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Christina Juhász-Wood

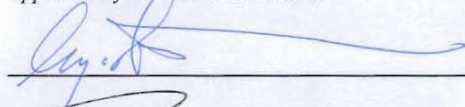
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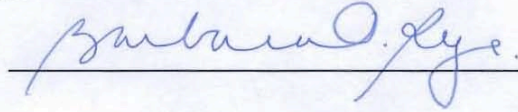
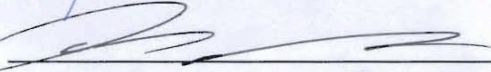
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ASSEMBLING THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN (1968)

QUEER ACTIVISM AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

by

CHRISTINA JUHÁSZ-WODD

B.A., SMITH COLLEGE, 2006

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF THE ARTS  
AMERICAN STUDIES

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

JULY 2011

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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QUEER ACTIVISM AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

by Christina Juhász-Wood

B.A., Government, Smith College, 2006  
M.A., American Studies, University of New Mexico, 2011

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to bring the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) of 1968 into contemporary discussions about queer scholarship and activism. The PPC assembled a diverse racial and ethnic constituency in an unprecedented way to produce a massive, national political campaign to end poverty. This complex assemblage was largely indecipherable to the press and many historians, which has contributed to the view that the campaign was a failure, particularly in relation to the civil rights movement<sup>1</sup>. I describe how the mainstream gay rights movement appropriates the civil rights movement as normative to seek forms of national inclusion.<sup>2</sup> I argue that the PPC provides a historical model for queer disruptions to homonormativity through radical alliances for racial, gendered, decolonial, and economic justice.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of press coverage of the PPC, see Gordon Mantler, "'The press did you in': the Poor People's Campaign and the mass media," *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 3, no. 1 (June 2010): 33-54. I pay particular attention to Charles Fager's historical analysis of the PPC, see Charles Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection: The Poor People's Washington Campaign* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969).

<sup>2</sup> I contrast what I term the mainstream gay and lesbian rights movement to queer scholarship and activism. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that these are two singular and readily identifiable groups. I primarily distinguish between what I term mainstream gay and lesbian rights activists by their attempts to fold into liberal modes of citizenship, for example through legalized same-sex marriage. By contrast, I view queer theorists as offering a framework of analysis that proposes structural changes to modes of American nationalism and exceptionalism.

<sup>3</sup> Jasbir Puar describes homonormativity in relation to US Empire-building: "homosexual sexual exceptionalism does not necessarily contradict or undermine heterosexual sexual exceptionalism; in actuality it may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require. The historical and contemporaneous production of emergent normativity, homonormativity, ties the recognition of homosexual subjects, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism." *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 9.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Background of the Poor People’s Campaign ..... 1

Theoretical Approach: Queering the PPC..... 4

“Gay is the New Black”? Gay Appropriations of the Civil Rights Movement..... 7

“The poor are their own worst enemy”: Pathologizing the PPC..... 14

Bodies in Motion: Queer Disruptions to Normativity ..... 22

Alternative Assemblages at Resurrection City ..... 47

Conclusion ..... 52

Bibliography..... 54

## Introduction: Background of the Poor People's Campaign

Prior to the founding of the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) of 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. publicly criticized the war in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> He also participated with class-based activist campaigns, for example in the Memphis garbage strike in April of 1968.<sup>5</sup> King recognized the inability of the legal victories of the civil rights movement to bring about widespread social and economic change. He argued that more fundamental structural changes to the nation needed to occur, and that they would be achieved through a continued commitment to nonviolent, large-scale civil disobedience.<sup>6</sup>

The PPC was meant to reenergize the War on Poverty, especially given the billions of dollars that were going to fund the Vietnam War. The campaign deliberately challenged the traditional black/white binary of racial representation in the US.<sup>7</sup> It included African Americans from the South and North, white Appalachians, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Latinos, Chicanos, Indo-Hispanos, welfare rights activists, and others.<sup>8</sup> Ideally, the multi-racial contingent of men and women, from both rural and urban areas, would force

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "A Time to Break Silence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1986), 231-244.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007); Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Michael K. Honey *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Garbage Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1986) and *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike and Martin Luther King* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing Co., 1989; 1985); *Citizen King: American Experience*, directed by Orlando Bagwel and Noland Walker (2004. Arlington, VA: WGBH Educational Foundation, 2004), DVD.

<sup>6</sup> Press Release, March 4, 1968, Papers of the Highlander Folk School and Center for Education and Research, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., Box 105, Folder 12, Page 4.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 1995): 369-387.

<sup>8</sup>I have attempted to remain consistent with my racial terminology. I refer most often to indigenous persons as Native rather than Native American, Indian, or American Indian. I use Black and African-American American rather than Negro, although some of the archival documents use this terminology. I use the terms Chicano, Latino, and Indo-Hispano to reflect the self-identification of a particular individual.



the federal government and larger American society to face the reality of poverty not as the failure of individuals or as the expression of racialized “cultural pathologies,” but rather as the sign of an unresponsive, deeply fractured nation.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. King was tragically assassinated on April 4, 1968. Reverend Ralph David Abernathy assumed the leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and chose to continue with the PPC to honor Dr. King’s legacy and memory. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1968 a “Committee of 100” representatives—consisting of a steering committee and recruited poor representatives—presented a number of demands to various federal executive agencies.<sup>10</sup> These demands generally called on the federal government to improve the lives of the poor through increased access to food, affordable housing, quality employment, childcare, healthcare, and education.<sup>11</sup> On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, following the memorial service for Dr. King, SCLC participants began Marching to Washington from Memphis in what was called the “Freedom Train.”<sup>12</sup> The procession of over 1,000 people included a mule cart that was meant to demonstrate the continued plight of rural African-Americans, and to make visible the US government’s neglected promise of “40 acres and a mule.”<sup>13</sup>

The PPC would, theoretically, involve numerous nonviolent protests and acts of civil disobedience at various governmental offices that would likely result in mass arrests. PPC leadership predicted that these arrests would invoke sympathy throughout the nation, leading to local actions of solidarity. The PPC would then organize national boycotts of businesses

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<sup>9</sup> Jodi Melamed describes the “culture of pathology” as: “both the effect of racism (that is, cultural maladaptation to social prejudice) and the cause of black inequality, in effect deploying liberal antiracism to renew racial stigma and to disavow structural racism.” See “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberation to Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *Social Text* 89, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 7.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Abernathy Announces Timetable for Memphis March, Mule Train, Shanty Town and Mass Movement on Washington in Poor People’s Campaign, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Page 1.

<sup>11</sup> For more detail on these demands see the section entitled “Bodies in Motion: Queer Disruptions to Normativity.”

<sup>12</sup> What Will Become of His Dreams?, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Pages 1-4; Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 189.

connected to the Johnson Administration, as the SCLC had done previously in Chicago with Operation Breadbasket, putting further pressure on the government to enact reforms.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than address the substance of the PPC demands, the mainstream press coverage of the campaign focused primarily on racialized disorganization, conflict, and violence among African-American participants.<sup>15</sup> Few of the demands of the campaign were met. The federal government continued to militarize, to privatize and to cut social services thereby maintaining the astronomical poverty and economic inequality rates in the US that continue to the present-day. I historicize the PPC through a queer lens to point to its significance for contemporary radical movements challenging racial, gendered, sexual, colonial, and economic injustices.

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<sup>13</sup> Roland L. Freeman, *The Mule Train: A Journey of Hope Remembered* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998); Hilliard Lackey. *Marks, Martin and the Mule Train* (Jackson, Miss.: Town Square Books, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Keith Mantler, "Black, Brown and Poor: Martin Luther King Jr., the Poor People's Campaign and its Legacies" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2008), 80.

<sup>15</sup> Mantler, "'The press did you in,'" 33-54.

## Theoretical Approach: Queering the PPC

The PPC has garnered little, if any attention from queer scholars. However, I argue that the campaign addressed some of the most pressing issues in queer scholarship and activism today including challenges to normativity, racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, homonationalism, and economic injustice.<sup>16</sup> The present thesis assembles primary and secondary source materials on the PPC including archival documents, oral history, newspaper articles, and secondary sources using a queer mode of analysis. In particular, I utilize Jasbir Puar's method of assemblage, from her influential book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, to engage with the queer complexities of the PPC. Puar challenges the tendency of theories of intersectionality to treat modes of identity as pre-constituted prior to their coming into contact with one another and argues that treating identities as static and unchanging can limit social movements.<sup>17</sup> The PPC was not a single movement with one message but an assemblage of diverse activists who exchanged unique histories, tactics, and opinions when they came together.

As in Licia Fiol-Matta's *Queer Mother for the Nation*, this thesis relies on multiple readings of "queer." Fiol-Matta uses "queer" as an adjective that doesn't necessarily confirm an individual's sexuality, but rather centers "issues about sexuality, race, and gender that may, upon first glance, appear 'off-center' but are, in fact, critical to nationalism."<sup>18</sup> In section III, I analyze how mainstream gay and lesbian activists appropriate the civil rights movement to

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<sup>16</sup> David L. Eng with Judith Halberstam and José Muñoz, "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 84-85 23, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2005): 1-84.

<sup>17</sup> Cathy Cohen describes intersectionality as an analysis: "that recognizes how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate and police the lives of most people. Black lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual feminist authors such as Kimberle Crenshaw, Barbara Ransby, Angela Davis, Cheryl Clarke, and Audre Lorde have repeatedly emphasized in their writings the intersectional workings of oppression." See "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: the Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3 (1997): 441.

seek forms of national inclusion. I argue that this appropriation both misreads and de-historicizes, not only the civil rights movement, but also the poor people's campaign.

In section IV, I examine why the PPC has been largely ignored and rendered invisible. I argue that mainstream reporters and scholars discredited the PPC by “queering” participants as violent, dirty, and disorganized. In doing so they contributed to the view that racial, sexual, and cultural “pathologies” were responsible for poverty, thereby legitimating government inaction. In section V, I explore how the PPC activists assembled their diverse and sometimes contradictory demands to government agencies in order to expose the historical roots of structural racism and economic inequality across the nation. Activists also physically assembled their bodies directly on the National Mall—the quintessential symbolism of American nationalism—in order to humanize the often hidden conditions of poverty. I focus specifically on the participation of Indo-Hispano, Native, and welfare rights activists to consider how discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality were constantly colluding and changing, rather than neatly intersecting, during the PPC. While I focus less explicitly on sexuality during my discussions of Indo-Hispano and Native activism, I nonetheless consider how their decolonial perspectives added to the heterogeneity of the campaign as (what I consider to be) a “queer” alliance.

In section VI, I point to specific forms of coalition building that occurred on the ground during the PPC to challenge the mainstream vision of the campaign as a failure. In a recent panel, Judith Butler suggested that queer is not an identity, but rather an *alliance* of individuals simultaneously fighting multiple forms of oppression. Butler stated:

I think what we have, what we have to do, is question the question. Right? It's like, you know, 'are you gay or are you not gay?' . . . Part of what queer was about, you know, was let's not ask people that question anymore. We don't really care what the answer to that question is. We want to live in a more

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<sup>18</sup> Licia Fiol-Matta, *A Queer Mother for the Nation: the State and Gabriela Mistral* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): xxvii.

just world and we want to live together with people that want a more just world, and we want to build alliances for that purpose.<sup>19</sup>

The PPC was not just a movement for economic justice, but one that challenged US imperialism, colonialism and white heteropatriarchy. Ultimately, I hope to incorporate gender and sexuality into studies of the PPC and correspondingly to bring the history of the PPC to the attention of queer scholarship and activism.

