NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT: WAR ON POVERTY
APRIL 28, 2015

>>> HELLO FROM WASHINGTON D.C. AND THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. THIS IS THE NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT OPEN THE WAR ON POVERTY. I'M CHRIS WILSON. HELLO. I'M KEVIN PERALTA. AND I'M CAMARYN CHICHESTER. WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT ON THE WAR ON POVERTY. TODAY WE'LL BE TALKING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE WAR ON POVERTY, WHAT POVERTY LOOKS LIKE TODAY AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

CHRIS WILSON: WE WANT TO WELCOME OUR ONLINE AUDIENCE WHO ARE JOINING US FROM 33 STATE, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, YEMEN AND IRELAND AND THE STUDENTS ATTENDING THE REGIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT.

THE NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER, HISTORYMIAMI, THE OKLAHOMA HISTORY CENTER AND THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND INDUSTRY IN SEATTLE, WASHINGTON.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO TAKING QUESTIONS FROM ALL OF YOU. IF YOU'RE JOINING US ONLINE, BE SURE TO SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL IN THE CHAT WINDOW TO THE RIGHT OF THE SCREEN. IN ORDER TO TALK MORE ABOUT THE WAR ON POVERTY, WE NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT IT.

KEVIN PERALTA: LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT A COUPLE PROGRAMS FOR THE WAR ON POVERTY. WHEN WE RETURN, WE'LL ASK OUR EXPERTS TO TELL US MORE. AND THIS ADMINISTRATION TODAY HERE AND NOW DECLARES

UNCONDITIONAL WAR ON POVERTY IN AMERICA. AND I URGE THIS CONGRESS AND ALL AMERICANS TO JOIN WITH ME IN THAT EFFORT. [APPLAUSE] IT WILL NOT BE A SHORT OR EASY STRUGGLE. NO SINGLE WEAPON OR STRATEGY WILL SUFFICE. BUT WE SHALL NOT REST UNTIL THAT WAR IS WON. [APPLAUSE] THE RICHEST NATION ON EARTH CAN AFFORD TO WIN IT. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE IT. POVERTY IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM REQUIRING IMPROVED NATIONAL ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT. BE THIS ATTACK TO BE EFFECTIVE MUST BE ORGANIZED AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL AND MUST BE SUPPORTED AND DIRECTED BY STATE AND LOCAL EFFORTS. FOR THE WAR AGAINST POVERTY WILL NOT BE WON HERE IN WASHINGTON. IT MUST BE WON IN THE FIELD AND EVERY PRIVATE HOME IN EVERY PUBLIC OFFICE FROM THE COURTHOUSE TO THE WHITE HOUSE.

CHRIS WILSON: >> SO WE STARTED WITH A BIT OF HISTORY THERE HEARING THE VOICE OF PRESIDENT JOHNSON WHEN HE WAS ANNOUNCING THE WAR ON POVERTY. WE WANT TO START OUR TALKS WITH HISTORY HERE AT THE SMITHSONIAN. WE'LL START THERE. JOINING US TO DISCUSS THE HISTORY OF THE WAR ON POVERTY, WE'RE JOINED BY MARCIA CHATELAIN AND PETER EDELMAN FROM GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY AND HEAD OF THE CENTER OF POVERTY AND EQUALITY. HE WAS AN AIDE TO ROBERT KENNEDY ALSO.

CAMARYN CHICHESTER: >> SO PROFESSOR EDELMAN, CAN YOU TELL US WHAT POVERTY LOOKED LIKE IN 1964?
>> YES. CAMARYN, THANK YOU. POVERTY, PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO SAY, WAS A LOT WORSE IN THE 1960s THAN NOW. POVERTY WAS 22% OVERALL. BLACK POVERTY WAS 55% AND WE CUT IT IN HALF TO 1973. 11% OVERALL AND 32% FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS. SO WHEN YOU LOOK AT ALL OF THE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES BEGINNING IN THE 1930s AND THE NEW DEAL COMING UP TODAY, NOT JUST THE 60s, WE WOULD HAVE 90 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY TODAY INSTEAD OF THE 45 MILLION WE HAVE NOW IF THESE PROGRAMS DIDN'T EXIST. AND THIS INCLUDES NOT ONLY THINGS LIKE SOCIAL SECURITY AND FOOD STAMPS BUT VITALLY IMPORTANT THINGS LIKE THE CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS AND MEDICARE. WE COULD MAKE NO MISTAKE, THESE LAWS AND PROGRAMS WORK. AS MUCH AS WE STILL HAVE A DISPROPORTIONATE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO POVERTY, THE RACIAL DISPARITIES WERE EVEN GREATER IN THE 60s THAN NOW. WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD MORE WHITE PEOPLE THAT WERE POOR THAN BLACK AND WHITE.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY BECAME MUCH MORE AWARE OF AMERICAN POVERTY WHEN HE VISITED APPALACHIA AND SAW WHITE POVERTY. POVERTY WAS MORE RURAL IN THE 60s THAN IT IS NOW. IT'S MUCH MORE SUBURBAN NOW THAN IT WAS THEN. BUT THERE WAS SERIOUS URBAN POVERTY ALL ALONG. THEN AND NOW. TO ME, THE MOST SHOCKING POVERTY IN THE 1950s IS WHEN I WENT TO MISSISSIPPI ARE ROBERT KENNEDY. WE SAW CHILDREN ON THE VERGE OF STARVATION IN THIS RICH COUNTRY. CHILDREN WHO HAD SWOLLEN BELLIES AND SORES ON ARMS AND LEGS THAT WOULDN'T HEAL. DISEASES ASSOCIATED OLD WITH THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES. THAT VISIT EVENTUALLY RESULTED IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM. WE SAW FOOD STAMPS IN THAT FILM. THAT WAS PROPOSED AS A NATIONAL PROGRAM BY PRESIDENT NIXON. IT STILL PREVENTS THE KIND OF POVERTY THAT I SAW IN MISSISSIPPI IN 1967 AS BAD AS IT STILL IS. POVERTY HAS CHANGED. IT'S MUCH MORE DIFFERENT. WE HAVE MANY MORE SINGLE MOMS THAT ARE TRYING TO COPE WITH ONLY ONE WAGE IN THEIR HOME AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF ALL RACES ARE THE POOREST GROUPS IN OUR COUNTRY. POVERTY IS PASSED ALONG FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION FOR TOO MANY AS A CONSEQUENCE. WE'RE SENDING TOO MANY MEN TO PRISON AND THEY'RE DISPROPORTIONATELY BLACK. POVERTY HAS GOTTEN WORSE. THERE'S A LARGE SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING. WE'VE TORN A HUGE HOLE IN THE SAFETY NET FOR PEOPLE WITH THE LOWEST INCOME. RACE AND GENDER STILL PLAY TOO BIG A ROLE IN THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY AND I MEAN STRUCTURAL RACISM AS WELL AS OUT AND OUT DISCRIMINATION. THE VASTLY GREATER INEQUALITY BETWEEN TOP AND BOTTOM MAKES IT HARD TO MAKE THINGS BETTER.

SO THE ISSUE, CAMERON, ISN'T SO MUCH WHAT POVERTY WAS LIKE IN 1960. WHAT WE DID ABOUT POVERTY IN THE 1960s WORKED AND STILL WORKS. THE ISSUE IS HOW TO DO BETTER NOW AND CHANGE THE CIRCUMSTANCES AT THE PRESENT TIME.

>> WELL, PROFESSOR CHATELAIN, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT WHAT L.B.J. DID IN THE WAR ON POVERTY AND WHAT WAS THE STRATEGY?

