

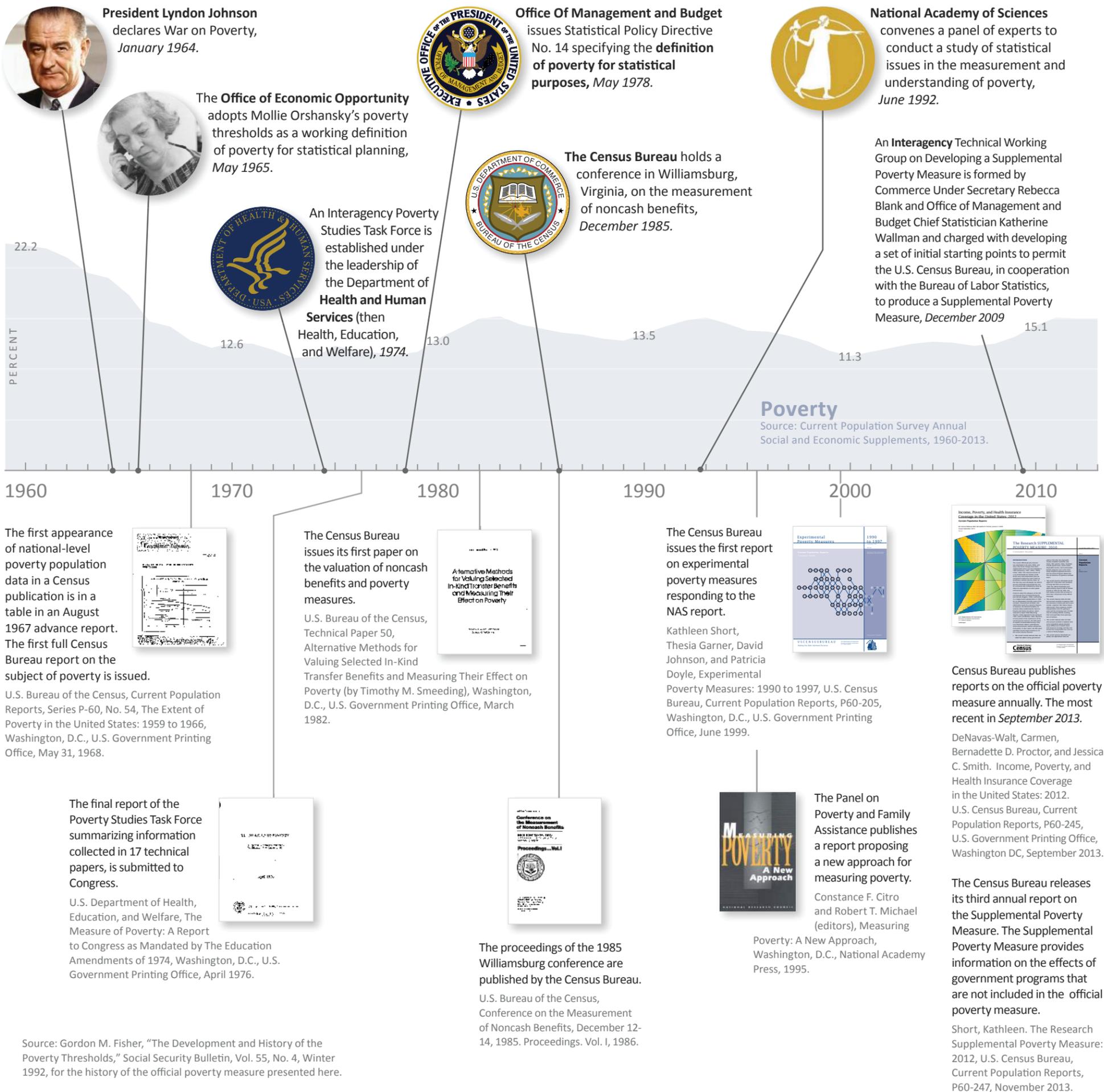
## Poverty: The History of a Measure

President Johnson's January 1964 declaration of his "War on Poverty" generated a new interest in measuring just how many people were in poverty and how those numbers changed from year to year. The next year the Office of Economic Opportunity adopted a working definition of poverty based on a methodology for counting the poor that had been proposed by Mollie Orshansky, an analyst at the Social Security Administration. In 1967, the Census

Bureau published its first set of poverty estimates. Two years later, the Office of Management and Budget issued a memorandum that established the nation's "official" poverty measure and charged the Census Bureau with responsibility for providing annual poverty estimates.

Over the past fifty years, there have been numerous efforts to improve the official poverty measure, including an Interagency Poverty Studies Task Force in the 1970s and

a National Academy of Sciences expert panel in the 1990s. These efforts triggered research by economists at the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics resulting in the November 2011 publication of poverty estimates using a new "Supplemental Poverty Measure." For the past three years, the Census Bureau has published two sets of national poverty estimates: one using the official method and one using the Supplemental Poverty Measure.



Source: Gordon M. Fisher, "The Development and History of the Poverty Thresholds," Social Security Bulletin, Vol. 55, No. 4, Winter 1992, for the history of the official poverty measure presented here.