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<sup>19</sup> John Greyson and Judith Butler, Moderated by Jasbir Puar, “How Now BDS? Media, Politics and Queer Activism” (public lecture, Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), New York, NY, March 11, 2011),

## “Gay is the New Black”? Gay Appropriations of the Civil Rights Movement

Jasbir Puar’s analysis is part of a larger contemporary movement in queer studies that seeks to understand how the invocation of gay and lesbian sexuality colludes with conservative economic, legal, and nationalist projects. The acceptance of gay sexuality by the general public and government has increased significantly in recent years. In *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) the Supreme Court overturned laws criminalizing sodomy.<sup>20</sup> Both President Obama’s and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton’s participation in the “It Gets Better Campaign,” involved a focus on preventing gay teen suicides.<sup>21</sup> Recently, the government lifted its ban on gays and lesbians serving in the armed forces.<sup>22</sup> While many view these recent developments positively, I argue that they raise important questions about the limitations and problems associated with forms of sexual national belonging.

I was recently walking down Central Avenue in Albuquerque, New Mexico when I came across a gay pro-marriage rally. While observing the participants, I was especially struck by one protester’s sign that read “blacks” with a box checked next to it, then “women,” also with a box checked, and finally “gays” with an unchecked box. The poster suggested that “gays” are just one in a long line of disenfranchised groups seeking inclusion in the full rights of American citizenship. The poster assumes that “blacks” and “women” have achieved full equality, and that “gays” are somehow distinct from them. It captures some of the ways in which the mainstream gay rights movement problematically treats identity categories and

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<http://adalahny.org/videos/video-how-now-bds-media-politics-and-queer-activism>.

<sup>20</sup> *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).

<sup>21</sup> President Barak Obama, “It Gets Better – President Barak Obama,”

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp\\_2E44GBzw&feature=fvst](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp_2E44GBzw&feature=fvst) (accessed April 30, 2011); Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “Secretary Clinton: Tomorrow Will Be Better,”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXBpW8GCDtY> (accessed April 30, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Obama Signs Away ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’” *New York Times*, December 22, 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/23/us/politics/23military.html?ref=dontaskdonttell>

situates itself historically. The sign is not an anomaly to mainstream gay rights organizing, but rather part of a larger tendency of the movement to align itself as the “new civil rights movement.” The inclusion of women on the sign, however, is relatively rare. The mainstream gay rights movement rarely positions itself in relation to the women’s movement, perhaps because of feminist critiques of marriage.<sup>23</sup>

The “Gay is the New Black” slogan was featured on signs during protests to Proposition 8 in California, which banned gay marriage in the state. Protesters also carried signs stating: “I have a Dream too” and “Welcome to Selma,” thereby positioning their activism directly in relation to the civil rights movement. There is also an entire website titled “the New Civil Rights Movement,” which expressly links the gay rights movement to the civil rights movement.<sup>24</sup> Kenyon Farrow notes that the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), one of the largest and most well funded mainstream gay rights organizations, began to draw on the civil rights movement in their campaigns in the 1990s.<sup>25</sup> Jason West, the mayor of New Paltz, NY, who started marrying gay couples, said: “The same people who don’t want to see gays and lesbians get married are the same people who would have made Rosa Parks go to the back of the bus.”<sup>26</sup> The fight for gay marriage is arguably the most visible and well-funded political issue for gays and lesbians. In Maine alone, pro-marriage groups spent almost six million dollars to keep legalized marriage in the state.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Stephanie Coontz describes how marriage as a legal institution has historically been used to privatize dependency within the married, (presumably white) heterosexual family. See *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992.)

<sup>24</sup> David Badash, “The New Civil Rights Movement.” [http://thenewcivilrights\\_movement.com/about-the-new-civil-rights-movement](http://thenewcivilrights_movement.com/about-the-new-civil-rights-movement) (accessed April 30, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Kenyon Farrow, “Is Gay Marriage Anti-Black???” in *Against Equality: Queer Critiques of Gay Marriage*, ed. by Ryan Conrad (Lewiston: Against Equality Publishing Collective, 2010): 28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Cover, “\$9.6 mil. spent on gay marriage fight,” *Portland Press Herald*, December 16, 2009. <http://blogs.pressherald.maintoday.com/updates/96-mil-spent-on-gay-marriage-fight>.

The “Gay is the New Black” slogan ties sexuality directly to consumption by suggesting that gayness is the newest trend (i.e. color) in fashion. In addition to increased legal and government acceptance, gay sexuality is represented through the consumption included in advertising, gay tourism, and television shows such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* as notably affluent, white (or multicultural), and most often male. The “Gay is the New Black” slogan is also featured on tee shirts, bumper stickers, buttons and other merchandise. Eng describes how gay marriage corresponds to the rhetoric of choice in the neoliberal market place:

a political movement of resistance and redistribution has been reconfigured and transformed into an interest group and niche market—a commercial scene of entertainment venues, restaurants, and shopping—in which gays and lesbians are liberated precisely by proving that they can be proper U.S. citizen-subjects in of the capitalist nation-state.<sup>28</sup>

I am interested in how and why the gays and lesbians appropriate the civil rights movement to seek modes of national social and legal belonging. I suggest that gays and lesbians utilize the civil rights movement in part because it holds an affective place in the national “imagination.”

By affect, I mean to say that images of the civil rights movement are often meant to garner sentimentality and sympathy. Keith Mantler notes that “media outlets, schools, governments, and churches recognize the anniversary of Montgomery, the sit-in-movement, the Freedom Rides, Birmingham, Selma, and, perhaps most prominently, the 1963 March on Washington.”<sup>29</sup> Affective readings of the civil rights movement neglect its economic underpinnings; for example, it is rarely mentioned that the 1963 march was for “jobs and freedom” and that many of the speakers pushed explicitly for economic reforms.<sup>30</sup> Mantler writes, the “SNCC’s John Lewis, whose speech garnered the largest ovation other than

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<sup>28</sup> David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 30.

<sup>29</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 7.



King's, painted a portrait of black life in Mississippi not through voting rights or segregated lunch counters, but through the pitiful daily wage of sharecroppers and their lack of economic security."<sup>31</sup> By contrast, the PPC is largely unknown outside limited historical and activist circles: there are no national celebrations or memorials to the campaign. Furthermore, the PPC is rarely treated as a part or continuation of the well-known civil rights activism in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The exceptional reading of the civil rights movement supports color-blind multiculturalism and identity politics.<sup>32</sup> Paul Kivel argues that this has led:

those in the middle management and academic jobs, corporations, and non-profits to hire some African-Americans, which has created a small Black middle class. But while those struggles succeeded in dismantling legalized segregation, many forms of structural racism still exist and the broader goals of political and economic justice have largely remained unfulfilled.<sup>33</sup>

Cathy Cohen, in her article "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: the Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" critiques civil rights strategies for giving racial minorities limited access to structures of power while large numbers of Americans remain socially and economically marginalized. Eng argues that the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the body politic works within a neoliberal framework that treats racism as nonexistent.

The tendency to treat racism and homophobia as the same, neglects the ways in which they are deeply intertwined with other modes of oppression. In relation to the appropriation of the civil rights movement, Kaufman and Miles argue:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Puar writes that "Exceptionalism paradoxically signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority), suggesting a departure from yet mastery of linear teleologies of progress. Exception refers both to a particular discourse that repetitively produce the United States as an exceptional nation-state and Giorgio Agamben's theorization of the sanctioned and naturalized disregard of the limits of state juridical and political power through times of state crises, a 'state of exception' that is used to justify the extreme measures of the state." See *Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Kivel, "Social Service or Social Change?" in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex*, ed. by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007): 136.

The comparison is made as if communities of color and black communities in particular, now enjoy structural equality. We know that's not true. We would like to see a queer community that, rather than appropriating the narrative of the civil rights movement for its marriage equality campaign, takes an active role in exposing and protesting structural inequality and structural racism.<sup>34</sup>

Gay marriage advocates, many of whom have significant economic resources, receive disproportionate amounts of media coverage. For example, the December 19th, 2008 cover of the popular gay and lesbian *Advocate Magazine* featured the headline “Gay is the New Black: the Last Great Civil Rights Struggle.”<sup>35</sup> As with the protest signs I described, the author of the article, Joseph Gross, writes as if “Black” and “gay” issues are separate, implying that all gays are like him—white, male, and seemingly affluent.

Gross describes organizing against Proposition 8 in the Castro, an expensive San Francisco neighborhood. When describing the presence of a drag queen during a protest against the proposition, Gross writes “She was fierce, and I was moved, but I also wondered why she was on the news that night, why the movement still doesn't have a Martin Luther King Jr., a telegenic, brilliant spokesperson to whom all of America can relate.”<sup>36</sup> This quotation illustrates how mainstream gay organizing works to create the image of gays and lesbians as normative. It is not inconsequential that Gross utilizes Dr. King as a model for normative leadership, belying Dr. King's radical politics including his criticism of the Vietnam War. Indeed, an exceptional reading of the civil rights movement relies on images of upstanding, proper citizens who were challenging a violent and racist state. Gross suggests that in order to receive mainstream support, gays and lesbians need to be similarly likeable and nonthreatening. Nikhil Pal Singh argues that Dr. King is utilized within an exceptionalist

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<sup>34</sup> Martha Jane Kaufman and Katie Miles, “Queer Kids of Queer Parents Against Gay Marriage,” in *Against Equality: Queer Critiques of Gay Marriage*, edited by Ryan Conrad (Lewiston: Against Equality Publishing Collective, 2010): 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Joseph Gross, “Gay is the New Black?” *Advocate Magazine*, July 3, 2009, [http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily\\_News/2008/11/16/Gay\\_is\\_the\\_New\\_Black\\_/](http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily_News/2008/11/16/Gay_is_the_New_Black_/)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

nationalist discourse, which suggests that racism was overcome through America's unique "democratic" structures and institutions.<sup>37</sup>

In order to fold into the national body, gays and lesbians must present themselves as "just like everyone else," presuming that the treatment of everyone else is desirable, fair, and just. Amy Brandzel notes that many gay organizations that promote marriage attempt to show responsible, long-lasting, essentially normative couples.<sup>38</sup> Queer activists have historically fought modes of normative assimilation; for example, a poster from a 1996 rally stated, "We don't want crumbs from society's table, and we are not fighting for a place at it. We want to overturn the fucking table. Assimilation is NOT liberation."<sup>39</sup> Cathy Cohen argues for a queer politics that does not seek entry or assimilation into normative institutions, but that seeks to overturn the mechanisms of structural inequality and oppression.

In a recent *New York Times* editorial, Dan Savage, founder of the "It Gets Better Project," argued that marriage is the most "meaningful right of them all."<sup>40</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Gross who writes, "We are close to winning everything we want. We are so close that we do not have time to rehash the Malcolm/Martin struggle between anger and peace, force and nonviolence."<sup>41</sup> Again, Gross both misrepresents and simplifies history in a way that seriously erases complex histories of state violence and racial organizing. Gross gestures towards the notion, evident in the posters at the gay marriage rally that I described above, that queers are the last in the line of disenfranchised groups to seek equality in the nation-state. The nation-state depends on modes of exclusion to justify its existence; gays' and

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<sup>37</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Brandzel, "Queering Citizenship? Same-Sex Marriage and the State." *GLQ* 11:2 (2005): 190.

<sup>39</sup> Deeg, *Against Equality*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Dan Savage, "A Gay Agenda for Everyone," *New York Times*, January 22, 2010. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23savage.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23savage.html?_r=1)

lesbians' efforts to enter into the modes of state recognition work to prop up, rather than challenge, how the state is fundamentally structured by economic, racial, and gendered inequality. Gross further neglects discussions of how queers of color and gender non-conforming individuals, are in fact isolated from structures of social, political, and economic power, and fails to recognize that marriage will not remedy these inequities.

