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An Improvised World: Jazz and Community in Milwaukee, 1950-1970

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AN IMPROVISED WORLD:
JAZZ AND COMMUNITY IN MILWAUKEE, 1950 – 1970

by

Benjamin A. Barbera

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

AN IMPROVISED WORLD: JAZZ AND COMMUNITY IN MILWAUKEE, 1950 – 1970

by

Benjamin A. Barbera

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2012
Under the Supervision of Professor Robert Smith

This study looks at the history of jazz in Milwaukee between 1950 and 1970. During this period Milwaukee experienced a series of shifts that included a large migration of African Americans, urban renewal and expressway projects, and the early stages of deindustrialization. These changes had an impact on the jazz musicians, audience, and venues in Milwaukee such that the history of jazz during this period reflects the social, economic, and physical landscape of the city in transition.

This thesis fills two gaps in the scholarship on Milwaukee. First, it describes the history of jazz in Milwaukee in a more comprehensive way than has been done before. Though the primary focus is 1950 to 1970, it touches on the roots of jazz in the city during the first half of the twentieth century as well as the trajectory of jazz over the last forty years. Second, this research builds on the scholarship on the African American experience in Milwaukee by looking at the interaction of culture and community in the twentieth century.

Ultimately this thesis does two important things. First it details the impact of migration, physical movement, and community fluidity on Milwaukee's jazz culture, especially its jazz clubs and musicians. Second it provides a framework to explain how the jazz community was impacted by African American migration, urban renewal, and

deindustrialization. In this way this thesis provides a model that explains the movement of jazz out of the African American community in Milwaukee, a movement reflected in cities throughout the United States.

This model demonstrates that in Milwaukee, the expansion of the African American residential district due to migration, the spatial dislocation created by urban renewal, the economic downturn beginning in the late 1950s, and changing tastes in entertainment, meant that the African American community and jazz community had to undergo a process of cultural renegotiation. In the end the economic, geographical, and social changes wrought by these shifts meant that the make up of the jazz community was forever altered. The jazz community survived, but it became smaller, middle class, and predominately populated by white musicians and audience members.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Introduction: “From Moment to Moment”.....	1
<i>Jazz Culture</i>	4
Chapter One: “Till Times Get Better” The Beginning.....	10
<i>A Brief History of African Americans in Milwaukee: 1835-1950</i>	15
<i>Jazz: Definition, Description, and Early History</i>	29
<i>Jazz in Milwaukee: The Early Years</i>	37
Chapter Two: “Get Out-A Town” The Second Great Migration.....	48
<i>The First and Second Great Migrations</i>	51
<i>Black Milwaukee in the 1950s</i>	64
<i>Jazz in 1950s Milwaukee</i>	78
Chapter Three: “Stormy” Transition – Urban Renewal.....	96
<i>Urban Renewal and Expressway Projects in Milwaukee</i>	99
<i>Black Milwaukee in the 1960s</i>	114
<i>Jazz in the 1960s</i>	123
Conclusion: “Cramer Street Blues” The 1970s and Beyond.....	149
<i>The African American Community, 1970 to Today</i>	151
<i>Jazz Post Urban Renewal</i>	157
Bibliography.....	169
Appendix: Milwaukee Jazz Clubs.....	178

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: African American Population in Milwaukee.....	60
Table 2: African American Population of Select Northern Cities, 1940-1970.....	60
Table 3: Number of Persons Per Unit in Occupied Housing.....	66
Table 4: Characteristics of White and Nonwhite Occupied Housing.....	66

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I dedicate this thesis to my wife Dr. Jessica Hoff and to our lovely daughter Katherine Claire Barbera who offered welcome distraction in the last year of the project.

Introduction

“From Moment to Moment”¹

James ‘Jimmy’ Mack was born in Hayti, Missouri in 1929. As a teenager he moved with his family to California and then moved to Milwaukee in the late 1950s or early 1960s. In the early or mid-1960s he opened the Main Event in the African American district of the city and it quickly became an important part of the jazz scene.² Adekola Adedapo a vocalist and keeper of local jazz lore said, “That was where the Black Jazz, the Black musicians, and the Black audience hung out.”³ In 1966 Mack moved the club to 1332 West Fond du Lac where it stood for several years. By 1979, due to the last installment of the I-43 interstate, Mack had again relocated, this time farther north to 3418 North Green Bay Avenue. The club remained there until it became financially untenable and Mack closed it in 2002.⁴

In many ways Mack and the Main Event are a microcosm of the events that took place in jazz and the African American community in the last half of the twentieth century. Mack was a migrant to Milwaukee who had to move his club due to urban

¹ Manty Ellis recorded this Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer song on his self produced 1999 album *In His Own Sweet Way*. The album features standout Milwaukee musicians Willie Perkins (piano), Melvin Rhyne (organ), Carl Allen (drums), and Vincent Herring (saxophone).

² There is some question as to the location and opening date of the original club as sources differ. Jacqueline S. Williams, “Milwaukee Jazz Club Owner, James ‘Jimmy’ Mack, Dies at 79,” accessed June 1, 2012, <http://voices.yahoo.com/milwaukee-jazz-club-owner-james-jimmy-mack-dies-at-1786775.html> says the original club was at 12th and Vliet Streets, that it moved to the Fond du Lac address in 1972 and to the North Green Bay Ave address in 1974. Also an unsubstantiated source said the club opened in 1961. However the listings in *Wright’s Milwaukee (Milwaukee County, Wis.) City Directory* (Milwaukee, WI: Wright Directory Co, 1960-1990) disagree. The first listing for the Main Event Tavern under James Mack’s name is at 2210 N Sixth St in 1964, though there is no listing in the business pages. I have chosen to use the addresses as listed in *Wright’s Directory* for this paper.

³ Derek Pinkham, *Milwaukee Jazz Profiles: Lives and Lessons of Musicians from the Cream City* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010), 103.

⁴ The *Polk Cross Reference Directory for Milwaukee County Wisconsin* (Detroit: R.L. Polk and Co., 2001) has a listing for the Main Event at 3418 N Martin Luther King Dr (this is the same location as the Green Bay Ave address), but no listing in the March 2002 directory. Williams, “Milwaukee Jazz Club Owner, James ‘Jimmy’ Mack, Dies at 79” says Mack closed the club in 2002.

renewal and expressway projects and eventually had to shut it down due to financial difficulties brought on by the loss of industry in the city and the city's efforts at urban renewal. Mack's story shows the perseverance that Milwaukee's jazz community has demonstrated over the decades as well as the connection, however tenuous, between jazz and the larger community.

This study examines those connections as it looks at jazz in Milwaukee between 1950 and 1970. During this period Milwaukee experienced a series of shifts that included a large influx of African Americans, urban renewal and expressway projects, and the early stages of deindustrialization. These changes had an impact on the jazz musicians, audience, and venues in Milwaukee such that the history of jazz during this period reflects the social, economic, and physical landscape of the city in transition.

This thesis will fill two gaps in the scholarship on Milwaukee. First, there have been no attempts to describe the history of jazz in the city in any comprehensive way. Though this project will primarily focus on the period between 1950 and 1970, it will also touch on the roots of jazz in the city during the first half of the twentieth century and the trajectory of jazz over the last forty years. Second, this research will help build on the scholarship on the African American experience in Milwaukee by looking at the interaction of culture and community in the twentieth century. The goal here is to determine how jazz, especially the musicians and audience, was affected by large scale African American migration and urban renewal projects in the middle part of the twentieth century and whether jazz offered, or perhaps could have offered, a means for the community to offset some of the negative outcomes of this period. Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the United States and this thesis will examine whether

jazz was a potentially unifying force for communities within the city, and if so to what level this was realized. In examining these processes this thesis will develop a framework, or model, that can be generalized to examine changes over time in jazz communities and other urban art forms in cities throughout the United States.

A topic of this nature raises a number of questions on a variety of themes. First, did post-World War II African American migration to Milwaukee have an impact on the jazz scene? What were the ramifications of this large influx of newcomers on Milwaukee culture and especially the black community? Within this context how did jazz fit into the larger political and social structure of Milwaukee during the post war boom? Next the thesis examines the impact of urban renewal on jazz culture, especially due to the resultant forced movement of people and venues. If these projects did indeed create a rupture, or at least a disruption, what were the after effects on the community and the interactions of blacks and whites? Some scholars argue that from a racial standpoint jazz is a potentially unifying force.⁵ Was this the case in Milwaukee? If not, was this a missed opportunity? In other words did the effects of urban renewal contribute to greater segregation in Milwaukee, thus disrupting jazz culture as a potential source to mitigate that separation? Finally, as industry slowed in Milwaukee in the late 1960s and 1970s, what were the ramifications of deindustrialization, its effects on the black community, and the effects on the budding Milwaukee jazz scene?

Jazz is a powerful force. It is improvisational in nature and being, and thus is in a constant state of creation. In this way, jazz is very much like community. There is

⁵ See for example Eric Nisenson, *Blue: The Murder of Jazz* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Burton Peretti, *Jazz in American Culture* (Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 1997); and Ben Ratliff's comments in Will Friedwald, et al., *The Future of Jazz* (Chicago: A Cappella, 2002), 24.

structure, definitions, and delineations, but at the same time jazz and community are continuously being reworked and reimagined by the very people who create it. In jazz the creator and the performer are one and the same, and the creation and performance happen simultaneously. In a community the people who live there are constantly recreating the place where they live while simultaneously living in what they have created. Thus, both jazz and community are in perpetual motion: always changing and grappling with the impact of those changes.

The African American community in Milwaukee experienced a number of changes following World War II that demanded a constant reformation of that community. From a rapid post-war migration of Southerners, to urban renewal and expressway projects in the 1950s and 1960s, to the deindustrialization of the 1970s and 1980s, the African American community in Milwaukee was in a constant state of reappraisal, adjustment, and ultimately improvisational living. And, throughout these eras there was always jazz. For many, jazz was an important constant, a hallmark of the black community, and something that connected them to a larger artistic heritage. For others it was just music, and one that was listened to less and less over time. Nonetheless, the history of the jazz community in Milwaukee and its connection to the African American community during that era is a fascinating story of improvisation and movement as both communities fought to survive and thrive.

Jazz Culture

Jazz has long been a part of culture and community. Horace Tapscott's autobiography, *Songs of the Unsung*, "presents jazz as the conscious product of collective

activity in decidedly local spaces.”⁶ David Ake further argues that jazz was not an “evolving series of musical styles but rather an array of individuals and communities engaging with diverse, oftentimes conflicting, actions, ideals, and attitudes.”⁷

Communities are made up of people with varying values and behaviors, but the totality, or the way these people come together to approach their needs and desires, is what makes culture. And culture has a profound influence on the “destiny of a people.”⁸ In Milwaukee the cultural productivity of the African American population, often in the face of economic, political, and social hardship, has had a lasting legacy and remains important to the community today. Jazz has always been a part of that output. Jazz has also been a place for black and white communities, or at least some individuals from the respective communities, to come together, and it has been no different in Milwaukee.

But jazz has not always been a respected part of any community, black or white. In its early days jazz was considered by many critics, both white and black, to be ‘lowbrow,’ a return to barbarism, and thus unworthy of the term culture. However, others said that jazz was vital, a true expression of America and the personal feelings of Americans. Ultimately since jazz refused to be categorized, it acted as a cultural bridge between the ‘lowbrow’ and ‘highbrow.’⁹ As part of this bridge, the jazz community has forged over time an identity that reflects “the ways in which jazz musicians and audiences experience and understand themselves, their music, their communities, and the

⁶ George Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 98.

⁷ David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 5.

⁸ Warren Swindell, “The Role of Criticism in Black Popular Culture,” in *African American Jazz and Rap: Social and Philosophical Examinations of Black Expressive Behavior*, edited by James L. Conyers Jr. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 23.

