

Why I March

Rochelle Robinson

I came to activism and to PPEHRC from years of struggle and anger. Struggling to keep a roof over my family's head, struggling to keep food on the table, struggling to find decent work with healthcare benefits and a living wage, struggling for my right to education, free education, struggling to fight poverty. I became angry at the system; a system embedded in the richest and most powerful country in the world. The system humiliated me when I needed government assistance. It stripped me of my dignity, my self-respect; invaded my privacy and held me in suspicion. I became the outsider, the deviant, welfare queen, fraudulent. I was the media example of bad parenting. I was the stereotypical matriarch—black, female, single mom. And I was poor...My anger propelled me to fight. And I am still fighting...

I am here because I believe in PPEHRC's mission and vision statements. The framework of human rights encompasses everyone. But if those rights were enforced, if the UDHR was truly a model by which we lived, I wouldn't be here today. I wouldn't be here fighting side by side with people who understand poverty in all its various forms and have experienced violations of their human rights. Their right to healthcare, food, housing, free education, a living wage job... When I walk the streets of Oakland or San Francisco or Berkeley, and see women, men and children living on the streets, I am witnessing a violation of rights. When I see day in and day out, poor folks being priced out of their neighborhoods, waiting rooms full of sick people who have no health insurance and are treated superficially by a money-driven healthcare system, I know I am observing human rights violations. The actions taken by PPEHRC and their members are to be applauded because this movement does not seek to comply, to be silenced. It does not seek pity. It does seek to call attention to US hypocrisy. A powerful and rich country that is quick to point a finger and then start a fight with other world leaders based on that country's human rights violations, but won't turn that finger inward at the blatant and most egregious of human rights violations here at home.

In California, our poor are struggling to keep their head above water from the flow of mass budget cuts that are proposed and legislated to hurt the poorest of its population. Healthcare, housing, education, childcare, immigrant rights are all at stake under the regime of the governor. And we know that we are not alone in this struggle. We know that from San Francisco to New York and places in between, we share a common struggle of fighting for the same human rights. We know that the war on poverty is synonymous with a war against the poor. It always has been, And therefore, I am here, representing California's poor, and demanding the return of our basic human rights. I am still struggling and I am still angry. I don't want pity; I want poverty to end.