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ITS PEOPLE,
ITS WONDERS

DRONES
THEY ARE COMING
FOR US





the color of ECONOMIC ANXIETY

by Malaika Jabali

THE BUILDING LOOMED OVER THE INTERSECTION like an apparition. Though hollowed out and lifeless, the shell of the former A.O. Smith Milwaukee Works headquarters on N 27th Street and W. Hopkins was still magnificent. But the grand two-story brick structure, wide as half a city block and featuring the odd boarded up window, felt like a tombstone. “Here lies the dream of the Great Migration,” it read.

“The 53206,” as the area is commonly called, and the predominantly black neighborhoods surrounding it, currently have the highest rate of incarcerated black men in the country. Deindustrialization, wealth inequality, unemployment, and historical patterns of discrimination and police terrorism have created a toxic mix for Wisconsin’s 359,000 black residents.

Yet, few outsiders seem to realize that Milwaukee is substantially black. And many of its black residents, who make up 40 percent of the city, have been simmering in their frustrations for decades. Those frustrations came to a head in 2016, after police killed 23-year-old Sylville Smith, when residents set fire to Milwaukee’s Sherman Park neighborhood. But there may be an additional form of resistance bubbling under the surface of Milwaukee’s famed breweries and steadily gentrifying neighborhoods.

A common narrative about the November 2016 election is that a wave of white backlash thrust Donald Trump to the White House and that white Obama voters “flipped” to Trump. This may have been true on a small scale, but Obama-Trump voters did not make a significant difference. White people of all genders and classes vot-

ed for Trump at about the same rates as they voted for Romney, McCain, and George W. Bush, and both white and Republican voter turnout stayed fairly steady between 2012 and 2016. More significant was the critical mass of Democrats who defected from the party or didn’t vote at all in the battleground states the Democratic Party needed most. The rate of this decline among Democrats in key swing states was larger than the increase of Republicans who brought Trump to victory. And in some states, the drop was unprecedented.

WHILE THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY ARGUES ABOUT whether and how to win back the vanishingly small number of white Obama-Trump voters, the uncomfortable fact remains that black voter turnout in 2016 was down in over half the country. In Wisconsin, the decline in black voter turnout between 2012 and 2016 was 86,830 votes. Hillary Clinton lost the state by a mere 22,748 votes. If Clinton won over more of the black Democrats who voted in 2012 in just three states—Wisconsin, Florida, and Michigan—she would have won the election.

So why didn’t black voters turn out for Clinton? Even accounting for the thousands of potential voters who were likely harmed by Wisconsin’s incessant suppression tactics, studies show that voter suppression was among the least important factors affecting black turnout in Wisconsin.

In search of some answers, I trekked to Milwaukee last fall to talk to some of the city’s black residents about why they stayed home.

WHEN NEWLY-ELECTED ALDERMAN KHALIF RAINEY parked his car a couple of blocks from the Sherman Park neighborhood in August 2016, he was met with a stranger's warning. "Don't go over there. It's about to go down tonight." On August 13, 2016, the historically black, middle class community was in flames, from police cars, to an auto parts store, to the BP gas station that had been a match point for prior protests. This north side Milwaukee neighborhood, which Khalif knew and loved since childhood, burned before his eyes.

Just a few hours after police officer Dominique Heaggan-Brown killed Sylville Smith, the neighborhood was burning. The arson wasn't just the climax of mourning for Sylville's death. It was also about the police killings of Dontre Hamilton and Derek Williams, whose deaths were still a recent memory. It was about the folks who were out of work and with few legitimate employment options, and the decades of legalized police terrorism that wracked residents since the earliest years of black migrants seeking refuge in Milwaukee from the Jim Crow South.

In the early 1970s, black people from the corners of rural southern towns could find a relatively fresh start in Milwaukee. Despite the city's notorious housing segregation, black residents were hired in manufacturing jobs with nothing more than a high school diploma. The city's culture of anti-black police violence could be mitigated some by its economic opportunities, which ranked among the best in the country for black people.