⁹ Lawrence Levine, “Jazz and American Culture,” in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, edited by Robert G. O’Meally (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1998), 435-438, 443.

world at large.”¹⁰ For the African American community this is especially important as black music allows us “to consider how notions of race community in the broadest sense register change for black folk, as much as establish the resilience of their identities.”¹¹ In fact, in the 1920s and 1930s, as jazz became more popular in the black community, it created a sense of unity and even became a means of protest against economic, social, and political alienation. African Americans identified with the music and saw it as a representation of strength and hope. Thus the music helped the people gel into a community that created “politically active neighborhood groups” to take on the challenges of the day.¹²

Throughout its history jazz has been a refuge for those people who have felt alienated from mainstream culture. And while this is certainly true for African Americans, white musicians and fans also found jazz to be a way to express themselves artistically and personally in an often indifferent or hostile world.¹³ In his book on black music in Chicago, Adam Green views “black life in Chicago as [a] vital and unresolved process, rather than as dreams imagined or betrayed” and the city “as a site of creativity, rather than constraint, a space of imagination as much one of brute fact.”¹⁴ For black and white jazz musicians and fans, Milwaukee was also a site of creativity, and jazz provided an opportunity to rise above or circumvent social and economic limitations. Jazz, culture, and community are always improvised, offering social freedoms and opportunities for

¹⁰ Ake, *Jazz Cultures*, 3.

¹¹ Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 52.

¹² Peretti, *Jazz in American Culture*, 54-55.

¹³ Levine, “Jazz and American Culture,” 439.

¹⁴ Green, *Selling the Race*, 2.

racial integration and social justice.¹⁵ In Milwaukee these opportunities were there, but the question is to what extent and what impact did it have on the city as a whole.

Ultimately this thesis does two important things. First it builds on existing scholarship on jazz, the Great Migration, and urban history to detail the impact of migration, physical movement, and community fluidity on the jazz culture of Milwaukee in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ Second it provides a framework to explain how the jazz community was impacted by African American migration, urban renewal, and deindustrialization. In this way this thesis provides a model that explains the processes that reduced the importance of jazz in the African American community. This study is specific to Milwaukee, but the same processes happened throughout the country, therefore the model could be useful to the study of other jazz communities. In addition this model could be applied to comparative works on other urban art forms such as hip-hop, visual arts, and literature.

This model demonstrates that in Milwaukee the expansion of the African American district due to migration, the spatial dislocation of the jazz landscape created by urban development projects, the economic downturn due to lost industrial jobs that began in the late 1950s, and changing tastes in entertainment, meant that the African

¹⁵ Frank Salamone, *The Culture of Jazz: Jazz as Critical Culture* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 9-10.

¹⁶ Some examples of this scholarship include Amiri Baraka, *Blues People* (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1995); Green, *Selling the Race*; James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Kenneth L Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter, eds., *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*; Joe William Trotter, ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

American and jazz communities had to undergo a process of cultural renegotiation. In the end the economic, geographical, and social changes wrought by these shifts meant that the make up of the jazz community was forever altered. The jazz community survived, but it became smaller, middle class, and more and more populated by white musicians and audience members.

The chapters of this thesis are organized in roughly chronological order, but with emphasis on the themes that most affected the African American and jazz communities of Milwaukee. Chapter One begins with a short history of African Americans in Milwaukee up to World War II that focuses on economic and social issues. The second part of the chapter examines the nature of jazz and gives a brief history of the rise and expansion of the music throughout the United States. The last part of the chapter looks at the early years of jazz in Milwaukee highlighting some of the early venues and musicians that had an impact on the jazz community.

Chapter Two is focused on the migration of African Americans from the South to Milwaukee in the first half of the twentieth century. The chapter begins with a historiographical look at the Great Migration and places the migration to Milwaukee in the context of national events. The second wave of migration following World War II had a far greater impact on Milwaukee so the chapter describes the state of the African American community in the 1950s as the effects of migration took hold. Finally, the chapter details the Milwaukee jazz community within the context of African American migration and conditions in the city itself as it peaked in the early 1950s and then began a slow decline.

Chapter Three explores the effect that the urban renewal projects of the mid-1950s to the early 1970s had on the African American community and jazz in Milwaukee. The chapter opens with a brief description of the urban renewal and expressway projects and then looks at some of the major trends in the African American community during the 1960s. As this was a rather tumultuous era in Milwaukee a brief description of some of the protests and tensions of the period are included. Finally, the chapter explores how urban renewal, economics, and changing tastes in entertainment affected the jazz scene of the 1960s and set the stage for a reconstructed jazz community in the 1970s.

The Conclusion opens with a short discussion of the African American community over the last forty years that highlights the effects of deindustrialization on the black economy. Next there is a description of the jazz scene over the last several decades and how the jazz community changed in the wake of migration, urban renewal, and deindustrialization. Finally, the thesis closes with a brief analysis and summation of the themes on which it is focused.

Chapter One

“Till Times Get Better”¹⁷

The Beginning

In 1930 Milwaukee was the site of a tremendous trumpet showdown between two young, but impressive jazz musicians. One was Roy Eldridge who would go on to have a long career and was often cited as one of Dizzy Gillespie’s main influences. The other was Cladys “Jabbo” Smith whose career arc did not fulfill its early promise, but at his peak he was considered the main rival to Louis Armstrong. After getting into some trouble in Flint, Michigan, Eldridge moved to Milwaukee in 1930 and joined Johnny Neal’s Midnite Ramblers.¹⁸ During this period Smith was splitting time between Chicago and Milwaukee and on the night of the showdown he was leading a band at the Wisconsin Roof Gardens in Milwaukee. Though Eldridge was almost pathological in his competitiveness, it was Smith that issued the first challenge that led to what must have been one of the great cutting contests of all time.¹⁹

Cutting contests began before the music was even called jazz. These contests were meant to show technical mastery and began with ragtime pianists around the turn of the twentieth century. They were soon taken up by stride pianists and became part of the jazz milieu as instrumentalists of all types tried to best each other. Generally musicians would trade songs, choruses, or even short four bar phrases as they attempted to show more skill and artistic ability than their opponent. Often these contests were decided in

¹⁷ “Till Times Get Better” was written by Jabbo Smith and recorded by his Rhythm Aces in Chicago for Brunswick Records on April 4, 1929.

¹⁸ John Chilton, *Roy Eldridge: Little Jazz Giant* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 40.

¹⁹ The documentary evidence for this showdown is almost non-existent, however both musicians remembered it well fifty years after it happened. As such most accounts rely primarily on Eldridge’s description of the events with a little bit of Smith’s recollections.

the court of public opinion and the victor enjoyed an increase in their reputation.

Sometimes these contests were like a duel where one musician would challenge another, and other times they were set up ahead of time as a way to impress the audience. Either way the battles could be cutthroat and some musicians had a gunslinger-like reputation.

Roy Eldridge was one of these. He once said, "All my life, I've loved to battle. I used to stand out on the sidewalk smoking, listening to the band inside, summing up the opposition. Eventually, I'd walk inside and try to cut them."²⁰ At the young age of sixteen Eldridge was bested by several trumpet players in St. Louis, but throughout the rest of his career he took on many of the best trumpet players in the world and rarely lost.²¹ Jabbo Smith was no stranger to cutting with the best either. In 1929 he took on Louis Armstrong in Chicago in a battle that ended in a draw. A couple of years later they met up again in Harlem and though Smith threw out everything he had, Armstrong was at the peak of his powers and bested him in what must have been an epic showdown.²² However, in 1930 Smith was on top of his game and Eldridge was still on his way up.

On the night of the battle Smith showed up at the club where Eldridge was playing to a good reception. Smith decided to protect his turf (Milwaukee) and asked Eldridge to let him play a song on Eldridge's trumpet. Smith played it well, but Eldridge acted unimpressed and asked for his trumpet back. Being young and brash he told Smith

²⁰ Simon Rentner, "Roy Eldridge: The 'Little Jazz' Centennial," National Public Radio, January 28, 2011, accessed July 20, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ablogsupreme/2011/01/28/133181564/roy-eldridge-the-little-jazz-centennial>.

²¹ Chilton, *Roy Eldridge*, 20.

²² Chip Defaa, *Voices of the Jazz Age: Profiles of Eight Vintage Jazzmen* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 204-205.

to go get his trumpet and they met up an hour later at a club called Rail's.²³ Somehow word had gotten out and dozens of people showed up to watch the showdown. Eldridge describes what happened next, "My determination got me through the first few numbers that we played, but gradually Jabbo's experience and speed took over and he washed me away, blew me every way but loose."²⁴ In this battle Smith was triumphant and Eldridge was humbled, somewhat.

Eldridge soon left Milwaukee, not because of the cutting contest, but because he did not want to get involved with the Chicago mobsters that hung out in Milwaukee. Eldridge moved to New York and had a successful career for the next fifty years. He was an innovator that built on Louis Armstrong's work and provided the inspiration to Dizzy Gillespie. His greatest success came in the 1930s and 1940s, but he continued to play as a representative of the mainstream jazz movement. Though his stay in Milwaukee was brief, his impact on jazz as a whole was profound.²⁵

Smith continued to bounce back and forth between Chicago and Milwaukee until he left for Detroit in 1936. He soon moved on to New York and got a steady gig in Newark, New Jersey for several years. In 1945 Smith moved to Milwaukee where he got married in 1948 to a woman with two children and settled down. He worked at the Moon Glow and the Flame for several years, but he became just a sideman. Finally, tired of scrambling to make ends meet and having problems with his teeth he quit playing altogether in the late 1950s. Despite a couple of small recordings in 1961 Smith pretty

²³ Again the record is scant at best and I could find nothing about this club. Since Smith was popular among the black audience and since cutting contests often took place at after hours sessions, this may have been an underground club in the Walnut Street area.

²⁴ Chilton, *Roy Eldridge*, 40-42.

²⁵ Ibid.; Kenneth Reich, "Jazz Great Roy Eldridge, Innovator on Trumpet, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1989, accessed July 20, 2012, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-02-27/news/mn-399_1_roy-eldridge.

much drifted into obscurity working a job at the Avis rental car company. He made a brief comeback at Tina's Lounge in 1966 and then in 1971 made an appearance at a jazz festival in Breda, Holland. In 1975 Smith was included in a program at Lincoln Center that honored the legends of jazz, which spurred a rediscovery of his playing. From 1979 to 1982 he had a small, but successful part in the stage show *One Mo' Time*, which was about black entertainment in the 1920s. After touring with the show Smith settled in New York and played a handful of gigs. His wife had passed away and Smith rented out their house in Milwaukee while he lived in New York. During the 1980s his health was failing as he had several small strokes, but he remained musically active until he passed away in 1991 at the age of eighty-three.²⁶

The battle between Eldridge and Smith may not have had a lasting effect on the national jazz scene, but it does demonstrate that there was an active jazz community in Milwaukee by 1930. That community had both black and white musicians and black and white audience members, though in its earliest days there was little crossover other than the white audience listening to black musicians at places like the Wisconsin Roof Gardens. However, the musicians would mix at the after hours clubs after their respective paying gigs were over. This was where the real interaction and sharing of musical ideas took place.

The stories of Eldridge and Smith demonstrate the migratory nature of jazz. Jazz musicians were often on the move as they bounced from city to city and this history of movement was important to the story of jazz in Milwaukee. The career path of Jabbo Smith is also indicative of several Milwaukee musicians. Over the years a number of

²⁶ Whitney Balliett, *Jelly Roll, Jabbo and Fats: 19 Portraits in Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 68-69; Defaa, *Voices of the Jazz Age*, 209-217; Len Weinstock, "Cladys 'Jabbo' Smith," *Red Hot Jazz*, accessed July 20, 2012 <http://www.redhotjazz.com/jabbo.html>.

successful musicians chose to settle down in Milwaukee, often because they fell in love and had a family. Others left and came back, while still others never left preferring the security of home to the unknown of the road. In the Milwaukee jazz scene very few musicians made a living simply playing jazz. Most had to take a day job and many, like Smith, ended up more or less giving up their careers in the interest of taking care of their families. But the important thing is that since the earliest days of jazz Milwaukee has had, and continues to have, an active jazz scene.

