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# Urban Renewal and the Development of Milwaukee's African American Community: 1960-1980

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URBAN RENEWAL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILWAUKEE'S AFRICAN  
AMERICAN COMMUNITY: 1960-1980

by

Niles Niemuth

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

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ABSTRACT

URBAN RENEWAL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILWAUKEE'S AFRICAN  
AMERICAN COMMUNITY: 1960-1980

by

Niles Niemuth

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014

Under the Supervision of Professor Robert S. Smith

This thesis examines the impact of urban renewal on the development of Milwaukee's African American community, with a particular focus on the 1960s and 1970s. While urban renewal programs of various stripes were promoted as a means of stoking economic development, these programs had a particularly negative impact on African American communities throughout the United States in the post-World War II era. Urban renewal resulted in the wholesale destruction of black neighborhoods, wiping away important areas of residential, economic and cultural development.

This case study of developments regarding urban renewal and its relation to the African American community in Milwaukee will provide historians with a deeper and more complex understanding of the black experience regarding urban renewal programs and the role that black agency played in that process. It will provide a better understanding of the ways in which African American neighborhoods were shaped in the 1960s and 1970s and how this process helped integrate key figures into local political infrastructures through their involvement in urban renewal projects.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**CBO - Community based organization**

**CCLD - Center for Community Leadership Development**

**CDA - Community Development Agency**

**CDBG - Community Development Block Grant Program**

**CUCD - Center for Urban Community Development**

**HCS - Harambee Community School**

**HDC - Harambee Development Corporation**

**HRP - Harambee Revitalization Project**

**MUFBH - Milwaukee United for Better Housing**

**NCIC - North Side Community Inventory Conference**

**NHRO- National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials**

**OIC-GM - Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee**

**UWEX - University of Wisconsin - Extension**

**WAICO - Walnut Improvement Council**

## Introduction

This thesis will examine the impact of urban renewal on the development of Milwaukee's African American community, with a particular focus on the 1960s and 1970s. While urban renewal programs of various stripes were promoted as a means of stoking economic development, these programs had a particularly negative impact on African American communities throughout the United States in the post-World War II era. Urban renewal resulted in the wholesale destruction of black neighborhoods, wiping away important areas of residential, economic and cultural development. This process repeated itself in cities as diverse as Charlotte, NC, Miami, Detroit, and Milwaukee. While it is difficult to locate hard evidence that it was the intention of city planners to deliberately disrupt these neighborhoods based on racial animus, it is clear from developments that they never intended to make whole the black communities disrupted by their urban renewal projects.

While blacks were more often than not the victims of urban renewal projects their impact did not represent entirely passive outcomes for African Americans, especially in Milwaukee. Black agency in the Cream City was instrumental in shaping and implementing urban renewal projects which helped to shift the focus away from government-sponsored destruction and moving efforts toward African American-engaged preservation. African Americans in Milwaukee became active in the urban renewal process, working to utilize federal funds to develop and maintain economically and culturally vibrant urban communities. Important local figures from multiple black

communities became involved in the urban renewal process and remained politically engaged afterward, utilizing their growing clout to funnel resources to their constituents.<sup>1</sup>

Urban renewal projects of the 1960s were beginning to reshape urban African American communities at the very same moment that the Civil Rights movement was at its peak. The involvement of African Americans in the urban renewal process and their attempts to shape programs is itself a manifestation of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. There would have been no Great Society initiatives pushing for “maximum feasible participation” without a powerful national freedom struggle led and organized by African American which drew attention to persistent and growing problem of urban poverty. Additionally there would not have been the development of neighborhoods like Milwaukee’s Harambee without the vibrant national discourse about black cultural pride and aesthetics and a push back against white standards in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

This case study of developments regarding urban renewal and its relation to the African American community in Milwaukee will provide historians with a deeper and more complex understanding of the black experience regarding urban renewal programs and the role that black agency played in that process. It will provide a better understanding of the ways in which African American neighborhoods were shaped in the 1960s and 1970s and how this process helped integrate key figures into local political infrastructures through their involvement in urban renewal projects.

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<sup>1</sup> For secondary sources on the Civil Rights movement in Milwaukee and the development of black civic engagement during this time period see Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Bill Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010); and Jack Dougherty, *More than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Although the processes examined in this thesis were repeated in urban centers large and small throughout the United States Milwaukee provides a unique example. 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. The black population was quite small when urban renewal began and grew quite rapidly through the 1960s and 1970s. Through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a continuous migration of blacks to the city not only from the South but increasingly from Chicago through the 1980s and 2000s.

The first chapter will examine the development and implementation of urban renewal projects in the city of Milwaukee and the varieties of responses that emerged out of the African American community as a response to these disruptions. The deepening of black civic engagement was one important result of urban renewal in the city; local leaders such as Reuben Harpole became embedded in the social and political networks which provided sustenance for the development of a black middle class and access to the necessary political apparatus.

The second chapter will examine the construction of Highway 43 as particularly egregious example of urban renewal. This chapter is an attempt at getting at the experience of the displaced and understanding the human impact of urban infrastructure that is often taken for granted. The construction of Highway 43 is an important moment of disturbance in the development of Milwaukee's African American community. The established center of African American culture and life, Bronzeville, was upturned and people were forced away from this traditional center of black settlement in the city. This

pushed black residents out into adjacent neighborhoods hastening the transformation of the Garfield Park neighborhood— once a nearly all German-derived immigrant community – to the nearly all black Harambee neighborhood.

The final chapter will examine the attempt by African Americans to organize urban renewal efforts to create a self-sufficient and vibrant black community in Milwaukee's Harambee neighborhood. Harambee is the quintessential example of African Americans in Milwaukee trying to shape and implement a comprehensive urban renewal project. Industrial employment began to fade away in the 1960s and 1970s at the moment that blacks were finally winning improved access to good paying blue collar jobs. African Americans attempted to use Great Society initiatives and anti-poverty programs to alleviate developing social and economic problems in often discreet ways. Harambee is one of the most visible and instructive instances of engagement to those interested in the history of African American community development.

The author would be remiss not to mention the social and political context in which this thesis was produced. In many ways social and economic conditions are much worse for the mass of African Americans in the city of Milwaukee and indeed in the United States than in the period under consideration. Indices concerning poverty, employment, and health amongst African Americans in the city are at levels which may well shock a person living in the 1960s or 1970s. The employment rate for black men in

the city between the ages of 16 and 64 in 2010 was only 44.7 percent, down from 73.4 percent in 1970.<sup>2</sup>

Racial inequality remains a persistent problem in Milwaukee and Wisconsin, hindering social advancement for a great number of people in the city and the state. The infant mortality rate for African Americans in the city between 2005 and 2008 was 15.6 for every 1,000 births, compared to 6.4 for whites.<sup>3</sup> A report published by The Annie E. Casey foundation in 2014 found that Wisconsin had some of the highest social, economic and educational disparities between black and white children.<sup>4</sup>

Among the many problems that have emerged in the last three decades, foremost amongst them is the mass incarceration of black men. The U.S. Census Bureau found that 12.8 percent of working age black men in the state of Wisconsin were behind bars in 2010, nearly twice the national average. The situation was worse for African American men in Milwaukee County where more than half of black men in their 30s had been incarcerated at some point in their life, and the same for half of black men in their 40s.<sup>5</sup>

Our society cannot begin to address these criminal social conditions without developing a clear understanding of how they developed, what has been tried to reverse

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<sup>2</sup> Levine, Marc. *Race and Male Employment in the Wake of the Great Recession: Black Male Employment Rates in Milwaukee And the Nation's Largest Metro Areas 2010*, (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development, 2012), [http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/black-employment\\_2012.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/black-employment_2012.pdf), 6.

<sup>3</sup> "For Milwaukee's Children an Early Grave," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/114430774.html>, Accessed April 16, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children, Policy report Kids Count*, (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014), <http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/R/RaceforResults/RaceforResults.pdf>, 12.

<sup>5</sup> John Pawasarat and Lois M. Quinn, *Wisconsin's Mass Incarceration of African American Males: Workforce Challenges for 2013*, (Employment and Training Institute University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013), <https://www4.uwm.edu/eti/2013/BlackImprisonment.pdf>, 2.

the trends, and what if anything has been effective. The author hopes that the lessons drawn by this brief historical review of one small corner of our world will inform contemporary efforts to attack social and economic inequality everywhere.

## **Chapter 1**

### **A Review of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will provide a review of the forms which urban renewal took in Milwaukee in the post-World War II era from 1949 to 1996 and the ways that it drove responses by African American community organizations in the city. Urban renewal was a phase of urban development common to all large urban areas in the United States in the immediate post-WWII-era. It took on a myriad of forms including the demolition and reconstruction of neighborhoods, construction of freeways, civic centers, government buildings, university expansion, as well as public housing units. The ways in which funds were distributed at the federal and municipal level changed over time, influencing how funds were utilized. By the late/mid-Sixties an emphasis on Maximum Feasible Participation in Great Society initiatives spurred the development of community based organizations that worked to organize redevelopment programs aimed at the revitalization and maintenance of existing neighborhoods rather than the razing and reconstruction of neighborhoods common to previous practices of urban renewal.

Unlike Chicago, Detroit, New York City and other large urban centers Milwaukee did not have a large black community with a significant middle class who could exercise significant political clout in the immediate post-World War II period. Urban renewal disrupted and influenced the development of Milwaukee's African American communities in very significant ways while the community was still in its infancy. In fact, the African American community was still quite small when urban renewal began

and grew quite rapidly through the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout this period, the heyday of urban renewal, the city experienced a continued influx of blacks not only from the South but increasingly from Chicago as well.

Discussions of urban renewal and its history can evoke feelings of anger, and strong cynicism. The pejorative phrase “negro removal” is often invoked by members of Milwaukee’s African American community, and by blacks in other cities. There is a notion that urban renewal 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. There is much more truth to this than many in the political establishment would like to admit.

New housing units were being constructed by urban renewal programs but more homes were destroyed by urban renewal than were ever rebuilt. In Milwaukee, for example, between 1966 and 1971 the area which would be covered by the Model Cities program saw a net loss of 3371 housing units.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of people, many impoverished, were displaced by federal programs over the years. The displacement process was not limited to urban renewal efforts but included the construction of Highway 43.<sup>2</sup> Throughout all of Milwaukee’s attempts at urban renewal and redevelopment African Americans have been disproportionately impacted.

This chapter will not examine in great detail the economic distress suffered by many in Milwaukee’s African American community, especially in the so called Inner

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<sup>1</sup> Elam E. McElroy, *Social Indicators for the Milwaukee Model Cities area: 1967 to Present* (Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, 1972), 100.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed study of displacement in Milwaukee due to highway construction see Patricia House’s *Families Displaced by Expressway Development: A Geographical Study of Relocation In Milwaukee*. House gives a very detailed account of who was displaced, where they moved, and how satisfied they were with federal assistance in relocation.

City. The grim economic and social situation for a significant number of African Americans in the city of Milwaukee in the present moment has deep roots in the 1960s and 1970s. Numerous studies by UW-Milwaukee's Center for Economic Development attest to this fact.<sup>3</sup>

Rather this chapter will highlight the impact that urban renewal had on the establishment and development neighborhood organizations, how African Americans in Milwaukee attempted to influence the urban renewal process, and how in the process of enacting various urban renewal programs and policies the state and federal government served to bring the community closer together.

Despite the deleterious impact of urban renewal on Milwaukee's African American community, the story is not just about neighborhood destruction or the oppression of African Americans. Urban renewal was not only the wholesale destruction of neighborhoods, and the displacement of people; it involved the preservation of homes and neighborhoods, the development of neighborhood organizations, and it spurred community engagement in the redevelopment process. Urban renewal also prompted the creation of citizen run home improvement organizations and construction companies that were owned, managed, and staffed by local African Americans. The development of a clear understanding of the impact of urban renewal projects on Africans Americans demands an examination of the historical realities of black agency.

Despite destroying or changing the physical make up of neighborhoods of historically black neighborhoods, urban renewal programs played a significant part in encouraging the development of a politically and economically cohesive African

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<sup>3</sup> UW Milwaukee Center for Economic Development, <http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/index.cfm>, Accessed on May 11th 2010.

American community in Milwaukee. While a neighborhood is a physical collection of buildings and can be destroyed, a community is something much less tangible though extraordinarily resilient. A community is comprised of not just the people that reside in these neighborhoods, but their businesses, organizations, clubs, churches, and associations. Through interaction in these public spheres amongst friends, families, and business associates a sense of community is developed and people join together to attempt to overcome whatever social problem presents itself and to shape their neighborhoods to meet their needs. When people organize themselves they are able to determine their own destiny and become less vulnerable to the whim of city planners and government bureaucrats. Urban renewal policies in the 1960s and 1970s, in part, encouraged members of Milwaukee's African American community to organize and form meaningful and lasting connections to local, state and national political infrastructure.

### **1949-1960: Setting the Base for Federally Supported Urban Renewal**

Intensive federally funded and sanctioned urban renewal began in earnest in 1949 with the passage of the US Housing Act of 1949. It was signed into law by President Harry S. Truman as part of his Fair Deal legislative agenda, which was an attempt at a post-war expansion of FDR's New Deal social programs. Title I of the US Housing Act authorized the distribution of federal aid to major US cities for slum clearance and the elimination of blight. This plan required that cities create comprehensive plans for renewal that included both commercial and residential property, and have local redevelopment plans conform to a general city plan. A study of Milwaukee's housing

conditions in 1948 by the city's Redevelopment Coordinating Committee<sup>4</sup> found significant amounts of blight on Milwaukee's south side and what would be labeled in the 1960s as the Inner Core, (Milwaukee's African American neighborhoods of the 1950s and 1960s). These findings were used to justify urban renewal programs in the Kilbourntown, Juneautown, and Walkers Point neighborhoods.

In 1954 the government amended the Housing Act of 1949 to include provisions for redevelopment, rehabilitation, and conservation of neighborhoods. The new Act continued to place emphasis on the clearance and redevelopment of severely blighted neighborhoods, though this practice was often ineffective and unpopular. In 1958 Milwaukee created a Redevelopment Authority after the Wisconsin Legislature passed the Wisconsin Blight Elimination and Slum Clearance Act which encouraged cities to create public authorities to guide renewal programs. In 1959 Congress approved grants for comprehensive Community Renewal Programs.

