**A** [**New War on Poverty**](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/07/economic-inequality-in-america-developing-a-new-war-on-poverty/?_r=0) **Speech**

**Directions:** You are a campaign director for either the [Bernie Sanders](https://berniesanders.com/issues/income-and-wealth-inequality/) or [Hillary Clinton](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/) campaign both who have made income inequality a core issue for the 2015-16 presidential campaign. You and your team have been tasked with drafting an opening statement for Tuesday October 13th presidential debate. You will draft a 3-5 minute speech addressing what is the best way to eliminate poverty in the United States. Your team will research four possible solutions (divide up your group into categories to research)

* Raising the minimum wage
* **Strengthen the Safety Net**
* **Job Creation**
* **Education**

**Assessment:** Students will be assessed on the following (50 points)

* 20 points - Background information on each of the four options (I will collect notes and assess these individually). Notes must include at least 10 specific details with at least 5 potential benefits and 5 potential negatives
* 30-points your final speech contains all of the following attributes
  + Is at least 3 minutes long but no more then 5
  + Addresses the root causes of poverty citing at least three pieces of specific data on poverty in America
  + Has an innovative and original plan to reduce poverty. The plan may include elements of other author’s ideas but needs to include your group’s own additions. You must cite at least two authors.
  + The plan must briefly address potential critiques and explain why they are not valid

**Schedule:**

10/6 and weekend

* Create a Google doc which all students can edit
* All students read the first two articles and share the answers to the questions with me
* Assign each student a category to research. Links are below.
* Start drafting the speech

10/12: Complete your campaign speech. Speech start at 9:30 on Monday

Read the article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/05/business/50-years-later-war-on-poverty-is-a-mixed-bag.html>

1. What evidence suggests that the government’s war on poverty has been a failure?
2. What evidence suggests the opposite — that the war on poverty has largely been a success?
3. What suggestions did you find in the article for further combating poverty?
4. What economic and sociological trends help explain why so many children and adults remain poor?
5. Why has economic growth generally failed to translate into income gains for workers over the past 30 years, according to the article?

Read Article 2: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/02/poverty-in-america-is-mainstream/>

1. What is the federal poverty line?
2. What percentage of Americans have directly experienced poverty according to the author?
3. What is the “typical pattern” to experiencing poverty?
4. According to the author does the government provide enough benefits?

**Raise the Minimum Wage:** With recent [strikes by fast-food workers](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/05/business/15-wage-in-fast-food-stirs-debate-on-effects.html) calling for $15-an-hour wages, and [Democrats rallying](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/30/us/politics/democrats-turn-to-minimum-wage-as-2014-strategy.html) around an increased federal minimum wage, the issue of low wages has made it front and center as a possible target to address in a new war on poverty. Yet some critics contend that raising the minimum wage only forces employers to cut down on overall hiring, thereby eliminating any gains made in the fight against poverty.

Students can read the articles linked above about the politics and economic theory behind the minimum-wage fight and then select articles to read from the Room for Debate feature, [“Making Low Wages Livable,”](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/12/04/making-low-wages-liveable) such as this argument [in favor](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/12/04/making-low-wages-liveable/raise-the-minimum-wage-to-12-an-hour) of raising the minimum wage and this one [opposing](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/12/04/making-low-wages-liveable/raising-minimum-wage-is-misguided-policy) it.

**Strengthen the Safety Net:** President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal during the Great Depression established Social Security as a means to prevent the elderly from living in poverty. President Johnson expanded the safety net with programs like Medicare, Medicaid, Head Start and the Food Stamp Act. Other programs like subsidized housing and unemployment benefits also try to help people from getting stuck in poverty. The United States definitely has a safety net, but some argue it is not strong enough.

This [map](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/02/12/us/entitlement-map.html) shows how much Americans have come to depend on government benefit programs. As this article points out, even [critics of the safety net](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/us/even-critics-of-safety-net-increasingly-depend-on-it.html) increasingly depend on it. But as the country makes hard choices about how to rein in government spending and get the economy moving again at full speed, some of these programs, such as [food stamps](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/08/us/cut-in-food-stamps-forces-hard-choices-on-poor.html) and [unemployment benefits](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/28/us/benefits-ending-for-one-million-of-unemployed.html), have already been cut.

**Job Creation:** Some say that work, and not government benefit programs, is the best answer to poverty. The unemployment rate has gradually fallen since its peak of 10 percent in 2009, but it still clings to 7 percent — and that number hides the many who have completely given up looking for work.

Peter Cove, in this [opinion piece in the New York Daily News,](http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/work-answer-poverty-article-1.1259031) argues that we need a “subsidized employment program in the private sector and Works Progress Administration-type effort.” Along the same line of thinking, some economists such as Jared Bernstein propose we [adopt a full employment policy](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/04/opinion/where-have-all-the-jobs-gone.html) — the concept that everyone who wants to work should be able to work. If the free market falls short in providing enough jobs, then the government should step in to fill the gap.

**Education:** Education can be the great equalizer, the springboard that propels children born into poverty into the middle class. An important part of President Johnson’s war on poverty was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which tried to equalize educational opportunities for all children. Yet 50 years later America still faces a [stubborn achievement gap](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/16/schooling-ourselves-in-an-unequal-america/) between rich and poor.

As a possible solution, Nicholas D. Kristof argues that [focusing on the youngest children](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/opinion/kristof-for-obamas-new-term-start-here.html) will reap the biggest rewards.

Others highlight the [difficult transition from high school to college](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/education/poor-students-struggle-as-class-plays-a-greater-role-in-success.html), and the immense obstacles that face lower-income students as they make the leap to college. This related [graphic](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/12/22/education/Affluent-Students-Have-an-Advantage-and-the-Gap-Is-Widening.html) shows how much of an advantage affluent students have over poorer students.

Perhaps a more equal system of public education funding would help? This article points out the widespread funding formulas that [reward wealthier students](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/06/business/a-rich-childs-edge-in-public-education.html), while depriving poorer school districts.

**Further Research:**

###### From NYTimes.com

* [In the War on Poverty, a Dogged Adversary](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/18/business/economy/in-the-war-on-poverty-a-dogged-adversary.html)
* [Poverty in America: Why Can’t We End It?](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/opinion/sunday/why-cant-we-end-poverty-in-america.html)
* [The Mismeasure of Poverty](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/18/opinion/the-mismeasure-of-poverty.html)

###### Around the Web

* [The Brookings Institution: U.S. Poverty](http://www.brookings.edu/research/topics/u-s-poverty#/?tab=1)
* [The Stanford Center on Policy and Inequality](http://www.stanford.edu/group/scspi/issue_home.html)
* [The Heritage Foundation: Poverty and Inequality](http://www.heritage.org/issues/poverty-and-inequality)