

Why I march with Rev. Barber

Poor People's Campaign continues King's legacy

BY YVONNE R. WALKER
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This past weekend at a commemoration in Fontana for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I joined another reverend, Dr. William Barber, who continues Dr. King's legacy as co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign.

Dr. King continues to be an inspiration in our lives. He was a forward-thinker who experienced racism first-hand and fought rampant political, racial, and economic inequality so that no one — regardless of race or nationality — should suffer or be treated differently.

Yet despite his efforts, inequality in all its forms is as prevalent today as it was more than 50 years ago. And that is why, as Reverend Barber says, we cannot just honor Dr. King one day a year in celebration, but must dedicate ourselves to the everyday fight. When prophets like Dr. King are killed and don't finish their work, we must reach down, pick up the baton, and carry it forward.

Rev. Barber's Poor People's Campaign does so by focusing on both poverty and inequality. This headline from January 1, 2020, summarizes the challenge we face: "Wealthiest earn so much they've already maxed out their Social Security tax for 2020."

So, before I even woke up and welcomed a new decade, 200 of the wealthiest people in the U.S. had already paid their Social Security taxes for the year. Another 1,000 paid them by Jan. 2, meaning their earnings had topped the cutoff of \$137,700 in a day.

Think of the difference it would make if the rest of their income was subject to Social Security taxes! In California, a state with the fifth largest economy in the world, 18.5% of our seniors 65 and older, nearly one in five, live in poverty because Social Security is too low or nonexistent. Even worse, we know senior poverty is not equal; when you get paid less in your lifetime, you earn less in retirement. As a result, the average income for senior women and people of color is even lower than that for white men.

What do wealthy people do with all that extra cash? A lot of them pay to maintain this inequality. They pay to limit who votes. They pay to control the press and social media to turn us against each other, make us fear each other, divide us with racism, sexism and xenophobia.

They also pay for political campaigns. At a time when the average Congressional campaign now costs \$10 million, the



Yvonne R. Walker and Rev. Dr. William Barber appeared together at the commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Fontana.

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Koch brothers — America's second richest family with nearly \$100 billion in wealth — fund conservative media groups and misleading climate change research. Why? Because Koch Industries is one of the biggest polluters in the U.S., and less regulation means more money for them.

These billionaire families bankroll right-to-work groups to whittle away at union membership, further exacerbating America's wealth inequality.

By stoking our fears and maintaining the status quo, we stay divided and racism is allowed to thrive. We also see it in our prisons; in California alone, we still spend more than \$11 billion annually to lock people up, many for low-level crimes. Wouldn't that money be better spent ending poverty?

That's why Rev. Barber is leading the march for justice, for voting rights, for ending poverty and redistributing wealth, for ending environmental destruction, and for shrinking our massive military budget.

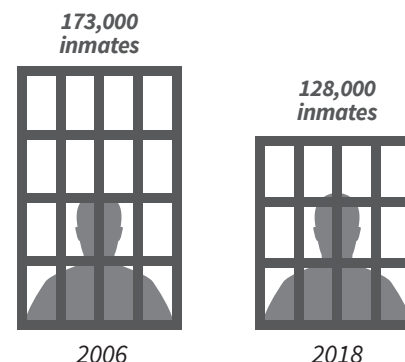
And that's why we march with him. We invite you to join in.



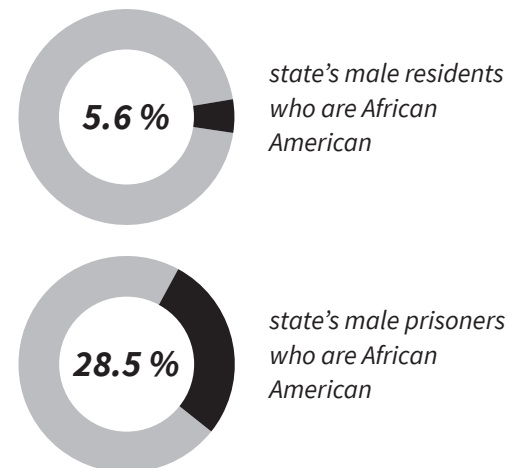
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California's prison population

Changes in sentencing laws have led to big decline



But African Americans are still over-represented behind bars



And over-stopped: African American drivers are much more likely than white drivers to be stopped by police, but less likely to be found with illegal items.

Source: Public Policy Institute and Stanford Open Policing Project



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