But the jobs left and the police presence remained. The union labor, pensions, and benefits offered by manufacturing employers gave way to insecure, contractual service work or, in many cases, nothing at all. A 2017 report from the Center of Wisconsin Strategy (COWS), a "think-and-do-tank" based in the University of

Wisconsin-Madison, notes that black people in Wisconsin experience "extreme" economic and social inequality far exceeding national rates.

In 2015, blacks in Wisconsin were nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than whites. Thirty-one percent of black people in Wisconsin are in poverty, six times the white poverty rate. The black household income is half that of whites in the state, giving it the second highest black-white income gap after Minnesota.

These figures are even starker for black men in the state's largest city. "No metro area has witnessed a more precipitous erosion in the labor market for black males over the past 40 years than has Milwaukee," according to University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor Marc Levine in his analysis of U.S. Census data. "[A]nd in no other large metro area is the contemporary black male employment crisis more acute than in Milwaukee." In 1970, 85% of black men in their prime working years of 25-54 were employed. This was above the national average. But by 2010, amid the Great Recession, that employment rate dipped to 52.7%.

This was the lowest level of employment for black males in their prime working years in any metropolitan area in the country.

At the break of dawn, at a news conference following the Sherman



Park uprising, Alderman Khalif Rainey diverted from the usual talking points about the ills of violent protest and instead issued a searing indictment of Milwaukee's failure to address racial inequities:

"This entire community has sat back and witnessed how Milwaukee, Wisconsin has become the worst place to live for African Americans in the entire country. Now this is the warning cry. Do we continue with the inequities, the injustice, the under-education that creates these byproducts that we see this evening?"

With increasing passion, the Alderman professed that "the black people of Milwaukee are tired. They're tired of living under this oppression. This is their existence. This is their life. This is the life of their children. There's racial problems here in Wisconsin that have to be rectified. Rectify this immediately."

Alderman Rainey speaks with the same clarity and fervor over a year later when I meet him to discuss the rebellion, and similar rebellions that took place in Milwaukee and other black, urban centers 50 years prior in the midst of parallel economic and racial conditions. The walls of his wood-paneled office are lined with plaques and notable achievements, including a framed media clipping from *TIME* magazine highlighting his protest statement.

I asked him what the Sherman Park uprising could have meant for the typically Democratic stronghold and a presidential election that was set to transpire just a few months later. Here, too, the young politician's response was unconventional: "I felt that there was no one that really spoke—they were speaking to [us] on a superficial level about what was going on."

He harkens back to the Obama administration and the onslaught of police brutality and uprisings the country witnessed. "We had Baltimore, we had Charlotte, we had Milwaukee. I wonder—how does that factor into a community's confidence in having an African American president, if during the tenure when we had [one] we've seen some of the most atrocious murders by police officers of unarmed black men? We've seen the decline in African American wealth."

"Did we lose confidence in the power or the ability of getting things done by a President? Were we coming off of a hangover or fatigue? Do we still have confidence in democracy at all?"

Rainey tells me that during the protests and their aftermath he couldn't eat for 5 days.

ALATECOMER TO THE GREAT MIGRATION, Milwaukee attracted black people from small, southern towns well into the late 1970s. The migrants hoped to escape the explicit racism and low-wage labor in the south. But jobs began disappearing shortly after many black Southerners arrived, giving way to automation and outsourcing.

With over half of black men in Milwaukee reliant on production jobs in 1970, this labor market shift killed their economic progress.

In 1984, A.O. Smith opened up motor assembly operations in Juarez and Acuna, Mexico. In 1995, it began joint ventures in China. Two years later, the company sold off its automotive unit and moved its headquarters, and its jobs, from its property in the urban center of Milwaukee 8 miles northwest to the suburbs.

