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La Vida, Moynihan, and Other Libels: Migration, Social Science, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Welfare Queen[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article is interested in how the "welfare queen" was born, that neoconservative icon that blames poverty on "bad mothers." This figure is usually located in relationship to the Moynihan report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. This article traces a closely related, Puerto Rican line of descent, through Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*. Lewis's notion of the "culture of poverty," located in that book among Puerto Ricans, was not the relatively innocuous paradigm that liberal anthropologists usually frame it as, and was in fact is just as scurrilous and libelous as anything Moynihan wrote. This article locates *La Vida* as part of a turn toward social science "solution" to a public policy problem: how to manage the mass migration of Puerto Ricans, particularly to New York. It suggests that *La Vida* solves that problem by representing Puerto Ricans as hypersexual, as bad mothers, and responsible for their own poverty—in short, as welfare queens. It concludes with an exploration of the ways Puerto Rican activists formulated problems of poverty as structural issues of racism and labor.

A longer version of this essay will appear in Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*© 2002, The Regents of the University of Califormia.

In 1961, long-time Puerto Rican labor activist Jesus Colón commented on what people in New York were hearing about Puerto Ricans. There were the "voluminous studies" and "official reports"

> Then, some readers may have read one or another of the periodic series on "The Puerto Rican Problem" that keep recurring in the New York press, from the *Long Island Newsday* to *The New York Times*. Even magazines like *Fortune*, *Harper's* and *The New Yorker* have found it expedient on occasion to provide their readers with elaborate highly-documented "surveys" of the "difficult" problem of the "unwanted, unassimilable Puerto Ricans" who live in the great metropolis of New York and other large industrial cities. We Puerto Ricans have even been subject to treatment in the Broadway drama and fabulously successful musical show. But invariably this treatment harps on what is superficial and sentimental, transient and ephemeral, or bizarre and grotesque in Puerto Rican life—and always out of context with the real history, culture and traditions of my people....
>
> Years ago, it was the "brutal and uncouth" Irish; then it was the "knife-wielding" Italians, later it was the "clannish" Jews with "strange" ways; yesterday it was the Negro; today, it is the Puerto Ricans—and the Negroes—who are relegated to the last rung of New York's social ladder.[2]

Colón, a communist and a regular contributor to papers like *Justicia* and the *Daily Worker*, was (with the better known Bernardo Vega and Arturo Schomburg) among the early Puerto Rican migrants to New York—he moved in 1918—joining a small but active community dating back to the nineteenth-century anti-Spanish political exiles, traders, and laborers.[3] Colón was also good at reading his times, as he watched New York respond to a flood of new Puerto Rican migrants in the postwar period. A decade later, these ways of representing Puerto Ricans would reach hyperbolic proportions: "highly-documented surveys" and "voluminous studies" about Puerto Ricans as a problem for New York would fill library shelves; the Broadway play "West Side Story" would reach a national audience as a film; the "bizarre and grotesque" would increasingly define Puerto Ricans on the mainland, in the popular press and the social science literature, and the process that linked together Negroes and Puerto Ricans and assigned them to the bottom "rung of the social ladder" in New York instead of the Irish, Italians, and Jews would have succeeded in persuading an extraordinary number of people in the U.S. that this was a "natural" or at least inevitable order of things.

It is the contention of this article that the key to understanding how these ways of characterizing Puerto Ricans were so effective and became so widespread is that they were grounded in a narrative of family, sex, and reproduction. In multiple kinds of sources, from newspapers to activist writings to social science works, one can find a coherently articulated dispute over whether a narrative of bad mothering and disorderly sexuality can be made to stand for the problem of Puerto Rican poverty, or whether it of necessity had to be construed in relation to social structural causes. An ambivalent but influential account of the "culture of poverty" was promoted by Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*, a story of a Puerto Rican family with branches on the island

and the mainland. In it, the "culture of poverty" was characterized by absent fathers, matriarchal families, women having children while still very young themselves, poor work habits, violence, and obsession with sex. By the time children were six or seven, he argued, they had been so damaged by the effects of this culture that they were unable to take advantage of opportunities to escape poverty. The family, whom Lewis called Ríos, were in a sense modern-day Jukes or Kallikaks. Like those earlier, eugenics literature exemplars of multigenerational degeneracy, the Ríos family stood as explanation of the cause of poverty and a significant threat to the society at large.[4] Not incidentally, most of the major protagonists in *La Vida* were prostitutes. While Lewis's intentions were evidently more complex, the book ultimately provided material for all those who wished to suggest that cultural, sexual, and reproductive causes were responsible for Puerto Ricans' poverty.

This mainland account of the "culture of poverty" followed closely on the social science of the island, which also identified bad mothering and improper sexuality as the key to understanding Puerto Rican poverty. Early in the century, military officials and reformers diagnosed the island as suffering from an epidemic of venereal disease, caused by prostitution, adultery, and the passing of the disease from immoral husbands to innocent wives and children.[5] "Overpopulation" was blamed for the poverty on the island starting during the Depression (with eugenics, then birth control and sterilization, the cure). The birth rate was also blamed for the slowness and limitations of export-led industrialization under "development" in relationship to Operation Bootstrap. At the same time, in the symbolic economy of nationhood, the woman was the mother of the nation; women's sexual deviance was about the failure of nationhood. Or, alternately, Puerto Rican men were represented as effeminate, emasculated, and castrated by colonialism. For U.S. colonialists, Puerto Rican nationalists, and reformers on and off the island, these ways of thinking about Puerto Rico as a nation or a failed nation have been terribly productive. They generated significant controversies at regular intervals, controversies that have realigned political power, public policy, meanings of gender and race, and the direction of economic initiatives.

The "culture of poverty," as applied to Puerto Ricans in the states, was a social science solution to a political problem. Hundreds of thousands of largely working-class Puerto Ricans migrated to the mainland in the postwar period, initially mostly to New York, where they were conspicuously under- and unemployed, poorly fed and often without sufficient warm clothing. At a time of widespread anxiety about the possible return of the Depression with the integration into the labor force of those who had served as soldier in World War II, New Yorkers greeted this mass-migration—the first since immigration restriction laws halted the influx from Europe in the twenties—with hostility. Newspaper headlines in the late forties heralded a "New Airborne Invasion," the "Puerto Rican problem," and, when substandard and inadequate housing forced Puerto Ricans to live in basements and coal-bins, "A New Race of Cavedwellers."[6] From the outset, Puerto Ricans were accused—mostly unjustly—of swelling relief rolls. Politicians turned to social scientists to explain, and thus to solve, the "problem" of working-class Puerto Ricans. One answer was bad mothers, who passed along the habits and pathology of being poor to their children. As a solution, "the culture of poverty" had the benefit of separating the problem of families' poverty from labor and housing markets, rooting it instead in sex and marriage. This narrative of mothers and cultures proved self-fulfilling: employers, by the mid-sixties often unable legally or morally to use "race"

as an explicit criteria for hiring, came increasingly to rely on "culture" as the reason they could not hire African-Americans or Puerto Ricans.[7] The "culture of poverty" produced a terrain on which to debate policy related to working-class people that was based on ideologies of gender, insulated from economy, and tremendously productive of difference, race, class, liberal discourses of rescue, and conservative demonization of the poor.

Ultimately, this literature both reflected and encapsulated the process through which the idiom of "race" shifted from biology to social science that so many historians of race have noted.[8] It is in the sixties, really, that one encounters a fully developed, productive, and culturally saturating *social science* of Puerto Rican difference, specifically the culture of poverty. The key to it was still reproductive, but "culture" did the work of "race." Joseph Monserrat captured this sense memorably in a report for the Commonwealth's migration division. He wrote, "When I was being raised in East Harlem, I was frequently called a 'spik.' I am now referred to as being culturally deprived, socially disadvantaged and a product of the culture of poverty."[9] The "culture of poverty" came to do the work of "spik." While the conservation of all the derogatory content of "spik" in the deployment of this social scientific concept suggests something of the persistent, hydra-headed quality of racism—that winning battles related to the intellectual framework in which race is characterized does little to improve the life chances of those who are racially minoritized or end the persistent ground-level skirmishes on playgrounds, in shops, at college or job interviews—nevertheless, this shift matters, if only so we can understand how Lewis's intentions failed so thoroughly and disastrously.

