



## **Transcript Information**

**Episode 19:** “The Poor People’s Campaign (PPC)”

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**Guests:** Brenda Joyce-Newman and Brother Carter from the Sacramento Chapter of the PPC

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## **Begin Transcript**

**Building Justice Music Lyrics:** Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we’re Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we’re Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, “Building Justice,” “Building Justice,” “Building Justice.” Building is to add on, or to do away with.

**Monicka:** Welcome to Building Justice, the podcast by Sacramento State Center on Race Integration and Social Justice (CRISJ). We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. I'm Monica Tutschka, a professor of political science at SAC State, and my guests for today are Brenda-Joyce Newman and Brother Carter. Brenda-Joyce is a Sac State alumni who earned her Master's degree in political science. She's also a mother of one son, Sydney, a proud grandmother of two granddaughters, Savannah and Jayln, and daughter-in-law, Jennifer. Brenda-Joyce is a CRISJ affiliate and member of the Sacramento Chapter of the Poor People's Campaign. Brother Carter is the California state co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign and also a CRISJ affiliate. Hello to both of you. It's great to have you on the Building Justice podcast today.

**Brenda-Joyce:** Thank you, Monicka, for having me. I'm pleased to be here and thank you listeners for tuning in.

**Brother Carter:** Yes. I also want to say thank you, Monicka, for having me on this podcast for building justice and the Sacramento State Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice.

**Monicka:** Absolutely. It's so great to have you here. I'm really honored to be talking with you today. Brenda-Joyce, Brother Carter, you are both active members of the Sacramento Chapter of the Poor People’s Campaign, and I know that the campaign takes its name from the original 1968 PPC. That was originally organized by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and he was working to gain economic justice for poor people in the US. Can you tell the audience a little bit more about the mission of the PPC? I know it restarted in 2017. Brother Carter, Let's start with you.

**Brother Carter:** Yes, Monicka, essentially, we are movement, a moral movement. The PPC fights poverty, not the poor. The policies we advance, or the demands we make are: number 1) a single payer healthcare system; the protection of the right to vote; the end to mass incarceration; federal and state living wage laws; and equity in education. We oppose 5 existing social structures, we call them “pillars.” Those pillars are: systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and religious extremism. We know that poverty intersects with other structures of oppression such as: classism, sexism, racism, anti-Native American Policies. And we take a faith-based approach to our work

**Monicka:** Thank you, Brother Carter. Brenda-Joyce, can you talk more about the faith-based perspective because I'm guessing some of our listeners might not understand what you mean there. And we want to provide accurate information.

**Brenda-Joyce:** Sure. The faith based perspective is what drew me to the PPC and that it makes room for the values and teachings that are common to Christian denominations, Um, reinforced moral values and traditions derived from this type of platform and are biblically based; and it strives to meet the spiritual, social and cultural needs of a community in and out of the church's four walls. The co-leaders Reverend William Barber and Reverend Liz Theoharris often quote scripture when fighting against the five pillars that Brother Carter just shared with you to show policymakers how policies disproportionately and negatively affect the community of people, a city and a nation. So being scripturally oriented, it resonates with me because the Bible instructs us, says how to ethically and morally treat poor people orphans, widows, children and foreigners. And many laws in our country are prima facie in fact, on the first impression when they're applied it looks good---excuse me---when it's written and looks good on the face---but when it's applied, it's a bad law and it's harmful. And this being said, many politicians who run on a religious platform establish political relationships with evangelical leaders and lobbyists. And I think we should hold them accountable and encourage them to create policies and pass legislation that helps rather than harm marginalized people. The poorest among us are, as the Bible says, the least of these. They should not and must not be afraid to correct bad legislation or laws. For instance, the child tax credit. We know that when it was in place that millions of children came out of poverty, but they decided to repeal it and redo it so that they don't benefit from a child, the parents don't benefit from the child tax credit any longer, and that threw those children right back into poverty. So that's an example of how something becomes a bad policy or a bad law.

