Chapter 3

Declaration of War – on Poverty

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DRAFT NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

As staff gathered papers left on the table after the final cabinet meeting President Kennedy held prior to departing for Dallas and his death on November 22, 1963, they found one page in a yellow lined pad which the president had covered with notes, doodles and the word "poverty" scribbled half a dozen times, encircled and underlined.[1] It reflected one of the day's discussions. Weeks later his brother Bobby came across it when going through his brother's papers. He hung it framed in his office at the Justice Department as a haunting testament of his brother and one of his last concerns.[2] This was a scrap of paper that would encapsulate a war.

~~Less than a~~ A month after that meeting on poverty, on November 23, a tense Lyndon Johnson, now president for one day, met with Walter Heller, Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors. He wanted to know what his predecessor had been considering about economic policy. Heller told the new leader about major efforts he and his staff, at Kennedy's request, had been devoting to investigating the causes and extent of poverty in the United States and what could be done about it. Then, Heller apprehensively asked Johnson if he wanted him to continue working on this project. The topic clearly struck a nerve in Johnson, and Heller reports he spontaneously replied, "That's my kind of program; I'll find money for it one way or another. If I have to, I'll take away money from things to get money to people."[3] Later, Johnson would recount many times the powerful effects of poverty he had experienced as a youth, with his family often depending on the charity of others for food, fearing the loss of their home and watching his father die penniless. He would also tell the story of the Mexican-

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[1] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 1012.
[2] Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life*, (New York: Simon & Schuster: 2000), 280.
[3] Transcript, Walter Heller Oral History Interview 20 February 1970, by David McComb, I, 19-21, LBJ Library, Austin, TX.

American children, often hungry and without lunch, he had once taught in the small South Texas brush country town of Cotulla.[4] Now, hours after the assassination, the grieving new president had responded without reflection, from a deep conviction for the underdog he had come to appreciate from personal experience in the Texas Hill Country.

When Lyndon Johnson was in charge, events never moved slowly. With the country struggling to find its way, his announcement that his first efforts to give it direction would be a series of laws and programs to eliminate poverty took even seasoned Washington political pundits by surprise.[5] One reporter described it as emanating from a man from whom "ideas would flow …like water out of a stream."[6] Barely six weeks after taking the oath as President, the nation learned its new leader intended to attack poverty as the principal domestic enemy. He acted with a Texas-style explosive manner, for which he would become famous.

On January 8, Johnson stood before a joint session of Congress to give his first State of the Union Address. It was a dramatic and effective speech filled with fervor and building on the metaphor of total war. It was later criticized as overblown and gaudy, but at the time judged a political triumph.[7] He announced to a nation still in shock over the violent death of its leader that he was declaring war - a War on Poverty. "It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice," he said, "but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it."

At the time he had no clear plans how this would be victory accomplished, but that was not the issue. The aim of the war was to be nothing less than the transformation of the nation – to completely wipe out the injustice of poverty in the wealthiest nation on earth,

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[4] Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 719.
[5] Douglass Cater, "The Politics of Poverty," *The Reporter*, 20, no. 4 (13 February 1964), 16.
[6] Stewart Alsop, Oral History Interview I, 15 July 1969, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Washington, D.C., LBJ Library. Online http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral-histories/alsop_s/Alsop1.pdf; Internet: accessed 27 November 2013.
[7] David Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1986), xiv, 28-39.

and to prevent it in the future. The undertaking would not be miserly and would ultimately transform into a vision of a "Great Society" [8]to address urban and rural poverty, provide work training, improve medical care, extend full civil rights to all citizens and legal aid for the poor, increase opportunities in employment, housing, education, begin a domestic Peace Corps, highway beautification, and much more. One commentator wrote, "The concerted effort at Federal, state, and local levels for which President Johnson is calling could inject government in social planning on a scale never before attempted. Inevitably there will be outcries against such encroachment."[9] Indeed some groused this was an unattainable utopia; others believed it possible and were prepared to make it reality. One person, who apparently held neither position, was soon chosen to lead the war.