"In a Home-Relief Office, newly arrived Puerto Ricans and others wait to talk to welfare workers. Although they are anxious to work, some Puerto Ricans can not find jobs because they speak only Spanish. A few are invalids and others are too old to work. After their long poverty they accept relief without embarrassment." Life *(Augiust 25, 1947: 27). Reprinted, by permission, from Al Fenn/TimePix.*

The full tragedy of this event was that Oscar Lewis was a socialist who favored government policies to ameliorate the lot of the poor and challenge colonialism. As sociologist David L. Harvey and others have argued at length, the introduction to *La Vida* locates it in a leftist tradition, suggesting that the desired result was to reveal the local, cultural expressions of the contradictions of capitalism and the results of exploitation.[10] The text itself, however, told a sordid story of endless sex, neglect of children, and failed love relationships. By focusing on family relations as the significant unit of analysis, the book located itself in the tradition of the social science of the island, which throughout the fifties and sixties was concerned with how to forge modern, small families in order to overcome "overpopulation"—or we could say more cynically, how to deliver a young, female

workforce to the U.S. corporations that were being recruited to relocate to the island, without the attendant complications of pregnancy, nursing, or young children. A whole spate of books came out in the 1950s with the imprimateur of the Social Science Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico, which was functioning in a strong advisory role to Puerto Rican government.[11] Works like Paul Hatt's *Backgrounds of Human Fertility in Puerto Rico*, J. Mayone Stycos' *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico*, and Reuben Hill *et. al.*'s *The Family and Population Control: A Puerto Rican Experiment in Social Change* attributed insular poverty not to colonialism or unemployment, but to things like large families, poor birth control use, oedipal complexes, machismo, modesty complexes in women, and steamy tropical childhoods.[12] By failing to notice the depoliticizing effects of these tales of women and children, full of birth control as the answer to poverty, and told by social scientists, Lewis unwittingly invoked their ultimately conservative politics.

Puerto Rican activists in New York, however, were well aware of these characterizations, and by the sixties, were actively constructing an alternative to them. Their response included labor activism, from the kind of socialism espoused by those like Jesus Colón to the workplace unionism of the International Ladies Garment Workers; the development of Puerto Rican political and cultural groups on the mainland, like the Young Lords Party and the Nuyorican Poets, and women's groups like the Young Lords' Women's Caucus and the Welfare Rights Organization. These groups argued for an economic interpretation of their situation. Puerto Ricans were not poor because of culture, family, sex, or child-rearing habits, but because of their location in an international political economy. "Operation Bootstrap" in Puerto Rico, that early, original trial of what came to be called "development," had resulted in rapid industrialization, the destruction of the island's agriculture, and the massive displacement of workers. Puerto Rican migrants were the casualties of this process, unwilling and unwelcome expatriates. As poet Martín Espada wrote, they were exiles in "cit[ies] of coughing and broken radiators,"[13] where the climate and the people were cold, where being poor inflicted unexpected cruelties and humiliations, where work was well-paid by island standards but unreliable, exhausting, boring, and unforgiving of days when one needed to stay home with sick children or just sleep in. Homesickness for *Borinquen* was a constant companion, but so too was knowledge of the lack of work there and the growing hostility on the part of those who remained on the island toward the people they derisively termed "Nuyoricans." People found they could neither stay on the mainland nor return to the island, and their constant shuttling back and forth has generated a whole genre of wry but poignant descriptions of this new kind of labor migration—they are a "commuter nation," taking the "guagua aérea" (air bus) and finding "Puerto Rican identity up in the air."[14]

Policy-making, however, does not thrive on irony, ambiguity, or nostalgia, and U.S. policy debate did not readily embrace terms like "colonialism" or "international division of labor." Rather, Puerto Ricans and their problems were duly enumerated by censuses, quantified by sociologists, and rendered into newsprint as numbers. From this work we learn that there were 53,000 Puerto Ricans living in the United States in 1930, a number that declined during the Depression and did not increase significantly during the early forties, as German U-boats patrolled the Caribbean, enforcing a blockade of Puerto Rico and making boat travel extremely dangerous. The end of the war coincided with an acute shortage of shipping and the advent of cheap air travel, an economic boom on the mainland, and U.S.-sponsored urbanization and industrialization on the island that meant both better jobs for some and an

increasingly sparse subsistence for others. Substantial numbers took the guagua aérea north. By 1969, according to the Census Bureau, there were 1, 454,000 Puerto Ricans residing in the states and Washington, D.C., an increase of 1.4 million over 1930. Puerto Ricans invented the air migration, and cheap airfares made it accessible even for working-class people. Figures developed by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's Migration Division[15] are suggestive about the extent to which it was a circular migration; in 1953, it claimed, 304,910 people left the island and 203,307 returned.[16]

Puerto Rican Migrants, 1947: The Making of a Moral Panic

Puerto Ricans became a "problem" for policy-makers in New York City (in José Colón's sense) in 1947. *The New York Times* published no articles about mainland Puerto Ricans in 1946, but almost thirty—all focused on the new migrants as problematic—in 1947. The tide began in January, with an article whose subtitle read, "1500 a week from island and social agencies map action."[17] The *Times* numbers were huge, and wildly inflated. In October, the *Times* reported that there were 600,000 Puerto Ricans in New York—400,000 more than the census could find in all of the mainland U.S. in 1950, after three more years of a considerable influx.[18] Indeed, official numbers identified 1947 as a low year for Puerto Rican migrants, with only 25,000 that year, compared with 40, 000 the year before.[19] But the level of panic evidenced in the newspapers in 1947 rapidly outstripped anything that could be the doing of even several times as many Puerto Ricans.

"Women seeking employment at the Migration Division." Photographer Luis R. Díaz. The Historical Archives of the Puerto Rican Migration. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

For the newspapers and magazines—and hence a significant number of New Yorkers and other readers—Puerto Rican migrants were always already inserted into the idiom of policy, problems, and poverty. There were no articles, for example, on the explosion of new *plenas* written about the migration, the flourishing of this transplanted music in *Nueva* York, the expansion of Spanish Harlem and the cultural transformation of the Lower East Side from a home for European immigrants into a Puerto Rican *barrio*. No one even wrote of the significant boon for the garment factories of the appearance of thousands of new women workers trained in Puerto Rico's needlework industry just as the Italian and Jewish women who had worked there were leaving in significant numbers, following the American dream as it moved to the suburbs. Rather, Puerto Ricans were simply a social work and public agency problem. One ethnographer told the following story:

> A photographer from a New York daily newspaper came to East 100th Street with an assignment to get a picture of "the children

> playing in the garbage." It was Sunday morning, and the children were scrubbed and dressed in their finest clothes—the smallest boys in suits and ties like their fathers', the girls in starched and lacy dresses with bright-colored bows. None were playing in the garbage. The photographer went to a storefront church on the block and asked the minister to help him carry out his assignment. The minister explained that it was Sunday, and the children didn't play in the garbage. The photographer, getting anxious now, said, "Look—there's some kids—over there." He ran to a garbage can, yanked off the lid, and motioned to the silent, staring children. "Hey kids—c'mere—over here. Let's play..."[20]

Headlines spoke of curbing migration, of pressuring the Puerto Rican government, of calling on Congress to halt the flow, of tropical diseases and poverty on the island.[21] Puerto Ricans were hardly the largest group of internal migrants in the U.S. in the postwar period, but, alongside with African-Americans leaving the unemployment wrought by the growing mechanization of agriculture in the South, their migration was thoroughly rendered a problem. Together, African-Americans and Puerto Ricans represented the first major ethnic/racial population shift in northeastern cities since the passage of immigration restriction in the twenties. As Carmen Whalen so cogently argues, the exact things that made them desirable as temporary laborers made them undesirable as citizens: their alienness, produced through ideologies of racial difference.[22] When a New York City welfare commissioner with a political bone to pick issued a report slamming the department's supposed lack of safeguards against fraud, he claimed that the influx of Puerto Ricans had caused a sharp rise in caseloads and costs (and fraud, by implication) even though a survey by the department just a few months earlier had found that less than eight percent of the city's Puerto Rican population had applied for relief, that "on the whole they were industrious, hard-working and willing."[23] Notwithstanding the incredible paternalism of that statement, these two reports, one in February, the next in May, make it clear that even before there were Puerto Ricans on relief, Puerto Ricans were already a welfare problem. When, that fall, another Department of Welfare study found that fewer than 4 percent of relief cases were Puerto Rican migrants,[24] another newspaper (mis)reported the conclusion as "New York's relief cases have increased 54 per cent in areas where Puerto Ricans tend to congregate."[25]