This chapter gives a short history of African Americans in Milwaukee from their arrival through the years immediately following World War II. This section focuses on housing, employment, economics, community institutions, civic participation, and the social standing of the small black community that lived in Milwaukee during the first century of the city's existence. Here we see that the African American community in Milwaukee began its process of improvisational living from its very inception. The second part of the chapter examines jazz in a broader sense and highlights the migratory nature of the jazz community. It explores the nature of jazz, what it is and how it is defined, and gives a brief history of the rise and expansion of the music throughout the United States. The last part of the chapter looks at the early years of jazz in Milwaukee. It examines how jazz emerged in the musical context of Milwaukee and describes some of the early venues and musicians that had an impact on the jazz community. This sets the stage for the processes of cultural renegotiation that become so important in the face of the challenges of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

A Brief History of African Americans in Milwaukee: 1835-1950

The first documented African American to live in Milwaukee was Joe Oliver who came to the city in 1835 as a cook for Solomon Juneau, the founder of the city. By 1840 there were twenty-three African Americans living in the city, though most lived with the white families they worked for or in the hotels that employed them. In 1850 there were over sixty blacks in Milwaukee, many of them self-employed, semi-skilled, or skilled workers. According to the 1860 census all of the black residents, except two who were in jail, were employed and several owned significant amounts of personal property.²⁷ During this period Milwaukee had a reputation as an abolitionist city, which may have drawn some escaped slaves as well as free blacks from the upper south and surrounding states. In fact in 1854 a runaway slave named Joshua Glover was captured under the Federal Fugitive Slave Act. However, Milwaukee residents broke him out of jail and helped him escape to Canada.

During the decade of 1860 to 1870 there was a significant increase in the number of black residents, though the black population of 176 was still quite small. During this decade work was fairly easy to come by, but it was mostly domestic or service work. This was a change from previous decades where the majority of African Americans had solid jobs. Part of the reason for this was increased competition with European immigrants. There were other changes too as older black families moved away and new residents moved in. And whereas “in 1860 forty eight blacks had considerable real estate

²⁷ R. O. Washington and John Oliver, *An Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Urban Observatory, 1976), 72. According to this report, in “1860 nineteen blacks had a total of \$30,000 and twenty-nine others had a total of \$6,200 in property.

holdings, by 1870 this number fell to eight.”²⁸ This was also the time when black residents began living closer together rather than spread throughout the city. Literacy rates and school attendance remained relatively high, but began to diminish during the period.²⁹

Though the number of black residents doubled over the next twenty years, to 449 in 1890, the percentage of the overall population of Milwaukee dropped significantly as the city experienced rapid growth. Much of this growth was due to increased heavy industry in the city, but blacks were almost completely excluded from these jobs. Many established black families left the city and the new black immigrants did not have the political or social power to compete for the better jobs. There was still work, but it was almost entirely in the domestic and service sectors. However, there were a few individuals who rose to higher positions and thus became the beginnings of a black elite.

Milwaukee is an immigrant city. First Germans and then Poles came in large numbers during the mid to late nineteenth century. Polish immigrants tended to settle in neighborhoods near labor sources. Poles settled on the south side near the industrial jobs in the Menominee River valley and on the east side near the tanneries and mills on the Milwaukee River. In the 1880s Russian Jews began to come to Milwaukee and settled in the former German neighborhood north of downtown. Soon after, other immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe came to pursue industrial jobs. Generally the new immigrants took the entry-level jobs and oldest housing as more established immigrants moved up the employment ladder and into better neighborhoods. All of these

²⁸ Ibid., 42.

²⁹ Ibid., 59. Washington and Oliver write that the black adult literacy rate was 70.3% in 1850, 84.4% in 1860, and 78.4% in 1870. School attendance rates for black children were 69.2% in 1850, 72.2% in 1860, and 57.1% in 1870. However, they cite no sources for literacy and school attendance numbers.

groups formed ethnic enclaves where they settled that further constrained the housing of Milwaukee. As a result of this large scale immigration blacks found it hard to gain industrial jobs and nearly impossible to move into the ethnic dominated neighborhoods.³⁰

During this period blacks began to experience increased discrimination in social settings and especially in housing. African American residents began to settle in one of the oldest sections of town and it became known as “‘Milwaukee’s Little Africa’ and, later, ‘the bad lands,’ because of the many brothels, saloons, and gambling dens operating in the area.”³¹ This area essentially ran from the Milwaukee River west to Sixth Street, and was bounded on the north by Cedar (Kilbourn Street) and on the south by Grand (West Wisconsin).³² Even after the ‘bad lands’ were cleaned up blacks were forced to remain in this area, as there was a housing shortage in the city due to the rapid influx of European immigrants.

Throughout their entire history in Milwaukee, African Americans have fought for greater civic engagement, political participation, and social inclusion in the city. Joe Oliver was allowed to vote in 1835, but blacks were disenfranchised in the 1839 city charter. When Wisconsin became a state in 1848, state law denied blacks the vote. An 1849 referendum to overturn this law was defeated. In 1865 a mixed race man named Ezekial Gillespie attempted to vote and when denied he sued the Board of Elections on the grounds that the Board of Election Commissioners had misinterpreted the 1849 referendum. The State Supreme Court agreed and in 1866 approximately thirty black

³⁰ For a broader discussion of European immigration to Milwaukee, as well as employment and housing patterns, see John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999).

³¹ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 54.

³² Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 24.

residents voted in Milwaukee's municipal election.³³ Though blacks were allowed to vote in Wisconsin from 1866 on, it was not until 1882 that the phrase that said suffrage was limited to only white citizens was stricken from the state constitution.³⁴

In the early years of Milwaukee, blacks moved fairly freely about the city, though they endured a second-class status. However, during the 1880s and 1890s there were increased efforts throughout the country to codify Jim Crow restrictions based on race. This eventually led to the *Plessy v Ferguson* Supreme Court decision that upheld racial segregation under the guise of 'separate but equal.' In Milwaukee there had been discrimination in housing and employment, but it was not until 1889, seven years prior to the infamous *Plessy* decision, that there was the first case of outright social discrimination. In that year a black man was forced to sit in the balcony of the Bijou Theater even though previously the main floor had been open to everyone. African Americans in Milwaukee were outraged and called a meeting that resulted in an organization that sued the owner of the theater, boycotted the Bijou, and called for a state convention of blacks. At this convention blacks drafted a civil rights bill that failed in 1891. A few years later a second bill was introduced and when Republicans took control of the state legislature in 1895 they passed a scaled down version of the law. However, this law was largely ignored and discrimination continued. A lack of organized leadership made it hard for blacks to push for stronger enforcement of the law.³⁵

³³ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 80-81.

³⁴ Henry A. Huber, "Citizenship of Wisconsin Some History of its Progress," *Racine Times-Call*, June 18, 1929. This article is posted on the Wisconsin Historical Society website, accessed June 14, 2012, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wlhbba/articleView.asp?pg=1&orderby=&id=3954&pn=1&key=&c>

³⁵ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 81-82; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 25.

Between 1890 and 1910 the black population again doubled, but still remained a miniscule percentage of Milwaukee's overall population at 0.26 percent. There was a dramatic increase in the black population in the 1910s and again in the 1920s as the population grew by 127 percent and 236 percent respectively.³⁶ In this period Milwaukee experienced part of the Great Migration of African Americans from the southern states to northern urban areas, but the total number of migrants paled in comparison to cities like Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. Also during this period the central business district and area of light industry expanded, which forced the black population to move north and west in the city. There they occupied the older homes owned by early German and Jewish immigrants.

In the period between 1890 and World War I, employment conditions continued to deteriorate for African Americans in Milwaukee. Domestic service jobs became harder to get as hotels and individuals hired European immigrants over blacks. At the same time many factories and industries would not hire black employees and the taverns and gambling halls of the 'bad lands' that provided income for blacks were shut down. There were some black business owners and professionals, many of whom catered to a white clientele, but this was a small percentage of the labor force. Faced with increasing discrimination blacks were not passive and "responded to their urban experience through both class and racial unity, though mainly through the latter."³⁷ In fact beginning in this period there was grumbling within the black community that lower class blacks were lazy and prone to drinking, gambling, and other vice. This intraracial conflict would only increase as more southern blacks moved to the city.

³⁶ Charles T. O'Reilly, Willard E. Downing, and Steven I. Pflanczer, *People of the Inner Core-North: A Study of Milwaukee's Negro Community* (New York: LePlay Research, 1965), 5.

³⁷ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 18.

World War I created an increased demand for industrial labor to maintain the war effort. At the same time there were fewer European immigrants coming to the United States. As some workers joined the army and remaining employees moved into higher skilled positions, there were openings in unskilled positions that African Americans were able to take advantage of. Though they remained on the bottom rung of industrial jobs, blacks in Milwaukee were able to sustain these positions through the 1920s. It was at this point that “an increasingly articulate urban-industrial working class” emerged and became active in pursuing increased economic and political stability despite ongoing discrimination.³⁸ Black workers created their own unions, or joined white unions and spun off separate black locals. Also during this period there were more semi-skilled, skilled, and professional African Americans in Milwaukee. Ultimately, the black unions represented a convergence of race and class as “they sought to organize first and foremost as blacks in order to break down racial barriers in the socioeconomic and political life of the city.” Thus a link between the black working class and black bourgeoisie emerged in the mid 1920s. For example the Milwaukee Urban League had tended to blame black workers for their problems, but began in the mid 1920s to support labor and put most of its efforts into helping people find jobs and preventing mistreatment in the workplace.³⁹

Migration of both blacks and whites to Milwaukee slowed dramatically in the 1930s due to the Depression and by 1940 African Americans still accounted for only 1.5 percent of the population.⁴⁰ The Depression hit Milwaukee later than other northern cities, but its effects were especially dramatic for blacks. As companies laid off workers,

³⁸ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁰ “Milwaukee’s ‘Harlem’ Is a Busy, Changing Community,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1939.

blacks were often the first to go. A 1930 study by the Milwaukee Urban League noted that approximately 2,700 of Milwaukee's 7,500 blacks applied for employment, which would put the unemployment rate at roughly sixty percent.⁴¹ This rate was three times that of white workers, which remained the standard for the next several decades.⁴² However, the 1930s did see a growth in black owned businesses including barbershops, restaurants, retail stores, and taverns. One contemporary commentator suggested that the Depression forced former wage workers out on their own to create their own businesses, some of which were successful.⁴³

With World War II industry jobs there was a rapid uptick in black migration to Milwaukee, a trend that continued for the next thirty years. Many of these people had already made one move from rural to urban areas before making the move to Milwaukee, and they tended to be a mix of agricultural and semi-skilled workers.⁴⁴ Thus Milwaukee experienced a much larger impact from the second Great Migration than the first. At the same time as the black population was growing, there was increased residential segregation within the city. By 1940 nearly all of the African Americans in Milwaukee lived in a one square mile area bounded by Wright Street, Kilbourn Avenue, Third Street, and Twelfth Street.⁴⁵ It was in this area, centered on Walnut Street, that the social and

⁴¹ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 77.

⁴² Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 59.

⁴³ "Milwaukee's 'Harlem' Is a Busy, Changing Community," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1939.

⁴⁴ Roy L. Hamilton, "Expectations and Realities: Black Migration from the South to Milwaukee, 1946-1958" (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1981); Paul Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee: A Case Study of the Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970," *The Journal of Negro History* 83 (1998): 232.

⁴⁵ Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, *Milwaukee's Negro Community* (Milwaukee: The Bureau, 1946), I.

economic heart of Milwaukee's black community developed.⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that not until 1950, with the increase in population due to the second Great Migration, were there any blocks in Milwaukee that had more than seventy-five percent black residents.

In 1941 Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which barred discrimination in all work governed by Federal defense contracts, and this increased the ability of blacks to move into World War II jobs. Also in the 1940s the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) began to accept black union members and this helped blacks move into skilled and semi-skilled positions that opened during the war. Nonetheless, the 2,160 black war workers in 1943 (the peak of the war effort) were only 1.2% of the 180,000 total war workers in Milwaukee.⁴⁷ Blacks continued to face discrimination in hiring and on the job, and when the war ended blacks were often the first to be let go. With relatively greater prosperity in the black community the number of black businessmen and professionals increased, though they generally maintained a lower economic status than those in the city at large. Nonetheless during this period the black middle class continued to grow and galvanize, though it still remained isolated within the black community.