Cohen argues for the inclusion of sexuality within a “left politics,” writing “A left framework of politics, unlike civil rights or liberal frameworks, brings into focus the systematic relationship among forms of domination, where the creation and maintenance of exploited, subservient, marginalized classes is a necessary part of at the very least, the economic configuration.”<sup>42</sup> When society is organized around marriage, the married couple is responsible for income, childcare, healthcare—rather than the government or employer. Queer studies scholars and activists argue that the fight for liberal and civil rights to marriage and inclusion in the military industrial complex perpetuates, rather than challenges, inequality for large number of individuals who do not fit into the normative married-couple model.<sup>43</sup>

PPC activists challenged economic inequalities rooted in histories of US racism, rather than non-normative family structures. They suggested, therefore, that the *government* had a responsibility to provide adequate income and social services including quality education, healthcare, and childcare. I situate their activism in a queer economic justice activism that addresses the interconnections between race, gender, and sexuality. Before turning to their specific and varied demands and activist formations, I consider how, and why, their demands were rendered invisible and obsolete.

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Joseph Gross, “Gay is the New Black?”

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 442.

<sup>43</sup> Lisa Duggan and Richard Kim, “Beyond Gay Marriage,” *Nation* (July 18/25 2005): 25.

## **“The poor are their own worst enemy”: Pathologizing the PPC**

I turn to examine dominant characterizations of the PPC written primarily during and directly after the campaign, to demonstrate how this coverage perpetuated racialized and gendered tropes of non-normativity. The complexities of the PPC participants’ demands went largely ignored in favor of sensationalist coverage of violence, disorganization, and dirt at Resurrection City, which I argue precludes the PPC from being viewed in the same manner as the civil rights movement. Furthermore, I seek to show how these tropes relate to the normalization of white heteropatriarchy. The nation-state essentially delegitimized the PPC’s demands even before they began the campaign; the press simply gave credence to the state’s pathologization of poor people of color, and legitimation to the projects of war, liberalism, and privatization.

I focus extensively on Charles Fager’s *Uncertain Resurrection: The Poor People’s Campaign* (published in 1969 just one year after the PPC ended) because he has written the only full-length published account of the PPC.<sup>44</sup> I additionally highlight Gordon Keith Mantler’s extensive analysis of the mainstream press coverage of the campaign.<sup>45</sup> The cover of Fager’s *Uncertain Resurrection* features a lone individual standing on boards atop a watery, muddy scene. It is unclear whether or not the person is a man or a woman or what the person’s race and ethnicity are. The individual faces what appears to be Resurrection City; the Washington Monument is just visible in the background. The cover art and title are indicative of the account that follows—a disparaging picture of the PPC, focused almost entirely on

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<sup>44</sup> Fager primarily describes the major press conferences and news accounts of the campaign. He apparently did not formally interview participants, or have much access to the inside of Resurrection City. Fager does not include footnotes or a bibliography; when he mentions news coverage he is inconsistent about citing the author of the article, the source, or its date of publication. Fager often refers to meetings among the SCLC steering committee (that he seemingly did not attend).

<sup>45</sup> Mantler, “The press did you in.”

Resurrection City and the SCLC's (seemingly failed) leadership. As with the shadowy and irresolute photograph, I argue that Fager's account obscures the complexity and tensions of the campaign, as well as the varied on the ground experiences of its participants.

The PPC exposed the state's role in perpetuating physical and economic violence against poor people of color. SCLC documents focused on governmental, military, police, and economic violence: "Millions of Americans lead lives scarred by the violence committed against the poor, the violence of the many indignities and inhumanities they suffer daily."<sup>46</sup> In addition, the SCLC argued that the violence being committed during the imperial war in Vietnam significantly contributed to domestic poverty in the U.S.<sup>47</sup> For example, poor people of color served and died in far greater numbers than whites, and the cost of the war in part led Congress to defund various social programs and cut approximately half a billion dollars from the War on Poverty.<sup>48</sup>

Instead of concentrating on PPC critiques of physical and economic violence, mainstream coverage of the campaign emphasized the supposed violence inside Resurrection City.<sup>49</sup> An article in the *New York Post* stated "There is rape, robbery, and cuttings every day, and there is nothing we can do about it . . . There are about 20 guns in Resurrection City. There are lead pipes and Molotov cocktails in there."<sup>50</sup> Fager concentrates on the PPC's "marshals," whom he characterizes as African-American men who served as the city's self-appointed internal police force. He writes that they often prohibited reporters from coming

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<sup>46</sup> Statement of Purpose: Poor People's Campaign, Washington, D.C, Papers of Reies López Tijerina, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N.M. Box 31, Folder 20, Page 3.

<sup>47</sup> Press Release, March 15, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Page 2.

<sup>48</sup> Gerald D. McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>49</sup> Mantler, "The Press did you in," 36-37; "The Poor: Woes in Capital," *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1968; Carl Bernstein, "Resurrection City Wears Out D.C. Officials' Welcome," *Washington Post*, June 23, 1968; "Crime Scars Poor's Drive, Leader Says: He Relinquishes Post," *Chicago Tribune*, June 22, 1968; "Officials Vow Closing

into Resurrection City, and were confrontational to the press and other participants. Fager writes that the marshals were militant and resistant to the campaign's overall strategy of nonviolence: "a significant number of young 'dudes,' many of them urban gang members, were from their arrival constantly getting out of hand, drinking, assaulting other residents and outsiders, harassing newsmen, taunting police and stealing everything that could be lifted."<sup>51</sup> Fager also notes that, "More youths were sent home, but some returned and many were replaced by others like them from the Washington area who were attracted by the free food and shelter (such as they were), the sanctuary from police pursuit, and the presence of so many suckers waiting to be hustled."<sup>52</sup> Fager writes that violence occurred in Resurrection City on an almost hourly basis, and that the press was pleased to report on it.

I do not wish to delegitimize the violence that may have taken place in Resurrection City. I do question, though, why Fager and the press focused so much on the supposed violence within Resurrection City, rather than on the systemic violence against people of color and the poor, to which the PPC was bringing attention. Mantler writes that the white, middle-class, and mostly male press corps for the most part did not question their own positionality in relation to the PPC and were therefore unsympathetic to resistance from participants. In addition, the supposed violence of the PPC eclipsed analysis of the state's overwhelming monopoly on force, and the intense FBI and police presence surrounding the PPC.<sup>53</sup>

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of Resurrection City," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1968; "Legacy of Resurrection City," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1968; Paul W. Valentine, "Air of Tension Prevails at City of the Poor," *Washington Post*, June 20, 1968;

<sup>50</sup> "Why the Poor People's Campaign Failed," *New York Post*, June 20, 1968.

<sup>51</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>53</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*; and Vigil; Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999, 54-63; Ben A. Franklin, "Law Enforcement Men to Outnumber Protesters at March of the Poor in Capital," *New York Times*, March 4, 1968.

Kivel argues that the “Police, security guards, prison wardens, highway patrol officers, sheriff’s departments, national guard members, soldiers, deans and administrators, immigration officials, and fathers, in their role to provide discipline in the family—traditionally masculine roles in the buffer zone designated to keep people in their place in the hierarchy.”<sup>54</sup> Here, Kivel importantly links state violence to white heteropatriarchy. The police and FBI at Resurrection City represented the larger state mechanisms for regulating, controlling, policing, and incarcerating poor people of color. In section V, I elaborate on the rhetoric of the “culture of pathology,” which is rooted in notions of non-normative intimacy for people of color. Roderick Ferguson argues that the violence in urban neighborhoods is often ascribed to non-normative sexuality stemming from male unemployment, unmarried women, and over-reproduction.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, many scholars and reporters neglected the multiracial and interethnic composition of the campaign—a key organizing strategy that was markedly distinct from past civil rights organizing.<sup>56</sup> Instead, mainstream coverage focused almost entirely on the SCLC, particularly Ralph Abernathy’s supposedly inadequate leadership style.<sup>57</sup> Fager suggests that Abernathy did not build up his stature as a leader in the short time period between Dr. King’s death and the start of the PPC. Fager also argues that white liberals were less supportive of Abernathy than they were of Dr. King. Abernathy’s speeches were for the

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<sup>54</sup> Kivel, “Social Service or Social Change,” 136.

<sup>55</sup> Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>56</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown and Poor”; George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> Mantler, “‘The press did you in,’ 39-40; Paul Good, “No Man Can Fill Dr. King’s Shoes’ – but Abernathy Tries,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 26, 1968; Ben A. Franklin, “Friction Is Developing Over Abernathy Leadership,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1968; Ben A. Franklin, “The Poor: Nothing Went Right But the Plea Was Clear,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1968; “SCLC Faces Leadership Problems,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 11, 1968; Ben A. Franklin, “The Poor: Campaign in Trouble,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1968; William C. Selover, “Poor People’s Campaign Beset,” May 20, 1968.



most part considered less eloquent than Dr. King's.<sup>58</sup> The SCLC further antagonized the press by consistently running behind schedule. These characterizations perpetuated the stereotype that people of color are disorganized and incompetent, and that these “cultural pathologies” contributed to their impoverishment. Ferguson notes that African-American families have often been characterized as “disorganized,” namely through reference to female-headed households. As I will discuss further, this characterization is part of a larger discourse that renders urban people of color deviant.

In addition to disorganization and violence, mainstream coverage paid considerable attention to the mud that plagued Resurrection City following various rainstorms.<sup>59</sup> Fager argues that the leadership of the PPC did not respond adequately to the extreme weather conditions. There are multiple associations to dirt and mud that were used to discredit the PPC; for example, *Newsweek* described Resurrection City as a potential health hazard, a “quagmire” and “an ill-housed, ill-fed, self-segregated, absentee-run slum afflicted with low morale, deep restiveness, and free-floating violence.”<sup>60</sup> Other press accounts characterized the PPC as physically dirty and filthy, and even an “untidy, littered morass.”<sup>61</sup> A reporter further characterized participants as “insolent loafers.”<sup>62</sup> Mantler describes how the Reverend Hosea Williams spoke out angrily to the press for sneaking “around like an underground assassin, looking for dirt and filth.”<sup>63</sup> Here dirt also stands for the reporters’ attempts to find any incriminating information on the PPC.

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<sup>58</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 22-25.

<sup>59</sup> Earl Caldwell, “Campsite of Poor Swamped by Rain: Hundreds on Mall in Capital Drive Out on ‘Worst Day,’” *New York Times*, May 29, 1968; Faith Berry, “The anger and problems and sickness of the poor of the whole nation were in this one shantytown,” *New York Times*, July 7, 1968; James Yuenger, “Poor People Refuse to Leave Mud-Filled Resurrection City,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1968.

<sup>60</sup> “Poverty: Courting Trouble,” *Newsweek*, Tijerina Papers, Box 28, Folder 22, Page 30.

<sup>61</sup> “Campaign Droops,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1968.

<sup>62</sup> James L. Kilpatrick, “Too Many ‘Poor People’ Are Professionally So,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1968.

<sup>63</sup> Mantler, “The press did you in,” 34.

Associations between dirt and racial and sexual difference have often been used to regulate people of color, women, and queers. Poor people have been physically marked as non-normative through a lack of poor hygiene and supposedly dirty and disorganized homes. Citing Phyllis Palmer, Roderick Ferguson notes that the production of the domestic space as heteronormative, white, middle-class, feminine, pure, and clean requires, “the ever-present and constantly regenerating racial, class, and sexual differences that require heteronormative regulation. That rationalization justifies its operation . . . by regulating sexuality away from the sinful and the dirty.”<sup>64</sup> Specifically, dirt is associated with non-normative sexuality including prostitution and female-headed households. These markers are read within the rhetoric of a “culture of pathology” that blames poverty on the poor themselves and also justifies increased state surveillance and policing. The state is thus absolved from its role in causing, maintaining, and perpetuating poverty; and responsibility is placed on the individual.

