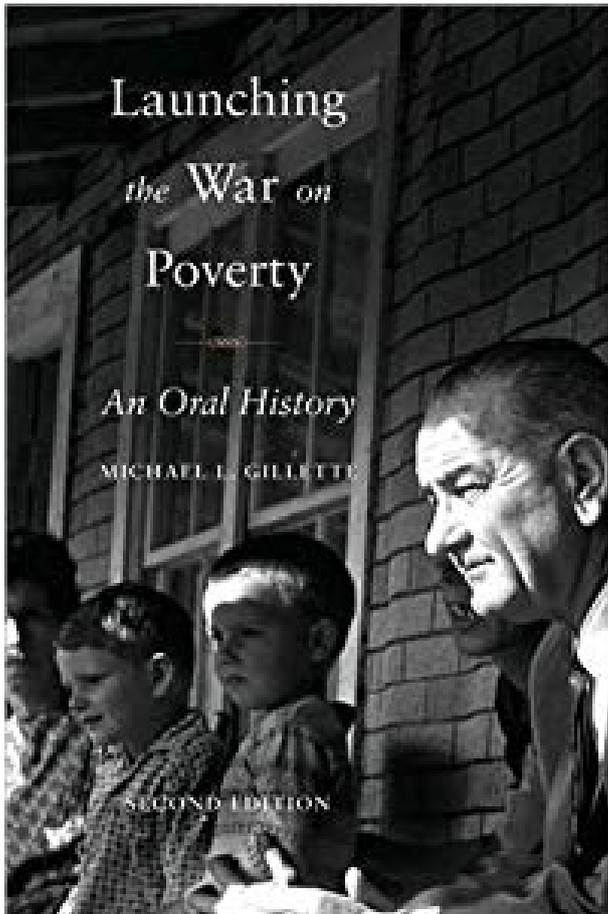


Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History



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In the mid-1960s, President Lyndon Johnson launched an unprecedented political crusade to eradicate poverty in America - an unconditional "War on Poverty" that transcended Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal agenda. Set into motion with the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), a federal agency established after the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, this bold crusade aimed to break the cycle of a culture of poverty by attacking its causes in urban ghettos and depressed rural areas. The War on Poverty formulated and administered an array of novel programs, including the Community Action Program, the Job Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Project Head Start, and the Legal Services Program. Despite criticism by political opponents, despite budgetary restraints, and despite the failure to achieve the lofty goal of ridding the nation of poverty, most of the social programs established under OEO still exist today. *Launching the War on Poverty* - the first single-volume oral history of this momentous federal plan to help society's least fortunate - brings the antipoverty crusade to life through the testimony of its creators. The author, Michael Gillette, has compiled interviews with forty-eight "poverty warriors" from the 1,700 oral history interviews in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. These brave planners were an assorted lot of borrowed government officials, business professionals, academics, experts on poverty, and freelance kibitzers, from the nation's top law schools and graduate programs. Their narratives focus on federal policies and the political climate of the 1960s, and document how policymakers perceived the problem of poverty and its

possible solutions. Today, the welfare programs of the Great Society are criticized as a failure of liberal idealism; but these firsthand testimonies demonstrate that the strategies of the original poverty warriors were rooted in the American work ethic and were designed to encourage self-help instead