

Poverty in America Awareness Month

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In January, we recognize Poverty in America Awareness Month as well as Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Day. Most people remember Dr. King for his civil rights campaign, but did you know he also campaigned against poverty? Marian Wright, a civil rights lawyer, suggested to MLK that they take poor persons to march on Washington, DC and meet with government officials to demand jobs, unemployment insurance, a fair minimum wage, and education for poor adults. Working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Dr. King started the Poor People's Campaign to protest for economic and human rights for poor Americans of diverse backgrounds in November 1967.

When MLK was shot the following April, he was in Memphis to support striking sanitation workers that were fighting for better pay and working conditions. These sanitation workers earned wages so low that many were on welfare and relied on food stamps to feed their families. Amid mourning his loss, the Poor People's Campaign marched on in Dr. King's memory. Thousands of people of all backgrounds built a protest camp for six weeks on the Washington Mall and confronted politicians.

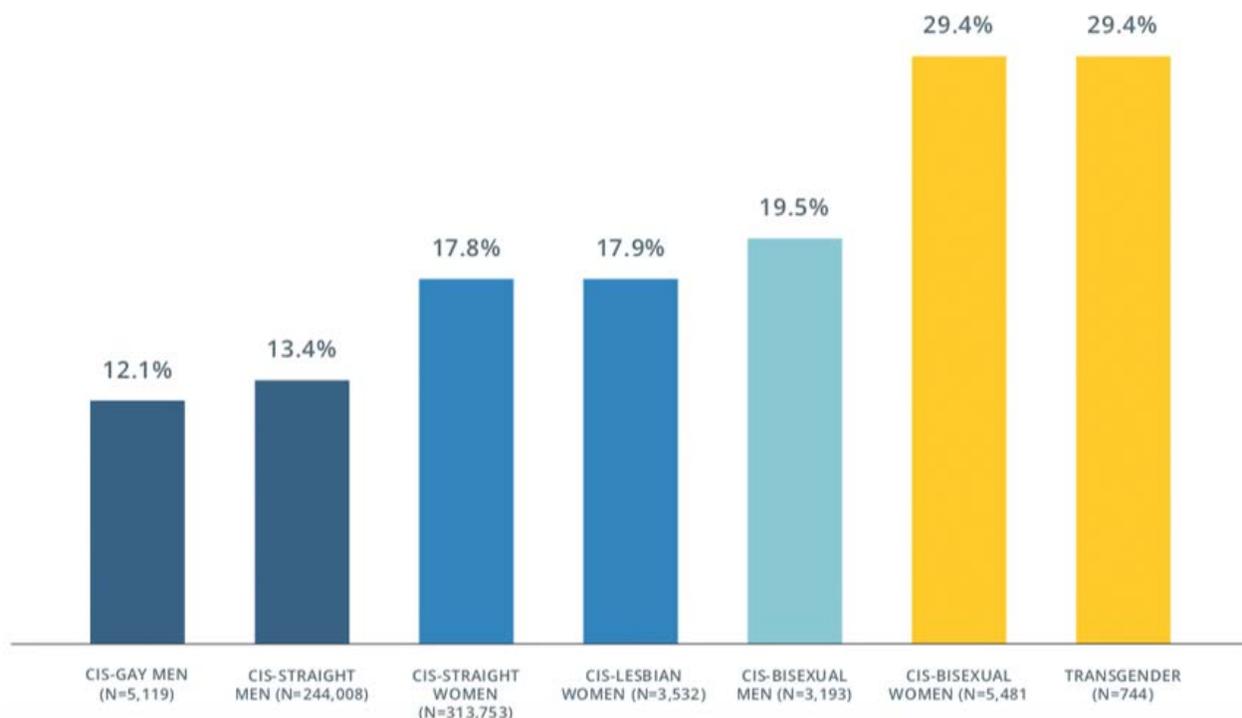


When this campaign started, 25 million people were living in poverty, but today that number is close to 40 million and possibly even higher. The Poor People's Campaign has been revitalized in recent years as poverty has only gotten worse. When we look at the intersections with poverty, Black people are still disproportionately affected but we also see an intersection with LGBTQIA+ persons that have also had to fight for equal rights.

According to 2018 US Census Data, the highest poverty rate by race is found among Native Americans (25.4%), with Blacks (20.8%) having the second highest poverty rate, and Hispanics (of any race) having the third highest poverty rate (17.6%). Whites and Asians both had poverty rates of 10.1%.



LGBT people collectively have a poverty rate of 21.6%, compared to the rate for cisgender straight people of 15.7%. Among LGBT people, transgender people have the highest rates of poverty—29.4%. There are also higher rates of poverty amongst all LGBT women when compared to their male counterparts.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Nobel Peace Prize address in 1964 made his thoughts on poverty clear:

“A second evil which plagues the modern world is that of poverty. Like a monstrous octopus, it projects it’s nagging, prehensile tentacles in lands and villages all over the world. Almost two thirds of the peoples of the world go to bed hungry at night. They are undernourished, ill-housed, and shabbily clad. Many of them have no houses or beds to sleep in. Their only beds are the sidewalks of the cities and the dusty roads of the villages. Most of these poverty-stricken children of God have never seen a physician or a dentist.”

You can support the Poor People’s Campaign in MLK’s honor this year or local charities that support those still experiencing greater rates of poverty. So many people in America continue to be on unequal footing from the lack of support and laws that were historically created to hold them back or give protection only to others.

Check out these organizations close to the Vizo Financial campuses and consider how you can make a difference!

[Poor People's Campaign](#) started by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Columbia Area

- [Harvest Hope Food Bank](#)
- [Oliver Gospel Ministry](#)

Greensboro Area

- [The United Way of Greater Greensboro](#)
- [Greensboro Urban Ministry](#)
- [Second Harvest Food Bank](#)

Middletown Area

- [Covenant House](#)
- [Downtown Daily Bread](#)

Pittsburgh Area

- [Proud Haven](#)
- [412 Food Rescue](#)
- [Sisters Place](#)
- [The Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers](#)
- [Listing of Pittsburgh Food Pantries](#)



For more information on MLK's work for economic justice, these videos are a great start!



[VIDEO 1: Martin Luther King III: My Father Had Another Dream](#)

[VIDEO 2: MLK on Economic Justice \(Poor People's Campaign\)](#) Please note there are brief images from the Vietnam War and the death of MLK that may not be suitable for everyone. Viewer discretion is advised.

[VIDEO 3: MLK Talks 'New Phase' Of Civil Rights Struggle, 11 Months Before His Assassination](#)

Article statistics sourced from: <https://www.povertyusa.org/facts> and <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-poverty-us/>