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Post World War II Housing Crisis for African American Communities in the North: Case Study the Inner Core of Milwaukee, 1945 – 1968

Mania Taher

In the past four months that I have lived in Milwaukee, I received the impression in the first few days that the city's urban fabric is racially segregated. While I was traveling through Milwaukee's different neighborhoods around downtown and from the north and south, I found it devastating to observe that the racial profiles of the neighborhoods are also spatially reflected through the physical condition of the public spaces and streets. I was majorly persuaded by this primary observation to research on this topic as an urban problem for HIST 971 class.

I started this research from looking into the post-World War II housing scenario of African-American communities in the context of the northern cities when the Second Great Migration was taking place. In this process, I looked into the post-war housing history of three northern cities: Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee. This research based on primary and secondary sources has helped me to make a comparison of these cities' past histories of racial segregation and its effect in the housing of African-Americans. On this point, I also agree with this statement by journalist author Frank A. Aukofer from his book *City with a Chance*, "Milwaukee is not Chicago, Chicago is not Detroit, Detroit is not Newark, Newark is not Watts. Each has its own peculiar characteristics, its history, ethnic composition, geography, climate, economy, and people" (p. vii). This research study was overwhelming for me to get the idea of how the complex issues of bigger racial tensions in these cities were reflected from the urban legal frameworks to neighborhood sentiments. Segregation of urban neighborhoods is the most visible practice of racial inequality, which started with Government's 'redlining' policy. This policy

stemmed from an anti-black sentiment of the white population, which later became a tool by the real-estate developers for persuading white families to buy homes at sub-urban areas, and to sell their old houses to the African-Americans at higher prices. Lack of home-ownership by the African-Americans was a major reason for the lack of development in the inner core Milwaukee, and this situation became worsened later with higher unemployment rate among African-Americans, and urban renewal projects in the neighborhood. The African-American aspiration to open housing in Milwaukee was thwarted by lack of co-operation from the city politicians. Racial conflicts and tensions surfaced as a persistent struggle for the neighborhoods of Milwaukee, and this gave rise to the local black political organization movements. Eventually, the representative voices from the African-American community were unheard in the city's bigger public policies regarding open housing. Housing crisis, neighborhood stagnation and segregation constituted the urban crisis in Milwaukee. Housing was one large factor among the everyday struggles of the African-American people that eventually led to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

The Great Migration of African-Americans in the post- World War II era had a major impact on the U.S. urban history, especially in the northern cities of Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, New York and Philadelphia. For example, in Milwaukee, the migration resulted in a nearly 600 percent African-American population increase from 1940 to 1960.¹ The migration also marked the intersection of race, power and public policy in those cities to which they migrated. U.S. urban policy of 'redlining' from 1934 National Housing Act marked the inception of informal discrimination and segregation against the cities' redlined residents, a majority of

¹ "Black History in Wisconsin", Wisconsin Historical Society, accessed December 1st, 2017, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS502>

whom were African-Americans. Redlining policy restricted African-American families from moving to better residential areas, or to improve their own neighborhoods which eventually led in the urban decay of the U.S. inner-city residential areas. The segregation practice also aided the real-estate developers to practice ‘blockbusting’ in this post-war era. Blockbusting was a business process of the real estate agents and building developers to convince white property owners to sell their house at low prices, which they did by promoting fear in those house owners that African-Americans will soon be moving into the neighborhood. This business tactics resulted in white people to selling their city neighborhood homes to move to the sub-urban areas, and those houses being bought by African-American families at higher prices. The racial ideology in the housing practice of post-war cities was initially the product of racial beliefs and popular culture among the white population, but strong physical segregation among housing neighborhoods bolstered that perception, as we would see in the inner core of Milwaukee.