A Sargent becomes a General

Recordings of White House phone conversations only a few weeks after the State of the Union address reveal how Johnson began to pursue his "war." On February first, Sargent Shriver, Director of the Peace Corps, answered his home telephone, exhausted just hours after he had returned from a round-the-world tour visiting Peace Corps volunteers. Shriver was taken totally by surprise when he heard the president on the other end of the line asking him to design and lead the new poverty program he had announced when the Director was traveling out of the country. Shriver quickly demurred, saying he knew nothing about the plan, was already overwhelmed with the demands of Peace Corps and besides, he loved that work. Johnson agreed to delay his decision. But within four hours, Johnson called a third time telling Shriver that he was announcing his appointment to the new post at a press conference in a few minutes! Listening to tapes of the conversations, one hears classic Johnsonian coercion, which few men were able to withstand.[10] Soon it became evident that this was to be no run-of-the-mill government

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[8]LBJ introduced his expansive utopian vision of the "Great Society" in a commencement address at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64.* Volume I, entry 357, pp. 704-707. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965. http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/november-1963-1964/05-22-1964.html; Internet: accessed 4 May 2018.

[9] Cater, "The Politics of Poverty," 20.

[10] Recordings of Telephone Conversations between Lyndon B. Johnson and Sargent Shriver, 1 February 1964, 1:02 PM, Citation # 1804; 2:25 PM, # 1807; ? , # 1809, Recordings and Transcripts of

undertaking. Rather, wrote Douglas Cater in *The Reporter* magazine a month later, "The concerted effort at federal, state and local levels for which President Johnson is calling could inject government into social planning on a scale never before attempted."[11] Shriver would soon discover for himself that the reporter was not exaggerating.

Poverty was a most unlikely topic for the new president to address with such gusto, especially since there were so many other issues pressing for national attention, and virtually no immediate public concern over poverty. Just a year earlier, the Cold War had nearly become a nuclear holocaust with the United States and Russia in a standoff over Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. Relations between the two world powers were still frighteningly tense in a "Cold War" that might become an actual war at any time. In fact, many feared the assassination of the President might have connections with those terrible recent events in Cuba. Little attention had been given to poverty as a national problem in the early 1960s, outside a small group which included the radical Catholic social worker Dorothy Day, the liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith and Illinois senator Paul Douglas. Neither the Kennedy administration nor Congress had seemed too concerned about poverty; in fact, the word could not even be found in the index of either the *Congressional Record* or the *Public Papers of the Presidents* prior to that time.[12] For most persons, the idea had seemed to spring from nowhere and caught them by surprise. The columnists Evans and Novak wrote a few years later that "Public awareness of poverty in the United States, virtually nonexistent a year earlier, was now pervasive. Johnson made the War on Poverty part of a national consensus."[13]

Why had this Texan, previously a stalwart of the conservative Southern Democratic caucus, who had so effectively worked in Congress and then led the Senate for over

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Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library. Shriver's recollection of these conversations is provided in Michael L. Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty: an Oral History*, in Twayne's Oral History Series, ed. Donald A. Ritchie, no. 23 (New York: Twayne Publishers, An Imprint of Simon & Schuster Macmillan: 1996), 26 – 31.

[11] Douglas Cater, "Politics of Poverty," *The Reporter*, 13 February 1964, 20.

[12] Scott Stossel, *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver* (Washington: Smithsonian Books), 2004, 334.

[13] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power*, (New York: The New American Library/Signet Books, 1966/1968), 457; Cater, "Politics of Poverty," 16.

fourteen years as the close friend of wealthy oil barons, Southern plantation owners and ranchers taken this arcane issue as his first key domestic policy – and then intended to fight it as an "unconditional war?" Unlike the Cold War that seemed mired in an armed stalemate, this new national war was to finish in "total victory," Johnson assured Congress in the Message on Poverty he sent them in March.[14]

The ground had been unobtrusively laid for this effort by the recent publication of Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society,* and Michael Harrington's *The Other America: Poverty in the United States.* Harrington defined poverty in human terms and descriptions of the lives of people passing invisibly in our communities. The causes of poverty, he argued, were to be found in the social structures which set the individual's status in a culture of poverty and subjected some to "persistent and degrading suppression of their living standards and whatever humanity they once possessed."[15] The individual was seen as a victim, not a cause of their estrangement from society. Dwight McDonald wrote a lengthy review of Harrington's book in the February 1963 *New Yorker,* and many believe that piece attracted the interest of John Kennedy and his staff to the issue. Kennedy began to investigate what accounted for the appalling squalor that he had witnessed in Appalachia and West Virginia as he campaigned for president.[16]