>> I THINK HE DID SOME THINGS IDEOLOGICALLY AND SOME THINGS PRACTICALLY. IDEOLOGICALLY, HE MADE SURE THE NATION COULD LIVE UP TO ITS PROMISES. HE SAID IN SUCH A RICH COUNTRY, WE CANNOT TOLERATE POVERTY. HE DID SOMETHING WONDERFUL FIRST AND FOREMOST BY SAYING POVERTY IS NOT ANYTHING NORMAL AND NOT SOMETHING WE SHOULD LIST WITH. LEGISLATIVELY, HE
PACKAGE ADD SERIES OF INITIATIVES AROUND THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATION TO HELP THE AMERICAN PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THAT EACH HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY FOR EACH OTHER. THE EXPANSION OF MEDICARE IN ORDER TO ALLOW DISABLED PEOPLE TO HAVE SERVICES AND BENEFITS.

THE EXPANSION OF PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOLS. HE UNDERSTOOD THE LINK BETWEEN POOR EDUCATION AND POVERTY. THE EXPANSION OF THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM, WHICH WAS TEMPORARY AND MAKING IT PERMANENT TO PREVENT THE TYPE OF MALNUTRITION THAT PROFESSOR EDELMAN SAW IN THE 60s AND HE ALSO INSPIRED A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO VOLUNTEERED THROUGH THE JOBS PROGRAM TO MAKE SURE THAT WE UNDERSTAND THAT POVERTY WAS A RESULT OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT IN THIS COUNTRY.

I THINK THAT THE LEGACY OF WHAT JOHNSON DID WAS TO MAKE SURE THAT PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD THAT OUR GOVERNMENT HAS A SERIOUS RESPONSIBILITY IN ALLEVIATING POVERTY.

>> SO SOUNDS LIKE WE HAD POVERTY THAT WAS QUITE A BIT DIFFERENT THAN IT IS TODAY IN TERMS OF, YOU KNOW, THE SEVERITY AND THE DEGREE AND THE REGIONALITY AND SO FORTH. PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S MOTIVATIONS AND WE HAVE GOOD QUESTIONS COMING TO US RELATED TO THAT. HIS MOTIVATIONS SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS TO NOT JUST ALLEVIATE THE POVERTY THAT EXISTED BUT CREATE A SAFETY NET, CREATE MORE OF A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR ALL AMERICANS.

CHRIS WILSON: SO THAT QUESTION -- THESE QUESTIONS SIT WELL WITH WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. WE HAVE A QUESTION FROM MRS. WATSON'S CLASS IN SCOTLANDVILLE MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA. THAT MIGHT HELP US UNDERSTAND THEIR STRATEGIES. THE QUESTION IS HOW DID LYNDON JOHNSON PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE POVERTY AND WHAT LINK DID HE MAKE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND POVERTY?

MARCIA CHATELAIN: >> WELL, GROWING UP IN RURAL TEXAS, THE ISSUE OF POVERTY IS SOMETHING THAT HE'S FAMILIAR WITH. WHEN HE TALKS ABOUT SOME OF THE MOTIVATIONS FOR THE WAR ON POVERTY, HE TALKED ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING SCHOOLS. HE TAUGHT AT A SEGREGATED SCHOOL FOR MEXICAN CHILDREN 90 MILES SOUTH OF SAN ANTONIO. THAT EXPERIENCE OF SEEING HOW LEFT BEHIND THIS POPULATION WAS IN A SCHOOL THAT WAS VERY IMPASSIBLE FOR HIM. IT HAPPENED IN THE 20s BUT

DIDN'T GO AWAY. JOHNSON IS THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU HAVE CONTACT WITH REAL PEOPLE AND HOW IT CAN SHAPE AND INFLUENCE YOUR IDEAS LATER.

PETER EDELMAN: >> I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT PRESIDENT JOHNSON WAS DEEPLY INTERESTED NOT ONLY IN POVERTY BUT CIVIL RIGHTS. WE KNOW THE GREAT CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION, THE VOTING BY FACTIONS, FAIR HOUSING IN 68. WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT AS A RESULT OF PARTICULARLY THE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ASPECT OF THE 64 ACT THAT THAT IN TURN HAD AN EFFECT ON EMPLOYMENT. EMPLOYMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PEOPLE. WHEN I TALKED ABOUT BLACK POVERTY GOING DOWN FROM 55% TO 32%, OVER THAT PERIOD IN THE 60s, A LOT HAD TO DO WITH PEOPLE BEING ABLE TO GET JOBS WHERE THEY WERE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AND NOT GIVEN JOBS, NOT PROMOTED BEFORE THAT.
SO IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO THINK OF JOHNSON IN A WAY THAT HE OBVIOUSLY DID WITH HIS -- TALKING ABOUT CIVIL RIGHTS AND POVERTY IN TWO VERY INTERRELATED WAYS.

CHRIS WILSON: >> OUR NEXT COMES TO US LIVE FROM THE OKLAHOMA HISTORY CENTER. I THINK WHAT THEY WERE CONCERNED ABOUT AND WHAT -- WHERE THEIR QUESTION COMES, WE THINK OF PRESIDENT JOHNSON AS HE'S BEEN CALLED THE LAST SOLDIER IN THE NEW ARMY IN A SENSE. SO I THINK THEIR QUESTION IS GOING TO BE RELATED TO SOME OF THE FORMATION OF JOHNSON'S THINKING ABOUT THE NATION AND HOW THE NATION WOULD SUPPORT ITS FORCE.

[TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES]

WHILE THEY'RE GETTING READY, I THINK WE HAVE A QUESTION FROM OUR ONLINE AUDIENCE AND THEN WE'LL GET BACK TO THAT. OKAY. I APOLOGIZE WE'RE HAVING PROBLEMS WITH OKLAHOMA. I THINK WHAT THEY'RE SAYING, GIVEN AS MANY STATES FROM OKLAHOMA BENEFITTED FROM THE SOCIAL PROGRAMS CREATED UNDER THE F.D.R. ADMINISTRATION AND NEW DEAL, WHY IS IT SO MANY OPPOSE THE WAR ON POVERTY LEGISLATION?

MARCIA CHATELAIN>> IT'S A COMPLICATED QUESTION. THE 60s WE SEE A HUGE POLITICAL SHIFT IN STATES LIKE OKLAHOMA FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PART TO THE REPUBLICAN PARTY. SO SOME OF THE LOCAL DYNAMICS IN TERMS OF POLITICS DEFINITELY HAD AN IMPACT ON HOW THE STATES UNDERSTOOD THE WAR ON POVERTY. THE SECOND PART OF THE WAR ON POVERTY IN OKLAHOMA PARTICULARLY IS IT BROKE PEOPLE AWAY FROM THINKING OF POVERTY AS BLACK AND WHITE, URBAN AND RURAL BECAUSE OF THE LARGE NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION WHO ALSO STRUGGLED TO ARTICULATE A VOICE IN SOME OF THE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AROUND THE WAR ON POVERTY. SO EVEN THOUGH MOST PEOPLE CAN AGREE THAT POVERTY IS A PROBLEM WE SHOULD ALL SOLVE, WE SEE THERE'S A LOT OF DIVISIONS ON PEOPLE'S APPROACHES TO SOLVING THAT PROBLEM.

