



Poor People's Campaign

A NATIONAL CALL for MORAL REVIVAL

Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival



- Taking a stand against systemic racism, poverty, the war economy and militarism, ecological devastation, and our nation's distorted moral narrative of Christian nationalism.





- The truth is that systemic racism allows us to deny the humanity of others; by denying the humanity of others, we are given permission to exploit or exclude people economically; by exploiting and excluding people economically, we are emboldened to abuse our military powers and, through violence and war, control resources; this quest for the control of resources leads to the potential destruction of our entire ecosystem and everything living in it. And the current moral narrative of our nation both justifies this cycle and distracts us from it.

The ROOTS:



- The **Poor People's Campaign**, or **Poor People's March on Washington**, was a 1968 effort to gain economic justice for poor people in the United States. It was organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and carried out under the leadership of Ralph Abernathy in the wake of King's assassination.





- The campaign demanded economic and human rights for poor Americans of diverse backgrounds. After presenting an organized set of demands to Congress and executive agencies, participants set up a 3,000-person protest camp on the Washington Mall, where they stayed for six weeks in the spring of 1968.



Motivation



- The Poor People's Campaign was motivated by a desire for economic justice: the idea that all people should have what they need to live. King and the SCLC shifted their focus to these issues after observing that gains in civil rights had not improved the material conditions of life for many African Americans. The Poor People's Campaign was a multiracial effort aimed at alleviating poverty regardless of race.



The 1968 Initial Demands



- An important aspect of the Campaign was to petition the government to pass an Economic Bill of Rights as a step to lift the load of poverty.
- \$30 billion annual appropriation for a real war on poverty
- Congressional passage of full employment and guaranteed income legislation [a guaranteed annual wage]
- Construction of 500,000 low-cost housing units per year until slums were eliminated

The 1968 Plan



- The Campaign was organized into three phases. The first was to construct a shantytown, to become known as Resurrection City, on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.
- The next phase was to begin public demonstrations, mass nonviolent civil disobedience, and mass arrests to protest the plight of poverty in this country.
- The third and final phase of the Campaign was to launch a nationwide boycott of major industries and shopping areas to prompt business leaders to pressure Congress into meeting the demands of the Campaign.

1968—The Aftermath



- An economic bill of rights was never passed, and leaders spoke with regret about the occupation. The campaign did produce some changes, however subtle. They included more money for free and reduced lunches for school children and Head Start programs in Mississippi and Alabama. The USDA released surplus commodities to the nation's one-thousand poorest counties, food stamps were expanded, and some federal welfare guidelines were streamlined. Marian Wright Edelman formed a network of agency bureaucrats concerned about poverty issues.

2018 PPC



- Over the past two years, the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival has reached out to communities in more than 30 states across this nation. We have met with tens of thousands of people, witnessing the strength of their moral courage in trying times. We have gathered testimonies from hundreds of poor people and we have chronicled their demands for a better society. The following moral agenda is drawn from this deep engagement and commitment to these struggles of the poor and dispossessed. It is also grounded in an empirical assessment of how we have come to this point today.

Source of the Facts



- *The Souls of Poor Folk: Auditing America* reveals how the evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, and the war economy and militarism are persistent, pervasive, and perpetuated by a distorted moral narrative that must be challenged.

Two prevalent myths debunked by this report:

- *Poverty is the fault of the poor.*
- *Despite our nation's abundance, there is not enough for all of us to survive and thrive.*

Facts



- Did you know that there are fewer voting rights in 2018 than there were 50 years ago when the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act were passed?
- Since 2010, 23 states have passed racist voter suppression laws, including racist gerrymandering and redistricting, laws that make it harder to register, reduced early voting days and hours, purging voter rolls, and more restrictive voter ID laws. Following the Shelby County v. Holder Supreme Court case, which gutted key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, 14 states had new voting restrictions in place before the 2016 Presidential election and there were 868 fewer polling places across the country.

PPC:2018 Demands



- We demand the immediate full restoration and expansion of the Voting Rights Act, an end to racist gerrymandering and redistricting, early registration of 17 and 18 year olds, the implementation of automatic registration to vote at the age of 18, early voting in every state, same-day registration, the enactment of Election Day as a holiday, and a verifiable paper record. We demand the right to vote for the formerly incarcerated.

Facts



- Undocumented immigrants contributed \$5 trillion to the U.S. economy over the last 10 years. They paid \$13 billion in Social Security in 2010, but only received \$1 billion in benefits. They also pay eight percent of their income in state and local taxes, while the wealthiest one percent pay just 5.4 percent. Yet undocumented immigrants and most lawfully residing immigrants are barred from receiving assistance under the major public welfare programs, causing hardship for many poor immigrant families.