Throughout the nineteenth century blacks had very little political power in Milwaukee. In 1906 Lucien Palmer was the first black person elected to the Wisconsin

⁴⁶ This part of the city has become known as Bronzeville, though it is unlikely that term was used before the 1940s and even then only sparingly. In fact former residents of Bronzeville agree the term was not used until long after the area was eradicated by urban renewal and expressway projects. The larger, and increasingly segregated, black neighborhood of Milwaukee began to be called the "inner core" in the 1950s. For the sake of clarity, I will use Bronzeville when referring to the cultural and economic heart of the black community prior to 1970, and the inner core when referring to the larger black district of the city. Author interviews with William Campbell and Clayborn Benson, April 28, 2011.

⁴⁷ Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, *Milwaukee's Negro Community*, 9.

state legislature and this was in part due to a case of mistaken identity as many voters thought he was a white resident also named Palmer. It was not until after World War I that there was a large enough black population to influence ward politics in the city.⁴⁸ In the 1920s African Americans became more active in electoral politics and voted for the Socialists locally and Republicans nationally. Blacks turned their focus toward ward-level positions and resisted token aldermen-at-large positions, though they were unable to elect an alderman during the period.⁴⁹

By 1932 blacks in Milwaukee, even more so than other northern cities, had shifted to the Democratic Party and Franklin Roosevelt. Class divisions undermined, in part, attempts to elect a black alderman in 1928, but by 1932 the Depression resulted in more racial unity and there was a concerted push for a black alderman.⁵⁰ Both black candidates lost in the 1932 primary, but made a decent showing. In 1936 James Dorsey made a strong bid for Sixth Ward alderman and then almost won in 1940. In 1944 a black assemblyman, LeRoy Simmons, was elected. Milwaukee blacks were not able to insert themselves in the established political machinery, but the effects of a strong third party helped in Simmons's election. While they failed to elect many black officials, black political strength did gain "various concessions from established political leaders."⁵¹

After the turn of the twentieth century blacks began to try to build up their own community rather than push for integration within the white community. Blacks "responded to the socioeconomic, political, and racial restrictions by intensifying their

⁴⁸ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

efforts to build a separate institutional life.”⁵² However, this created division among the black elite as some wanted to follow the Booker T. Washington model of self-help, pride, and solidarity to the point of almost not caring about discrimination, while others wanted to build black institutions, but be full participants in the larger civic life. There were also class divisions as the black elite tended to look down on the working class and especially newly arrived black migrants.⁵³

Nonetheless, beginning in the 1890s several black institutions formed. Among these were literary societies, women’s groups, and fraternal and mutual aid societies. During this period black churches were some of the most important institutions in the community, though many were plagued with a lack of funds and antagonism between congregations. The largest and most stable of these, such as St. Mark’s A.M.E. and St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church, provided important social and educational services for the black community. In 1919 the Milwaukee Urban League was established and worked very hard to improve the economic and social standing of blacks in Milwaukee.⁵⁴ The Urban League was formed in 1910 as a direct response to large scale African American migration from the South to northern cities. Like the national organization the goal of the Milwaukee chapter was “To assist African Americans in their transition to urban life and employment” and “taught basic skills such as social courtesies, proper dress and grooming, sanitation, health, and homemaking.”⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 29.

⁵³ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 83-84; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 27-30.

⁵⁴ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 84-85; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 30-32.

⁵⁵ “History of the MUL,” *Milwaukee Urban League*, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.tmul.org/about/history.html>.

After World War I blacks were increasingly restricted in many public institutions and services, most likely as a result of their growing population. The state civil rights law was often subverted, with the most blatant discrimination in restaurants, theaters, and health institutions. By 1931 an improved law was passed, but most blacks could not afford to bring suit. Though not as blatant as other cities, blacks in Milwaukee experienced abuses by the police and the courts. However, blacks were not passive and “vigorously expanded their civil rights protests, electoral politics, and separate institutions,” especially churches.⁵⁶

Though black institutions were strengthened during this period, black society had become stratified and this led to divisions within and between institutions. For example the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which peaked in the early 1930s, generally sided with the working class, while the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) tended to focus on the concerns of the business and professional class. Divisions in the black community were also reflected in the organizations and social clubs where some older, elite, organizations persisted while new ones emerged, many of which were made up of new arrivals and the working class. Though there was discrimination, blacks in Milwaukee did not face the uniformly hostile environment found in other cities, and this allowed for a lack of racial unity in resistance.⁵⁷

It took the Depression, and its subsequent job discrimination and inadequate relief programs, to increase unity between the working and middle class and across institutions. For example both the Milwaukee Urban League and the NAACP pushed for access to

⁵⁶ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-140.

work relief and “middle-class leaders also fought to break down racial barriers in local industries.”⁵⁸ During the Depression and World War II there was also increased segregation in housing as blacks were forced by economic conditions, zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants, and other discriminatory policies into the oldest and worst housing.⁵⁹ It was in this period that the black neighborhoods came closer to being a ghetto. This was partly exacerbated by the black community itself as many felt a consolidated black community was the best way to further black interests. Nonetheless, most blacks were not willing to give up better housing to preserve black institutions and they continued to push for open housing.⁶⁰

After the Depression the division between blacks and whites deepened and some black institutions pushed even more for racial separation. This was especially apparent in leisure activities as “private and commercial institutions, as earlier, segregated blacks in the community’s leisure-time life.”⁶¹ The segregated Milwaukee Urban League social center provided activities during the 1930s, but blacks still did not have enough, or adequate, leisure facilities.⁶² Even social centers in the black neighborhoods, such as the Fourth Street School and Lapham Park, were for the most part under the control of whites, and blacks were excluded from many of the clubs. There was a separate YMCA branch for blacks, and dance halls (except those in taverns) excluded blacks as did many pool halls and bowling alleys. Some hotels and restaurants also excluded blacks.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁹ See Charles Edward Vaeth, *Milwaukee Negro Residential Segregation* (Milwaukee: 1948) for a contemporary discussion of the causes and effects of residential segregation.

⁶⁰ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 176-184.

⁶¹ Ibid., 201.

⁶² For a brief discussion of some of the social clubs and leisure activities see Paul Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville, 1900-1950* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006).

At this time blacks both tried to expand their separate institutions while also gaining access to “all aspects of the city’s economic, social, and political existence.”⁶³

Despite the class division within the black community, African American institutions proved to be important sources of strength and pride in the face of increasing discrimination and hardship. In addition, since blacks of all classes lived in proximity to each other they tended to make use of the same institutions. One of the most important aspects of these institutions was the promotion of cultural pursuits, especially music. In 1939 William Kelley, the executive director of the Milwaukee Urban League, explained that the League’s music programs helped “the Negro to realize that his music is a proud heritage.”⁶⁴ There were dozens of black social, religious, and fraternal organizations—in fact there may have been as many as 160 by the late 1950s. Many of the social clubs would hold fundraising matinees on Sunday afternoons and hire local jazz musicians to perform. Community institutions such as the Milwaukee Urban League, Booker T. Washington YMCA, and the Lapham Park Social Center also held jazz performances.⁶⁵ This practice of hiring jazz bands continued for decades, long after jazz had ceased to be the most popular music in the community, because it was seen as classy or “the thing to do.”⁶⁶

Music was always an important part of African American community life in Milwaukee. Between 1920 and 1930 the number of musicians and music teachers increased by 168 percent, the largest increase of any profession during that decade.

⁶³ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 203.

⁶⁴ “Milwaukee’s ‘Harlem’ Is a Busy, Changing Community,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1939, 2.

⁶⁵ William Albert Vick, “From Walnut Street to No Street: Milwaukee’s Afro-American Businesses, 1945-1967” (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, 1993), 42, 50. Vick got the number 160 from interviews he conducted with William Mosby a retired businessman.

⁶⁶ Author interview with Reuben Harpole and Kaye Berigan, June 15, 2012.

Historian Joe Trotter writes that, “The expansion of blacks into music and show business professions was a response to the expanding cultural and entertainment needs of the local black community.”⁶⁷ In fact, in 1924 black musicians chartered their own musician’s union, Local 587, when they were excluded from the American Federation of Musicians Local 8.⁶⁸ After the black and white unions merged in the wake of the 1964 Federal Civil Rights Act, Milwaukee was one of the first large cities in the United States to have an integrated symphony.⁶⁹

Milwaukee’s African American institutions were an important foundation that the black community built on, and music played a central role in the cultural life of the institutions and the community as a whole. As jazz was the popular music in the black community from the 1920s into the 1950s, and it retained an important place in the community after that, it is not a stretch to imagine that jazz had a role in community development in Milwaukee. Jazz, as America’s most notable indigenous art form, was a point of cultural pride for African Americans. It also was a source of entertainment and offered a means of release from daily struggles. And for some, musicians and audience members alike, it was a way to explore their creative side, a way to get away from physical labor and to tap into a more intellectual mindset. In this way jazz allowed people to get away from the hardships of their world and to explore a more artistic side of their community.

⁶⁷ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 96.

⁶⁸ E-mail correspondence with Lew Mancini, AFM Chief Operating Officer, January 24, 2012. Also Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 99.

⁶⁹ Lew Mancini e-mail, January 24, 2012; George Seltzer, *Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989), 118.

Jazz: Definition, Description, and Early History

Defining jazz is not as easy as one might think. Jazz writers and musicians have debated the definition of jazz since its inception. In fact the very term jazz has been a topic of contention for as long as it has been used to describe a certain type of music. Since jazz was a pejorative term in the decades that the music was emerging, some have argued that we need a new word or phrase that better highlights the artistic and sociocultural aspects of the music. The Milwaukee guitarist Manty Ellis argues, like many others, that the music should be called black classical music.⁷⁰ However, for the sake of clarity, and since it is by far the most widely accepted term, this paper will refer to the music as jazz.

But what is jazz? This too can be an incredibly complex discussion. However, since this study is more concerned with historical matters than musical, and since it will cover a rather wide range of eras and styles within the jazz milieu, a fairly broad explanation of jazz will suffice. Jazz is a music rooted in African American cultural traditions that employs distinct characteristics such as ensemble play, improvisation, a blues influenced sonority, and a primacy placed on rhythm. The jazz scholar Barry Ulanov writes that jazz is “music of a certain distinct rhythmic and melodic character, one that constantly involves improvisation—of a minor sort in adjusting accents and phrases of the tune at hand, of a major sort in creating music extemporaneously, on the spot.”⁷¹ Scholar and composer Gunther Schuller says that jazz rhythm is the most obvious difference from the rest of Western music, and that this rhythm is made up of the elements of swing and equal consideration given to the strong and weak beats of a

⁷⁰ Author interview with Manty Ellis, June 6, 2012.

⁷¹ Barry Ulanov, *The History of Jazz in America* (New York: Viking Press, 1952), 7.

measure. Swing is another amorphous term, but Schuller offers two characteristics to explain swing: “1) a specific type of accentuation and inflection with which notes are played or sung, and 2) the continuity—the forward-propelling directionality—with which individual notes are linked together.”⁷² Ultimately, for our purposes the most important characteristics of jazz are its improvisatory nature, the importance of rhythm, and its connection to African American cultural traditions.