PETER EDELMAN>> WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT THE GREAT NEW DEAL LEGISLATION IN TERMS OF ALL THE JOB CREATION, SOCIAL SECURITY ACT, FAIR LABOR STANDARDS, WERE ALL WRITTEN IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY EXCLUDED WORKERS OF COLOR, AFRICAN AMERICAN IN EXCLUDING FARM WORKERS AND HOUSEHOLD WORKERS. THAT WAS ESSENTIALLY EXCLUDING PEOPLE THAT WERE DISPROPORTIONATELY PEOPLE OF COLOR. IN THE 60s, ALL OF THAT WAS DONE BECAUSE THE SOUTHERN DEMOCRATS WOULDN'T SUPPORT PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S LEGISLATION IF IT HELPED BLACK PEOPLE, TO PUT IT QUITE BLUNT ABOUT IT. THAT WAS A PROBLEM THAT HAD TO BE CONFRONTED WITH THE WAR ON POVERTY. THEY WERE NOT HAPPY WHEN HEADSTART WAS BROUGHT TO MISSISSIPPI. THE GOVERNOR OPPOSED IT TOTALLY. IT WAS FUNDED BY GOING AROUND HIM. SO THE PEOPLE THAT I TALKED ABOUT IN MISSISSIPPI THAT WERE NEARLY STARVING IN MISSISSIPPI IN 1967 WAS BECAUSE THE WHITE POWER STRUCTURE IN MISSISSIPPI WANTED TO DRIVE PEOPLE, FELLOW AFRICAN AMERICANS OUT OF THE STATE. THIS IS A DYNAMIC THAT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR DECADES. WE'RE SEEING SOME REVERSIONS OF THAT IN THE POLITICS OF THE SOUTH NOW.

>> THAT'S WHY THE WAR ON POVERTY HAS PRESIDENT JOHNSON GOING TO APPALACHIA AS OPPOSED TO URBAN -- >> THAT'S TRUE. BUT IT'S ALSO TRUE THAT THE WAR ON POVERTY HAD A TREMENDOUSLY
POSITIVE EFFECT IN TERMS OF BRINGING UP AFRICAN AMERICANS IN A ECONOMIC WAY.

CHRIS WILSON: >> WE DO HAVE A QUESTION FROM ONLINE. THIS IS FROM LEXIE. IT SAYS, HOW HAS DIFFERENT INEQUALITIES THAT RUN IN OUR COUNTRY CONTRIBUTED TO THE NUMBER OF IMPOVERISHED CITIZENS?

MARCIA CHATELAIN: >> WE SEE IT, LIVE WITH IT TODAY. ALL OF THE CIVIL UNRESTS THAT HAVE HAPPENED OVER THE PAST NINE MONTHS SHOWS US HOW DEEPLY STRUCTURED INEQUALITY IS AND HOW POVERTY IS ALLOWED TO GROW AND REPRODUCE ITSELF. SO WE SAW THAT POVERTY HAS A PERVASIVE IMPACT ON NOT ONLY A PERSON'S MATERIAL CONDITIONS BUT THEIR ACCESS TO EDUCATION, THEIR ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND THEIR FEELING OF BEING A REAL CITIZEN AND BEING ABLE TO PARTICIPATE. SO WE SEE THE WAY THAT POVERTY CLIPS ALL OF THESE WINGS THAT WE NEED TO GROW AND EXPAND AS A NATION.

PETER EDELMAN: >> WE HAVE TO KEEP TWO IDEAS IN MIND. ONE IS YOU CANNOT TALK ABOUT POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT RACE. THE SECOND IS THAT THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE THAT ARE WHITE THAN ANY OTHER GROUP WHO ARE POOR. TWO DIFFERENT THOUGHTS, BUT THEY HAVE TO KEEP BOTH IN MIND IF WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A COMPLETE STRATEGY TO REDUCE POVERTY IN THIS COUNTRY. THOSE ARE ISSUES THAT ARE JUST AS COMPLEX TODAY THAN WITH PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S ADMINISTRATION. IT'S GOTTEN WORSE IN THE SENSE THAT WITH ALL THE PROGRAMS THAT I TALKED ABOUT, THE POLICIES THAT I TALKED ABOUT HAVE KEPT US FROM THINGS GETTING WORSE. THE INEQUALITY THAT WE HAVE IN THE 1970S IS A HUGE BARRIER TO MAKING PROGRESS AT THE BOTTOM.

CAMARYN CHICHESTER: >> AS WE ROUND OUT THIS PORTION OF THE PROGRAM, WE WOULD LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THE OUTCOMES OF THE WAR ON POVERTY. THIS QUESTION COMES FROM MRS. SERGEANT'S CLASS IN WHITESBURG, KENTUCKY. THEY ASKED DID WE WIN THE WAR ON POVERTY AND IS A VICTORY POSSIBLE? HOW WOULD YOU GUYS RESPOND?

MARCIA CHATELAIN: >> THAT'S A TOUGH QUESTION. WHAT WE WON WAS A SERIES OF LEGISLATIVE MOVES THAT PREVENTED THE TYPE OF SLOW DEATH THAT PROFESSOR EDELMAN TALKED ABOUT. WE'VE SEEN THE REDUCTION OF POVERTY AMONGST SENIOR CITIZENS. WE'VE SEEN PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN. WE'VE SEEN A CONCERTED EFFORT TO REALLY THINK ABOUT THE MOST VULNERABLE POPULATION. WE HAVE NOT WON THIS WAR, BUT WHAT WE HAVE DONE IS INFUSE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WITH SUCH OPTIMISM AND WITH SUCH HOPE THAT WE CAN BE A PARTNER WITH OUR GOVERNMENT AND NOT AN ADVERSARY IN RESOLVING THESE PROBLEMS. WE'VE SEEN SO MANY FAILURES BUT THE TYPE OF LEADERSHIP THAT JOHNSON EXERCISED AT THIS MOMENT CAN BE AN INSPIRATION FOR GENERATIONS FORWARD ABOUT USING YOUR POWER FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE.

PETER EDELMAN: >> I WOULD JUST ADD, CAMARYN, THAT ONE WAY TO SAY THIS IS THAT WE SORT OF DID WIN THE WAR OF THE 60s. THE PROGRAMS THAT WE PUT IN -- ACTUALLY GOING BACK TO THE 30s AND GOING UP TILL TODAY. BUT WE HAVE -- THE POLICIES WE ARE VERY EFFECTIVE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE THINGS THAT I SAID TO YOU BEFORE, THE FACT THAT WE'VE BEEN A LOW WAGE
NATION. SO ALONG WITH WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR SCHOOLS AND OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND OTHER THINGS, IT'S REALLY THAT WE NEED, IF YOU WILL, A NEW WAR ON POVERTY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF TODAY.

CHRIS WILSON: THANKS FOR HELPING US UNDERSTAND A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE WAR ON POVERTY. AND NOW WE'RE GOING TO TAKE A BREAK FROM THAT AND MOVE INTO OUR NEXT SECTION. BEFORE WE DO THAT, I WANTED TO START WITH SAYING THAT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY HERE AT THE SMITHSONIAN HAS ABOUT THREE MILLION OBJECTS AND ARTIFACTS. A NUMBER ARE RELATED TO THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION AND THE WAR ON POVERTY. KEVIN AND CAMARYN, YOU HAD A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO GO BEHIND THE SCENES INTO THE STORAGE OF OUR POLITICAL HISTORY COLLECTION AND MEET OUR CURATOR, HARRY RUBENSTEIN THERE. WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

KEVIN PERALTA: >> CAMARYN AND I, WE BOTH WENT BEHIND THE SCENES WITH MR. RUBENSTEIN. HE SHOWED US A COUPLE ARTIFACTS RELATED TO WAR ON POVERTY. SORT OF WHAT PEOPLE WERE DOING BACK THEN. THE ONE THAT STOOD OUT THE MOST TO ME WAS, THERE WAS A COPY OF THE STATE OF THE UNION THAT HE GAVE IN 1964 TO CONGRESS. THAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE TO ME. IT WAS THE SORT OF BEGINNING WHERE HE DECLARED AN ALL-OUT WAR ON POVERTY.

