



Chaudhuri finds. Under a sophisticated system of economic exchange, traders from diverse lands bought and sold silk, spices, rice, and other goods in the dispersed markets of Aden, Calcutta, and Canton. But finally, because mercantile capitalism was "legally undefined and socially misunderstood," the realm of commercial and cultural contact remained largely limited to merchants, traders, and dealers. Ordinary Arabs, Hindus, or Chinese never "lived and breathed with the same rhythms," as Braudel claims the Mediterranean Turks and Christians once did.

Trade, moreover, never loomed large in the minds of Asian rulers. Sultan Bahadur, 16th-century ruler of Gujarat (on the northwestern coast of India), blithely declared that "wars by sea are merchants' affairs, and of no concern to the prestige of kings"—an attitude that contemporary European monarchs did not share.

### *Contemporary Affairs*

**FAMILY AND NATION**  
**The Godkin Lectures,**  
**Harvard University**  
 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan  
 Harcourt, 1986  
 207 pp. \$12.95

Washington's two-decade-old war on poverty has not been a complete failure. Today, poverty rates for America's elderly are "lower than poverty rates for the rest of the population," says a recent issue of *Economic Report*. Children have fared less well: Although they represent about 27 percent of the nation's population, they now make up 40 percent of its poor. Nearly half of all black children live below the poverty line.

Moynihan, Democratic U.S. Senator from New York and former Harvard government professor, attributes child poverty to the breakdown of the American family—a trend that he first noted over 20 years ago. In 1965, Moynihan, then a Johnson administration official, predicted in a famous report that "pathologies" within American black families (such as the growth in single-parent households), if unaddressed, would undercut economic and social gains made possible through new civil rights legislation. Liberals and some black spokesmen promptly denounced his report as "racist." Although many of his original detractors have since changed their minds, few politicians or scholars have been willing to address the subject.

Since 1965, Moynihan argues, the plight of

American families, white and black, has vastly worsened. The federal government, he contends, has still done little to help. In some respects, as in its long failure to increase income tax deductions for dependents, Washington has made matters worse. In three Harvard lectures reprinted here, Moynihan needles liberals for showing more concern for individual self-fulfillment (including "freer" sexuality) than for the overall health of families; and he takes conservatives to task for their claims that welfare aid has hurt rather than helped families. Moynihan offers a modest set of palliatives (e.g., work programs for welfare mothers, tax relief for poor families, stricter enforcement of drug laws). His larger point, however, is that society's neglect of problem families is itself a policy—and a bad one at that.

**THE ESSENTIAL  
REINHOLD NIEBUHR**

edited by Robert  
McAfee Brown  
Yale, 1986  
264 pp. \$19.95

George Kennan once said that he doubted any less sanctimonious man ever wore clerical cloth. Claimed variously by liberals and neoconservatives, traditional theologians and liberation theologians, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) remains America's most influential religious thinker of the 20th century. In this selection of essays and addresses, Brown, a former Niebuhr pupil and professor emeritus of theology at the Pacific School of Religion, presents Niebuhr on a variety of topics: Political pieces discussing man's "essential freedom" and democracy, such as "The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness," are balanced with his theological essays, including "Man's Nature and His Communities" and "Optimism, Pessimism, and Religious Faith."

To Niebuhr, the doctrine of Original Sin remained the one empirically verifiable doctrine of Christian faith. Politically, he underwent gradual changes throughout his life. The crimes of Stalin and Niebuhr's misgivings about Marxism led him to attack communism as vigorously as he had once condemned capitalism; yet he never quite shed his socialist views. He was a dweller in paradox, describing himself as an "unbelieving believer" and love as the "impossible possibility." But faith kept him from being crippled by life's ambiguities: "Show us what we ought to do," reads one of Niebuhr's prayers. "Show us also what are the limits of our powers and what we cannot do."