Jazz is generally considered to be a blend of African and European musical elements. While scholars debate the extent that African musical traditions played in the creation of jazz, there is no denying that there is a heavy African influence in the music. Schuller argues that, “African traditions survive in an astonishing array of musical detail, covering all elements and aspects of music, including to some extent even harmony, which has generally been associated with the European branch of jazz ancestry.”⁷³ In addition to harmony, elements of form—often employing cycles of improvisation, and rhythm—especially polyrhythms or layers of rhythm, are essential elements of jazz derived from African music. While Ulanov downplays the role of Africa in early jazz, Schuller argues, “that *every* musical element...is essentially African in background and derivation.” Most recent scholars would agree with Schuller “that within the loose framework of European tradition, the American Negro was able to preserve a significant nucleus of his African heritage” and this makes up an essential part of jazz.⁷⁴

⁷² Gunther Schuller, *The History of Jazz Volume 1: The Swing Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 6-7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴ Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, 10. Schuller, *The History of Jazz*, 62. For scholars with viewpoints similar to Schuller see Baraka, *Blues People* and Gary Giddins & Scott DeVeaux, *Jazz* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

In the nineteenth century African American and white musicians borrowed from each other to create several important precursors to jazz. Blacks, primarily slaves, took ideas from the Bible and European hymns to create spirituals, a more expressive and, to them, more meaningful music. At the same time whites borrowed ideas from black secular music and culture to create minstrel shows.⁷⁵ The songs from these shows contained “the melodic line and rhythmic accent of the American Negro” that influenced popular songwriters from Stephen Foster to Irving Berlin to George Gershwin.⁷⁶ In addition the minstrel shows influenced ragtime, which became popular music for both blacks and whites at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, African Americans adopted European marching band traditions and instrumentation and combined them with their own funeral processions that led to brass bands and directly into the early jazz bands.

Two other factors were key to generating the musical ideas that formed the early rumblings of jazz. Following the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves, large numbers of African Americans began to move around the South. For the first time blacks could move about relatively freely, which allowed for musicians to share ideas and musical forms. One of the most important and influential forms was the blues, which was central to the African American folk experience. Amiri Baraka argues that the increased mobility of southern blacks allowed the former slaves to gain a better idea of just what America was and how they fit into the country. However, this experience meant that the work songs and hymns were no longer sufficient to interpret “the more complicated social situation of self-reliance [that] proposed multitudes of social and

⁷⁵ Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, 20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

cultural problems that they never had to deal with as slaves.”⁷⁷ Hence, the blues developed as a way to explain, explore, and ameliorate the hardships of life. And virtually every scholar, critic, and musician, agrees that the blues is essential to jazz.⁷⁸

New Orleans is often cited as the birthplace of jazz—but we can already see that a myriad of musical styles made up the roots of jazz—so it is hard to pinpoint a single location for its birth. However, there is no denying that New Orleans was essential to the creation of jazz and was home to many the most important early innovators. New Orleans had many elements that were key to rise of jazz. There was Congo Square, where in the first half of the nineteenth century slaves and free blacks were allowed to dance and play music on Sundays. Though these gatherings were formally stopped before the Civil War, they did help preserve elements of African culture in the music of New Orleans that had an impact on early jazz.⁷⁹ In addition European influenced Creole (often mixed race individuals that tended to enjoy a higher place in society) musicians and ‘uptown’ black musicians influenced each other to help further develop the musical ideas behind jazz. Finally there was Storyville, the ‘vice district’ of New Orleans, where blacks and whites worked and caroused together. Though not all the early jazz musicians got their start in Storyville, it is likely that the atmosphere and the combination of dancing, music, and licentiousness had an influence on early jazz.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Baraka, *Blues People*, 60-61.

⁷⁸ There is not space to fully explain the influence of blues on jazz. Suffice to say that much of the form, improvisation, even subject matter that later was central to jazz first appeared in the blues. Baraka, among others, makes the contentious argument that since the blues is so deeply rooted in the African American experience, and since the blues is so important to jazz, non-blacks cannot truly play/experience jazz because it is not a part of their inherent culture. Given that jazz is so broad stylistically and can be experienced in such a variety of ways, I believe this idea overstates the case, but it does show how important jazz is to African American culture.

⁷⁹ Giddins and Deveaux, *Jazz*, 77.

⁸⁰ Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, 38; Giddins and Deveaux, *Jazz*, 84.

There is a myth that when city officials shut down Storyville in 1917 it caused the New Orleans musicians to leave and thus gave impetus to the spread of jazz. This is of course too simple, too romantic, and very much untrue. As early as 1913 Art Hickman, a white musician in San Francisco who had been influenced by African American musicians in bars along the Barbary Coast, formed a band that played an early form of what would be called 'sweet' jazz. In fact the very term jazz, or jas, is often credited to a San Francisco newspaper writer, though he was actually writing about baseball. In addition the Original Creole Band, with the influential cornet player Freddie Keppard, left New Orleans and toured from California to Maine between 1913 and 1918.⁸¹ The Mississippi riverboats employed many jazz musicians from New Orleans in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Some of these, including Louis Armstrong, played in the influential Jaz-E-Saz band put together by the St. Louis pianist Fate Marable.⁸² So it is clear that jazz musicians were on the move before the shutdown of Storyville. In most cases these musicians were simply looking for better opportunities, and they became part of the Great Migration of African Americans, primarily, from the South to the urban centers of the North. There is a clear connection between the migratory nature of jazz and the migration of African Americans. As blacks moved in search of better opportunity they brought the elements of jazz with them. Eventually this constant motion became ingrained in jazz and the history of the music is in fact a history of movement.

One of the most important destinations of New Orleans musicians was Chicago. Brown's Dixieland Jass Band, made up of white New Orleans musicians, was playing in Chicago as early as 1915. In a 1915 *Chicago Tribune* article about the band, 'jazz' was

⁸¹ Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, 54.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 91.

first used “as a term to describe the semi-raucous, always rhythmic, and quite infectious music these men played.”⁸³ The first jazz recording was made by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, a band made up of white musicians from New Orleans, in Chicago in 1917. By 1918 the trumpet player Joe “King” Oliver, arguably one of the most influential musicians of the time, had moved to Chicago. By 1922 there were several big bands full of important musicians, including Louis Armstrong, Jabbo Smith, Earl Hines, and Fats Waller playing the clubs of both the black and white parts of town.⁸⁴ Though jazz had become so transient, that many of these musicians soon left Chicago for California or New York. Nonetheless, Ulanov argues that Chicago made the largest contributions to jazz in the 1920s. He says the New Orleans diaspora grew in fits and starts, but by the mid-1920s musicians in Chicago, from New Orleans and elsewhere (especially Midwesterners), had begun to realize the potential of the New Orleans music.⁸⁵

On the other hand, Giddins and Deveaux argue that New York City was key to the development and growth of jazz after its New Orleans roots. However, periodization becomes important here as they say the city “has served as the focus for jazz’s maturity and evolution from the late 1920s to the present.”⁸⁶ Whereas Ulanov says that “New York was a sad fourth or tenth or twentieth in taking up jazz” and that the earliest jazz did not really take hold in New York City, but “then Harlem really woke up.”⁸⁷ Three elements combined to make New York an important center for jazz. First, technological innovations in recording, radio, and movies meant that musical ideas could travel farther

⁸³ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 93-94.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁶ Giddins and Deveaux, *Jazz*, 113.

⁸⁷ Ulanov, *A History of Jazz in America*, 142-143. One can only assume he is referring to the Harlem Renaissance and its explosion of African American culture of which jazz was an important part.

and faster than ever before. This created a demand for quicker development of creative ideas. This also leads to the second element. By the mid to late 1920s New York had become a place where several musical styles, from Tin Pan Alley popular songs to New Orleans music to vaudeville, came together and allowed for the musical creativity demanded by faster technology. Finally, Prohibition actually created a vast array of illegal nightclubs whose owners hired the best entertainers they could to draw customers. There was such a demand for music that the composers could not keep up, but jazz musicians could improvise on existing songs to meet the demand.⁸⁸

This musical environment, as well as the large number of talented musicians who moved to New York, meant the city was fertile ground for the next step in jazz. By the mid-1920s many of the best New Orleans and Chicago musicians had made their way to New York to record. These recordings demonstrate that jazz had become more rhythmic, melodic, and that the individual soloist had taken primacy over ensemble improvisation. In the late 1920s three important arrangers and band leaders, Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman, and Duke Ellington, built on these innovations to create tight-knit, well orchestrated big bands that were able to show off the individual soloist and still retain the spirit of the early jazz. These bands, along with some of the smoother jazz bands such as Paul Whiteman's, were key to the development of what became known as 'Swing.' Ultimately, Swing was just a style of jazz, but by the mid 1930s it had become quite popular and ensured that jazz would remain on the musical landscape of America.

The United States had a unique set of characteristics in the early twentieth century that allowed for the creation and spread of jazz. Among these were a black subculture with its own music that was attractive to whites, the city of New Orleans with its unique

⁸⁸ Giddins and Deveaux, *Jazz*, 114-116.

multi-ethnic society, a turn toward rejecting the Victorianism of the nineteenth century, and a rapid movement away from an agrarian lifestyle to urban living. This combination of mobility and urbanization were instrumental in the spread of jazz. As described above, after the Civil War rural blacks traveled around the south sharing musical ideas that formed the basis of jazz. Then in the early part of the twentieth century jazz spread through the cities. Without urbanization jazz may have died, as the cities allowed for economic subsistence through a market for music, the sharing of ideas, and a realistic chance of success as a musician, none of which could be found on the farm. Finally, it was the rejection of Victorian ideals that drew many young white people to the music as performers as well as consumers.⁸⁹

As African Americans engaged in a migration of opportunity there was a corresponding cultural migration of jazz. The constant motion of black people and jazz meant that there was an ongoing reinterpretation and reimagining of the music and the jazz community as it took in elements from around the country. This early migration also set the tone for small-scale movements in jazz locales. By the early 1920s jazz had made its move, north from Chicago and east from the Mississippi River, to southeastern Wisconsin and was firmly entrenched in Milwaukee. But the migratory nature of the music means that it did not stop, but rather became localized in its movement. As we will see, within Milwaukee the movement and reformation of jazz and the jazz community continued throughout its history.

⁸⁹ See Burton Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 2-7; James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz: the American Theme Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4-8; and Baraka, *Blues People*, 70-71.

Jazz in Milwaukee: The Early Years

Music has always been a fundamental part of the lives of the people of Milwaukee. Long before it was a city, area Native Americans produced music that reflected sounds of nature and songs for work, entertainment, war, and ritual. The first European visitors brought music with them such as religious chants by Jesuit missionaries and the lyric-driven *chansons* of the voyageurs. Later, music was an important part of the social life of both soldiers in the frontier forts and the first settlers.⁹⁰

Wisconsin in general, and Milwaukee especially, became a musical center in the period of 1840 to 1860 that could rival many Eastern areas. German immigrants brought their own musical traditions and joined migrants from the eastern United States to bring to Wisconsin “a body of trained professionals with a common interest in musical enhancement.”⁹¹ Though many musicians and composers were lost during the Civil War, new settlers helped Wisconsin expand its music industry in the decades after the war. Wisconsin conductors and composers became well known regionally and Wisconsin became a center for the manufacture of instruments.

Music further expanded in Milwaukee around the turn of the twentieth century. At this time there were daily opera performances in Schlitz Park and several musical societies such as *Gesangverein Bavaria* and *Sozialistische Liedertafel* formed. During this period a variety of musical styles became popular, including marches, mandolin orchestras, and vocal music. Also, many Wisconsin composers and musicians of this era

⁹⁰ Much of this brief history of Milwaukee music comes from “The Wisconsin Music Story” in *Wisconsin: A Guide to the Badger State*, compiled by workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the state of Wisconsin, and reprinted in Michael Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music, 1840-1990: 150 Years of Melodies and Memories* (Milwaukee: Yesterdays Memories: MGC Publications, 1991), 9-16.

⁹¹ Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music*, 19.

were well regarded in the classical arena. For example Hugo Kaun, a German immigrant who moved to Milwaukee in 1887, became a famous director and composer of works across the spectrum from simple piano compositions to full symphonies.⁹²

In the 1920s music began to take off in the schools and soon there were several, solo, ensemble, and band contests. Also in the 1920s and 1930s radio made it possible for farmers and people from small towns to enjoy popular and community music. During this period prominent composers such as Carl Eppert and Jerzy Bojanowski chose to relocate to Milwaukee, indicating the strength of Milwaukee's musical reputation. During the 1930s the Works Progress Administration (WPA) had several organizations that gave work to local professional musicians. And after the war the small ethnic festivals, where music played an important part, grew into the huge enterprises we know today as Summerfest, Festa Italiana, and Germanfest.⁹³

Many of the musical styles that provided the roots of jazz were also popular in Milwaukee. There were several Wisconsin musicians who composed and performed ragtime songs, many of which were published for a national audience. Walter E. Blaufuss of Milwaukee began by composing rags, but became famous for his song "My Isle of Golden Dreams," which became a successful song for both Glenn Miller and Bing Crosby. Dance bands that played pop songs and 'light' jazz, as well as fox trots and waltzes, were popular throughout Wisconsin during the 1920s. The information on blues in Milwaukee during this era is limited, but there was an important record company in Port Washington that produced blues and 'race' records. Many national blues stars such

⁹² Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music*, 147, 127-128, 13, 119-120.