In a pattern that was to be repeated, the rising panic about excessive Puerto Ricans in New York and the (utterly undocumented) strain on city services was halted with the announcement that the sociologists had been called in to study the problem. The cycle of this particular panic crested in the first week of August, when *The New York Times* ran daily exposés about the problem of Puerto Rican migration: officials worried, children abandoned in the airport, disease, substandard housing, swelling relief rolls, rising crime levels. The series, signed by Albert Gordon, spawned letters and editorials demanding that "something" be done.[26] Within days, "something" was: the governor of Puerto Rico was asking Columbia University to do a study of the "problem" of Puerto Rican migration. Paul Lazarsfeld, director of Applied Sociology at Columbia, accepted the commission.[27] The uproar in the newspapers died down, and a cottage industry for social scientists in and around New York was born, one that produced both the popularity of the notion of the "culture of poverty," a new "race" for Puerto Ricans, and indirectly, the Moynihan

report. A photo essay in *Life* that month, titled "Puerto Rican Migrants Jam New York," solidified this account: it featured pictures crowded to the edges with Puerto Ricans arriving on planes, filling welfare offices, overcrowded apartments, children swarming city streets, and—in the one picture in the essay with empty space—"Puerto Rico's Governor Jesus T. Pinero [sic] discusses the problem with sociologist P. T. Lazarsfeld."[28]

The Social Science of *El Barrio*

Historian Gordon Lewis observed in 1963 that Puerto Ricans were the most studied and least understood people in the United States.[29] There was close collaboration of policy-makers and social scientists. In 1947, it was governor Piñero who funded the Columbia study, and its authors, in turn, allowed him to approve the detailed plan for it.[30] Five other studies were commissioned at about the same time by New York agencies, including the Board of Education and the Welfare and Health Council of New York City.[31] Even when foundations like Rockefeller and Ford began offering private funds for the development of a social science of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, it remained commonplace that such studies would be maintain close relations with policy-makers.

This first crop of studies did not use sex and morality as a lens through which to make sense of Puerto Ricans; quite the opposite, their authors saw themselves as resisting the sensational tendencies of the newspapers and magazines. They found, in general, that Puerto Ricans were doing well—assimilating, finding jobs—and that what problems there were would pass away with time. The initial social science of Puerto Ricans in New York simply had little to say about families or family structure. C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Ruth Goldsen published the results of the Columbia research in 1950 as *A Puerto Rican Journey*, based on the work of a research team associated with the department of Applied Social Research. The sociologist's role, in this text, was to defend Puerto Ricans with facts against the unfounded and unwarranted assertions in the popular press, including claims that Puerto Rican women had "loose morals" or were extensively involved in prostitution.[32] Unsurprisingly, given Senior's involvement in the Commonwealth's projects on the island, the monograph's assessment of sex and gender stressed the story of the "modernization" of gender relations: Puerto Rican women coming to the United States were achieving greater independence from home and husband, freedom from male dominance, usually through work outside the home. In the study's terms, this was straightforwardly a good thing. The other book-length works on Puerto Ricans on the mainland—including an ethnography, the work of a New Left journalist, and the studies by the Welfare Council and the Board of Education—found either close-knit families or heterogeneity with respect to family.[33] Unlike several of those that followed, the books were based on research in the community—surveys and ethnographies—rather than derived from published sources.

The fashioning of a liberal, "expert" consensus in the late forties and early fifties about the assimilability of Puerto Ricans, given the right public policy measures by groups like the Board of Education, happened side-by-side with massive repression of the Puerto Rican left in New York. The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, the Communist Party, U.S.A. (CP/USA), and the International Workers Organization (IWO) had mobilized thousands of Puerto Ricans in 1947, but in the fifties, their leaders were harassed, jailed—even killed—and membership dwindled. Jesús Colón

and nine other Puerto Rican labor activists were forced to testify before Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee.[34] After Truman signed Public Law 600 in 1950, legally clearing the way for permanent U.S. possession of Puerto Rico (only a few years after the Philippines had been given independence), Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos led a short-lived uprising to declare the Republic of Puerto Rico. On the mainland, Nationalists attempted to assassinate President Truman. The resulting repression effectively put an end to the Nationalist Party, both on the island and the mainland, at the same time that internationalist Communism in the U.S. was driven underground. In New York, the F.B.I. visited the homes and workplaces of suspected Puerto Rican radicals.[35] The Puerto Rican left on the mainland was decimated, and would not again emerge as an effective political force until the *nuevo despertar* (new awakening) of the late sixties.

By default, centrist, middle-class "experts"—mostly but not exclusively North Americans—emerged as the interpreters of the Puerto Rican experience in *Nueva* York. On the island, the Commonwealth government employed significant numbers of those Puerto Ricans trained in social science (many in U.S. universities), further dividing the population into workers over here and professionals on the island. Still, some middle-class Puerto Ricans found themselves on the mainland, including Puerto Rican anthropologists Elena Padilla and Rosemary Santana Clooney.[36] There was no shortage of organizations designed to help Puerto Rican migrants, but also to make them respectable on middle-class terms. In 1948, the Commonwealth's Migration Division of the Department of Labor opened offices in New York City. In 1949, the Mayor's Committee for Puerto Rican Affairs was established, including many long-term "ethnic" activists and a number of Puerto Ricans, and in 1951, the Hispanic Leadership Forum. In 1956, the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs was organized (composed primarily of young social workers), and in 1960, the Puerto Rican Family Institute.[37] For the most past, these organizations stressed the politics of respectability, and found working-class people to be something of a scandal, much as they had on the island. In a series of publications, the Migration Division endorsed the position that the migrants were, by and large, quite respectable: they had well-organized families, were originally urban residents on the island, not peasants, were eager to find jobs, and contributed positively to the economy of the mainland. At the same time, these groups urged Puerto Ricans to make the most of their opportunities, and avoid behavior that would reflect badly on the group as a whole.[38] The one exception to this respectable, assimilationist emphasis was the *desfile puertorriqeño*—the Puerto Rican Day Parade—which was a cultural event rather than a political group *per se*, and hence not (deliberately) organized to change political institutions.

The Sixties: Inventing "the Poor" and Solving their Problems

In the sixties, the creeping tone of disparagement of not only Puerto Ricans but also Negroes in the social science and policy literature would momentarily be ameliorated, only to return again with a vengeance in the Moynihan report and *La Vida*. The initial impetus would come, ironically, from Oscar Lewis. In 1961, Lewis began using the concept of the "culture of poverty," which had the effect—both in social science and in public policy—to turn the nature of the "problem" of poverty and dysfunction from a racial one, characteristic of Negroes (North and South) and Puerto Ricans (Northern and insular), to a class question. In 1947, when Puerto Ricans first became a problem, the poor did not exist in the United States. Everyone

was lower class, upper class, or middle class. There were "unskilled laborers" to be sure, and "juvenile delinquents," a "criminal element," even "paupers," "inebriates," and "organized crime." But while there was social pathology, often associated with an immigrant group or a particular class of native-born whites (such as "okies" or "hillbillies") "the poor" was not a stable concept. People spoke of "poor people," and while "the poor" would not have sounded odd to most people, it was not in systematic use in the U.S. social science literature, nor was the "underclass." (Michael Katz dates the emergence of the use of the "underclass" even later, to Ken Auletta's book of that title in 1982).[39]

