Book Reviews

Lost in the Shuffle: A Political Case History

The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy. LEE RAINWATER and WILLIAM L. YANCEY. M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1967. 511 pp., illus. Paper, $3.95.

The present treatment of the Moynihan controversy is a most revealing account of the foibles, pitfalls, and failings that still beset attempts to make scientific information a basis of public policy.

During the spring of 1965, Daniel P. Moynihan, then Assistant Secretary of Labor, distributed to a limited number of federal administrators a report entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* The major arguments of the report were clear and concise, and reflected Moynihan's view that government policy could benefit from social science theory and research. The report began by maintaining that the Negro demand for civil rights was being met, at least on a legal basis, and that it was now time to go beyond civil rights to establish equality in the distribution of resources and achievements. The focus was then turned to the Negro family, which was said to be at the heart of the deterioration of the Negro condition. An analysis of parental absenteeism, illegitimacy, and the role of the Negro male all pointed to a crumbling family structure. A number of factors were pinpointed as giving rise to the state of the lower-class Negro family. Slavery, reconstruction, urbanization, unemployment and poverty, and the wage system were all strongly implicated. While each of these factors was felt to have contributed to family breakdown, the ailing family itself was seen to engender additional roadblocks to equality. For one, as a result of the matriarchal family structure, the Negro male suffered psychologically. Negro children from broken homes were also found to do more poorly in school. In addition, crime, delinquency, occupational disadvantage, and alienation were traced to family disorganization. This "tangle of pathology" was seen not only as self-perpetuating, but as increasing in seriousness, and as presenting a clear challenge for national action.

Throughout the report, the major points were supported by reliable findings or dominant theoretical contributions in the social sciences. So compelling were the implications of the document that it served as the basis for President Johnson's widely heralded civil rights speech at Howard University that June. In the speech Johnson promised the Negro people that a White House conference of scholars, Negro leaders, and government representatives would soon be held which would map out a strategy for meeting the challenge developed in the Moynihan report.

To be sure, the report was not without fault. The tone was overly dramatic; data available to Moynihan which would have weakened several of his arguments were unused; comparative data for Negro and white populations were not used extensively enough; heavy reliance was placed on correlational data which lent themselves to explanations other than those the report proposed; and the strong emphasis on family deterioration detracted from the larger network of interrelated factors involved in the problem. However, such difficulties were only minor in comparison to the other forces which precipitated the storm of controversy that followed. It is in laying bare these additional forces that the present volume is most successful.

The analysis itself rests on a rich array of resources. Rainwater and Yancey interviewed some 61 representatives of academia, the civil rights movement, the federal government, and other relevant organizations. In addition to a variety of documents, the authors were able to draw from Moynihan's personal files and from their own experiences with the White House conference.

Fact and opinion are successfully marshaled from these widely varying sources, and the outcome is an enlightening and absorbing account of the controversy. The stage is set with a discussion of the political situation at the time the report was written, and of Moynihan's personal strategy in undertaking the task. The report is then reprinted in full, along with the President's Howard University speech. The heart of the book, however, is its description and analysis of the ensuing controversy.

First the press comes under fire, as the authors demonstrate the various ways in which the report was distorted and portions exaggerated to make it appear as if the Negro family were being held to blame for the predicament of Negroes. The emphasis on the role of the press is indeed appropriate, for, as the book makes apparent, many of the central protagonists in the controversy were influenced primarily by the journalistic accounts and had little or no familiarity with the actual report itself.

The government, civil rights organizations, and the academic community come under similar scrutiny. In the case of government, the reader is led to see how basic differences in orientation between the President and his appointees, on the one hand, and career civil servants on the other exacerbated the controversy. A central theme emerges in this context which pervades, if not haunts, the remaining chapters of the volume. That is, makers of public policy may be prone to distort, deny, defend against, selectively perceive, and misinterpret both scientifically established fact and theory in order to maintain vested interests. If science stands in the way of programs or positions to which one is emotionally and socially committed, science is likely to be the loser. The negligible impact that the findings linking cigarette smoking to cancer have had on cigarette sales in the United States demonstrates that such recalcitrance is not limited to the policy-making domain. Rainwater and Yancey are duly bothered by such phenomena, and during the course of the volume they spell out a number of ways in which both science and government might guard against the misuse of scientific findings. In light of the powerful social and psychological forces at play, their suggestions appear somewhat pallid.

By the time the planning sessions for the White House conference were held, some six months after the report had become a public issue, the Moynihan report had been pushed to the sidelines to permit progress. Some had

maintained that Moynihan had condemned the Negro family and was thus a subtle racist; others felt the report took the emphasis away from the important problems of equal rights and Negro economic development; still others felt the report required either too great a federal investment, or, on the other hand, required the Negro to pull all the weight. It is no small wonder that during the opening meeting of the planning session the executive director jokingly announced, "I want you to know that no such person as Daniel Patrick Moynihan exists."

