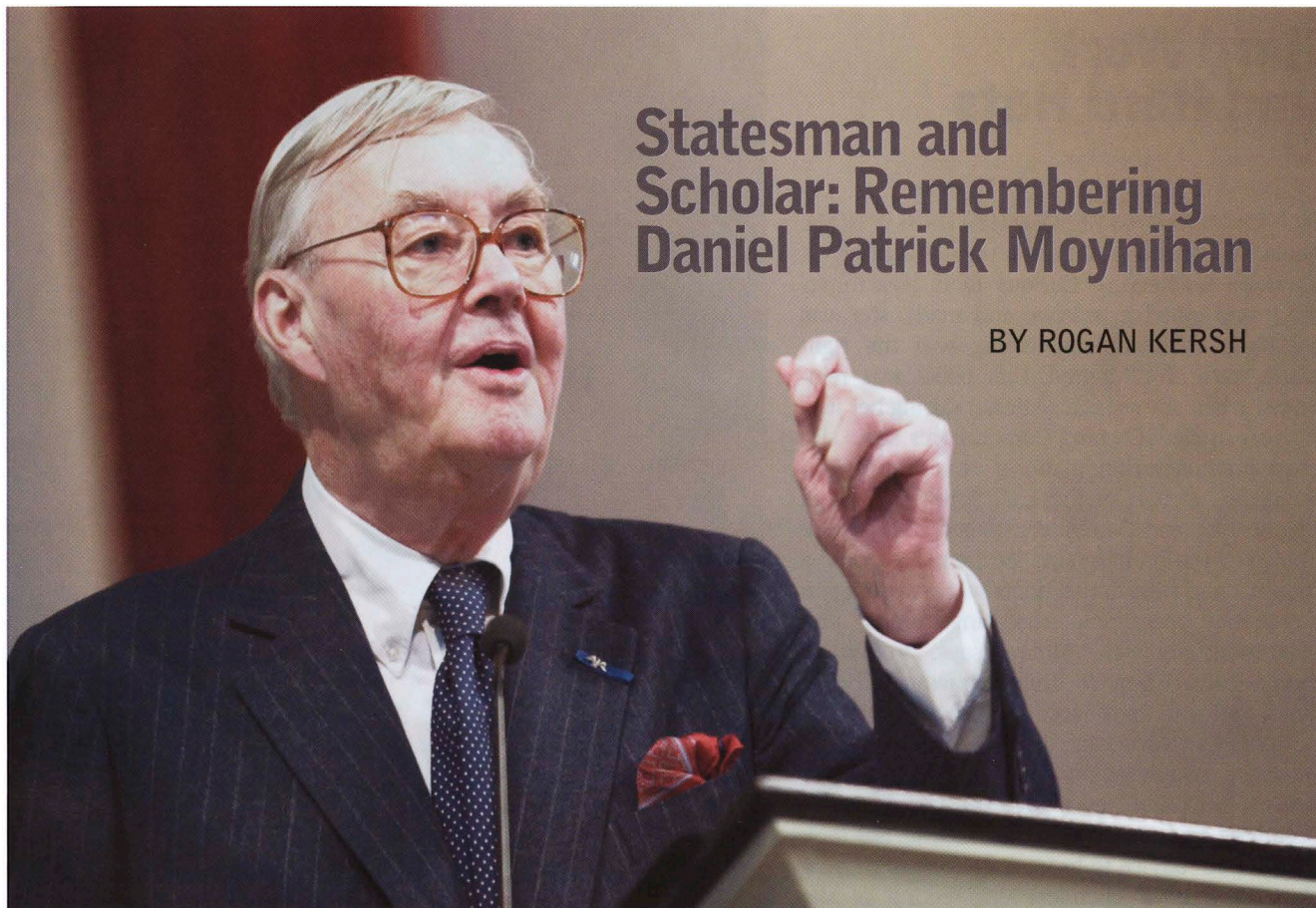


# Perspectives



## Statesman and Scholar: Remembering Daniel Patrick Moynihan

BY ROGAN KERSH

University Professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan delivers a lecture on Social Security in Hendricks Chapel.

Photography by Steve Sartori

For half a century, U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan stood as the nation's premier intellectual statesman. Perhaps no American public figure in recent times has received such an outpouring of acclaim following his or her death. It is richly merited, given Moynihan's unmatched accomplishments in fields ranging from social policy, urban architecture, and New York State stewardship to political history, international affairs, and historic preservation. Also noteworthy is the constant and mutually cherished connection between the senator and Syracuse University.