CHRIS WILSON: >> AND YOU GOT A CHANCE TO GET CLOSE TO THAT DOCUMENT AND SEE WHERE IT STARTED. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THAT VIDEO AND SEE THE EXPERIENCE YOU HAD AND THEN WE'LL TALK MORE ABOUT POVERTY TODAY.

>> ALL RIGHT. I'M KEVIN. THIS IS CAMARYN. WE'RE HERE AT THE SMITHSONIAN BEHIND THE SCENES TO CHECK OUT THE ARTIFACTS, WHERE THEY STORE THEM. SO COME WITH US. COME ON IN. I'M HARRY RUBENSTEIN. THE CURATOR HERE AT THE MUSEUM. NICE MEETING YOU. THANKS FOR COMING. OKAY. CAMARYN, WHERE WE'RE STANDING HAS MANY STORAGE FACILITIES. IN THIS ROOM IS ABOUT 100,000 ITEMS. YOU'RE HERE FOR A PROGRAM ON WAR ON POVERTY, RIGHT? SO I'M GOING TO SHOW YOU A FEW THINGS IN STORAGE THAT SORT OF RELATE TO THIS TOPIC. 1941, THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR -- [ AUDIO DIFFICULTIES ] IN THE NEXT DRAWER, JUST LIKE PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT, THERE WAS ANOTHER ANNUAL STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS. IT'S HERE -- THIS IS A COPY OF HIS STATE OF THE UNION. SO AS YOU'LL SEE, AS HE LAYS OUT -- [ AUDIO DIFFICULTIES ] THE WAR ON POVERTY COMES FROM THIS ADDRESS. AND SO. [ AUDIO DIFFICULTIES ]

CHRIS WILSON: >> OKAY. THAT MUST HAVE BEEN A GREAT EXPERIENCE TO GET A CHANCE TO GO BEHIND THE SCENES AND SEE SOME OF THE THINGS IN STORAGE HERE AT THE SMITHSONIAN. I DON'T THINK WE HAD TIME TO GO THROUGH EVERYTHING. YOU SAW PRESIDENT JEFFERSON OR THOMAS JEFFERSON BEFORE HE WAS PRESIDENT, HIS WRITING DESK ON WHICH HE WROTE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND WROTE "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL" AND ALSO TALKED ABOUT THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, AS RELATIONS TO WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT TODAY. GLAD YOU GOT THAT OPPORTUNITY AND THAT'S AVAILABLE FOR ALL OF YOU WHEN YOU COME TO THE SMITHSONIAN. WE DO THE BEST WE CAN AND GET AS MANY OF THOSE OBJECTS OUT.
NOW THAT WE UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THAT THE WAR ON POVERTY AND ITS PROGRAMS, WHAT ARE THE LESSONS OF THE WAR ON POVERTY. TO HELP WITH THAT, WE'RE JOINED BY MICHAEL TANNER FROM THE CATO INSTITUTE AND MELISSA BOTEACH FROM THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS.

KEVIN PERALTA: SO WE'LL START WITH A PRETTY BIG QUESTION. IN YOUR OPINION, WAS THE WAR ON POVERTY A SUCCESS OR DO WE NEED A NEW WAR ON POVERTY TODAY? I GUESS WE'LL START WITH MR. TANNER AND THEN MRS. BOTEACH.

MICHAEL TANNER: >> ONE OF THE THINGS WE NEED TO LOOK AT IS HOW BIG THE WAR ON POVERTY HAS GOTTEN. THE FACT IS THAT 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. EVEN IF YOU USE A BETTER ALTERNATIVE MEASURES ON POVERTY THAT THEY HAVE COME UP WITH, WHAT YOU SEE IS THERE WAS A BIG DECLINE FROM THE FIRST TEN YEARS BUT THEN IT LEVELLED OUT AS WE SPENT MORE AND MORE MONEY ON IT. SO WE'RE NO LONGER GETTING A GREAT DEAL OF BENEFITS OUT OF THE EXTRA DOLLARS WE'RE SPENDING. WHAT WE FOUND IS THAT IN TERMS OF BEING ABLE TO MAKE POVERTY LESS UNCOMFORTABLE, BECAUSE PEOPLE HAVE BETTER FOOD AND SHELTER AND SO ON, WHAT WE HAVE SUCCEEDED IS LIFTING PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY.

GIVING THEM THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO RISE UP AND GET ALL THAT THEY CAN GET OUT OF LIFE. THAT'S SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN'T DO BY SPENDING MORE AND MORE MONEY ON THE PROBLEM.SO I WOULD LOOK BACK AT PRESIDENT OBAMA DURING HIS STATE OF THE UNION THIS YEAR WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT HI CUBA POLICY. HE SAID IF YOU TRY SOMETHING FOR 50 YEARS AND IT FAILS, TRY SOMETHING NEW. WHAT WE NEED IS A NEW WAR ON POVERTY, ONE THAT STRESSES MORE OPPORTUNITY, MORE DIGNITY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL AND NOT TRYING TO PAPER OVER POVERTY BY GIVING PEOPLE MORE MONEY.

CHRIS WILSON: >> THIS IS A COMPLICATED QUESTION AND I WANT TO SAY THAT -- THOSE ON THE CHAT, WE'RE JOINED BY DR. ALVARO CORTES. HE WROTE A REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS TO THE U.S. CONGRESS. SO THOSE OF YOU ON THE CHAT CAN TALK WITH HIM AND HAVE QUESTIONS FOR HIM THAT HE CAN HELP ANSWER AND BE SURE ALSO TO SHARE QUESTIONS FOR OUR PANEL HERE WITH MICHAEL AND MELISSA. WE'LL GET TO THOSE QUESTIONS AS WELL.

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> 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. WHEN YOU TAKE IN THE INTERVENTIONS FROM THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM TO THE TAX CREDIT FOR LOW WAGE WORKERS, YOU CAN SEE -- YOU HAVE TWICE AS MANY PEOPLE IN POVERTY TODAY WITHOUT THE INTERVENTIONS THAT WE MADE. BY THAT MEASURE, I'D SAY THE WAR ON POVERTY HAS BEEN A SUCCESS OF THAT. IF YOU LOOK AT THE OUTCOMES AND A LOT MORE PEOPLE ARE A LOT BETTER OFF.

THAT BEING SAID, ALMOST ALL THAT PROGRESS WAS MADE THROUGH INTERVENTIONS AND THE SAFETY NET. SO MUCH HAS CHANGED OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS. IN A LOT OF WAYS THE POLICIES
HAVEN'T CAUGHT UP. SO THE MINIMUM WAGE, IF IT WERE TODAY WHAT IT WERE IN 1968 WOULD BE NEARLY $11 AN HOUR. IT'S $7.25 TODAY. THAT MEANS THAT A SINGLE MOM WORKING FULL TIME AT THE MINIMUM WAGE WITH TWO KIDS IS STILL IN POVERTY DESPITE WORKING FULL TIME.