### **1960-1970: African American Neighborhood Organizations and Urban Renewal**

Milwaukee began its Community Renewal Program in 1961. The Department of City Development, which was also established in 1961, defined urban renewal as "a process whereby areas of the community are rebuilt or otherwise upgraded in whole or in part by public and private enterprise." In 1964 the Department of City Development produced a report on Milwaukee's plans and objectives for Community Renewal Programs until 1970. Under this six year redevelopment plan African American

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<sup>4</sup> Milwaukee Redevelopment Coordinating Committee, *Blight Elimination & Urban Redevelopment in Milwaukee: Report of the Redevelopment Coordinating Committee* (Milwaukee: The Committee, 1948), 3.

neighborhoods were classified as Class IV Areas. Class IV Areas were defined as areas where,

...deterioration and blighting influences have reached the stage where substantial clearance and redevelopment is necessary. Rehabilitation of buildings is no longer feasible; community facilities may be inadequate or obsolete; overcrowding of land, mixed land uses, traffic and parking problems, and other environmental deficiencies are widespread. Redevelopment programs by the city in these areas will be scheduled as soon as possible. Renewal activities by private redevelopers, in accordance with the master plan, will be encouraged and assisted in every way possible.<sup>5</sup>

These Class IV areas comprised 2.6% of the cities land area, 6.5% of the city's housing units, and 33.5% of the cities dilapidated housing.<sup>6</sup> A significant amount of the city's blighted housing stock was concentrated in a very small part of the city, much of it just to the North and West of the downtown area. The city planners proposed redevelopment projects for five African American communities, all deemed to be Category IV, the worst of the worst. These projects were Carver Park, Highland Park, Twelfth and Vliet, Mt. Sinai, and Hay Market Square. Projects that were already in progress in 1964 were the Hillside Neighborhood Redevelopment Project, Marquette Urban Renewal Area, and the Roosevelt Redevelopment project.

The Hillside Neighborhood Redevelopment Program had displaced 69 individuals, 116 families, and destroyed all 204 buildings located in the area between W. Walnut Street N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, W. Galena St and N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street by the end of 1963. The Roosevelt Redevelopment project directly to the north would clear all 60 buildings in the area between W. Vine St., 6<sup>th</sup> St. W. Walnut and N. 10<sup>th</sup> St. and displace 88 families. The main technique used for renewal in these severely blighted communities was clearance

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<sup>5</sup> Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*. (Milwaukee: The Department of City Development, 1964), 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

and redevelopment; very few buildings were preserved in the cities attempt to eradicate blight. All of the plans that covered African American neighborhoods called for clearance and redevelopment, which translated into significant numbers of individuals being displaced throughout the 1960s.

It took many years to build enough housing units to replace those that were destroyed in these areas, and even then more housing units were destroyed by urban renewal in Milwaukee's African American neighborhoods than were rebuilt. The clearance approach favored by city officials was unpopular with those residence impacted by them. In response to these clearance techniques people began to organize to improve and maintain their neighborhoods. At the federal and municipal level governments began to reevaluate how they funded and carried out renewal programs in an effort to respond to citizen's demands to be involved in the urban renewal process.

In 1963 the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NHRO) passed a resolution that called for the formation of neighborhood associations that could organize citizens to actively participate in the process of urban renewal in their neighborhoods. These organizations were formed by citizens in reaction to the blight and deteriorating conditions they saw developing in their neighborhoods and the threat posed by urban renewal. These groups also formed to address inter-racial problems, inadequate police protection, housing code enforcement, juvenile delinquency, lack of recreational facilities, vandalism, and zoning complaints amongst numerous other issues city dwellers encountered.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau (Wis.). *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal*. Milwaukee: The Bureau, 1964, 5.

In 1964 a report by The Citizen's Governmental Research Bureau, a Milwaukee think tank which monitored local politics and public policy issues, identified nine neighborhood improvement organizations operating in the city of Milwaukee. These nine were Community Beautification and Stabilization Committee, Inc., the Mid-Town Neighborhood Association, the Thirteenth Ward Community Council, the Lakeside Community Council, Action 7 Community Council, the Atkinson-Capitol-Teutonia Community Council (ACT), Cooperation West Side, the Eighth Ward Conservation Council, and the Milwaukee Urban League.

Out of these nine, with the leadership of Wesley L. Scott, the Milwaukee Urban League provided the African American community with the most support during the 1960s. The Milwaukee Urban League was second only to the NAACP in recognition amongst members of the African American community as a group that was working to advance the interests and well-being of blacks.<sup>8</sup> The Urban League represented the Inner Core area which held the greatest number and highest concentration of African Americans in Milwaukee. They divided the area into seven different neighborhoods and provided staff to each neighborhood to assist in the development of a community organization and a plan for development and improvement. The leaders of the seven smaller organizations held meetings to coordinate their actions.

These small community groups also belonged to the North Side Community Inventory Conference (NCIC), which was an organization of "60 religious, civic, education, social, professional and other organizations in the city's north side."<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> Charles O'Reilly, Willard Downing & S. Pflanzler. *The People of the Inner Core-North-A Study of Milwaukee's Negro Community* (University Of Wisconsin, 1965), 167.

<sup>9</sup> Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal*. (Milwaukee: Citizens Governmental Research Bureau), 1964.

Conference was formed in 1959 by the Milwaukee NAACP, the Urban League, and the Commissions on Community Relations. The NCIC's main concerns were coordinating the actions of community organizations, providing information on opportunities in the community, and relaying information on community needs. The Urban League and the NCIC sponsored numerous seminars at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Marquette University on topics such as "the citizen and social action", and volunteer leadership in the community.<sup>10</sup> These small community groups served as the embryos for much larger and more ambitious projects such as the Harambee Redevelopment Project in the 1970s.

In 1964 the Urban League's community organizations in the Inner Core had 150 members of which 75 percent were African American and 25 percent white.<sup>11</sup> This reflected the racial composition of the area as some whites remained in increasingly black areas despite the change in the racial composition of their neighborhoods. The groups held monthly meetings in churches, schools, libraries, and at the Urban League headquarters. The Urban League urged members to attending Common Council meetings to voice their support for urban renewal plans, and to present the views and grievances of the African American community to the city leadership. They also sponsored neighborhood clean up and fix up campaigns, in attempts to prevent the types of blight which prompted urban renewal projects. Though several of the city's neighborhood associations included African American neighborhoods, the Urban League was the only community organization which focused on organizing African American's in response to neighborhood blight and urban renewal programs two of the group's boundaries such as

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<sup>10</sup> "Sessions Seek Leaders for Negro Community," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 8, 1964.

<sup>11</sup> Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal* (Milwaukee: Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, 1964), 124.

ACT, and The Thirteenth Ward Community Council overlapped the Inner Core, but did not consider issues affecting the African American community.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside the Urban League, community organizations, clubs, churches, and social groups worked to promote urban renewal, and preservation of communities. The Northcott Neighborhood House (an anti-poverty organization run by the American Methodist Church) in coordination with the Urban League performed clean-up activities. St. Francis of Assisi on N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street coordinated with the Urban League on various activities including neighborhood cleanup efforts. The Upper Third Street Commercial Association was formed to draw attention to the decay of the North Third Street business district, and to promote its preservation and rehabilitation. They lobbied city officials, provided bus tours of the area, and in 1963 provided tours of proposed urban renewal sites.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the challenges facing their community African Americans were organizing themselves to battle urban blight and decay. They were encouraged by groups like the Milwaukee Urban League to organize themselves to build and maintain their communities. People acted out of concern for their communities, they attended meetings, organized, educated themselves, and volunteered their time. They worked not only with other blacks, but also with whites who lived in their neighborhoods, and who were concerned about the issues faced by Milwaukee's African American community. They formed groups to stave off blight and other social ills, but more often than not it was too much for modest community organizations to contain.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Milwaukee's African American community had been subject to disastrous urban renewal projects but due to their organization by the late 1960s African Americans developed increasing influence over the direction of federally funded urban renewal. Under the Model Cities program initiated in 1970 neighborhood organizations and individual citizens were given a greater say in the planning and implementation of urban renewal programs.<sup>14</sup>

### **1970-74: The Model Cities Program and WAICO**

In 1970 Milwaukee was chosen by the federal government as one of 140 cities which would be involved in the Model Cities Program which was targeted at addressing growing social problems in the country's urban centers. This was an attempt by state and federal planners to develop an effective and uniform way of implementing their redevelopment plans. In the face of organized citizen response to past attempts at urban renewal the Federal Government explicitly stressed the importance of citizen input in the redevelopment and renewal process through Maximum Feasible Participation. Community development and involvement would be central to the Model Cities program. It attempted to stimulate community development especially in the poorest of neighborhoods, without resorting to the clearance and reconstruction plans that were relied on in the past.

In 1970 the city of Milwaukee produced their Model Cities First Year Action plan. This comprehensive urban renewal plan, included provisions for 56 different programs that covered housing, employment, education, welfare, commercial

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<sup>14</sup> Milwaukee Office of the Mayor, *Application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for a Grant to Plan a Comprehensive Model Cities Program*, (Milwaukee; Office of the Mayor, 1968).

development, protection, health, transportation, and recreation. The designated area for the Model Cities programs encompassed most of north central Milwaukee. The Model Cities sites included some of the oldest buildings and highest concentration of people, which are key factors in the development of blighted and dilapidated housing. Not only did this area face problems of blight and dilapidated housing, but a shortage of housing due to previous urban renewal projects, including the construction of Highway 43. This area had about 90,000 people, of which 40% was African American. While 11% of the city's total population resided in this area, it had more than 33% of the city's substandard housing units, and 37% of the city's dilapidated housing units.<sup>15</sup>

The Model Cities Plan for improving housing conditions included rehabilitation loans, new housing subsidies, as well as subsidies for non-profit rehabilitation corporations, federally directed Project HOME, and support of plans presented by the Walnut Improvement Council (WAICO), a neighborhood self-help group. WAICO's objective was to organize the citizens living in the Walnut street area in a concerted effort to eliminate blight in their neighborhood. The organization reported over 250 dues paying members in 1969. The group sought to employ and empower African Americans by working with minority contractors, and required that local residents be hired to help plan and construct residential projects.<sup>16</sup> The employment of residents and minority contractors would ideally funnel the wages of those employed back into the neighborhoods covered under the plan, and bring jobs back to the African American community.

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<sup>15</sup> Milwaukee Model Cities Agency, *Milwaukee Model Cities Program: First Year Action Plan* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Milwaukee Model Cities Agency, 1970), 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

The first project proposed in Milwaukee's Model Cities *First Year Action Plan* was the Owner Occupied Rehabilitation Loan Supplement. This program encouraged home owners to bring their homes up to code by providing grants to supplement home improvement loans. The plan was to encourage up to 150 homeowners to take advantage of the loan supplement. Funds would go directly to the homeowner, and only single family and duplex homes would be eligible for the funds. To gain access to this grant the homeowner would have to contact their bank and determine how much they could get in home improvement loans, and then they would have to contact the Community Conservation Office to arrange an inspection of their home to determine what work needed to be done to bring their home up to zoning standards. Then the homeowner would contract with the Community Conservation Office and agree to have the work done. The report estimated that they would pay out roughly \$150,000 in supplements aimed at encouraging citizens to improve their homes.

The project known as WAICO #1 called for the production of 100 new homes in the Walnut Street area bounded by 12<sup>th</sup> Street on the east, 20<sup>th</sup> Street on the west Brown Street on the North, and Galena Street on the South. In 1960 the neighborhood surrounding the WAICO area was nearly 63% black. As a result of continued inflow of Southern migrants the areas black population had seen an astounding 1,955% increase in the neighborhood from 380 black residents in 1950 to 7,809 in 1960.<sup>17</sup> Over half of the housing in the area was deemed either dilapidated or deteriorating, with nearly 93% of all the housing having been built in 1919 or earlier.<sup>18</sup> By 1970 city leaders and planners agreed that this area was in dire need of direct assistance from the city government. The

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<sup>17</sup> H. Yuan Tien, *Milwaukee Metropolitan Area Fact Book, 1940, 1950, and 1960* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 184.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

WAICO #1 plan provided for the provision of \$2,500 per construction site in land write down subsidies, in order to encourage the construction of 100 new homes in the area. The homes would be sold to low-income families through the FHA's 235 loan program. The city would also promote beautification of alleys, properties, and yards surrounding the new homes. The program was dedicated to providing employment to inner city contractors and laborers first before looking for outside contractors. The planners budgeted \$2,401,000 for the acquisition of property, construction of housing, and land improvements.<sup>19</sup>

Another project in the area, WAICO #2, called for the construction of a small park system throughout the area bounded by 17<sup>th</sup> Street on the East, 20<sup>th</sup> Street on the West, Walnut Street on the North and W. Galena Street on the South. It planned for the abandonment of certain alley ways and streets, and the development of these areas into playgrounds and parks.<sup>20</sup>

The final project presented in the *First Year Plan* was Project HOME. Its stated goal was to "provide property owners and tenants... with basic knowledge regarding household management and to develop their individual skills enabling home improvements and maintenance through the self-help method."<sup>21</sup> It called for the establishment of a tool loan library, which they hoped would enable residents to repair their own homes. WAICO officials also hoped to hold classes on home improvement, and management of home finances. They hoped to establish the first tool lending library in the Midtown neighborhood, a mostly black neighborhood. This plan laid the base for a contemporary Tool Loan Center located at 2500 W. Capitol Drive, which loans tools to

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<sup>19</sup> Milwaukee Model Cities Agency, *First Year Action Plan*, 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Milwaukee homeowners for an annual fee of \$35. It is supported by funds from the successor to the Model Cities, the Community Block Development Grant program.<sup>22</sup>

An examination of the housing programs laid out in the *First Year Plan* indeed shows that the Model Cities programs were intended to give more assistance to Milwaukee's African American community than to the white community. The members of WAICO hoped to utilize Model Cities funds to encourage the rehabilitation of decaying neighborhoods, through the creation of new homes, mortgage subsidies, and the creation of new housing and park space around the Walnut Street area. The plan to turn the area around Walnut between 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets into park space never materialized. The Model Cities program did a better job at facilitating input from residents in the planning and construction stages of renewal, than previous attempts at urban renewal.

In 1972 the Citizens Governmental Research Bureau of Milwaukee, a local organization formed in 1913 to monitor social and economic trends in the city, released a report on the Model Cities area which intended to illustrate how social conditions in the neighborhoods had changed after two years of the program. It was an attempt to establish a way of tracking progress within the Model Cities neighborhoods, and to illustrate problem areas. The Bureau examined social indicators over a five year period starting in 1966, four years prior to the Model Cities program. These indicators were commercial development, communications, crime, education, employment, fires, health, housing, income, recreation, transportation, and welfare. They found a general increase in attendance of playgrounds and community centers between 1967 and the year after implementation of the Model Cities programs in 1971. There was also a decrease in the

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<sup>22</sup> Milwaukee Common Council, "Need the Right Tool for the Job?" <http://www.city.milwaukee.gov/NeedTheRightToolForT16686.htm>, Accessed on March 26th 2010.

number of fires in the area, though false alarms increased. That same year witnessed a significant net increase of housing units in the Model Cities area. All previous years had seen a significant loss of housing units. The citizen guided process of urban renewal via the Model Cities program, which promoted not just new housing but preservation of housing, seemed to be effective in improving key social indicators. In spite of the progress the program would be phased into a new approach towards urban renewal, the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) which further emphasized local control of urban renewal projects.<sup>23</sup>

The cities previous urban renewal projects prior to Model Cities such as Kilbourntown-3 and Midtown attempted a top down approach, completely clearing all of a significant portion of target areas in an attempt to recreate neighborhoods as bureaucrats saw fit. Where Kilbourntown-3 was by some accounts a success in urban renewal, Midtown was an undeniable failure. The Midtown project destroyed the neighborhood it was intended to rehabilitate, so much so that “by 1975 only 340 new units had been built, while 1,700 had been razed.”<sup>24</sup>

The Model Cities programs focused on parts of the Midtown area in hopes of rectifying the net destruction of housing units.<sup>25</sup> The Model Cities programs took the bottom up approach, and tried to develop programs and plans residents found more immediate. It was an attempt to revitalize, and rehabilitate neighborhoods with the guidance of citizens who knew and appreciated their neighborhood, as opposed to the

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<sup>23</sup> Elam E. McElroy, *Social Indicators for the Milwaukee Model Cities Area: 1967 to Present*, (Milwaukee: Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, 1972).