**Monicka:** Thank you so much, Brenda-Joyce, for sharing a little bit about this faith based perspective. It gave me a lot to think about. Brother Carter, is there anything else you'd like to add about the faith based orientation of PPC?

**Brother Carter:** Yes, I just want more folks to know that when we talk about faith based leadership, I want them to know that it comes in all denominations of of religion. We talk about Judaism, we talk about the Catholic Church. We talk about Christian Church, you know, Baptist[s], Muslim[s]. It's all faiths. LGBTQ. You know, there's not a faith that is left out. Not even just “in the faith,” but also we have atheists that are part of this movement.

But we don't discriminate just because it's not about, you know, religion. This is about coming to a moral agenda and having a moral conscience.

**Monicka:** Thank you. That's really good to know, because there are some secular and atheist people who might be listening to the podcast and might not know how they belong or whether they belong to the PPC. So that was really informative. Let me turn our attention now more directly to social justice activism. I mean, what does activism around basic needs look like for you specifically? I mean, how do you act in a day to day basis to advance the uplifting of low income people? Brenda Joyce, how about you go first?

**Brenda-Joyce:** For almost two decades in the church, I volunteered in the arts ministry, which consisted of acting and dance. So I was naturally drawn to the arts and culture component of the PPC. And it's often our cultural and spiritual practices that remind us of our inherent worth and dignity. So in arts and culture, we're tasked to use our creative power to provoke conversation and action around the need to reclaim and build a more just society which we know is possible. The arts and culture connect us to each other by honoring our past and learning and sharing ideas and reflecting on what we envision a just society to be. And we accomplish this through the pictorial artists who use pencils and paint, making posters, and T-shirts, and things like that. And for instance, the people in Berkeley came together once to paint a mural on the street where they were protesting legally. Another way, we moved the people's hearts and minds toward a more revivalist, through theomusicology, which is the study of God and music and the music college is a continuation historically of the Freedom Riders of the Civil Rights Era and act, activists (excuse me), use gospel songs to articulate injustices and to give voice to the struggle to combat Jim Crow and other laws that that were not conducive to marginalized people, to produce new visions of a better future, a promised land, if you will. For example, there's an old Negro spiritual and excuse me, I'll try and sing this.

**Brenda-Joyce singing:** Ain't nobody gonna turn me around. Turn me around, turn me around. Ain't no by the going to turn me dat dat dat dat dah.

**Brenda Joyce:** And so in the 60s they took that gospel arrangement and put in words like,.

**Brenda-Joyce Singing:** Ain't no segregation gonna turn me around, turn me around, turn me around Mississippi. Ain't gonna turn me around Da da da da da. Bull Connor ain't gonna turn me around, turn around, turn me around. Bull Connor ain't gonna turn me around. Da da da da.

**Brenda-Joyce:** And then in the seventies, it progressed to a more Afrocentric kind that used, that used drum beats. You know,

**Brenda-Joyce Singing:** Ain't no policeman gonna turn me around. Bu boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Turn me around da bum da bum, turn me around. Ronald Reagan ain't gonna turn me around time around. Ba bum boom, ba boom, boom.

**Brenda-Joyce:** That kind of thing. So contemporarily, we now have more of a "call and response" which originated in sub-Saharan Africa cul- cultures as a pattern of democratic

participate participation. And that's just a statement that's quickly followed by an answering statement that they used in public gatherings, religious rituals and vocal instrumental musical expression. So if Brother Carter would help me, we can demonstrate how call and response works.

**Brother Carter:** Okay, so when I say “Forward together,” you say, “Not one step back.” And when I say, “when we lift from the bottom,” you say, “Everybody rises.” Are you ready? “Forward together.”