Another, and more personal influence on Kennedy in this area, came from his sister Eunice (wife of Sargent Shriver), who within the first months of his administration convinced him to address one of her long-time concerns – juvenile delinquency, a problem especially affecting poor urban areas. "In the spare moments when she wasn't pressing her brother to have the federal government do more for the mentally retarded, Eunice was urging him to have the federal government do more for juvenile delinquents," wrote Shriver's biographer Scott Stossel.[17] Not all were of the same opinion, for two

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[14] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty," 16 March 1964, 1. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26109. Internet accessed 12 March 2014.
[15] Page??
[16] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Dwight MacDonald, "Our Invisible Poor," *The New Yorker*, 19 January, 82-132.
[17] Stossel, 335

years earlier, J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, had offered his assessment and labeled them as "beastly punks" and "teenage brigands" whom muddle-headed sentimentalists wrapped in the protective cocoon of the term "juvenile delinquency."[18]

Acceding to his sister, President Kennedy delegated their brother, the Attorney General, to take on her concern, and in 1961 the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency (PCJD) began its work under the direction of David Hackett, a close friend of Bobby Kennedy from their high school days together in Milton Academy in Massachusetts.[19] Thus began a circuitous route by which some of the most radical ideas would enter the strategies of the new war which was declared three years later by a man whom many at that time judged a most conservative Senator, and certainly no friend of the Kennedys.

To undertake his task in the Kennedy administration, Hackett had to teach himself about juvenile delinquency and began to travel the country to talk with persons who did. He was referred to Richard Cloward and his research partner Lloyd Ohlin, both at the School of Social Work at Columbia University, who were studying urban gangs and delinquency. A few years earlier, they had written a well-received book, *Delinquency and Opportunity*, which argued that juvenile delinquency resulted more from social conditions than from individual moral depravity.[20] The remedy, argued these sociologists, was to provide opportunities in the communities in which these young persons lived which would allow them to achieve socially constructive success. Ohlin was hired to advise the PCJD under President Kennedy.

The Poverty Task Force

After John Kennedy's death and the new president's declaration of war on poverty, Johnson assigned Sargent Shriver to lead his new efforts to eliminate poverty as

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[18] Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 409.
[19] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 44-45, 392-416.
[20] Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960).

a Special Assistant to the President. Johnson and Shriver had come to like and respect one another a few years earlier when they had worked together to keep the Peace Corps administration outside the established Washington bureaucracies.[21] Furthermore, Johnson feared his war would become bogged down and defeated if it were to become a part of the existing government bureaucracy. He wanted legislation written and implemented in the shortest time possible and its implementation free of bureaucratic restraints. This meant bypassing cabinet departments, such as Health, Education and Welfare, where Shriver had proposed it be situated when first approached by Johnson. So, the man who did not want the job began immediately to put together a team to write the legislation to eliminate the social and economic blight of poverty from the nation forever. Some, perhaps many, did not believe it could be done, and for them, the words of the Christian scriptures provided the caution, "You will always have the poor with you…:" (Mark 14:7). Johnson and his Poverty Director intended to challenge even the Divinity.

Unlike the writing of most laws by either staff working for Congressional sub-committees or the White House, this act was cobbled together by a team given almost no budget, and meeting in crowded rooms of requisitioned or borrowed space, often in decrepit government buildings spread across Washington. Some were so bad that the loosely organized Poverty Task Force drafting the legislation had to constantly move for safety reasons from one location to another. At one stage, 200-pound chunks from the thirty-foot ceiling at the 130-year old Court of Claims building began to fall to the floor due to construction next door, causing more chaos than was already in progress within the committee, and that was substantial.

As locations changed, phone numbers and addresses changed constantly; bills went unpaid; it was not clear who were on the Task Force. If you showed, up you were assumed to be a part of the effort and expected to begin to work. Since there was for all practical purposes no budget, some had no compunction "liberating" office supplies from other government agencies, including a Bible from a Commerce Department warehouse used to swear in Sargent Shriver as Director of the new agency when it finally began.

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[21] Stossel, *Sarge*, 224-225, 233-245.