Richard Rothstein, in his book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, clearly discusses the inter-relationship of redlining policy and blockbusting business practice, and claims that “Blockbusting could work only because the FHA (Federal Housing Administration) made certain that African Americans had few alternative neighborhoods where they could purchase homes at fair market values” (p. 99). In 1973, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights also reflect upon this idea in its conclusion of housing chapter by mentioning that, “housing industry, aided and abetted by Government, must bear the primary responsibility for the legacy of segregated housing ... Government and private industry came together to create a system of residential segregation.”² Based upon this discussion, I will draw

² “The Federal Civil Rights Enforcement Effort: A Reassessment Report,” U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Washington, D.C. January, 1973. CR1.2: En2/2/973, Online Archival Collection of Thurgood Marshall Law Library, Francis King Carey School of Law, University of Maryland, accessed December 5th, 2017, <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/chrolist.html>

light on the post-war northern cities' contradictory practice in the housing sector: African-Americans were forced by city regulations to live in the impoverished and overcrowded neighborhoods of inner-city areas, while subsidized federal home loans helped white families to disperse into single-family suburban homes.

This argument is well-supported by Arnold R. Hirsch in his book (1983), *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940 -1960*. In this book, he discusses the role of Chicago in the context of housing segregation of post-war U.S. cities as a “pioneer in developing concepts and devices” (p. xviii). In the author’s elaborate discussion of Chicago’s history of urban and race relations, he focuses primarily on the role of the white population in ghetto formation, and he does that because he believes “that is where the power was” (p. xvi). He also adds, “White hostility was of paramount importance in shaping the pattern of black settlement” (p. 9). On the reference of ‘white fight’, historian Amanda Seligman also agrees on the same role of white people in her book *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side*. She suggests that when African-Americans started to move to West Side neighborhood, many white residents defended their space with violence, intimidation, or legal tactics. Eventually, this role of ethnic, working-class white communities helped to shape the urban policies for Chicago, who were the main consumers for city businesses and the major voter bank of the politicians. On this point, Hirsch also discusses the strategic tactics adopted by the city’s downtown business interests and academic institutions, in order to keep ‘the black belt’ away. The ultimate success of these actors came along with governmental support by Congress passing the Housing Act of 1949, which provided substantial funding for public housing. Vast-scaled urban “vertical ghetto” housing projects took place at the African-American dominated

residential areas in the south and west sides of Chicago, in order to confine the race only within their territories.

Thomas J. Sugrue's (1996) *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* is another secondary source that explained the "complicated and multi-faceted reality" (p. 8) of racial segregation in the context of economically-depressed, post-war northern cities, like Detroit. In his words, "The convergence of the disparate forces of deindustrialization, racial transformation, and political and ideological conformity laid the groundwork for the urban crisis in Detroit and its northern counterparts...The shape of the postwar city, I contend, is the result of political and economic decisions, of choices made and not made by various institutions, groups and individuals." (p. 11) His concise analysis of the racism and inequality from the early 1940s housing and employment, to the 1950s-changing geography of black Detroit, and finally, leading to the crisis moments of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s intelligibly depicts the succession of changing race and class in the city. Hirsch, in his book, discusses African-Americans as helpless victims of other social and political actors. On the other hand, Sugrue's literature sheds a different light: he discusses the inequality of power between African-American Detroiters and other actors in the game, but he also emphasizes on the African-American's visibility and role at the local-level power politics of Detroit. He talks about the role of African-American organizations for expanding the horizons of opportunity for the community. He also narrates how economic prosperity among a number of African-Americans resulted in growing class divisions within the community and its aftereffects, "Well-to-do black homeowners, like their white counterparts, fled to outlying sections of the city, and contributed to the residential segregation of the black poor." (p. 12). I find his Marxist re-telling of African-American history

in Detroit interesting. He indicates the priority of individualistic attitude of middle and upper-income African-Americans over their racial bondage. The reasoning behind this attitude was very simple, “These Black Detroiters sought peaceful neighborhoods where they could live without the fear of disorder and crime... They sought the status of ‘high-class’ neighbors, and the beneficial influence of good schools and good role models for their children... In so doing, they fulfilled their middle-class aspiration, at least for a time” (p. 206). Eventually, all African-Americans in Detroit were at a common point of their deep distrust for White people, majorly due to “the growing marginalization of the city in local, state, and national politics.” (p. 265) “Critically, Sugrue’s examination of northern white homeowners’ attempt to maintain racially segregated neighborhoods and white opposition to equal employment opportunities for African Americans reframed the historical dialogue that had identified the 1960’s as the onset of the postwar white conservative ‘backlash’.”³

