NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & OUTREACH
NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT
FINAL REPORT

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Smithsonian Institution
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The National Youth Summit on the War on Poverty took place on April 28, 2015.

The National Youth Summit is a webcast event that brings middle and high school students together with scholars, teachers, policy experts, and activists in a national conversation about important events in America’s past that have relevance to the present.

The program is an ongoing collaboration between NMAH and museums across the United States in the Smithsonian Affiliations network. The program included Regional Youth Summits at Smithsonian Affiliate museums in Cincinnati, Ohio; Miami, Florida; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Dearborn, Michigan; and Seattle, Washington. The National Youth Summit team also developed a conversation kit of discussion questions and lesson suggestions for classroom use. This year’s National Youth Summit program examined the history and legacy of the War on Poverty, and addressed the following central questions:

- What are the central debates around the role of government in the fight against poverty?
- How has poverty changed in the United States since 1964?
- How does poverty limit the opportunities of individuals in the United States?
- How are people addressing poverty today? What would you do to address poverty?

Marcia Chatelain, professor of history at Georgetown University, and Peter Edelman, professor of law at Georgetown and head of the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality discussed the history of the War on Poverty. Professor Edelman also drew on his personal experience as a legislative aide to Robert Kennedy in the 1960s. Participants viewed a behind-the-scenes tour to our political history storage then heard Melissa Boteach of the Center for American Progress and Michael Tanner of the Cato Institute debate whether we need a new War on Poverty. Michael Tanner emphasized a central message of the program when he explained, “Melissa and I see things differently. We share the same goals. People should ask both questions and try to determine their own answers.”
The program was moderated by the National Museum of American History’s Director of the Program in African American History and Culture Christopher Wilson with support from two high school students, Camaryn Chicester and Kevin Peralta, from E.L. Haynes Public Charter School in Washington, DC. The students hosted and assisted in creating the behind-the-scenes video for the webcast, reviewed the run of show and suggested changes and additions, and asked questions of the panelists during the live webcast.

Approximately 2700 students were registered to participate online at 191 locations along with an additional 300+ students at five Affiliate locations, for a total of approximately 3000 students. Registered students represented 33 states, DC, Yemen, and Ireland. The program used Ustream to broadcast the live webcast. Ustream’s analytics show that we had 194 total views and 133 unique views on the day of the program, suggesting that the majority of registered viewers did join the live program. In addition, there have been 133 views of the archived webcast as of June 2015.

We promoted the program through email and social media, including testing a new paid social media campaign. Forty-two percent of registrants learned about the program by email, 13% heard about it from a colleague, and 23% learned of the program on social media.

Our final program survey showed that our primary short-term goals were achieved. Among these was that “Students report feeling empowered to make change.” According to one teacher, “The highlight was definitely the end where the students talked about ways we could help hunger. My students felt empowered that they could be a part of a solution. Also, focusing on education as a solution was very meaningful to my students.” Student comments include the following:

- “The message I am taking away from this is that young people are knowledgeable and opinionated, and we play a key role in the future of this nation.”
- “A take away I have is that kids like us can help win the war on poverty. It gives me hope that maybe in my lifetime we can put an end to poverty for good.”
Another goal was that “Teachers report that the program enhanced their curriculum or expanded student understanding of the topic.” As one teacher noted: “We set it up as a luncheon program. Once everyone had their pizza and drinks, they sat together to watch and discuss the program. It was a great change from our usual school lunches and the discussion was relaxed and interesting. After the webcast ended, our regular class period began and we spent the period talking about poverty issues, the minimum wage debate and LBJ. We all enjoyed it.”

Another noted: “The students enjoyed listening to different points of view from the speakers. We had a great discussion after the webcast.”

While we encountered technical challenges, ultimately our use of live webcast with facilitated chat offered good opportunities for students to engage with each other. As one student noted, “[The highlight of the program was] The chat! It was the experience of my life being able to communicate, ask, and answer questions with other kids my age from all over the world.” For another, the highlight was “That I learned so much and got to communicate with other students in the U.S. and had a great time sharing my ideas with other kids my age and older and listening to there [sic] ideas also. It was very interesting and made me feel like I had a voice in the conversation.”

When asked if they would recommend that their teacher participate in the webcast with future classes, all respondents answered in the affirmative. As one student noted, “All of a sudden I got a new look on life, and I strongly think that students all over would benefit from this entire experience.”