IT'S TRANSLATED INTO FLAT WAGES FOR PEOPLE AT THE MIDDLE AND AT THE BOTTOM. THERE'S A HUGE WAGE STAGNATION SINCE THE 70s AND PEOPLE AT THE SAME TIME, THE COST OF BASIC PILLARS OF ACCESS TO THE MIDDLE CLASS, CHILD CARE, HEALTHCARE, UNIVERSITIES HAVE GONE UP. OTHER THINGS THAT IN THE 1960s, ABOUT 25% OF MOTHERS WERE BREAD WINNERS OR CO-BREAD WINNERS FOR THEIR FAMILY. TODAY IT'S LIKE 2/3s RELY ON THE MOTHER'S INCOME. WE'RE THE ONLY DEVELOPED NATION THAT DOESN'T HAVE BASIC LABOR STANDARDS LIKE PAY FAMILY LEAVE, PAID SICK DAYS SO PARENTS DON'T HAVE TO MAKE IMPOSSIBLE CHOICES WHEN Caring FOR THEIR KIDS OR MISSING A DAY'S WORK OR EVEN THEIR JOB. SO I THINK THAT WE NEED TO BUILD UPON WHAT HAS WORKED. THE SAFETY NET THAT WE PUT IN PLACE HAS MITIGATED POVERTY, HARDSHIP AND RECENT STUDIES SHOW THAT IT'S BOOSTED ECONOMIC MOBILITY.

IF YOU LOOK AT CHILDREN THAT GOT FOOD STAMPS WHEN IT WAS ROLLED OUT VERSUS THOSE THAT DIDN'T, THEIR OUTCOMES HAVE CHANGED. SO WE MADE SOME GREAT PROGRESS, BUT NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO STOP. NOW IS THE TIME TO BUILD ON WHAT HAS WORKED.

CHRISt WILSON: OKAY. SO ONE OF THOSE THINGS THAT SEEMS DIFFICULT IS THE DEFINITION OF POVERTY IN TERMS OF WHAT TO DO WITH IT. THOSE OF YOU ON THE CHAT TALKED WITH DR. CORTEs ABOUT THIS. WE HAD A LONG TALK ABOUT HOW YOU DEFINE HOMELESSNESS. LET'S TALK MORE ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF POVERTY, AGAIN, IT LOOKED LIKE HOW IT AFFECTED THE POLICIES THAT WE MIGHT ENACT OR NOT, YOU KNOW.

MELISSA BOTEACH: SO THE MEASURE THAT -- THE TRADITIONAL POVERTY MEASURE THAT WE USE TODAY SHOWS THAT IN THE 1960s, THE AVERAGE FAMILIES SPEND ABOUT A THIRD OF THEIR FAMILY BUDGET ON FOOD. SO THEY TOOK THE BASIC FOOD BASKET, MULTIPLIED IT BY THREE AND INDEXED IT TO INFLATION AND THAT WAS THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE. TODAY THE TYPICAL FAMILY SPENDS ABOUT 1/7 ON FOOD. AS MORE MOTHERS HAS MOVED INTO THE LABOR FORCE, OTHER KINDS OF EXPENSES LIKE CHILD CARE, EDUCATION, ET CETERA HAVE TAKEN A LARGER PORTION OF THE PIE. IF YOU ASK SOMEBODY THAT IS MAKING $24,000 AND $25,000 A YEAR IF THEY CAN MEET THEIR NEEDS, THE ANSWER IS GOING TO BE NO. SO WHAT A LOT OF PEOPLE DO IS USE TWICE THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE AS A PROXY FOR WHETHER OR NOT YOU'RE ABLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET. THAT IS ABOUT $46,000 A YEAR FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR.

CHRISt WILSON: SO A QUESTION FROM GARRETT. IF WE HAD A NEW WAR ON POVERTY, HOW WOULD WE FIGHT IT? MICHAEL, YOU STARTED ANSWERING THAT QUESTION. MAYBE ELABORATE MORE.

MICHAEL TANNER: SURE. I THINK WE HAVE A GOOD IDEA OF THE BASIC WAYS TO GET OUT OF POVERTY OR TO KEEP PEOPLE FROM FALLING IN POVERTY. NUMBER 1 OF THOSE IS EDUCATION. THE FACT IS IF YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE ABOUT A 50% CHANCE OF LIVING IN
POVERTY. IF YOU FINISH HIGH SCHOOL, GET A COLLEGE DEGREE, YOUR CHANCES OF BEING POOR ARE VERY SMALL. WE NEED TO FOCUS ON EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION. IF YOU GIVE BIRTH AND YOU'RE NOT MARRIED, YOUR CHANCES OF POVERTY ARE FIVE TIMES HIGHER THAN IF YOU WAIT TO GET MARRIED BEFORE YOU HAVE CHILDREN. IT'S NOT MORAL, IT'S AN ECONOMIC ONE. IT'S HOW TO RAISE A CHILDREN ON YOUR OWN AND YOU'RE YOUNG THAN IN AN INTACT FAMILY. OUT OF WEDLOCK BIRTH RATES HAVE BEEN INCREASING FROM THE 60s TILL NOW. 1960s, ABOUT 17% OF AFRICAN AMERICANS WERE BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK. TODAY IT'S ALMOST 2/3s FOR EXAMPLE. SO WE NEED TO FOCUS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH PREGNANCY PREVENTION. NUMBER 3 IS JOBS. LESS THAN 3% OF PEOPLE WORK FULL TIME LIVE IN POVERTY. WE TALK ABOUT PEOPLE AND MINIMUM WAGE. LESS PEOPLE OF FIVE PEOPLE EARNING MINIMUM WAGE ARE SINGLE AND HEADING A HOUSEHOLD. WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS CREATE MORE JOBS. THAT MEANS CUTTING TAXES, DEREGLATION. PARTICULARLY IN THE INNER CITY. YOU KNOW, WHEN YOU SEE A CITY LIKE BALTIMORE, WHICH IS BURNING TODAY AND YOU REALIZE THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE THERE IS ABOUT 25% AND ABOUT -- HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE IN POVERTY IN THAT CITY, YOU NEED TO HAVE A ECONOMIC CLIMATE THAT WILL BRING JOBS INTO A CITY LIKE THAT.

CHRIS WILSON: SO WE HAVE ANOTHER ONLINE QUESTION THAT IS ASKING. SO WHAT IS A BETTER WAY TO FIGHT WAR ON POVERTY, MELISSA?

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> SO THERE'S MICHAEL THAT JOBS IS A HUGE PART OF THAT. BUT IT CAN'T JUST BE JOBS. HAS TO BE GOOD JOBS. AS I SAID BEFORE, THE POVERTY LINE IS SO LOW THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE A DOLLAR OR TWO ABOVE IT AND WORKING FULL TIME AT THE MINIMUM WAGE, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO AFFORD THE PILLARS TO HAVE UPWARD MOBILITY. SO WHEN I TALK ABOUT GOOD JOBS, I DON'T JUST MEAN WAGES. THAT'S A BIG PART OF IT. RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE TO $12 WOULD BE A GOOD START AND WOULD SAVE PROGRAMS LIKE FOOD STAMPS BECAUSE PEOPLE WOULD PURCHASE FOOD WITH THEIR OWN WAGES. PEOPLE SHOULDN'T LOSE A JOB BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO STAY HOME TO CARE FOR A SICK KID. THEY SHOULDN'T DROP OUT BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE PAID FAMILY LEAVE. YES, JOB CREATION IS CRITICAL. WE CAN INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE, INVEST IN EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE. ALSO MAKING THE JOBS GOOD AND THEIR QUALITY.

MICHAEL TANNER: >> I THINK WE'RE GOING TO DISAGREE ON THE IDEA THAT YOU CAN MANDATE HIGHER WAGES OR MANDATE HIGHER BENEFITS WITHOUT MAKING THE JOBS DISAPPEAR. WE ALL AGREE THAT IF EVERYONE EARNED $100, THERE WOULD BE FEWER JOBS AVAILABLE AT THAT WAGE THAN THERE ARE TODAY. SOME LEVELS YOU CAN'T MAGICALLY MAKE PEOPLE RAISE WAGES. LET'S HAVE ANOTHER AREA THAT WE CAN AGREE. THAT IS CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM. THE IDEA THAT WE FIGHT A WAR ON DRUGS IN WHICH WE LOCK OF MILLIONS OF YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN FOR SMALL CRIMES, FOR SMALL POSITION OF MARIJUANA OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, THAT LEADS TO A FUTURE IN WHICH THEY DON'T HAVE EMPLOYABLE OPPORTUNITIES, NOT MARRIAGEABLE IN TERMS OF PROVIDING A STABLE FAMILY.SO THOSE ARE SORT OF THINGS THAT WE CAN AGREE ON DOING TODAY.