In section III of this thesis, I critiqued gay and lesbian attempts to be included in the normative, and heteropatriarchal rights to marriage. Specifically, I analyzed how appropriations of the civil rights movement have been used to situate (affluent white or multicultural) gays and lesbians as normative, upright citizens thereby propping up, rather than dismantling modes of racial, economic and legal exclusion. Homonormativity therefore folds (seemingly white and affluent citizens) into a private domesticity in which the state cannot intervene. Instead of seeking to dismantle white, heteropatriarchal spaces of domesticity, normative gays and lesbians contribute to an exceptionalist discourse that continues to render deviant people of color and gender non-conforming individuals.

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<sup>64</sup> Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 103. Ferguson discusses the work of Phyllis Palmer in *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 138.

I suggest that these negative representations in part explain why the PPC has been sidelined from activist histories, and largely eclipsed by the civil rights movement. I suggest that these representations resulted in a far different affective relationship to the PPC than to the civil rights movement. Fager and the mainstream press provide a number of arguments for why the PPC was a failure, and the civil rights movement a success.<sup>65</sup> Fager describes civil rights activists as moral, upstanding, clean, and Christian in contrast to the supposedly violent, dirty, lazy, and disorganized PPC participants. Fager also argues that the PPC was not fighting against clear enough “enemies,” since poverty was too diffuse and amorphous to name and confront. He additionally suggests that the PPC did not produce big or entertaining enough public “spectacles,” particularly through images of nonviolent resistance. He suggests that these factors contributed to the lack of strong support from the press, local Black community in Washington, D.C., government, and the wider nation.<sup>66</sup>

Mike Clark, president of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Appalachia who participated in the PPC, reviewed a manuscript of Fager’s book. While he generally agreed with Fager’s analysis of SCLC leaderships’ missteps, he gives a more critical view of press coverage of the campaign. He astutely argues that for the predominately white, middle-class (and male) reporters, “The myth of press objectivity dies a wet and messy death in the mud of Resurrection City.”<sup>67</sup> In effect, he argues that the press supported the governmental and class elites: “The Press served as the surgical tool of the ruling class and tried to crush the ideas and education which came out of Resurrection City.”<sup>68</sup> Notably, Fager did not incorporate Clark’s criticisms in his final text. Clark was not the only individual

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<sup>65</sup> Robert B. Semple Jr., “Mood of the Marchers: Patience Worn Thin and a Feeling This Is the Last Chance: Anger Replaces Hope of ’63,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1968.

<sup>66</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 71; Kahn, “Why the Poor People’s Campaign Failed.”

<sup>67</sup> Letter to Chuck Fager from Mike Clark, December 13, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 109, Folder 10, Page 2.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

who spoke out against the mainstream coverage of the campaign. Hosea Williams argued: “The newspapers just *lied*. I never seen [sic] papers like the Washington *Post* and the Washington *Star* stoop to such a low ebb!”<sup>69</sup> Williams suggested that the government had also planted reporters, and that pressure had been placed on religious leaders to stay away from the movement.<sup>70</sup>

In summing up the end of the campaign, Fager writes “The Campaign had no momentum; it had failed both as a moral crusade and as entertainment.”<sup>71</sup> The mainstream press similarly eulogized the PPC, justifying a negligent response from the federal government to the campaign’s demands.<sup>72</sup> Fager’s vision of activism suggests that progressive movements are only successful if they result in clear support from the mainstream press and legislative or legal gains. As I have argued, it is these sentiments that have reinforced a simplistic view of the civil rights movement and made it the paradigm for mainstream gay and lesbian organizing. In contrast to these portrayals, I characterize the PPC as queer alliance of diverse individuals calling for radical social and economic change. The PPC challenged the nation to address the historical roots of poverty in racism, which remains critical for queer activism today.

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<sup>69</sup> Mantler, “The press did you in,” 33.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 124.

## **Bodies in Motion: Queer Disruptions to Normativity**

The fight for gay marriage often presumes a homogenous, or “multicultural,” constituency of gays and lesbians seeking rights to citizenship. I have argued that the gay marriage movement often fails to substantively address race, class, colonialism and imperialism. In addition, the appropriation of the civil rights movement neglects civil rights activists’ economic analysis and their attempts to build multi-racial and ethnic coalitions during the PPC. The PPC challenged a liberal, race-blind multiculturalism by assembling a heterogeneous body of activists to challenge structural racism and economic inequality across the nation. In this section, I examine how race, gender, and sexuality were assembled in PPC literature and through the specific physical assemblies of participants with one another during various stages of the campaign.

A PPC press release states: “Our insight into the structure of American society teaches us that the right to vote or to eat in any restaurant, while important does not penetrate the ‘power plant’ and therefore does not actually affect conditions of living.”<sup>73</sup> Here, the word “power” takes on several meanings. Power connotes both access to better employment and resources and to forms of social and economic authority and influence. The PPC was meant to connect individuals from across the country who shared limited access to various modes of power. The rhetoric of power was also significant given the growing Black and Chicano power movements. The SCLC was seeking to harness the energy of these movements for non-violent civil disobedience. Each contingent of the PPC was facing a society in which whiteness, patriarchy and heterosexuality were treated as the norm.

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<sup>72</sup> Mantler, ““The press did you in,”” 45.

<sup>73</sup> Statement of Purpose: Poor People’s Campaign, Washington, D.C, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Page 3.

PPC activists directly challenged the liberal notion that racism had been overcome, and that capitalism was an equal playing field regardless of race, gender, or sexuality.

Mantler historicizes the uniqueness of the PPC's interracial and ethnic organizing. He argues that labor and social justice organizing by African-Americans and ethnic Mexicans significantly decreased during the Cold War. In addition, civil rights leaders were less likely to push for economic justice during the 1940s and 1950s, for fear of being labeled communist and garnering increased state surveillance in the context of the red scare.<sup>74</sup> During the early 1960s, civil rights campaigns largely sought equal voting rights and better education and were "rooted in American citizenship, particularly the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment."<sup>75</sup> However, Mantler notes that by the mid-1960s, African-Americans wanted better jobs and income more than access to public areas.<sup>76</sup> The SCLC had built limited coalitions with Latinos and Puerto Ricans during the Chicago Freedom Movement in 1966.<sup>77</sup> Widespread dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War in 1967, especially among people of color, helped bring together African-American and Chicano activists.<sup>78</sup>

A PPC Minority Leaders' Conference was held in Atlanta on March 14, 1968.<sup>79</sup> Mantler argues that the conference was one of the most productive and promising aspects of the campaign. This meeting marked the first physical "assemblage" of PPC activists together in one space. A SCLC press release reads: "Representatives from each group talked about poverty and oppression of their people and the rich culture of the heritage they cherish. There were songs and stories of the poor white miner, the Mexican-American migrant

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<sup>74</sup> Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor," 24-87.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>78</sup> Lorena Oropeza. *¡Raza Sí! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor," 100.

worker, the Negro slave, the Puerto Rican worker, the proud original American – the Indian.”<sup>80</sup> This physical assembly of activists helped to build the momentum of the PPC.

Following this meeting, the PPC, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and the Friends Committee on National Legislation assembled the “Demands of Poor People’s Campaign to Executive Agencies,” which was presented to various government agencies by the “Committee of 100” consisting of PPC leaders and poor participants. As with those of the many PPC activists who were a part of the campaign, not all of these demands were “radical” or “progressive.” The PPC was not calling for anarchy, the overthrow of capitalism, but primarily for positive rights to jobs, education, housing, food, healthcare, and collective bargaining and for the government to uphold anti-discrimination laws.

Many of the demands stressed the inclusion of the poor in decision-making, organizing and running various programs. These were made to the Department of Education, Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Labor.<sup>81</sup> The statement to the HUD challenged urban renewal programs for segregating poor people of color. There were also demands to this department for meaningful employment for all citizens, job training, and living wages that could support a family or those who were unable to work. The statement prepared by the SCLC called for access to universal healthcare, the removal of toxins and pollutions from their environments, and quality food and nutrition.<sup>82</sup> The statement to the Department of Agriculture described widespread conditions of hunger and malnutrition, particularly in the rural South, claiming: “that approximately 300 of the 800

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<sup>80</sup> Press Release, March 15, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Page 2.

<sup>81</sup> Demands of Poor People’s Campaign to Executive Agencies, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Pages 1-20.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

counties identified by the Department of Agriculture as among the poorest—continue without any food programs.”<sup>83</sup> The PPC requested increased food stamps and reduced school lunches, as well as support for poor rural African-Americans and Mexican Americans to grow their own foods through farmer cooperatives.<sup>84</sup>

Assemblage serves as a useful framework to analyze the PPC because of the diversity and heterogeneity of the activists involved. The demands of Indo-Hispano and Native activists were distinct from many of the other demands because of their emphasis on treaty rights, land rights and cultural sovereignty. I utilize Puar’s theory of assemblage to consider how conflicts, disruptions, and collaborations that took place during the PPC incorporated these seemingly disparate demands. Rather than suggest that race, gender, and sexuality are discrete and fixed categories, I interrogate how they were constructed and deconstructed through constant movement during the PPC. My discussion of Indo-Hispano and Native participation focuses less explicitly on sexuality than on the assemblage of histories of US colonialism to the larger campaign. I go on to discuss the role of welfare activists with the campaign, as they assembled race and class in their critiques of the state’s enforcement of white heteropatriarchy on poor women of color. In the final section, I turn to analyze the physical assemblages that took place as activists resided at Resurrection City.

### Indo-Hispano Participation

While many of the demands of PPC activists reflected the conditions of poor people of color in urban areas, the addition of rural activists to the PPC led to distinct histories of racial injustice, and corresponding demands upon the nation. These demands were

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 8.



assembled into PPC literature and also through the bodies of activists as they travelled, lived, and protested with one another during the campaign. I elaborate on the inclusion of Indo-Hispano and Native activists in detail, because there has been little written on how their participation in the PPC specifically related to processes of racial construction. I seek to elaborate upon the specific decolonial perspectives of these participants at distinct points during the PPC.

Many activists from New Mexico who participated with the PPC were associated with the land-based movement Alianza, which sought to regain lands that had been taken following the US Mexico War of 1848.<sup>85</sup> An Alianza newsletter from 1965 states:

This said treaty has been completely violated in all forms to the injury and destruction not only of our economic needs by also of our culture. This bitter experience and hard struggle, without a ray of light or hope, the cry of our people and the shameful misery has forced us to unite ourselves for the first time in the last 118 years or since the treaty was signed.<sup>86</sup>

For Reies Tijerina, the founder of Alianza, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in the name of God, and became a part of the US Constitution; he suggests that the nation-state would remain broken until the US government honored the treaty.<sup>87</sup> The quotation also conveys what Jake Kosek describes as a feeling of profound loss in Northern New Mexico, which remains to the present-day: the loss of land, of culture, of identity, and significantly of

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>85</sup> For more on Alianza's participation with the PPC, see Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor," 158-228; Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Longman, 2000), 370-1; David Correia, "'Rousers of the Rabble' in the New Mexico Land Grant War," *Antipode* 40, no. 4 (2008): 561-583; Oropeza, *¡Raza Sil! Guerra No!*, 73-74; Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice*, 54-63. For more on the US Mexico War, see Christopher Conway, *The U.S.-Mexico War: a Binational Reader* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010); Richard Castillo del, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); Alvin R Sunseri, *Seeds of Discord: New Mexico in the Aftermath of the American Conquest, 1846-1861* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979).

<sup>86</sup> Alianza Federal de Mercedes Newsletter, 1965, Tijerina Papers, Box two, Folder one.