Students participating at the Regional Youth Summits had similar responses. As students at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan noted:

- “I will remember the topic of the minimum wage the most because as a youth I really depend on it.”
- “I think teachers should bring us back because this program was interesting.”
- “Everybody should get a chance to experience this activity.”
**Arab American National Museum, Dearborn**

Drawing lessons from the program presented last year, this year’s Summit at the Arab American National Museum built on that effective model and was even more successful. The program began with Beverley McDonald who serves as a co-chair and public policy analyst for Michigan Catholics for the Common Good and healthcare chair of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. Ms. McDonald discussed poverty in Michigan and how it has changed over time and four students from University of Michigan-Ann Arbor led an activity that brought the issue of poverty to a high school level. The Arab American National Museum’s Jenna Hamed led a poverty workshop to guide the students to express their emotions creatively, including through poetry. One student wrote: “Dear Money, you’re so powerful you have people angry when they spend you, you have people greedy when they get a bunch of you, and you run our world.” The students then enjoyed a Middle Eastern lunch and a spoken word performance by Zain Shamoon, a Muslim American performance artist and social activist. Finally, the students moved to the auditorium for the national portion of the summit. Two students spoke on behalf of Focus Hope and what the youth are doing to fight poverty for the national webcast.

**HistoryMiami, Miami**

The local panel consisted of Commissioner Daniela Levine-Cava who served as moderator, Joshua Williams a 14 year-old student who at the age of 4 started a charitable organization called “Joshua’s Heart” to help feed the needy, Paco Velez, President and CEO of Feeding South Florida and Dr. Shed Boren, CEO of Camillus House. Over 30 students lined up to engage the panelists. The ongoing civic unrest in Baltimore at the time of the panel made it for a heated conversation.
REGIONAL SUMMITS

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati

The local panelists were Sherman B. Bradley - Founder and CEO - Consider the Poor and Kevin Finn - Executive Director - Strategies to End Homelessness. Consider the Poor’s mission is to provide the very best advocacy, consulting, training, and service projects that will enlighten people to consider and engage issues around poverty. Strategies to End Homelessness leads a coordinated system of care for the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless throughout Cincinnati and Hamilton county.

Museum of History and Industry, Seattle

The panelists for the Regional Youth Summit in Seattle were Emily Lieb, Professor, Poverty Education Center at Seattle University; Marilyn Watkins, Policy Director, Economic Opportunity Institute; Liz Speigel, Safe Place Coordinator, Youth Care; Heidi Neff, Program Manager, Youth Tutoring Program, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington; with moderator Ben Curtis, Director of the Poverty Education Center at Seattle University. The panelists and students discussed common misconceptions about poverty in the United States and in Seattle, what can be done at the local, state, and national level, and how young people can be involved.

Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City

The Oklahoma History Center invited Dr. Kenny Brown, professor of history at the University of Central Oklahoma and Professor Danne Johnson from the Oklahoma City University School of Law to speak at the Regional Youth Summit. This portion of the program was moderated by Oklahoma History Center Curator of Education Rachel Kellum. The discussion surrounded poverty in Oklahoma, both historically and currently. After the topic was introduced, Dr. Brown was asked to speak to the history of the War on Poverty in Oklahoma as well as his own personal history with several social welfare programs. Professor Johnson was then asked to speak to the current state of poverty in Oklahoma. Following both of their prepared remarks, discussion was facilitated between the students, teachers, and the panel.

The regional portion of the program was extremely successful. Students engaged deeply in the discussion of poverty and were passionate about trying to fight it in their home communities. Many students mentioned that this open discussion, which lasted an entire hour after the national webcast, was their favorite part of the program.
Unanticipated Outcomes

Our greatest unanticipated outcome was related to promotion and registration. This year, we experimented with a social media campaign through WeAreTeachers, a subset of Market Data Retrieval that develops social media content for teachers by teachers in addition to a purchased email list. This support was essential to getting the word out among teachers and increasing our registrations. In addition, we used hot leads, sending a follow-up email to teachers and administrators who had opened our original email. That follow up email had an open rate of over 60% and 40% click rate, well above the industry standard. We received a total of 205,840 impressions across Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr through WeAreTeachers. In addition, we went from approximately 200 participants in 12 states from our internal marketing efforts to over 1500 participants in 31 states in the first week and a half after the paid email and social media push. We anticipate using targeted social media more heavily in future programs, as it is clear that this was an effective way to reach teachers and to encourage them to share the information with each other.