<sup>24</sup> Daniel C. McCarthy, “The Quest for Authority: A Survey of the History of Milwaukee's Redevelopment Process, 1900-1975,” (Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1983,) 87.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-88.

wholesale destruction of homes by often indifferent city planners. In doing this there was much less resistance from citizens who were much more open to renewal in their neighborhood, since they were able to be involved in the decision making process.

Opposition to urban renewal often arose out of a lack of citizen involvement in the process and the displacement of individuals due to the clearance of housing units. The Model Cities approach to urban renewal empowered community groups like WAICO to organize and formulate plans for the revitalization as well as giving homeowners incentives to fix up their homes. Instead of looking for laborers and contractors outside the community it encouraged the employment of local laborers and contractors. This initially directed jobs and money to the African American community which had high levels of unemployment and high levels of poverty. The Model Cities program facilitated citizen's desires to control the development of their neighborhoods.

### **1974- 1996: Community Development Block Grant Program**

After four years the Model Cities programs was consolidated with six other federally funded development programs into the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The CDBG program was created under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. This Act provided for the distribution of funds for activities covered under the seven development programs that preceded it. Activities which were eligible to be funded by the CDBG program included the acquisition of blighted property, construction of public works, code enforcement in deteriorated areas, rehabilitation of buildings, removal of architectural barriers to the elderly and handicapped, and providing public services such job training and health care. It also

called for federally funded programs to “be carried out in a neighborhood consisting predominately of persons of low and moderate income and provide services for such persons; or involve facilities designed for use predominately by persons of low and moderate income; or involve employment of persons, a majority of whom are persons of low and moderate income.”<sup>26</sup>

The Department of City Development released a report in 1977 that called on the city to develop an urban renewal plan that focused on preservation of existing housing stock and structures in the city. They found that the need for new housing structures in Milwaukee was minimal at best. Between 1970 and 1980 the cities population had begun its slow process of stagnation and eventual decline. The pressing need for new housing stock which existed in the 1960s eased in the 1970s and 1980s as Milwaukee’s total population began to decline as an increasing number of whites left the city and factories began to shutter.

The CDBG program ushered in much more supple form of federally funded urban renewal and redevelopment in Milwaukee’s African American community, one that took into account the thoughts and feelings of residents about existing neighborhoods much more than ever before. The DCD’s report stated quite clearly:

Clearance should not be a major strategy in Milwaukee’s preservation policy—except where blighted structures or pockets of deterioration are detrimental to stable, surrounding residence. Definitions of stable and blighted differ, and care must be taken not to impose rigid planning standards on any neighborhood

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<sup>26</sup> 42 U.S.C. 5301 Community Development Program, and CPD Web Team. “U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,” <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/rulesandregs/laws/sec5305.cfm#sec5305%28c%29><http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/rulesandregs/laws/sec5305.cfm>, Accessed on May 9th 2010.

without the involvement of neighborhood residents. A 1976 survey of upper third Street residential community, for example indicated that over 25 percent felt their neighborhood was a good place to live and 84 percent said that it was not a bad place to live. Health and safety standards should be strictly enforced, but resident input is important in determining the viability of an area.<sup>27</sup>

The report also found that there was enough empty land in the inner city that if it was necessary to build new housing, there would be no reason to destroy or clear out entire neighborhoods as had been done in the 1960s. Rather than enforcing a comprehensive plan, renewal would be engaged on a case by case basis only where it was deemed absolutely necessary

Numerous community-based organizations (CBO) were developed and funded under the CDBG program in Milwaukee to meet the new challenge of preservation and redevelopment. Many of these organizations were managed, operated, and staffed by African Americans. These African American lead CBO's spent most of their efforts and funding in targeting the development, maintenance, and improvement of housing stock as well as improving social in black neighborhoods. Amongst the major African American CBO's were the Social Development Commission, Carpenters Inc., Commandos Inc., Harambee Ombudsman Project Inc., Milwaukee United for Better Housing (MUFBH), and the O.C. White Soul Club. From roughly 1988 to 1997 African American housing producers received a total of \$2,891,000, though funding was sporadic for these groups, and most of it came between 1988 and 1990. MUFBH was the major African American operated housing producer in Milwaukee having received a total of \$1,752,000 in CDBG funds. MUFBH received consistent funding from the CDGB program, until funding was

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<sup>27</sup> Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Toward a Comprehensive Plan: A Preservation Policy for Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee: The Department of City Development, 1977), 6.

cut in 1997 due to a controversy over fiscal problems.<sup>28</sup> During the time that it was funded by the CDGB programs (1989-1995) MUFBH constructed 38 housing units in African American neighborhoods.<sup>29</sup> The O.C. White Soul Club worked in housing rehabilitation, receiving \$2,695,000 from the CDBG fund between 1988 and 1995. The group completed over 130 rehabilitation projects before their funding was cut in 1995.<sup>30</sup>

Another major beneficiary of the CDGB funds was the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Greater Milwaukee (OIC-GM). OIC-GM initially engaged in assisting the impoverished and elderly in weatherizing their homes, and also provided job training for African Americans. OIC-GM received \$6,488,000 in CDGB funds between 1988 and 1997.<sup>31</sup> Yearly funding doubled to over \$1 million in 1996 when under the direction of political and business leaders the organization became the primary state funded organization which targeted the needs of impoverished individuals and families in Milwaukee's African American community.<sup>32</sup> Other groups that engaged in block grant funded programs were not directly run by African Americans, but employed a significant number of blacks. The largest among these groups were ESHAC, the West End Community Association, and the Sherman Park Redevelopment Association.

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Bonds, "Vanishing Hope: Race, Politics and the Distribution of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds in Milwaukee, 1975-1997," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1998), 169.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth L. Little, Stanley F. Battle and Rick Hornung, *The State of Black Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Urban League, Inc., 2000), 241.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Farrell, Jr., "The Rise and fall of OIC in Milwaukee," *The Milwaukee Business Journal*, April 2, 2005, <http://milwaukee.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/stories/2005/04/04/editorial4.html>, Accessed on May 8th 2010.

Between 1995 and 1996 CDBG funded housing programs employed over 230 people. Nearly 50 percent of those employed were African American, whites made up 36.5 percent. The other 15 percent were denoted as other. African American run housing programs employed 27 percent of the CDGB funded workforce. They employed 52 African Americans, nine whites, and one other.<sup>33</sup> In 1995 these block grant funded, African American-run housing programs received 2,955,000 in block grant funding. This amounted to a little over 25% of the block grant money awarded in that year. This amount was down from 1990 which saw over 36% of funding go to African American run programs, and a high of 48% in 1985.<sup>34</sup>

Between the years of 1974 and 1996, though their share of the funds declined over time, the CDBG program fed millions of dollars into the African American community for the express purpose of maintaining and developing black neighborhoods. Thanks to these funds hundreds of people were employed in maintaining their own neighborhoods and neighborhoods around the city. Black-owned, managed, and staffed business were developed to meet the challenges set by local, state, and federal governments in the production of housing, and the battle against urban decay and blight. These groups were funded with CDBG funds as long as they could provide the service they promised, and could do it without financial problems or malfeasance. Citizen run organizations were able to use state and federal CDBG funds to help out their neighborhoods where they saw the greatest need. MUFBH built housing, OIC-GM assisted in weatherization, Commandos Inc. built ramps to make buildings handicap

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Bonds, *Vanishing Hope: Race, Politics and the Distribution of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds in Milwaukee, 1975-1997*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1998), 278.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-273.

accessible, and many other organizations engaged in activities which they hoped would help sustain their neighborhoods and enhance their community.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to examine how Milwaukee's African American developed and remained cohesive during a time of great disruption. Most of the neighborhoods that African Americans lived in during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were subject to some form of urban renewal. A much larger and more cohesive community arose out a very turbulent period in history, where it was subject to repeated attempts at urban renewal. Throughout the 1960s Milwaukee engaged in urban renewal which resulted in the wholesale destruction of African American communities. Much of the housing that was destroyed in African American neighborhoods was never rebuilt, and much of what was rebuilt was replaced with public housing. In response to this style of urban renewal the Urban League assisted in the establishment of neighborhood organizations to help citizens gain control over their neighborhoods. Residents were encouraged to organize themselves and improve their community to keep themselves from being subjected to invasive and destructive renewal projects. The leaders in the Urban League encouraged residents to voice their opinions, and to promote plans they thought would be beneficial to their community.

In the 1970s the government responded to citizen's reaction to destructive urban renewal with the Model Cities Program. Residents of African American neighborhoods had an official outlet to present their ideas and attempt to get funding for their own renewal programs. The Model Cities Program was targeted specifically at helping the

oldest and most impoverished neighborhoods in Milwaukee. This included most of the African American neighborhoods in the city. Following on the heels of the brief Model Cities experiment the Community Development Block Grant Program was established in 1974. It initially made an active attempt to fund organizations that were owned and run by minorities, and that employed minorities or worked in minority neighborhoods.

This hodgepodge of programs may not have been effective at completely eliminating the visible blight that bureaucrats were so concerned with, but it had the effect of shaping Milwaukee's African American neighborhoods into more cohesive communities better able to sustain their infrastructures through federal assistance with services, jobs, and political organization.

The story of urban renewal for Milwaukee's African American community therefore is one of persistence and resiliency. The Urban League was instrumental in developing the community, and bringing people together as African American's were being displaced and their neighborhoods were being decimated. Over the past sixty years people have been unwilling to sit back and watch their neighborhoods deteriorate, or be subject to invasive urban renewal. Wherever and whenever black Milwaukeeans have perceived a social wrong they have made attempts to eradicate it. They have formed neighborhood organizations, founded businesses, engaged in the policy planning process, and worked through their social groups and churches in attempts to improve social conditions for themselves and their neighbors. Without the funding and guidance of federal urban renewal legislation and federal monies many of these projects would never have happened, or would not have been as effective.

Urban renewal earned its bad image for the destruction it caused, but it would be unfair to overlook the ways in which various programs funded citizens' attempts to preserve their neighborhoods, encouraged the active participation of residents in determining the destiny of their neighborhoods, and the instances where federally directed urban renewal was more or less successful at eliminating blight. It is quite clear that the issue of urban renewal and its impact on the development of Milwaukee's African American community remains contentious.

The next chapter will examine one of the most egregious and destructive acts of urban renewal undertaken by the city of Milwaukee, the construction of Highway 43. Freeway construction projects had deleterious effects on African American communities throughout the United States and Milwaukee was no exception. Freeway construction projects, like other urban renewal projects in post-World War II era, should be seen as significant moments of disruption in the development of urban African American communities and the reinforcement of patterns of racial segregation.

## Chapter 2

### Highway 43, Urban Renewal and the Reinforcement of Racial Segregation

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a case study of a particular form of urban renewal, freeway construction, and the impact that it had on Milwaukee's African American population. As in numerous urban centers throughout the United States in the post-World War II era freeway construction was undertaken as a means of easing traffic congestion with the hopes that this would stave off economic stagnation and decline particularly in the old industrial cities of the Midwest. These projects had a disparate impact on African American communities disrupting or destroying important residential, cultural, and economic centers which had developed out of the Great Migration sparked by the industrial demands of World Wars One and Two.

Urban centers throughout the country, but particularly in the North and the West, witnessed an explosion in their African American populations in the Twentieth Century. Milwaukee is a typical example of one such city. This growth in population also witnessed the development of residential segregation wherein African Americans were restricted to the areas of cities which were the least desirable and contained the oldest housing stock. These restrictions along with a rapid expansion in population contributed to above average population densities. Due to the tenuous nature of their economic position, restrictions on housing, and high population densities it often meant that African Americans lived in neighborhoods that were rapidly decaying.

What was dreamed up as a key to prosperity for post-war America, and for many it was, was a nightmare for many African American and working class white communities. In urban areas as different as Miami, Detroit, Charlotte, NC and Milwaukee freeway construction destroyed thousands of homes, numerous businesses, and displaced tens of thousands of individuals. Little attention was given to supporting those that were displaced, even though they were already the most socially and economically marginalized groups. The amount of housing units destroyed by freeway construction through residential neighborhoods outpaced any efforts to build new affordable housing for inner-city residents. Additionally there was resistance by suburban whites, and those who lived in affluent white neighborhoods to building new housing stock that might attract African Americans from the ghettoized portions of American cities.

As the African American population grew in urban areas they quickly became associated with these ghetto conditions, and many whites feared that if African Americans moved into their neighborhoods it would lead to a precipitous drop in their property values. This meant that as African Americans moved into new and better housing on the fringe of ghetto areas that these neighborhoods rapidly lost their white population. Every white person with means either moved to another part of the city or into the rapidly expanding suburbs. When whites fled the city they not only took themselves and their families, they also took whatever money and wealth they had with them as well. This historical process is classically known as white flight.

This process of white flight and expanding ghettos provided a dual problem for cities. By the end of the 1950s urban areas were no longer the economic engines they once were, but were increasingly spaces of concentrated poverty and extreme racial

segregation. Racist housing practices extended to the suburbs, via restrictive residential zoning ordinances and resistance to federally subsidized low income housing. This kept all African Americans regardless of socio-economic status restricted to increasingly destitute cities. This made it inevitable that any attempt by cities or the federal government to address the economic imbalance between city and suburb would disproportionately impact African Americans.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1950s urban planners believed they had discovered the key for urban economic woes. They utilized federal funds to build interstate highways through the heart of all major metropolitan areas. They believed that highways would be an economic boon to central cities; they would send property values back up, and would bring back the businesses and affluent whites who had fled to suburbs. Highways would serve to funnel much of the capital that had fled to the suburbs back into the city. To those who pushed for highways they represented a potential for the rebirth of urban centers. At the same time freeways could be placed in such a way as to eliminate much of the so called blight which was tarnishing the image of cities and seemed to be spreading like a contagion. Freeways could contribute to urban renewal in more way than one.<sup>2</sup>

In the post-WWII period Milwaukee followed in the footsteps of many urban municipalities throughout the United States supported by the federal government by engaging in urban renewal and large scale construction projects. This included the construction of federally subsidized public housing, slum clearance, and the construction of the interstate highway system. This was a direct response the economic decline of

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold R, Hirsch, "With or Without Jim Crow," in *Urban Policy in 20<sup>th</sup> century America*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 78-90.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-94.

