

# FORUM

## Surprise! Money is a great cure for poverty and its many ills, report finds



**Rob Schofield**  
Guest Columnist

It may be hard to believe in today's world of trickle-down, dog-eat-dog, "Trump-omics," but it was just a few decades ago

that a conservative Republican president proposed something that would, today, be widely disparaged as radical socialism. In 1969, Richard Nixon gave a televised address to the country in which he proposed to establish a minimum, federally funded family income.

Nixon called his proposal a "Family Assistance System" and he proposed to replace the nation's alphabet soup of income support programs with a simple, basic amount that the federal government would guarantee to all families with dependent children who met certain criteria.

**This is from the speech:**

"Under this plan, the so-called 'adult categories' of aid - aid to the aged, the blind, the disabled - would be continued, and a national minimum standard for benefits would be set, with the Federal Government contributing to its cost and also sharing the cost of additional State payments above that amount. ...

"Its benefits would go to the working poor, as well as the nonworking; to families with dependent children headed by a father, as well as to those headed by a mother; and a basic Federal minimum would be provided, the same in every State.

"What I am proposing is that the Federal Government build a foundation under the income of every American family with dependent children that cannot care for itself - and wherever in America that family may live."

**(Emphasis supplied)**

There were many legitimate critiques of the details of Nixon's proposal from all points on the political spectrum, but, at its heart, the proposal contained one critically important insight that we would do well to revisit and revive in 2015 - namely the power of money to combat poverty.

Simply put: The best way to fight poverty and its many ill effects is to make sure people - especially children - have enough money to live a decent life.

For all of his faults, Nixon understood that it was absurd for the richest nation in the history of the world to have impoverished children and that the simplest and most efficient way to combat the problem was to make sure their families had enough cash on which to live.

**The power of money**

Nixon's insight was brought home once again recently as the result of a powerful new study of children in North Carolina. This is from a recent article in the Washington Post titled "The remarkable thing that happens to poor kids when



From Wikipedia.

you give their parents a little money" (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/10/08/the-remarkable-ways-a-little-money-can-change-a-childs-personality-for-life/>):

"Twenty years ago, a group of researchers began tracking the personalities of 1,420 low-income children in North Carolina. At the time, the goal was simple: to observe the mental conditions of kids living in rural America. But then a serendipitous thing happened.

"Four years into The Great Smoky Mountains Study of Youth, the families of roughly a quarter of the children saw a dramatic and unexpected increase in annual income. They were members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and a casino had just been built on the reservation. From that point on, every tribal citizen earned a share of the profits, meaning about an extra \$4,000 a year per capita.

"For these families, the extra padding was a blessing, enough to boost household incomes by almost 20 percent on average. But for the fields of psychology, sociology and economics, it has been a gold mine, too. The sudden change in fortunes has offered a rare glimpse into the subtle but important ways in which money can alter a child's life. The dataset is so rich that researchers continue to study it to this day."

**As the Post story goes on to note, the results for the kids were striking.**

"Not only did the extra income appear to lower the instance of behavioral and emotional disorders among the children, but, perhaps even more important, it also boosted two key personality traits that tend to go hand in hand with long-term positive life outcomes."

The traits were conscientiousness and agreeableness - both of which correspond closely with success and happiness later in life. The change was actually most notable

amongst kids who had been the most deficient.

Basically, the authors' best thinking (something that would also seem to be common sense) is that the boost in family income lowered family stress and contributed mightily to lifting the wellbeing of their children.

As Professor Noah Smith of Stony Brook University put it in his own column examining the study:

"Children whose families got the money ended up having better job outcomes at age 25. Examining surveys of these families, [the authors] hypothesize that much of the improvement comes from more harmonious family relations. Parents are happier because they have more money, leading to less fighting within the family. This lowers stress on kids, making them healthier, happier and better-behaved, and leading to a more productive adulthood."

As Professor Smith also reports, the study of Cherokee kids coincides neatly with a 2014 study by neuroscientists that has actually discovered a close relationship between family income and the brain structure of children. As Smith pithily and grimly summed it up: "More money, bigger-brained kids."

**What all this means**

Of course, as even a few moments' reflection by anyone who has ever wrestled with poverty (or near poverty) confirms, all of this makes a lot of sense. While there are always exceptions, as a rule, not having to worry where one's next meal will come from makes life a lot easier and better.

Moreover, it doesn't matter particularly where that money comes from. As the millions of Americans lucky enough to live on inherited wealth can no doubt attest, having money is much better than not having it. While there can certainly be negative consequences that ultimately result for some people from not having to

work (sloth, fraud, substance abuse, etc. ...), the fact remains that when the basic choice is between grinding poverty and having enough to get by, the negatives associated with receiving income that one "didn't have to work for" are hard to find.

The implication of these findings for public policy ought to be clear: The simplest, most efficient and best thing that state and federal leaders can do to combat the scourge of poverty and its devastating long-term impact on children is to craft and enact policies that lift the incomes of the poor.

This doesn't mean that we need a rapid expansion of casino gambling - indeed there are other studies that speak to many other negative impacts of casinos in and around the places in which they are located.

What it does mean, however, is that we would do well to use all public tools at our disposal to put more cash in the pockets of people who lack it. Whether the path to this outcome is a macro-fix like reconsidering Nixon's minimum family income proposal or, more likely, a set of specific income-boosting policies like a dramatic increase in the minimum wage, universal health insurance coverage and a reversal of North Carolina's recent, ill-considered elimination of the state Earned Income Tax Credit (something that even longtime John Locke Foundation contributor Professor Mike Walden of N.C. State recently endorsed), is not terribly important.