Lessons Learned and Challenges

Our greatest lesson learned was that our efforts to use more internal Smithsonian resources to produce this program had a positive outcome on the program content. Having an internal Smithsonian moderator meant that we could guide the conversation more easily than in years past, when we used external experts. Also, the Youth Access Grant funding enabled the National Youth Summit team to select the topic most in line with issues studied during this time of year and one that was compelling for both students and teachers. Teachers’ stated reasons for registering for the program demonstrate some of the value of the topic from their perspective, as well as the diversity of classrooms reached through the Summit:

- Most of my students live in poverty. Education and their right to vote is their best bet to a brighter future. I want them to have every opportunity to learn and understand that.

- I teach a Discussion and Debate class with juniors and seniors and feel that this would be very enlightening to them. Most of my students are very unaware of the reality of poverty and the
challenges it poses for the youth in the US. Many feel that people are poor because they do not work hard or try to get out of the poverty cycle.

• Our school is in rural Arkansas where the majority of students qualify for free and reduced lunches. I wanted to make my students aware of this issue outside their area. I want them to understand that this is a national problem and understand what it might take to combat the issue. I also want them to understand that this is not a new issue but one that has been around for many years.

In addition, as one student explained, “Students all over need to know about poverty. Kids our own age are homeless, starving, and going to sleep at night on the streets worrying about issues that they shouldn’t be thinking about.”
In the end, we found ourselves having the webcast discussion of poverty and inequality on the day that civil unrest broke out in Baltimore, and the relationship among poverty, federal policy, and this unrest was a key part of our conversation. This connection showed powerfully the importance of considering historical context when examining contemporary issues.

However, timing was a challenge and a lesson learned this year. Based on feedback from our Affiliate partners last year, who found that hosting a program early in the calendar year was challenging, we agreed to host the program during the last week of April. We selected a date that was after standardized testing for many of the most populous states and after spring break in most areas. Yet snow days pushed some testing into our broadcast date and the fact that spring break took place in the week or two prior to the program meant that registration was lower than anticipated. After a conversation with our Affiliate partners, we expect to host future programs either the first week of May or in mid-May after Advanced Placement exams.

Technology was also a challenge this year. Although we offered a webinar in advance of the program to teach teachers how best to use the webcast, and offered recommendations for preparing for the webcast including sharing a test page that teachers could access at any time, we received many reports of technical glitches. The most common problem was a clicking noise and trouble with audio. Our audiovisual technician noted that the clicking was likely the result of an old Flash plugin on the user end. Our solution for future webcasts is to run a live test the day before the Summit, and to encourage teachers not only to participate in that but also to update all browsers and plugins before the webcast.

In addition, we decided to enhance the sense of having a national conversation by making live video conference connections between NMAH and the students and panelists at Affiliate museums. Unfortunately, communication broke down between the Smithsonian and staff at those museums as we attempted to connect technical staff on each side. In the end, none of the live connections
was a complete success or especially audible. In the future, we will consider reverting to our previous method of taped questions and emphasizing the questions sent through the registration process and online chat. New equipment in the NMAH 1W Innovation Wing may enable us to more effectively implement live remote engagement.

Course Corrections

Circumstances required a few changes to our stated plan. We had intended to work with the Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access (SCLDA) on a digital badge to prepare students for the program. However, shortly after we were awarded funding we learned that SCLDA was changing their digital badge model and suspending development of new badges. In addition, we were unable to work with a student from the Center for Inspired Teaching over the course of the fall, as a result of communication challenges with the teacher. Instead, we worked with the students from E.L. Haynes Public Charter School on the webcast itself. Their teacher has been recognized for her work by Teaching Tolerance, the education arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Staff from Teaching Tolerance assisted the National Youth Summit team as unofficial partners and advisers by providing recommendations on the central questions of the Summit and input on the program conversation kit.

Overall, we are pleased with the outcomes from the National Youth Summit 2015 and thank the Youth Access Grants for making the program possible. The full program and transcripts can be found at http://americanhistory.si.edu/nys/war-poverty