America's major urban centers, and the explosion of suburban areas. The post-war economy witnessed the emergence of a large middle class, and the explosion of automobile ownership. At the same time it witnessed a transition away from war time industry. The impact of differing municipalities' efforts on marginalized communities throughout the country would be remarkably similar.

The African American experience of urban renewal and highway construction was not unique to Milwaukee. In nearly every city where freeways were built they had a negative impact on African American neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> The explicit racial character of the construction of the highway system witnessed the dramatic transformation of the land and the transition of urban African American communities throughout from the first ghetto of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the second ghetto of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two very different places marked by distinct social problems. As black urban populations grew in the post-World War II period they were pushed and prodded by city planners away from central areas of cities towards fringe areas, and generally less desirable spaces. Much of

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<sup>3</sup> The secondary literature which deals with the impact of urban renewal and freeway construction on African American communities is quite broad. Amongst the most significant are: Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City*, (Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, 2008); Howard Gillette Jr., *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Postindustrial City*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City*, (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1993); Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Carolyn Adams, *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991); Daniel J. Monti, *Race, Redevelopment, and the New Company Town*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990); Joe T. Darden, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1987); John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1987); Christopher Silver, *Twentieth-Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

this expansion was guided by white realtors and city planners with the specific intent of moving black populations and reshaping their neighborhoods in the quest of profit and higher property values. Throughout the United States “expressways plowed through black communities, destroying thousands of low-income housing units. The interstate highway system provided an unparalleled opportunity to clear out inner-city blight and make room for central business district development.”<sup>4</sup>

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the city of Milwaukee saw its demographics shift with whites comprising the minority population, and African Americans and Hispanics in the majority. Despite this shift, patterns of racial segregation within the city persist, and Milwaukeeans are reminded on a yearly basis they live in one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the country. These patterns of segregation have deep roots in Milwaukee’s past. It came about via variety of official and unofficial actions which restricted African Americans to certain areas, and then directed their movement in a certain direction.

The construction of Highway 43 was one of the most significant official actions taken by city leaders which reinforced established patterns of racial segregation in the city of Milwaukee. City leaders utilized federal funds to build a network of high speed freeways which they hoped would ease traffic congestion in the city, draw back former residents who had absconded to the suburbs and spur economic growth in the downtown area. The North-South route now known as Highway 43 was constructed through the heart of the city through the area known as Bronzeville, the center black life and

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “Race and Space in Miami,” in *Urban Policy in 20<sup>th</sup> century America*, ed. Arnold Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 135.

entertainment in the city, with devastating consequences for many individuals and families in Milwaukee's developing African American community.

The construction of Highway 43 is an important moment of disturbance in the history of Milwaukee's African American community. The established black neighborhood of Bronzeville was completely upturned and a large number of people were forced away from the traditional center of black settlement in the city. This pushed black residents out into adjacent neighborhoods hastening the transformation of the Garfield Park neighborhood into Harambee which contributed to the expansion of the areas which were open to African American in the city, though still restricted to those neighborhoods on the Northwest side.

### **The Development of Milwaukee's African American Community Prior to WWII**

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Milwaukee Real Estate Board was determined to confine Milwaukee's black population to a single Black Belt as was being done in other cities such as Chicago. Unofficial policies which were utilized to achieve this goal included redlining by banks, and racially restrictive covenants enforced by realtors, homeowners and home owner associations. Additionally gentlemen's agreements between realtors asserted that they would only sell housing to African Americans in certain neighborhoods. These were the tools that were utilized in the shaping of Milwaukee's first ghetto between 1900 and 1950. Their efforts worked and by 1932 a

distinct African American neighborhood had emerged between E. North Avenue., State Street, N. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Street, and N. 12<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>5</sup>

In comparison to other major metropolitan areas the growth of Milwaukee's African American community in the pre-WWII period was quite slow. Milwaukee did not experience significant expansion in its African American population until well into the post-war period. In 1940 8,821 African Americans claimed residence in the city of Milwaukee, a tiny 1.8% of the total population. In 1950 Milwaukee's black population totaled 21,772, roughly 3.4% of Milwaukee's total population. By the end of the decade in 1960 the total black population stood at 62,458, 8.4% of Milwaukee's population. African Americans' total numbers had nearly tripled in the ten year period between 1950 and 1960, and grown seven times between 1940 and 1960. This dramatic rise in the African American population, many of them young and poor migrants from the South, brought increased scrutiny and uncertainty from the white population, the petty bourgeois black community, and governmental power structures.

Unofficial policies of containment only worked to hold Milwaukee's black population for a short period of time. The African American population's continued and dramatic growth pushed against the established boundaries. Racially restrictive covenants and gentlemen's agreements, due to their voluntary nature, were ineffective tools for enforcing racial separation. As blacks moved into fringe neighborhoods whites moved out and the areas where African Americans were allowed to live began a block by block expansion. City planners turned to enacting strategic zoning laws as a means of ensuring

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<sup>5</sup> Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat 1915-1945*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 68-71.

that blacks would not move south into the central business district. The southern half of the African American district was zoned for industrial and light manufacturing construction in 1920 and it remained as such until World War II. This was effective in cutting off a Southern route for the growth of the black residential area, keeping African Americans on the outer fringes of the central business district. It also provided a means for landlords to squeeze as much money out of a limited housing supply as possible.<sup>6</sup>

In 1945 the area open for black's to find housing remained much the same as in 1932 with the expansion of the northern boundary to E. Wright Street. The area was also increasingly populated by African American migrants, as much as two thirds of the population. While ever greater numbers of blacks were moving into Milwaukee's working class neighborhoods whites began their post-war movement to the fringes of the city and ultimately the suburbs.<sup>7</sup> A general trend of the movement of black residential into neighborhoods on the city's northwest side began to take shape.

The 1940s also witnessed the emergence of a central African American residential, business and entertainment district, known as Bronzeville, centered on the Walnut St. area. Taverns, jazz clubs, barbershops, drugstores, and funeral homes had been established in the neighborhood to meet the demands of Milwaukee's growing African American population. This centralization of black capital was not enough to counter the flight of white capital. Many black owned businesses had also catered to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 176.

many of the working class whites who were leaving the area for better homes and neighborhoods on the fringes of the city and in the suburbs.<sup>8</sup>

Few new housing units were being constructed, and there wasn't enough capital in the area to maintain old housing units contributing to the further decay of housing stock in the area. This growth of blight, a catch all term for the physical breakdown and decay of housing stock, which accompanied the growth of Milwaukee's black population gave city planners an objective cause for further attempts at controlling and containing the growth of African American residential areas in the city. Anything that was seen as unsightly was deemed blight; from chipped and peeling paint on a house, to an unkempt vacant lot, to a fully dilapidated housing structure. The issue of blight was seized upon by city planners in order to enact a variety of plans which engineered effective racial segregation in the city, something that racially restrictive covenants and gentlemen's agreements were unable to do.<sup>9</sup>

These concerns about the continued growth of the city's African American population, the social issues surrounding such a dramatic increase, and rising racial tensions found its expression in 1960 with the publication of *The Final Report of the Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City*, commonly known as the *Zeidler Report*. The report reveals the degree of marginalization that African Americans were facing at the start of the 1960s in the city. Social and economic conditions had stagnated or declined for the majority of black women. Single

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of the development of African American jazz culture in Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood in the decades just before and after its destruction see Ben Barbera, ["An Improvised World: Jazz and Community in Milwaukee, 1950 – 1970,"](#) (Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee: The Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 358-369.

parent families were on the rise, and the number of black women on the welfare rolls was increasing. Additionally unemployment for black men was significantly higher than it was for whites.

The committee was tasked by Mayor Frank Zeidler with identifying social problems in the Inner Core, and then making suggestions to ameliorate the problems. The catalyst for the production of the report was two killings in the summer of 1959. On September 22<sup>nd</sup> Sylvia Fink, a white woman, was brutally murdered in her home by Roscoe Simpson, an African American man; a day later the police killed Simpson. These two killings brought racial tensions to a fever pitch in the city with blacks and whites fearing violent retaliation from each other.<sup>10</sup>

The report located the problems of Milwaukee's African American population in the breakdown of the traditional family structure. According to final report of the Mayors study committee "as the number of these families increased their behavior patterns became more noticeable and in many instances disturbing."<sup>11</sup> This report focused on an arbitrary geographic region denoted as the Inner Core. The Inner Core was defined as the area between W. Juneau Ave. to the south, W. Keefe to the north, N. Holton to the east, and N. 20<sup>th</sup>. St. to the west. They chose this area because of the aging housing stock and because a significant number of poor Southern migrants, almost entirely black, were

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<sup>10</sup> "Zeidler: Same Enforcement of the Laws for All," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1959.  
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=a6oVAAAIBAJ&sjid=ExAEAAAIBAJ&pg=7565,1829232&dq=mayor%27s+study+committee+on+social+problems+in+the+inner+core+area&hl=en>, Accessed on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City, *Summary of final report of Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City* (Milwaukee, The Mayors Study Committee, 1960), 8.

settling in the area. Some of the individual reports examined areas beyond the Inner Core since they felt that similar social problems existed beyond this area.

The study examined a host of social issues associated with the increasing African American population, including high birth rates, and their confinement to one of the poorest part of Milwaukee. One area of particular concern of the Committee was “hard core or multi-problem” families. These families were defined in the study as having “a chronic problem which is of concern to the community” and which have “received services over a long period from one or more of the agencies of the community with significant improvement.”<sup>12</sup> A family met these criteria if it was a “functional failure” in more than one of four areas of raising children. These four areas were “protecting children during their period of dependency,” “maintaining a personal and/or home life which will enable the person or family members to develop emotional stability and maturity,” “accepting and maintaining social controls to the end that the person or member of the family meets his major responsibility to society,” and “securing and managing income in order to meet the physical and social necessities for healthful living.”<sup>13</sup>

The study reveals concerns about the shifting demographics of the Inner Core area and the city in general via higher birth rates than white women, and concerns about the rapid growth of the African American population. Despite their concern about the migration of African Americans into these areas, with 90% of Milwaukee’s non-white population residing in the Inner Core in 1950, it remained dominated by white residents with only 19.1% of the areas total population being non-white. The study also raised

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<sup>12</sup> Mayor’s Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City, *Report on Problem Families in the Inner Core*. (Milwaukee, The Mayor’s Study Committee, 1960), 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

significant concerns surrounding the birth rate in the Inner Core. Women in the Inner Core were having children at a much higher rate than the rest of the city. The birth rate in 1950 for the Inner Core was 25.8 births per 1,000 people, for the city as a whole it was 22.7. In 1957 the birth rate in the Inner core had risen to 31.5, while for the city it was only 26.2.<sup>14</sup>

The report suggested that more could be done to promote birth control amongst residents of the inner core to bring birth rates in line with the cities and slow the pace of growth in the African American community. The Zeidler Report proposed:

An intensive and extensive education in the several accepted methods of birth control. These methods would be chosen and taught in terms of the capacity of the marital partners to understand and utilize the various methods and according to the religious beliefs of the couple.<sup>15</sup>

The committee believed that they should control the growth of the African American population by promoting birth control, even though most of the population increase came from migrants from the southern states seeking employment in the city. They were especially worried that the live birth rate for blacks was beginning to far outpace infant mortality rates. Expressing an overbearing sense of paternalism toward African Americans in the city the committee worried that an increase in births was putting greater amounts of economic pressure on women and their families.

In addition to focusing on the birth rate of African American women the study also examined the growing number of women in the Inner Core on the welfare rolls, and

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<sup>14</sup> Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City, *Report in Size, Physical Characteristics and Population in the Inner Core*. (Milwaukee: The Mayor's Study Committee, 1960), 7.

<sup>15</sup> "The Mayor Gets Proposals on Housing, Birth, Pay," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 16<sup>th</sup> 1960. Accessed May 8<sup>th</sup> 2011. [http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=k\\_4jAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=ihAEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=7352,3109408&dq=mayor%27s+study+committee+on+social+problems+in+the&hl=en](http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=k_4jAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=ihAEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=7352,3109408&dq=mayor%27s+study+committee+on+social+problems+in+the&hl=en)

an increase of “hard- core or multi-problem families” in the area. They found that though the Inner Core contained roughly 10% of Milwaukee’s total population in 1950, 51% of the people receiving Aid to Dependent Children resided in the area, and nearly 40% of the people receiving General Financial Assistance.<sup>16</sup> These numbers illustrated the day to day struggle that many African American women in Milwaukee were facing at the beginning of the post-war period. There was no significant progress in a socio-economic sense for the vast majority of black people in the city.

The *Zeidler Report* stressed the need for an increase in social programs in the Inner Core, and the development of educational facilities at every level. It also called for more job training programs to give experience to Southern migrants, and additionally calls for the elimination of employment discrimination so that more industrial jobs would be open to African Americans. They hoped to decrease poverty and increase employment through a multi-faceted approach that would touch every aspect of African Americans lives. The committee suggested that a combination of education, job training, welfare, private sector job creation, improved social services, public leisure facilities, and urban renewal projects could ameliorate the problems that residents of the Inner Core faced.

As Milwaukee’s African American population began to grow after World War II the city became one of the most racially segregated in America. The African-American population became confined to an area deemed by the city government as the Inner Core. As defined by the Zeidler Report in 1960 the Inner Core is bound by Keefe Ave on the North, W. Juneau Ave on the South, Holton Ave and the Milwaukee River on the East

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<sup>16</sup> Mayor’s Study Committee .*Report on Size*. 13.

and N. 20<sup>th</sup> Street on the West.<sup>17</sup> African Americans had a presence in nearly every neighborhood of the city by 1960, but not in significant numbers, due to restrictive covenants, redlining, and personal prejudices of landowners and landlords. The neighborhoods with the greatest African American population in 1960, Halyard Park and Garfield Avenue, roughly cover the Inner Core as defined by the *Zeidler Report*. Ninety-one percent of Milwaukee's African American population lived in the Inner Core, which made up a total of 5.63 square miles, or 6.98% of the city's total land area.<sup>18</sup>

As the African American population began to grow in these neighborhoods in the 1960s and 1970s the population became increasingly concentrated. A variety of urban renewal projects served to negatively impact many in the African American community and reinforce patterns of segregation including the construction of Highway 43 through multiple neighborhoods on the city's Northwest side including the historic center of African American life in the city, Bronzeville, the Kilbourntown No. 3 and Eastside A projects which demolished nearly all of the buildings in areas just to the North and West of the Downtown area, as well as the Midtown project west of North 20<sup>th</sup> Street between State Street and Vliet Street which preserved some of the existing housing stock in the area.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City, *Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: The Mayor's Study Committee, 1960), 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Annex D., 1.

<sup>19</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 394-394.