**Brenda-Joyce:** “And not one step back.”

**Brother Carter:** “When we live from the bottom,”

**Brenda-Joyce and Monicka:** “Everybody rises. Everybody rises.”

**Brother Carter:** And one more time, “Forward together.”

**Brenda-Joyce and Monicka:** Not one step back.

**Brother Carter:** “When we lift from the bottom.”

**Brenda-Joyce and Monicka:** “Everybody rises.”

**Brother Carter:** Yeah, so that those are things, you know, that we use in the campaign that keeps everybody motivated, you know what I’m saying, and focused.

**Monicka:** Wow, that was really wonderful. Thank you so much. Everyone, let's take a break and we'll be right back.

## **BREAK**

**Brother Carter Singing:** Somebody is hurting our people, and it's gone on far too long, and is going far too long. Somebody is hurting our people and it's gone on far too long and we won't be silent anymore.

**Monicka:** Welcome back, everyone. Before the break, Brenda-Joyce and Brother Carter sang together to give us a sense of the power of theomusicology and call and response. Brenda-Joyce, can I ask you another question about your activism? I mean, how do you think gender informs the kind of activism you do?

**Brenda-Joyce:** I want to say that roles can be gendered. And, one thing I do like about the PPC is that it values the contribution of women. Women are in many of the leadership roles in the Poor People's Campaign as a whole, and although a certain amount of patriarchy still exists in some communities committed to social justice, I see just the opposite with Poor People's Campaign, and I really, really like that. And maybe Brother Carter can share more of the

leadership positions that demonstrate how the PPC is working to recognize women in certain positions of power.

**Brother Carter:** Okay. Yes. Thank you, Brenda Joyce. In our campaign, um, we have, um, leadership from the women from top to bottom. As you know, we have Reverend Liz TheoHarris, who is the other co-chair of our campaign, along with Reverend Barber. And then as Rose inside of the campaign. When we talk about the repairs of the breach, the women that do the leadership roles in there. When we talk about music, we have women in those roles. So when we talk about the faith based leadership, we have women in those roles. And we just recently went to Washington, D.C., and we had about 30 of faith leaders that came to talk to a hearing with Congress. And half of those were women faith based leaders. So, and then, as I sit here coordinating committee and also as a state co-chair, I am the only male. I like to see our sisters in these positions because like I said, they are very strong and they do great work in our campaign.

**Monicka:** Brenda Joyce, do you do you notice any any gender roles at the macro level? It sounds like the PPC is doing a great job, but given your long commitment to activism, what observations do you have?

**Brenda-Joyce:** Yes, I do. Historically, on a macro level, men, particularly religious figures, serve in the leadership roles that organizations at the national and state levels. So women have historically seen their activism relegated to images of being an accidental matriarch like Rosa Parks or Coretta Scott King who was a phenomenal organizer and leader. And before her time when she advocated for LGBTQ rights, they were reduced to being she was reduced to being Dr. King's wife and widow. That's what she's known for more than anything else, rather than her activism. And Claudette Covin is another. She refused to give her seat up before Rosa Parks, but patriarchy dictated that because she was pregnant at 16, it was decided she would not be the best face for the movement. So it was a while before Rosa Parks would not give up her seat. Elaine Brown is another example. When she assumed the leadership role from Black Panther leader Huey Newton, when he fled to Cuba, only to be met by hostility from a predominantly male rank and file membership. The women who do show up at the table and present their work or studies are often dismissed and overlooked. And I was in San Francisco when Gloria Steinem was a pretty vocal Playboy bunny, but she only garnered national attention when she became leader of the National Organization for Women. And so historically, women typically must have their own platforms to advance their agendas. And I have to say this in conclusion, patriarchy is is no more apparent than it is in the church. There are some denominations that do not allow women to preach or even sit in the pulpit. They are forced to have a stand put down on the floor, away from the pulpit to speak or even read the announcements. So perhaps patriarchy is still problematic in some areas.

