

Historical Perspectives on Poverty

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Presenter:

Stephen Pimpare, PhD
New York, NY

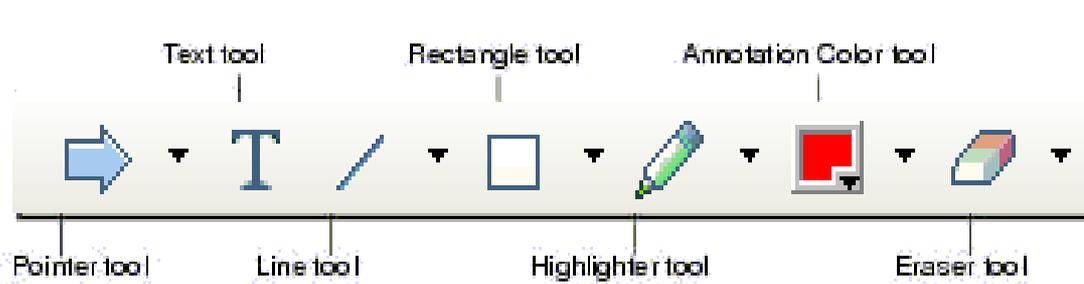


Webinar Host:

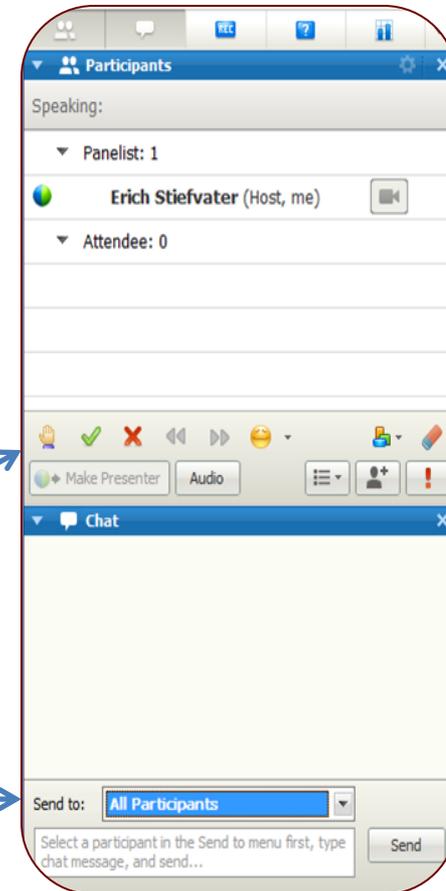
Amy Cannata
Education Northwest
Portland, OR



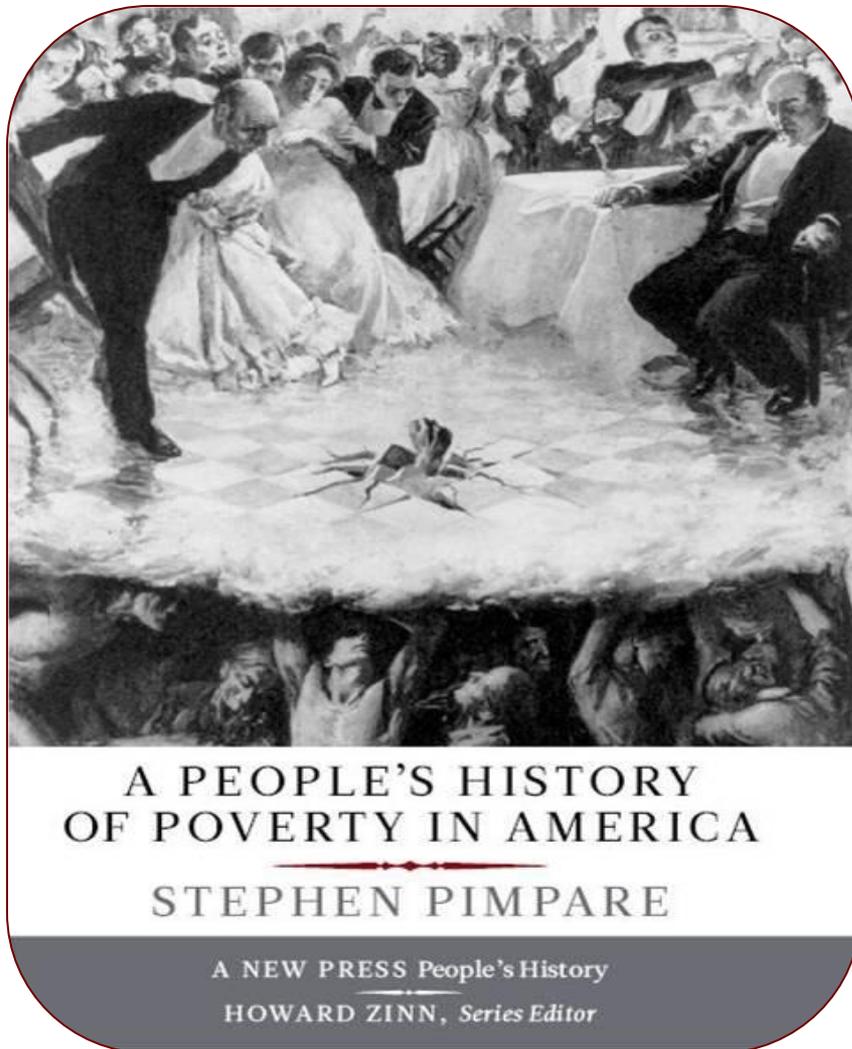
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- ☉ Phones will be muted to reduce background noise
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 - Raising your hand
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Historical Perspectives on Poverty