National and city-level policy makers in the north heavily reinforced racial stereotypes and inequalities for African American people in the housing, employment, and education sectors. Government policies in social security, welfare and job programs played a strong role in determining African American positions in the larger social, political and economic context. In the issue of housing, the major struggles for the African-Americans revolved around many complex issues, such as- red-lining, the scarcity of housing units, dilapidated condition of housing, overcrowding and lack of basic public facilities within the community.

³ Tula Connell, “1950s Milwaukee: Race, Class, and a City Divided.” *Labor Studies Journal* 42 (2016): 1-25 (3). Accessed Oct. 29, 2017. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313033359>

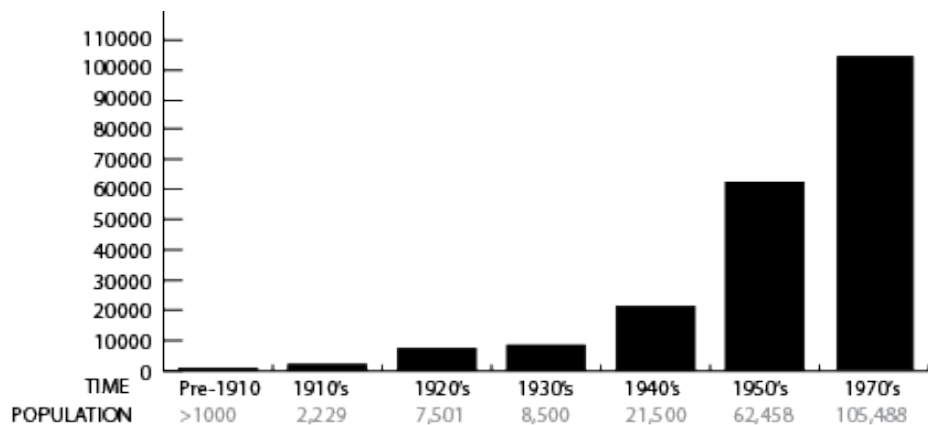


Fig. 01: Population growth chart of African-Americans in Milwaukee.
 Data Source: "The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee". Author: Patrick D. Jones.

The late 19th and early 20th-century was a period of dynamic growth and change in Milwaukee, spurred by industrial expansion and massive immigration... earning the city the nickname 'Machine Shop of the World' (Jones, p. 14). Overwhelmingly white and middle-class, Milwaukee oversaw a great change in its demography, as thousands of African-Americans from the U.S. South migrated to the city in search of a better living following World War II. These migrant African-Americans were a largely low-income population, as they only found the jobs as unskilled laborers in the war industry. This change in African-American demography in the city resulted in the sharpening of class divisions in the already 'divided Milwaukee'. "In the early 20th century Milwaukee, "the growth of Milwaukee's black community coincided with racial concentration, supporting Gillbert Osofsky's 'ghettoization model' of urban African American development." (Jones, p. 19) Due to the continuous practice of segregation in the city's housing sector by resistance of the white Milwaukeeans, African Americans were forced to live in a very segregated neighborhood.

"An identifiable thirty-five blocks 'black district', referred to variously as 'Little Africa', 'Bronzeville', or, later, 'the inner core', emerged on the near north side, an area also known for its brothels, liquor joints, and gambling dens. By 1940, the inner core had expanded to a seventy-five-block area, and housed more than 90 percent of Milwaukee's black population... As white residents left the area, their

large homes were sold and subdivided into rooming houses or one- and two-bedroom apartments... Housing in the core was among the oldest in the city, often absentee-owned, neglected and deteriorating. A disproportionate number of black families lived in overcrowded, dilapidated dwellings that violated building codes.” (Jones, p. 19)

“In Milwaukee, as elsewhere, non-white families are confined to extremely limited areas and pay higher rents for inferior and crowded quarters. Even the rapidly growing group of minority families with adequately financial means is largely confined to substandard ghetto neighborhoods.”⁴

Milwaukee had an established African-American middle class who were educated and rich in culture, and they had solidified their position in the Milwaukee society back in 1920’s. Wilbur and Ardie Halyard founded the Columbia Building and Loan Association in 1925, a venture they undertook in order to provide home loans to African-Americans in the city. But this private organization was not sufficient for the whole community’s demand, and due to the red-



Fig. 02: Map showing Inner Core growth from the book “The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee”. Author: Patrick D. Jones.