PPC:2018 Demands



- We demand a clear and just immigration system that strengthens our democracy through the broad participation of everyone in this country. This includes providing a timely citizenship process that guarantees the right to vote. It also requires protecting immigrants' abilities to organize for their rights in the workplace and in their communities without fear of retribution, detention and deportation.
- We demand that First Nations, Native Americans and Alaskan Native people retain their tribal recognition as nations, not races, to make substantive claims to their sovereignty.

The Facts



- We challenge the idea that our economy rewards hard-working individuals and, therefore, if only the millions of people in poverty acted better, worked harder, complained less and prayed more, they would be lifted up and out of their miserable conditions.
- Beginning in the 1970s, wages for the bottom 80 percent of workers have remained largely stagnant and today there are 64 million people working for less than \$15 an hour.
- Meanwhile, the top 1 percent's share of the economy has nearly doubled to more than 20 percent of our national income. In 2017, the 400 wealthiest Americans owned more wealth than the bottom 64 percent of the entire U.S. population, or 204 million people.

The Facts



- Did you know that while the U.S. economy has grown 18-fold in the past 50 years, wealth inequality has expanded, the costs of living have increased, and social programs have been restructured and cut dramatically?

Let this sink in...



- Just three individuals possessed a combined wealth of \$248.5 billion, an equal amount of wealth as the bottom 50 percent of the country.

PPC:2018 Demands



- We demand the immediate implementation of federal and state living wage laws that are commensurate for the 21st century economy, guaranteed annual incomes, full employment and the right for all workers to form and join unions.
- We demand an end to anti-union and anti-workers' rights laws in the states.
- We demand equal pay for equal work.
- We demand fully-funded welfare programs for the poor and an end to the attacks on SNAP, HEAP, and other vital programs for the poor.

Demands



- We demand equity in education, ensuring every child receives a high-quality, well-funded, diverse public education. We demand an end to the re-segregation of schools. We demand free tuition at public colleges and universities and an end to profiteering on student debt. We demand equitable funding for historically black colleges and universities.
- We demand the expansion of Medicaid in every state and the protection of Medicare and single-payer universal health care for all.
- We demand fully funded public resources and access to mental health professionals and addiction and recovery programs.

Demands



- We demand reinvestment in and the expansion of public housing, ensuring that all have a decent house to live in.
- We demand equal treatment and accessible housing, health care, public transportation, adequate income and services for people with disabilities.
- We demand public infrastructure projects and sustainable, community-based and controlled economic initiatives that target poor urban and rural communities.
- We demand fair and decent housing for all and the end to the rolling back of fair housing protections at HUD.
- We demand relief from crushing household, student, and consumer debt. We declare Jubilee.
- We demand that the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share of our country's urgent needs around decent and affordable housing, free public education, a robust social safety net and social security.

Demands



- We demand the repeal of the 2017 federal tax law and the reinvestment of those funds into public programs for housing, health care, education, jobs, infrastructure and welfare for the poor.
- We demand that the nation and our lawmakers turn their immediate attention to passing policies and budget allocations that would end child poverty. This includes a public hearing on the federal and state institutions charged with child safety and protection, including on how their resources are used to take children away rather than strengthening families.

The Facts



- Did you know there are 140 million people who are poor or low-income in the United States today?

More Facts



- 51.9 percent of children under the age of 18 (38.2 million children)
- 40.7 percent of adults between the ages of 18-64 (81.5 million adults)
- 42.5 percent of our elders over the age of 65 (20.8 million elders)
- 45 percent of women and girls (73.5 million people)
- 33.9 percent of White people (67.1 million people)
- 60.3 percent of Black people (25.9 million people)
- 65.1 percent of Latinx people (37.4 million people)
- 41.1 percent of Asian people (7.6 million people)



- We challenge the Official Poverty Measure (OPM) as too narrow a definition of poverty today. The OPM is an income-based measure developed in the 1960s that uses the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) to define poverty. In 2016, the FPL was \$11,880 for a single person under the age of 65 and was \$24,300 for a household of four. An alternative measure developed in 2009, the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), takes into account income as well as the costs of food, clothing, housing and utilities, and government programs that have assisted low-income families and individuals who are not otherwise designated as poor.

2018 Demands



- We demand a change in the current poverty standards. We demand an accurate assessment of who is poor — based on access to decent and adequate housing, education, health care, water, sanitation and public utilities, childcare, as well as income, savings and debt, and welfare — and that is made widely available to all.
- We demand particular attention be paid to data concerning First Nations, Native Americans, Alaskan Native, LGBTQIA and disabled people regarding poverty. This means working with these communities to ensure the safekeeping of sensitive information and that all data is collected with respect, dignity and security.

Fact



- Did you know that we imprison and detain more people, especially poor people, than any country in the world?

The Facts



- The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, almost five times the average for other wealthy countries. Since 1976, federal spending on prisons increased tenfold to \$7.5 billion a year. The number of sentenced state and federal inmates grew from 188,000 in 1968 to nearly 1.5 million in 2016. Two thirds of these inmates are people of color, while Native Americans are incarcerated at a 38 percent higher rate than the national average.