A Conversation
with Stephen
Pimpare

October 27, 2011



Learning Objectives

- ① Describe some common views about people living in poverty and identify three common explanations about why people are poor
- ① Describe the experience of poverty as viewed by poor Americans themselves
- ① Compare the perspectives of people experiencing poverty and those not in poverty, and offer hypotheses about why they might differ
- ① Begin to evaluate how this affects your own views, or challenges any preconceptions you might have had





Affluence, unless
stimulated by a keen
imagination,
forms but the vaguest
notion of the practical
strain of poverty.

-Edith Wharton,
House of Mirth, 1905

What do you think the most important factors are that create poverty in the U.S. today?
Name up to three.



Public Opinion Poll

Are These Major Causes of Poverty?	Not Poor	Poor
Drug abuse	68	75
Medical bills	54	69
Too many jobs being part-time or low-wage	50	64
Too many single-parent families	52	61
A shortage of jobs	27	52
Too many immigrants	27	39
The welfare system	47	45
Poor people lacking motivation	51	56
A decline in moral values	56	58
Poor quality public schools	47	46

“Not Poor” means those making more than twice the poverty level.

“Poor” means those making less than twice the poverty level.



Why are People Poor?

Bradley Schiller, *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination* (Pearson, 2008)

- ◎ Flawed Character
- ◎ Big Brother (Perverse Incentives)
- ◎ Restricted Opportunities



Survey

Which do you think best explains most of the poverty you've seen in your area?

- a. Flawed Character
- b. Big Brother (Perverse Incentives)
- c. Restricted Opportunity



Some Common Perspectives, Then & Now



Too often it will be found that the root of the evil lies in the characters of the poor themselves, – in habits of laziness, shiftlessness, intemperance, or vice, which have reduced them to an irregular and meager subsistence.

- Mrs. Glendower Evans, National Conference on Charities and Corrections, 1889





Image 3: SamPac



Image 4: Matthew Mendoza



Image 5: Ariff Tajuddin

It is hardly too much to say that people do not beg because they are poor, but that they are poor because they beg, and that as long as they beg they will stay poor. For centuries the stream of charity has been steadily flowing, and the flood of poverty has been growing; and we have not stopped to consider that it might be merely cause and effect.

-Frederick Almy, 1900

...Continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit... The Federal Government must and Shall quit this business of relief.

-Franklin D. Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, 1935





One-way handouts usually hurt those they are intended to help. True charity begins by requiring responsible behavior from the beneficiary as a condition of receiving aid. True charity seeks to generate in the recipient the virtues, commitment, and self-discipline necessary for success in society, rather than passively subsidizing ever-escalating levels of social pathology.

-Robert Rector, 2000

My grandmother was not a highly educated woman, but she told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals. You know why? Because they breed. You're facilitating the problem if you give an animal or a person ample food supply. They will reproduce, especially ones that don't think too much further than that. They don't know any better... I believe government is 'breeding a culture of dependency' which has grown out of control.

-South Carolina Lt. Governor Andre Bauer, 2010



Other Perspectives





Image 9: Library of Congress



Image 10: Library of Congress



It is said that our poor are indolent, and will not work... [but] give the poor a sufficient compensation for their work; let the demand for their exertions be constant and steady...and it will soon be found that the charge of indolence, is a calumny on the most destitute part of our fellow citizens.

-Philadelphia Independent Gazette,
May 1791

Welfare Rights Organization



our children
go to bed
hungry
and get up
hungry
and don't even
know nothing
in between

our children
go to bed
hungry
and get up
hungry
and don't even
know nothing
in between



WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION
NATIONWIDE

WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION
NATIONWIDE

WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION
NATIONWIDE



21 **Image 13:** Library of Congress



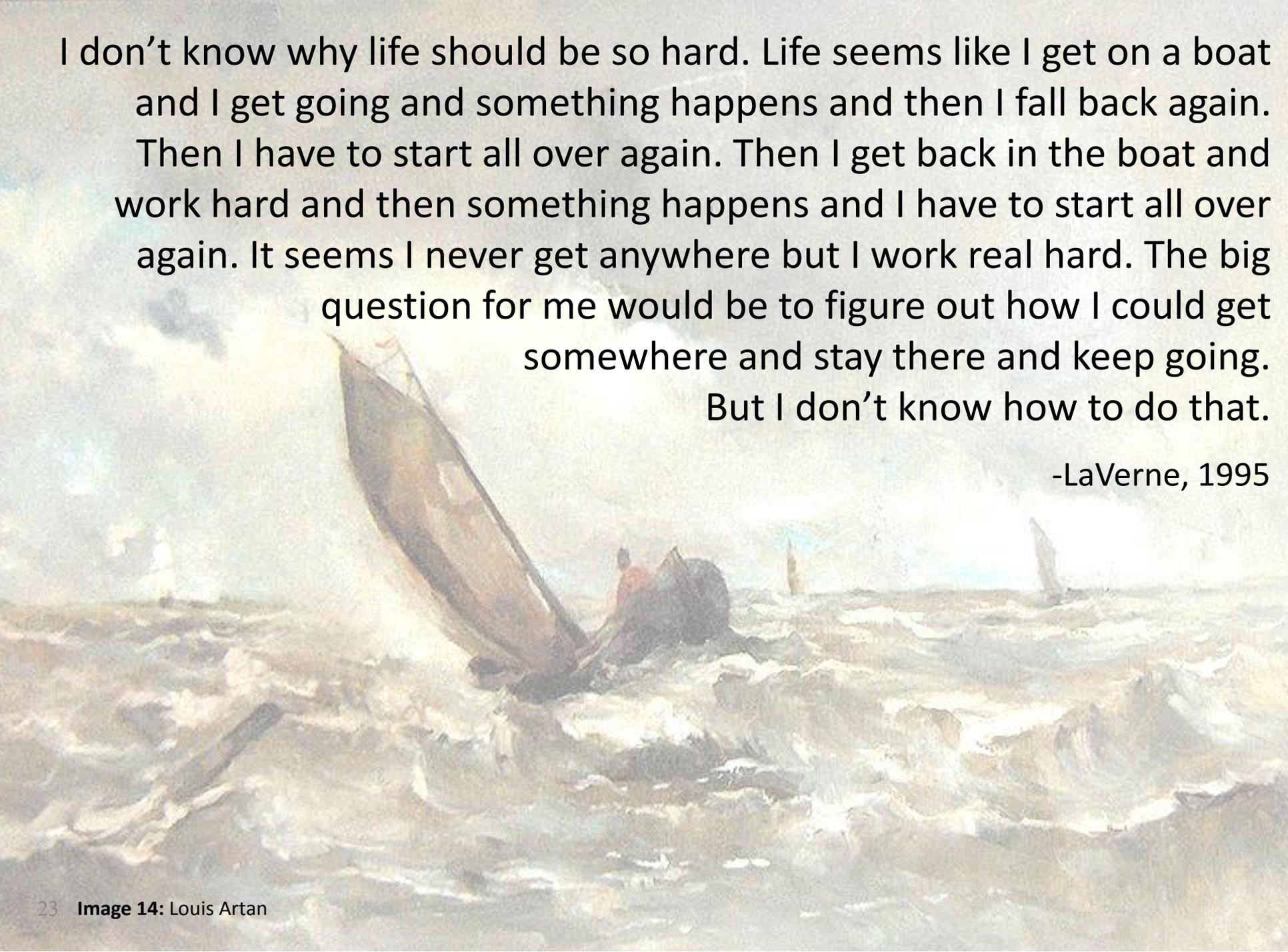
My first recognition of the stigma that poor single mothers face came with my initial visit to the welfare office in my third month of pregnancy... As I approached the reception desk, a clerk looked at my small, brown, and still not showing body and bitterly remarked, 'Pregnant, I suppose!' From there, it went downhill. During my screening, the caseworker sarcastically stated, 'I suppose you don't know who the daddy is'; stifled a laugh when I said I planned to finish my GED and go on to college; and glared at me when I told him that I refused to have my teachers – who did not yet know I was pregnant – sign notes for the welfare office stating that I was still in school and in good standing. To be frank, I was shocked...[they felt that they] had the right to hate me, to laugh at me, to disrespect me openly and blatantly because I was black and poor, because I was pregnant, and because I was alone.