The key is to recognize the plain and simple power of having money and the devastating negative impacts (for everyone) of consigning a huge proportion of our population to a life without it.

**As Professor Smith concluded:**

"Improving the condition of poor children is not only good for them, it's also good for society. Children who are more emotionally stable and better behaved engage in less crime and less violence in schools and out, making the country a safer place to live. So we shouldn't see poverty alleviation as merely a mission of mercy. It would make the U.S. better for all Americans."

**Even Richard Nixon could see that.**

Rob Schofield, director of research and policy development at N.C. Policy Watch, has three decades of experience as a lawyer, lobbyist, writer, commentator and trainer. At N.C. Policy Watch, Rob writes and edits frequent opinion pieces and blog posts, speaks to various civic groups, appears regularly on TV and radio and helps build and develop movements for change. Contact him at [rob@ncpolicywatch.com](mailto:rob@ncpolicywatch.com) or 919-861-2065.

Article printed from NC Policy Watch: <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com>.

URL to article: [www.ncpolicywatch.com/2015/10/20/surprise-money-is-a-great-cure-for-poverty-and-its-many-ills/](http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2015/10/20/surprise-money-is-a-great-cure-for-poverty-and-its-many-ills/)

## Black women should 'walk the walk' to survive heart disease

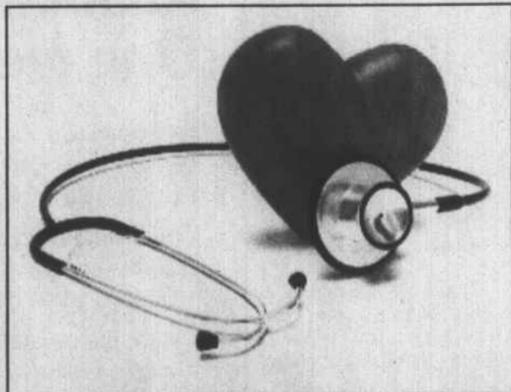


**Cynthia Brown**  
Guest Columnist

American Heart Association, 48.9 percent of non-Hispanic black women age 20 and older have heart disease. As I take a moment to reflect, the familiar faces of vibrant women pass through my mind. ... Jan, age 35, died of a heart attack, while Debra aged 56 died suddenly from complications of heart disease, and Joan, age 62, died as a result of a massive stroke ... all African-American women, all died of heart disease; all someone's mother, sister, wife or friend.

As African-American women, we are 69 percent more likely to have heart disease and heart attacks and twice as likely to not understand the health risks. As we age, risk factors for heart disease increase, in part, due to the decreased production of estrogen.

However, largely in part because of risk factors that are preventable. The question of "why?" suddenly screams out to be answered. While the answer is complicated, this we know: African-American women are more likely to be physically inactive, more likely to be



obese, and more likely to have poor diets that contribute to heart disease. Statistics like these led to the development of the STEPS to a Healthier Heart Program. STEPS stands for "Sisters Together Empowered for Prevention and Success" and is a heart disease educational intervention targeting African-American women. Our research study, based on a 12-week intervention consisting of weekly exercise and "heart smart" seminars related to nutrition, heart disease risk factors and prevention, indicated that by teaching women to take small steps and continue their healthier lifestyle

journey can help women prevent heart disease for themselves and their families.

That's the GOOD NEWS! These trends can be reversed! The American Heart Association says that "80 percent of heart disease and stroke can be prevented." How? You might ask. Simply by taking small "steps." Once you have begun, then take another, then another. It is said that "the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." By beginning with small steps such as going meatless one day, reducing the amount of sugary drinks, adding 10 minutes of walking a day, taking

your medication if you have high blood pressure, etc. (the list is almost endless), you can begin your journey to a healthier heart.

This journey is not taken alone. The path is paved with advocacy and research. The American Heart Association is the largest voluntary health organization dedicated to defeating heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases. Its mission is to build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

While research projects like STEPS are important, they also point to the need to fund the vital research and programming that address heart disease and stroke in women and minorities.

We were very excited to take part in this year's Tanglewood Heart & Stroke Walk, locally sponsored by Wake Forest Baptist Health. It was designed to promote physical activity and heart-healthy living in a fun environment. In total, 4,500 people attended the walk, raising \$450,000 for heart disease and stroke research and prevention education

in our community.

Closing the gap on heart disease requires proactive steps on all fronts, especially from those who are affected the most. The bottom line is that regardless of our age, as African-American women, we must make the decision to take STEPS to a healthier heart. It's time to stop "talking the talk" and begin "walking the walk." And not just one day - but walking just 30 minutes every day can make all the difference in your heart health.

Cynthia Williams Brown is chair of Health, Physical Education and Sport Studies and associate professor at Winston-Salem State University. She is also principal investigator of the STEPS to a Healthier Heart Project.

For more information on the results of the 2015 Tanglewood Heart & Stroke Walk, contact Sonja Seeloff at [heart.org](mailto:heart.org) or visit [www.tanglewood-heartwalk.org](http://www.tanglewood-heartwalk.org).

For more information on the STEPS project, contact Marian Anderson-Booker at 336-750-8915.