As Professor Marc Levine notes: The city of Milwaukee, where almost 90% of the region's black males live, has lost over three-quarters of its industrial jobs since the 1960s. In metro Milwaukee, all of the region's net job growth since the 1980s has occurred in the suburbs,

where few working-age black males live due to past and present housing segregation, and where transportation links between the central city and suburban jobs are poor (and increasingly facing cutbacks).

Milwaukee followed the formula of many other American cities in the mid-20th century. Even without state or local laws implementing Jim Crow segregation, Milwaukeeans enforced an anti-black racial caste system through the real estate market. By the 1940s, according to research by Lois Quinn of the Metropolitan Integration Research Center, "at least 16 of the 18 Milwaukee County suburbs were using racially restrictive covenants to exclude black families from residential areas."

The legacy of this segregation persists: the Milwaukee metro area now stands as the most segregated in America.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, one of America's longest-running civil rights organizations, isn't known to be especially critical of the Democratic Party. But the president of Milwaukee's NAACP chapter pulled no punches when discussing Hillary Clinton's 2016 Wisconsin campaign.

"Hillary Clinton did not come and do any type of campaigning in the general election" are the first words Fred Royal says to me after introducing himself. We were seated in Coffee Makes You Black, a cafe and restaurant repurposed from its past life as a local bank. The once-vacant building had become one of black Milwaukeeans' central gathering spots. Royal had just wrapped up a meeting at a nearby table.

"She [campaigning] in the primary. Bernie Sanders won the primary. That should have told her she should have come here and campaigned a little harder to get a turnout if Bernie Sanders beats you in the primary. She never came." Mr. Royal also refers to the number of people who voted third party and others who may have been in Bernie Sanders' base who stayed home as possible reasons for her losing the state, a first for a Democratic candidate in over 30 years.

"There were no distinct issues that she ran on that were associated with black voter turnout," he asserts. "And a lot of people faulted Bill Clinton's mistreatment of African Americans as her baggage, such as welfare reform, the drug war that was [really] the war on drug users. When you're on video and a woman is asking about your comments about super-predators and you get rattled. You have to be accountable for your record," Royal remarks, referring to a term the Clintons advocated while campaigning to pass the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, otherwise known as the "crime bill." "[S]he didn't handle it well. It was one of the worst campaigns I've ever seen here in Wisconsin."

A few days before interviewing Mr. Royal, I spoke with Martha Love, an officer of the Democratic Party of Milwaukee County. She was confounded as to how Hillary lost the state and huge numbers of its black voters. Mr. Royal, on the other hand, was very clear in his assessment of the 2016 election. I asked him whether he considered Hillary Clinton's campaign to be among the worst merely because of her ground-game missteps or if anything else factored in. "African Americans, especially African Americans in this city with [high rates of] poverty, 50% black male unemployment for . . . years. That shows you the systemic racism that isn't being addressed. And if you're not going to speak to that, why would I be engaged?"

Before sitting down with Mr. Royal, I had conversations with some of the restaurant's kitchen staff as they wound down for the day. Juan, a young cook from Milwaukee's north side whose skin was peppered with tattoos, admitted that he didn't "really care for



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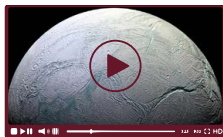
LIVE STREAM

of formerly endangered species...



LIVE STREAM

of the anarcho-communes on Enceladus...



The History of "Twitter"

The platform that was...



We Dug Up Your Old Comments and...

nobody cares, we all said things when we were young and stupid.



#livingwageUBI
#well-rested
#blessed

Why We Post Less...

It's because everything sucks less!

Welcome! Do you want to...

...find someplace to go today?
...find someone to speak to?
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Make New Friends!



Gomez, 74

[MEET GOMEZ](#)

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...she received life-saving surgery thanks to universal healthcare and now she's home in time for her daughter's birthday!

90 or 95% tax on the rich: The candidates debate...

12 Cats Who Look Like Leon Trotsky



You Won't Believe...