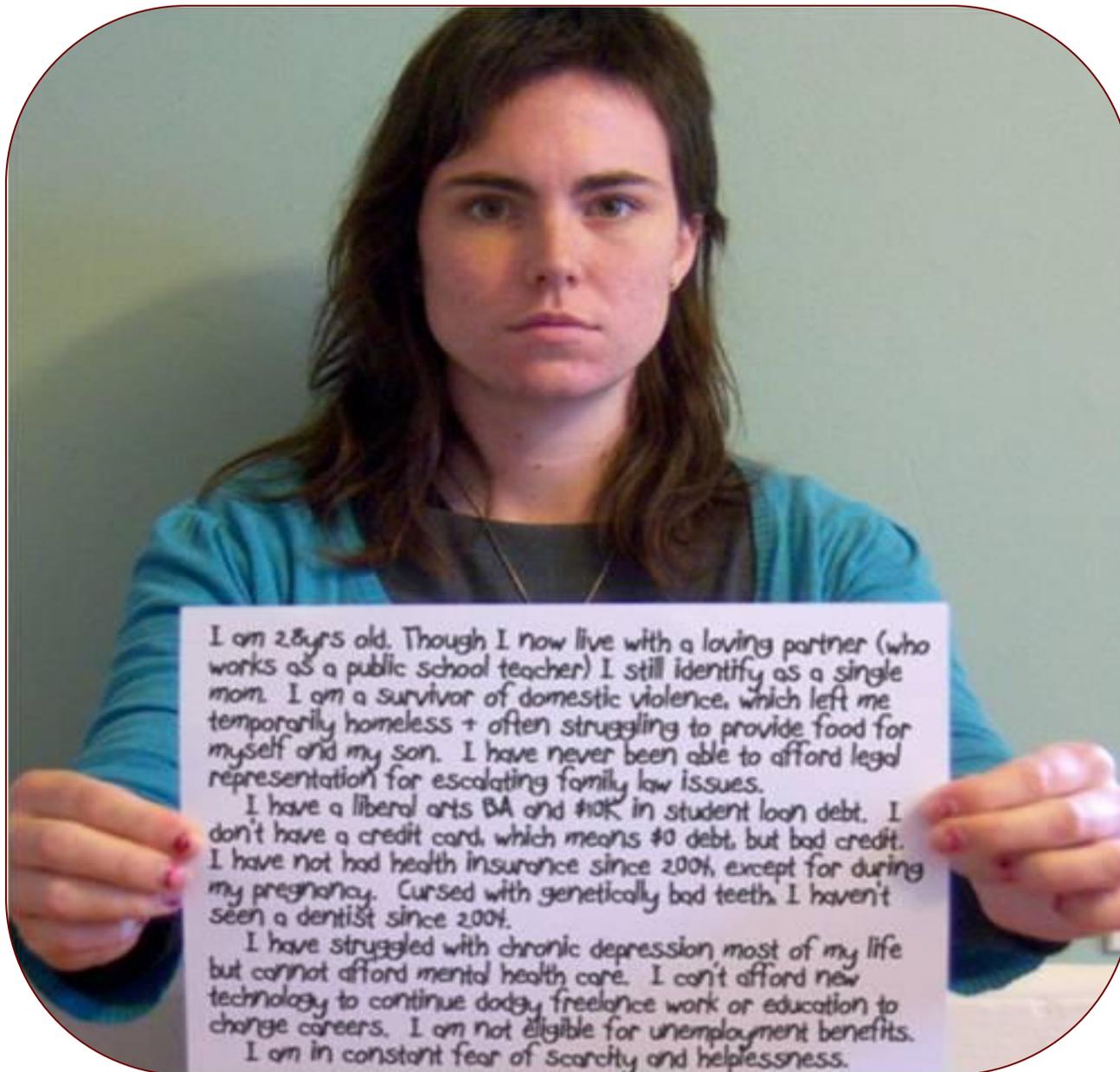
-Tonya Mitchell, 2003



I don't know why life should be so hard. Life seems like I get on a boat and I get going and something happens and then I fall back again. Then I have to start all over again. Then I get back in the boat and work hard and then something happens and I have to start all over again. It seems I never get anywhere but I work real hard. The big question for me would be to figure out how I could get somewhere and stay there and keep going. But I don't know how to do that.

-LaVerne, 1995





I am 28yrs old. Though I now live with a loving partner (who works as a public school teacher) I still identify as a single mom. I am a survivor of domestic violence, which left me temporarily homeless + often struggling to provide food for myself and my son. I have never been able to afford legal representation for escalating family law issues.

I have a liberal arts BA and \$10K in student loan debt. I don't have a credit card, which means \$0 debt, but bad credit. I have not had health insurance since 2004, except for during my pregnancy. Cursed with genetically bad teeth, I haven't seen a dentist since 2004.

I have struggled with chronic depression, most of my life but cannot afford mental health care. I can't afford new technology to continue dodgy freelance work or education to change careers. I am not eligible for unemployment benefits.

I am in constant fear of scarcity and helplessness.

Poverty becomes a vicious cycle that is written on our bodies and intimately connected with our value in the world. Our children need healthy food so that we can continue working; yet working at minimum-wage jobs we have no money for wholesome food and very little time to care for our families. So our children get sick; we lose our jobs to take care of them; we fall more and more deeply into debt before our next unbearable job; and then we really cannot afford medical care...The food banks we gratefully drag our exhausted children to on the weekend hand out bags of rancid candy bars, past-pull-dated hot dogs, stale and broken pasta, and occasionally a bag of wrinkled apples. We are either fat or skinny, and we seem always irreparably ill. Our emaciated or bloated bodies are then read as a sign of lack of discipline and as proof that we have failed to care as we should.

-Vivyan C. Adair, 2003





No one saves their money... a little money and these foolish young things buy a hat, a dollar for breakfast, a bright scarf... If you've ever been without money, or food, something very strange happens when you get a bit of money, a kind of madness. You don't care. You can't remember that you had no money before, that the money will be gone. You can remember nothing but that there is the money for which you have been suffering. Now there it is. A lust takes hold of you. You see food in the windows. In imagination you eat hugely; you taste a thousand meals. You look in windows. Colours are brighter; you buy something to dress up in. An excitement takes hold of you. You know it is suicide but you can't help it. You must have food, dainty, splendid food and a bright hat so once again you feel blithe, rid of that ratty gnawing shame.