<sup>87</sup> For more on Tijerina, see Jacqueline Bernard, *Voices from the Southwest: Antonio Jose Martinez, Elfege Baca, Reies López Tijerina* (New York: Firebrand Books, 1972); Patricia Bell Blawis, *Tijerina and the Land Grants: Mexican Americans in Struggle for Their Heritage* (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Rudy Busto, *King Tiger: the Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Richard Cummings, *Grito! Reies Tijerina and the New Mexico Land Grant War of 1967* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970); Michael Jenkinson, *Tijerina* (Albuquerque: Paisano Press, 1968); Peter Nabokov, *Tijerina and the Courthouse Raid* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1970).

history.<sup>88</sup> Loreana Oropeza argues that Tijerina acted as a “memory interpreter” in New Mexico. In articulating this loss he helped ignite Alianza activism as well as subsequent scholarship on the US settler-colonialism in the Southwest.<sup>89</sup>

The inclusion of Alianza members brought to light a significant, though relatively unknown history of US settler-colonialism in the Southwest to the PPC. While many Americans were familiar with the SCLC, and the civil rights movement, the history of settler-colonialism in New Mexico has been rendered mostly invisible in the larger imagining of US history. Tijerina described the population of individuals who lost land as “Indo-Hispano” people, individuals of both indigenous and Spanish descent mainly located in Northern New Mexico.<sup>90</sup> When asked about how he became involved with the PPC, Tijerina said

I told Dr. King and the people when he asked me to talk I said I will, I will participate with one condition, and that is that the...Indian case people can be in the front, like an arrow, and then the Black peoples' problems, and then the Indo-Hispano, us, problems, third...but my condition is that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo be taken into consideration because the Constitution of New Mexico, Article 2 Section 5 that says all rights, all the rights civil, political, or religious guaranteed to

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<sup>88</sup>Jake Kosek, *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). For more on the history of Spanish land grants in New Mexico, see Charles L. Briggs and John R. Van Ness, *Land, Water, and Culture: New Perspectives on Hispanic Land Grants* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Roots of Resistance: A History of Land Tenure in New Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Malcolm Ebricht, *Land Grants and Lawsuits in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994) and *The Tierra Amarilla Grant: A History of Chicanery* (Santa Fe: Center for Land Grant Studies, 1980); Emlen G. Hall, *Four Leagues of Pecos: A Legal History of the Pecos Grant, 1800-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); William Keleher, *Maxwell Land Grant: A New Mexico Item* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); Antoinette Sedillo López, *Land Grants, Housing, and Political Power* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995); Maria E. Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land-grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Correia, “Making Destiny Manifest: United States Territorial Expansion and the Dispossession of Two Mexican Property Claims in New Mexico,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009): 87-103 and “Taking Timber, Earth, and Water: The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and the Struggle for New Mexico’s Land Grants,” *Natural Resources Journal* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 949-962; Denise Holladay Damico, “The Cebolleta Land Grant: Multicultural Cooperation and Contention,” *Natural Resources Journal* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 963-982; Phillip B. Gonzales, “Struggle for Survival: the Hispanic Land-grants of New Mexico, 1848-2001,” *Agricultural History* 77, no. 2 (2000): 293-324; Manuel Garcia Y. Griego, “Persistence and Disintegration: New Mexico’s Community Land Grants in Historical Perspective,” *Natural Resources Journal* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 847-856; Kristopher N. Houghton, “The Blighted History of the Alameda Land Grant: *Montoya v. Unknown Heirs of Vigil*” *Natural Resources Journal* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 983-1008; Elaine Patricia Lujan, “The Pajarito Land Grant: a Contextual Analysis of its Confirmation by the U.S. Government.” *Natural Resources Journal* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 1009-1038;

<sup>89</sup>Lorena Oropeza, “The Heart of Chicano History: Reyes López Tijerina as a Memory Interpreter,” *Sixties* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 2009): 49-67.

<sup>90</sup>I use the term “Indo-Hispano” though the population Tijerina refers to can also be termed Hispano, Neuvomexicano, Mexican, or Mexican-American.

the people of New Mexico by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo shall be preserved inviolate. And they had been you know stepping on it like many people on the Bible...  
[Interviewer] And how does that relate to the Poor People's [campaign]? What about the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo?  
Well when they steal your property and everything you become poor. You understand? What makes you poor? That was what the campaign was all about.<sup>91</sup>

There are a number of complex tensions implicit in Alianza activism in relation to what Laura Gómez terms the “double colonization” of New Mexico by both Spain and the United States.<sup>92</sup> Though Tijerina begins by describing his arguments with PPC leadership about whether Natives should lead the marchers, he quickly shifts to address Indo-Hispanos’ distinct concerns. By doing so, he separates Indo-Hispanos from Natives. As Loreana Oropeza argues, the term “Indo-Hispano” reflects the often Mestizo make-up of Spanish land grantees, in contrast to their depiction as the white descendants of Spanish colonizers.<sup>93</sup>

Tijerina’s criticisms of U.S. colonization in New Mexico were not equally applied to Spanish colonization that had taken traditional Native lands, involved great violence, and attempted religious conversion of the indigenous populations. Spanish land grants were hardly egalitarian; they often took a feudal structure in which race, class, and gender stratified the labor force. It is important to keep this history in mind, especially when thinking about Tijerina and Alianza’s decolonial rhetoric and coalition building with Native activists prior to and during the PPC.

The double colonization of New Mexico led Alianza members to make distinct demands from other participants in the PPC. The concerns of Indo-Hispanos were included in the demands to the executive agencies and were also described in Resurrection City’s newspaper *True Unity News*. Their demands called for treaties with the government to be enforced, for the teaching of Spanish language, culture, and history in schools, for the return

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<sup>91</sup> Reies López Tijerina, interview by Christina Juhász-Wood and Jakob Schiller, September 18, 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Laura E Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: the Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 10.

of land, and for rights to minerals, water, and grazing.<sup>94</sup> Tijerina reflected on the differences between Indo-Hispano and Native demands, and others in the campaign:

The demands of the Negro section are for economic assimilation through increased job and educational opportunity, housing improvement and guaranteed annual income. In many cases these parallel but are not identical to the demands of the Spanish-Americans and the Indians, whose cultural history and treaty agreements with the U.S. Government raise different specific grievances. The demand of urban, industrially oriented Negroes for jobs and education differs greatly from the demand of Northwest Indians for their rights, guaranteed by treaty to hunt and fish their ancestral lands and waters. The demand for upgraded education by Appalachian whites varies greatly with the demand for the inclusion of cultural history and bilingual education, guaranteed by treaty and state constitution, of the Spanish-Americans of the Southwest.<sup>95</sup>

Most of these demands made it into the executive demands, with the exception of the calls to have Spanish taught in schools.<sup>96</sup>

Alianza's demands were also placed in a transnational context. During the PPC, Tijerina held a meeting with the Mexican Ambassador in which he presented a petition asking the country of Mexico through her ambassador to intervene for America's Spanish-speaking people.<sup>97</sup> He requested that Mexico bring US violations of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the United Nations.<sup>98</sup> This was not the first time that Tijerina had appealed to Mexico to assist Indo-Hispanos in New Mexico. Tijerina had conducted extensive legal research in Mexico pertaining to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and New Mexican land rights, and had led a caravan to Mexico to request support in challenging the US government.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Oropeza, "The Heart of Chicano History," 49-67.

<sup>94</sup> Alianza Federal de Mercedes Newsletter, 1965, Tijerina Papers, Box Two, Folder One.

<sup>95</sup> News Release, June 3, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 28, Page 1.

<sup>96</sup> Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor," 189.

<sup>97</sup> News Release, June 3, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 28, Page 1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Lorena Oropeza, "Becoming Indo-Hispano: Land-Grant Activists Confront the Legacies of Conquest in 1960s New Mexico" (presentation, American Studies Association Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 2010).

PPC demands were problematic in that they called for an end to Mexican and Caribbean migration until every American worker had been given a job.<sup>100</sup> This demand perhaps reflected the early history of anti-immigrant sentiment of the United Farmworkers.<sup>101</sup> (Although César Chávez did not participate with the PPC, he built coalitions with SCLC leaders and other PPC participants.) These demands stressed state support of American citizens as separate from and more important than support of those immigrating to the US. The assemblage of California farmworker demands with the PPC further points to the social construction of race, as such demands differed from Indo-Hispanos and Mexicans.

Mainstream press accounts of the PPC “queered” Alianza and Tijerina from the other participants.<sup>102</sup> Fager argues that the animosity between Tijerina and SCLC leadership stemmed from disagreements over different activist and protest tactics. The *Washington Post* reported that Tijerina felt “betrayed” by PPC leaders for ignoring the demands of Indo-Hispano and Native participants: “Tijerina has repeatedly accused SCLC of dominating the campaign and excluding non-Negro elements from policy-making roles.”<sup>103</sup> Tijerina had also been critical of SCLC leadership for staying in the Pitts Motel rather than in Resurrection City. Press accounts suggested that conflicts between Alianza and the SCLC had led Alianza to stay at the Hawthorne School, rather than at Resurrection City.

There was also limited press coverage of an action spearheaded by Tijerina and Corky Gonzales, Chairman of the “Crusade for Justice” in Denver, Colorado. Mantler notes that the PPC helped to build coalitions between the more urban Crusade for Justice and the

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<sup>100</sup> Demands of Poor People’s Campaign to Executive Agencies, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Page 2.

<sup>101</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Richard A Garcia. *César Chávez: a Triumph of Spirit* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995.)

<sup>102</sup> Mantler, “The press did you in,” 42; Ben A Franklin, “Non-Negro Units Hit March Chiefs: Charge They Are Ignored and ‘Abused’ by Black Militants,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1968.

rural land-based claims of Alianza. The protest took place at the Department of Justice in support of Chicano students who had been arrested during the student “blowouts” in East Los Angeles. The students had been protesting unequal education for Chicano students. The press release for the PPC action quoted Elizar Risco, one of the students arrested, who framed the actions in relation to US colonialism:

We are behind bars now but these bars are only a symbol of the oppression Mexican-American people have been suffering for over 120 years under Anglo Colonization . . . We issue a call to La Raza Unida in the Southwest, to our black brothers, to our Puerto Rican brothers and to our Indian brothers and all those Anglos who see through the farce of white society that preaches freedom and practices oppression, to demonstrate solidarity.<sup>104</sup>

In this case, Indo-Hispano, Chicano, and other PPC participants assembled in response to events that were happening outside of Washington. Although activists assembled distinct histories of racialized oppression, they were united by their demands for better education for poor people of color.

In contrast to mainstream press reports, Mantler describes significant activist and cultural exchange among the members of the Western Caravan of the PPC, which included participants primarily from East Los Angeles, New Mexico, and Denver. Busses left from Los Angeles and met-up in different locations across the West and Southwest, holding rallies at major cities. For example, when the caravan arrived in Albuquerque, there was a march with over 1,000 people and “a rally with an almost festival-like atmosphere, food, entertainment including Hollywood actor and activist Marlon Brando, and speeches by Abernathy, Tijerina, Tuscarora chief Mad Bear Anderson, and others.”<sup>105</sup> Mantler also describes the interpersonal connections that were made among members of the Western Caravan as they travelled the long distance to Washington with one-another:

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<sup>103</sup> Paul W. Valentine, “Tijerina Charges Poor Were Betrayed,” *Washington Post*, July 12, 1968 and “Too Many Factions Say Poor People’s Unity,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1968.

<sup>104</sup> Alianza News Release, Monday, June 3, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 27, Page 2.

<sup>105</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 197.

After spending anywhere from five to eight days living on the road together, in both exuberant rallies and intimate living quarters, large sports venues and personal homes, a community started to develop on those busses—sometimes between African Americans, ethnic Mexicans, and American Indians and even more often among people of the same ethnicity from different cities.<sup>106</sup>

He argues that these connections provided significant foundations for continued interethnic and interracial coalition building.

