

Tribute to Daniel P. Moynihan

by Nathan Glazer

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There have been many meetings, seminars, and events to memorialize the passing of Daniel P. Moynihan. He earned many distinctions, filled many important offices, wrote many books. He was four times senator from the state of New York, American ambassador to the United Nations, American ambassador to India, domestic advisor to President Nixon, professor of education and government at Harvard University, assistant secretary of labor in the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and a key initiator and founder of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. And this is only a partial listing of the posts he held and the good work he did.

But today we pay tribute to his long and fruitful association with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He became a member of the Academy in 1966, when he was a professor at Harvard, but before that he had already been involved in and guided important projects of the Academy. The 1960s were marked by the increasing salience of the problems of race, poverty, and urban decline and disorder, and in the analysis of all of these Pat Moynihan was a master. He participated in Academy conferences on the increasingly turbulent issue of the condition of Negro Americans in the early 1960s, which climaxed in the publication in 1965 and 1966 of two large issues of *Daedalus* on the Negro American. Moynihan's major article in *Daedalus*, "Employment, Income

and the Ordeal of the Negro Family," was decisive in supplementing and clarifying his report to President Johnson on the disaster overcoming the Negro family – a report that had been massively misrepresented in the media and in public discussion. It described what was happening to the Negro family and argued that the answer lay not in social work but in jobs and income. Moynihan's article in *Daedalus* sharpened that point.

His involvement with the Academy's project on Negro Americans led directly to his leadership of an Academy project on the problem of poverty, which was clearly one root of the problems of Negro Americans. Pat Moynihan became the chairman of a continuing Academy seminar on race and poverty that met regularly during 1966 – 1967. This seminar resulted in the publication in 1969 of an important Academy volume, *On Understanding Poverty*, which Moynihan edited. In introducing the volume, Talcott Parsons, then president of the Academy, described it as "the result of the first continuing seminar of the Academy dealing with American domestic problems." Until then, the Academy's work in public policy had concentrated on security issues, the control of atomic arms, and the like. The book was widely noted, widely cited: It was an important contribution to the understanding of the complex problem of poverty.

Race, poverty, the family, and the social policies that tried to deal with race and poverty were continuing interests of Pat Moynihan as a writer, researcher, and policymaker. But his interests spread beyond these issues to the questions raised by ethnicity and ethnic con-



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flict, and this at a time when neither ethnicity nor ethnic conflict were much in the center of public or academic interest. Having begun his political career in New York City's Democratic Party, Moynihan of course could not be unaware of the significance of ethnicity and the power of ethnic attachments. But his interest was sharpened when I drew him into collaboration with me in the early 1960s in writing a book on the ethnic groups of New York City, entitled *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963). It was not long after that book was published that we had to take account in a second edition of the increasing rancor and violence around issues of race, religion, and ethnicity.

In the wake of that book and as we saw the increasing salience of ethnic issues in various parts of the world in the 1970s, Moynihan and I decided to launch an Academy project on ethnicity, extending our concern from the United States to Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the great communist empires of Soviet Russia and China. This project resulted in the publication of our co-edited volume, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, in 1975. It is still in print and widely cited despite the enormous expansion of publications in that field in the years since. That volume became the first in a series of Academy projects on immigration, ethnicity, and ethnic conflict in which the Academy cooperated with scholars in France, Germany,

and elsewhere, and which resulted in the publication of a number of important books. I should note here that Corinne Schelling of the Academy staff played a key role in bringing to fruition the publication of the books *On Understanding Poverty* and *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, and in extending the Academy's work on ethnicity and immigration into collaborative projects with scholars in other countries.

Despite Moynihan's great and continuing interest in these issues, his direct involvement in such projects was no longer possible when he became senator from New York in 1976. He had moved from writer, researcher, and academic to statesman – the word certainly fits rather better than its near synonym "politician," even though Moynihan was a master of the arts of politics, too, as indicated by his successive elections to the Senate with ever larger majorities.

Moynihan was known for his perspicuity and far-sightedness in drawing attention to important issues before others had taken much notice of them. In the 1980s he criticized the CIA's and other government agencies' estimates of the strength of the Soviet Union. He was no expert on Soviet Russia but he understood one thing that the experts apparently did not: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a multiethnic empire in

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which one ethnic group dominated many others. Even though conflicts among them were suppressed by the totalitarian regime and were not evident, they were there. When the Soviet Union broke up Moynihan was virtually alone among the public figures who had pointed to the fault lines of divisiveness and the potential weakness represented by the dominance of one group over many. Certainly his work on ethnicity, beginning with our book on New York City and extending to ethnic conflict around the world in the Academy project of the 1970s, sensitized him to this issue.

I have given a somewhat parochial picture of the work and mind of Daniel P. Moynihan in concentrating on his connections with the Academy. There were so many other issues on which he played key and historic roles: the reform of welfare, the shoring up of social security, the improvement of the design of federal buildings, the creation of new institutions of research in public affairs. He was a unique figure in American intellectual and political life. It was said of him that he had written more books than many members of the Senate had read. His work as a senator for twenty-four years – and there are no sabbaticals in the Senate – meant that the writing of books was limited to his summers, and some were inevitably sketchy and brief. But when one considers his last few books one sees immediately how his mind was naturally drawn to and encompassed the kind of issue that the Academy is best at addressing: one that for its better understanding inherently requires bringing together people from many disciplines and from many worlds.

In his last books, he demonstrated his continued remarkable ability to seize on key issues whose significance would only become greater in time. In 1990, Moynihan

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published with Harvard University Press *On the Law of Nations*, a defense of the possibilities and prospects of international law. Moynihan was concerned with certain cavalier actions of the Reagan administration, which had pushed against and beyond the fragile restraints of international law. Compared to what we have recently seen, the issue then was no larger than a man's hand, but it is now a very large cloud indeed. In 1993 Moynihan published *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Affairs* with Oxford University Press. As we look at Iraq and Israel and Palestine today – not to mention the Caucasus, the Congo, Sri Lanka, and on and on – the issues to which Moynihan drew attention then have only become larger.

In 1997 Moynihan conducted Senate hearings on the scope of secrecy in the government. Yale University Press published his last book, *Secrecy: The American Experience*, in 1998. The hearings and book dealt with an issue that can only be of ever increasing concern. What should a democratic government keep secret from the people? And with what consequences? Moynihan was troubled by the enormous expansion of the number and size of our security agencies entitled to stamp their work "secret." This "secret" category of government documents is of unimaginable quantity and range. How does all this shape policy, and can it be good policy when so much is withheld from the people, from actors in government, per-

haps up to and including the President? Moynihan raised these questions; how prescient they are today.

Moynihan was one of our great public servants. But he was also, as we look at his relations to the Academy and to the kinds of issues he brought to public attention, the ideal member of our Academy. And so we of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences must note with sadness his passing, and record our appreciation of the gifts of insight and understanding he brought to us. ■

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