-Meridel Le Sueur, "Women on the Breadlines," 1932



See, the first thing they think – that we're all bums. Next they think we're criminals. Am I right? Or we're drug addicts. Or we're chronic alcoholics and don't mean no good to ourselves or anybody. Since we're homeless they think there's got to be something wrong with us, you know.

-T., late 1980s

It would have been greatly to my advantage if I could have admitted to being an alcoholic or a drug addict. The social workers have no way of assisting someone who is sane and sober. My interview with the social worker made it clear that only three explanations of homelessness could be considered: drug addiction, alcoholism, and psychiatric disorder. The more successful I was in ruling out one of these explanations, the more certain the others would become. Professional people like to believe this. They like to believe that no misfortune could cause them to lose their own privileged places. They like to believe that homelessness is the fault of the homeless – that the homeless have special flaws not common to the human condition, or at least the homeless have flaws that professional people are immune to.

-Lars Eighner, 1993



I'm five foot seven and 147 pounds. I live in the ghetto. I'm supposed to be a loser. I'm supposed to be on the six o'clock news shooting people's heads off. I'm supposed to be the one that you grab for your purse when I walk by. I'm the person that doesn't vote. I'm the person that is supposed to drink. I'm the person that is supposed to smoke weed. I'm the motherf***r that is supposed to fill your jails. I'm the person that you make examples to your kid of what not to be like. I'm supposed to be a basketball player. I'm supposed to make it only because of affirmative action. I'm not supposed to be positive. I'm not supposed to be educated. I'm not supposed to know what I know. But I do.

-LeAlan Jones, age 17, c.1987



Image 18: The Andy Warhol Museum



Image 19: LeAlan Jones





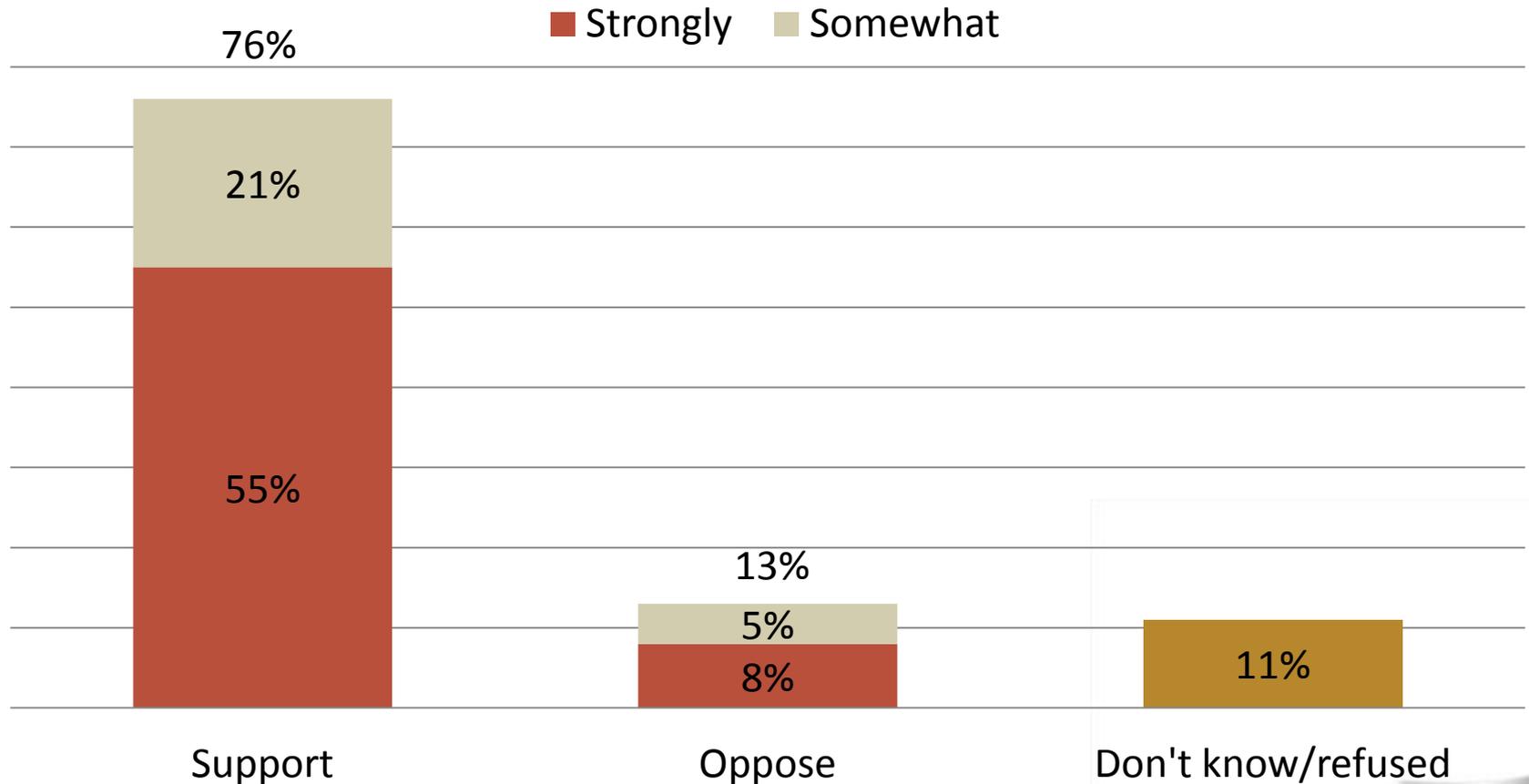
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-Edith Wharton,
House of Mirth, 1905