*True Unity News*, the internal newspaper of the PPC also challenged the image of conflicts between organizers. The paper describes the productive work of activists located in the Hawthorne School and cites a May 28<sup>th</sup> press conference, in which Abernathy, Corky Gonzales, and Tijerina argued that the press had overplayed conflicts among them.<sup>107</sup> In response to a critical *Albuquerque Journal* article Tijerina argued that Alianza had stayed at the Hawthorne School simply because there was not enough space at Resurrection City.<sup>108</sup>

Mike Clark, from the Highlander Center, also positively described the community at Hawthorne, which included Chicanos, Indo-Hispanos, Natives, and African-Americans. Mantler notes that Hawthorne also included poor whites from Appalachia and describes how Indo-Hispanos and Chicanos had rarely seen poor whites who were that impoverished: many did not have shoes.<sup>109</sup> Drawing on interviews with Hawthorne residents, Mantler describes the community there as “tight-knit” and argues that the interactions that took place at Hawthorne were also significant for the growing Chicano movement.<sup>110</sup> The limited attention given to the Hawthorne school by the mainstream press contributed to the vision of the PPC as a primarily African-American movement riddled with conflict. As I have argued, these characterizations served both to discredit PPC activists and to portray poverty as the result of racialized “cultures of pathology.”

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>107</sup> True Unity News of Resurrection City, May 30, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Pages 1-4.

<sup>108</sup> News Release, June 3, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 28, Page 1.

<sup>109</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 213.

In a press release at the end of the campaign, Tijerina spoke positively about the PPC, stating: “the poor have shifted the ‘burden of proof’ off their shoulders. In the eyes of the world now, the ‘burden of proof’ is on the rich and no longer the poor.”<sup>111</sup> Though Alianza activism waned after the 1970s, there have been continued activist and legal efforts to regain lands and challenge US national exceptionalism by illuminating the colonization of New Mexico.

### Native Participation

On May 30<sup>th</sup> 1968, a group of PPC participants protested a Supreme Court decision that limited Native fishing rights in Washington State. Tijerina argued that the Supreme Court was breaking its treaty obligations to Natives in a similar manner to the breaking of their obligations to Indo-Hispanos with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In a press release before the protest Tijerina stated: “We support our Indian brothers at all times, in all places, and under all conditions when it is a matter of their treaty rights, for their fight and our fight are the same.”<sup>112</sup> When participants arrived at the Supreme Court, several basement windows were broken.<sup>113</sup> While they waited, “Indians smoked peace pipes, played tom-toms, and waited for the clerk of the court to acknowledge them.”<sup>114</sup> Tijerina and others, including SCLC leader Ralph Abernathy, argued with a Clerk of the Supreme Court until a group of about 21 of them were allowed into the building.<sup>115</sup> While lowering the American flag to

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<sup>110</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 14; Mary Finch Hoyt, “A Free-Wheeling School with High Marks,” *Parade Magazine*, January 18, 1970.

<sup>111</sup> Press Release, July 20, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 28, Page 1.

<sup>112</sup> News Release, May 29, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 28, Page 1.

<sup>113</sup> News Release, May 30, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 27, Page 1. Ernesto Virgil later admitted that he and other protesters had broken the windows, see Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 217.

<sup>114</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 217.

<sup>115</sup> “Courting Trouble,” *Newsweek*, June 10, 1968.



half-mast, three individuals were arrested.<sup>116</sup> Following their arrests, the police viciously attacked roughly a dozen protesters.<sup>117</sup>

The press offered a critical view of the Supreme Court protest. For example, a *Newsweek* article stated:

The march was beset from without by hostility, from within by tensions among its disparate bands of blacks, whites, Indians, Latins, hippies. Then to top all of this, the campaign last week suffered its worse embarrassment to date when a handful of members got out of hand and turned a protest march into a raggedy, window-smashing, siege upon the unlikeliest target of all—the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>118</sup>

However, in a statement to the media, the “Indian Contingent” of the PPC challenged the coverage of the Supreme Court protest stating:

Instead of reporting to the American Public of the real issues that involve the right of Indian tribes to fish for their basic subsistence, the press headlines about the broken windows. The American public was in fact told that American Indians came to Washington to get windows broken. While it is unfortunate that these were incidents, the windows can be replaced at a minimal cost in comparison to the human cost caused by the ruling of the Supreme Court.<sup>119</sup>

Tijerina’s attempts to speak *for* Natives during the campaign is problematic, and as noted did not address the history of Spanish colonization of Native lands in New Mexico. Press coverage of the Supreme Court protests included many more quotes from Tijerina than from Native participants.<sup>120</sup> Native activist Tillie Walker critiqued Tijerina for excluding Native women from leadership roles.<sup>121</sup> In addition, Mantler notes a number of critiques of Tijerina by other Hawthorne residents for his lack of organization, disregard for the welfare of some Chicano activists, and seemingly self-interested attempts at publicity.<sup>122</sup>

The assemblage of Native activists to the PPC added another layer of complexity to the organization of the campaign. Prior to the PPC, some Native participants expressed their concerns that the PPC would result in increased government attention, and the possibility of

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 217.

<sup>118</sup> “Courting Trouble,” *Newsweek*, June 10, 1968.

<sup>119</sup> Statement to the National and International Press by the Indian Contingent, Poor People’s Campaign, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Page 1.

<sup>120</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 230.

losing funds for some of their community action programs.<sup>123</sup> Some Native activists viewed their interests as too distinct from the PPC to allow for their participation, for example in a June 10<sup>th</sup> letter from Kahn-Tineta Horn to Ralph Abernathy during the National Aboriginal Traditional Conference.<sup>124</sup> Horn focuses her criticisms on the African-American organizers of the campaign. (She does not really discuss the other groups involved.) Horn argues that Native issues were distinct from those of African-Americans because they involved losses of land, fishing and hunting rights, treaty rights, and culture rather than access to jobs, welfare, etc.<sup>125</sup> She further argued that the Christian religious influence on African-American organizing was incompatible with Native beliefs. She additionally wrote that, “The motivations of Negroes and those of Whites are identical—ambition, effort, discipline, acquisition, possession, competition and destruction. The motivations of Indians are the opposite and are not related and there is no common ground or motivation.”<sup>126</sup> Horn appeared to be referring to the previously described demonstration outside the Supreme Court, arguing that participants were seeking publicity, and should not be taken to represent all Natives. She does argue that African-Americans could “endorse” Native causes, but not conflate them with African-American ones.<sup>127</sup>

However, many Native activists chose to participate with the PPC. Hank Adams and Tillie Walker were two of the main Native organizers prior to and during PPC. Adams was a seasoned activist who had been involved in numerous Native struggles.<sup>128</sup> Walker had been active with the SCLC, and was a director of the United Scholarship Service (USS) that

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 263-264.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 224-225.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 247-248.

<sup>124</sup> Kahn-Tineta Horn Letter to Ralph Abernathy, June 10, 1968, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 20, Pages 1-4.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>128</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 242.

provided scholarships to Native and Mexican students.<sup>129</sup> She recruited over 100 Natives from over a dozen tribes across the country to join the campaign.<sup>130</sup> The caravan of Natives that joined the campaign was nicknamed the “Indian Trail.”<sup>131</sup> Native participants addressed their demands to the Department of Interior and specifically to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. These demands called for “guaranteed jobs, guaranteed income, housing, schools, economic development, but most important, *we want these things on our own terms.*”<sup>132</sup> The participants described the Department of Interior as racist, paternalistic and established through processes of colonial domination, and defined the inclusion of Natives as “tokenism.”<sup>133</sup> In contrast to the anti-segregation arguments made by the PPC to the Departments of Education and Housing, Native participants described their rights to “separate and equal” communities.

A statement written by Chief Mad Bear from the Iroquois Confederacy on June 11<sup>th</sup> describes some conflicts during the campaign. He criticizes the African-American leadership for attempting to speak for Native participants, writing: “We intend to assert our own individuality, follow our own leadership and maintain equal voice with other ethnic groups in this very worthy campaign.”<sup>134</sup> He suggests that the problem could potentially be remedied through discussions with SCLC leaders. Mantler writes that many Native participants with the PPC viewed their participation positively. Native participation led to the formation of the Coalition of Indian Citizens and helped Native women build their leadership styles. Mantler also notes that many Native activists left the campaign further disillusioned with the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>132</sup> Demands of Poor People’s Campaign to Executive Agencies, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Page 18. Emphasis added.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>134</sup> “Press Release Poor People’s Campaign North American Indian Contingent,” Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 20, Page 1.

potential of the federal government to offer them assistance, and instead looked to focus more energy on their local communities.

The participation of Indo-Hispano and Native participants with the PPC added complex decolonial perspectives to the campaign. The “queer” decolonial perspective of Indo-Hispano and Native activists on the PPC challenged an identity politics rooted in simplistic views of Black/white race-relations in the US. A theory of assemblage resists folding-into the white, heteropatriarchal national-body. The shifting categories of racial formation for Indo-Hispanos, Chicanos, Mexicans, and Natives stem from complex histories of Spanish and US settler-colonialism and their continued resonance for racialized populations that experienced some of the highest rates of marginalization and impoverishment in the US.<sup>135</sup> As I have argued, “queer” does not purport to speak for a unified or singular individual or population. The inclusion of Alianza and Native activists in the PPC fostered an alliance of activists who were seeking fundamental racial and economic changes to the nation, without equating their demands as the same.

### Solidarity Day

However, the PPC did not always include the perspectives of Indo-Hispano and Native activists equally. In addition to their demands to government executive agencies and encampment at Resurrection City, PPC participants assembled for a large event called Solidarity Day. Gordon Keith Mantler writes that the press focused much attention on Solidarity Day, which took place on June 19<sup>th</sup>, and was billed as the main event of the

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<sup>135</sup> Kosek, *Understories*, 33.

PPC.<sup>136</sup> The press contrasted the event with the 1963 March on Washington, suggesting that it lacked the power, hope, and overall success of that march.<sup>137</sup> However, independent and alternative newspapers often wrote positive portrayals.<sup>138</sup> Mantler notes that several of these publications detailed the central role of women. Mantler writes, “Although Ralph Abernathy was the headliner, reporter Ethel Payne reported that Coretta Scott King, the National Council of Negro Women President Dorothy Height, and American Indian activist Martha Grass stole the show – and perhaps appropriately so, considering how poverty disproportionately affected non-white women.”<sup>139</sup> Because of the central role of women in the PPC, gender and sexuality became physically and theoretically assembled into this queer alliance.

Baynard Rustin had been hired to help organize Solidarity Day, after he had initially chosen not to participate. Rustin was a key tactician of the civil rights movement and the primary organizer of the 1963 march. He had argued against King’s criticism of the Vietnam War in 1967.<sup>140</sup> He was also an early critic of the PPC, arguing that the campaign should stress coalition politics rather than massive civil disobedience and that the SCLC should present a concrete and achievable set of demands to the government.<sup>141</sup> On Solidarity Day, Rustin presented to the press a list of 14 simplified campaign demands, which immediately drew praise from the otherwise hostile press.<sup>142</sup> Fager argued that this version clarified the demands, whereas Mantler argues that key demands were entirely removed, especially from the Southwest contingent: “The declaration omitted demands for land rights, fishing rights,

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<sup>136</sup> Mantler, “The Press did you in,” 45.