**Monicka:** Brenda Joyce, I really appreciate the complexity that you brought to your answer. And what I mean by that is, what I heard at least is, some women do have leadership roles, but they're not getting recognition for those leadership roles. Or they might have the role, but they don't have the same kind of power as men do. And, as you were just saying, some women don't assume those roles at all because they are not welcome or even not allowed in certain churches. So it seems like there's this is a really complex issue that we need to keep talking

about to make sure that we realize full equality for everyone. Brother Carter, let's turn to you and maybe to a different topic. What does activism look like for you? I mean, what kind of activism do you do day in and day out that you can share with the audience?

**Brother Carter:** Thank you, Monicka. My activism is, um, is a strong commitment. It's rigorous. It holds a moral conscience. I go out, um, started going out and doing basic needs in encampments, making assessments [of] the people that are living in those encampments to see what those needs are because everybody's needs are different. Going out and bringing food, clothes, water. Making sure that I got the different medical groups out there to to work with them, to help them, not just with COVID 19 issues, but scrapes and scars. Some people have other health issues. Just a day to day grind. Being out there for their basic needs, helping to create shelter for them. I mean, I've worked so hard doing this that my vehicle played out by carrying just gallons of water. For me, it was like I said, it was a strong commitment, a dedication, but more than anything is having a moral conscience for humanities, you know what I'm saying, for the next human being, not judging them in their situation, but helping them to overcome that situation. And it was a spiritual uplift for the folks that I was providing for. They got a chance to know me and also knew the work that I was doing. And one of the things about people that are unhoused, they don't they don't trust right away. And so that was one of the things I was able to do to build trust.

**Monicka:** So, Brother Carter, I also know that you bring some of these findings to local officials and you also serve as the co-chair of the PPC. Can you talk a little bit about that activism, too?

**Brother Carter:** Yes, um, far as in my activism on that end, it is to just to *advocate* and go to the local officials to let them know the needs (of those that are on the outside) and how can we create policies to help them. The other part of the question that you asked me, I believe, was my activism on the coordinating committee and as a co-chair, state co-chair. That there is a collectivity working together with other co-chairs around the state and the region on different issues that are going on in their region and what's going on in our region. But bringing all of that together, saying and seeing how we create solutions, you know, and advocate around the needs for those folks. One of the other things that we do as co-chairs is we get the calling down from the national campaign on the next thing that we'll be doing, you know, such as—now---we're getting ready to do a march for democracy and justice, and that's around the Voting Rights Act, which is also part of the third reconstruction.

**Monicka:** Brother Carter, I hear that you are very active on all kinds of levels. This makes me think about solutions. And let me turn this question to Brenda Joyce. Brenda Joyce, what solutions do you think Sacramento should be advancing right now to uplift unhoused people and low income people generally?

**Brenda-Joyce:** Well, I have three things that I would speak to. And one is based on Isaiah 61 and the Bible, where it says that talks about Repairers of the Breach that they “will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. That they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.” And so we see blighted areas in our communities all over Sacramento. And I think that that we could take some of those places and rebuild them into something like transitional housing to help others to get back on their feet and combat

homelessness and mental illness. And, um, whether they are food insecure or maybe financially insecure in that transitional type of atmosphere. And then a second example that I was told about from my sister who lives in Marin County, that they had a problem, you know, with homelessness and there were just unkempt areas, needles and things that the kids couldn't walk to the park anymore and families and things like that. So, what they did, it was the park they weren't using any longer, or very much. And they took that area and they...told the people that they could move there and stay. So, you know, [they] providing spaces for people to place their tents, you know, and then provide them with the necessities they need like, uh, oh gosh, to throw away their trash and, um, you know, to use the bathrooms and things like that. So I think that was another good example. And then lastly I wanted to speak to is called Cob Village in Oakland. In 2021 in May, it became known for providing structures that offer food, health care, showers and a free store. And it developed--a strong—it gave people a strong sense of community. And the people built it from a guy, a guy who had been in Africa and built it from newspapers and all all different kinds of rocks and sand. And they build these little, they call them “Cobins,” you know, like cabins. So right on that site is for them to go and get medical care. And if they need something more deeper, then they would be referred to one of the medical clinics. So the people ran it themselves. And so they were held accountable and it gave them pride in themselves. And so it was a lady, Meg, she did she cooking and she passed out the food to the people. So it was very organized and they're very cute, little, you know, Cobins. So there's many ways, you know, that we can make this a better place and that we can help the homeless, you know, rather than ostracize and them, you know, just mobilize to help them. And nobody wants a free handout. They just want a hand up.