### **Freeway Construction in Context**

Out of all of these urban renewal and redevelopment projects the construction of the North-South Expressway (referred to as Highway 43) from 1962 to 1968 had the greatest negative impact on Milwaukee's African American community. The highway cut through the heart of the African American community. The African American community in 1960 made up roughly 8% of Milwaukee's total population, and by 1970 comprised nearly 15%.<sup>20</sup> Despite their minority status in the city, African Americans accounted for more than half of the people that would be displaced by the construction of Milwaukee's highway system in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

As in many other urban centers in the United States with substantial black communities, such as Detroit, Miami and Charlotte highway construction led to the destruction of homes, businesses, and property, and the displacement of thousands of people. In 1956 Miami began construction of a highway interchange system that cut through the heart of Overtown, the city's main African American neighborhood. Upon its completion the interchange had eliminated over two dozen city blocks, much of this the central black business district. Overtown was located on the edge of the downtown business district and planners hoped the interchange would increase property values and attract more people downtown by pushing blacks further from the central business district and giving ease of access to those who owned automobiles. Since their goal was

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<sup>20</sup> Miriam G. Palay and the Milwaukee Urban Observatory, *Census Update, City of Milwaukee, 1975* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Urban Observatory, 1977), 16.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 25.

displacement of the city's African American population there was little concern among freeway planners and boosters for the relocation of the dispossessed.<sup>22</sup>

The construction of freeways in Miami spurred the emergence of a second ghetto. Pressure from the freeways spurred the growth of black enclaves further away from the central business district. As more and more black families were displaced or threatened with displacement in the first ghetto, Overtown, they moved into two separate areas of Miami known as Liberty City and Brownsville. Though the concerted effort of relators and city planners these two areas merged and by beginning of the 1960s Liberty City emerged as the center of black population in the city, the second ghetto. Through the strategic placement of the freeway system city planners had succeeded in pushing the cities black ghetto further and further from the central business district.<sup>23</sup>

In Detroit one of the most significant centers of black life and culture to emerge after World War I, Black Bottom and its business district Paradise Valley, were razed by urban renewal and freeway construction in the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> Most residents of Black Bottom were employed by the auto companies and as plants moved out of the city and workers lost their jobs the neighborhood fell into an increase state of disrepair. As in other cities these conditions of blight were used to justify the destruction of the neighborhood and placement of freeways as an attempt to spur economic growth. Black Bottom/Paradise Valley located just to the east of the downtown area was replaced by the Chrysler Freeway and a mixed income high rise housing complex designed by famed Modernist

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 112-120.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 129-134.

<sup>24</sup> Detroit Historical Society, "Paradise Valley," *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, <http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/paradise-valley>, Accessed March 25, 2014.

Mies van der Roh known as Lafayette Park.<sup>25</sup> Once again these redevelopment projects had the effect of pushing working class blacks away from the central business district and disrupting long established black-owned business. Very few of those displaced were able to afford or even locate housing in their redeveloped neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

In Charlotte, North Carolina the historic African American neighborhood of Brooklyn was completely razed by the city's Redevelopment Authority with the assistance of federal funds between 1960 and 1967. 1,007 families were displaced by the project while there was no effort to replace the 1,480 structures which were demolished. The neighborhood which was located just to the east of the downtown area was replaced by private offices, businesses, a government complex and a brand new city park. Other African American neighborhoods were disrupted by urban renewal projects throughout the city including a black business district which was replaced by the Charlotte Convention Center and a Radisson Hotel. As in the other cases these projects had the effect of pushing African Americans in Charlotte away from the expanded central business district, into overcrowded existing black neighborhoods and into white working class neighborhoods.<sup>27</sup>

Plans for the construction of a highway system in Milwaukee began soon after the Federal government began funding construction on the Interstate highway system with the passage of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956. These plans, based on the German

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<sup>25</sup> Detroit Historical Society, "Black Bottom Neighborhood," *Encyclopedia of Detroit*, <http://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/black-bottom-neighborhood>, Accessed March 25, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Joe T. Darden, et. al., *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 169-170.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1998), 247-251.

Autobahn system, served two distinct purposes, first for strategic defense purposes, and second to facilitate the transportation of goods and people quickly across the country as a means of stimulating economic growth. City planners within the Federal government and in metropolitan areas across the nation believed it of the utmost importance that the United States have an efficient highway system to facilitate the defense of cities in case of an attack by the Soviet menace. Planners believed that building an intricate and efficient highway system would also increase the economic capacity of the country's growing cities, and would also help alleviate population concentration and urban decay. The U.S. highway system, instead of skirting around urban populations, would cut right through cities. Planners hoped these new routes would facilitate the return of white suburbanites and their wealth to the city. In hopes to ensure the return of wealthy whites the highway would be built right through the African American community.<sup>28</sup>

Milwaukee began planning for the construction of its own highways in the late 1940s prior to the commitment of full-fledged federal support. One plan created in 1949 by DeLeuw, Cather and Company had two North South expressways which ran through areas with low population density. They designed a plan that would displace relatively few people and follow the natural geography and population patterns of the city.<sup>29</sup> This plan would have placed the freeways through open areas of the city including county parkland and along the lakefront. But by 1962, when highway construction began in the African American community, the city had discarded the DeLeuw plan in favor of one that would cut through the densely populated Inner Core and would displace thousands of

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<sup>28</sup> "Wisconsin Highways: Milwaukee Freeways: North-South Freeway," *Wisconsin Highways*, <http://www.wisconsinhighways.org/milwaukee/northsouth.html>, Accessed April, 23, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> De Leuw, Cather & Company, Wisconsin, and Milwaukee, *Major Trafficways: Milwaukee Metropolitan Area* (Chicago: DeLeuw, Cather and Company, 1949), Exhibit 2.

people within the African American community, in the process paving over thousands of homes and businesses. It was much more politically expedient to build through areas which were determined to be blighted and which exhibited slum-like conditions than through highly valued parkland.

The recommendations of the *Zeidler Report* published in March of 1960 made city leaders and highway planners more than aware of the hardship their decision to build the highway through the Inner Core would cause. The report's second recommendation stated the situation quite clearly:

Another phase of the problems of the inner core that seemed most pressing and yet ignored by the public as well as the private agencies is the fact that within a relatively short span of years it is anticipated that 6,000 families will be displaced by public action such as expressways, urban renewal, and through code enforcement. A substantial part of this displacement of people will occur in the inner core area where housing is already a serious problem and where mobility is restricted...It is therefore the recommendation of this committee that a central relocation agency be established to do research on housing availability and to assist people displaced by various city and county public works to find adequate homes.<sup>30</sup>

The *Zeidler Report's* chapter, *Report on Size, Physical Characteristics and Population in the Inner Core*, once again addressed the impact highway construction would have on the community. The report's authors recognized that the displacement of land caused by the construction of the freeway would impact a significant amount of residential space. The table indicates that they expected 148.8 acres of land would be

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<sup>30</sup> Mayors Study Committee, *Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee*, Annex F pg. 4.

displaced in the Inner Core. 95 of those displaced acres would be residential, and defined only 1.53 of the acres lost as vacant.<sup>31</sup>

These dire warnings from the Committee fell in to the laps of indifferent city leaders. Political leaders voiced little concern over the social effects of displacement in the lead up to construction. Eliminating urban decay concerned city leaders much more than limiting the negative social and economic effects construction might have. Highway construction served as a precursor to urban renewal, it allowed city leaders to reconfigure a portion of the city without the consent of the people living in the targeted areas. In an interview in 2005 former Milwaukee Mayor Frank Zeidler commented on the impetus for placing the highway through African American communities, stating that “In one sense the freeway did get rid of a lot of blight. The freeway routes. Of course, that’s why they picked them.”<sup>32</sup>

Though their actions would displace thousands of people, politicians felt a vital service was being to done to both white and black residents by eliminating the most impoverished areas of the city. Relocation assistance in the form of monetary payments for moving fees did come from the County government. Available aid came in the form of \$200 from the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission Relocation Division to assist in moving costs for home owners and for tenants with at least three year lease.<sup>33</sup>

Even though thousands of people had been displaced by construction, and thousands more expected only two state highway employees worked to assist families

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Annex D.

<sup>32</sup> “empty streets » Nik Kovac's Interview with Frank Zeidler,” *Empty Streets*, [http://emptystreets.net/blog/?page\\_id=84](http://emptystreets.net/blog/?page_id=84), Accessed May 9, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia A House, *Families Displaced by Expressway Development: A Geographical Study of Relocation in Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Photoduplication Dept, 1972), 86.

relocate. In addition these relocation services lacked adequate publicity therefore a majority of displaced families never knew about the meager compensation made available to them by the state. Professor of Urban Studies and Planning Bernard J Frieden states it quite plainly when he says that “relocation is clearly an incidental function in the case of highways, and there is no strong motivation to extend more than a minimum of aid.”<sup>34</sup> The lack of a serious to assist in the relocation of those displaced by these projects indicates that there was no real desire to help those people that lived in targeted neighborhoods. Perhaps it expressed a desire on the behalf of city leaders and planners that poor African Americans might be driven out of the city entirely and back to the places from which they had migrated.

Patricia House addresses the impact of displacement by the construction of the north south expressway in her study, *Families Displaced by Expressway Development: A Geographical Study of Relocation in Milwaukee*. She concludes that African Americans moved significantly shorter distances when displaced and that a majority of displaced families relocated in areas already occupied by a black majority. Displacement caused an increase in the area’s population concentration, and acted to further segregate as white people left the area, and black people only moved an average of a few blocks from their previous home. She found that race was the most important factor when it came to the displacement and resettlement of families. House discovered direct discrimination against African Americans by property owners and real estate agencies, indirect discrimination against African Americans due to psychological fears and prejudices of the white population, and the avoidance of African American neighborhoods by whites. In a survey

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<sup>34</sup> Bernard J Frieden, *Urban Planning and Social Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1968) ,321-322.

that House conducted she found assistance from the Relocation Division of the County Expressway Commission the least utilized out of several options by displaced people to find a new home.<sup>35</sup> Only ever employing two people, it would have been an impossible task for this Relocation Division to adequately assist the thousands of the people that had been displaced. Though city and county activities displaced thousands of people little compensation and even less compassion came from public officials who held the most responsibility. No one at any level of government took full responsibility for disrupting the African American community, and disrupting the lives of thousands of citizens.

On November 8th 1966 Mayor Henry Maier passed the responsibility of assisting displaced people to the county. Attempting to use compassionate of language he framed the displacement of people as a “human problem” which everyone in the County held responsibility for, not just in the city. Maier stated, “Responsibility for the slums of the metropolitan area does not disappear when you walk across the center of N. 60<sup>th</sup> or Edgewood Ave.”<sup>36</sup> Maier spoke for the city leaders as he passed the buck onto someone else. If he truly cared about the “human problem” he could have vocalized support for open housing, or plans for public housing placed throughout the cities, and allocated city funds to ease the process of displacement.

Displaced persons were given the distinct perception of being a nuisance for the city, it would be a massive undertaking to properly relocate people and adequately repay them for their loss, and if the city government just passed on the issue it would not have to expend any money. The city’s leadership saw African Americans as a nuisance prior

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<sup>35</sup> House, *Families Displaced by Expressway Development*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Henry W. Maier, Position Paper No.3 Nov. 8 1966, Milwaukee Series 49, Box 159, Folder 9, UW-Milwaukee Archives.

to, during, and after highway construction. City officials seemed to believe it possible to eliminate the nuisance African Americans caused by paving over what they saw as the absolute worst areas in the city.

In early 1968 criticism of highway construction and its impact on the African American community emerged from prominent Milwaukee Attorney Leonard Zubrensky. Zubrensky became the only major critic of the city's handling of construction and displaced peoples to emerge from amongst the city leadership. He served as the secretary of the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission, putting him in a unique and credible position from which to critique highway construction. On July 7<sup>th</sup> 1968 Zubrensky vocalized his concern: "If need be we must put the brake on our expressway programs in order to give massive attention to the problem of dislocation and relocation until this grave social problem is under control."<sup>37</sup> In a *Milwaukee Sentinel* article titled 'Family Relocated, Plight Described' Zubrensky noted the injustice of the situation: "There is something basically wrong with the system. It's affecting those least able to help themselves."<sup>38</sup>

After six years of construction and displacement a member of the political elite considered the plight of the people who highway construction had displaced, but it came too late to achieve any meaningful abatement of the grave injustice committed by city leaders' decisions. At the time that Zubrensky raised his concerns, over 13,000 people had been displaced by expressway construction with meager assistance or compensation

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<sup>37</sup> "Relocation Aid Called Inadequate," *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>38</sup> "Family Relocates, Plight Described," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

from city, county, state or federal governments.<sup>39</sup> Between the years of 1962 and 1967 highway construction destroyed 8,535 housing units. With only 1,198 new housing units rebuilt a severe housing shortage served to compound the complications the African American community experience due to highway construction through the Inner Core.<sup>40</sup> Not only had individuals and families been displaced but they faced diminished options of available housing as there was no one for one replacement of demolished housing stock in the areas on the Northwest side of the city where blacks were allowed to live.

Through a close examination of the evidence it becomes quite clear that very few white leaders had the will to take on the responsibility of assisting in the re-housing and compensation of the displaced. Though glaringly apparent the entire time, everyone in a position of power kept passing the buck and the impoverished fell through the cracks. Proposals to scatter low income housing and public housing for the displaced throughout the city, in order to avoid the re-concentration of the impoverished, never materialized. Vocal opposition came from within the white community to any new public housing being built in their neighborhood, because it would inevitably house mostly African Americans. In addition African Americans had a much more difficult time finding adequate housing, than their fellow displaced whites did. After Attorney Zubrensky raised a critical voice Mayor Maier spoke in favor of an examination of the effects of major government construction projects, saying, "In all our renewal efforts we must first make sure that the problem of people is fully taken into account."<sup>41</sup> This speech came off as an empty gesture to the thousands of people who had already been displaced by

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<sup>39</sup> "Re-house X-Way project Victims," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>41</sup> "Maier Stresses need to look at Relocation," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

highway construction. Actions and criticism brought forth in 1968 and 1969 came too late to mean anything to the majority of people displaced by highway construction throughout the 1960s.

Ruth Zubrensky, in *A Report on Past Discrimination against African Americans in Milwaukee, 1835-1999*, argues that racial discrimination formed the basis for the lack of equitable assistance for the relocation of African Americans. She found that they were not provided with real alternatives which would have allowed them to locate housing anywhere in the city. Blacks displaced by urban renewal projects were effectively restricted to relocating in the same inner city neighborhoods and many returned to overcrowded housing conditions.

Zubrensky quotes Richard Perrin, director of the Department of City Development during the period of mass displacements, who stated that, “most Blacks did not want to move from the core area because they wished to remain near the persons whom they were used to associating.”<sup>42</sup> The kind of racial stereotypes put forward by people like Perrin contributed to the lack of relocation service for African Americans, and served to strengthen segregation in the city. Policies enacted by political leaders at the very top of the city government contributed to the lack of assistance, re-concentration of population, and disproportionate impact on the African American community.

Construction of Highway 43 cut the heart of the African American community in two. The highway served as a concrete wall that split the African American community, and served to further separate the African American community from the rest of the city.

