

## **We Need to Get Serious About Equal Economic Opportunity in Milwaukee**

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MILWAUKEE - Over the weekend, another young black man lost his life and civil unrest exploded in Milwaukee.

Our hearts go out to all the residents of Milwaukee's Sherman Park neighborhood who have experienced this weekend's civil unrest, to the family of the young man who lost his life, and to the peace officers who have put their lives on the line to protect public safety. As public order is restored, it is important we take stock of what happened, and what we have to do together to create a Wisconsin where everyone has an equal chance to live a fulfilling life.

Although the violence and property destruction seemed spontaneous to outsiders, for many African American residents it was a predictable outpouring of frustration flowing from unbearable racial inequality and exclusion. Shocking statistics support this, as the Milwaukee metro area has for many years consistently ranked among the worst in the country for African Americans across a variety of indicators including, segregation, incarceration rates, black male nonemployment, child poverty, and many others.

African Americans in Milwaukee, who came during the Great Migration to work and work hard and claim their piece of the American Dream, were drawn by the plentiful opportunities to work in union manufacturing jobs. They have borne the brunt of deindustrialization since the late 1970s. According to the UWM Center for Economic Development, the percentage of African Americans working in manufacturing declined from 54.3% in 1970 to 14.7% in 2009.

Many leaders in the Milwaukee area seem to see this as a natural phenomenon beyond our control. But the economy is not a natural disaster or an extreme weather event beyond our agency to influence, it is human made. What has been lacking in Milwaukee is the courage and vision to fight for solutions up to the scale of the problem. Once the dust is settled in Sherman

Park, the question will be which public officials, which community leaders, which corporate leaders are willing to stand up and fight for public interventions at the scale necessary to end Wisconsin's system of economic apartheid and truly guarantee full opportunity for everyone in our great state. This means striving to create an economy where everyone who wants a good jobs can find one near their local community.

Citizen Action of Wisconsin and our over 12,000 members in the Milwaukee area look forward to continuing to work with everyone in the community who wants to work toward economic and social transformation.

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