

## GIVE PEACE A CHANCE: END THE WAR ON POVERTY

By Liz LaSorte

In his 1961 inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy discussed the evils of poverty in the USA. “For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago. The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God... If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”

Wow, that sounds like a President leading a country that is not spiritually vacuous.

In 1964, as America grew into a prosperous and wealthy country, President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) announced an “unconditional war on poverty” in his first State of the Union address that January. President Johnson said that “the days of the dole in this country are numbered” at the signing ceremony for the Economic Opportunity Act in August 1964. Create Equal Opportunity for all – sounds like a wonderful way to move forward after a century of Jim Crow and Appalachian type poverty.

Wait, people were on the dole before 1964? The American welfare experiment began during the Great Depression and a lot more people can describe it better than I can,<sup>1</sup> but it is important to understand the mindset because during the depression era, the idea was that Uncle Sam was giving a “helping” handout when times get tough. Before Uncle Sam started helping people during the Depression era, the handouts came from a variety of charities, usually from local churches.

How did the idea of equal opportunity somehow morph into the idea that we are all equal? You are probably better looking and smarter than I am, so how can we be equal? The premise in the Declaration of Independence is based on Natural Law; that our rights come from our Creator (let’s call our Creator “God”) and not from any Government and that we are all created equally ***in the eyes of our Creator***. Being created equally in the eyes of God is significantly different from saying that “we are all created equal.” We may not be created equally, but we should be treated equally. But if We the People do not believe in God, then the idea of Natural Law will not make sense. [It is unfortunate that too many people equate the dogma of various religions

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<sup>1</sup> <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/great-depression/american-social-policy-in-the-great-depression-and-wwii/>

with the basic belief in God and conclude God cannot exist.] Could that be a reason we confuse the premise of equal opportunity with everyone being equal and that we all need equity?

The idea to “give a hand and not a handout” makes sense. Those of us with a good education, good parents and good guidance get good jobs and gain American privilege. We go to work, pay our taxes, and continue to earn more as we learn more, allowing us to create our version of the American dream, like many American generations before us. But some of us are not born with the privilege of good parents who guide us towards a good education and to be good citizens, and that is where the problem starts.

More than a half a century has passed since LBJ declared War on Poverty. Are we better off as a country because of the War on Poverty?<sup>2</sup>

According to the Urban Institute, 59 million Americans, or 19% of the population, received some form of welfare in 2019. For the “racists” out there, as of 2021, according to the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>3</sup>, white people take the most welfare: “75.9% of welfare recipients are white, 13% are black and 6.5 % are Asian.” However, this study includes Social Security and Medicare, so these statistics include people who worked all their lives and are now collecting Social Security and Medicare. That is how it is with statistics; the numbers can pull outliers or be crunched into whatever result one is looking for. To try and understand the numbers, we must be vigilant in analyzing the numbers.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>4</sup> 45 million people were lifted out of poverty in 2021. So says this agency that is a part of the Department of Commerce. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS) says it continues to conduct an excellent job and performed magnificently during Covid.<sup>5</sup> USHHS was founded in 1953. It employs 88,509 employees and has an \$879 billion budget with an employee expense account of \$10.05B as of 2022. This federal department cost taxpayers approximately \$890,000,000.00<sup>6</sup> in 2022.

I would like to live in a color-blind society, believing that Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) had it right: it is our character that matters, not our race. What difference does it make what color the dependent American is, anyway? What matters is that they are dependent on the government *to continue* to stay alive.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4822720/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/who-is-receiving-social-safety-net-benefits.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/government-assistance-lifts-millions-out-of-poverty.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy2021-performance-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy-2024-budget-in-brief.pdf>

Malcom X said, “We are trapped in a vicious cycle of economic, intellectual, social, and political death. Inferior jobs, inferior housing, inferior education which in turn again leads to inferior jobs.” [Malcolm X at UC Berkeley (October 11, 1963)]

Malcom X also said “Get off the welfare, get out of the compensation line. Be a man and earn what you need for your family. Then your family will respect you because you are accepting the responsibility of manhood.”

Walter E. Williams said, “The welfare state has done to Black Americans what slavery couldn’t do.... And that is to destroy the black family.”

Thomas Sowell said that in 1960, “before this expansion of the welfare state, 22 percent of Black children were raised with only one parent. By 1985, 67 percent of Black children were raised with either one parent or no parent.” What is that figure today?

So culturally, from several voices of Black Americans, the War on Poverty has harmed many Black Americans. Maybe the federal government should follow the Hippocratic oath: First, Do No Harm.

Didn’t President Clinton change “welfare as we know it” creating workfare (must have a job or receive job training to receive benefits), signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996? After less than a decade of success<sup>7</sup>, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2003, there were 3.5 million fewer people living in poverty with less people “on the dole” after only eight years since welfare reform in 1996. People will argue that it was a stronger economy then. President Obama removed the federal work requirements in 2012, increasing more people “living on the dole.”