Facts



- This coincides with the broader criminalization of poverty and the poor. By the Department of Justice's own admission, 95 percent of the growth in the incarcerated population since 2000 is the result of an increase in the number of un-convicted defendants, many of whom are unable to make bail.

PPC:2018 Demands



- We demand an end to mass incarceration and the continuing inequalities for black, brown and poor white people within the criminal justice system.
- We demand equality and the safety of all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.



- Did you know 13.8 million U.S. households cannot afford water?

Facts



- Federal assistance to local water systems is currently 74 percent below its peak in 1977. This has contributed to the inability of public water utilities to address failing and aging infrastructure. It has also prompted utilities to privatize their water systems, even though private water utilities charge 59 percent more per unit of water than publicly owned water systems.
- As a result, nearly 12 percent of U.S. households face unaffordable water bills. Tens of thousands of households have had their water shut off due to non-payment, precipitating homelessness, child removal and a host of medical problems. It also means that at least 4 million families with children are being exposed to high levels of lead from drinking water and other sources. Poor rural communities face the additional problem of lacking access to piped water and sewage systems in the first place. Of the 20 counties with the highest percentage of households lacking access to complete plumbing, all were rural and 13 had a majority Native American or Alaskan Native population.

PPC:2018 Demands



- We demand 100 percent clean, renewable energy and a public jobs program to transition to a green economy that will put millions of people in sustainable living wage jobs.
- We demand a fully funded public water and sanitation infrastructure that keeps these utilities and services under public control and that prioritize poor, rural and Native communities that have been harmed by polluting and extractive industries.
- We demand a ban on fracking, mountaintop removal coal mining, coal ash ponds, and offshore drilling. We demand a ban on all new pipelines, refineries, and coal, oil, and gas export terminals.
- We demand the protection of public lands and the immediate cessation of opening up public lands for polluting and extractive industries.

Facts



- Did you know that currently 53 cents of every federal discretionary dollar goes to military spending and only 15 cents is spent on anti-poverty programs?

The Facts



- Military spending in 2017 was \$668 billion and out of federal discretionary spending only \$190 billion was for anti-poverty programs. Under the current administration's proposed budget, by 2023, 66 cents of every dollar of federal discretionary spending would go to the military and only 12 cents to anti-poverty programs.
- Most of these resources allocated to war are not benefitting our troops. In 2015, the Department of Defense obligated more money on federal contracts, \$274 billion, than all other federal agencies combined. In 2016, CEOs of the top five military contractors earned on average \$19.2 million each — more than 90 times the \$214,000 earned by a U.S. general with 20 years of experience and 640 times the \$30,000 earned by Army privates in combat.

2018 Demands



- We demand an end to military aggression and war-mongering.
- We demand a stop to the privatization of the military budget and any increase in military spending. We demand a reallocation of resources from the military budget to education, health care, jobs and green infrastructure needs, and strengthening a Veterans Administration system that must remain public.
- We demand a ban on assault rifles and a ban on the easy access to firearms that has led to the increased militarization and weaponization of our communities.
- We demand the demilitarization of our communities on the border and the interior. This includes ending federal programs that send military equipment into local and state communities and ceasing the call to build a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border.
- We demand an immigration system that, instead of criminalizing people for trying to raise their families, prioritizes family reunification, keeps families together and allows us all to build thriving communities in the country we call home.

Facts



- Did you know that thousands of people die every year from anti-poor policies, while an extremist religious and Christian nationalist agenda deliberately diverts attention from the key issues and challenges facing the majority of Americans?

Facts



- In the history of this country, moral justifications have been offered for the genocide and forced removal of indigenous people from their lands, slavery, resisting the *Brown v. Board of Education* school segregation case and opposing the *Roe v. Wade* abortion case. Today, religious extremists focus on issues like prayer in school, abortion, and gun rights that distort the national moral narrative.
- This distorted narrative became integral to the well-funded libertarian movement to redefine “liberty” as freedom from government. In 2016, Franklin Graham invested \$10 million of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s money in his 2016 Decision America Tour to each state house in the country. Billed as “nonpartisan” prayer rallies, these gatherings framed the “moral crisis” as a decision between progressive atheist values and God. After the election, Graham called Trump’s victory an answer to prayer.

PPC:2018 Demands



- We demand that all policies and budgets are based on the five key principles of the U.S. Constitution: Establishing Justice, Ensuring Domestic Tranquility, Providing for the Common Defense, Promoting the General Welfare and Securing the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

Not one step back!



- We declare that if silence was betrayal in 1968, revival is necessary today.
- We come to remind our nation what truths we hold to be self-evident and what values we hold dear.
- We draw on the histories of resistance that echo their truth down through the centuries and the power of the blood that has been shed through generations of struggle.
- We loudly proclaim that we will move forward together, not one step back!
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