Moynihan, who died in March at age 76, had a remarkably productive career, encompassing 24 years in the Senate, as well as service to four U.S. presidents (two Democratic, two Republican), including ambassadorships to the United Nations and to India. Everyone who encountered him has a favorite "Moynihan moment." My fondest memory arises from his recent tenure as University Professor at SU.

In spring 2001, for the better part of 10 weeks, my Interest Group Politics class undertook an elaborate public policy simulation focused on health care issues. The 80-odd students played members of Congress, lobbyists for groups like

the American Medical Association, White House officials, and reporters, all working to promote—or block—legislation on a prescription drug benefit, a patients' bill of rights, and the like. Late in the semester Senator Moynihan graciously agreed to resume his senatorial role and evaluate the lobbyists in the group.

For a memorable four hours, Moynihan's Eggers Hall office was transformed into a Senate anteroom, where successive groups of "student-lobbyists" trooped in nervously to promote their goals and ideas on health care—a subject Moynihan knew as well as anyone, given his recent turn as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. He took up his part with relish, gently but firmly pushing one student on her claims about uninsured Americans; joking with another about a (real-life) lobbyist from his group, Families USA; and barking with apparently genuine asperity at one fellow who'd boldly mentioned "our recent contribution to your campaign, Senator." Moynihan responded sternly, "One should never discuss financial matters in a U.S. senator's office."

At day's end, Moynihan emerged to find the students gathered in Eggers Commons, excitedly discussing their respective lobbying experiences. Acknowledging their expressions



Senator Moynihan meets with students in the Maxwell School.

of gratitude, the senator remarked, “The thing about you lobbyists in D.C., whether you’re Democrats or Republicans, is you all wind up in the evening at the same saloon!” In unprompted notes later, several of the students called the experience the highlight of their SU academic careers.

Moynihan’s career was marked by countless gestures of similar good cheer, as well as rigorous intellectual engagement and unmatched wit. (When addressed, with a sneer, as “Professor Moynihan” by incumbent Senator James Buckley, his opponent in his first Senate campaign in 1976, Moynihan mock-lamented, “Ah, the mudslinging has begun.”) His years as a public servant, both in the executive branch and in the Senate, yielded an astonishing record of involvement and achievement. As one book reviewer wrote, “The story of modern American social policy and the story of Daniel Patrick Moynihan are one and the same.”

Senator Moynihan’s public contributions were of two general types that rarely are coupled in the same person: policy making, where despite an oft-described “owlish demeanor” and tendency to “lecture” colleagues, he proved a master at the give-and-take of hardball politics; and serious scholarship. Among Moynihan’s 18 books, half of which were written while he served in the Senate, are truly vital studies such as *Beyond the Melting Pot*, *On the Law of*

*Nations*, and, most recently, his powerful rumination on officialdom’s penchant for hidden activity, *Secrecy: The American Experience*.

The details of Moynihan’s early life, though well chronicled, deserve recollection. Though the Hell’s Kitchen boyhood frequently attributed to him is not exactly accurate—his mother indeed owned a bar there, but not until Moynihan was older—he did work as a shoeshine boy in Times Square and, later, as a dock worker on Manhattan’s piers. His service in the Navy followed, along with a stint tending bar for his mother. He then went off to college at Tufts, where he earned a B.A. degree, then M.A. and doctoral degrees from the Fletcher School at Tufts.

Senator Moynihan’s academic career began where it concluded, at Syracuse University. From 1959 to 1961, while working on a Ph.D. in international relations, Moynihan directed SU’s New York State Government Research Project and wrote a book on Governor Averell Harriman’s administration. He also “taught a class or two, though the students back then knew more than I did,” as he puckishly recalled in a talk at SU last year.

His return to the Hill as University Professor after he retired from the Senate in 2000 was equally multifaceted. Moynihan lectured in several different undergraduate and Maxwell School courses, held regular meetings with doctoral students from across the social sciences, and convened symposia, including a memorable 30-year anniversary roundtable on his book *Beyond the Melting Pot* with his co-author, Nathan Glazer. He also presided over the Moynihan Award ceremony, which each year honors an outstanding junior faculty member in the Maxwell School. Moynihan endowed the award nearly two decades ago. That gift—one small but significant and generous gesture characterizing a life of an unmatched range of public contributions—testifies to the profoundly good nature of the man. It also speaks to the proud and enduring link between SU and this great citizen of New York, the United States, and the world.



The University Professor gets together with Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw and Vice Chancellor and Provost Deborah A. Freund.

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