Revisiting Public Opinion on Poverty and Welfare: Digging Deeper



Would you support or oppose the next president and Congress setting a national goal to cut poverty in the United States in half within ten years?



Please tell me whether you agree more with the first statement or agree more with the second statement.

■ Agree much more ■ Agree somewhat more

Given all the money we are spending to fix the financial crisis, the government should not plan any new spending to help the poor.



Even with the costs of fixing the financial crisis, the government cannot ignore the economic needs of poor families.



Both 1%

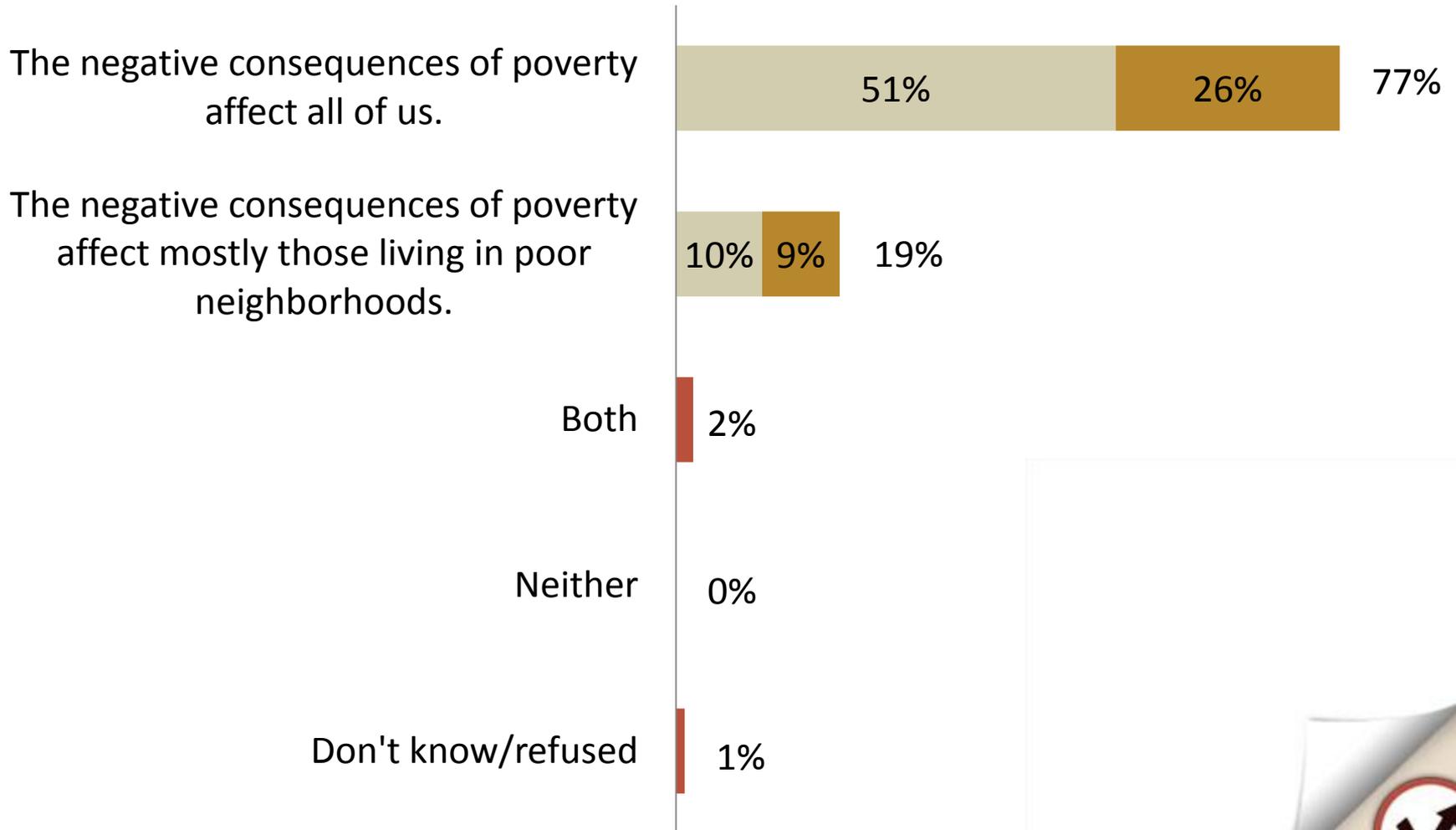
Neither 2%

Don't know/refused 4%

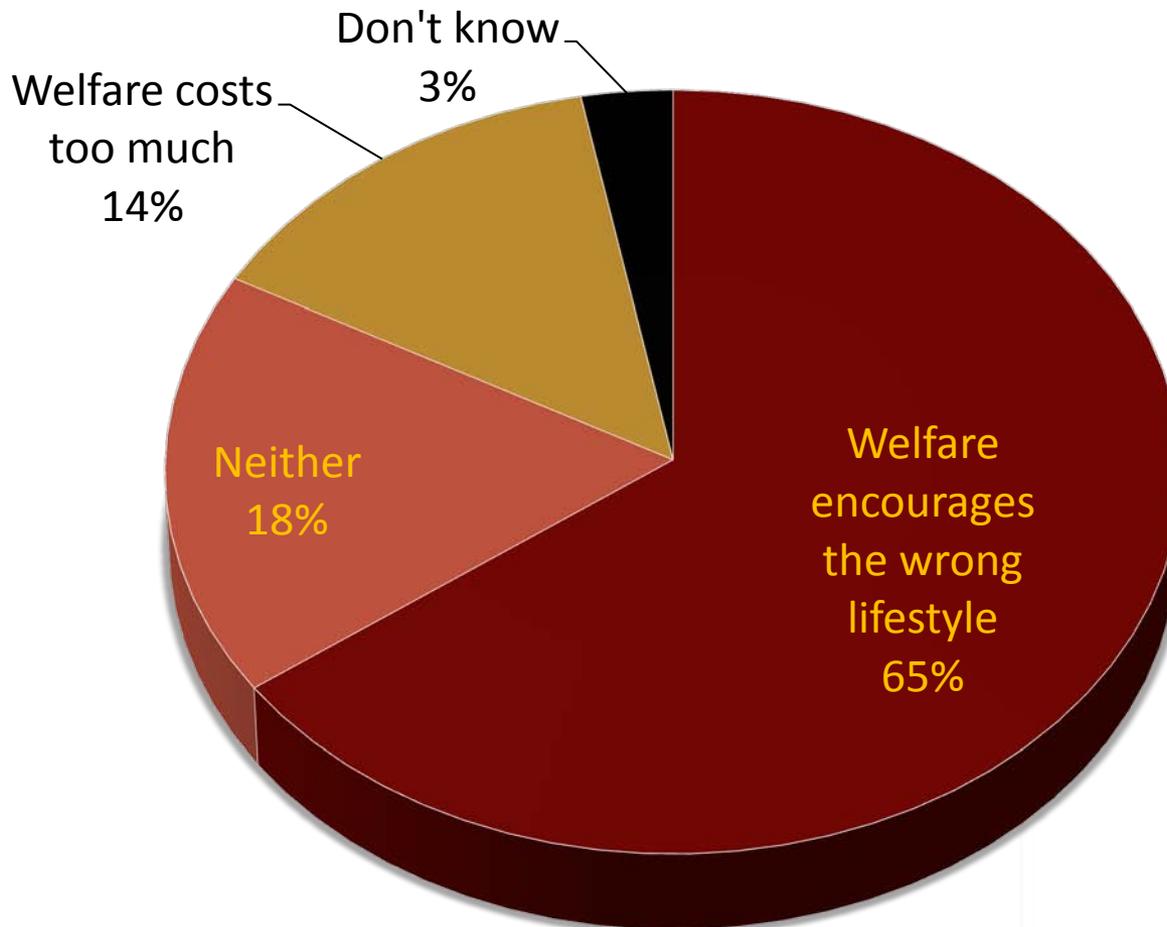


Please tell me whether you agree more with the first statement or agree more with the second statement.