⁴ Milwaukee Commission on Human Rights, “Proposed Conference on Housing Problems of Nonwhite Families”, Memorandum to Group Relations Agencies, box 22, folder 39, 1953, Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

lining practice, state agencies and banks used to avoid providing home loans to the African-Americans in the inner core. The city's black press expressed the concern that Milwaukee Real Estate Board had untold mission to 'restrict blacks to a black belt because of growth of the black population'. This concern reflects the same philosophy of earlier discussed redlining practices by the state agencies.

“In 1940, the inner core remained roughly half white, but it had already become known as a ‘Negro district’. When affluent whites moved, they either rented the properties themselves or sold them to loan associations, realtors, and other ‘slum investors’. Residential segregation also meant inferior housing for the vast majority of Milwaukee blacks. Roughly 3 percent of local African Americans owned their homes, while most of the remaining 97 percent rented homes or apartments from landlords- almost always white- inside the inner core.” (Jones, p. 19)

Lack of home ownership among African-Americans was a major drawback for the inner core's housing crisis. One major concern that comes forward is that typical landlords of inner core could not care for the up-keeping of their dwelling units for several reasons. “First, the ‘slum-lord’ usually does not intend to own his building for a long period. Second, the slum building may be so old and run-down that it does not justify large expenditures on repair. Finally, the building is likely to be rentable despite its bad repair.”⁵ On the other hand, The African-American renters were also highly dissatisfied with the leased settlements, as “his apartment is likely to be both old and in very bad repair. Although he may have no legal restraints on his freedom to abandon the premises, because he has a month-to-month tenancy, he is likely to face several other restraints. Shortage of low-rent housing and patterns of ghettoization restrict the availability of more desirable apartments, and the cost of moving may constrain the poor tenant not to move at all. Therefore, the slum tenant is likely to want not abandonment, but one of the

⁵ Braum, Geoffrey A., “Of Common Law, Codes and Cockroaches: Are Implied Warranties the Answer?” *the Conference on the Landlord-Tenant Relationship*, University of Chicago Law School, Nov. 1966, box 11, folder 2, Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

other permanent solutions mentioned- either repair or diminution or rent.”⁶ The promise of better housing to everyone, including African Americans, had always been an unrealized promise by the city. “By 1930, Milwaukee’s Socialist mayor, Daniel W. Hoan, appointed a committee to study negro housing in the city. The committee reported back that building spacing, heating, and sanitary facilities in the area were below average. The city then started a program to ultimately demolish all below standard buildings in the city. As one historian put it in 1967: ‘No target date was set for this objective, which may have been just as well’ ... By the end of the depression years, studies showed that more than half of the homes in Milwaukee that were unfit for human habitation were occupied by Negroes.” (Aukofer, p. 34) Back in that time period, African American population in the city was also not that large, thereby solving their housing issue could not be a big concern for the city. The program to demolish technically uninhabitable buildings lacked proper objective or timeline, which eventually indicates to the city’s lack of concern to solve this issue. According to a riot study report, “Indeed, the very concept of a ‘second ghetto’ rooted in a heretofore unexamined post-World War II black migration was conceived precisely to draw attention to the dynamism of black urban life and the significance of the period.”⁷ This indicates to the fact that ghettoization of the migrant African-American neighborhoods was conceived as a typical phenomenon by the state agencies. Thereby, the up-keeping of the inner core was neither a responsibility for its homeowners, renters or the city, which is why the area and its buildings had remained so dilapidated.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Chicago (Ill.). Riot Study Committee, “*Report of the Riot Study Committee to the Honorable Richard J. Daley*,” (Chicago: City of Chicago, 1968),21.