⁹³ Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music*, 16.

as Blind Lemon Jefferson and Ma Rainey recorded at Paramount records and may well have performed in Milwaukee on their way to Port Washington.⁹⁴

Within this musical context and given the migratory nature of the music, as well as its success in urban centers, jazz was readily available in Milwaukee by the early 1920s. In fact John H. Wickcliffe and his Famous Ginger Jazz Band, an early jazz band, that was active in the late 1910s used to play Milwaukee frequently. They were the only black band to play at the Schlitz Gardens, “one of the most opulent and most popular beer gardens in the city.”⁹⁵ Originally based in Chicago, the band “played Milwaukee so often that several of its members came from the local black population, and some of those from Chicago took up residence in Milwaukee. Roy Wolfscale, the band’s leader, and his wife were among those who moved to Milwaukee.”⁹⁶ Ever since that time Milwaukee has had a small, but vibrant, jazz community made up of musicians, promoters and club owners, and aficionados.

In the 1920s many of the jazz musicians in Milwaukee were white. There were several dance bands that toured the state playing some version of the sweet jazz that was popular among white audiences. Paul Whiteman, who in the 1920s was called the ‘King of Jazz,’ made several successful appearances in Milwaukee over a period of thirty years playing in such ballrooms as the Eagles Club, the Modernistic at State Fair Park, and the Schroeder Hotel.⁹⁷ At the same time there were a few white bands playing ‘hotter’ music. Woody Herman, who would go on to lead famous swing bands for fifty years,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 158-159, 180, 235-236, 287. For a complete history of Paramount Records see Alex van der Tuuk, *Paramount’s Rise and Fall: A History of the Wisconsin Chair Company and Its Recording Activities* (Denver, CO: Mainspring Press, 2003).

⁹⁵ “A souvenir from the Schlitz Palm Garden, 1896,” *Wisconsin Historical Society*, accessed July 22, 2012, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1185>.

⁹⁶ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 96-97.

⁹⁷ Joe Botsford, “Jazz King Dead, Memories Live On,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 29, 1967.

made a name for himself playing in Joie Lichter's band in Milwaukee in the early 1920s.⁹⁸ The popularity of 'hot' jazz and Dixieland lasted longer in Milwaukee than in other parts of the country as exemplified by the bands of Dick Ruedebusch. Ruedebusch was a trumpet player whose bands spawned many well-regarded Milwaukee musicians such as clarinet player Chuck Hedges and pianist Sig Millonzi, and remained popular until Ruedebusch's death in the late 1960s.⁹⁹

There were popular black musicians in this era as well, including Jabbo Smith. Though he did not have Armstrong's fame, in recordings with Duke Ellington and Fats Waller he demonstrated similar ability. Smith played around Milwaukee and Chicago for several years before he retired and took a job at a car rental business at the Milwaukee airport.¹⁰⁰ Before retiring, Smith may have briefly played in the Bernie Young band in the 1930s.¹⁰¹ Young, a trumpeter originally from New Orleans, settled in Milwaukee in 1924 and became an important bandleader. He led several popular bands that played for white audiences at downtown ballrooms, including the swanky Wisconsin Roof Ballroom, as well as black audiences in Bronzeville venues. Many prominent Milwaukee

⁹⁸ Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music*; Gene Lees, *Leader of the Band: The Life of Woody Herman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Herman gets short shrift in this thesis especially since he is arguably the best-known jazz musician to come out of Milwaukee. However, since he left Milwaukee at a young age and only returned to play occasional concerts, I chose not to discuss his career in any depth.

⁹⁹ "The Melody Lingers: Dick Ruedebusch Memorial Concert Sunday," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 31, 1968; Michael H. Drew, "Dick Ruedebusch Colleagues Honor Memory With Music," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1969.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of Jabbo Smith see Schuller, *The History of Jazz, Volume 1* and Balliet, *Jelly Roll, Jabbo & Fats*.

¹⁰¹ There is a reference to this in the script to John Schneider's play *Jazz: A Milwaukee History*, but I have been unable to confirm it. This play, along with another written by Schneider called *A Guy Who Likes Jazz*, are based on the research into Milwaukee jazz by William Vick as well as interviews by the playwright. While admittedly fiction they give an interesting account of the jazz scene in Milwaukee. Though unpublished, Mr. Schneider was willing to share the scripts of these plays with me.

musicians such as Frank Gay and Jimmy Dudley spent time in Young's WPA sponsored band before it was disbanded in 1942.¹⁰²

Jimmy Dudley, an alto saxophone player, was born in 1903 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, moved to St. Louis, and started touring nationally in the 1920s. He played with nationally touring groups such as Noble Sissle's band and McKinney's Cotton Pickers, a major influence on the swing style that emerged in the 1930s. While touring in Milwaukee he fell in love with a woman named Viola Newell and the couple had two daughters. At that point Dudley decided to give up the road and settle in Milwaukee.¹⁰³ This is a common theme in Milwaukee's jazz history as several prominent musicians such as Jabbo Smith, pianist and guitarist Manty Ellis, and saxophone player Leonard Gay gave up, or forsook altogether, the road to stay home and take care of a family while maintaining their musical careers on a local level. In addition to being a family man Dudley was a very good musician. Art Dawson, the owner of an after hours club said, "Dudley plays a mighty tough sax. He could play with any colored band in the country but he wants to stay around here till his daughter finishes high school."¹⁰⁴ Dudley had an excellent career in Milwaukee throughout the 1940s and he inspired many local musicians both black and white.

As the black population increased following World War I, cultural and entertainment options in Milwaukee's African American community expanded in the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time interest in black entertainment grew in the white

¹⁰² "Bernie Young, Musician, Dies," *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 4, 1952; John Sippel, "Disks Worth Plenty," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 2, 1944; "Park Dances is Date Idea," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 24, 1942; Vick, "From Walnut Street to No Street," 50.

¹⁰³ Vick, "From Walnut Street to No Street," 47; William Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Owned Jazz Clubs, 1935-1967" (Unpublished paper, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, 1990), 7.

¹⁰⁴ Doyle Getter, "Here's a 'Ticket' to Jam Session of Hottest Jazz Players in Town" *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 5, 1941, 2. An article in *The Milwaukee Globe*, December 25, 1948 says that Dudley refused offers from Duke Ellington and Count Basie because he did not want to go on the road.

community. Part of this appeal was the unfamiliarity or ‘primitivism’ of black culture, especially jazz, as seen by the white audience.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, the music venues in black neighborhoods were often less regulated than those in white neighborhoods, an important factor in the Prohibition era. As a result of the increased black population and interest among a white audience, ‘black and tan’ clubs emerged throughout northern cities. Many of these clubs were ostensibly for a black audience, with black employees and entertainers, but much of the clientele was white.¹⁰⁶ As Bill Mosby, owner of the Chateau Lounge said, “We never had problems with whites. Whites were some of your best customers. Back when you had black clubs with music that blacks and whites frequented, you had no problems.” The number of working jazz musicians and bands increased dramatically in this period, which was key to the emergence of Bronzeville as Milwaukee’s jazz district.¹⁰⁷

Bronzeville is generally described as the area bounded by North Ave on the north, Juneau Street on the south, Third Street on the east, and Twelfth Street on the West with Walnut Street as its cultural and commercial heart. Even in the pre-World War II period this area was the entertainment center of black Milwaukee and as the popularity of jazz and the population increased there was a corresponding increase in live music venues. Between 1940 and 1950 the number of taverns in the immediate Bronzeville area that

¹⁰⁵ “Milwaukee’s ‘Harlem’ Is a Busy, Changing Community,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1939. This article says that, “Stories about night life in New York’s Harlem have prompted many Milwaukeeans to seek it out.”

¹⁰⁶ “Milwaukee’s ‘Harlem’ Is a Busy, Changing Community,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1939.

¹⁰⁷ Mosby quote is in Dave Luhrssen, “Walnut Street Rhythm,” *Milwaukee Magazine*, August, 1993, 34; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 96; Collier, *Jazz*, 15, 205-206; Randy Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet: Race and the Mythology, Politics, and Business of Jazz* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 108; Campbell Interview, April 28, 2011.

offered live music grew from six to sixteen.¹⁰⁸ The clubs of this period were densely concentrated in an area that was about three quarters of a mile on each side, which made it easy to move from space to space. In addition the jazz clubs were just part of a lively entertainment district that contained literally dozens of taverns as well as theaters and social clubs.

The close proximity of the Bronzeville clubs allowed for a fair amount of movement from club to club. Some of these venues had bright neon signs and welcoming entrances to draw people in. A 1939 article in *The Milwaukee Journal* described the scene thusly, “But at night electric signs light up, the sidewalks take on life, couples appear walking hand in hand, the younger crowd comes out—especially on Saturday and Sunday nights—laughter is heard and gaiety prevails.”¹⁰⁹ The first venue in the area offering jazz was the Metropole, established in 1922. Others followed suit including the Blue Room in the late 1920s. Clubs such as the Flame had hostesses, doormen and coat checks along with large stages and dance floors.¹¹⁰ Others such as the Moon Glow, definitely a rival of the Flame in terms of audience and musicians, were narrower, tighter, and more intimate. These clubs often had a variety of entertainment including dancers of all varieties, including exotic, comedians, singers, and blues

¹⁰⁸ Data on Milwaukee jazz venues was extracted from *Wright’s Milwaukee (Milwaukee County, Wis.) City Directory*, (Milwaukee, WI: Wright Directory Co, 1940-1990), *The Negro Business Directory of the State of Wisconsin*, M.E. Shadd, ed. (Milwaukee, WI, 1950, 1951, 1952); Vick, “From Walnut Street to No Street;” various newspaper articles and advertisements; Author interviews with Adekola Adedapo, March 27, 2012; Kaye Berigan, April 19, 2012; Anonymous, March 30, 2012, and Reuben Harpole, April 26, 2012. The ‘Anonymous’ interview was conducted with a Milwaukee musician who has been in the jazz scene since the early 1950s, but asked to be kept anonymous.

¹⁰⁹ “Milwaukee’s ‘Harlem’ Is a Busy, Changing Community,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1939.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

musicians.¹¹¹ Still other clubs were so small that there was only room for a pianist or organist and a singer. Nonetheless these venues, large and small, tended to be open and accessible to anyone who wanted to enjoy the music and the nightlife of Bronzeville.¹¹²

Less well known were the after hours clubs. These, such as Art's located in the segregated union for black musicians, and Casablanca, located in a mansion converted to a rooming house, were even more happening for those in the know. Often major touring musicians and their band members, both black and white, such as Gene Krupa, Louis Armstrong, and Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, and Woody Herman would show up at these places after playing gigs in the downtown clubs that catered to the upper class. There they would jam with local musicians well into the early hours of the morning. Evans Woods, a drummer, grew up around the corner from Art's and used to warm up visiting bands until the regular drummer sat down. This way he got to meet Lionel Hampton, Jimmy Dorsey, Lucky Thompson, Charlie Parker, and other famous musicians.¹¹³ Art's was especially popular and on any given night between twenty-five and one hundred musicians, black and white, might gather to listen and jam from about three in the morning until daybreak. In 1941 Louis Jordan, an immensely popular musician from Chicago, played a six week gig at the Lakota Lounge downtown.¹¹⁴ While in town the guys from his band showed up at Art's almost every night.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ For example, advertisements in the *Milwaukee Globe* from June 12 and 19, 1948 for the Flame and Moon Glow list exotic dancers, shake artists, comediennes, tap dancers, and singers of a variety of styles.

