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## Losing the Half-Century War on Poverty

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We were only a few short years into the War on Terror when the Left demanded we pull the plug because of a lack of results. Yet 50 years into the War on Poverty declared by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, we've spent an estimated \$22 *trillion* trying to alleviate poverty with little to show for it.

One in seven Americans [still live in poverty](#), roughly the same rate as when the policies began to take effect in the late 1960s. The 2013 poverty rate of 14.5% was the first decline in the year-over-year rate since 2006, as the 2012 rate was 15%. But even during flush economic times, we've never driven the poverty rate below 10%.

Despite the stagnation in the poverty rate, the changes wrought by Johnson's "[Great Society](#)" have manifested themselves in a number of societal ills that were uncommon five decades ago. Many of those stem from an out-of-wedlock birthrate that has skyrocketed from single-digits in 1964 to over 40% today. With the marriage rate in [steep decline](#), we could call it the era of the "baby daddy" – despite recent U.S. Census reports indicating a female-headed single-parent family is five times more likely to be poor than a married-couple one. [Marriage really does matter](#).

On the other hand, to be poor in this day and age carries with it a number of advantages even middle-class families could only dream of a generation or two ago. Contrary to popular perception, the average poverty-level family likely has a car (and perhaps two) as well as their own place to live, whether a single-family home or apartment – less than one in 10 live in a mobile home or trailer. Just 4% of those considered poor are homeless at some point during a calendar year, according to Census Bureau statistics. (The Heritage Foundation has done an outstanding [study](#) detailing these and other facts about our poor.)

The dirty little secret about America's "poor" is that most of the dozens of means-tested government programs aren't considered income for recipients. If these programs were given an income equivalent, only a tiny percentage of the 45.3 million Americans who fall below the poverty line would be considered poor and the perceived need for these programs would decrease. Last year the Cato Institute put out a [controversial study](#) claiming that welfare programs in many states paid more than minimum wage jobs, providing a disincentive to work but a tremendous incentive to vote in such a way as to assure the gravy train will continue to roll.

The more people who are touched by government assistance, the easier it is for politicians distributing the “help” to maintain power. As the saying goes, those who rob Peter to pay Paul can always count on the vote of Paul.

In short, the Great Society has created the great dependent underclass, a massive voting bloc that is now beholden to statist. No longer do we hear of the generation too proud to accept “relief” from the government. And no longer do we subject our dependent class to the humiliation of cashing welfare checks or counting out food stamps – now it’s as easy as swiping a credit card, only with no payment due. Meanwhile, those from the faith-based community who used to provide for society’s less fortunate by providing a hand up rather than a handout are more and more shut out of the process.

The *stated* intention of the Great Society was to simply provide the tools to bring people out of poverty – they still had to do the work. But work is hard and handouts are easy, and that simple truism has brought us to the unsustainable situation we’re in today, with no end in sight unless radical change comes from the very government that has become the vote-gathering provider to so many. It won’t be under this regime, of course, as Barack Obama has put us on a path to throw another \$13 trillion at the problem over the next fruitless decade.