In 1963, an article by Elizabeth Herzog in *Social Science Review* credited Oscar Lewis with originating the rigorous social scientific usage of "the poor" as a group distinct from the working class, based on a conference paper he gave at the American Anthropological Association in 1961, describing a "culture of poverty." Although there were undoubtedly multiple sources, Lee Rainwater's book, *And the Poor Get Children* provides indirect confirmation for Herzog's account giving Lewis credit. Published a year before Lewis's purported innovation, Rainwater uses "the poor" in his title—suggesting that the usage was quite available for general purposes—but in his text, he uses the awkward circumlocution, "lower-lower class" (as opposed to "upper-lower class"), and never "the poor," when talking about the people whom he believed had trouble controlling their fertility. In other words, when he meant to be rigorous, he did not use "the poor," even though he is using paradigms for class and family remarkably similar to those of Lewis and Moynihan. There is one important distinction, however: his "lower-lower class" is white, and explicity distinguished from Puerto Ricans, which his text (re)locates on the island, exclusively. This account, if correct, suggests that at precisely the moment when the labor department, the media, and some social scientists were saying that "the working class" was being absorbed into the "middle" through improved wages and a greater access to consumer goods, another class, largely non-white, emerged: "the poor."[40]

Also in 1961, Lewis published *The Children of Sanchez*, in which he summarized the "culture of poverty" as follows:

> In anthropological usage, the term implies, essentially, a design for living which is passed down from generation to generation. In applying this concept of culture to the understanding of poverty, I want to draw attention to the fact that poverty in modern nations is not only a state of economic deprivation, of disorganization, or the absence of something. It is also something positive in the sense that it has a structure, a rationale, and defense mechanisms without which the poor could hardly carry on. In short, it is a way of life, remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines.[41]

This is a striking definition; in three sentences, Lewis mentions that this culture is "passed down from generation to generation" twice. What distinguished "the poor," different from any other class, was not their relationship to labor or the means of production, but a set of behaviors and their reproduction in children. It is a definition about bad mothering—fathers are definitionally absent. Indeed, an early, approving commentator commented on its behavioral features, "the ill-defined group

referred to as 'the poor' does not include the stable, respectable working class."[42] Like Mayhew putting London prostitutes in the nineteenth century into the class of "those that will not work," Lewis's redefinition served to place whole groups of people doing remunerative work, even waged labor, outside the working class, specifically through their family structure and sexual behavior.[43]

Herzog's review article about "the poor" is even more revealing about the work of "the culture of poverty" thesis: it clarifies that this is a racialized class. Social science, it argued, has identified three key characteristics of "the poor":

1. There is a culture of poverty.
2. The family and sex patterns of the poor differ from those of the middle class.
3. The family and sex patterns of poor Negroes differ from those of whites on the same socioeconomic level.[44]

Here, not only are "the poor" identified by their "sex patterns," but "sex patterns" are held to be a proxy for race: "Negroes" are identified as outside the working-class at an income-level where whites would be within it. Not surprisingly, this new class proved notoriously hard to define—by the 1970s, social scientists had dismissed neighborhood, work-history, or even income levels as reliable identifiers of "the poor." Neighborhoods proved to be remarkably heterogeneous, work-history changed, and income levels were erratic. This did not discourage believers in a class "below" the working class. Rather, this flexible class of the impoverished seemed to remain what it was when Oscar Lewis wrote in 1961: describable predominantly in terms of behavioral characteristics, either heroism or pathology, depending on who was doing the defining. Among those who favored pathology—and even among the considerable number of liberals who preferred to split the difference, with heroism but a bit of pathology thrown in—the poor were distinguished primarily by their disorganized families and female-headed households. This definitional feature meant there was a tautology at the heart of the social science of the ghetto. The poor were those with disorganized families, and the cause of poverty was familial disorganization. Familial disorganization, in turn, was a feature of non-whites.

The ideological work of "the poor," in short, was that it made race into class, and class into immorality. That is, in Herzog's account, Negroes almost always belonged to the "culture of poverty"—however contradictory, the argument insists that even when they were middle-class, they were poor. This habit of using race as a proxy for class (Black or Puerto Rican=poor) was not unique to Herzog; as many have pointed out, it characterizes affirmative action and many other race-based programs to address economic injustice.[45] Lewis's work, however, set the stage for the non-economic, neoconservative reply to these arguments for racial/economic change: that the answer is stronger families. As anthropologist Charles Valentine pointed out, one of the problems with Lewis's formulation is that he distinguished between poverty and the culture of poverty so strongly that they become not only conceptually distinct but autonomous from each other, arguing for example that it is easier to eliminate poverty than the culture of poverty. As Valentine wrote, "It is but a short step from this position to a belief that the allegedly distinct culture patterns of the poor are more important in their lives than the condition of being poor. The policy corollary of this belief is that it is more necessary and urgent for our society to abolish the special lifeways of the poor than to eradicate poverty."[46]

In so doing, it made it possible to respond to race-based calls for social and economic justice in terms of sex—both gender and sexuality. If the poor had better organized home lives, they would not be poor. This position has perhaps reached its *reductio ad absurdum* in current antipoverty initiatives to enroll women in classes on finding and keeping a husband.

The Moynihan Report and *La Vida*

Given the marked politicization of social science in the fifties, it is not surprising that two of the most import social science texts of the sixties about race were written in relation to public policy problems. *La Vida* was written about two familiar "problems"—the problem of Puerto Rican migrants in New York, and *La Perla* in San Juan, that famous slum of long duration that had taunted generations of Washington administrations about the enduring poverty of the island, located conspicuously along the road between *El Condado*, the luxurious hotel where overseas visitors stayed from the time of the Spanish, and *La Forteleza*, the governor's mansion. Lewis drew on a trope borrowed from the newspapers as much as the social science literature that explained their respective poverty problems: the promiscuous mother (that original Madonna/whore complex). In these texts, the story of the "ghetto" was not about legal or organized exclusion from American political and economic life, but "matriarchy" (in Moynihan's terms) or "matrifocal households" (in Lewis's), illegitimacy, and sexual immorality. Lewis and Moynihan did not invent the social science of the ghetto or its assertions about disorganized families, but they gave them a new, more important audience: Moynihan offered it up to policy-makers in the Johnson administration at the highest levels, and Oscar Lewis wrote a bestseller. Throughout the fifties, social science had become increasingly politicized, but they took it to a new level. *La Vida* told the story of poor Puerto Ricans in the most compelling way possible, without footnotes, essentially as a novel, and full of titillating sexual details. The Moynihan report, encountering the Black civil rights movement, was roundly (if not entirely successfully) refuted; *La Vida*, a politically more multivalent book that encountered an even poorer, less organized community, became a liberal social science classic.

The story of the Moynihan report is well known. Moynihan wrote *The Negro Family* while Assistant Secretary of Labor as an advisory document for cabinet members about where civil rights policy ought to head next. The 1964 Civil Rights Act had just been passed, and some inside and outside the Democratic Party were trying to understand from where, with Jim Crow legally dead, the next challenge from the Civil Rights movement was going to come. Suspecting that they would not like the answer—the Black Power movement was on the rise, there was rioting in cities, and even people like Martin Luther King, Jr. were talking about economic equality—some white liberals were trying to seize the moment and channel the next phase of the movement in what seemed to them a reasonable direction. The Moynihan report was an answer to these circumstances. It carefully made the case that American slavery had been the worst in history, that unemployment rates for African-American men were unconscionably high, twice that of whites. The result of the former and cause of the latter, he argued, was family breakdown. Illegitimacy, "black matriarchy," emasculated black men, and a familial "tangle of pathology" were together responsible for the limited educational and economic achievements of African-Americans.[47] The next target of civil rights activity needed to be governmental action to save the Negro family.

The only concrete political outcome of the report was a speech by Johnson at

Howard University, written by Moynihan. Somewhat after that, there was a tremendous political uproar over Moynihan and his report. The speech was vetted beforehand by a handful of civil rights leaders and was initially received well. However, Moynihan's enemies inside the administration leaked word that there was a high-level, secret report that cast aspersions on the black family. Some people got copies of the report, and it set off a firestorm. Left and civil rights groups objected strenuously; hundreds of columns of newsprint, glossy magazine pages, and hours of time in political meetings were filled with denunciations and defenses of Moynihan, mostly denunciations.[48] Three things happened as a result. The event made Moynihan's political career, and he became a long-term Senator from New York. The controversy left an enduring mark on social science, one that continues to the present, with few scholars able to work in areas even tangentially related without having to take a position on Moynihan. No monograph on the history of black women under slavery, contemporary black families in the U.S., or ethnography of the Caribbean can escape the imperative to respond to Moynihan's assertion that slavery made the black family eternally and irremediably dysfunctional. The sociology of women and poverty was also dominated by this paradigm. The final thing the debate did was ensure that the figure of the sexualized black woman would be an enduring feature of the U.S. political landscape, affecting political debate on things as divergent as the "welfare queen" and Anita Hill's insistence that she was sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas.[49] Almost immediately, the Moynihan report became an Ur-text of gender, race, and poverty.