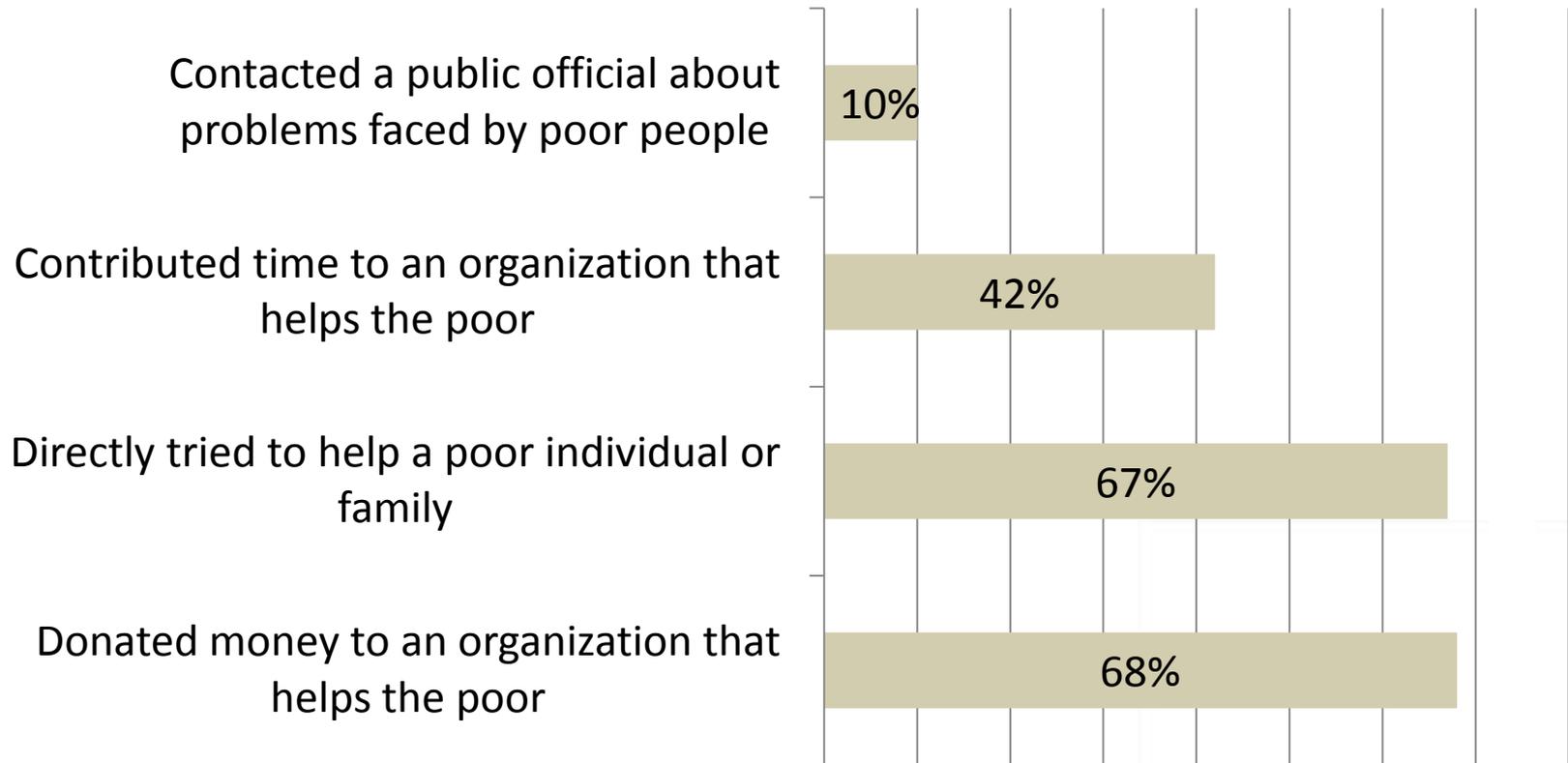
■ Agree much more ■ Agree somewhat more



Some people feel that the most upsetting thing about welfare is that it costs too much in tax money. Others feel that the most upsetting thing about welfare is that it encourages people to adopt the wrong lifestyle and values. What is your opinion?



I am going to read you a list of things that some people do and others don't. In the past 12 months have you...?



Too often the voices and knowledge of poor people are perceived by policy-makers and researchers as anecdotal, providing items to be used when introducing an article or lecture, but not as a source of knowledge necessary for the setting of policy or for the refinement of intervention methods... their voices are regarded as mere noise, signifying nothing, or reflecting their distorted, unsophisticated or irrelevant perceptions...The assumption is that people in poverty are to learn from the professionals and never the other way around.

-Michal Krumer-Nevo, 2008



Next Webinars?

1. Who's Poor Today? What Every VISTA Should Know
2. Poverty, Crime, & Criminal Justice
3. Making Sense of the Economic Crisis
4. A History of Charity & Philanthropy
5. Something else?



Thank You!

Please complete the webinar
survey!

Historical Perspectives on Poverty Webinar

Citations

Quotations

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Figures

Figure 1:

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Figure 2–4:

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Figure 5:

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Figure 6:

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Images

Image 1:

Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection. (1913). *Mrs. J.C. Bishop*. Retrieved from Yahoo Flickr website: http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/3409601938/

Image 2:

Library of Congress, Harris & Ewing Collection. (1913). *Woman suffrage: Mrs. Oliver Hasbrouck, Mrs. Glendower Evans*. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/hec2008001340/#>

Image 3:

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Image 4:

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Image 5:

Tajjuddin, A. (2011). *Beggar@Petaling Street*. Retrieved from Yahoo Flickr website: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/simply01/6048988776/>

Image 6:

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Image 7:

Heritage Foundation. (2011). *Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation: A publicity shot*. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons website: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Rector_publicity_shot.jpg

Image 8:

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Image 9:

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Image 12:

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Image 14:

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Image 15:

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Image 16:

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Image 17:

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Image 18:

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Image 19:

LeAlan Jones: 2010 Green Party candidate for U.S. Senate from Illinois. (2010). Retrieved from Wikipedia website: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LeAlanJones.jpg>

Historical Perspectives on Poverty Webinar

Recommended Reading

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