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# Unifying Working People of All Ages

## Learning from King's last campaign

#### **by Jessicah Pierre**

As we celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., it's natural to remember his courageous advocacy for

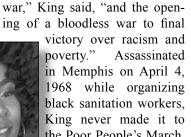
racial equity. But before he was King's memory and to pursue his 9 in 10 Democrats, 7 in 10 indeassassinated, King had also begun to broaden his efforts to unify the around economic justice.

That's worth remembering today.

In December 1967, King, the Southern Christian Leadership laid out their vision for the first Poor People's Campaign. Seeing how poverty cut across race and geography, these leaders built the campaign into a multiracial effort including African Americans, white Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and vision. Native Americans aimed at alleviating poverty for all.

The goal was to lead a massive protest in Washington D.C. demanding that Congress prioritize a massive anti-poverty package that included, among other things, a commitment to full employment, a guaranteed annual income, and more low-income housing. And by party. But the truth is, we have they wanted to pay for it by ending the Vietnam War.

"We believe the highest patri-



in Memphis on April 4, the Poor People's March, but thousands did protest

that 52 percent of American voters across party lines reported experiencing a serious economic problem in the past year. This tracks with other research, including the 1968 while organizing Federal Reserve Board's finding black sanitation workers, that 40 percent of Americans don't King never made it to have the money to cover a \$400 emergency.

The same CAP survey shows in Washington to honor that strong majorities — including

That vision remains to be realized. Today, 140 million Americans — over 40 percent of Conference, and other conveners us — remain poor or low-income. As in King's day, black and brown Americans are especially impacted, but so are millions of poor whites.

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Our country may be polarized more in common to fight for than what divides us.

A December survey by the Cen-

pendents, and 6 in 10 Republicans - support government action to "reduce poverty by ensuring that all families have access to basic living standards like health care, food, and housing if their wages are too low or they can't make sive election season — and as we ends meet."

Even at a time of stark partisan polarization, a majority of Americans support policies like raising the minimum wage — while ty media specialist at the Institute opposing things like the Trump administration's draconian cuts OtherWords.org.

otism demands the ending of the ter for American Progress found to federal nutrition assistance programs.

King and the Poor People's Campaign promoted a vision of unity. But it wasn't a unity that avoided conflict - it was one where poor and low-income overcame their divisions to fight for economic justice together.

To revive that vision, a new Poor People's Campaign has emerged to confront the interlocking evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, and militarism — and what they're calling "the distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism." Over the past two years, this campaign has organized communities from all over the country to build lasting power for poor and impacted people.

"Poor and low-wealth people are seeing the need to galvanize themselves around an agenda, not a party, not a person, but an agenda," said Rev. William Barber, one of the new campaign's leaders. "What happens if a movement is able to help people see how they're being played against each other? You could reset the entire political calculus."

As we head deeper into a diviremember Dr. King - it's worth remembering that our real enemy is injustice, not each other.

Jessicah Pierre is the inequalifor Policy Studies. Distributed by



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