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IS AGE AREA OF BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS. IT'S MAKING SURE WE'RE NOT PUTTING PEOPLE IN PRISON FOR MINOR OFFENSES. IN ADDITION, IT'S ON
THE BACK END. MAKING SURE THEIR CRIMINAL RECORD IS NOT A LIFE-LONG SENTENCE TO POVERTY AND REMOVING BARRIERS TO HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT, CREDIT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP. THOSE ARE ARE AS AN AREA THAT MICHAEL AND I CAN AGREE.

CHRIS WILSON: >> ABSOLUTELY. THAT'S HELPFUL. WE WOULD LIKE TO POSE THAT QUESTION ABOUT WHAT POVERTY LOOKS LIKE TODAY, WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT. KEVIN IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIES IN CINCINNATI, OHIO AND PARTICIPATING IN THE REGIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT THERE AT THE NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER. KEVIN, CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE POPULATION THAT YOU WORK WITH AND ABOUT THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES?

[ AUDIO DIFFICULTIES ]

CAMARYN CHICHESTER: >> OKAY. SO WE'VE LEARNED MORE ABOUT THE NATURE OF POVERTY AND WE'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT ITS IMPACT. WE TALKED ABOUT THAT, BUT EVEN THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE. AND WHY IS IT SUCH AN IMPORTANT ISSUE?

MELISSA, LET'S START WITH THAT.

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> SURE. FIRST OFF, AS YOU SAID, POVERTY AFFECTS THE PEOPLE UNDERNEATH THE POVERTY LINE ADD A MOMENT IN TIME. RECENT RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT OVER THE COURSE OF THEIR WORKING YEARS, OVER HALF OF AMERICANS WILL EXPERIENCE AT LEAST A YEAR OF POVERTY ON NEAR POVERTY. FOUR IN FIVE AMERICANS WILL EXPERIENCE A YEAR OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP MEANING IF YOU HAD TO TURN TO THE SAFETY NET. SO THIS IS NOT A STAGNANT GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT CAN'T CLIMB OUT. YES, THERE'S PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC ISSUES THAT STAY IN POVERTY. A LOT 0 CIRCLING OUT BECAUSE OF LOW WAGE WORK. IT'S BAD FOR OUR ECONOMY. WHEN PEOPLE DON'T HAVE THE PURCHASING POWER TO BUY GOODS AND SERVICES, IT DAMPENS DEMAND, WHICH IS 70% OF THE ECONOMY. WE'RE NOT GROWING THE WAY WE CAN AS A COUNTRY AND GROWTH CAN'T BE MORE BROADLY SHARED. AND CHILD POVERTY IS COSTING OUR COUNTRY $5 BILLION DOLLARS A YEAR IN LOST EDUCATIONAL OUTPUT, RISING HEALTH CARE COST AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE EXPENDITURES. THAT'S CHILD POVERTY. THIS IS NOT JUST A PROBLEM OF SOMEONE ELSE OVER THERE. THIS IS SOMETHING THAT WE HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER ADDRESS. ONE MORE THING THAT I'D ADD IS THAT PETER TALKS AND HOW YOU CAN'T SEPARATE POVERTY AND RACISM. THIS IS IMPORTANT. NOT ONLY ARE THERE RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES THAT EXIST. BUT 2042 IS OUR ECONOMY WILL BE A ECONOMY OF COLOR. IF WE'RE NOT ADDRESSING AT THE PERSISTENT AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES OF POVERTY AND EDUCATION TODAY, IT'S NOT BAD MORALLY, IT'S BAD FOR THE ECONOMY. THAT'S SOMETHING THAT WE NEED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT AS WE TALK ABOUT PUBLIC POLICY.

>> MICHAEL, ANY RESPONSE?

>> I LARGELY AGREE. I THINK IT'S NOT JUST THAT WE'RE LOSING OUT ON CONSUMERS. WE'RE LOSING OUT ON THEM AS ENTREPRENEURS AND AS MINDS AS PEOPLE THAT CAN CHANGE THE FUTURE IF YOU HAVE A GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT ARE PUSHED INTO INFERIOR SCHOOLS, THEY DON'T GET THE EDUCATION THEY NEED AND THEY CAN'T RISE IN THAT WAY OR BECAUSE THEY CAN'T FIND JOBS,
THEY CAN’T GET IN, CAN’T GET ON THE BOTTOM RUNG OF THE LADDER AND CAN’T MOVE UP INTO BUSINESS IN OTHER WAYS, WE Loose THAT POTENTIAL BRAIN POWER. WE’RE IN A VERY COMPETITIVE WORLD. WE CAN’T TAKE 1/4 OF THE AMERICAN POPULATION, LOCK THEM IN A BACK ROOM AND SAY WE’LL PLAY WITHOUT THEM. IT’S LIKE TRYING TO PLAY BASEBALL WITH SEVEN MEN ON THE FIELD. YOU CAN’T DO THAT.

CHRIS WILSON: >> LET’S TALK MORE ABOUT EDUCATION. THIS IS -- SEEMS TO BE A TOPIC THAT A LOT OF STUDENTS WATCHING ARE REALLY INTERESTED IN, WHICH IS NOT NO SURPRISE AND WE’VE RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FROM TWO SCHOOLS FROM MISS FREEDMAN’S CLASS AT NORTH SCOTT HIGH SCHOOL IN IOWA AND MRS. JACKSON’S CLASS AT OSBORNE M.S.T. HIGH SCHOOL IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN. I KNOW OSBORNE HIGH SCHOOL WELL. BUT HOW DOES POVERTY AFFECT THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN?

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> I THINK WHEN KIDS COME TO SCHOOL AND THEY’RE HUNGRY OR NOT IN STABLE HOUSING OR SAFE HOUSING, THAT AFFECTS THE ABILITY TO LEARN. SO THERE’S A LOT OF THINGS THAT WE CAN DO TO IMPROVE EDUCATION AND MAKE IT WORK BETTER AND ADDRESS SOME OF THE ROAD ECONOMIC CAUSES THAT ARE MAKING OUR HAMPERING CHILDREN’S ABILITY TO LEARN IN THE CLASSROOM.

MICHAEL TANNER: >> LET’S NOT TAKE THE ONUS OFF OF SCHOOLS THAT THEY NEED TO IMPROVE. I AGREE WITH YOU COMPLETELY. BUT THAT CAN’T BE USED AS AN EXCUSE FOR NOT DOING THINGS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM. RIGHT NOW TOO MANY SCHOOLS EXIST TO SERVE THE TEACHERS AND THE TEACHER’S UNION. WHEN YOU HAVE A CITY LIKE BALTIMORE WHICH SPENDS MORE ON PER CAPITA THAN ALL BY FIVE ORB SIX CITIES IN THE NATION AND YOU HAVE 61% OF THE ADULTS IN THAT CITY DON’T HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE, 1/4 OF THE STUDENTS DON’T GRADUATE, WHERE THE AVERAGE SAT SCORE IS 100 POINTS LOWER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE, CLEARLY SOMETHING IS BEING DONE WRONG IN THE SCHOOLS.