The report, *The Housing of Negroes in Milwaukee: 1955* by The Intercollegiate Council on Intergroup Relations, Milwaukee, is a brief survey report on the housing of African Americans in Milwaukee. The survey area was divided into 4 zones; African-American population percentage in these zones were – Zone 1-76%, Zone 2- 45%, Zone- 3-18%, Zone 4- 9%. The survey points out that in terms of education, income, rent and median value of dwellings, these four zones were substandard in comparison to the rest of the city. The report showed that 55 percent of the African-American population lived in fewer than 2 percent of the city’s census tracts. “This agency also found that a 1945 census taken by the Milwaukee Health Department in tracts 20 and 21 [Zone 1 and Zone 2] segregation was more concentrated than it had been in 5 years earlier, i.e. an increase from 75.4% to 80.4% of the non-white population



Fig. 03: Activity of two kids in the playground of the inner core Milwaukee
Source: “Milwaukee Star” newspaper, Vol. VIII No. 27, Wednesday, May 22nd, 1968, (1).

living in blocks of three-fourths or more non-white occupancy.”⁸ The age of structures in these four zones was mentioned as ‘equally archaic,’ in comparison to the rest of the city. Most of the structures in these zones were brick or frame construction; duplex or single-family building in

⁸ Irwin Rinder, “The Housing of Negroes in Milwaukee,” report of the Intercollegiate Council on Intergroup Relations, Milwaukee, box 22, folder 43, 1955, Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

sub-divided apartments. Overcrowding in these zones came as “Each of the four zones contains more persons per household than the city average and that this crowding is greatest in Zone 1 and decreases as we move out through the other zones.” (Rinder, p. 22) Zone 1 and 2 had overall poor plumbing conditions, “Negroes are 70% of the population in Zone 1 and they report 75% and 80% of the dilapidated or absent plumbing facilities in that zone.” (Rinder, p. 25) The survey also finds that in terms of heating, “the four zones have a greater incidence of non-centrally heated structures than the city average and that this rate decreases as we move out from the center.” (Rinder, p. 27) The picture of the only playground (Fig. 03) in the inner core area also resonates to the impoverished spatial characteristics of the neighborhood traced from the survey report. “The only playgrounds available for many of the younger children in our community are often at best a rubble-filled, dangerous alley or yard. The city parks in the area are usually too far for the toddlers to go alone, since the parks are so few for such a large community.”⁹

In contrast to all the sections mentioned from the survey which express the poor condition of services of these units, the consumption of luxury cars and better furnishings were standard in comparison to the rest of the city neighborhoods. In the author’s point, “These point out that the very incongruity of the now and the shiny amidst the bleakness of these dilapidated structures make them stand out in a fashion which perhaps exaggerates them in human perception.” (Rinder, p. 35) But I would also like to question, what if this spending practice on movable luxury items by the African-Americans actually represented their insecurity to spend money on a transient place to live? I would go for the opinion that they had the desire to live elsewhere in the city beyond the inner core. Earlier when I discussed the middle-income African-

⁹ “A Playground in the Inner Core,” *Milwaukee Star* newspaper, Wednesday, May 22nd, 1968, (1). Special Collections, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Americans in Detroit, I noted on their individualistic aspiration to live in a better neighborhood. The African-Americans in the inner core also had that same mentality, but they were not allowed to go out of the core to live. Thereby, the better-off African-Americans in the inner core also tended to live at the outer periphery areas, which are the Zone 3 and Zone 4. In these areas, they could get the chance to live in a neighborhood of better housing and facilities, along with a larger mixed-race population. Later on, in the survey, the author points out these statements which strengthen my assumption, “The further from the core of the segregated area, the greater the desire to leave it. Of those who have considered building their own home and been unable to, financial reasons rather than discrimination were almost exclusively given.” (Rinder, p. 37) Especially, for the middle-class African-Americans in Milwaukee, they could afford economically to live outside the core, but they were not let to live beyond the core at that time.

