My Humble Take on the War on Poverty

I will start by freely admitting I am not an expert on the origins and outcomes of the “War on Poverty.” I don’t know all the history. I don’t know all the actors involved. I just don’t. What I do know is that I and many others (whether they would like to admit it or not) have benefitted from the efforts that have been made on behalf of the War on Poverty.

For me, that benefit came from food programs (my family made good use of that “government cheese” that they would hand out of one the projects that we lived across the street from); Social Security (when an uncle I never knew committed suicide, the survivor benefits my aunt and cousin received helped them a great deal); unemployment insurance (when I found myself without work, yeah, those benefits were a help), et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

I’m sure if you looked back on your own personal history, you could find some point in your life; the life of someone you care about; or someone you know where the efforts made in the name of the War on Poverty have been of great immediate or long-term benefit.

What is troubling about this recent “War on the Poor”, which has largely been focused on undoing or weakening the governmental programs that are either a result of the New Deal or the War of the Poverty, is that it is being led by people who are obviously afflicted by amnesia. Now, understand this, if you were born into wealth (you know, with a silver spoon in your mouth), I am not talking to you, unless you fit the profile of my first example of people who have are waging the War on the Poor despite having benefitted from government programs directly or indirectly. Exhibit A: Governor Mitt Romney.

Now, I’m sure Gov. Romney worked for every dime he has. Big deal, so have the rest of us. But did you know that Governor Romney’s parents, George and Lenore, were on WELFARE? Did you know that Rep. Paul Ryan received survivor benefits from SOCIAL SECURITY? Did you know that Ayn Rand, the famous (or in my book, infamous) novelist and philosopher, who spent decades railing against government benefits, elected to receive them (in the form of SOCIAL SECURITY) in her golden years? And I’m sure there are a plethora of examples of people, whom we can only call two-faced, who have gladly accepted the fruits of the War on Poverty and its sister effort, the New Deal, only to make every attempt to pull up the ladder behind them once they got theirs.

As a side note, did you know that J.K. Rowling, author of the wildly-successful Harry Potter novels, which in turn spawned the equally wildly-successful Harry Potter film and merchandising franchise, wrote the first novel while receiving (gasp) government assistance?

I think you’ve figured out by now, that I’ve written all of this to make this simple point. The War on Poverty has been successful in transforming the lives of our most successful and least successful citizens. It gives people a chance to keep their heads above water long enough to make one more grab for that American Dream. When we don’t take care of our poor, we are not short-changing them...we are short-changing ourselves. Who knows where the next Governor Mitt Romney, Representative Paul Ryan, or Author Ayn Rand will come from, if we decide to turn our backs on the same poor people from whose ranks these noted individuals sprang? Something to consider.