



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Trump attacks 'horrible' Milwaukee

written by Stephen Millies
June 24, 2024

How deliberate deindustrialization made U.S. cities poor



Milwaukee is the 2nd worst city in the U.S. for Black people, with incomes half of any others, according to 24/7 Wall St., a financial news source. That's not what Trump's snarling about.

It shouldn't surprise anybody that Donald Trump called Milwaukee "horrible." He hates cities with large Black and Latinx communities.

Trump described the Black-majority city of [Baltimore](#) — the hometown of Frederick Douglass and Billie Holiday — as a "very dangerous & filthy place." The billionaire bigot tweeted that "no human being would want to live there," implying that over 300,000 Black people in the city were less than human.

Like Baltimore, Milwaukee was an industrial powerhouse that saw tens of thousands of union jobs destroyed. Sometimes described as a big machine shop, specializing in making the means of production, the city was famous for its breweries.

Milwaukee was the last big U.S. manufacturing center where the Great Migration of Black people from the South arrived in large numbers. In 1940, only 9,000 Black people lived in Milwaukee.

During World War II and the postwar economic boom, capitalists needed Black workers in their Milwaukee factories. The city's Black population grew seven times from 21,000 in 1950 to 146,000 in 1980.

Milwaukee was one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Racist landlords wouldn't rent to Black people, while Black families couldn't buy homes in white neighborhoods.

It was the same story in New York City. Landlord Fred Trump (folk singer Woody Guthrie's "[Old Man Trump](#)" is about his racist housing and rental practices) and his son, Donald Trump, were sued in 1973 by the federal government for refusing to

rent to Black people.

Year after year, Vel Phillips — the first Black member of Milwaukee's city council — introduced fair housing legislation. It would be voted down 18 to 1 despite nightly marches led by the NAACP Youth Council and its advisor, Father James Groppi.

It was only after Milwaukee's 1967 rebellion against racism — one of 200 Black uprisings that year — that the city passed a law banning housing discrimination. As Frederick Douglass declared, without struggle, there is no progress.

Milwaukee police were vicious. Future police chief Harold Brier helped cover up the 1958 police murder of Black motorist [Daniel Bell](#). Decades later, it was revealed that policeman Thomas Grady planted a knife at the scene.

Just during December 1974, Milwaukee cops killed three Black people, including 16-year-old Jerry Brookshire, on Christmas Eve. Eyewitness Ola Mae Davis testified that cop Raymond Marlow deliberately shot Brookshire as the unarmed teenager was climbing a fence. Davis had her house burned down for telling the truth.

Filthy rich, racist capitalists

Despite Wisconsin's one-time liberal image, union-busting bosses and racist politicians dominated the state.

Wisconsin's legislature eliminated any welfare payment for winter coats in 1969, hoping to freeze or drive out Black and poor families.

Latin American Union for Civil Rights president Ernesto Chacon was arrested for protesting this vicious decree. A march from Milwaukee to Madison was organized by Lucille Berrien and Father Groppi.

Joined by thousands of students in Madison, they occupied the state capitol. State

workers and their supporters did the same in 2011.

Just as housing was segregated, so were Milwaukee's schools. Assemblyperson Lloyd Barbee led school boycotts in 1964 and 1965.

Many capitalists refused to hire Black workers. Less than 1% of the 6,000 workers at Allen-Bradley, a Milwaukee maker of electrical controls, were Black in 1968. Company boss Harry Bradley was a founder of the racist John Birch Society.

The Bradley family sold the company to Rockwell Automation in 1985 and used the dough to expand its [Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation](#), a billion-dollar slush fund for right-wingers.

The tax-exempt outfit helped publish "The Bell Curve," an [anti-science tract](#) that makes the Hitler-like claim that there are racial differences in intelligence.

Ben Marcus was still refusing in 1969 to hire any Black waitresses at his now-defunct "Big Boy" chain of coffee shops. Marcus led the local "Israel Bond" campaigns that helped finance the apartheid occupation of Palestine.

Then there are [Elizabeth and Richard Uihlein](#), billionaire owners of the Uline supply outfit, who are pouring millions into Trump's campaign. The Uihlein family grew rich by owning Schlitz beer for a century before running it into the ground.

Even though the old Schlitz brewery was located right next to the original heart of Milwaukee's Black Community, none of the local breweries hired any Black workers until 1951. ("Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45," by Joe William Trotter Jr.)

A lockout of Black workers

Even after plant shutdowns had begun, 36.9% of Black workers in the Milwaukee

metropolitan area in 1980 were employed in manufacturing. Only Gary, Indiana, and Greensboro, North Carolina, had higher percentages of Black workers having factory jobs. (Metropolitan Area Fact Book)

Most factory workers in Milwaukee were union members with union wages and union benefits. That's why a majority of the city's Black families owned their homes.

The city is now known for evictions and foreclosures, as described in "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City," by Matthew Desmond.

Nearly [7 million manufacturing jobs](#) were destroyed in the United States between 1979 and 2019. That's the biggest reason for declining union membership.

The working class wasn't defeated in battle as much as it had thousands of battlefields taken away. The wealthy and powerful enjoyed a 50-year-long holiday, cutting wages as it minted hundreds of new billionaires.

This orgy of profit-taking was greatly aided by the overthrow of the socialist Soviet Union.

Thousands of Black workers in Milwaukee were made jobless when the A.O. Smith, American Motors, and Allis-Chalmers plants shut down. Thousands more were laid off at other factories.

What made this more obscene was that while Milwaukee County lost 55,000 factory jobs between 1977 and 1992, the rest of Wisconsin — overwhelmingly white — gained 66,000 manufacturing jobs. (Census of Manufacturers)

Capitalism was fleeing Black workers. While Milwaukee County has less than a sixth of Wisconsin's population, it has almost 70% of its Black residents.

[Manufacturing employment](#) in Wisconsin reached 601,000 in 1996 before falling

slightly to the current total of 574,000 workers. The state leapfrogged past the former industrial strongholds of Massachusetts, New Jersey, and North Carolina to become the ninth-largest manufacturing state.

Only [Indiana](#) has a higher percentage of its workforce employed in manufacturing.

Meanwhile, the number of [factory workers](#) in Milwaukee County fell to 46,678 in 2021. In less than two generations, 107,000 manufacturing jobs were wiped out in a county of 940,000 people, 26% of whom were Black.

This deliberate deindustrialization was a lockout of the Black working class. Bordering the closed A.O. Smith plant, where thousands of Black workers had jobs, is the impoverished zip code 53206, which has one of the country's highest incarceration rates.

Instead of getting jobs in the big plants, Black youth are being railroaded to the big prisons. The number of prisoners in Wisconsin has leaped from less than 3,000 in the early 1960s to over 20,000. (Wisconsin Blue Book) Joe Biden helped push through mass incarceration legislation in the U.S. Senate during the 1990s.

The Black Lives Matter movement that swept Wisconsin in 2020 shows the way forward. Struggle will defeat all the Trumps.