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<sup>42</sup> Ruth Zubrensky, *A Report on Past Discrimination Against African-Americans in Milwaukee, 1835-1999* (Milwaukee: R. Zubrensky, 1999), 54-55.

Highway 43 joined the Milwaukee River and the Menominee River Valley as the lines that served to demarcate racial separation in housing, business, and education. Though the government held all the responsibility for destroying homes, businesses, and property; they did little to rectify all of the physical, psychological, and economic, destruction that highway construction caused. People had largely been left to their own devices in finding a way to survive being uprooted by the hand of the powerful political elite.

The African American community due to its small size did not have the political power to control its own destiny. Population size and concentration made it possible for the community to remain at the whim of the white power structure. The city and county governments forced the highway through the area with surprisingly little protest from residents in and around the immediate area that would be transformed into a massive ribbon of concrete. The African American community lacked the economic and political power necessary to stop the concrete monster from eating up an entire corridor of the neighborhood. Homes, businesses, memories, and histories had been completely obliterated and paved over by Highway 43.

The lives of those people who lived in its path would be altered forever, and they were effectively cast aside by the very government that had removed them from their homes. Though their homes, businesses, and land had been taken from them and reapportioned for this economic conduit, the highway did nothing to improve the economic situation of the African American community. The city used the highway in an attempt to woo the wealthy white residents who had fled the city for the suburbs, taking their pocketbooks and tax dollars with them. City leaders did not build Highway 43 for African Americans living in the Inner Core. The African American community only

came to mind because they stood in the way of economic progress and easing access to and from the growing suburbs surrounding the city.

The construction of a concrete barrier through and around the African American community, and the displacement of thousands of people without equitable compensation had only negative effects for that community. Long after construction had been completed economic conditions in Milwaukee's African American community worsened, and the so called "urban blight" that city leaders claimed to strive to eliminate only increased. According to city leaders the highway system was a vitally necessary means of encouraging economic progress, and a means of improving the cities physical appearance. The heart of their neighborhood had been sliced in two and in the process the African American community had been excluded from any share in this economic progress. Public officials viewed the plight of the African American community as a hindrance, easily paved over, and summarily forgotten, all in the name of economic progress and national defense.

The construction of Highway 43 through Milwaukee's African American community, and the subsequent abandonment of displaced citizens reveal the devastating influence of racism in Milwaukee's history. Segregationist policies in the city planner tool box included urban renewal projects, such as Kilbourntown-3, which entirely demolished poor and blighted neighborhoods that African American's lived in due to their lower economic standing; and public housing projects, many of which initially restricted access for black residents while those that allowed black occupants were sited in already segregated neighborhoods reinforcing the negative pattern. The pretense of urban renewal was that it would improve conditions for those living in the neighborhoods

that were to be renewed. Renewal often resulted in the complete removal of previous residents, and their replacement with fewer and wealthier residents. Where public housing was built it often failed to replace the number of housing units it displaced, forcing families to move elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the 1950s and 1960s freeway construction emerged as the most significant tool to be wielded in the engineering of impoverished and decidedly segregated African American ghettos throughout the United States. The already existing patterns of segregation were seized upon in the construction of the freeway system setting up a physical barrier placed in such a way as to reinforce patterns of segregation and social exclusion. Freeway construction was the culmination of six decades of efforts to control and confine Milwaukee's rapidly growing African America population. With the placement of the freeway system roughly along the Menomonee River Valley and the Milwaukee River it reinforced the barriers that had been established by realtors, politicians, and private agreements. The freeways cemented on the land patterns of residential segregation and exclusion. Racially restrictive covenants and other private

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<sup>43</sup> John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 366-367.

agreements were no longer a necessity, the new lay of the land made it quite clear where a person of one race or another should live in the city.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to cementing patterns of segregation, freeway construction also destroyed businesses, housing, and centers of community and culture. Bronzeville, considered by many to be the center of African American life in Milwaukee was obliterated by the construction of the North South freeway known today as I-43. African Americans had established themselves in this area as early as the 1930s if not earlier. The freeway cut through their business district which was centered on Walnut St. Those businesses that were not physically wiped out by the placement of the freeway between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> streets, eventually withered away due to the lack of business thanks to the displacement of patrons and a precipitous decline in property values. It is around the time of the completion of the freeway when Milwaukee's second ghetto emerged in the 1960s,

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<sup>44</sup> The geographical features of the city of Milwaukee have had a significant impact on the development of racial segregation patterns. The city is divided into three distinct parts by two major natural features: the Menomonee River Valley which runs west to east just south of the Downtown and the Milwaukee River which runs north to south. These features have divided the city into an Eastside, a Southside, and a Northwest side. Each of these areas has had their own distinct economic, ethnic, and racial developments which have been clear throughout the city's history. The Southside has developed from an area of the city dominated by working class Polish immigrants to an area populated by a large community of working class Hispanic and Latino immigrants. The Northwest side developed from an area populated by working class German and Eastern Europeans immigrants to an area which is populated by a predominately black working class area. Since the city's earliest days the Eastside has been populated by middle and upper class whites. While a very rough sketch these ethnic and racial patterns have largely held true throughout Milwaukee's history. There has yet to develop any significant African American neighborhoods outside of the Northwest side and the Hispanic population largely remains confined to the area South of the Menomonee River valley. The Eastside is dominated by middle class whites and a significant student population. The neighborhood known as Riverwest of the west bank of the Milwaukee River is a transitional neighborhood with both black and white residents. Here old parish boundaries which run North and South along Holton Avenue serve as an racial and economic boundary between the racially mixed and economically developed Riverwest and the predominantly black neighborhood of Harambee.

and the point from which African Americans would begin their expansion into the city's Northwest side in search of better housing within the city.

The displacement of African Americans in Milwaukee's restricted housing market contributed to the increase in the concentration of the black population which contributed to the growth of impoverished and blighted areas in the city. A desperate cycle of poverty and population concentration contributed to the emergence of the second ghetto. In their search for better housing middle class African American's began to move into areas on the fringes of the already existing ghetto. As they moved away from the inner parts of the original ghetto they were replaced by an increasingly impoverished population. The African American residential area grew outward in a North and West fashion moving further away from the freeways and into shrinking white residential areas.

In addition to destroying established African American neighborhoods the freeways also worked to reinforce patterns of residential segregation and serve as a bulwark against the physical expansion of African American neighborhoods. In Milwaukee the freeways followed the traditional lines of racial segregation the Milwaukee River and the Menominee River Valley. To the east of the Milwaukee River and south of the Menominee River Valley black residents were few and far between in the post-war period. In the late 1960s Civil Rights activists would march from the North side to the South side across the 16<sup>th</sup> street viaduct protesting for an open housing law. Revealing the stark geographic divide residents often joked that this was the longest bridge in the world, since it connected Africa to Poland.

The outward expansion of African American residential areas continued until they reached suburban municipal boundaries. Black migration has been severely limited, making the Milwaukee one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the country. The annexation of Granville in the northwest corner of Milwaukee County in the 1960s opened up space for Milwaukee's rapidly expanding African American population to continue their search for better homes and neighborhoods away from the reinforced racial boundaries in the city and towards the reinforced racial boundaries of the suburbs.<sup>45</sup> The freeway fortification of established racial boundaries served to cement the Northwest portion of the city as predominantly African American, and reserved the South and East sides for the white population that still lived and worked in the city.<sup>46</sup>

Despite all the bulldozing and the miles and miles of concrete the freeway booster's dreams of impending prosperity went unrealized. Instead of bringing prosperity to America's urban centers freeway construction contributed to the continual physical and economic decline of cities well into the 1970s and beyond. Rather than ameliorating the process of deindustrialization in urban areas freeways served to only quicken the pace. Industries could locate further and further from their workforce, meaning they could locate in areas with low property and income taxes. People who worked in central cities could more easily commute from the suburbs. Freeways promoted the growth of the suburbs, and the continual decline of central cities, the complete opposite of their promise. The only thing freeways were truly effective at was strengthening and solidifying patterns of racial segregation.

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<sup>45</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 390.

<sup>46</sup> Greg Carman, "[Wall of Exclusion: the Persistence of Segregation in Milwaukee](#)," (Ph. D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2011), 74-78.

The next chapter will challenge the notion of urban renewal as “negro removal” by examining an instance where African Americans in Milwaukee sought to redevelop a black neighborhood in their own way, with substantial input from residents. African Americans were not simply the passive victims of urban renewal, the attempt to redevelop the Harambee neighborhood represents an important intersection of black agency with the implementation of urban renewal programs in the 1960s and 1970s.

## Chapter 3

### Pulling Together: The Development of Milwaukee's Harambee Neighborhood

#### Introduction

The Harambee neighborhood and revitalization efforts emerged as a response to the disastrous impact of the urban renewal projects discussed in the previous chapters. Though they were often victims, the impact of urban renewal did not represent passive outcomes; many African Americans were active in attempting to shape the process. Harambee provides a case study which gives a better understanding of African Americans' experience of urban renewal and the vital role of black agency in shaping the process. This chapter will develop a better understanding of the development of social and economic conditions in Milwaukee and the Harambee neighborhood in the 1970s and one particular way that people living in that neighborhood and this city responded. It will contribute to a broader discussion about neighborhood redevelopment and the implications of this history for us today.

One result of urban renewal projects in Milwaukee was to strengthen black civic engagement. Individuals who emerged as important community leaders, such as Reuben Harpole, became embedded in the social and political networks which provided fuel for the development of a strong African American middle class and the development of the necessary political networks to represent their interests at the city, state, and national levels.

Developments in the Harambee neighborhood are a quintessential example. As industrial employment began to fade away in the 1960s and 1970s at the precise moment

that blacks were winning increased access to good paying blue collar jobs, African Americans attempted to use resources made available through Great Society anti-poverty programs to alleviate emerging social and economic issues in discreet ways. A small but stable black middle class developed out of the urban renewal initiatives that were aimed at sparking new economic growth in the city.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s enormous shifts in the global economy along with the relative decline of American capitalism was starting to drain Milwaukee of the industrial jobs which had drawn tens of thousands of African Americans to the city since the beginning of World War II. Three decades of economic prosperity were coming to a close for the “Machine Shop of the World.” This can be seen most clearly in population trends for the city. Milwaukee’s population peaked in the 1960 U.S. Census with an official tally of 741,324 residents.<sup>1</sup> The following census in 1970 marked the first time in the city’s history that it had witnessed a decline in its total population dropping 3.3 percent to 717,099.<sup>2</sup>

Deindustrialization began to take its hold on the metropolitan region between 1967 and 1977 manufacturing employment dropped by 5.8 percent.<sup>3</sup> A long era of growth and prosperity, which had for decades drawn tens of thousands of foreign immigrants and

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1960,” Table 19, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab19.txt>, Accessed May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1970, U.S. Bureau of the Census,” Table 20, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab20.txt>, Accessed May 5<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>3</sup>Marc Levine and Sandra J, Callaghan, *The Economic State of Milwaukee: The City and the Region*, “Chapter 5: Employment, Unemployment, and Job Growth,” (Milwaukee: Center for Economic Development, 1998), <http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/milwecon/chap5.cfm>, Accessed May 5, 2013.

internal migrants to the city had officially closed for the city of Milwaukee. These trends contributed to the development of disruptive urban renewal projects which city leaders hoped would rejuvenate economic and population growth witnessed in previous decades.

This process expressed itself most starkly in the economic and social decline of Milwaukee's African American working class neighborhoods as industrial employers shed jobs and shuttered factories. The last hired and the first fired in industrial employment, African American men and women experienced the worst of the deindustrialization that would remake urban centers throughout America's emerging rust belt. The unemployment rate for blacks in the city of Milwaukee was 8.3 percent and rose to 13.9 percent by the end of the decade in 1980.<sup>4</sup> Real median family income for African Americans in Milwaukee dropped 22 percent between 1970 and 1980, as a proportion of white family median income it fell from 70.4 percent to 59.4 percent.<sup>5</sup>

As result of this economic decline black working class neighborhoods fell into precipitous spirals of decline. Homeowners were no longer able to provide upkeep for aging housing stock leading to the physical decline of aging housing and infrastructure. While a small number of African American's in the city were able to capitalize on the promises of the Civil Rights era and advance into the middle class, the vast majority of blacks in Milwaukee's inner city were increasingly condemned to declining wages, increasing rates of poverty and entrenched unemployment. Between 1970 and 1980 the percentage of African Americans living in poverty rose moderately from 27.1 percent to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *The Economic State of Milwaukee*, Chapter 6: Income, Earnings, and Inequality <http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/milwecon/chap3.cfm>, Accessed May 5, 2013.

29.5 percent, but the number of African Americans living in high poverty census tracts in the city grew 46 percent from 17,319 to 31,982.<sup>6</sup>

The present-day inner city ghetto marked by boarded up homes and vacant lots was taking shape even as efforts were being formulated to combat these worsening social conditions. The legislative gains of the Civil Rights era proved to be inadequate to address the needs to the masses of African Americans. An era of promise and hope for social progress had given way to an era of deindustrialization and sky rocketing rates of unemployment and poverty.

### **Fighting Decline with Revitalization**

Many of the more liberal minded African Americans, who belonged to the middle class including academics, university employees, unionized industrial workers, and white collar workers, turned their attention to what they quite correctly concluded were the worsening social and economic conditions for the great numbers of black people in Milwaukee. The task as they saw it was not just to improve their own social station, but to use their skills to help those African Americans who were suffering the injustices of urban poverty. They were joined by academic reformers, such as Belden Paulson, and community activists, such as Reuben Harpole, who were concerned with the impact of growing poverty on African Americans in Milwaukee. Paulson and Harpole worked to turn their social and economic positions to funnel pools of federal money from Title I of the Higher Education Act to the redevelopment and revitalization of Milwaukee's

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<sup>6</sup> *The Economic State of Milwaukee*, Chapter 4: Poverty, <http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/milwecon/chap4.cfm>, Accessed May 5, 2013.

African American neighborhoods in the form of the Harambee Revitalization Project (HRP).