Debates about development, decolonization, and the "Third World" were important to the Report. It contemplated Brazilian slavery—and Latin American slavery more generally—at length. Nathan Glazer, Moynihan's earlier collaborator and ally, pointed out that international projects of development and decolonization in general become quite important to the social science of the black family in this political moment. "The period of lower-class romanticization came to an end," he wrote, because of

> the explosion of independence movements in colonial areas....Thus the cultural relativistic stance in sociology and anthropology went into eclipse. The question now was: How do we get development.... In this perspective, of course, the lower-class family came out rather badly.[50]

For both Moynihan and Glazer, then, Latin America and the problem of international politics became the launching point for a new critique of the African-American family.

La Vida came out the year after the Moynihan Report, and made a similar argument explicitly in a "development" context. Like the "overpopulation" argument, Lewis's "culture of poverty" thesis shifted the terrain of debate about poverty and colonialism from the economy to sex. *La Vida* made essentially the same argument as Moynihan did about who the poor were—bad mothers, illegitimate children, broken homes and their products (who were unsuccessful in the labor market)—but with a different policy gloss. Lewis's introduction suggested that either war-on-poverty-style liberalism or Cuban-style radicalism could end poverty, but the book that followed it told a completely different tale. It is the story of a prostitute, Fernanda ("a good-looking, dark Negro woman of about forty with a stocky, youthful figure. She had dull black eyes, heavy eyebrows and full lips."[51]) and her children, three

daughters—two of whom also become prostitutes—and a son. All three were fostered out as small children. Three of her children had moved to New York, although there is considerable travel back and forth.

With the exception of a long (forty-page) introduction, the book is narrated in the first person, based on the transcripts obtained by Lewis's research assistants in their interviews with members of the family. Lewis's editing produces it as a story that is intensely scatological, sexual, and violent. In the opening pages, readers encounter Fernanda, in her forties, and her teenage lover, Junior. Within the very first paragraph, Fernanda comments on shit, toilets, dirt, drinking, and how she dislikes children. Her struggle to find a new home is rendered in terms of its inadequate privacy, and what that means for sex. "Junior and I like to neck all the time and that looks bad in front of children...I'll have to hang a curtain over the bedroom doorway, too, but it won't do much good. The neighbors can hear the whole thing through the wall."[52] The book is obsessed with sex, but not love. In the course of two pages, the edited transcript has Fernanda relating the stories of two husbands and a lover; of the lover she says, "Benjamín wanted to set me up in a room of my own and everything. He offered to pay a month's rent in advance so I could get a room. But I told him, 'No, don't do it. I'm only doing this in revenge' [against her husband]. I didn't love him or feel anything for him. Nothing at all."[53] In the same two pages, we find her cutting her husband's face with a knife, passing a night in jail, and engaging in prostitution. The narrative portrays nothing of how people manage food and housing with very little income, but sex is present in endless detail. One reviewer described the content of *La Vida* as "sex in a thousand forms, minutely described, until the world seems a gigantic, monotonous brothel."[54] The husbands, wives, and lovers of Fernanda and her children enter the narrative only for the briefest interludes, as numbers rather than people. The text constantly reinscribes what Lewis says in the introduction: Fernanda and her children have collectively had twenty marriages—only three of them legalized by church or state.

The book left little doubt about the fact that this was a depraved, unhappy existence. These people's lives, argued Lewis, are lonely, violent, tragic. People were sociable without real human connection. They were profligate with money, engaged in petty criminality, worked irregularly. ("I've made lots of money and I've spent it all," said Fernanda. "What would I want to keep it for? We're not made of stone and we all must die, right? Suppose I save money in the bank and then I die. Who is going to enjoy that money?"[55]) Many decisions seem inexplicable, if not downright self-destructive. Fernanda and her daughters reported shame and self-loathing associated with prostitution, but persisted in that work even when they had other options. Women end perfectly good relationships, and persist in degrading and violent ones. Poor people seem incapable of holding on to money from one day to the next, spending their last dollar on beer or making a loan unlikely to be repaid. They are explosively violent, including with their children. Other times, with little logic, they were lenient to the point of neglect; their parenting seemed to leave everything to be desired.

Parenting, sexuality, and the visibility of the body and its functions are co-mingled in ways intended to shock U.S., middle class readers. Visiting Fernanda's daughter, Cruz, the ethnographer walks in on the following scene: Cruz's ex-husband is sitting in the corner of a room with his fly open. Their three-year-old daughter, Anita, is there. "Ay, you just saved me," Cruz told the ethnographer.

> Emilio came in like a wild man with such an erection I swear it could have torn out any girl's insides. Listen, right in front of Anita he grabbed me, ripped off my blouse, and at one stroke I landed on the bed. He began killing me and kissing me, and telling me to lock the door at this hour of the day....I get mad but Emilio said, "I like it better when you're angry." So I told him, "You son of a great whore! You queer!"

Anita, listening, finally says to her mother, "Crucita, want titty." So Cruz picks her up and begins to nurse her, with a baby boy on the other breast. Cruz's sister's two children, ages seven and four, are also hanging about, as Cruz says she found them wandering the street at 11 pm the night before.[56] She finds a basin of urine under a cot, and asks

> "Whose piss is this? Oh, it's Anita's and mine." She took the basin to the toilet to empty it, closing the door behind her. The door slowly swung open and [the ethnographer] could see her urinating. When Cruz came out of the bathroom, Anita went in, pulled off her drawers and urinated on the floor. She came out naked. "Put your *panties* on, you hear me?" Cruz said.[57]

Then, in a scene a few pages later, Cruz teaches Anita the following poem:

> My cock went and died on me,
> He's in mourning, the stupid jerk,
> Open that cunt, woman,
> To put the corpse inside.[58]

Later, Cruz plays with her baby boy's genitals. The children are hungry, dirty, poorly toilet-trained, poorly weaned, knowing about sexuality; most are raised by people other than their parents for at least some period of their youth. They were, in short, for many readers the shocking antithesis of the 1960s middle-class, American nuclear family.

La Vida brought the "culture of poverty" to a wide audience. It was published in a popular edition, priced at ten dollars, below most "serious" books and ultimately released in an inexpensive paperback edition—intending, and finding, a wide audience. *La Vida* presented a version of the "culture of poverty" that located female sexual promiscuity as at the heart of community breakdown, violence, and poverty. (Glazer commented that, in comparison with *Children of Sanchez*, it had "weaker men, more immoral women, more irresponsible fathers, and mothers all too often grossly indifferent to their children.")[59] The amount of sex in the book probably goes a long way toward explaining the book's popularity; one reviewer complained that in the book's public relations promotions, "the obvious novelistic and revelatory aspects have been discussed as if this were a cheap piece of pornography."[60] It is a pornography of poverty, whose chief pleasures are voyeuristic. Nevertheless, it won the National Book Award for nonfiction in 1967.

Lewis's policy proposals are strangely at odds with the way the book makes it case for who "the poor" are. In the introduction, Lewis argued that two kinds of things can help the poor: either participation in some kind of revolutionary

activity—he cited the civil rights movement or the Cuban revolution as good examples—or gradually raising the income of the poor, possibly combined with psychotherapy. Yet nothing about the story he told suggested that these were realistic solutions. He describes participants in the culture of poverty as apolitical (despite evidence in the text that the members of the Ríos family are not), and further, that their poverty is self-perpetuating because it was passed down from mothers to children—in short, not amenable to simple fiscal solutions. Furthermore, it seemed that Lewis saw it as strengthening his call to action paint the family in terms that were as depraved as possible. That he could have told a compelling story about their political *engagement* and their extensive theorizing about poverty, its causes and consequences, seems to have occurred to Lewis, because he includes a great deal of such material in the text, though he also seemed consciously to have submerged it. He apparently also chose the most chaotic family of those he studied to portray at length in the book. It emerged in *A Study of Slum Culture: Backgrounds for La Vida*—sort of the extended footnote to *La Vida*—that of the 50 families he studied at length, only 16 percent were female-headed.[61] All the families he explored in *La Vida* were female-headed.