¹¹² For more on Bronzeville's jazz clubs see Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Owned Jazz Clubs;" Vick, "From Walnut Street to No Street," 35-64; Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*.

¹¹³ Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street," 60.

¹¹⁴ John Chilton, *Let the Good Times Roll: The Story of Louis Jordan and His Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 86.

¹¹⁵ Doyle Getter, "Here's a 'Ticket' to Jam Session of Hottest Jazz Players in Town" *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 5, 1941.

During this period there were also several clubs downtown and on the Southside that catered to a white clientele and employed white musicians. Many of these venues were restaurants owned by Italian families. The owners often refused to allow black musicians to play, thus further deepening the divide in Milwaukee between white and black jazz musicians.¹¹⁶ Organized crime was also a factor in many of these clubs, but musicians tended to be treated well as long as they respected the rules, showed up on time, and did not drink too excess.¹¹⁷

Many of the larger theaters and ballrooms downtown would employ local and touring musicians, both black and white. In addition to Bernie Young's bands at the Roof Ballroom, the pianist Loretta Whyte frequently performed at the Schroeder Hotel, and the dancer Betty Conley did shows at the Riverside and Warner theaters.¹¹⁸ Famous touring musicians often came through Milwaukee during the post World War II period.¹¹⁹ Woody Herman's band came through periodically, as did Gene Krupa's big band. Duke Ellington was a frequent visitor as was Dizzy Gillespie and Lionel Hampton. In the 1930s and 1940s, visiting black musicians could play the downtown theaters, but could not stay in downtown hotels. Thus they often stayed with families and in rooming houses in the black community.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Adedapo interview, March 27, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous interview, March 30, 2012.

¹¹⁸ Amy Silvers, "Thomas Loved Performing Jazz," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, May 15, 2008; Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Owned Jazz Clubs," 7. Jazz has always been a male dominated world and regrettably men tend to dominate the pages of this thesis as well. Most of the women in the Milwaukee jazz community tended to be singers, keyboard players, dancers and I have highlighted a number of them. However they do not receive the same attention their male counterparts do because women musicians were fewer in number and they tended to receive less coverage in the popular press. The role of women in jazz in general is still fertile ground for scholarship and it is especially needed when it comes to Milwaukee women.

¹¹⁹ For example *The Milwaukee Globe*, a black newspaper in Milwaukee has listings or advertisements for performances by Sarah Vaughn, Illinois Jacquet, Kai Winding, Red Rodney, Shelly Mann, Stan Kenton, Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Woody Herman, and others in 1948 alone.

¹²⁰ Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012; Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*.

While jazz bands in Milwaukee tended to be segregated during the height of jazz popularity, this was by no means regimented. It tended to be more a factor of location and venue. White bands played dances and halls in the surrounding area and black bands mostly played in the Bronzeville area. However, there were some mixed bands and after hours all bets were off. It was the audience however that truly broke down racial barriers, both nationally and in Milwaukee. From its earliest days jazz has always had a large white audience and with the advent of swing in the 1930s it became the popular music for both blacks and whites. This was reflected in Milwaukee where many white jazz fans would go to the Bronzeville clubs on the weekends, truly making them 'black and tans.' Also white and black teenagers would listen to records at the Bronzeville record shops. Mannie Maulding Jr., a record store owner said, "White kids and black kids would sit there listening to records all night long. We didn't have no race issue. White kids were walking up and down Walnut Street at midnight." But this may have presaged a change in audience as the black audience began to leave jazz in the 1950s. As bebop replaced swing young African Americans drifted toward rhythm and blues and it was mostly white people who were drawn to bebop. Blacks continued to have a lasting impact on the music, but less impact as an audience.¹²¹

At the close of the 1940s jazz was doing well in Milwaukee. No local musicians were getting rich, but some were able to make a living from the music. In addition Milwaukee was a destination for touring musicians and many stayed for extended gigs. Thus, if you were a jazz fan in Milwaukee, the scene looked pretty good. However, jazz was just one part, and really a rather small part, of the entertainment picture in

¹²¹ Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music*, Dave Lührssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," *Milwaukee Magazine*, August, 1993, 31; Mauldin quote appears in the Lührssen article, page 33; Collier, *Jazz*, 207-208.

Milwaukee. African Americans still made up a very small portion of the population, and not even all black Milwaukeeans were jazz fans. In addition, while there was definitely a white audience for jazz, it was a clear minority in a city more interested in pop, classical, and ethnic music. It is also important to note that in the 1930s and 1940s jazz was at its peak of popularity in the nation and in Milwaukee, something that would come to an end with the end of Swing. In the 1950s there would be major changes for Milwaukee, the African American community, and the jazz community.

Chapter Two

“Get Out-A Town”¹²²

The Second Great Migration

In the 1930s William “Bill” Mosby made fifty cents a day picking cotton outside of Memphis, Tennessee. He decided to join the many African Americans who had made the move north in hopes that they would find better jobs in northern industrial centers as well as avoid the crippling racism of the South. Like many southern migrants who ended up in Milwaukee, Mosby stopped off in Chicago for a few years where he found work as a doorman at a nightclub. In 1935 Mosby moved to Milwaukee where he again worked as a doorman at a nightclub until it closed in 1939. Over the next couple years he worked at the Packard Motor Car Company, did a possible stint in the army, and then began working at A.O. Smith in 1942. War industry jobs, like those at A.O. Smith, were opened to African American workers after President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 that created the Fair Employment Practices Commission and prohibited discrimination in World War II defense industries.¹²³

It is not clear when he started, but Mosby had a love of jazz and began writing songs. While at A.O. Smith he would sing while working and found inspiration from the noises of the machines. According to a 1945 *Milwaukee Journal* article several of Mosby’s songs were being performed by famous national acts including Rochester from the Jack Benny show, Jimmy Lunceford’s band, and Louis Jordan. However, the accuracy of this article is debatable. For example, the article says Mosby wrote the Louis

¹²² Frank DeMiles recorded this Cole Porter song live at Stefano’s in Milwaukee in 1959.

¹²³ Geib, “From Mississippi to Milwaukee,” 230, 238; Vick, “From Walnut Street to No Street,” 74. Vick, who interviewed Mosby, mentions time in the army. Geib (who also interviewed Mosby) and various newspaper stories do not mention this.

Jordan song “Meet Me on the Outskirts of Town,” which is problematic in two ways. First, Jordan recorded two songs, “I’m Going to Move to the Outskirts of Town” and the ‘answer’ song, “I’m Going to Leave You at the Outskirts of Town,” never one with the ‘Meet Me’ title. Second, the songwriters for “I’m Going to Move to the Outskirts of Town,” a big hit for Jordan, were William Weldon (who first recorded it) and Roy Jordan. Additionally, no other sources on Mosby, including those derived from personal interviews, mention his supposed song writing credits. Nonetheless, it is clear that music played a role in Mosby’s life.¹²⁴

In the late 1940s or early 1950s Mosby left industrial work to become an entrepreneur. He opened a barbecue and chicken restaurant called Bill’s Better Batter that was quite popular. Over the course of ten years the restaurant existed in three different locations as its clientele grew. In addition to food the restaurant had a popular jukebox that almost certainly had several jazz records in it. In the late 1950s Mosby also opened a tavern called the Chateau Lounge that had occasional jazz performances, though it is hard to judge the success of this venture. William Vick wrote that Mosby shut down the business in 1957 because he could not make enough money to take care of his eleven children.¹²⁵ However, Milwaukee city directories have listings for the Chateau Lounge up to 1965, so it is possible Mosby sold it and the new owner kept the name.¹²⁶ Further complicating this timeline, in the late 1950s or early 1960s Mosby went to work as a longshoreman.

¹²⁴ “Factory Noises are Inspiration for His Music,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 7, 1945. Any number of sources list the actual writers of the song including the Louis Jordan website, accessed June 21, 2012, <http://www.louisjordan.com/lyrics/ImGonnaMove.aspx>.

¹²⁵ Vick, “From Walnut Street to No Street,” 74-75.

¹²⁶ *Wright’s Milwaukee City Directory*, 1960, 1964/65.

As a longshoreman Mosby joined the union and eventually was elected president of the International Longshoremen's Association local in Milwaukee. He also founded the Sickle Cell Anemia Foundation and was active in raising funds to fight the disease.¹²⁷ Throughout his time in Milwaukee Mosby was active in politics and even went to the Democratic Convention as the whip for the 5th Congressional District delegates in 1980.¹²⁸ In the late 1970s Mosby had to retire from being a longshoreman due to a crippling leg injury but he and his family opened a new business, "a family consulting firm that will arrange parties, travel, 'or whatever a person wants.'"¹²⁹ Then in 1985, at the age of 68, he made his debut as a folk artist at the African American art exhibit called "Soul Catching the Senses" at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Union Art Gallery.¹³⁰

Mosby's life in Milwaukee was both exceptional and typical of the black migrant experience. On the one hand he was able to find industry jobs, and eventually fought through remaining elements of discrimination to land a semi-skilled position. However, the economic realities, and the physical effects of the work, took their toll. Then he was able to reinvent himself as a businessman in Milwaukee's Bronzeville district. But the declining economic status of the area, as well as the effects of early urban renewal and expressway projects, meant that for many owning a business was no longer tenable in 1960s Bronzeville. Mosby then found a decent job as a longshoreman, but again the effects of the economy in the city—this time the shift away from manufacturing—and the physical demands of the job, meant that he had to retire early. Nonetheless, Mosby was

¹²⁷ "What's Going on Around Town," *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 1, 1972.

¹²⁸ Frank Aukofer, "At This Convention Blacks are Insiders," *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 14, 1980.

¹²⁹ Jerry Wilkerson, "Listening at a Longshoreman's Bar," *The Milwaukee Journal* June 14, 1977.

¹³⁰ Dean Jensen, "Black Artists Offer Rich Show," *The Milwaukee Journal* February 8, 1985.

able to do important things for his community and his family throughout his life, and despite hardships was able to realize some aspects of the migrant's dream. Many of the migrants that came to Milwaukee in the 1940s and 1950s would not be so lucky as to find sustained employment and income and be able to own property, though in the post war a significant number did. What is interesting is to examine what level of impact this migration had on the jazz scene in the city.

This chapter explores Milwaukee's place in the widespread migration of southern African Americans to northern and western cities that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. The chapter begins with a brief historiography of the literature related to African American migration. Next it examines the effect of the migration on Milwaukee with a focus on the far greater impact the second, or later, period of migration had on the city. Here we see how the landscape of the African American and jazz communities began to shift as more people moved into the traditionally black district of Milwaukee. The chapter then looks at the state of the African American community in the 1950s as the effects of migration and the early stages of the industrial economic downturn took hold. Finally the chapter details the Milwaukee jazz community of the 1950s and demonstrates how it peaked early in the decade and then began a slow decline, all within the context of African American migration and conditions in the city.

The First and Second Great Migrations

Scholars began writing about the Great Migration—the rapid movement of black southerners out of the rural south that began early in the twentieth century—as it was

happening. The first studies appeared as early as 1918 and scholarship continues to be published to this day.¹³¹ However, for what appears to be a fairly straightforward event there is considerable debate among scholars as to the particulars of the Great Migration. There is not space here to fully engage the historiography of the subject, but there have been some major historiographical trends in the scholarship, as well as new scholarship that attempts to tell a fuller version of the story. Interestingly, a new era of scholarship in regards to the Great Migration and African American urban history began with a study of Milwaukee.

Though there was a small increase in the African American population of Milwaukee during what has been called the First Great Migration—generally the 1910s and 1920s—Milwaukee did not experience explosive growth until the post World War II era. Because of this Milwaukee is rarely covered in depth in studies on the Great Migration. However, many of the themes approached in these studies, ranging from ghettoization to the push and pull factors that drove the migration, can be applied to Milwaukee. Many of these studies however, tend to portray African Americans as victims or uneducated and unprepared for urban life in the North. Joe Trotter's *Black Milwaukee* offers a corrective on both of these problems; it is focused on Milwaukee and it portrays African Americans as having more agency in their movement and livelihood.