The HRP had its roots in the social upheavals of the 1960s and the push by African Americans for equality before the law and the elimination of racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. The Open Housing movement in Milwaukee guided by the NAACP Youth Council, Father James Groppi and Alderwoman Vel Phillips provided much of the impetus for other social activism in the city of Milwaukee. The city also had a vibrant movement aimed at improving public education for African American youth, with a strong legal push to desegregate Milwaukee Public Schools spearheaded by Attorney Lloyd Barbee between 1965 and 1976.<sup>7</sup>

The national Civil Rights movement, led by Martin Luther King, the NAACP, SNCC, and CORE augmented the local fights for social change. Reuben Harpole, the guiding hand behind the attempt to revitalize the Harambee neighborhood attests to this in his narrative history of the project, stating that “During the turbulent sixties, I, like many other people in Milwaukee’s general community, was caught up in the quest for equal rights as advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King, James Farmer, and many others.”<sup>8</sup>

The lessons of the 1960s Civil Rights movement’s success and failures were instrumental in guiding the activity of community activists in the 1970s. Frustration with

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<sup>7</sup> Two important discussions of social activism by African American’s in Milwaukee are Patrick Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Jack Dougherty, *More than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Reuben Harpole, *History of Harambee*, Box 8, Folder 23, “Harambee Creation, 1974-1975,” University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1.

the slow pace of the Civil Rights movement gave way to much more radical notions of what was necessary to end the oppression of African Americans in the United States. When Stokely Carmichael gave his first speech raising the slogan of “Black Power” in 1966 he was tapping into concepts which had deep roots in black social movements, from Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association and Back to Africa Movement to the Pan-Africanism of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Demands for racial integration and equality before the law for some had given way to demands for self-determination and Black Power. Strong currents of Pan-Africanism and demands for Black Power expressed themselves in the push to redevelop the Harambee neighborhood in Milwaukee. One of the most apparent testaments to this was the choice of the name for the neighborhood, Harambee, a Swahili term which when literally translated means “pull together.”<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will examine the history of the attempt to revitalize the Harambee neighborhood in the face of deteriorating social and economic conditions. The Harambee Revitalization Project represents an important instance in which African Americans in the city of Milwaukee attempted to reshape urban renewal programs into something that would improve rather than destroy one their neighborhoods. It will trace the history from the initial inception of the HRP in the early 1970s until the near dissolution of the Harambee Development Corporation (HDC) in 1978. Through Harambee, a mostly black neighborhood organization contended with the consequences of worsening social conditions for the majority of blacks in the city and struggled to find a way to alter this

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<sup>9</sup> Overview of the Harambee Revitalization Project, Box 8 Folder 23, “Harambee, Creation, 1974-1975,” University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1.

decline in one particular part of the city. The Harambee project marked the convergence of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, emerging notions concerning Black Power and self-determination, and an influx of federal funding for community based programs through the Great Society initiatives established by the administration of Lyndon Johnson. These trends that emerged from social upheavals in the 1960s came together and fell apart in the 170 block area that became known as the Harambee neighborhood.

The attempts to revitalize the Harambee neighborhood in Milwaukee tell us something about the state of the Civil Rights movement by the 1970s as well as provide a lesson in the difficulties involved in achieving significant and lasting social change at the local level. Milwaukee's industrial economy was entering into a terminal decline at the very moment that African Americans involved in Civil Rights activism demanded a greater share of the economic pie. These changes had a dramatic effect on the demands of activists and what they thought was possible as they attempted to utilize federal legislation passed in the 1960s to combat deteriorating social conditions in the 1970s.

### **Reuben Harpole: Mastermind of Harambee**

Foremost amongst the local black activists and reformers in Milwaukee who saw promise in working at the local level was Reuben Harpole. Harpole operated as the main impetus behind the project to revitalize the Harambee neighborhood and would guide it, often from behind the scenes as well as functioning a representative of the University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX). Harpole and others, inspired by the successes of the national Civil Rights movement and the development of President Lyndon Johnson's

Great Society programs, worked to revitalize Milwaukee's African American community.

After several years of working for the Post Office, and inspired by the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, Harpole became a community activists in 1960 working as the circulation manager and selling advertisements for the Milwaukee Star, one of the city's African American newspapers. He then found employment in the mid-1960s with the UWEX's Center for Community Leadership Development (CCLD) where he would guide the development the HRP.<sup>10</sup> His position in the CCLD would serve as a launching pad for his development into one of the leading social reformers in the city of Milwaukee. Harpole since went on to become known as "the mayor of Black Milwaukee" for the leadership role he has played since the 1970s through his position as a community outreach specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Helen Bader Foundation.<sup>11</sup>

Harpole witnessed firsthand the transformation of the Harambee neighborhood (formerly known as the Garfield Park neighborhood) from a predominately ethnic German working class neighborhood to an overwhelmingly black working class neighborhood. The transition process began in 1959 as land clearance for the construction of Highway 43 forced an increasing number of African Americans north, northwest, and east out of the Bronzeville neighborhood.<sup>12</sup> The transformation of the neighborhood was expressed most notably in the renaming of parks, churches, and schools and roads

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<sup>10</sup> Jack Dougherty, "Oral History Interview with Reuben Harpole Jr., June 6, 1995, part I," <http://collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/march/id/1632/show/1630/rec/64>, Accessed May 2, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> "Harpole Ave.' doesn't begin to tell the story," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 5, 2009, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/57410737.html>, Accessed May 16, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

throughout the neighborhood: in the late 1970s Garfield Park became Clinton Rose Park; in 1994 St Elizabeth's Catholic Church became St Martin de Porres Catholic Church; in 1992 Victor Berger Elementary School became Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary school; and the portions of Green Bay Ave. and North 3<sup>rd</sup> St. which run through the Harambee neighborhood were renamed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.<sup>13</sup>

This transition from a predominantly white community to a predominantly African American community took less than two decades. While the number of African Americans in the neighborhood increased between 1960 and 1975 at the same time the total population of the neighborhood decreased by 25 percent. This population decline marked a significant outmigration of white residents. The Harambee neighborhood, bounded by Capitol Drive on the North, North Avenue to the South, Holton Ave to the east, and Highway 43 to the west was 81.9 percent black by 1975. While in that same year African American's made up only 18.5 percent of the entire city's population.<sup>14</sup>

The neighborhood's social indicators were found to be significantly lagging the city as a whole. While the individual poverty rate for the City of Milwaukee was 11.4 percent the Harambee neighborhood had an individual poverty rate of 25 percent. The median family income in Harambee in 1970 was \$7,138 (\$42,856 in 2014) compared to \$10,262 (\$61,613 in 2014) for the entire city.<sup>15</sup> Only 35.8 percent of housing units were

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<sup>13</sup> Clinton Rose was one the first African Americans elected to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors; he served from 1968 to 1977. He was also a Parks Commissioner from 1972 until 1976. St. Martin de Porres was the first black saint from the Americas to be canonized and is known as the patron saint of all people of African descent.

<sup>14</sup> *A Data Profile of the Harambee Area*, Box 8, Folder 7, "Harambee 1972-1974," University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

owner occupied in Harambee compared to 59.8 percent for the city.<sup>16</sup> It was these trends that the founders of the Harambee Revitalization Project had in mind as they attempted to develop a viable redevelopment program.

In the 1960s the Milwaukee's Urban League had engaged in early efforts to stabilize neighborhoods and fight against the negative economic trends taking hold in the African American community. Inspired to action by civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and James Farmer, Harpole became involved with this effort as Chairman of Area 7, which was concerned with stabilizing the neighborhood surrounding St. Elizabeth Catholic Church (now St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church), located at 128 W. Burleigh Street. Harpole participated in meetings held at St. Elizabeth between blacks and whites in the neighborhood in an effort to work out differences and ease tensions arising out of the neighborhood's rapid racial transition.<sup>17</sup>

In 1964 former Mayor Frank Zeidler, President of the Thirteenth Ward Community Council, approached Harpole and asked him to consult with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as to whether they could assist in improving their neighborhood. As a result of this Harpole and another neighborhood resident, Harold Bagin, met with and started working with Dr. Belden Paulson of the University's Political Science Department. Harpole and Paulson worked together at the University of Wisconsin-Extension's CCLD to develop a program for Harambee.<sup>18</sup>

Through Paulson and Harpole the CCLD operated as an arm of the UW-Extension in the community which resulted in a series of studies and programs in the Harambee

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Reuben Harpole, *History of Harambee*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1.

neighborhood. This included an educational assessment of a 60 block area in Harambee in the spring of 1965, a Central City Teacher-Community project in coordination with the Milwaukee Public Schools, and a series of classes through the Department of Continuing Education for Women titled “Afro-American in Contemporary Society” held at the University and in neighborhood churches.<sup>19</sup>

All of this work by the University in the neighborhood appeared for naught when civil disturbances erupted in Milwaukee on July 31<sup>st</sup> 1967. This disrupted plans which had been in place to attempt to raise the educational level of inner city residents. Between 1967 and 1970 the main focus for the CCLD turned to “sensitivity programs” in an attempt to decrease tensions between blacks and whites in the city.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Harambee Community School**

Plans for the development of a revitalization program emerged out of the Harambee Community School (HCS), a non-partisan private school formed in 1970, which was in desperate need of a steady source of funding. Mildred Harpole, the first principle of HCS, approached her husband Reuben Harpole in 1970 to see if through his connections in the CCLD he could help establish a source of permanent funds for the school.<sup>21</sup> The creation of the HCS served as the initial catalyst for the Harambee project.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Case History of Development of Harambee Project*, Box 8 Folder 23, “Harambee, Creation, 1974-1975,” University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1.

HCS had emerged out of the old St. Elizabeth's Catholic School, a change brought about by the collapse of Milwaukee's inner-city Catholic parishes through the 1960s, an outcome of the religious and racial transition of Northside working class neighborhoods. As more well off white families left the city for the suburbs Catholic parishes were no longer self-supporting and relied increasingly on the arch-diocese for funding to keep their churches and schools open. Between 1966 and 1971 twenty one Catholic schools were closed and enrollment plummeted by 20,000 students.<sup>22</sup>

In the most dramatic example St. Boniface, which once stood just outside of the Harambee neighborhood at 11<sup>th</sup> St and Clarke St, had 2,000 families in the late 1940s as the first African American parishioners began to arrive, by the 1970s the church had completely collapsed with only 30 families in the parish.<sup>23</sup> In 1975 the church that had served as a civil rights hub in the city of Milwaukee was razed to make room for the expansion of Milwaukee Public School's North Division High School.<sup>24</sup>

The response by the Milwaukee arch-diocese to the funding crisis was to shed many of its schools and transform them into independent community schools in hopes of attracting more non-Catholic students, many of whom were young African Americans. The racial change in Milwaukee's inner city Catholic schools happened quite rapidly. In 1965 St Elizabeth's enrollment was 17 percent black, by 1969 the school had a majority black enrollment and was reorganized as the Harambee Community School. Students at

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<sup>22</sup> Bill Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 209.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-210.

<sup>24</sup> "Once-Militant St. Boniface Church Faces Wreckers' Ball," *Sheboygan Press*, April 14, 1975, <http://newspaperarchive.com/sheboygan-press/1975-04-14/page-9>, Accessed May 16<sup>th</sup> 2013.

the once St. Elizabeth's now engaged with an experimental pedagogy and black and white teachers that promoted Black Power, Pan-Africanism, and other radical ideologies.

This dramatic shift toward black radicalism forced many of the last remaining white Catholic families and staff out of the school completing the transformation to a school which had a black enrollment of more than 90 percent.<sup>25</sup> This represented a development a period in the Civil Rights movement when African American parents as well as students expressed a greater demand for the representation of both African American and African history and culture in education curriculums. Where blacks became the dominant demographic in public and private schools they demanded greater control and input over issues of pedagogy, curriculum, and hiring practices.

Despite the radical shift in pedagogy, the school was still faced with the fundamental question of finding steady funding. This was a perennial problem confronted by all of the Catholic schools that had transitioned into independent community schools at the end of the 1960s, and most schools would fold in short time for a lack of funding. Only the Harambee Community School was successful in securing sources of public and private funds. In an ironic twist the reason main the school, which promoted Black Power and self-sufficiency, was able to stay afloat and succeed was thanks to the support of wealthy white patrons, in particular Adele Christensen of the Miller Brewing family and philanthropist Jane Bradley Pettit of the Allen-Bradley family.<sup>26</sup> Thanks to the support of

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<sup>25</sup> Dahlk, *Against the Wind*, 218-219.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 220.

their wealthy patrons the school operated until the end of 2010 when it was shuttered for a lack of funds.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Birth of a Plan for Harambee**

In the beginning though Harambee school leaders turned to Reuben Harpole at the UWEX in an attempt to gain access to public funds for the school and to revitalize the neighborhood so it might eventually sustain such a school on its own. The first idea that Harpole proposed was the establishment of a McDonald's franchise in the neighborhood which would be run by the school. McDonalds had established a program to assist schools with financial difficulties by allowing them to operate a restaurant for profit. This idea fell through with McDonalds claiming that the proposed plot of land at the intersection of Port Washington Road, Green Bay Avenue, and Keefe Avenue was too small for a building.<sup>28</sup>

With the collapse of the McDonalds plan discussions began within the CCLD of creating a general development plan for the Harambee neighborhood which might lead to the development of a social and economic environment which would support the Harambee Community School. They turned their focus to gaining access to funds availed through Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965 for developing and enacting a plan which involved the community and the UWEX working together toward the economic revitalization of the Harambee neighborhood.

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<sup>27</sup> "Harambee Community School remains shuttered," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 13, 2011, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/113541999.html>, Accessed May 16, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Reuben Harpole, *History of Harambee*, 4.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was one of the key components of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, intended to increase funding to public universities. Title I provided funding to public university's to encourage educational efforts "relating to community problems in the areas of housing, government, recreation, youth opportunities, transportation, health employment, poverty, and land use without restricting activities to these categories."<sup>29</sup> One of the intentions of Title I was to encourage public universities to develop a closer working relationship with surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

Harpole and Paulson worked with Roy Hudson, president of the Harambee School Board and Bill Desing, another school board member, to put together a grant proposal. The ideas contained in the proposal were presented in a paper, titled "The New Community as an Application of Community," given by Paulson and Harpole at the November 1970 national meeting of the Adult Education Association. With further discussion between the CCLD and local Title I Administrator Dave Steward the funds were allocated in 1971 to begin the development of a blueprint aimed towards the implementation of a community based revitalization plan.<sup>30</sup>

With funds in hand a Policy Committee was formed with Harpole as the Project Director and a committee was established to recruit a Planner for the project. Carole Watson, the wife of Donald T. Watson the assistant program director of Cream City Neighborhood Health Center, was selected as the projects Planner. Watson, with a

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<sup>29</sup> *Wisconsin State Plan for Title I Higher Education Act, 1965, Community Service and Continuing Education*, Box 9, Folder 30, "Harambee Title I, 1965-1974," University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

<sup>30</sup> *Case History of Development*, 1

background in social work, was committed to developing a program for involving community members in the planning process. She worked to reach out to community members and businesses to get their support for the HRP.<sup>31</sup>

In an interview with the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in January 1972 Watson laid out her ambitious vision for the project, stating, “The project proposes to align professional persons from the universities with community residents in a working group which will create a comprehensive plan to include not only housing and economic development recreation and social services. Among the questions facing this group will be how to combat crime, develop an industrial base, encourage prospective employers, supply more transportation, provide local services- in short, rebuild a good community life.”<sup>32</sup> Watson and others were seeking to develop an all-encompassing plan which would economically revitalize the neighborhood that would include input from the current residents as well as experts which would not result in the destruction and displacement of residents which had been the hallmark of urban renewal up to that point.

