



Poverty War Lost

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America has 99 problems, and poverty is one.

At the National Youth Summit's war on poverty discussion, experts rapped about poverty's causes and solutions in a numbers battle. At the discussion's center was President Lyndon Johnson 1964 declaration "to not only relieve the symptoms of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it."

Many of President Johnson's programs including food stamps, job corps, Medicaid, Medicare and Head Start existing today. 51 years later, the question is: Do we need a new war on poverty? The panelists at this summit said yes, but differed how to execute the war and what it would entail.

Carmack Waterhouse professor of law and public policy at Georgetown University Law Center Peter Edelman said that President Johnson wasn't just interested in poverty but civil rights. He referenced how the anti-discrimination act of 1964 improved employment opportunities for African-Americans, citing that in the 1960s, Black poverty went down from 55 percent to 32 percent.

The summit, facilitated by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, allows American middle and high school students nationwide to be among audience members and participants in national conversations about indelible events in America's history that shape the present. HistoryMiami, a Smithsonian Institution affiliate, hosted students in the Stephen P. Clark Miami-Dade County Commission Chamber, in addition to an online audience of 33 states, Yemen and Ireland.

POVERTY BY THE NUMBERS

The Census Bureau defines poverty for a family of four as living with an annual income below \$23,050 and adjusted according to household size. The youngest are the poorest in the county. Bloomberg News in 2014 reported that some Miamians live on \$11 per day.

Almost one fifth of Miami-Dade County's 2.7 million residents live in poverty. In Miami-Dade zip code 33127, almost 80 percent of the residents are deeply poor, according to City-Data.com. In October 2013, the Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources Planning Research Section reported that poverty in Miami-Dade hovered at around 20 percent and was not improving even as the Great Recession ended and unemployment fell.

"... since 2010 the unemployment rate has steadily decreased with no matching fall in the poverty rate," the report said.

"One of the things we need to look at is how big the war on poverty has gotten," said Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute. "The fact is the federal government has 126 separate anti-poverty programs today. We spent about \$688 billion last year on those programs, about \$300 billion at the state level. To go back to 1965 from \$22 trillion fighting poverty, the standard poverty rates are about the same level as they were in 1965."

Poverty and Prosperity Program vice president at the Center for American Progress Melissa Boteach countered: "One of the issues is that a lot of times when people talk about poverty, they use a poverty rate that doesn't take into account the interventions that are made from the war on poverty. I'd say the war on poverty has been a success. If you look at the outcomes, a lot more people are a lot better off."