

OPINION



The Moral Revolution America Needs

Shifting the conversation on poverty and race

BY JESSICAH PIERRE

Thousands of civil rights advocates, low-wage workers, and religious leaders kicked off massive protests on May 14, launching a 40-day campaign across the nation in an effort to revive Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign.



The Poor People's Campaign brings together poor and marginalized people from all backgrounds, places, and religions to stand up for their lives and rights by calling for a "revolution of American values." They're taking aim at the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, and ecological devastation.

The first Poor People's Campaign in 1968 brought thousands of Americans of all races together to fight for fair incomes and living

standards. After King was murdered that same year, the movement slowed down. But with the fights for racial and economic equality as intertwined now as they were 50 years ago, organizers believe that the movement's vision for America couldn't come at a better time.

The Poor People's campaign calls not only for a radical redistribution of political and economic power, but for a deep moral analysis of the national consciousness around poverty and racism.

This analysis calls out the common myths that perpetuate systemic inequality, including the dangerous belief that poverty is the fault of the poor. Those with more than ample wealth, the narrative goes, fully merit what they have. And others merit less.

My colleague Chuck Collins describes this narrative as the "myth of deservedness." In his book *Born on Third Base*, Collins defines that myth as the belief "that people are poor because they don't try as hard, have made mistakes, or lack wit and

wisdom." And the rich, the same story goes, have worked "harder, smarter, or more creatively."

This "deservedness" narrative largely ignores the discrimination and other barriers that have blocked economic progress for poor people and people of color, or the public policies that have kept these barriers intact — things like housing and employment discrimination, mass incarceration, and tax policies that favor the wealthy over poor people of all colors.

A report released this year by the Institute for Policy Studies, *The Souls of Poor Folks*, examines how what Dr. King called the "Triplets of Evil" — systemic racism, poverty, and the war economy and militarism — as well as the interrelated problem of ecological devastation, have deepened since 1968 because of structural and systemic reasons, rather than individual failures.

The report points out that since 1968, the top 1 percent's share of national income has nearly doubled, while the official poverty rate for all U.S. families has merely inched up and down. The 400 wealthiest

Americans now own more wealth than the bottom 64 percent of the U.S. population (or 204 million people).

As the government increasingly caters to the interests of the few rich and powerful rather than being accountable to the poor and marginalized majority, the Poor People's Campaign reminds us of the ongoing and emerging movements that are compelling a change in our national priorities.

During a time where America couldn't be more politically and economically polarized, it's time to change the moral narrative in this country by coming together under moral clarity. We must shift the national conversation from "right versus left" to "right versus wrong."

The Poor Peoples Campaign is currently organizing events in over 30 states. Learn more about how you can get involved at poorpeople-campaign.com.

Jessicah Pierre is the inequality media specialist at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Letter to the Editor

Thank You Voters

Thank you to the 18,000 voters who believed in me, my passion, and skill sets to create positive change within our communities. Considering my journey for the county Board of Commissioners Chair position began with

my filing for the office on March 8, and in those 2 and 1/2 months drew such strong support for a non-traditional candidate, with no household name, or branding, the result, while not a victory for me, validates my message and cry for hope and change.

I want to reaffirm to the community that I will not "sit down on the stairs" and be contented allowing the issues that plague us to simply set on the shelf. I often allude to the word "fatalism" where many underserved and underrepresented feel "that's just the way it is." Not so, for a change is going to come.

I will continue to be a true servant and voice for our commu-

nities, representing and respecting people from all walks of life. Nobody told me the road was going to be easy, but with the over 18,000 votes of confidence and encouragement, I see each of you and those who missed the opportunity to vote in the Primary as the wind beneath my wings as we soar for healthy change.

(Deborah) Bora Harris



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