

## THE SOULS OF POOR FOLK: AUDITING AMERICA WITH THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

An estimated 10,000 people will die every year from the provision in the new federal tax bill that will take away the health care of 13 million people. Thousands have died every year because of some states' decision to deny Medicaid expansion benefits. There are 32 million people who remain uninsured. Further, an estimated 40 percent of Americans have taken on debt because of medical issues, making medical debt the number one cause of personal bankruptcy filings. Overall, more than 250,000 people die in the United States from poverty and related issues every year. There are 32 million people who remain uninsured.

As of July 2017, 25 states have passed laws that preempt cities from passing their own local minimum wage laws. Most of these have been passed in response to city councils passing or wanting to pass minimum wage increases. 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. Just 3 individuals had a combined wealth of \$248.5 billion, the same wealth as the bottom 50 percent of the country.

In 2016, there was no state or county in the nation where someone earning the federal minimum wage could afford a 2-bedroom apartment at market rent. 2.5 to 3.5 million people are living in shelters, transitional housing centers and tent cities. This population includes a significant number of women, children, LGBTQIA youth, veterans and the elderly.

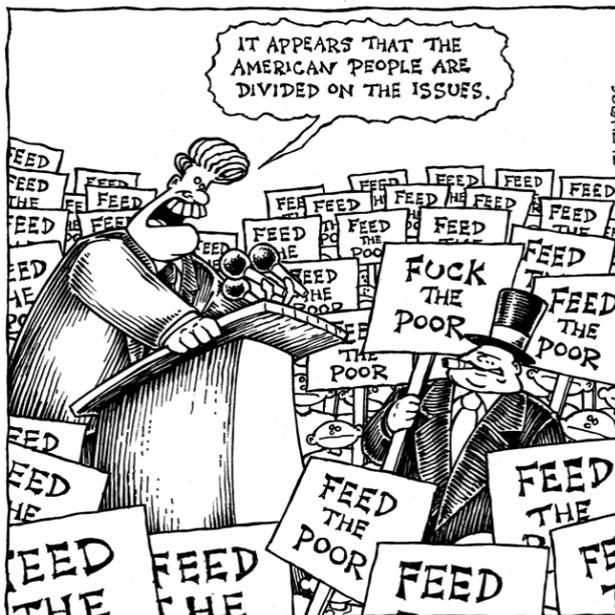
The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program only assists 23 percent of poor families with children. The current administration has proposed a 30 percent cut to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and a restructuring that would impose onerous work requirements that threaten to destabilize this highly effective program.

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. Using SPM, 43.5 percent of the U.S. population — or 140 million people — were poor or low-income in 2016.

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. There are also 6.1 million people who have been disenfranchised due to felony convictions, including one in 13 Black adults. While these laws have disproportionately targeted Black people, in 2016, at least 17 states saw voter suppression cases targeting American Indian and Alaskan Native voters.

Federal spending on immigration, deportations and the border has increased from \$2 billion in 1976 to \$17 billion in 2015, with ten times as many deportations. From 1993 to 2013, immigration detentions increased from 85,000 to 441,000 per year. Undocumented immigrants contributed \$5 trillion to the U.S. economy over 10 years. They paid \$13 billion in Social Security in 2010, but only received \$1 billion in benefits. They also pay 8 percent of their income in state and local taxes. The wealthiest 1 percent, by contrast, pay just 5.4 percent and their benefits pile higher and higher.

The number of sentenced state and federal inmates grew from 188,000 in 1968 to nearly 1.5 million in 2016. From 1970 to 2014, the total female jail population increased fourteen-fold from under 8,000 to nearly 110,000. More than 80



percent of these women were imprisoned for non-violent offenses. 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.

Federal assistance to local water systems is currently 74 percent below its peak in 1977. 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.

Since 1998, there have been 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures on U.S. pipelines. And since 1964, there were more than 2,400 spills from offshore drilling in U.S. waters. The largest of these was the Deepwater Horizon "BP" oil spill in 2010, which accounted for 95 percent of oil spilled in the past 50 years. There are also 1,100 coal ash sites throughout the country. Toxins from these sites gradually leach into water bodies and groundwater, or get released in catastrophic spills.

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.

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. . And the Department of Defense was responsible for 72 percent of the U.S. Government's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2016.

More than 68 percent of the civilian casualties in 2017 from aerial attacks were women and children. Nearly half of female military personnel sent to Iraq or Afghanistan reported being sexually harassed and nearly 25 percent said they had been sexually assaulted.

In 2012, suicide claimed more military deaths than military action and as of September 2017, an average of 20 veterans died by suicide every day. Young Black males are 9 times more likely to be killed by police officers than other Americans. From 1968 to 2016, there were about 1.6 million gun deaths in the United States. LGBTQIA immigrants are 15 times more likely to experience sexual assault in confinement than nonimmigrants.

Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. called for a "revolution of values" in America. Inviting us to stand together against the "triplets of evil" — militarism, racism, and economic injustice — to insist that people need not die from poverty in the richest nation to ever exist. They sought to build a broad, fusion coalition that would audit America: Together, they would demand an accounting.

In communities across this land, people impacted by systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and our distorted moral narrative have said the same thing: "We want to be free! We need a Poor People's Campaign! We need a Moral Revival to make this country great for so many for whom it has not yet been." King and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign declared that "silence was betrayal." We are coming together to break the silence and tell the truth.

Events will begin on Mothers Day weekend and continue until mid-June. Participants will convene primarily on Washing D.C. as well as 37 State Capitols. including Sacramento.

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## ACTING OUT OUR PRAYERS

*There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.*

There are hundreds of ways to pray. You can walk through a forest.

You can sit by a pond. You can watch the air turn into clouds and then slowly dissipate.

You can lie on your back and look at the stars.

Those are crucial acts of prayer and sanity.

*But with the world being killed, the prayers we really need today are actions.*

We need people to not merely walk through the forest, but to defend it from being cut.

And we need people to not merely look at the pond, but to make sure that those who live in the pond can survive this culture.

A prayer without actions to work toward protecting whomever you love is not a prayer.

It's not even a wish, but it's almost a blasphemy.

I often said that I don't hope that salmon survive, but I'll do whatever it takes to make sure that salmon survive.

An Anishinaabe woman wrote to me and said: "I hear what you're saying, and it is an obscenity to hope that salmon survive, or pray that salmon survive, when you're not doing anything in the real world to help them survive. But after you have taken out the dam, you have to pray that the river accepts your offering of the dam removal, and does its own work then."

**I completely agree.**

So we have to do everything that we can, and then we have to pray that the earth accepts our offering and accepts our prayer and that the salmon come home.

**Derrick Jensen**

This is a transcript of a Deep Green video: [deepgreenresistance.blogspot.com](http://deepgreenresistance.blogspot.com)