

# 50 years on

## Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign reemerges today as a national call for moral revival

BY COLLEEN GRABLICK  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Fifty years after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned a mass movement for economic equality, activists are working to reignite the flame of the movement.

Last month, a revival of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign began a six-week period of national activism. Demonstrators in more than 30 states and Washington, D.C., met in their capitals to call for equality. The campaign went on to partner with grassroots organizers to lead a march in Marks, Miss., the town that, 50 years ago, inspired King to call for a Poor People's Campaign when he witnessed the poverty there.

### GET INVOLVED

The Oregon Poor People's Campaign will gather in Salem on April 14 for a day-long teach-in and nonviolent, moral, direct action training event. The campaign will then mobilize communities for similar regional events. Complete details to be announced. More information is available at [www.facebook.com/oregonppc](http://www.facebook.com/oregonppc), and at [poorpeoplescampaign.org](http://poorpeoplescampaign.org).

the modern movement joined with striking fast-food workers to push for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage.

In Washington, D.C., The Rev. Liz Theoharis and the Rev. William J. Barber II are leading the campaign to build on King's work to unite the poor, and seek justice and equality for disenfranchised and marginalized people. Meetings have been held in cities across the country since late 2017. In the new year, they began to lead nonviolent protests, such as the minimum-wage march in Mississippi.

The campaign's resurgence comes with an expanded name, now officially the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Today the campaign has grown to 45 states, including Oregon.

Monica Beemer, a member of the Oregon coordinating committee, emphasized that the campaign isn't a new version of the old, but a continuation of the work started by King. The goals are ending poverty, the military economy, systemic racism and ecological devastation.

"This is a people's movement," Beemer said. "Reclaiming the moral narrative is important because that's been really distorted. So we're saying it's immoral what's happening. Poverty and ecological devastation are immoral, and we demand change."

The Oregon branch of the campaign is launching 30 days of training and 40 days of action, starting April 14 with a teach-in and training on nonviolent moral direct action in Salem. Additional trainings are planned across the state into mid-May.

"A lot of it will be focused in the state capital because that is the people's house and they are often not doing the people's business," Beemer said. "We need to be going there and saying this is our house and we demand that you take moral action against these evils."

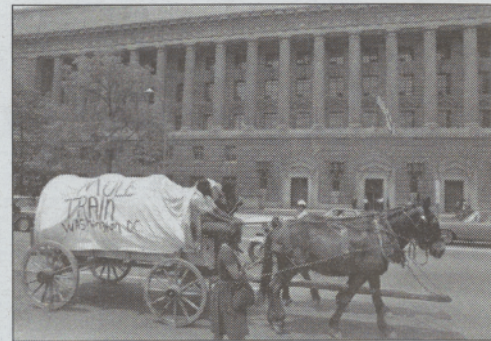
Coinciding with the historic events from the 1968 movement, campaign participants nationwide will gather in Washington, D.C., to set up an encampment June 18-23.

In February, the campaign held a meeting at Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., to discuss public action through testimonies and speeches by local community members. Activists, organizers and religious leaders of diverse backgrounds from D.C., Maryland and Virginia attended.

Washington, D.C.'s, poverty and homelessness rates, as well as its proximity to lawmakers, made it an important location for the campaign, Theoharis said.

"We want to really highlight, both as a nation's capital and as a place with rampant poverty and racism, that the people are coming together and calling for this campaign," she said. "A lot of the issues that are affecting people all over the country are particularly pronounced in our nation's capital. ... Until we shift the narrative, until we are able to talk

The photos here are images taken from the events of May and June 1968, during the Poor People's Campaign March on Washington, D.C.



The campaign called for the passage of an Economic Bill of Rights, along with \$30 billion to battle poverty and a guaranteed annual income. The campaigners also called for the elimination of slums with the construction of 500,000 low-cost housing units per year.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, but the campaign resumed preparing for its demonstration in Washington, D.C., only a few weeks later.

The initial phase of the campaign was to build a shantytown, named Resurrection City (shown above and below), on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. The "city" eventually had 3,000 residents during the campaign, with additional members living throughout D.C.

Through public demonstrations, mass nonviolent civil disobedience and mass arrests, participants protested the plight of poverty.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL. IMAGES DISTRIBUTED UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION: NO DERIVATIVES 4.0 INTERNATIONAL LICENSE.