The spatial segregation of inner core neighborhood from the rest of the city is nothing but the expression of an ideology construct by white population. From the past till the present, there has been the tendency of mutual avoidance between the people of two races. This poem¹⁰ here bluntly speaks out about this unresolved notion of uneasiness-

God but I'm scared of niggers
God, I'll go to mass every morning
If you'll keep niggers outta the south side
Jesus, help us one and all
Do not let our ghetto fall
To those hands of another race,

¹⁰ Harland Ristau, “Milwaukee Looks to Pray,” *Kaleidoscope*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Oct. 27 – Nov 10, 1967, Special collections, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Let each man have his proper place.

Mary, Mother we do pray

That we find grace every day

In white faces everywhere

That shall remain pure and fair.

(Milwaukee Looks to Pray, Harland Ristau, 1967)

The Second Great Migration was economically promising for the African-Americans at the job opportunities of the burgeoning industrial cities at the north during World War II era. But the post-war depression in the industrial economy of these cities had hit very hard at the employment sector of the African-Americans. The African Americans in Milwaukee could not achieve their rights to the city due to their economic stagnation from unemployment, segregated and poor housing, discriminatory real estate and loan practices, and finally, overt racism from the rest of the city. Based on my research from primary and secondary sources, I would mention three major factors behind the racial segregation in Milwaukee's urban neighborhoods, which eventually affected the African-American community very negatively. These are- the practice of discrimination in employment sector, the resisting role of real-estate developers, and the non-cooperative role of the city-level politicians.

After the war, economic stagnation in Milwaukee resulted in severe unemployment among the African-American community. "Hire last, fire first" was the average policy for African-American employment. Many of Milwaukee employers continued to discriminate racially by laying off African-Americans from the jobs on a priority basis, showing

discrimination in hiring, providing union restrictions, and unequal wages and benefits. “Although the return of veterans to Milwaukee after World War II did not result in large-scale layoffs of black workers, employment among black males declined in the post-war years, with employment for black females... black workers remained concentrated in manufacturing, generally given the dirtiest and most difficult jobs.” (Connell, p. 6) A labor survey of Negro workers in 1949 mentioned that “Negro workers were not accepted in financial institutions and in the majority of the professions within the area.”¹¹ A 1957 survey found that on a per capita basis, Milwaukee’s middle-class black residents owned and operated more businesses than in any other large metropolitan area, including the nation’s twelve largest cities.¹² Milwaukee Urban League (MUL) was working to improve the employment situation for African-American workers, but it did not help much. High unemployment rate among the African American community made them more vulnerable to achieving home ownerships. Moreover, frustration started to grow among the African-American youth due to unemployment, which resulted in increasing social problems at the inner core, and in the city- robbery, car theft, rape, drug use and other crimes increased from the 1950’s to the 1960’s.

“With high unemployment and poverty rates on top of poor housing conditions, social problems in the inner core blossomed. Milwaukee lacked a sufficient African-American population to have created institutions of capable of successfully dealing with its explosive growth. Economic, social and spiritual decay spread; crime rates and drug use escalated; the presence of the police grew; and confrontation simmered.” (Jones, p. 24)

Access to adequate public housing might have become one solution for the housing crisis of the African-Americans in Milwaukee during post-war period. On the surge of post-war public

¹¹ Humphrey, Mel J., “Labor Survey of Negro Workers, 1949: A Sample Labor Survey of Employment Relating to Negroes in the Milwaukee Industrial Area,” Industrial relations secretary, box 17, folder 24, Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

¹² Shadd, Mary E. “Negro Business Directory of the State of Wisconsin, 1950-51.” (Milwaukee: M.E.Shadd, 1950) 38.