Despite her vision and optimism of redeveloping community involvement Watson resigned out of frustration in June 1972. Community planning assistants that were supposed to engage in community outreach to assist Watson failed to do their jobs. During her tenure she was able to establish the Green Bay Action Year Program, which provided four students to work as aides and later teachers at the Harambee Community

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Planner Cites Goals for Harambee (sic),” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 5, 1972, Box 9, Folder 30, “Harambee Title I, 1965-1974,” University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

School. She also established several task forces which engaged with union officials to increase visibility of the project.<sup>33</sup>

In Watson's place the Policy Committee chose two men Leon Todd and Bill Delany who worked against the idea of complete community control of the planning process. In their report to the HRP directors they expressed frustration with inheriting a plan which was "fragmented and not very functional."<sup>34</sup> They dedicated a whole section to their views on the complexities of citizen participation in the development of urban renewal plans. They felt that for any plan to be successful it must include the input of outside experts such as themselves who spoke the "technical language of finance" and could develop an "analytical frame work acceptable to city planners."<sup>35</sup> Their report expressed real tensions within the HRP over what exactly counted as community control and citizen participation. They stressed that a neighborhood redevelopment project could not succeed unless it connected with the connected with the interests of outside housing developers and other financial interests in the city.

Under Delany and Todd's guidance a blueprint was completed and the decision was made to incorporate a Community Development Corporation to implement their plans.<sup>36</sup> The Community Development Corporation would serve as the umbrella organization for a whole host of programs, including the Harambee Ombudsman Project and the Harambee Development Corporation, designed to tackle the social and economic problems faced by a growing number of residents in the Harambee neighborhood.

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<sup>33</sup> Rueben Harpole, *History of Harambee*, 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> William J. Delaney and Leon W. Todd, Jr. ed. *Paired Town In-Town: Harambee Revitalization Blueprint*, (Milwaukee: Harambee Revitalization project in Cooperation with University of Wisconsin – Extension Center for Community Leadership Development, 1973), 11.

<sup>35</sup> Delaney, *Harambee Revitalization Blueprint*, 25-26.

<sup>36</sup> *Case History of Development*, 2.

### Revitalization in Action

The HRP was officially incorporated as a CDC with the state on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1973. Harpole took on the title of Project Director for the HRP. Deploying the language of Black Power and self-determination to frame the importance of the project Harpole explained, “We must lead the way for our children as well as for ourselves in shaking off the last of the chains of slavery. We must begin to determine for ourselves, what is going to happen in our neighborhood and our community, rather than having those kinds of decisions being made by outsiders. The latter way is called colonization, and the first democracy.”<sup>37</sup> The goal was to create a program that would benefit all African American’s in the neighborhood and with African American’s in control of every step of the process.

The first concrete step the HRP took towards revitalizing the neighborhood was the sponsorship of a “Maxwell Street Day” event on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1973. The HRP hoped that this event would draw attention to businesses along the Green Bay Ave/North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street corridor which ran through the neighborhood. As well an Information Resource Center was established at the Martin Luther King Library by the School of Library Science at UWM.<sup>38</sup>

With a goal of economic revitalization and the development of an independent black community the HRP established a series of projects which would attack the

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<sup>37</sup> *Harambee Revitalization Project, Inc.*, Box 2, Folder 45, “Harambee Revitalization Project, Articles of Incorporation, 1973-1974,” University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

<sup>38</sup> Reuben Harpole, *History of Harambee*, 15.

problems plaguing residents and hopefully develop a strong leadership. At the same time programs were also established to reach out to the city and state to increase resident's access to social services and health programs. While espousing self-determination and Black Power the leaders of the project knew they would need help from outside governmental entities if they were going to adequately address the problems of unemployment, poverty, and the health problems that accompany adverse social conditions. The leadership hoped that appeals to a collective black identity would mobilize residents of Harambee around the redevelopment project while also realizing that the resources for revitalization and levers of power rested outside the boundaries of the neighborhood in the hands of a largely white political and economic system.

The HRP established the Harambee Ombudsman Project as a means of identifying and resolving community problems. The Ombudsman worked to connect families with public and private services which might ameliorate their issues. Two Ombudsmen were tasked with going door to door surveying neighborhood residents with brief surveys. Some of the problems which they attempted to address included rat infestations, garbage collection, home repair, street maintenance, street lighting and improving recreational facilities throughout the neighborhood. The Ombudsman project also established a block watch program to develop community leaders who could bring issues to the attention of the HRP.<sup>39</sup> The Ombudsman project produced a monthly newsletter, "Harambee Speaks," in an attempt to inform neighborhood residents on what sort of progress was being achieved in the area.

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<sup>39</sup> "Overview of the Harambee Revitalization Project," Box 8, Folder 7, "Harambee 1972-1974," University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

As rates of unemployment and poverty rose in Harambee deteriorating housing stock became a major problem. The Harambee Development Corporation (HDC) was created under the aegis of the HRP to provide home repair services and encourage residents to fix up their own homes. The desired result was to educate residents in how to maintain their homes and to provide them with repair loans so they could make appropriate repairs and upkeep.<sup>40</sup>

Deteriorating health conditions in the neighborhood also followed increasing rates of poverty and unemployment. The Harambee Health Project was an attempt to develop a neighborhood based health program to provide health screenings, medical screenings, education in preventive care, and limited primary care. This program had input from the Harambee Health Committee, the Medical College of Wisconsin, the City Health Commissioner, Milwaukee County's Downtown medical Center, and the UW-Extension.

### **Harambee at a Crossroads**

Despite their best intentions all was not well with the HRP at the end of the 1970s. A project that began with the utmost optimism and determination in the early 1970s found its self in a state of crisis at the close of the decade. The HDC was on the verge of collapse by the spring of 1978. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* published a highly critical piece on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1978 which chronicled the HDC's fiscal woes ahead of a

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<sup>40</sup> "Project Proposal Revised November 11, 1974.," Box 8, Folder 7, "Harambee 1972-1974," University of Wisconsin- Extension Center for Economic Development Records, 1967-1991, Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

decision by the Community Development Policy Committee as to whether the city would continue to fund the troubled neighborhood redevelopment program.<sup>41</sup>

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that the HDC was beset with poor bookkeeping, bad checks, overdue bills, and unpaid income withholding taxes. Milwaukee's Community Development Agency (CDA), the organization tasked with distributed federal redevelopment funds, had given HDC \$48,100 in administrative funds. A funding agreement had been signed between the city and HDC in June 1977. In November 1977 a city comptroller review found that HDC had not paid \$15,824 in FICA and state and federal withholding taxes. Checks written in September and October of 1977 had been returned due to insufficient funds. The comptrollers review concluded "The internal control over cash appears to be extremely poor."<sup>42</sup>

The HDC failed to meet the promises it made to the CDA. It had presented a plan to provide repair services to 501 homes in 1977, but by November of that year had only conducted 101 "home repair interviews" and 29 "small service repairs." Kenneth L. Anderson, president of the HDC board and a crane operator, was quoted as saying that the program was a "sloppy mess." He told the paper that former staff failed to collect on bills owed to the HDC and overlooked the theft of funds. The executive director of the program had resigned in January of that year.

When the HDC had first applied to the city for funding from the CDA in 1976 it had listed \$139,000 in potential funds from outside sources. According to board

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<sup>41</sup> "Money Woes Plague Program," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 3, 1978.  
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=zHBIAAAAIBAJ&sjid=6REEAAAIBAJ&pg=3226,491378&dq=harambee&hl=en>, Accessed May 2, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

president Anderson some of these funds failed to materialize, contributing to the short fall. His explanation for the shortfall was that “our staff didn’t hack it, didn’t manage,” and that his staff failed to stop stealing of HDC funds and didn’t collect on overdue bills.<sup>43</sup>

The HDC appealed to the city to utilize \$27,000 in unspent CDA funds to pay for supplies, vehicle maintenance, and to pay the salary of a consultant up to \$1,200 a month to sort out the corporations fiscal woes. CDA director Wallace Burkee, indicated that he didn’t want the funds to be spent on anything other than their original intended purpose, which was providing limited home maintenance, small loans, counseling, repair estimates, and referral services. Due to the alleged mismanagement of funds the city left the HDC out of its 1978 request for federal funding for community development.

After reviewing the fiscal situation of the HDC the CDA’s Community Development Policy Committee voted to alter guidelines on \$29,700 earmarked for the program to see if it could be revived. The new guidelines would allow the HDC to hire a consultant to reorganize staff, pay for truck repair and maintenance, offices supplies, and utilities. Eunice Lockhart-Moss, the president of consulting firm E. Inc., was hired to oversee the reorganization of the HDC. Newly hired consultant Lockhart-Moss reported that the HDC had a total debt exceeding \$25,000, but due to restrictions set by the Community Development Policy Committee none of the newly released funds could be used to pay it down. This debt included \$13,629 in state and federal withholding taxes, \$9,464 owed to contractors and building material suppliers, and \$2,300 in legal fees. CDA director Burkee told the paper that while a city audit of the HDC had uncovered

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

“very, very inept management,” it had not uncovered any fraud or theft by staff members. The CDA gave provisional support for future funding depending on a review of the new management team less than two months later on May 31<sup>st</sup>.<sup>44</sup>

Emile A. Jarreau, of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, was brought in to serve as the program’s interim director. Jarreau had previously served as the head of the Northside Citizens Neighborhood Conservation Corporation, a redevelopment organization which had purchased 300 housing units and resold them to low and moderate income families on Milwaukee’s north side.

Belden Paulson, now chairman of the UW Extension’s Center for Urban Community Development (CUCD) spoke out in defense of the HDC which had been under the sponsorships of the CUCD until January of 1977 when it broke off to seek more federal community development funds. Rather than focusing on the gross mismanagement of funds Paulsen called on the CDA to help make the Harambee project work. Paulsen stated that the HDC program had identified “a no man’s land” in the neighborhood where homeowners had income too high to qualify for rehabilitation programs, but not high enough to qualify for conventional city redevelopment loans. This area, Paulson felt, deserved concerted attention from the CDA which the work of the HDC would potentially provide if it was allowed to reorganize and get back on track.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “OK \$27,000 to Harambee,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 4, 1978, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=zXBIAAAAIBAJ&sjid=6REEAAAIBAJ&pg=6939,802408&dq=harambee&hl=en>, Accessed May 2, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> “Harambee Firm to be aided,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 4, 1978. <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=Qm8aAAAIBAJ&sjid=iCkEAAAIBAJ&pg=7000,2050614&dq=harambee&hl=en>, Accessed May 2, 2013

## Conclusion

Even with perfect book keeping and the highest of fiduciary skills the Harambee project would still have run into trouble finding committed public funding to maintain and expand their operations. After the initial funding through the Title I of the Higher Education Act the HRP had to turn to the city of Milwaukee's CDA which distributed federal grant money for neighborhood revitalization to keep its projects afloat. In 1974 the Community Development Block Grant program was established to consolidate federal redevelopment programs and distribute federal funds to local redevelopment agencies which would then distribute those funds to community organizations.

According to Professor Michael Bonds in *Race, Politics, and Community Development Funding* this degree of local control over the distribution of development grants, particularly in Milwaukee, gave rise to a disparity in funding for projects in African American neighborhoods. Funds intended to reach impoverished African American neighborhoods were funneled to benefit whites, and black organizations were more likely to lose their funding. This bias in funding made it much more difficult for any African American development organization to even stay afloat.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the efforts of the HRP and its various projects the social and economic deterioration of the Harambee neighborhood would continue at an even quicker pace in the 1980s, 1990s and up to the present day. Manufacturing employment continued to decline at a rapid rate. Rates of poverty and unemployment rose precipitously for African Americans. Concentrations of extreme poverty increased. At the HRP a majority of

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Bonds, *Race, Politics, and Community Development Funding: The Discolor of Money* (Binghamton, NY: The Harworth Social Work Practice Press, 2004), 101-112.

everyone's time was spent in planning the development of plans to be implemented at some point in the future. Progress from the Harambee Revitalization Project was extremely slow and the program became beset by problems, not the least of which was receiving adequate funding.

On top of this globalization continued to wreak havoc on working class communities in Milwaukee and throughout the United States. There was little that an organization which attempted to achieve change on the neighborhood level could do to counter these changes. Working people and especially those who found themselves in poverty benefited little from the flows of federal money and the initiatives of community organizations. There was little that could be done to create good paying jobs which would ameliorate the neighborhoods decline. Those who ultimately benefitted were those people such as Reuben Harpole who spearheaded these initiatives and went on to bigger and better things.

Additionally the federal government's decision to switch its funding model for urban renewal projects to the Community Development Block Grant model which while simplifying the process for applying and receiving federal redevelopment grants it represented the beginning of a decline in the federal government's commitment to supporting social programs and was beset by problems of racial bias as the decision for distribution of funds was placed in the hands of local officials who funneled funds to friends and political allies.

Although the HRP failed to revitalize the Harambee neighborhood, or even to stem the tide of rising of poverty and unemployment it represents a significant

development in social activism by African Americans in the city of Milwaukee. The creation of the HRP marked the convergence of the Civil Rights activism of the 1960s, developing notions concerning Black Power and self-determination, and an influx of federal funding for community based redevelopment programs made possible by President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society initiatives. These trends that emerged from social upheavals in the 1960s came together in the 1970s through Harambee as a creative and ambitious but ultimately failed attempt to create a vibrant and self-sufficient African American community in the city of Milwaukee.

Black Power and Pan-Africanism emerged as a defining theme for many social activists, though this appearance of radicalism often served as a cover for more conventional politics and often failed to rally African Americans in the way that some thought it might. The experience of the HRP also illustrates quite clearly the difficulties involved in achieving significant and lasting social change, especially at the neighborhood level, in the face of a highly integrated global economy.

## Conclusion

This thesis has examined the impact of urban renewal projects on the development of Milwaukee's African American community with particular focus on the 1960s and 1970s. City planners and politicians thought that by undertaking urban renewal projects they could rejuvenate the economies of industrial cities which began to decline in the face of suburbanization and globalization. Understanding the implementation and impact of urban renewal is vital to understanding the development of Milwaukee's African American community and the development of black civic involvement. The city's black population was quite small when urban renewal projects began disrupting a community which had only just begun to put down roots in the immediate post-World War II period.

Initially urban renewal consisted of destructive projects referred to as slum clearance which cleared out African American neighborhoods and pushed working class blacks and whites away from soon to be thriving downtown business districts. Urban renewal projects played an important role in shaping and influencing the development of Milwaukee's African American community. Massive projects such as the construction of the interstate highway system were disruptive moments whose legacy continues to be felt in black communities throughout the United States.

These projects were being carried out and implemented at the very moment that the Civil Rights movement was beginning to make gains in the fight against racial segregation and discrimination. The effort to revitalize the Harambee neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s represents an extension of Civil Rights ideology activism into the field of urban renewal. Black agency was instrumental in shaping urban renewal projects in the

city of Milwaukee and changing the focus from neighborhood destruction to African American led neighborhood preservation. Despite the best efforts of those who engaged in the process of urban renewal the outcomes have been mixed and social conditions for many African Americans have stagnated or gotten worse in the decades since the heyday of urban renewal. The promise of economic revitalization on which urban renewal was sold proved illusory for most as globalization sunk its teeth further into Milwaukee's industrial base.