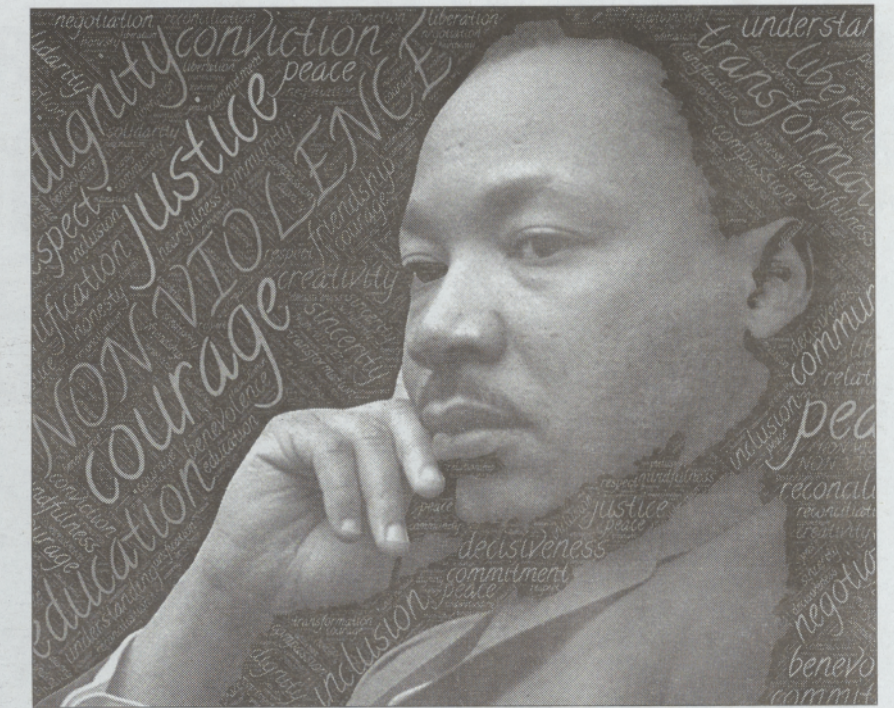


about these issues and come up with solutions to these problems, no real change can happen."

The new Poor People's Campaign plans to tour the country in 2018, visiting places such as Flint and Detroit, Mich., where residents are still battling contaminated water issues and a housing crisis. The organizers will continue to meet with local activists and grassroots leaders to push toward the end of racial and economic injustices, Theoharis said.

"We've been really inspired by the 1968 Poor People's Campaign that Dr. King planned for ... to finish some of the unfinished business that was left undone from about 50 years ago," she said.

Courtesy of Street Sense / INSP.ngo. Street Roots contributed to this article.



## Events mark April 4 anniversary of King's assassination

A morning call to action for racial and economic justice will be followed by a nationwide minute of silence at 4:01 p.m. and an evening march

BY EMILY GREEN  
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On April 4, 50 years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated while standing on a balcony outside his room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn.

King had traveled to Memphis to stand with the local chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) after two African-American sanitation workers were crushed to death on the job. The union was striking in protest of sanitation workers' unsafe working conditions, degrading treatment and poverty wages.

King believed that racial and economic justice were closely intertwined and that one could not exist without the other. The night before he was fatally shot, King delivered his famous "I've been to the Mountaintop" speech at a local church, where he called for boycotts of discriminatory companies and for his audience to march in solidarity with the sanitation workers.

"The question is not, 'If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?'" King said. "The question is, 'If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?' That's the question."

On the anniversary of his death, the AFSCME and Church of God in Christ are renewing King's calls for racial and economic justice.

In Portland, these organizations have joined with Metro to host "I Am 2018." This

April 4 event is free to the public and will feature gospel singers, a unity invocation led by Portland NAACP President E.D. Mondaine, and presentations from local faith, youth, labor and public service perspectives.

"It's framed around each speaker's personal experience, the history of Dr. King and what he's meant for them, and then what they see as a call to action for racial and economic justice," said Elizabeth Goetzinger, event organizer, AFSCME 3580 president and Metro employee.

The event will run from 9 to 10:30 a.m. in the Portland Ballroom at the Oregon Convention Center, with doors opening at 8:30 a.m. and refreshments and breakfast pastries served. Space is limited; RSVP at [oregonmetro.gov/iam2018](http://oregonmetro.gov/iam2018).

Later in the day, at 4:01 p.m. PST, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis has asked for a nationwide minute of silence to honor King's legacy. At 4:07 p.m., faith leaders across the country will toll their church and campus bells 39 times, once for each year that King was alive.

At 5 p.m. in Portland, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and First Congregational United Church of Christ Portland will lead a permitted march beginning at the Japanese American Historical Plaza in Tom McCall Waterfront Park at Davis Street, and ending with a rally at the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. statue on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Northeast Holladay Street.