Lewis's studies were dogged by controversy. His Mexican books had caused a scandal in Mexico—criticized as "obscene beyond the limits of human decency," defamatory of Mexico and Mexicans, and perhaps the work of an FBI agent attempting to destroy Mexican society. While the government eventually cleared him of charges of subversion, he was roundly criticized. *La Vida* was a still harsher book. Lewis explicitly, and disparagingly, compared Puerto Ricans to Mexicans, complaining that they had no revolutionary tradition to speak of, no knowledge of their own history, and were far more deviant by virtually any standard.

Political scientist Susan Rigdon, after extensive review of Lewis's papers and field notes, argues persuasively that "the culture of poverty" thesis was contradicted by a great deal of Lewis's own research and convictions, which suggested that there were many, many ways of being poor and Puerto Rican, or Mexican. Nevertheless, the thesis imposed a rough coherence on sprawling material by making a particular family "typical," following similarities across generations, and hence concluding that the book said something about poverty in general. Rigdon notes that on the Puerto Rico project,

> Lewis essentially processed all the data in his head. No attempt was made to do a content analysis of the interviews—more than 30,000 transcribed pages—even though they contained the great bulk of the data. Working in this manner there was virtually no way to produce generalizations about the material that were anything more than impressions or intuitions.[62]

The Puerto Rico project, funded by the Johnson administration, was incredibly unwieldy. It employed a staff of about fifty, and Lewis did little of the actual interviewing and spent little time in Puerto Rico. He was in failing health, and, according to Rigdon, people closest to him noticed an impact on his memory and thinking. A number of his collaborators on the Puerto Rico project suggested alternate interpretations: psychiatrist Carolina Lujón argued that most members of the Ríos family were mentally ill, and so what he had produced was a multi-generational study of mental illness, not poverty. In speeches and lectures, he

admitted the fragility of the "culture of poverty," suggesting that the Ríos family might not be typical of anything, telling an audience in 1967 that

> I'm afraid that some people take certain constructs or models more seriously than I do. My whole thrust is to try to show that no matter what generalization social science comes up with, be it the folk society or the subculture of poverty... [there is a] range of variation of human conditions and family life.[63]

Later, in a letter, he claimed that his work was never intended to support the culture of poverty concept.[64] While this combination of soft-peddling and disingenuousness about the claims made in *La Vida* distanced him personally from the controversy over the "culture of poverty," Lewis never repudiated it in print.

The reception of *La Vida* was as divergent as the text itself was contradictory. It was widely reviewed, and the responses of the reviewers reflect the essential multivalence of the work itself. One of the most important reviews was Michael Harrington's, on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review*, which hailed Lewis's latest work as a progressive event, destined to persuade middle America of the need for renewed commitment to ending poverty.[65] Manuel Maldondo Denis, a sociologist at the University of Puerto Rico and a Marxist, was similarly enthused, characterizing its critics as "defenders of the status quo."[66] However, some of the most negative reviews came from education activists on the left, including some associated with the Department of Migration who saw the book as essentially libelous. Reviewers like Gertrude Goldberg in *IRCD Bulletin* and Francesco Cordasco in the African-American Studies journal *Phylon* argued that the book was a treasure-trove of misinformation, telling the story of a mentally ill family as if it were representative of something, and suggested that it reiterated the major fallacies of the Moynihan report about the immoral poor.[67]

Two other reviewers who raised questions of representativeness did so from the other side of the political fence—Oscar Handlin and Nathan Glazer. Handlin suggested that on the one hand, the Ríoses were not representative of the poor (especially not "the poor of Europe and America before 1940"), so we should not feel sorry for them. Those who did fit into Lewis's culture of poverty, he stressed (but quoting Lewis) were non-white or marginal whites: "very low-income Negroes, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians and Southern whites." His conclusion is that, *contra* Lewis's own account, *La Vida* should cause Americans to question the war on poverty: "The evidence runs counter to the simple assumption that subsidizing these families will transform their lives and introduce order and self-sufficiency into their existence." He points out as representative of the poor in general that in Lewis's text,

> Simplicio cannot understand his bosses, who have 'the custom of saving money....They kill themselves week in and week out. For that reason, they are rich and able to send to their children to school to get a good education'....Simplicio and his friends are proud to be poor. When they have money they spend it on clothing or immediate gratifications.[68]

Bad decisions, bad work habits, and bad morals account for why the poor are poor, and nothing he finds in *La Vida* persuades Handlin that the federal government ought to be

subsidizing them. *Newsweek*, equally, quoting Simplicio saying "I am proud to be poor," suggests that this sort of sentiment among "the poor" is exactly why it is so difficult for many people to work up much enthusiasm for the war on poverty programs.[69] Glazer also anticipated a "storm that is certain to accompany the distribution of this book," no doubt based on the experience of Moynihan. It largely did not appear.[70]

From the left, *The Nation* also reviewed it as a critique of liberal solutions like income supports as a solution to poverty.

> It is embarrassing to a reformer to find that new housing projects quickly become skyscraper slums, and that when a trickle of affluence sweeps down to the lowest strata of society it sometimes enables a slum dweller to feed a narcotics habit or buy a Cadillac instead of paying the rent. An explanation of why some of the poor behave as they do, and why handouts and social work are inadequate, has now been formulated neatly, concisely, even brilliantly....Poverty may be ameliorated or even eliminated, [Lewis] says, without necessarily modifying the vast and horrible 'subculture of poverty'—a way of life that spits at middle-class values.[71]

However, *The Nation*'s reviewer, Elmer Bendiner, notices the same split in the book that Handlin does. In contrast to Handlin, he prefers the politics of the introduction to the politics of the text. "It makes a harrowing book, certainly, but I do not know what it means. It is not needed to support the argument in the introduction and it does not strengthen it."[72]

One thing that virtually every reviewer included was some fairly extensive quote encapsulating Lewis's account of the culture of poverty from the introduction. This, they suggested, was what the book offered that was relevant to policy. Nat Hentoff's review in *The New Yorker* is representative.

> The degree to which Lewis can help create a better understanding is important, but even more important is the discovery of precisely what social actions can bring about the changes the poor need most. In this area of diagnosis and tentative prescription , Lewis makes a real contribution. What he has evolved during his work in Mexico and in Puerto Rico is his concept of "the culture of poverty," which, he says is a way of life, passed on from generation to generation, that is more difficult to eliminate than poverty itself. This culture transcends regional, urban-rural, and even national differences. Among its traits, as *La Vida* amply demonstrates, are 'the absence of childhood as a specially prolonged and protected stage in the life cycle, early initiation into sex, free unions and consensual marriages, a relatively high incidence of the abandonment of wives and children a trend toward female- or mother-centered families...a strong predisposition to authoritarianism, lack of privacy, verbal emphasis upon family solidarity which is only rarely achieved because of sibling rivalry, and competition and maternal affection.'[73]

This was *La Vida*'s chief legacy: the widespread availability—for popular, policy, and academic audiences—of the notion of the "culture of poverty," one as wedded to a sexualized, dark-skinned woman as Moynihan's "matriarch."[74]

Alternative Formulations

There were essentially three kinds of responses among Puerto Ricans in the sixties to the "culture of poverty." Some groups, composed significantly of social workers and other professionals, accepted that there were things that could be reformed about the family lives and personal decisions of working-class Puerto Ricans, but saw poverty as largely driven by forces outside the community. A second group included the radical left antipoverty activists, who saw the entire cause of Puerto Rican poverty as racism and discrimination. The third kind of group saw mainland Puerto Rican poverty as rooted in colonialism, and worked for the independence of the island. (The difference between "antipoverty" and "nationalist" Puerto Rican groups had to do with emphasis, not with goals; they tended to agree in broad strokes.) None, however, accepted the argument that the primary cause of poverty was women's sexual behavior, "matriarchy," or "matrifocal" households.