...that we used to waste perfectly good land on farming these noble beasts! Meet some cool cows on their protected range.



Strangers Who Could Use A Kind Word



Leonora

I

Leonora's interests include: crochet, BBC murder mysteries, krav maga...

[SEND](#)

DISCUSSIONS



Substantive Debate Zone



Amiable Chit-Chat



Consensual Flirtation



Narcissism of Small Differences Quarantine Zone

NICHE GROUPS



Manatee Enthusiasts



Cookie Baking Bros



3-D Chess Players



People Who Like Working Out (But Aren't Judgy About It)



Tree Climbers



Musicians Who Are Not Guitarists



People Who Like Pears



Atheists Who Aren't Jerks



Jazz Types



Astronomers Who Can't Stand Neil DeGrasse Tyson



Bird Watchers



Train Spotters



Bird Trainers



Whistling Gardeners



Ex-Lawyer Support Group



Miscellaneous Nerds

FIND UPCOMING MEETUPS

Feeling distressed?

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neither one of them. There ain't no such thing as Democrat and Republican; they both intertwined with each other." Given the Democrats' intentionally conservative economic strategy since the late 1970s, this was a reasonable observation. Though Juan voted for Obama in his first term, he didn't seem convinced that presidential elections affected his day-to-day life. "Obama wasn't a bad president. But at the same time, it's like, the President is just a face. He's just a figurehead at the end of the day."

His co-worker Ace hadn't voted for a president in years, though he liked Bernie Sanders. The older black man, who hails from Birmingham, Alabama, moved to Milwaukee to pursue construction work. He believes his days in Milwaukee are numbered, and he plans to return south to join his family. Sanders, he felt, "is talking about our needs."

Campaign mistakes from Democrats may have been excused by Wisconsin's black voters in prior elections despite the state's perpetual inequalities. But what Royal described, and what Juan and Ace echoed, was a perfect storm of fatigue generally, disinterest in Hillary Clinton specifically, and the promise of a relative political unknown showing hungry voters that there didn't have to be Democratic politics as usual. All of these factors appear to have kept black Milwaukeeans and other loyal Democrats out of the voting booths.

The exact reasons for disinterest in Clinton vary, but her absence from Wisconsin didn't help.

WENDELL HARRIS SAW THE OTHER KIDS struggling in the hot Arkansas sun and knew he wanted more. As a farm hand he would only get three dollars a day picking cotton, and he had to pay one of those dollars to his supervisor each day. Wendell ingratiated himself to his boss and was soon promoted to getting water for the fatigued sharecroppers.

His ambition led him to Milwaukee the day after he graduated high school, joining his older brother to the city in 1967. Within a year of moving to town, he landed a job at A.O. Smith, where he worked for 30 years. With just a high school degree, he could soon enter Milwaukee's burgeoning black middle class.

Mr. Harris, who regaled me with stories of his childhood in Arkansas and his migration to Milwaukee, described his transition into politics and his concerns about Bill Clinton during the former president's early political campaigns. As an officer of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and a member of A.O. Smith's union, Mr. Harris was approached by Democratic Party leaders in the early '90s to join their ranks. But Harris, a Democratic Socialist who now serves on the school board of the Milwaukee Public Schools, was averse to joining the Party in the midst of its newfound conservative identity.

"I didn't like Bill Clinton from the outset based on his politics

when he was the governor of Arkansas," Harris recalls as we drive from a school board meeting, winding through Milwaukee's black neighborhoods as the sun begins to set. Referring to Clinton's political response after having lost one of his campaigns, he notes that Bill Clinton asserted "in his own words, no one would be able to 'out-prison' him. Meaning that he was [perceived as] too soft on crime. Rickey Ray Rector had the mental capacity of an infant. He was on death row in Arkansas. Bill Clinton stopped his [presidential] campaign to stop and execute that guy. That's how he proved his point about being hard on crime."