When the actual White House conference, attended by over 2400 representatives, was held during the spring of 1966, the Moynihan report had faded almost completely into obscurity. From Rainwater and Yancey's point of view, the recommendations developed at the conference failed on several counts. Not only did they not reflect the views of the representatives, but they contained few real departures from current government policy. The strong advocacy of local action also made it appear that, because of its Vietnam commitment, the government was attempting to avoid any heavy financial expenditures. In effect, the conference had not met Moynihan's challenge.

At this point in the book, which may seem premature to many readers, the historical analysis is brought to a close, and the authors turn to the task of drawing conclusions and developing recommendations. The 24 issues treated here are broad in scope, and in fact sometimes seem to have only remote connection with the preceding material. The authors' point that the government needs much more extensive liaison with civil rights leaderships and that civil rights organizations should attempt to develop expertise in social science is particularly well taken. A pointed discussion also appears concerning the problematic position of the social scientist confronted simultaneously with his data, the pressures of various social groups, and his own personal convictions. Less convincing, however, is the authors' moral dictate that social scientists have a "responsibility" to study social problems, monitor the use made of the findings, and comment publicly on the applications. One might argue that an individual should be free to reject any of these imperatives in order to pursue his own intellectual goals. This issue of the social and moral responsibility of the scientist has not been satisfactorily resolved in the scientific community, and a good airing of the problem is long overdue.

In spite of the enlightenment the book provides about the controversy, it does have its shortcomings. If one applied the criteria traditionally used in a number of intellectual disciplines, the work would not pass muster. As a sociological study, the methodology can be faulted on a number of counts. Not only are there grave problems with the method of sampling employed, but the questioning of the participants in the controversy was apparently quite unsystematic. In addition, the investigators often allow their own biases to dominate their stand or interpretation of events. Their sentiments are decidedly pro Moynihan. For those who aren't content with the authors' interpretation of various issues, however, over a third of the volume consists of reprints of the major documents of relevance. As political science, the work has much to recommend it on a descriptive level. On an analytic level, the offering is thin. There are few generalizations that could allow one to penetrate other, conceptually similar, problems. As a historical account, the book is enlightening but not thorough. Qualifiers such as "presumably," "apparently," "perhaps," and "probably" abound in the text and cause the reader often to wonder about the authors' success in obtaining "inside" information from several of the groups under study.

And yet, the fact that the volume does not attempt to measure up by traditional yardsticks may at the same time be one of its greatest assets. In sidestepping the standard approaches, the authors are able to shift easily from one perspective to another to provide a document of considerable insight and broad significance. In essence, they are striving for a new form of intellectual endeavor, a form which cuts across standard intellectual domains to engage the scientist, political official, and civil rights worker alike. This is no simple task, and though this book may not represent the end point, it is a giant step in a challenging and important direction.

KENNETH J. GERGEN
Department of Psychology,
Swarthmore College,
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

A Battle Ended, An Issue Unresolved

The California Oath Controversy. DAVID P. GARDNER. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967. 343 pp. $6.50.

This study of the oath controversy of 1949–1952 at the University of California is an impressive addition to the literature that deals with the long and largely futile effort between 1940 and 1960, at both national and state levels, to find a workable, constitutional balance between the demands of national security and the interests of individual freedom. Its author, David P. Gardner, is assistant professor of higher education and assistant to the chancellor at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Gardner has had access to previously unavailable papers and records, such as those of the regents of the university and President Robert Sproul. His research and writing are marked by a thoroughness, objectivity, and style that make this volume a model of good scholarship in the social sciences. One senses that Gardner has a deep concern for the people and the issues that figured in the controversy, but his book is singularly free of the coloration that mars much contemporary writing by social scientists who have made strong personal commitments to political and social causes.

In March 1949, the regents of the University of California, on the recommendation of President Sproul, voted to add to the oath of allegiance already required of all employees of the university a disclaimer of belief in, or membership in any organization advocating, overthrow of the United States government by force or other illegal means. Thereafter, for three years regents, faculty members, administrators, alumni, the legislature, and the courts in California were drawn into an ever-widening circle of disagreement, conflicting actions, and frustration. Eventually the regents voted to dismiss 31 teachers who had refused to sign the revised oath; the state legislature passed an act requiring a similar oath of all state employees, including university professors; all professors who had not been dismissed signed the legislative oath; and the courts overruled the dismissal of the 31 and the regents' oath requirement on the ground that the