"We always felt that was appropriate, because where else would the Department of Commerce keep a Bible but in a warehouse? So that's where we copped the Bible from," explained Edgar May who had just published a book on poverty and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1961 for a series of articles on poverty and welfare. As persons in other government agencies, universities and private companies learned what this small group around Shriver were up to, their numbers increased. Some persons would come to work for a few days or weeks or months and then return to their "official" government, university or private sector job. Others were "on extended loan" from other government departments. As the work continued almost non-stop, some would come to work in the evening or on weekends. Most received no salary from Shriver's operation. They remained on their other government or academic or private sector salary or donated their time. "In my experience, this was the first time we ever undertook anything of this magnitude without any money," William Kelly told an interviewer in later years. And Kelly spoke from extensive experience in a host of government programs including the army, air force, NASA, Aid for International Development, and the Peace Corps. The excitement among some of the most talented people working in government, academia and private industry was palatable, invigorating and contagious. And unbelievably, the basic document needed to create a new bill emerged from chaos in a scant three weeks. The short turn-around and the result were simply extraordinary – in many ways.[22]

Juvenile Delinquency Provides One Solution

As the "Poverty Task Force" searched for ideas to provide a framework for the new program they found the most interesting approaches coming from persons who had been working with the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency (PCJD). In addition to ideas from Cloward and Ohlin's Opportunity Theory, some of the PCJD members who had worked for the Ford Foundation brought other ideas they were using in their experiments in urban "Gray Areas" of decline, located between renovated downtowns and new suburban communities. The focus of this effort was not on physical

[22] Michael L. Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 55-64; Stossel, *Sarge* 369-371. Stossel, *Sarge*, 569-571.

revitalization, but on addressing social needs, and using a new method called "community action." This concept held that the people who were poor and lived in deteriorating urban areas knew more about poverty than anyone, and that they themselves should be closely involved in designing the means to eradicate it. Shriver was familiar with and supported a similar concept being used among Peace Corps volunteers in their work in foreign countries. A key concept of Opportunity Theory was that delinquent and antisocial behavior was largely the result of promoting middle-class aspirations and then putting up barriers, such as status, income, education, and race, which made these aspirations unattainable using legitimate means. Membership in gangs and lawlessness were ways that offered substitute avenues and goals for "success." They argued that if something was offered to replace the rewards and opportunities provided by delinquent behavior, then socially constructive behavior would be more likely.

Blending ideas from Opportunity Theory and community action from the Ford Foundation experiments, along with more traditional approaches used to fight poverty, members of the Task Force began to draft a bill which would allow space for new government programs to provide positive alternatives to destructive delinquent activity. It also looked to five urban renewal communities in the Ford Foundation experiments where residents were being taught and empowered through "community action." These became models for other new government initiatives to fight poverty.[23] The two approaches stressing empowerment through community action along with opportunities for individuals and communities soon would find their way as major strategies promoted by the new unusual legislation being developed by Shriver's Poverty Task Force.

The Poverty Bill in Congress

Chairmanship of congressional committees at the time was determined by strict seniority; virtually all were headed by conservative southern Democrats. They controlled

[23] G. William Domhoff, "The Ford Foundation in the Inner City: Forging an Alliance with Neighborhood Activists," available from http://www.2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/ford_foundation.html; Internet; accessed 8 December 2013.

what legislation was considered by committees and the full House or Senate. A bill proposed by the Democratic President which expanded government was opposed by most Republicans in both Houses who denounced it as a "boondoggle," a "hodgepodge of programs and a "throwback to the 1930s."[24] The supporters knew that if southern Democrats joined with Republican opponents, the bill was doomed, as President Kennedy had learned so painfully during his many failed attempts to pass legislation. Lyndon Johnson and Sargent Shriver devised astute political maneuvers to counter expected opposition.

