

From: Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II <info@breachrepairers.org>

To:

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Subject: Moral Clarity About Our Own Atrocities

REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH

Dear Movement Family,

In Philadelphia this week, the Pennsylvania Poor People's Campaign organized a march from City Hall to a church downtown, where Carolyn Hill shared the story of losing her two nieces to poverty. "The child welfare department decided I was too poor to raise them," Ms. Hill testified. "I had a roof over my head and food in the fridge and the girls were doing well in my care... But if I had had the Child Tax Credit earlier, child welfare might not have taken my nieces from me." She hasn't seen the babies she helped to raise in nine years because of policy decisions by Republicans and Democrats who believe lies about scarcity.

Over the past couple of months, Russia's assault on Ukraine has produced scenes that demand action from people who want to hold onto our humanity. To see the butchery at Bucha or the massacre at Mariupol and do nothing would be to forfeit any claim to moral authority. We know this instinctively. It is why, despite the political gridlock on Capitol Hill, Republicans and Democrats have acted swiftly to approve historic military aid to Ukraine. In the face of such a moral imperative, it would be anathema for either party to ask, "How are we going to pay for it?"

But our moral clarity on the question of Ukraine exposes the contradiction at the heart of American politics for the past 40 years. In 1967, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. told the story of visiting Marks, Mississippi, and meeting a teacher who cut her apple into several pieces at lunch each day so that students who had nothing else to eat could share it for nourishment. In the richest nation in the history of the world, King knew it was a moral contradiction to witness such poverty and do nothing. So he agreed to work with a coalition of Black, White, Latino and Native poor people to make America see the human suffering in its midst. King was gunned down for his efforts to build a Poor People's Campaign, but the mobilization helped compel the government to launch a War on Poverty. Republicans and Democrats agreed it was unimaginable to simply look away.

America has not sustained that moral clarity about the catastrophe of poverty. As we continue our national tour to prepare for the [Mass Poor People's and Low-Wage Workers' Assembly and Moral March on Washington and to the Polls on June 18, 2022](#), poor and low-income people like Ms. Hill are putting a face on the moral crisis of poverty in the richest nation in the history of the world.



Marchers from the Pennsylvania Poor People's Campaign and their allies at the national mobilization tour stop on April 25, 2022, in Philadelphia. (Photo by Steve Pavey/Poor People/s Campaign/Repairers of the Breach/Kairos Center)

As we all watch the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine, Americans are aware that the main difference between us and the Russian people is that we see the truth of the human slaughter that is hidden from them by Putin's propaganda. If they could see what we see, we know they could not allow it to continue in their names. But if this is true of human suffering half a world away, then it must be also true of the catastrophes hidden in our cities' homeless encampments and Walmart parking lots, filled with families sleeping in cars because they cannot afford housing. If it is true for babies in Ukraine, then it is also true for Ms. Hill's babies.

We are no less culpable than the Russian people because we have been willing to go along with narratives that blame poor people or hide their suffering behind arguments about book bans or "critical race theory." It is our moral duty to see the suffering of other human beings, especially those closest to us. And when we witness unnecessary suffering, it is our duty to act.

If Russia's atrocities in Ukraine demand action, then so too does the failure of the US Senate to pass Build Back Better's provisions for affordable housing, green jobs, living wages for care workers, and a child tax credit that will immediately lift 4 million children out of poverty. If Putin's attack on democracy in

Europe can unite Western democracies, then the assault on voting rights in state houses across America must, at the very least, unite Senate Democrats in their resolve to pass federal voting rights protections before the midterms this fall.

The moral imperative of these issues is no less pressing than the human suffering in Ukraine. We cannot ignore the cry for help from Ukraine, just as we cannot look away from the poor people and low-wage workers who are calling for a [Mass Poor People's & Low-Wage Workers' Assembly and Moral March on Washington and to the Polls](#).

This historic gathering at a watershed moment in our nation's history isn't just another rally. It is a call coming from grassroots movements in communities across America where people are learning that we have power when we get together, and we have authority when we act to stop the atrocities that we have allowed here at home for far too long.

Forward together,

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II
President and Senior Lecturer
Repairers of the Breach

PS: As we focus our attention on mobilizing people for June 18th, our organizers have put together a [great set of resources](#) to help you organize a bus from your community. Please reach out to your faith community, union, neighborhood association, or civic organization to start signing people up for a bus this week. We're putting everything we've got into building a national platform where we can demand that this nation see the suffering of people like Ms. Hill.

Forward together, not one step back!

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II
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