....

In our efforts to deal with the breakdown of these traditional structures, our social policies are weakening them further and making matters in some important respects worse. We are making no steady headway against a sea of misery. Our efforts to deal with distress are themselves increasing distress.²

If that weren't bad enough, the following would certainly get him cancelled today:

This may be something of a caricature, but it gets, I think, to the essence of the liberal view of social problems. The typical stance in this view of social policy is blame—not of course of the unfortunates suffering from the social problem the social policy is designed to remove, but blame rather of our society and political system.²

It wouldn't be surprising that Glazer's grave has been desecrated for what he wrote about public education and the reasons why some racial/ethnic groups do better academically than others. He said that a major cause of poor grades was "the welfare culture itself, or more cautiously, the experience of living in poor female-headed families dependent on income transfers and living in concentrations

of such people.”²

Conservatives didn’t go unscathed by Glazer, who devoted a chapter to Ronald Reagan’s social policies. He began by using the pejorative “right-wing” to describe the Reagan administration, but as is the custom today among liberals and the media, the adjective “left-wing” was not used to describe leftists.

Though not a fan of Reagan, Glazer wrote that the President’s actual welfare cuts were not as severe as his rhetoric, and that irrespective of Reagan, the times had changed. Due to a general disillusionment with social policies, the “day of the ‘laundry list’—the array of new programs for all possible problems and constituencies—seems gone.”²

Let’s turn now to *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Both authors would be cancelled for what they wrote, especially what they wrote about the coverage of black violence by the mass media and the intelligentsia.

They were particularly critical of the coverage of the assassination of Malcolm X and of the shoot-outs between Black Panthers and police in Oakland, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The two wrote about the intelligentsia as follows: “Instead of introducing clarity and sanity, the intelligentsia devoted itself to encouraging the varied fantasies and the fascination with violence of black militants.... The number of dead policemen is not of any interest to the intelligentsia.”³ And they said this about the media: “During this decade intellectuals continued their surprising conquest of the mass media, which began after the Second World War.”³

Sound familiar?

Incidentally, Glazer and Moynihan were impressed by Malcolm X, as I was, but didn’t say why. Perhaps it was because he wanted blacks to become self-reliant without the paternalism and condescension of whites—both of which are in abundance today, along with hollow virtue-signaling.

In the introduction to the second edition of *The Melting Pot*, the two reflected on where they had been correct and incorrect in the first edition and on developments in America in the seven years since its publication in 1963.

One development they found regrettable and harmful was the distillation of the scores of ethnic groups in the nation into a handful of contrived racial categories, which have become chiseled in stone today as White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific-Islander, and Native-American.

They called the trend “ominous,” said the labels were a “biologically and humanly monstrous naming,” and warned that it was leading to the scores of diverse ethnic groups in the white category being typecast as oppressors and everyone else as the oppressed—in spite of the fact that many of the hundred or so ethnic groups in the white category had been oppressed themselves and had not been seen as white by the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant establishment.

The two authors were prescient. This corruption of history and sociology has led 51 years later to today’s racial identity politics, to the racist notion that whites are somehow genetically evil, and to the class notion that whites are economically, educationally, and politically privileged,

although many white ethnic groups are doing poorly relative to various non-white ethnic groups.

What the authors wrote a half-century ago about these fallacies is still germane today. An excerpt:

The same kind of diversity we find among whites prevails among the newer and poorer groups that are now considered in opposition to whites, that is, Negroes and Puerto Ricans (who are mostly white, which demonstrates one weakness in phrasing the struggle in racial terms). Indeed, much of our thinking about racial and ethnic conflict in the society has been badly flawed by our tendency to see two “sides,” and to ascribe uniformity of one kind or another to both. All the whites are affluent, all the blacks and Puerto Ricans are poor. Or all the whites are racists, all of the blacks are militant.³

The diversity movement of today also does not recognize the wide diversity within racial groups, because it sees each group as homogenous instead of heterogenous—an ignorant and harmful perspective.

In particular, the movement doesn’t recognize the ethnic and class diversity of blacks, although blacks encompass a wide range of values, beliefs, customs, experiences, cultures, and ancestry. Descendants of free blacks in New England have a different history than descendants of slaves in the South. Middle- and upper-class African-Americans have different cultural norms and viewpoints than impoverished blacks living in crime-ridden inner-city neighborhoods. And native-born African-Americans have different perspectives and traditions than recent immigrants from Africa or blacks who have lived all their lives in the Caribbean or South America.