The President used his masterful understanding of Congress to assure the legislation was assigned to the most liberal committee in the lower chamber, the House Education and Labor Committee, chaired by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. He asked Representative Phil Landrum of Georgia, a respected southern conservative, to introduce it in the House. Landrum was infamous among organized Labor for the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, and supporters of this bill were amazed when they found him personally receptive to this legislation. The result was that his sponsorship brought along a large block of southern conservative House Members.[25] It was not a totally smooth process, for painful concessions had to be granted: a loyalty oath would be required of all Job Corps enrollees and VISTA Volunteers, provisions were added to ensure rural areas would be served, unusual arrangements were made to resolve church-state issues (could programs be funded in faith-based organizations?). But perhaps the most difficult compromise for Shriver was one that he believe he needed to obtain the support of a group of North Carolina Democratic congressmen. They were angry because they believed Shriver's top assistant, who was "borrowed" from the Defense Department, had a leading role in declaring segregated facilities in that state off-limits to military personnel. They demanded Shriver sacrifice his most loyal and effective administrator as a scapegoat to stop what some feared might result in a defeat for the legislation. Shriver describes the dismissal of Adam Yarmolinsky as the most personally painful cost he paid for the new program. He lost a colleague and masterful administrator who would have been

[24] Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty*, 114.
[25] Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty*, 117-118.

invaluable in helping run the new undertaking. It resulted in long-lasting damage to the future success of many of the efforts.[26]

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was indeed an unusual law. It directed the War on Poverty from several specific directions. Out of these ideas the Economic Opportunity Act would incorporate a Job Corps, local work-training programs, a work-study program to help poor college students pay for their education, and VISTA, the domestic Peace Corps. Other sections of the act focused on rural poverty and loans to small businesses.

Title II encompassed the still untested and major heart of the legislation - Community Action Programs. CAPs purpose was to empower the poor to fight for themselves and reform their communities by changing the entrenched power structures. It admonished that the programs should involve the "maximum feasible participation of the residents of the area." The phrase would become infamous in just a few short years.[27] The programs which are the focus of this book that emerged from this section of the law, while later attacked, would be spared the vilest of the future venom that that was to spew out against other outcomes arising from this legal parentage.

But at this stage the broadly framed Section II "gave the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) the equivalent of wartime emergency powers – a degree of flexibility that would be unimaginable today," wrote one scholar. "By contemporary standards, congressional requirements for program accountability were virtually nonexistent. If the campaign against poverty was going badly on one front, the president could simply broaden it on

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[26] Robert F. Clark, *Maximum Feasible Success: A History of the Community Action Program* (Washington: The National Association of Community Action Agencies, 2000), 61.

[27] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: Macmillan, 1969). For an example of the debates see Adam Walinsky, "Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding," NYT Books, 2 February 1969. Available from https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/10/04/specials/moynihan-community.html?scp=43&sq=lewis%2520mumford&st=cse; Internet; accessed 5 May 2018.

another without bothering to seek formal approval (of Congress)."[28] Within a few years, unseen outcomes claiming legitimacy from this section of the law would become painfully evident when mayors, state politicians, and the president himself began to face how the poor envisioned their part in Mr. Johnson's dramatic war. But in August of 1964, euphoria over the utopian dreams of eliminating a scourge that intimidated even a writer of the Christian Gospels trumped all.

Shriver and his staff began to fight the war. The Community Action section of the law provided wide flexibility for inventing new strategies. A pre-school program for children known as Head Start was the first to emerge from section II; close behind was another education-focused program to prepare high school youth for success in college given the name of Upward Bound.[29]

[28] Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow *Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 2.
[29] Maris Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); John Groutt and Calvin Hill, "Upward Bound in the Beginning," *Opportunity Outlook: Journal of the Council for Opportunity in Education* (April 2001): 26-33. Stan Salette, *The Edge of Politics: Stories from the Civil rights Movement, The War on Poverty and the Challenges of School Reform*, (Potomac, MD: BEA Press, 2011), 93- 139.

How to define "Poverty"

"Unlike some other calculations, those relating to poverty have no intrinsic value of their own. They exist only in order to help us make them disappear from the scene…With imagination, faith and hope, we might succeed in wiping out the scourge of poverty even if we don't agree on how to measure it."

Mollie Orshansky[30]

"If I write about the poor, I don't need a good imagination – I have a good memory."

Mollie Orshansky[31]

"Poverty" is a term whose limits and definition were eventually taken for granted and now used to set eligibility for a myriad of government social programs. However, prior to 1963 there was no general agreement upon a standard for measuring "poverty." At the time of passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 the conventional definition had arbitrarily been established by the President's Council of Economic Advisors. Without any rationale, it identified those in families with incomes less than $ 3,000 a year as below poverty, regardless of number in the family or location.