<sup>137</sup> Robert B. Semple Jr., “Mood of the Marchers: Patience Worn Thin and a Feeling This Is the Last Chance: Anger Replaces Hope of ’63,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1968.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 85, 115.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>142</sup> Gordon Mantler. “The Press did you in,” 44.

greater prosecution of police brutality, and an immediate end to the Vietnam War.”<sup>143</sup>

Conflicts erupted between PPC leaders and Rustin over his actions, and Rustin chose to resign from the campaign.<sup>144</sup>

Rustin’s “gay sexuality” animates the complexities of assemblage explored by both Puar and Fiol-Matta. Rustin did not press for an inclusion of sexuality within the PPC’s analysis; in fact, during Solidarity Day, he worked to simplify rather than expand the number of PPC demands on government agencies. The HRC, an influential gay rights organization seeking inclusion of gays and lesbians in the nation primarily through legalized marriage, has championed Rustin.<sup>145</sup> An HRC guide on coming out for African-Americans describes Rustin’s involvement with the original 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom as “behind the scenes.”<sup>146</sup> Rustin’s relation to the nation mirrors that of Gabriel Mistral.<sup>147</sup> (For the HRC, Rustin serves as an example of a gay figure, such as Mistral, who was able to hold significant positions of power despite his non-normative sexuality.) Notwithstanding his “queer” sexuality, Rustin pushed for more conservative demands than other people. Rustin helped to create the image that civil rights participants were upstanding, deserving citizens. In contrast, as I have argued, the mainstream media portrayed PPC participants as the pathological, undeserving poor. However, I have argued that it was these activists’ challenges that remain pertinent for a heterogeneous queer activism.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>145</sup> “Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans,” Human Rights Campaign, accessed May 1, 2011, <http://www.hrc.org/documents/AfricanAmericanResourceGuide.pdf>.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> See Fiol-Matta, *A Queer Mother for the Nation*.

## Welfare Rights Activism

Although welfare rights activists were key contributors to the PPC, scholars of the campaign have paid limited attention to their participation.<sup>148</sup> The inclusion of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) was particularly important given the paternalism and sexism of the SCLC and other organizations involved with the PPC. The NWRO assembled gender and sexuality into the heterogeneity of the PPC through contributions to organizing phases of the campaign, and through the inclusion of their demands in key PPC documents and through protests and interactions with other participants.

The PPC involved the activists living on the national mall, a quintessential site and symbol of American exceptionalism. In doing so, the PPC exposed these activists to national scrutiny on top of the already heightened regulation and surveillance of poor women of color. Mainstream coverage of welfare activists during the PPC often perpetuated stereotypes about poor women of color as lazy, immoral, and incompetent.<sup>149</sup> For example, a *New York Times* article states: “One now finds in Resurrection City a very different breed of ‘poor.’ Many of them are chronic welfare types—tough, insolent, sullen, uncommunicative . . . the truth is that many of the demonstrators have made poverty their business. They loaf indifferently around their shantytown.”<sup>150</sup> When describing one of the speakers at Solidarity Day, Fager writes: “a big welfare mother stridently denounced every bureaucrat in Washington.”<sup>151</sup> Fager does not mention the woman by name nor provide any biographical

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<sup>148</sup> Mantler describes welfare rights activists role in the formation of the PPC, but does not elaborate on their activism during the campaign, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 118-123.

<sup>149</sup> Kilpatrick, “Too Many ‘Poor People’ Are Professionally So,” Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 104. Carolyn Lewis provides an alternative view of women’s participation during the campaign. See, “Women Speak on Poverty,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1968.

<sup>150</sup> Kilpatrick, “Too Many ‘Poor People’ Are Professionally So.”

<sup>151</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 77.

information about her, as he had usually done in his descriptions of other Solidarity Day speakers. Instead, he identifies her by her size, invoking stereotypes of lazy welfare queens.<sup>152</sup> He further suggests that her criticisms of bureaucrats were simplistic and ultimately futile.

Welfare rights activists had organized a Poor People's March in October of 1966, which had involved over 2,000 activists and caught Dr. King's attention.<sup>153</sup> Prior to the PPC, welfare activists expressed frustration about the lack of SCLC attention to their work. Following a meeting with King in February of 1968, NWRO members agreed to participate with the PPC under the condition that they have autonomy in their negotiations and planning.<sup>154</sup> During the PPC, the NWRO held a Mother's Day March and rally, which included over 3,000 participants on May 12. The rally featured a speech by Coretta Scott King. She connected domestic poverty to racism and war, arguing that they shared a mutual root in violence. She described how the money from the Vietnam War could be used to aid the poor: "All of this is to say that a guaranteed income, a job for those who need a job, could be had if the war was stopped and the will created by our government to act on behalf of its deprived citizens."<sup>155</sup> The National Council of Negro Women also held a one-day conference with PPC participants to address the specific concerns of women of color.<sup>156</sup> One participant remarked, "We're sick of sociological studies about black women. We're here to get down to the nitty-gritty of solving our problems."<sup>157</sup> Participants debated

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<sup>152</sup> For criticism of stereotypes of welfare recipients as "controlling images," see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69-96.

<sup>153</sup> Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*, 53.

<sup>154</sup> Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 72.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>156</sup> Carolyn Lewis, "Resurrection City Women Confront D.C. Counterparts," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1968.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*



strategies for engagement both inside and outside of the mainstream political and economic systems.<sup>158</sup>

Welfare right activists called for a guaranteed income, regardless of whether or not a person held a job outside the home.<sup>159</sup> Senator Russell Long from Louisiana was particularly critical of calls for a guaranteed income: “If they think they are going to push us into bankrupting this country to pay worthless people to be more worthless, they are making a mistake.”<sup>160</sup> NWRO members argued that labor inside the home be considered work. PPC demands to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare further called for an end to compulsory work requirements, guaranteed support for families with unemployed fathers, and requirements for minimum levels of aid from all states.<sup>161</sup> The PPC also demanded childcare facilities, healthcare, and minimum wages for welfare recipients who chose to enter the workforce. They additionally requested the inclusion of poor people by “Hiring recipients and other poor people to help check up on the way the program is carried out by the states and localities” and “Requiring that recipients be involved in making policy and program decisions about how the program will be carried out by States and localities.”<sup>162</sup>

Welfare rights activists also called for the repeal of sexist “man in the house” and other invasive rules.<sup>163</sup> The letter to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare states:

To get even that pittance from the welfare program, mothers and children are humiliated and harassed; their lives are pried into; their homes searched. Their welfare payments are denied, reduced or stopped for all sorts of arbitrary and irrelevant reasons. If they complain about this treatment, there

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Demands of Poor People’s Campaign to Executive Agencies, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Pages 39-42; Edwin L. Dale Jr., “A Guaranteed Income: Idea Gains Ground Among Leaders, But to Many People It’s a ‘Handout,’” *New York Times*, May 28, 1968.

<sup>160</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 32.

<sup>161</sup> “Demands of Poor People’s Campaign to Executive Agencies, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 22, Page 11.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

is little chance of their getting redress—without the help of a lawyer whose services they cannot afford.<sup>164</sup>

In a set of demands released in June, the SCLC demanded the termination of the Wilbur Mills' welfare amendments that sought to limit the number of women on welfare and included a mandatory work program.<sup>165</sup> Twenty-nine women, each representing a different state, protested the bill.<sup>166</sup> Nine welfare rights activists were jailed in June when they protested at Wilbur Mills' home.<sup>167</sup> Welfare rights activists from Arizona and New Mexico also met with their congressmen and other government officials to bring attention to local mistreatment by welfare agencies.<sup>168</sup>

Mantler notes that when the Supreme Court eventually struck down the “man in the house” rules, Chief Justice Warren alluded to activism by PPC activities taking place in Washington.<sup>169</sup> Nadasen writes that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) responded sympathetically to PPC activities, and worked to implement many of the activists' demands, particularly the inclusion of welfare activists in the administration of benefits.<sup>170</sup> The positive response from federal agencies to NWRO demands further challenges the view that the campaign was a failure.

Welfare activists challenged the normalization of married, heterosexual families. I would suggest that these challenges be included in queer scholarship and activism. As with Eng et al., I argue for a queer epistemology that reorients “the field's potential to engage with a wide field of normalization.”<sup>171</sup> Cohen argues for a queer politics attuned to how normativity structures

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>165</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 65-66.

<sup>166</sup> True Unity News of Resurrection City, no. 2, May 30, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Page 3.

<sup>167</sup> James Yuenger, “Poor People Refuse to Leave Mud-Filled Resurrection City,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1968.

<sup>168</sup> Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 72.

<sup>169</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 262.

<sup>170</sup> Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 72-74.

<sup>171</sup> Eng, “Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?”, 4.

power. She describes how “The stigmatization and demonization of single mothers, teen mothers, and, primarily, poor women of color dependent on state assistance has had a long and suspicious presence in American ‘intellectual’ and political history.”<sup>172</sup> She argues that literature since the *Moynihan Report: The Negro Family The Case for National Action* (1965) has continued to portray women of color as overly reproductive, disorganized, irresponsible, immoral, and lazy. Queer scholars challenge heteronormativity not only for its promotion of heterosexuality but also for producing the idea that “middle-class, white heterosexuals are synonymous with ‘Americans.’”<sup>173</sup>

Roderick Ferguson argues that mainstream sociology writing, such as the Moynihan Report, has worked in accordance with the pathologization of African-American family structures. Moynihan criticizes African-American “matriarchal families,” suggesting that they are placed at a disadvantage to white heteropatriarchy. Moynihan argues that a matriarchal family structure formed the basis of a “tangle of pathology” in African-American urban environments, which directly contributed to unemployment, alienation, delinquency, and criminal behavior. According to Moynihan, the supposed absence of African-American fathers contributes to children’s delinquency. He argues that by changing Black family structure to a patriarchal one, the root cause of poverty will be destroyed.

Ferguson argues that straight African-Americans were therefore deemed non-heteronormative because of their so-called deviant sexuality.<sup>174</sup> Ferguson argues that: “Moynihan’s text helped authorize a hegemonic discourse about black matriarchy and enabled a national discourse that understood nonheteronormative racial difference as deviant.”<sup>175</sup> For Moynihan, non-normative Black family structures put them at a disadvantage in the seemingly

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<sup>172</sup> Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” 455.

<sup>173</sup> Brandzel, “Queering Citizenship,” 190.

<sup>174</sup> Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 87.

equal playing field of American capitalism. Ferguson notes that this discourse worked in accordance with the state's regulation of women of color within the bounds of white heteropatriarchy, for example through punitive welfare laws that funneled women into low-wage surplus service work that PPC activists were fighting.

Ferguson (citing George Lipsitz) argues that Moynihan's depictions of African-Americans were rooted in the legislative gains of the civil rights movement. Moynihan's critiques rested on the incorrect assumption that there was no longer racial discrimination, and that African-American poverty was the result of non-normative gender and sexuality. They reinforced multiculturalism and the ascendancy of whiteness. However, Ferguson sees an agency in what he describes a "queer of color analysis" that unites queers in fights for radical justice.<sup>176</sup> As I have argued, the PPC was not proffering a multicultural, or identity politics, but rather confronting structural racial and gendered inequalities head on.

For gay rights advocates, arguing that married families should continue to be privileged by the state, implicitly makes deviant "common law marriages, out of wedlock births, lodgers, single-headed families, nonmonogamous sexual relationships, unmarried persons, and homosexual persons and relationships. Without eliding their various meanings, all are related because they fail to conform to a heteropatriarchal household legalized through marriage."<sup>177</sup> As Cohen argues, a radical queer scholarship and activism seeks to include, rather than exclude, non-normative relations.<sup>178</sup> As queer studies scholars note, the contemporary push for gay marriage is reminiscent of conservative arguments for marriage promotion, particularly debates over welfare "reform" during the 1990s. Conservatives argued that poor women of color must marry or fight for child-support, rather than receive

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<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 2-4, 5, 10, 24, 26, 138, 141, 143.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 87.

social services and state-support. The rhetoric of personal responsibility accompanied multicultural and race-blind politics to further privatize dependency to the married couple and to force unmarried women into surplus labor positions.