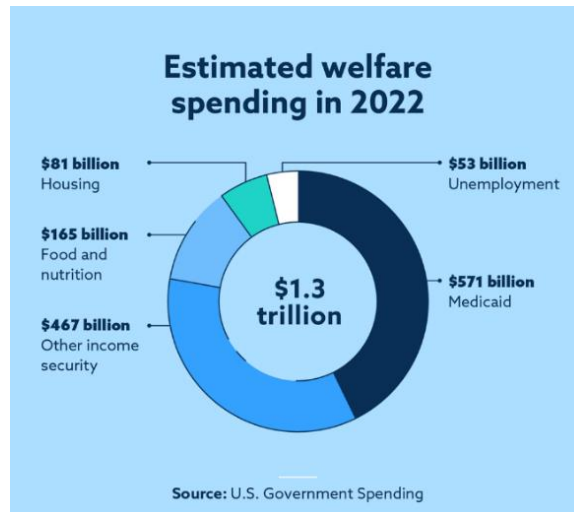
In 1984, Peter Cove founded America Works<sup>8</sup> and claims to have helped over two million people end dependency and earn their dignity back through work by “increasing their self-sufficiency through gainful employment, including military veterans, welfare and SNAP recipients, young adults, the criminal justice involved, homeless, non-custodial parents, persons receiving disability, among others.” He discovered that “work, not welfare, uplifts the poor.” He describes his story here <https://www.city-journal.org/article/what-i-learned-in-the-poverty-war>.

How much do we spend on the “War on Poverty” each year? According to U.S. Government Spending, taxpayers spent 1.3 trillion dollars as of 2022. [That is a lot of interest payments on the national debt.]

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/welfare/report/the-continuing-good-news-about-welfare-reform>

<sup>8</sup> <https://americaworks.com/about/>



There will always be proponents for the War on Poverty, who say that the War on Poverty has been successful, and in fact, H. Res. 971 was introduced in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress on January 17, 2024.<sup>9</sup>

Others will say the opposite and that after all the expense, closing in on \$30 Trillion dollars since 1964, the rate of poverty remains about the same, proportionately, as the population has increased since 1964, and because all Americans are the heirs of the American Experiment, that allows even the poorest among us to live with 1<sup>st</sup> world advantages.

Others will argue that it is difficult to quantify the actual amount spent annually since the total amount is divided into a myriad of federal and state programs.<sup>10</sup> And, then there is Fraud. How big is the fraud department of each agency? It takes time to unravel the tentacles of federal control. So, maybe it would be better to get it out of federal control and push it back to the states, ala the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment. At least, the people can have a better idea of where their state tax dollars are going, and that is precisely the point of Limited Government – that the federal government is not too big and out of control.

America has so much potential to be a great country. Like all flawed humans, Americans make mistakes, but if we learn from our mistakes and try not to continue to make the same mistakes, maybe we can survive. Slavery was America's original sin, and it took 76 years after the founding of the American Experiment to abolish slavery. We enacted Civil Rights more than half a century ago, yet, America, at age 235 years, is in turmoil over our past and speed walking towards the last cycle of Democracy - Dependency or the Point of No Return.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-resolution/971/text>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/welfare/report/understanding-the-hidden-11-trillion-welfare-system-and-how-reform-it>

In the past, Americans did not identify as victims. Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass were born into slavery. They could easily argue that, yes, they were victims, but both refused to do so, and instead, they embodied what it means to be an American and improved the lives of themselves, their families and many other Americans as a result.

Can we heed the warning from Alexander Tytler, who said, “A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through this sequence: From bondage to spiritual faith; From spiritual faith to great courage; From courage to liberty; From liberty to abundance; From abundance to selfishness; From selfishness to apathy; From apathy to dependence; From dependence back into bondage.”

Dependency, the last cycle before Tyranny. Do taxpayers really want to continue to keep people “on the dole” and take the chance that Tytler was right? Why not skip over dependency and bondage, and abide by the USC so we can once again live under a Constitutional Republic rather than a democracy? Maybe we could even grow spiritually according to the 1<sup>st</sup> Law of the Universe: That of Divine Oneness.

So, if we understand and agree that we must end dependency on the federal government, how do we do this? Gradually and carefully. Plenty of people will argue that the welfare clause in Article 1, Sec. 8, “to provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States” allows the federal government to enact any law for the common good, but the fact that common Defense is coupled with general Welfare in the same sentence begs to differ that interpretation to feed and house people. At a minimum, it should go back to the states, so that any welfare spending is closer, smaller and more manageable to the People and only used as a true and temporary safety net so as to not create dependency on the state governments.

When will the days of people “living on the dole” end? War...what is it good for? Absolutely not to end poverty.