housing across the U.S. cities with the passage of the U.S. Housing Act of 1949, Frank Zeidler, the last socialist mayor of Milwaukee, ran the mayor's office from 1948 to 1960, and one of his primary goals during election was to achieve affordable public housing for Milwaukee's low-income residents, regardless of race. During his time, the proposed low-income public housing projects from the Common Council received severe opposition from conservative city representatives and city's real estate developers.¹³ Lack of funding was another major reason that resulted in inadequate affordable public housing for the city's low-income population, mostly African Americans. "The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 represented by the federal government, provided an opportunity for utilizing private low-rent housing scheme... by the leasing of private housing by public housing agencies, and the rent supplement. Unfortunately, this program also had fallen far short due to lack of funding and supporters."¹⁴ Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM, established in 1938) executed five major low-income housing projects- Parklawn (1937), Hillside Terrace (1950-51), Westlawn (1950-52), Hillside Terrace Addition (1954-56), and Lapham Park (1963-64), which could house 8,158 people. These public housing projects served with 1917 units of one-and two-bedroom apartments in total, which were allocated for low-income families, veterans, and elderly people.¹⁵ Moreover, during the construction of Lapham Park "in the Hillside Neighborhood Urban Renewal Area, where it replaced 267 housing units classified as substandard."¹⁶ "By 1960, African-Americans made up roughly 8.5 percent of Milwaukee's total population and topped 10

¹³ "Jim Arndorfer," Cream City Confidential: The Black-biting of Milwaukee's Last Pink Mayor, The Baffler Magazine, accessed Nov. 15, 2017, <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/cream-city-confidential>

¹⁴ Edward A. Christensen, "Rent Subsidies: Dream or Reality", *Conference on the Landlord-Tenant Relationship UC Law School*, 1966 November, box 11, file 2, Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

¹⁵ "Department of City Development for the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee, Public housing in Milwaukee, 4th ed, 1966, 1-64.

¹⁶ Ibid.

percent of the total in 1965.” (Jones, p. 23) The disproportion of the large population of African-Americans in need of affordable housing and the available low-income public housing units is very evident from the discussion. Thereby, public housing projects in Milwaukee could hardly bring any solution to the affordable housing crisis for the African-American community.

Urban renewal programs in post-war timeline “was not meant to assist African-Americans who lived in blighted neighborhoods, but was rather to remove them from urban spaces located near what city officials hoped would be soon-to-be blossoming downtown districts.”¹⁷ Milwaukee found a new mayor in 1960, Henry W. Maier, who ran the office until 1988. During his time period, the construction of highways 43 and 94 took place from 1960-67, which connected suburban residents with Milwaukee downtown areas. This resulted in

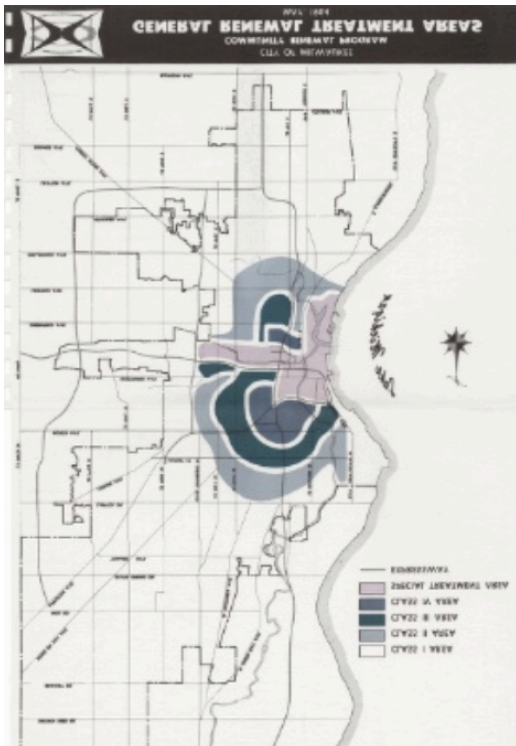


Fig. 04: Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program Map showing the treatment areas
 Source: “Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program: Projects and Objectives, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, May 1964”