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> ONE THING I’LL SAY, TODAY PEOPLE ARE MORE EDUCATED THAN THEY WERE ON AN AVERAGE 50 YEARS AGO, BOTH HAVING A HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION, SOME COLLEGE AND COLLEGE COMPLETION, BUT YET THE POVERTY SHIFTS. IT’S HARD BECAUSE IT GOES BACK TO THE LABOR MARKET. IF THERE’S NOT ENOUGH GOOD JOBS FOR THE PEOPLE COMING OUT WITH DEGREES, ALL THE EDUCATION IN THE WORLD ISN’T GOING TO GET THAT PERSON OUT OF POVERTY. YES, WE NEED TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOLING, ADDRESS THE ECONOMIC ROOT CAUSES AND CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH OPPORTUNITY IN THE LABOR MARKETS TO EARN GOOD WAGES. AND THE FACT IS, WITH -- AT ATIME IN 60s, YOU COULD GET A JOB AT THE MILL AND HELP SUPPORT YOUR FAMILY. THOSE JOBS ARE NOT THERE AND WON’T COME BACK. NOW YOU HAVE TO HAVE AN EDUCATION. THE FURTHER DOWN THE INCOME SCALE YOU GO BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF BASIC SKILLS IN A COMPETITIVE MARKETPLACE TODAY.

CHRIS WILSON: >> WELL, TO UNDERSTAND HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ADDRESSING POVERTY, WE’D LIKE TO TURN TO WINSTON AND -- WE’RE NOT READY FOR THAT TO BE LIVE. SO WE’RE GOING TO WAIT FOR DEARBORN FOR A MINUTE. CAMARYN AND KEVIN, DO YOU HAVE IN QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL AS
WELL? WE'RE HOPING TO GET AN ONLINE QUESTION BUT IT'S NOT COMING THROUGH TO ME RIGHT NOW.

KEVIN PERALTA: >> MY QUESTION IS, HOW DO YOU THINK -- WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE THE DAILY LIFE OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY IN ORDER FOR -- ESPECIALLY FOR THE YOUTH, IN ORDER FOR OUR POVERTY LINE AND PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY TO GO DOWN.

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> GOOD JOB. THAT IS -- YOU NEED EDUCATION TO GET THE GOOD JOB. YOU NEED CHILD CARE TO ACCESS THAT JOB. TRANSPORTATION TO GET TO THAT JOB. AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE NEED TO MAKE THE INVESTMENT NECESSARY TO CREATE JOBS AND AT THE LABOR STANDARDS TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY'RE SUPPORTING. I THINK THAT THAT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT WE CAN DO TO CUT POVERTY TODAY.

MICHAEL TANNER: >> I'D AGREE ON JOBS. I'D SAY IT'S A MATTER OF HOPE AS WELL. YOU HAVE TO GIVE PEOPLE IN THE IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITIES THE BELIEF THAT IF THEY WORKED HARD, CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOR AND CHANGE GRATIFICATION, THERE'S PLACES THAT THEY CAN RISE WITH THAT. YOU CAN'T BELIEVE THERE'S NOTHING OUT THERE IN THE FUTURE SO WHY NOT CONSUME TODAY OR WHATEVER. THE BASIS FOR SUCCESS IS DELAYED GRATIFICATION. IT'S NOT SPENDING MONEY TODAY. IT'S DOING SOMETHING THEY DON'T WANT TODAY OR LEARNING SOMETHING THEY DON'T WANT TODAY BECAUSE THEY'LL BE BETTER OFF TOMORROW. IF YOU DON'T SEE A FUTURE OUT THERE, IT'S HARDER TO DO THAT. THAT'S WHAT I WAS AIMING FOR. YOU CAN'T REALLY -- MELISSA MENTIONED JOBS. YOU CAN'T REALLY GIVE PEOPLE THOSE JOBS IF THEY DON'T HAVE THE TOOLS NECESSARY TO SUCCEED IN EDUCATION.

KEVIN PERALTA: I GUESS ANOTHER QUESTION THAT I HAVE IS WE SEE POLICE ISSUES THAT THEY -- ESPECIALLY NOW IN BALTIMORE. WE TALK ABOUT INCARCERATE RATES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS, SPECIFICALLY MEN. WHAT DO YOU THINK CAN BE DONE IN TERMS OF THAT TO SORT OF LOWER THE POVERTY LEVEL?

MICHAEL TANNER: >> I THINK WE OVERCRIMINALIZE OUR SOCIETY. WE HAVE TOO MANY LAWS. THE RESULT IS, THE POLICE CAN ALWAYS FIND A REASON TO STOP SOMEBODY OR ARREST SOMEBODY. THE WAR ON DRUGS IN PARTICULAR HAS BEEN A DISASTER FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. YOU END UP IN MAJOR CITIES WHERE ONE OUT OF THREE OR ONE OUT OF FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN ARE IN JAIL OR ARE ON PROBATION. ONCE YOU DO THAT, THEY DEVELOP A CRIMINAL RECORD AND MAKES IT HARD TO GET A JOB IN THE FUTURE. WE TALKED ABOUT THE HIGH OUT OF WEDLOCK BIRTH RATES. THE MEN THAT WOULD MARRY THE WOMEN THAT ARE IN JAIL OR UNEMPLOYED, YOU HAVE TO DEAL WITH THAT PROBLEM BEFORE OTHERS.

CHRIS WILSON: >> A QUESTION FROM KATELYN ONLINE. I THINK HEARING THINGS ABOUT HOW WE NEED TO CHANGE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, CHANGE THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND SO FORTH AND THESE BIG ISSUES. SHE'S WONDERING, WELL, WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO?

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> OKAY. A LOT YOUNG PEOPLE CAN DO. SO THAT'S A WONDERFUL QUESTION. I THINK ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS IS TO BE CIVICALLY ACTIVE. YOU CAN WRITE YOUR MEMBER OF
CONGRESS AND LET THEM KNOW WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT -- THEY NEED TO PUT A FOCUS ON CUTTING POVERTY. WHEN YOU'RE 18, VOTE. DON'T JUST GIVE YOUR VOTE AWAY. LEARN WHAT ALL THE DIFFERENT CANDIDATES STAND FOR ON THE ISSUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU AND BE CIVICALLY ACTIVE. YOU CAN VOLUNTEER IN YOUR COMMUNITY. THE SOCIAL CAPITAL THAT PEOPLE BUILD WHEN THEY GO TO CHURCH TOGETHER OR VOLUNTEER TOGETHER IS IMPORTANT IN PROVIDING THE HOPE AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY. SO THERE'S THINGS YOU CAN DO TO VOLUNTEER AND THINGS YOU CAN DO TO BE ENGAGED TO ADDRESS THE MORE ISSUES SO PEOPLE MAKING DECISIONS UP HERE SEE AND HEAR FROM YOU. KNOW THAT YOU GUYS ARE OUT THERE AND READY TO TAKE ACTION.

MICHAEL TANNER: >> I AGREE WITH EVERYTHING MELISSA SAID. BEING ENGAGED AND VOTING. GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY. IT USED TO BE ONE TIME THAT THE COMMUNITY WAS THE PRIMARY AGENCY IN DEALING WITH POVERTY. GO BACK TO THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY FOR EXAMPLE WHERE AFRICAN AMERICANS ARE LARGELY EXCLUDED FROM THE GOVERNMENT WELFARE SYSTEM. THEY DEVELOPED ENORMOUS COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY DEVELOPED THEIR OWN ANTI-POVERTY EFFORTS THAT WERE RIVALLED THAT OF THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS. THOSE SORT OF DISSIPATED NOW OVER TIME. WE NEED TO REENGAGE THOSE THINGS.

