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OPINION

Men and Women on the Side of Right

A civil rights icon charts a new course

BY MARC H. MORIAL

After 12 historic years leading the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, the Rev. Dr. William Barber is stepping up to a new challenge. It's one posed by the late



Martin Luther King Jr. nearly five decades ago to unite the poor and put an end to the social inequities and universal indifference that breeds poverty in our nation—and our world.

Rev. Barber's activism—powered by morally induced outrage to unjust policies and the abuse of the most vulnerable—has taken on many forms and roles, moving him from national stages to the streets.

In 2013, as the chief architect of what would become the ongoing "Moral Mondays" movement, an extension of the NAACP's Forward Together movement, Rev. Barber stood and protested with impacted people, civil rights activists and community leaders in front of the North Carolina state legislature to challenge discriminatory voter access laws and other

state-sponsored attacks on civil rights.

Protestors sang "We Shall Overcome," held signs, blocked the doors to the Senate chambers and got arrested. Described in his own words as the "largest state-government-focused civil disobedience campaign in U.S. history," the first protest would, thankfully, not be the last.

Crossing traditional barriers of religion, race, class, political affiliation or sexual

orientation, several times.

Under the umbrella of Repairers of the Breach—a nonprofit founded by Rev. Barber that develops church and lay people into leaders who strategize and organize for progressive, moral agendas—Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign will find new life. The new campaign, now the New Poor People's Campaign: National Call for a Moral Revival, will pick up where his assassination left the nascent movement.

A year before his death, Dr.

People's Campaign at a staff retreat for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967. He described the campaign as a "highly significant event," adding that the campaign was "the beginning of a new cooperation, understanding, and a determination by poor people of all colors and backgrounds to assert their right to a decent life and respect for their culture and dignity."

He planned on descending on our nation's capital with scores of poor people to demand fair wag-

justice Dr. King understood was essential to achieve, if our nation was truly committed to giving everyone, regardless of color, gender or zip code, a fair chance at life.

Today, Dr. King's legacy in the fight for economic justice for all Americans has been passed on to Rev. Barber, and I am pleased that Rev. Barber has answered the call to lead this effort in the affirmative.

As a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment for the poor and underserved, The National Urban League will honor Rev. Barber and his long-time commitment to civil rights and justice during our annual conference this year.

We live now in worrisome times where a robust movement is afoot to limit Americans' access to the ballot box, where millions of people worry that they will not have healthcare next year, and where the stock of private prisons continue to soar as the Trump administration finds more people to criminalize and occupy prison beds. So we are fortunate to have men and women on the side of right, like Rev. Barber, who contemplate action in the face of abuse and refuse to remain silent in the face of injustice.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

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orientation, that first Moral Monday has inspired tens of thousands of people to lock arms in solidarity and protest beyond the state of North Carolina, undeterred by the very real threat of arrests, with over 1,000 protestors handcuffed and jailed—including Rev. Bar-

King shifted his focus to economic inequality, and as he did with civil and voting rights, he was committed to making poverty and the plight of all our nation's poor a top priority on our federal government's agenda.

Dr. King announced the Poor

es, unemployment insurance and quality education. He would not live to join the protestors who would eventually descend on Washington, erect a protest camp and demand economic justice, but the campaign was short lived, and we continue to fight for that same

Republicans are Right: Going to College Hurts

But not for the reasons you might expect

BY JESSICAH PIERRE

Going to college is a good thing, right? That's at least what I was told as a kid, and what led me to get a college degree. I was the first one in my family to do so.



Yet new public opinion polling shows most Republicans think colleges have a negative impact on the country. Unfortunately, they might be right — but not for the reasons you might expect them to give.

Attending college has been proven to unlock opportunities. A report by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities found that college graduates are 24 percent more likely to be em-

ployed than high school graduates — and earn \$1 million more over a lifetime.

Those with college degrees are also more than twice as likely to volunteer, and over three times more likely to give back to charity.

College educations also affect the way people vote. Three-quarters of bachelor's degree holders vote in presidential elections, compared to just over half of high school graduates.

So why might some view college negatively? Well, there's a lot of reasons — 1.3 trillion, to be precise. That's how much debt students, current and former, are carrying in this country: \$1.3 trillion worth, and rising.

Who's hit worst by this skyrocketing debt? Women -- who owe two-thirds of that amount — and especially black and Latina women.

A recent report from the Amer-

ican Association of University Women found that the average woman who graduated from a four-year university between in 2012 carried \$21,000 in college debt. That's about \$1,500 more than the average man. Black women are even more negatively impacted, averaging over \$29,000 in student loans.

Worse still, women are paid about 80 cents to every dollar a man makes — a number that falls to 63 cents for black women, and just 54 cents for Latina women, when compared to white men. That means these grads start out deeper in debt and then have a much harder time getting out.

So, is rising Republican opposition to the academy a result of their concern for the economic well-being of black or Latina women? Doubtful.

After all, our GOP-led Congress refuses to engage with potential solutions to close the gender wage gap, which could make

huge strides in reducing overall student loan debt. And not a single Republican senator supported the Pay Check Fairness Act, which would make it harder for employers to discriminate based on gender.

Same goes for the College for All Act, a bill put forward by Senator Bernie Sanders to create a debt-free higher education system and help student borrowers refinance their debt. A lot more effort is needed on the federal and local levels to remove this economic burden systemically placed on women.

Unfortunately, the Pew study that showed Republican opposition to universities didn't dive deeper as to why. However, an old quote from Karl Rove, the Republican mastermind responsible for bringing George W. Bush into office, offers a clue: "As people do better, they start voting like Republicans — unless they have too much education and

vote Democratic."

What else about college might rub conservatives the wrong way?

Colleges provide a space for critical thinking where students can expand their minds and become more knowledgeable of the world. That might be why universities have historically played major roles in the resistance to bad public policy — from Vietnam to Iraq to today's #resistance to Donald Trump.

Fixing higher education means reducing barriers to college, not increasing them. Greater investment in debt-free higher education and debt relief for the most impacted students, including black women like me, is what's needed — not mindless broadsides against the idea of education.

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