An example of the first type is the Puerto Rican Forum, a group of young professionals who won an antipoverty grant to design a plan for a culturally appropriate Puerto Rican self-help plan (other examples included groups like Aspira—an education-reform group that eventually won a lawsuit in 1974 to force the Board of Education to stop tracking Spanish-speaking youngsters into the lowest classes based solely on their English-speaking ability). The Puerto Rican Forum argued that the issue of poverty was as much about discriminatory activities of Anglo employers as impoverished Puerto Ricans.

> Because there is a culture of poverty that shapes personality and reaches into job behavior, family structure, community and political action, all of these are legitimate and vital concerns of programs to combat poverty as the new poverty legislation acknowledges for the first time. Because the culture of the poor is part of a larger system including persons whose actions may be more decisive than those of the poor themselves in altering the conditions of poverty, it is also vital to fight poverty by allocating funds to work among the non-poor—employers, landlords, educators, government officials, politicians, labor leaders, and others whom the poor accept as leaders.[75]

The Forum argued that poverty was a cycle—poor people were poor because bad educational opportunities led to lousy jobs, and bad education was caused by being poor. Its members were among the first to argue that the "immigration cycle," in which things would inevitably get better for the next generation, was not happening for Puerto Ricans: "It is necessary to know that Puerto Ricans are <u>not</u> 'making it' once they learn English; that the children born in the city of Puerto Rican parents are <u>not</u> becoming successful New Yorkers once they go through the city's school system; that the story of the Puerto Ricans will <u>not</u> be the same as the story of the groups of immigrants that came before."[76] While they included "to strengthen family life" among their goals, they refused to make family causal.

The Young Lords' analysis of the "problem" of poverty was even sharper: jobs and services failed to reach the Puerto Rican community. In this, their analysis was much like the artists collectively known as the Nuyorican poets, the Puerto Rican Student Union, or *El Congreso del Pueblo*, a working-class group uniting New York's more than eighty Puerto Rican social clubs and leading mass demonstrations about housing, police brutality, racism, and discrimination, or similarly, El Comité-MINP

(Movimiento de Izquierda National Puertorriqueña), which began as an anti-urban renewal group. The Young Lords used direct action tactics both to dramatize the problems of discrimination and work to alleviate them. In New York City, the Young Lords began with a protest about municipal garbage collection, piling up trash in the middle of the city street and blocking traffic. They took over a church and started a breakfast program, organized clothing drives, commandeered a X-ray machine and ran a TB-screening program. Not only did their analysis point steadily beyond the poor themselves, but they were also noteworthy for their analysis about women and gender. They made "equality for women" a key plank in their platform (in response to a demand from the Women's Caucus). In the revised program and platform written in 1970, their fifth point could not have been further from Moynihan and Lewis's fear that "matriarchy"—too much power for women—led to poverty:

> We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism. Under capitalism, women have been oppressed by both society and our men. The doctrine of machismo has been used by men to take out their frustrations on wives, sisters, mothers, and children. Men must fight along with sisters in the struggle for economic and social equality and must recognize that sisters make up over half of the revolutionary army: sisters and brothers are equals fighting for our people. Forward sisters in the struggle!

When the Lords took over Lincoln Hospital to protest mistreatment of workers, lack of service to patients, and lack of repairs to the building, they also started a daycare center.[77]

The third kind of group was exemplified by the Movimiento Pro-Independencia, 1960-1971, then renamed the Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño or the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (MPI-PSP), the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño or the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), the Movimiento para Liberación Nacional or Movement for National Liberation (MLN), and the clandestine Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, or Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN). The mainland wings of these groups relied on a variety of strategies and tactics. They successfully sought to reopen the question of Puerto Rico's colonial status at the United Nations; kept alive concern about imprisoned Puerto Rican political activists, arguing that they were political prisoners; kept Puerto Rican independence a priority for the mainland U.S. left; and focused attention on the U.S. bombing of Vieques. Some advocated armed struggle for Puerto Rican liberation, drawing massive repression from COINTELPRO in particular and the FBI and local police forces in general.[78] (While virtually all Puerto Rican groups on the mainland were the target of some level of infiltration and repression in the sixties and seventies, some of it brutal, the harassment of the independence groups stand out.) Their only passing nod to even engaging the "culture of poverty" question was their continued focus on the question of sterilization abuse.

From Liberals to Neoconservative to Neoliberals

Over the course of four decades, the trope of the dangerous mother as the cause of poverty made its way, in both "overseas" development projects and "domestic" welfare policy, from liberal to neoconservative to neoliberal projects. After the initial phase, marked by the contribution of the social science of Puerto Rico (and to a

lesser extent, Mexico), there were multiple cross-fertilizations between "welfare" and development policies. The status of the "welfare queen" has sometimes been different from the mother of Third World "overpopulation," but they continue to be in conversation with each other. What remains constant is the centrality of ideologies about women— victimized or dangerous—to provide the "cause" for policy intervention, and reproduction and sexuality to provide the core of a discourse of racial/national/class "difference."

In the 1970s and '80s, Moynihan, Glazer, and Handlin's search for the pathology of black and Puerto Rican families became a core ingredient of neo-conservatism, as did their belief that it was absent from white, Catholic, and Jewish "ethnics." At least as much as feminists, neoconservatives like Charles Murray and Irving Kristol have insisted family politics are central to national public policy.[79] For them, these politics are racialized; there are good (male-headed, male-dominant) families and bad (female-dominant, disorganized) families, which are almost always non-white. With the decline of the influence of the Civil Rights, Nationalist, and New Left traditions, this position has at times flowered into punitive consensus. Charles Murray's 1984 *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* argued that AFDC itself was causing poverty by rewarding female-headed households, and should be eliminated. In 1994, Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich proposed that the children of young, single mothers be put in orphanages, and many liberals agreed that it was a proposal worth considering.[80] A form of this proposal was passed into law as adoption reform, which nullified the policies (largely imaginary anyway) making it difficult for white folks to adopt children of color, and offering a massive tax break (making up to $9,000 in adoption or "special needs" expenses deductable) to do so.[81] Or, with less striking imagery but more immediate effect, liberals and conservatives worked together to eliminate the AFDC "safety net" for poor women with children in 1996, largely in response to Murray's critique.

Thus, "the welfare queen" was born as much in Puerto Rico and the lower East Side as it was a home-grown characterization of African-Americans. This is not to say that there was not a sociology of the "deviance" of the black family prior to the postwar arrival of Puerto Ricans; there was, of course, a continuous tradition from E. Franklin Frazier to Eugene Genovese.[82] The two traditions have reinforced each other's authority, and emerged again with renewed vigor in recent years. This article, in a sense, represents a genealogy of the demonization of poor women in the welfare reform debates of 1994-1997. One branch of their descent comes not from the mainland but Puerto Rico.

NOTES

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[2] Colón, *The Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*, 9-10.
[3] See Sánchez Korrol's brilliant study of that early community, *From Colonia to Community*, and James' monograph on the larger Caribbean community, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*.
[4] Lewis, *La Vida*; Dugdale, *The Jukes*; Goddard, *The Kallikak Family*.
[5] Findlay, *Imposing Decency*.
[6] Cited in Monserrat, "Puerto Rican Migration," 78.
[7] For indirect but extensive documentation of employers reliance on the "culture of poverty" as a proxy for older, science-based racial categories, see Wilson, *When Work Disappears*. Wilson is among those who believes that there really is a homogeneous culture of the underclass (though his effort to mark it geographically unintentionally points up the incredible diversity of labor experiences even within a neighborhood). Nevertheless, he is also increasingly clear that "culture" is an alibi for "race" for discriminatory employers.
[8] Some date the shift as early as 1920, see, e.g., Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America"; others in the 1930s, Barkan, *Retreat of Scientific Racism*; Degler, *In Search of Human Nature*; others give more weight to World War II as a factor, see e.g., Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*.
[9] Monserrat, "Puerto Rican Migration," 82.
[10] Harvey and Reed, "The Culture of Poverty."
[11] Lapp, "Puerto Rico as Social Laboratory."
[12] Paul K. Hatt, *Backgrounds of Human Fertility in Puerto Rico*; Hill, et al., *The Family and Population Control*; Stycos, *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico*.
[13] Title poem, Martín Espada, *City of Coughing and Dead Radiators: Poems* (Norton: 1993).
[14] Torre, et al., *The Commuter Nation*; Sánchez, *Guagua Aerea*; Sandoval Sánchez, "Puerto Rican Migration Up in the Air."
[15] The migration division developed these numbers by counting people at the airport, which proved so unreliable it was later abandoned. So one must read these numbers as suggestive, not conclusive.
[16] Cordasco, "Forward," ix. Based on the Census Bureau's sample-survey data for November, 1969 as well as the Department of Labor, Migration Division, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.
[17] "Aid Planned Here for Puerto Ricans," *The New York Times*, 12 January 1947, p. 25.
[18] "Columbia is Ready for Migrant Study," *The New York Times*, 14 October 1947, p. 31. The 1950 Census found 226,110 Puerto Ricans living in the mainland, and an additional 75,265 children born on the mainland to Puerto Rican parents. Even if the census had undercounted Puerto Ricans by 100 percent, the *Times*'s numbers would still have to be significantly inflated. (See Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 4, *Special Reports: Puerto Ricans in the Continental United States*, pt. 3, ch. D). Oscar Handlin was the first to point this discrepancy out, *The Newcomers*, 61.
[19] Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Department of Labor, Migration Division, *A Summary of Facts and Figures*, 15.
[20] Wakefield, *Island in the City*, 213.