**Monicka:** I really like the way you ended by saying there are so many things we can do because sometimes folks pretend like this is an impossible issue to tackle. And you're pointing the way. Brother Carter, what solutions do you believe would really help uplift low income people and unhoused people right now that we could implement and imagine today?

**Brother Carter:** I think it would be resources and policies, a change of policies. And, but, the beginning of that is when you see the people out in the encampments... what we need [is] to start with a “big tent” encampment, a big tent where those resources are brought there. And they can begin to invite people into that tent, in that area. And create small, tiny homes in the tent areas. But one tent or one house don't fit all. Because you have some people that are there that are dealing with mental illness issues. And so, um, when we begin to, um, place people, they're able to be placed in the right areas. But inside of the tent, um, the resources are there, you know what I'm saying, for mental illness, for families that that need housing, um, [for] individuals that may be going through addiction, you know what I'm saying, and have no way to fight it or to overcome, you know, that addiction---to have these these things in place. Because what we're doing is: this is about a recovery; figuring out how to help individuals, and help bring them and regenerate them back into society, you know what I'm saying, and, um, this crisis needs a lot of moral support from our civic leaders and not just from our leaders, but from our churches and our communities, you know what I'm saying, to see that *they* are *us* and *we* are *them*, you know what I'm saying---this humanities-- how do we help one another? And this is one thing I would just say to that is: that we, in this life, we all share the same guarantee. And that guarantee is that one day we're going to leave this earth. But before you leave, what will you do to make a

difference in somebody else's life that may be doing less fortunate than you? And that's we say, well, "Each one reach one and each one must teach one." To stay out of this area of poverty and bring our society back up to the basic means of what it means, you know what I'm saying, and that's a helping hand.

**Monicka:** Brother Carter, I'm hearing two major solutions that have got me thinking. One is resources, this big tent, and the second is a more spiritual kind of rebirth and a commitment to love others as oneself and to see others as oneself. Brenda Joyce, um, let me ask you another question. How do you encourage activism around basic needs? I mean, what do you do to motivate people to get involved? And who are you particularly trying to motivate in your work?

**Brenda-Joyce:** I try to work through the church. I try to begin with pastors and leadership because the parishioners trust their leaders. And if you can get them on board, then generally the people will follow. And I'll give you an example where Shiloh Baptist Church went on the murder of Stephon Clark. They began walking the neighborhoods, the streets, to protect, like a neighborhood watch, and they engaged a policeman who patrolled the neighborhood to walk with them so that they can meet the people and learn that just because you see three young men with sagging pants on the corner that they're not going to rob somebody or do something wrong. So by merging the church and the police, then then you're able to teach people about, you know, the different cultures, the police culture and also the community culture. And I also like to work with the children and I have taught tolerance magazines and I teach the kids to have tolerance for other people who may look different than yourself are or maybe act differently than you do or speak differently than you do--to have tolerance for that, because it does begin with them when they're young. And I try to encourage the young people that I come into contact with to vote, you know, and let them know that how crucial it is for them to be able to vote. And I encourage them to also seek service learning opportunities because it's good when you start get ready to go to college to put that in your application.. So, and the last thing I'd like to say that the church can also be a respite center for people in the neighborhood where they can go and get the latest news, where they can lend a hand take out by elderly person, fix their home. One church that I belong to, we would do that. We will help an elderly lady paint our home, you know, and the guys got up and fixed her room. So these are the kind of things that you show love and you show, you know, moral values and you show people that you care. And I think that goes a long way, you know, and to making your activism work. And that's what gives you the joy of being an activist, because it doesn't pay much, for those that even get paid, you know, but the joy you get, the smiles you get when you help somebody. And this, for real will be the last. I saw a guy with the sign. And, you know, my window was down and I was stopped and and I said, I'm so sorry. I just don't have anything right now. And he said, "Yeah, but you spoke to me and you gave me a smile, and that's enough." So sometimes that's all it takes.

