

# Good-by cruel sixties, hello calm seventies

**Moynihan says the turbulence of the sixties was due to an aberration that will not pass this way again**

Violence in the streets, on the campuses and in the prisons . . . mass arrests, political assassinations, tear gas and drugs. All of these things were signs of the times in the 1960's. But Daniel P. Moynihan, former Presidential adviser and Harvard sociologist and now Ambassador to India, says, "Things are going to be much better than they are."

In the summer issue of the *PUBLIC INTEREST* quarterly, he outlines his optimistic prognosis: "Most of the events that tore American society almost apart (or so it seemed in the 1960's) arose from conditions unique to the decade in which they occurred. They had not ever existed before. They will not ever exist again." And having survived a tumultuous and rending decade, he says, "We can see ourselves resuming the fairly well-defined directions of a democracy, and doing so as a fundamentally competent people."

Moynihan enumerates several elements he feels came together in a synergistic fashion to produce the singular symptoms of the sixties. Outstanding among them are: the war in Southeast Asia, changes in attitude toward race relations, drug use, ecology, patriotism and dependency on government. But there was one more ingredient, a catalyst that made the whole mixture explosive. An extraordinary number of young people were added to the pot. "The 1960's," says Moynihan, "saw a profound demographic change occur in American society which was a one-time change, a growth in population faster than any that had ever occurred before, or any that will ever occur again, with respect to a particular subgroup in the population—namely those persons from 14 to 24 years of age."

It is this group, he says, that causes most of the "trouble" in any society. But, "they are also the people who are the most interesting, most attractive, brightest, healthiest, liveliest . . . everybody knows you run the fastest, dance longest, and, at least in my youth, drink the most in these

years." But the passage from 14 to 24, from childhood to adulthood, is "extraordinarily turbulent." And, says Moynihan, it has become especially so because of the constant dropping of the age of physical maturity and the extension of the age of social maturity. "You might be physically mature at 12 and not be thought socially mature until you have had two years of graduate school at MIT. And if, in between, young people become turbulent, one is not to be surprised."

But the 1960's are gone, and there will never be such a large cohort of volatile young people again. With demographic data from Norman B. Ryder of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Moynihan points out that the 14- to 24-year-old group increased by 13.8 million persons in the 1960's. This was a 52 percent increase in one decade, five times the average rate of the preceding 70 years. The same age group will grow by only 600,000 in the 1970's and it will decline in the 1980's. The ratio of young people (14 to 24) to older people (25 to 64) increased 39 percent in the 1960's, after either an increase of zero or a decline in every decade from the 1880's on.

Moynihan's hypothesis is that "suddenly a new social class was created in the United States, so large in its number that it was fundamentally isolated [on campuses, in slums and in the armed forces] from the rest of society. . . . A youth culture developed. Youth acquired its own music, its own form of dress, its own grammar, all to a degree without precedent in the United States."

"Well, it's over. That time is past." Moynihan says, "We are going through a period now when we are going to have a profound change in almost all of our politics, almost all of our social relationships, because this period is behind us."

What is ahead of us, he says, is a long-overdue change in the operation of institutions. State and local governments, for instance, went through hell in the 1960's, he says, because they had the job of looking after young people. Schooling, housing, hospitalization, etc., had to be provided for them. But with fewer of them and with revenue sharing, these jobs will be much easier. For example, if the ratio of teachers to pupils remains the same, not one additional teacher will be needed in all of the 1970's.

Because a population that is barely growing tends to be curiously straitened and strict in its behavior, Moynihan predicts a more "conservative" society. The radical leaders of the 1960's, for instance, (such as Abbie Hoffman, Angela Davis and Renie Davis) have left the streets and taken up such things as reading, writing and mysticism. But Moynihan says, "This doesn't mean you have a society sated with conservatism. Ideological radicalism may even flourish." There just won't be as many young radicals around to carry their protests into the streets. Instead, says Moynihan, they will "think left, live right."

Moynihan does not say that the 1960's were all bad. "In some respects," he says, "we came out a stronger society." Race, male-female and foreign

relations have matured. And maturity, says Moynihan, is a sign that marks the movement from that period of 14 to 24 into that period beyond.

"And so," he concludes, "it will be different, and it will not in every respect be better. It will certainly in no respect be more exciting. But it will, I think, be more rewarding. I think we have come out of our time of troubles." □

—Robert J. Trotter