21 "Puerto Rico Seeks to Curb Migration," *The New York Times*, 23 February 1947, p. 20; "Why Puerto Ricans Flock to the U.S." *The New York Times*, 1 June 1947, p. E5; "Puerto Ricans Drift to Mainland Gains," *The New York Times* 31 July 1947, p. 18.
22 Whalen, From *Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 5-6.
23 "Rhatigan Reports on Relief Spending," *The New York Times*, 25 May 1947, pp. 1, 3. Edward Ranzal, "Puerto Rico Seeks to Curb Migration," *The New York Times*, 23 February 1947, p. 20.
24 "82,000,000 Rise in Relief is Seen," *The New York Times*, 17 October 1947, pp. 1, 14.
25 "New York Relief Cases Increase," *New York World Telegram*, 20 October 1947, p. 10.
26 "Migration Spontaneous: Puerto Rico Officials Say Flow to New York is Not Forced," *The New York Times*, 1 August 1947, p. 3; "Officials Worried by Influx of Migrant Puerto Ricans," *The New York Times*, 2 August 1947, pp. 1, 15; Albert Gordon, "Crime Increasing in 'Little Spain,'—Puerto Rican Migrants Jammed Into East Harlem District Keep the Police Busy—Boy Gangs Roam Streets—Robberies, Gambling and Vice are Common—Authorities Urge More Play Areas," and "117 Arrive at Newark," *The New York Times*, 3 August 1947, p. 12. "The Tragedy of Puerto Rico," *The New York Times*, 3 August 1947, sec. IV, p. 6. Gordon, "Solution is Sought to Migrant Influx—Puerto Rico Plans to Develop Island Resources to Reduce Number Leaving Home—Relief Costs Here Soar—Surveys Show Many Diseases Prevalent in 'Little Spain' and Other Settlements," *The New York Times*, 4 August, 1947, pp. 19, 35; Letter, *The New York Times*, 5 August 1947, p. 4; Letter, *The New York Times*, 7 August 1947, p. 20.
27 "Governor of Puerto Rico Planning Study by Columbia of Migration," *The New York Times*, 8 August 1947, pp. 1, 4; "Columbia Accepts Puerto Rico Study," *The New York Times*, 10 August 1947, p. 54.
28 "Puerto Rican Migrants Jam New York," *Life*, 25 August 1947, pp. 25-29.
29 Lewis, *Puerto Rico*.
30 Mills, Senior, and Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey*.
31 New York City Board of Education, Bureau of Educational Program Research and Statistics, *Teaching Children of Puerto Rican Background New York City Schools*; J. Cayce Morrison, *The Puerto Rican Study*, 1953-1957; The Welfare Council of New York City, Committee on Puerto Ricans in New York City, *Puerto Ricans in New York City*; Welfare and Health Council of New York City, *Population of Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage* (1950); Welfare and Health Council of New York City, Brooklyn Council for Social Planning, "Report on Survey of Brooklyn Agencies Rendering Services to Puerto Ricans."
32 Mills, Senior, and Goldsen, *Puerto Rican Journey*, 60, 61, 63, 88-89, 95-98.
33 Wakefield, *Island in the City*; Padilla, *Up from Puerto Rico*; Welfare Council of New York City, Committee of Puerto Ricans in New York City, *Puerto Ricans in New York City*; Welfare and Health Council of New York City, *Population Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage*.
34 James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*.
35 Rodríguez-Morazzani, "Political Cultures of the Puerto Rican Left in the United States."
36 Clooney worked with Lloyd Rogler on *Puerto Rican Families in New York City*.
37 Rodriguez-Fratricelli and Amílcar Tirado, "Notes Toward a History of Puerto Rican Community Organization in New York City."
38 Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Department of Labor, Migration Division, *A Summary in Facts and Figures*.
39 Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 277.
40 Herzog, "The Culture of Poverty." Rainwater, *And the Poor Get Children*.
41 Oscar Lewis, *Children of Sanchez*, xxiv, cited in Herzog, "The Culture of Poverty."
42 Herzog, "The Culture of Poverty," 391.
43 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*.
44 Herzog, "Culture of Poverty," 390.
45 Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History."

[46] Valentine, "The 'Culture of Poverty.'"
[47] Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, *The Negro Family*.
[48] Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*.
[49] The person who is best on this point is Wahneema Lubiano. See "Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense," and "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels."
[50] Nathan Glazer, "Forward" xi-xii.
[51] Lewis, *La Vida*, 4-5.
[52] *Ibid.*, 5.
[53] *Ibid.*, 92.
[54] Bendiner, "Outside the Kingdom of the Middle Class."
[55] Lewis, 27.
[56] *Ibid.*, 535.
[57] *Ibid.*, 538.
[58] *Ibid.*, 662.
[59] Glazer, "One Kind of Life."
[60] Horowitz, "Meurte en Vida."
[61] Lewis, *A Study of Slum Culture*, 116.
[62] Rigdon, *The Culture Façade*, 76.
[63] *Ibid.*, 90.
[64] *Ibid.*, 94.
[65] Michael Harrington, "Everyday Hell," *The New York Times* Book Review, 20 November 1966, pp. 1, 92.
[66] Maldonado-Denis, "Oscar Lewis: *La vida* y la enejenación."
[67] "*La Vida*: Whose Life?"; Cordasco, "Another Face of Poverty."
[68] Oscar Handlin, "Reader's Choice," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1966, pp. 138-44, 142.
[69] Saul Maloff, "Man's Fate?" *Newsweek*, November 21, 1966, pp. 131-32.
[70] Glazer, "One Kind of Life," 82.
[71] Elmer Bendiner, "Outside the Kingdom of the Middle Class," *The Nation*, 2 January 1967, 22-23.
[72] *Ibid.*, 22.
[73] Nat Hentoff, "Life Near the Bone," *The New Yorker*, 4 March 1967, pp. 54-60.
[74] The evidence for this in Lewis's case is the introduction; for Moynihan, his other published writings. (see, e.g., Moynihan, "The President and the Negro: The Moment Lost," *Commentary*, February 1967, 31-45).
[75] Puerto Rican Forum, *The Puerto Rican Community Development Project*, 4-5.
[76] *Ibid.*, 9.
[77] *Pa'lante, Siempre Pa'lante: The Young Lords*; Abrahmson and the Young Lords Party, Palante: *The Young Lords Party*.
[78] Andrés Torres, "Political Radicalism in the Diaspora—The Puerto Rican Experience."
[79] See the various neoconservative declarations on race, poverty, and family, e.g., Rainwater, Rein, and Esping-Andersen, *Stagnation and Renewal in Social Policy*; Kaus, *The End of Equality*; Williams, *America, A Minority Viewpoint*; and Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy*, 1950-1980. Murray's subsequent book, with Richard Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve* also argues, but in a biological register, that reproduction of the "wrong sort"—that is, passing along heritable low IQ—causes poverty. These scholars tie their own genealogy directly to the Moynihan Report. See Williams et al., "Sex, Families, Race, Poverty, Welfare."
[80] See Katha Pollit, "Subject to Debate," *The Nation*, 13 February, 1995, 192.
[81] Patton, *Birth Marks*.
[82] Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*.

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