"Another reason I didn't like him is he was the architect of the New Democrats, and in essence they were supposed to be as close to the Republicans as possible to still be considered a Democrat."

Wendell Harris was not alone in his disdain of Clinton and his colleagues' conservative policy agenda. In his final presidential campaign in 1992, California governor Jerry Brown asked a Philadelphia labor convention to compare Clinton's record as "a right-to-work, union-busting, scab-inviting, wage-depressing, environmental-disaster governor versus [himself,] a labor governor."

"New Democrats," for whom Bill Clinton was the face, promoted privatization, anti-union policies, and the deregulation of financial markets in furtherance of Reagan-era conservatism. Though the ideology gained steam in the 90s, it had been developing for much longer.

While championing welfare cuts for the black masses, Bill Clinton enhanced corporate welfare for the country's elite. Clearly a successful campaign tactic at the time, the last few years have been unforgiving to the right-leaning legacy of New Democrats, as poverty, wealth inequality, and mass incarceration have continued to soar unabated under their watch.

Mr. Royal highlighted the common concern that Hillary Clinton's embrace of more progressive economic policies, after decades advocating for Bill Clinton's neoliberalism, probably didn't register as genuine for the many young black voters who preferred Bernie Sanders. For some, it was likely too little, too late.

When Democrats joined Hillary Clinton on the 2016 presidential campaign trail, the widespread messaging was that people of color simply had too much to lose with a Trump presidency.

But many of them felt that they already lost.

Instead of addressing the conservative economic policies that defined the Democratic Party for decades and helped undermine black progress, Clinton attempted to appeal to black voters' identity. By targeting a limited conception of this identity, the presidential hopeful failed to appreciate the multitude of black experiences and discounted the ways in which black Midwestern priorities have departed from the Democrats' black, southern firewall.

The 2016 Democratic Primary made these distinctions explicit.

*"A growing number of
black people are losing
faith in the two major political
parties, yet the common refrain
is that Democrats must appeal to
white swing voters..."*



Whereas Hillary Clinton breezed through southern states with significant support among blacks who went to the polls, Bernie Sanders pulled his strongest black support in the Midwest. According to NBC News exit polling data, the percentage of black support for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries in major southern states never got past the teens. He fared best in North Carolina, where he won 19% of the black Democratic vote. But in key battleground states, including Michigan, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, Sanders averaged about 30% of the black vote. His greatest support came from black voters in Wisconsin, 31% of whom said they voted for him in the Democratic primary.

But, unlike Sanders, Clinton failed to make real assessments and offer meaningful policy solutions to the economic woes of those living in post-industrial urban centers, instead relying on appeals to black identity. This failure hit at precisely the wrong time—when cities, including Milwaukee, were literally still smoldering from summer uprisings—and in precisely the wrong places—in northern cities where democrats rely more heavily on their urban black and progressive base to counteract conservative rural districts.

“That hot sauce in the bag comment was one of the most offensive comments I’d ever heard from anyone,” Alderman Rainey shares with me with as he recalls Hillary Clinton’s remarks on a black radio show while on the campaign trail. “I mean, I love hot sauce, but to think that [this comment] and bringing out Jay-Z and Beyoncé in Ohio was enough to secure the black vote, the youth vote. It was insulting to the intelligence of the black voter.”

Even addressing systemic racism was couched as a zero-sum game: to dismantle one form of oppression you have to keep all the others. Few comments exemplified this more than Clinton’s rhetorical question along a Nevada campaign stop: “If we broke up the big banks tomorrow . . . would that end racism?”

There was a wide opening to address the financial environment in which big banks targeting black home buyers for subprime loans deepened the destabilization of black communities during the Great Recession and beyond. Pitting unmitigated capitalism, itself a driver of black subjugation and ongoing racial disparities, against some generalized admonishment of racism was one of the more shamefully disingenuous themes of Clinton’s campaign.

And on top of being shameful, it didn’t work.