By 1965 articles had appeared that proposed measures to assess how income status impacted opportunity for children low income families. Its author was an obscure, committed and brilliant research analyst in the Social Security Administration. Mollie Orshansky proposed minimum incomes required to provide necessities for living. Since no definitive or accepted standards for the minimum need of major consumption items necessary for living – housing, medical care, clothing, transportation, etc. existed except for food, she began with food.

The Department of Agriculture had proposed a minimum amount that a person needed pay for food each year to *survive*. Orshansky used the *very lowest cost of these food plans* upon which to base her calculations. It would provide a nutritious but monotonous diet that was essentially for emergency use. Using the Department of Agriculture studies, she determined that families at all income levels spent about one-third of their income on food.[32]

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[30] Gordon M. Fisher, The *Development of the Orshansky Poverty Thresholds and Their Subsequent History as the Official U.S. Poverty Measure*, Poverty Working Papers, U.S. Census Bureau (Revised September 1997), quote from Orshansky, cited on p 63, note 265; available from http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/povmeas/papers/orshansky.html; Internet; accessed 3 February 2010.

[31] William J. Eaton, "The Poverty Line," *New York Post*, 4 April 1970, 24. Quoted by Gordon Fisher, in " Remembering Mollie Orshansky– The Developer of the Poverty Threshold, " *SS Bulletin,* 2008, Vol 63, No.3*,* p. 79. Available from https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v68n3/v68n3p79.pdf; Internet accessed 5 My 2018.

[32] Mollie Orshansky, "Counting the Poor: Another Look at the Poverty Profile," *Social Security Bulletin,* January 1965, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In *The Measure of Poverty*, Technical Paper I: Documentation of Background Information and Rationale for Current Poverty Matrix, Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 16-43; available from http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/papers/Orshslct.htm; Internet; accessed 3 February 2010.
Fisher, *The Development of the Orshansky Poverty Thresholds,* 3-4, 37 n. 23.

Working with that information, she multiplied the basic cost of food by three to set the "poverty" line for an individual; then she made adjustments for fewer or more family members. She also arguably assumed that a farm family grew some of their own food and lowered their poverty thresholds to 70% compared to non-farm families. (This distinction between farm and non-farm was eventually scrapped and special adjustments were also made to accommodate the exceptionally high costs of living in Hawaii and Alaska.)

Once Orshansky's proposed poverty thresholds were circulated in 1965, the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Council of Economic Advisors recognized their value, and both accepted her methods and measurements. At that time the poverty threshold for a family of four was set at $ 3,334. Orshanky's methodology for calculating poverty thresholds, slightly modified and often challenged, has not changed substantially since that time.[33]

Some argue that Orshanky's definition was too restrictive. Orshansky herself protested that this figure, like previous calculations, included arbitrary assumptions and was never intended to be used as a program guide but rather as a statistical convenience. In this use it allowed comparisons at various levels, among years, regions and social groups.[34]

Its usefulness for policy decisions became apparent as it provided evidence that the poverty rates diverged widely among populations, and for some groups ran as high as thirty to fifty percent. In 1965, almost seventy percent of the poor were white, and eighty-seven percent lived in nonfarm areas. Certain minorities and female-headed families and the elderly were found in far greater proportions and the highest proportion of the poor regionally lived in the south. Poverty was exposed as a major national problem, not by radical social advocates, but by the bureaucracy itself, and it would be used to argue forcefully that poverty deserved attention.[35]

Words in chapter 5,285

[33] Fisher, *The Development of the Orshansky Poverty Thresholds*. Robert F. Clark, *Maximum Feasible Success: A History of the Community Acton Program* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Community Action Agencies: 2000), 78-82.
[34] Gordon M. Fisher, "Remembering Mollie Orshansky – The Developer of the Poverty Thresholds," *Social Security Bulletin*, no. 68 (2008):82-83. The "poverty guidelines" used for administrative purposes, such as the Department of Education to determine eligibility for TRIO programs, are a simplification of the "poverty thresholds" invented by Orshansky. These latter are used mainly for statistical work, such as estimating the number of Americans in poverty each year.
[35] Robert A. Levine, *The Poor Ye Need not Have with you: Lessons from the War on Poverty*, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 12-27.