**Monicka:** Brenda Joyce, you just gave us a lot of ideas on how to motivate activism and the spirit with which you perform your activism. Brother Carter, How do you motivate activism in others?

**Brother Carter:** What I basically do is bring people to see what the reality is of the problems that exist on the outside and in these encampments. And then from there, from there, allow them



to, you know, weigh in on the different things that they see and have questions on. And, from there, to bring them not only to the area of talking about basic needs of food, water and shelter, but how do we advocate. And that's one of the things that I like to do, bring them to the table to see in the Campaign. There's so many ways that you can advocate when you fight poverty, and especially to the Poor People's Campaign that's organizing, you know, phone banking, um, going out to actions, being part of the basic everyday, finding solution, think tanks. That's the, to me, that's the best way. So that way that the person doesn't get bored or or lose interest in the work. It's a role. We say that road is too hard. Well, that's up to us and our, our passion, you know what I'm saying, and how we're motivated to do it and what our conscience tells us. So I would encourage folks that want to get involved with this: to come and take it one day and one step at a time, you know what I'm saying, and, and begin to learn and understand what poverty is, and what poverty means to us as a society. And it's going to take each and every one of us to get us out of poverty, and to change the narrative of what poverty is and what it looks like and how, like I said, how we can make a difference. Dr. Martin Luther King was interested in solutions: organizing commissions, think tanks with real and incremental solutions. The PPC is orienting towards bringing people together to devise and then legislate real solutions. So let's, let's get together and prevent people from falling into poverty in the first place and implement solutions that work.

**Monicka:** Brenda-Joyce, Brother Carter, I want to thank you for coming on to the Building Justice podcast today. I learned a lot about the PPC, about its mission, the work it's doing and the work you're doing, the incredible work you're doing through the organization. Is there anything you'd like to say to the audience before I officially close? Brenda-Joyce, How about starting with you?

**Brenda-Joyce:** I just want to thank you, Monicka, for spearheading the Building Justice podcast, and it was a pleasure being here. And I want to thank your listeners. They could have been anywhere else but sitting on here listening to me babble away. But I hope that I was able to encourage someone to become an activist because it really does bring joy to one's heart, to love on somebody and just to see a smile.

**Brother Carter:** Yeah. Thank you, Monicka. I want to thank you. I want to thank CRISJ. I want to thank the Building Justice podcast. And most of all, I want to thank all of the listeners, those that are out there from different walks of life, different sizes, shapes and colors. If I could encourage you today to advocate. Regardless of what you're doing, if you see the struggles around you today, know that that you could be a part of that. Don't wait till the last minute, you know what I'm saying, when something affects you and then you do something about it. Be preventative. Be NOW. You know, if you want to join this campaign, just go to "Poor People's Campaign." It's simple: [poorpeoplescampaign.org](http://poorpeoplescampaign.org) Come and join this fight. Come and join this movement. Thank you. God bless you all and continue to move forward. "Forward together. And not one step back." And remember, "When we lift from the bottom, everybody rises." Thank you. God bless you, Monicka.

**Brenda-Joyce:** I have one question for you. Do you know what Martin Luther King Junior's favorite song was?

**Monicka:** No, I don't! Tell me.

**Brenda-Joyce:** “If I can help somebody” sung by Mahalia Jackson.

**Monicka:** Oh, that's right. Yeah, that's a great that's a great song. All right, everyone with that, Thank you for listening. We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathy and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. Take care, folks. Bye.

### **Musical Outro Lyrics**

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice,"  
"Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.