CHRIS WILSON: >> OKAY. WE HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION ONLINE HERE, WHICH IS HOW DO WE BREAK THE CYCLE OF POVERTY FOR KIDS?

MELISSA BOTEACH: >> SO SURE. I THINK THERE'S -- STARTING WITH YOUNG EDUCATION IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS. IF YOU GIVE SOMETHING AN EDUCATION, YOU GIVE THEM HOPE AND THE SKILLS TO GO OUT AND COMPETE IN THE ECONOMY. EARLY EDUCATION IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT. THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF EVIDENCE THAT HAS SHOWN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 0 AND 5, THERE'S A BIG PART OF KIDS BRAIN ARCHITECTURE IS BEING BUILT. PRESCHOOL, HIGH QUALITY CHILD CARE, HOME VISITATION, PARENTS GIVEN INFORMATION ON THE BEST WAYS TO CONNECT TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES HAVE A HUGE IMPACT LATER ON DOWN THE LINE. SO INVESTING A LOT AND INVESTING EARLY IN CHILDREN IS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS.

MICHAEL TANNER: >> I'D DISAGREE WITH THAT. I DON'T THINK THE EVIDENCE IS THERE ON THE PRESCHOOL. I THINK IN STUDIES, IT DOESN'T HOLD OVER THE LONG-TERM. ONE OF THE THINGS PEOPLE NEED ARE ROLE MODELS IN THE COMMUNITY. IN POORER AREAS, THEY NEED SUCCESS AND SEE IF I BEHAVE IN A CERTAIN WAY, I CAN CHANGE. >> THERE'S BOTH ENDS. AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL, THERE'S LOTS OF THINGS PEOPLE CAN DO. EVERY DAY IN OUR LIVES, THERE'S PEOPLE WE LOOK UP TO. TEACHERS WE LOOK TO. THERE'S HOPE AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL. AND ADDRESSING THE STRUCTURAL ISSUES. INEQUALITY, LACK OF JOBS. BOTH ARE NECESSARY AND BOTH NEED TO WORK HAND AND HAND. AND WE NEED THE ABILITY OF GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS. MELISSA AND I SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY. WE SHARE THE SAME GOALS. PEOPLE SHOULD ASK BOTH QUESTIONS AND TRY TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN ANSWERS ON THESE THINGS.

CHRIS WILSON: IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE FROM OUR AUDIENCE AND AS WE SAW -- KEVIN AND CAMERON SAW IN OUR COLLECTION HERE AT THE SMITHSONIAN, PEOPLE DISAGREED IN 1964 WHEN THEY BROUGHT THIS OUT. I GUESS YOU GUYS PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW THAT THERE WERE COMIC
BOOKS RIDICULING THE WAR ON POVERTY AND NOT JUST CONFRONTED IT BUT TALKING ABOUT IT FROM AND IDEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW THAT THEY THOUGHT THIS WAS A BETTER WAY TO DO THIS. IT WAS AT ANY TIME WAY THAT THEY WOULD TACKLE THIS PROBLEM BUT DIDN'T AGREE THAT THERE WAS A PROBLEM. AND WHY SO MUCH LEGISLATION WAS ABLE TO GET DONE. YET IT WAS AN OVERWHEMLINGLY DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS BUT THERE WAS STILL RESISTANCE. PEOPLE MOBILIZE. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THE LABOR MOVEMENT. THEY PUSHED PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO GO FURTHER. PUSHING CONGRESS THAT WAS STRATEGIZING. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WAS A HUGE FORCE BEHIND THE CHANGE. TODAY THE FAST FOOD WORKERS ON STRIKE, DOMESTIC HOMEWORKERS ORGANIZING FOR BASIC RIGHTS AT WORK. THESE ARE THE KINDS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ACTIONS THAT WILL GET US A CHANGE IN ADDITION TO ALL THE WORK YOU NEED TO DO EVERY DAY IN OUR COMMUNITIES. LET US REMEMBER THE 1964 CIVIL RIGHTS ACT PASSED WITH A MAJORITY OF REPUBLICAN VOTES. IT WAS A BIPARTISAN MOVEMENT BACK THEN.

CHRIS WISLON: SO WE WERE TALKING ABOUT WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE COULD DO. NOW WE WANT TO GO -- I THINK WE'RE READY TO GO TO DEARBORN MICHIGAN. WE'RE GOING TO TURN TO WINSTON AND SYLVIA. YOU'RE STUDENT ACTIVISTS JOINING US FROM THE ARAB AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM IN DEARBORN. THEY'RE FROM A PROGRAM THAT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN CROSS-CULTURAL PARTICIPATION. THE NAME OF THIS PROGRAM IS CALLED FOCUS HOPE. SO WINSTON AND SYLVIA, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE NATURE OF POVERTY IN DETROIT, WHAT IS YOUR ORGANIZATION DOING TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF POVERTY AND WHAT CAN WE AS YOUNG PEOPLE DO TO SORT OF WORK ON POVERTY. >> OKAY. WE LOOK LIKE WE'RE HAVING TROUBLE WITH THE AUDIO. GIVE US A SECOND AND SEE IF WE CAN HEAR FROM WINSTON AND SYLVIA. WE HAVE IT NOW.

SYLVIA LUPA: >> SO ALTHOUGH POVERTY HAS GOT DONE, IT'S STILL A BIG ISSUE IN DETROIT. THEY HAVE PROGRAMS TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO HELP WITH DIFFERENT JOB SKILLS. GET THEM THE JOBS THEY WANT.

WINSTON BALMACEDA: AND THE THING ABOUT FOCUS HOPE, MOST OF THE SOLUTIONS ARE LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS AND THEIR GOAL IS TO BETTER NEXT GENERATION RATHER THAN TO KEEP UP -- I'M SORRY.

CHRIS WILSON: >> OKAY. THAT'S GREAT TO HEAR FROM THEM. I WAS -- AGAIN, I GREW UP IN DETROIT. I WORKED WITH FOCUS IN HIGH SCHOOL. SO THERE'S ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THAT IN CITIES AND RURAL AREAS ACROSS THE COUNTRY WHERE STUDENTS CAN GET INVOLVED AND WORK TO BETTER THEIR OWN CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OTHERS. SO ACTIVISM ISN'T JUST FOR ADULTS. SO WE HAVE TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE WAR ON POVERTY TODAY. HAD SOME GREAT CONVERSATIONS. THE IDEA OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT IS TO BRING TOGETHER AS MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE COUNTRY INTO CONVERSATION ABOUT HISTORICAL EVENTS THAT STILL MATTER TODAY. SO THOUGH WE HAVE COME TO THE END OF OUR PROGRAM, WE HOPE THAT IT'S NOT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION ABOUT POVERTY BOTH PAST AND PRESENT.
CAMARYN CHICHESTER: >> AND IN HIS 1964 STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, PRESIDENT JOHNSON SAID THE WAR ON POVERTY WON'T BE WON IN WASHINGTON D.C. BUT MUST BE WITHIN IN THE FIELD FROM THE COURTHOUSE TO THE WHITE HOUSE SO WE ASK YOU TO LOOK AT YOUR STATE AND LOOK AT YOUR TOWN. WHAT DOES POVERTY LOOK LIKE IN YOUR AREA?

KEVIN PERALTA: >> WHAT ARE YOUR COMMUNITY ASSETS? WHAT ORGANIZATIONS ARE DOING WORK WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS POVERTY AND WHAT CAN YOU DO?

CHRIS WILSON: >> THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR JOINING US FOR THE 2015 NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT WEBCAST. HAVE A WONDERFUL DAY. THANK YOU.