Considering “whites,” Glazer and Moynihan wrote about the diversity among Italians, who are one of the ethnocultural groups featured in their book. As the grandson of poor and poorly educated Italian immigrants, and the son of working-class parents, I found that the authors had a refreshing understanding of the trials and tribulations of Italian immigrants and their children in America, as well as what life was like for Italians in the old country.

Unlike what has been portrayed in television shows and movies, the authors knew that the Italians of New York City were not representative of Italians in all other parts of the country, including my hometown of St. Louis, in customs, cuisine, skills, and traits. Those who settled in New York (and most of the East Coast) tended to be from Sicily and Southern Italy, while those who settled elsewhere tended to be from Northern Italy. Even among those two divisions, there were marked differences between Italians, depending on which province or former city-state they were from.

Despite these differences, most had poverty in common, as was the case with my fraternal grandfather, who first worked as a coal miner in southern Illinois upon immigrating to America, before moving to St. Louis.

But as with other ethnic groups spotlighted in *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Italians had two cultural norms in common that were indispensable in overcoming discrimination and

climbing out of poverty. One, they had strong, close-knit family bonds; two, they carved out cohesive neighborhoods built on mutual support and shared values, centered on a parish church and school.

To that point, in front of the church in the Italian section of St. Louis, where my parents were born and raised, is a statue an Italian immigrant family carrying all their possessions in valises. Somehow, in spite of being poor, my fraternal and maternal grandparents were able to send their children to parochial elementary school and high school, where they got a good education and the reinforcement of moral values.

This brings us to the main theme of the book, backed up by research: that where social policies and/or cultural norms have resulted in broken families and communities, it is exceedingly difficult to remedy educational disparities, income inequality, and self-defeating behavior.

Too many of today's social "scientists"—really ideologues—refuse to accept this, and instead, blame white privilege and institutional racism.

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2. Glazer N. *The Limits of Social Policy*. Harvard University Press; 1988.
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AAPS PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL POLICY

Medical care is a professional service, not a right. Rights (as to life, liberty, and property) may be defended by force, if necessary. Professional services are subject to economic laws, such as supply and demand, and are not properly procured by force.

Physicians are professionals. Professionals are agents of their patients or clients, not of corporations, government, insurers, or other entities. Professionals act according to their own best judgment, not government "guidelines," which soon become mandates. Physicians' decisions and procedures cannot be dictated by overseers without destroying their professionalism.

Third-party payment introduces conflicts of interest. Physicians are best paid directly by the recipients of their services. The insurer's contract should be only with subscribers, not with physicians. Patients should pay their physician a mutually agreed-upon fee; the insurer should reimburse the subscriber according to the terms of the contract.

Government regulations reduce access to care. Barriers to market entry, and regulations that impose costs and burdens on the provision of care need to be greatly reduced. Examples include insurance mandates, certificate of need, translation requirements, CLIA regulation of physician office laboratories, HIPAA requirements, FDA restrictions on freedom of speech and physicians' judgment, etc.

Honest, publicly accessible pricing and accounting ("transparency") is essential to controlling costs and optimizing access. Government and other third-party payment or price-

fixing obscures the true value of a service, which can only be determined by a buyer's willingness to pay. The resulting misallocation of resources creates both waste and unavailability of services.

Confidentiality is essential to good medical care. Trust is the foundation of the patient-physician relationship. Patient confidences should be preserved; information should be released only upon patient informed consent, with rare exceptions determined by law and related to credible immediate threats to the safety or health of others.

Physicians should be treated fairly in licensure, peer review, and other proceedings. Physicians should not fear loss of their livelihood or burdensome legal expenses because of baseless accusations, competitors' malice, hospitals' attempts to silence dissent, or refusal to violate their consciences. They should be accorded both procedural and substantive due process. They do not lose the basic rights enjoyed by Americans simply because of their vocation.

Medical insurance should be voluntary. While everyone has the responsibility to pay for goods and services he uses, insurance is not the only or best way to finance medical care. It greatly increases costs and expenditures. The right to decline to buy a product is the ultimate and necessary protection against low quality, overpriced offerings by monopolistic providers.

Coverage is not care. Health plans deny payment and ration care. Their promises are often broken. The only reliable protection against serious shortages and deterioration of quality is the right of patients to use their own money to buy the care of their choice.