Radical forms of community organization, support, and care are deemed “non-normative” within this limited model. Amy Brandzel argues that, “In effect, advocating for same-sex marriage has distracted the GLBT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender] movement from more important and immediate issues, such as organizing for antidiscrimination laws and economic restructuring.”<sup>179</sup> Queer activists argue that marriage structures exclusion from benefits and social services, such as healthcare and tax benefits, which should be available to *all* people regardless of their relationship status. Duggan, for example, argues for a movement that recognizes household diversity.<sup>180</sup> The inclusion of welfare rights activists in the campaign added necessary critiques of racial, gendered and sexual injustices to the larger campaign. These critiques remain critical for queer rights activists resisting marriage as the primary form of social and legal organization today.

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<sup>178</sup> Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.”

<sup>179</sup> Brandzel, *Queering Citizenship*, 189.

<sup>180</sup> Lisa Duggan and Richard Kim, “Beyond Gay Marriage,” *The Nation* (July 18/25 2005): 26.

## Alternative Assemblages at Resurrection City

Puar's theory of assemblage runs contrary to a linear and progressive notion of history and activism, arguing that in the "stillness of position, bodies actually lose their capacity for movement, for flow, for (social) change."<sup>181</sup> I have argued that the mainstream coverage of the PPC and its complex assemblages has precluded the type of affective national relationship to the civil rights movement that is generally treated as static, and identified by a series of signs and symbols. The PPC's heterogeneous assembly of demands and physical bodies challenged a homogenous, white, patriarchal national body. Although participants were united around a shared challenge to economic inequality, they all experienced distinct forms of racial, ethnic, colonial, sexual, and gendered injustices that often resulted in distinct demands to government agencies. I have suggested that these modes of identity did not neatly intersect but rather fluctuated in discrete spaces, including at Resurrection City, the space where at one time, over 3,000 PPC participants lived together.

Although the assemblage of PPC participants at Resurrection City and the Hawthorne School was either indecipherable or rendered deviant by the press and government, it produced significant connections between activists who may not otherwise have been able to meet and interact. I suggest that their participations and experiences offer a counter-archive to the official accounts put forth by Fager and the mainstream press. Lauren Berlant argues that by the late 1990s, there was no longer a public sphere accountable to non-wealthy Americans.<sup>182</sup> Resurrection City and Hawthorne provided a model for social support, integration, education, and housing for the larger nation-state.

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<sup>181</sup> Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 213.

<sup>182</sup> Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 1-24.

Mantler reports that (at least some) activists viewed Resurrection City positively as a city without taxation, police brutality, and incarceration.<sup>183</sup>

Prior to the formation of Resurrection City caravans from across the country, including the Western Caravan previously described, journeyed to Washington. Mantler describes the diversity of these caravans, for example “the Eastern and Midwest caravans had more diverse, urban constituencies. Starting with fifty participants in Brunswick, Maine, the Eastern group added blacks, whites, and Puerto Ricans in every major city it passed down the Eastern seaboard.”<sup>184</sup> Construction on the A-frame houses that would make-up Resurrection City began on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1968. The PPC provided residents of Resurrection City with supplies for building their own A-frames, cleaning and maintenance services throughout the city, and three daily meals.<sup>185</sup> The PPC also provided residents with free health and dental care and doctors who would make “house calls” to the A-frame houses that lined the streets of the city.<sup>186</sup> Many of the participants lived at Resurrection City for nearly six weeks.<sup>187</sup>

In contrast to Fager and the mainstream press, Mantler cites articles and interviews that described Resurrection City as “vibrant” and argues that it was marked by cultural cooperation, exchange, and dialogue. Carawan describes little violence and conflict during his stay at Resurrection City.<sup>188</sup> He writes, “Tents sported slogans such as ‘The Great Society’

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<sup>183</sup> Mantler, “Black, Brown, and Poor,” 3.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>185</sup> Amy Nathan Wright. “Labor, leisure, poverty, and protest: the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign as a case study.” *Leisure Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 2008): 452.

<sup>186</sup> Wright. “Labor, leisure, poverty, and protest” 206; Nan Robertson, “City of the Poor Develops Style All Its Own: It Is Restless and Noisy, Untidy and Funny and Alive,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1968.

<sup>187</sup> Wright “Labor, leisure, poverty and protest,” 447. For a detailed discussion of the construction, maintenance, and composition of Resurrection City, see Wright, ““Civil Rights “Unfinished Business’: Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign,” PhD diss., University of Texas, 2007, 348-418. See also John Wiebenson, “Planner’s Notebook: Planning and Using Resurrection City.” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 6 (November 1969): 405-411.

<sup>188</sup> Memo on the Poor People’s Cultural Workshop, May 13, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 109, Folder 10, Page 5.

and ‘Sugar Shack,’ while soul music blared and old men played checkers. Adults lined up for haircuts and children played in the Coretta Scott King Day Care Center. If residents did not meet during demonstrations, they saw each other in the mess line, in class at the Poor People’s University, or in an impromptu workshop in the Many Races Soul Center.”<sup>189</sup>

Mainstream coverage of the campaign did not mention the role of culture in Resurrection City. For example, the Highlander Folk Center, located in Tennessee ran a Poor People’s Cultural Workshop Music Workshop.<sup>190</sup> Originally, Highlander participants planned to hold a music workshop outside of Resurrection City for six days; however, they moved into Resurrection City two weeks after it was established and remained there for the length of the campaign.<sup>191</sup> Letters from Myles Horton, the founder of the Highlander School, describe efforts to recruit a diverse group of musicians prior to the campaign: “Our purpose is to encourage Mexican-American, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and white poor to bring their songs, music, dances and poems into the Poor People’s Campaign to be merged with the black poor.”<sup>192</sup>

Anne Romasco managed the cultural program, and the Smithsonian provided consultation and helped to run some of the programs.<sup>193</sup> Guy Carawan, the director of the program described how:

Discussions of poor whites and how these problems can be geared into the problems of other poor were being discussed around the campfire. These discussions were enriched by the participation of our Negro, Mexican-American, Indian and Puerto Rican brothers who were always dropping by. When the rain started, a shelter was built above the fire where coffee was always boiling and around which good conversation or singing was always taking place. The scheduled sessions soon gave way to an 18 hour round of informal discussions, arguments, music, singing, coffee drinking and eating.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Mantler, “The press did you in,” 42.

<sup>190</sup> Memo on the Poor People’s Cultural Workshop, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 109, Folder 10.

<sup>191</sup> Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Long, July 26, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 109, Folder 10.

<sup>192</sup> Memo on the Poor People’s Cultural Workshop, May 13, 1968, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 109, Folder 10.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



Music therefore served as a bridge between activists. The cultural center featured performances by Pete and Mike Seeger, musical programs for children, and visitors including Rosa Parks. Carawan also describes the significance of interpersonal interactions he had with participants outside the Highlander's cultural center. For example, he recalls talking with a woman from Alabama about the Montgomery bus boycott while she cleaned her clothes in the reflecting pool on the mall.<sup>195</sup> In addition to the cultural center there was a Poor People's University (PPU) that provided courses on poverty and non-violence trainings.<sup>196</sup>

As noted above, residents of Resurrection City also produced an internal newspaper, *True Unity News*. The newsletter included articles in both English and Spanish ranging from coverage of the campaign to national news, opinion pieces, and poetry. One of the articles challenges the negative portrayals of Resurrection City by putting the focus back on the conditions motivating the campaign; "Our government has become a socialist government for the rich and medium well-to-do. Don't blame them, because they are only using the tyrannical powers."<sup>197</sup> Another article describes a sewing business started by one of the residents at Resurrection City: "Mrs. Boynton will house her industry in one of the new buildings being constructed near the Martin Luther King Plaza...It's rather hard to describe her invention. The best thing to do is to visit her in the hut #2, Overview Avenue, facing the reflection pool."<sup>198</sup> This business was supported by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which donated a number of sewing machines to the project.

In contrast to Fager's description of the top-down and closed-door structure and meetings of SCLC leaders, Horton describes a more collaborative meeting that included a variety of activists within Resurrection City. Rather than focus on individual speeches and

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., page 3.

<sup>196</sup> Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor," 206.

<sup>197</sup> True Unity, Tijerina Papers, Box 31, Folder 21, Page 6.

group meetings by SCLC, which were covered by the mainstream press, each of the participants at the meeting was invited to discuss activist tactics, the connections between poverty and racism, and strategies of nonviolence.<sup>199</sup> Horton asked one of the participants to lead the discussion, and the workshops continued for the next week without anyone from Highlander. Horton therefore established a meeting style that was inclusive and interactive, and that was led by participants themselves.

Mike Clark, the president of the Highlander Center in Appalachia, suggested that the success of the PPC did not come from the limited legislative and governmental reforms that came after it, but through the interactions of the wide variety of participants in Resurrection City, the Hawthorne School, and other areas around the campaign. He ultimately suggests that the campaign was an educational experiment, in which many participants took what they learned from the campaign back to their local activist settings. Puar pushes for an activism of movement and change that resists homogenous notions of identity. Many of the PPC participants who lived at Resurrection City were motivated to bring attention to the physical bodies of the poor. Although the press perpetuated stereotypes about these bodies, the interactions that took place on the National Mall served to build and develop future activist coalitions that would continue to fight against forms of racial, gendered, sexual, and economic injustice. Indeed, groups such as Queers for Economic Justice and the Audre Lorde Project continue to push for a queer politics that seeks to dismantle forms of racial, gendered, and economic injustices.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> True Unity News of Resurrection City No. 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 105, Folder 12, Page 5.

<sup>199</sup> Highlander Center Poor People's Workshop, Wisconsin Historical Society, Box 109, Folder 10.

## Conclusion

Since the PPC, the gap between the rich and the poor has only widened. The wealthiest one percent of the nation holds approximately 40 percent of the nation's wealth.<sup>201</sup> The trends towards neoliberalism since the 1970s have exacerbated economic and inequality: "Since the beginning of the Reagan administration in 1981, the distance between the ruling and managerial classes and the rest of the population has increased dramatically. Class mobility has decreased, and the economic well-being of the poorest 80 percent has substantially deteriorated."<sup>202</sup> Kivel notes that the top one percent of the population, or what he refers to as the "ruling class," has substantial power over public policy, job creation, environmental policy, and more.

Since the 1960s, conservatives have sought a return to the "American Dream," which presumed that through hard work all people can succeed economically. The rhetoric of the "American Dream" reflects on King's iconic speech at the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington; an exceptionalist reading of this speech has often been used to support a multicultural and race blind identity politics that works in accordance with neoliberal projects of racial, economic, and neo-colonialism.<sup>203</sup>

Gay marriage advocates often link the right to marriage as part of the promise of living the "American Dream." In doing so, they project a normative image of gay and lesbian families as good citizens and consumers.<sup>204</sup> Therefore, living the "American Dream," for gays and lesbians requires assenting to social and legal normativity. A radical queer activism

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<sup>200</sup> "Audre Lorde Project," Audre Lord Project, accessed May 1, 2011. <http://alp.org/>; "Queers for Economic Justice," Queers for Economic Justice, accessed May 1, 2011. <http://q4ej.org/>.

<sup>201</sup> Joseph E Stiglitz, "Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%." *Vanity Fair*, May 2011. <http://www.vanityfair.com/society/features/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105>

<sup>202</sup> Paul Kivel, "The Revolution Will Not be Funded," 132.

<sup>203</sup> Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism," 1-24.

that centers sexuality, gender, decolonization, race, and economic is critical not only as a challenge to the mainstream gay rights movement but also as a foundation for local, national and global fights for radical equality. I have proffered the PPC as a model for just such a queer alliance.

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<sup>204</sup> Brandzel, "Queering Citizenship?" 190.

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Reies López Tijerina, September 18, 2010, El Paso, Texas.