¹⁷ Niemuth, Niles W. “Urban Renewal and the Development of Milwaukee’s African American Community: 1960-1980,” accessed December 11th, 2017, <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/416/>

demolishing 14,219 inner core housing units which compounded the housing shortage for African-Americans.¹⁸ The highway construction went over the Bronzeville neighborhood at the inner core, which was the commercial and cultural hub of the African-Americans. “Urban renewal resulted in the wholesale destruction of black neighborhoods, wiping away important areas of residential, economic and cultural development.” (Niemuth, p. ii) Milwaukee community renewal program map in 1964¹⁹ (Fig. 04) shows that a significant amount of these renewal projects took place in the inner core. The immediate site clearance approach by the city officials was very unfavorable for the displacing families and businesses. In a city report, it is found that, less than 40% of persons displaced received a relocating cost of maximum \$200 for their loss.²⁰ African-American local community organizations were very enraged at this time period due to the city’s racial segregation, majorly at employment, education and housing, but they didn’t have much power over the city-level politics. “Unlike Chicago, Detroit, New York City and other metropolitan regions Milwaukee did not have a large long established black community with a significant middle class that was able to express significant political power or economic influence.” (Niemuth, p. 3) During 1960’s, the city sees a rise of local black power politics against inequality, which ultimately leads towards the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1956, Vel Phillips was elected as the first Common Council member, and she was the first African-American alderwoman to represent the second ward which was largely populated by the African-Americans. In 1961, alderwoman Vel Phillips pursued open-housing legislation

¹⁸ Final Report to Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee. (Milwaukee: The Committee, 1960), 12.

¹⁹ “Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program: Projects and Objectives”, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, May 1964, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.ComRenewObj>

²⁰ “A Summary of the Potential Impact of Statutory Changes on Persons Displaced by Highway Construction”, Racial Relations Services of the Federal Government’s Housing Agencies, 2-3. Box 22, folder 42, Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

for Milwaukee, and that was continuously refused by Mayor Maier and the city representatives, for fear of losing votes from the city's dominant Polish south side. In 1967, after six years of struggle with the passing of the legislation, Phillips joined the Catholic priest, father James Groppi, who led the NAACP Youth Council to march to Civil Rights Marches in July of 1967. A series of marches over 200 consecutive evenings was led by Father Groppi and the NAACP Youth Council to protest housing and education discrimination. All of these initiated with a city-level riot. As the aftereffect, mayor Maier placed the entire city under a 24-hour curfew, and several days later, unveiled his "39-Point Program" which was an attempt to do something about inner-city problems.²¹ In April 1968, the Federal Fair Housing law passed and erased racial discrimination of housing based on race. But in all these post-war years, "suburbanization perpetuated segregated housing as whites increasingly moved out, leaving the inner city to African Americans — a trend that persists to this day."²² This gets evident from the discussion that African American community in post-war Milwaukee was under suppression for a long time, and their voice was unheard for their improvement of living up until the Civil Rights Movement.

Milwaukee is still in its transformation phase from the post-war history of race relations. "Approaching 2010, black people make up roughly 40 percent of the total population of Milwaukee and can be found in all segments and at all levels of local society, but their representation is not proportional... However, the overriding reality of race and the African-American experience in Milwaukee continues to be dominated by poverty and inequality."

²¹ Excerpts from Statements on Open Housing Ordinance, 1967 October 10, Box 148, Folder 6 (selections), Golda Meir Library Archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

²² Wisconsin Historical Society. "Wisconsin Historical Society" (website), accessed 13th November, 2017, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS502#rights>

(Jones, p. 257) The post-war housing crisis for African-Americans in the inner core Milwaukee is the reflection of the common history found in many of the U.S. cities- redlining and blockbusting, high unemployment and economic stagnation, dilapidated housing and neighborhood facilities, stagnation in overcrowded neighborhoods, segregation and racism from the rest of the city, destruction of neighborhoods for the sake of ‘urban renewal’ – all these exploitations accumulated to the acceleration of the Civil Rights struggle for the cities. Neighborhoods like inner core were the invisible areas in the city, they were the subject of neglect and denial, starting from the Government to the white residents of the cities. In Milwaukee, the African-American’s history of stagnation in poverty and poor housing in the inner core might be one of the major reasons for their lacking of social mobility in upward direction till today.

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