A GROWING NUMBER OF BLACK PEOPLE AND BLACK women in particular appear not only to have lost faith in the electoral process in 2016, but to be losing faith in the two major political parties. A September 2017 *Essence* study shows that 21% of black women felt that neither party represented them, up from 13% in 2016. The belief that the Democratic Party represents them fell from 85% to 74% in the same time frame.

There is evidence that disillusionment is a far more significant factor than voter suppression in deflating turnout among voters of color. Even in states that did not introduce new voter ID laws after 2013, when the Supreme Court rolled back voter protections in *Shelby County v. Holder*, black voter turnout dropped. A University of Wisconsin-Madison study of 2016 voter behavior in its two most populous counties, which lean heavily Democratic, indicates that the primary reason its 294 respondents did not vote in the presidential election is that they were “unhappy with choice of candidates or issues,” representing 33% of the responses. “Not interested” and “vote would not have mattered”

represented another 8.8% and 6.6%, respectively. “Did not have adequate photo ID,” “told at polling place that ID inadequate,” and “lines too long,” measures indicating possible voter suppression, represented 1.7%, 1.4%, and .9% of the answers.

Yet nearly two years after the presidential election, the common refrain is that the Democratic Party has to appeal to white swing voters if they want any chance of success in 2020.

A February *Bloomberg* story on voter turnout of non-college educated whites in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin offered that “[i]n two of the three states — Michigan and Pennsylvania — Clinton would have been able to carry the states if this group’s turnout had remained at 2012 levels.” The same, of course, is true of Michigan and Wisconsin if Clinton had turned out black voters at 2012 levels. And, as noted earlier, higher black voter turnout in Florida would have won Clinton the presidency.

For the Democratic Party’s success, it would seem that trying to secure one’s base would be a more certain bet than adjusting to the whims of swing voters or convincing those who generally vote for Republican candidates. Yet liberal outlets have run away with the idea that they must appeal to “working-class,” presumably conservative-leaning, whites in order to win. A *Washington Post* newsletter from May 2, 2018 suggested that in order for Democrats to bring something “new to the table” in 2020, they should win over “battleground states filled with working, white swing voters who have been caught for years in an economic vice and fear further status slippage.”

This sentiment has reverberated across the media landscape, with op-eds, reporting, and long form essays attempting to uncover the economic anxieties of white Trump voters.

There are signs that some prominent Democrats are indeed shifting gears and embracing leftist economic initiatives that could satisfy its multi-racial voters, including a federal jobs guarantee. This, and the abject failures of Trump and his administration, may be enough to regain a critical mass of the Democratic base who defected from the party in 2016 as midterms continue. But—as progressive victories in Florida and the Bronx indicate—addressing working class anxiety across race is plausibly the most effective path forward.” For some of the Democratic base, the time is ticking to rebuild their confidence, particularly as some liberals are poised to cling to the Clintons’ triangulation playbook and abandon meaningful economic appeals to black constituents.

Alderman Rainey, who steers clear of the Democratic Party machine, hypothesized on the viability of an independent third party: “Is it time for us to create our own serious credible party and force these two political parties to concede to our demands?” he asked. “The way things are currently set up, the Democratic Party just takes us for granted that we’re going to vote for them. The Republicans attempt to just peel us off and disenfranchise us. In order for us to be taken seriously as constituents, I think we have to start a ticket and articulate our demands ourselves. Unless you speak to these solutions, don’t count on our vote.”

The past few decades of conservative economic policy from both parties, and its effects on wealth and income in black industrial cities, may continue to cause disaffection in black voters where Democrats need their support most. Yet, liberal pundits and policy makers assume that it’s white working class voters, not black ones, whom they should lure back. If the Party fixates on whites with economic anxieties, instead of how economic policies have harmed households across races, they are at real risk of losing again. †

PHOTOS: Black life in Milwaukee—bus drivers in the 1960s, a street festival in the 1980s. Courtesy Milwaukee Public Library Historic Collection.