¹³¹ For examples of the earliest studies see A. Epstein, *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburgh*, 1918; T.J. Woofter, *Negro Migration: Changes in Rural Organization and Population of the Cotton Belt*, 1920; and Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot in 1919*, 1922. Also see Carter G. Woodson, "The Exodus During the World War," in *Up South: Stories, Studies, and Letters of This Century's Black Migrations*, edited by Malaika Adero (New York: The New Press, 1993), 1-18. As early as 1918 Woodson had already examined the push/pull factors that motivated the migrants including discrimination and social conditions, the effects of the boll weevil and subsequent floods, and job opportunities in the north that opened due to a lack of European immigration during World War I. He also discussed arguments made for and against migrating; the long-term outcomes of the migration, the conditions blacks will face in the north (he argues that racism and discrimination will become nationalized rather than go away), and black political possibilities and limitations.

Thus, Trotter is often cited as the scholar that set Great Migration research on its new path.

Trotter later edited a collection of essays that featured the new scholarship that emerged in the late 1980s. In this collection he argues that, “few studies systematically analyze the role of blacks in shaping their own geographical movement.” Thus Trotter offered a “critique of the black migration literature, pinpoints strengths and weaknesses therein, and suggests a framework for essential discussion, reconceptualization, and new research.”¹³² In the introduction he explained how the literature on black migration took on “three distinct, but interrelated, conceptual orientations.”¹³³ Of course these models as explained by Trotter are only part of an extensive debate that includes push and pull factors, a look at who left and who stayed, where people ended up and why, the effect of outside recruiters, the agency of the migrants themselves, and so on. Again the historiography is too rich to delve into deeply, but an overview of some of the issues will lend context to the Milwaukee experience.

The first of Trotter’s three orientations was the race relations model that existed in the first half of the twentieth century. Sociologically based, this approach focused on the “socioeconomic push-pull explanation of black population movement, and analyzed black migration as a pivotal element in changing race relations.” This model tended to pay little attention to historical processes and focused more on economic forces. Many of the scholars in the 1920s portrayed the city as undermining the stability of black families and that “black migrants swelled the crime, divorce, and illegitimate birth rates on one hand, while deflating African-American urban social, cultural, and institutional

¹³² Trotter ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective*, xii.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

affiliations on the other.” Studies from the 1930s to 1950s looked at push and pull factors and “the role of the black family and friend networks, but still tended to be weak on the historical factors that led to and persisted through the migration.” During the 1950s scholars turned away from migration studies and tended to focus on class issues and race relations.¹³⁴

The ghetto model of the 1960s and 1970s “treated the black migration as a historical process, incorporated the push-pull explanation of the pattern, and, most of all, analyzed its impact on the process of ghetto formation.” However this model did not pay enough attention to black agency or the impact of migration on class. Scholars focused primarily on urban housing and tended to downplay migration as a social process. While some scholars neglected working-class formation, later scholars did examine the connection between migration and working-class life, as well as black agency, but still emphasized the “racial violence, urban poverty, alley life, and militant race consciousness that resulted there from.”¹³⁵

The proletarian model, of which Trotter’s *Black Milwaukee* is the first major example, looks at migration as a historical process and focuses on class, especially the rise of the urban industrial working class. The major intervention is that Trotter emphasized black agency rather than portraying them as unwitting and ill prepared for their move north and the life they were forced to create there. Trotter’s work set the stage for much of the improved scholarship on African Americans that has emerged in the last twenty-five years.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1, 9, 12

¹³⁵ Ibid., 14. The classic ghetto studies are Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* and Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto* (1967).

There are criticisms of the work of course. Trotter himself says it “gives inadequate attention to the roots of black migration in the southern black experience, including the role of black kin and friendship networks.”¹³⁶ Others have said the book does not delve deeply enough into lives of Milwaukee’s black residents and that it is particularly lacking on gender issues. There is also some question of how far the proletarianization model can be pushed, especially in an era of deindustrialization.¹³⁷ And because the book ends in 1945, Trotter missed the key period of black migration to Milwaukee and hence did not push his proletarian analysis into the city’s most crucial era of decline. Trotter addresses this somewhat in the Second Edition with an epilogue that focuses on African Americans in Milwaukee in the late twentieth-century, but it is really just an overview of some of the major issues that arose in that period. Nonetheless, despite the criticisms, *Black Milwaukee*, and Trotter’s subsequent work, have had a profound influence on the field.¹³⁸

James Grossman’s *Land of Hope* looks at the early Great Migration with a focus on the people who arrived in Chicago. His major intervention is that he focuses on the participants themselves and their adjustment to northern urban life in gleaning a larger meaning from the Great Migration. Grossman says most other studies have focused on institutional issues or viewed the people merely as pawns in larger social and economic changes. He argues that, “the migrants represent a crucial transition in the history of Afro-Americans, American cities, and the American working class.” He notes that within the interaction of several forces, north and south, the migrants made choices that

¹³⁶ Trotter, *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective*, 2.

¹³⁷ See Arnold Hirsch, “Second Thoughts on the Second Ghetto,” *Journal of Urban History* 29(2003): 298-309.

¹³⁸ Earl Lewis, “How *Black Milwaukee* Forever Changed the Study of African American Urban History,” in Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 326.

influenced not only their individual experience, but also the way northern cities were shaped. In this way he demonstrates the agency of African American migrants in ways that few other studies have.¹³⁹

Grossman begins by examining the motivations for people to move north, but he portrays it “as a conscious and meaningful act rather than as a historical imperative.” In this way he takes into account all the nuanced factors that went into this life altering decision. He then explores the experiences of these black southerners when they first reached the north and how their approach shaped the institutions and the city itself. The second half of the book focuses on Chicago, but larger themes can be gleaned from this study that can be applied to other northern cities. He looks especially at how migrants interpreted class, race, and gender in the migration process. He argues that migrants’ “consciousness of racial categories” was especially influential in the development of African American communities that were often segregated away from the workplace and focused more on black institutions. He further argues that many migrants felt that escaping the southern racial categorization would allow them better prospects for social mobility, but they often found that they were undermined by “northern racism, the business cycle, and class relations.”¹⁴⁰ Grossman’s study is one of several that emerged soon after Trotter’s *Black Milwaukee* and has been credited with offering a new perspective on the Great Migration. It too escapes the race relations and ghetto models and offers a refreshing look at the migrants as individuals with power over their lives.

In his book *The Southern Diaspora*, James Gregory is one of the few scholars to discuss the migration of both black and white Southerners. He examines how the large

¹³⁹ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

movement of people influenced the urban areas where they arrived as well as the effect the migration had on social life, popular culture, religion, and politics. Gregory acknowledges that “African Americans and whites left the South for somewhat different reasons, moved in somewhat separate directions, and interacted on very different terms with the places where they settled,” but says the migrations were related. He says the side-by-side comparison shows that the standard stories of both black and white southerners do not tell the full story in that they do not give enough credit to individual agency. He further argues that the experiences of white and black southerners were often intertwined, especially in religion, music, and politics. One of the important outcomes Gregory demonstrates in this book is the complex interplay between region and race as dynamic social phenomena. Thus his work allows one to see how the dual migration streams overlapped and that the interaction of the migrants in their new settings had significant meaning for the United States especially in the areas of civil rights, popular culture, and religion.¹⁴¹

Jazz is by no means solely the province of African Americans so Gregory’s work is useful in that it compares the experiences of black and white southern migrants. Since black and white jazz musicians have moved about the country extensively, their experiences often mirror those of southerners who migrated for better opportunities especially in the interaction between musicians and between musicians and the audience. Gregory’s study is also interesting because unlike most migration studies, he devotes a fair amount of attention to popular culture and music. He sets the most extensive section on jazz in his discussion of ‘Black Metropolises,’ where he points out that jazz increased the visibility of African Americans and thus influenced the interaction between blacks

¹⁴¹ Gregory, *Southern Diaspora*, 5-6.

and whites. He further argues that this interaction and the southern migrants influenced other areas of popular culture such as fashion and language.¹⁴² This discussion of jazz, plus his innovative look at southern migration, is enlightening when applied to the Milwaukee story where the 'black and tan' clubs provided one of the few areas of black and white interaction in the city prior to the 1960s. However, in Milwaukee the influence of southern culture was felt more profoundly in the black community than in the white community that was still dominated by ethnic immigrant influences.

Following the lead of Trotter and others, recent scholarship has emphasized that the migrants were not a homogenous group. Early studies portrayed the migrants as poor sharecroppers who were forced out of the South either by agricultural problems such as drought and boll weevil infestation or the desire to escape Jim Crow discrimination. However, historian Stewart Tolnay argues that the migrants were a much more heterogeneous group that was motivated by a variety of factors. He further argues that it is likely that the reasons for leaving the south changed over time as economic and social conditions changed.¹⁴³ By the 1940s agricultural reorganization had shaken up the sharecropping arrangement in the South. This combined with a lack of industrial and urban jobs to provide economic motivation for southern blacks to move north. In addition there were social factors such as the opportunity for better education, the ability to escape overt racism and racial violence, and the chance for political participation that motivated migrants. As a result the second wave of black migration, what is commonly called the Second Great Migration, involved much greater numbers than the first wave.

¹⁴² Ibid., 135-136.

¹⁴³ Stewart Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond" *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 212.

Scholars have demonstrated several factors that influenced where migrants chose to move to and where they ultimately settled. One factor was ease of transportation. Since most migrants traveled by rail or bus, they tended to follow the major north-south lines of the day. Thus, migrants from Louisiana and Mississippi often ended up in Chicago (and later Milwaukee), while those in the more eastern Southern states ended up in Philadelphia and New York.¹⁴⁴ Another factor that influenced migrants was how comfortable they felt in a city. Communities such as those in Detroit and Chicago that offered “stronger ‘ethnogenic’ support...and eased the adjustment for newcomers” tended to draw higher numbers of migrants.¹⁴⁵ And this concept of comfort combined with the influence of friends and family who had already moved created patterns of ‘chain migration.’ Thus, with improved transportation, increased supporting institutions, and greater numbers of acquaintances in the North, migration increased dramatically after 1940. As Nicholas Lemann states, between 1910 and 1970 6.5 million blacks moved from the South to the North, 5 million of these after 1940.¹⁴⁶

The Second Great Migration had a much stronger effect on Milwaukee than the first. Though the greatest percentage increase in black population occurred between 1920 and 1930 this is distorted by the strikingly small number of African Americans in Milwaukee at the time. For example the black population of Chicago in 1920 was nearly fifty times that in Milwaukee. Between 1940 and 1970 the African American population of Milwaukee increased by 1200 percent, much of this due to migration from southern states. In this period the percentage of blacks in the overall population increased from

¹⁴⁴ For examples see Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

¹⁴⁵ Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration,’” 217.

¹⁴⁶ Lemann, *The Promised Land*, 7.

1.5 percent to 14.6 percent (see Tables 1 and 2). This rapid increase in population had a profound effect on both the black and white community of Milwaukee.

Table 1: African American Population in Milwaukee					
City Population			African American Population		
Year	Population	Percent Increase	Population	Percent Increase	Percent of Total Pop.
1850	19,963		98		.49
1860	45,140	126.12	106	8.16	.23
1870	71,440	58.26	176	66.04	.25
1880	115,587	61.80	304	72.73	.26
1890	204,468	76.90	449	47.70	.22
1900	285,315	39.54	862	83.96	.30
1910	373,857	31.03	980	13.69	.26
1920	457,147	22.28	2,229	125.45	.49
1930	578,249	26.49	7,501	236.52	1.30
1940	587,472	1.59	8,821	17.60	1.50
1950	637,392	8.5	21,772	146.82	3.42
1960	741,324	16.29	62,458	186.87	8.43
1970	717,372	-3.20	105,088	68.25	14.6
1980	636,210	-11.32	145,850	38.79	22.9
1990	628,088	-1.28	189,408	29.86	30.2

Adapted from O'Reilly, *People of the Inner Core North*, 5; Sammis White, *Toward Housing and Community Development Policy for Milwaukee* (Milwaukee Urban Observatory, 1974), 24, 52-53; *City of Milwaukee Urban Atlas* (Planning Division, Department of City Development, City of Milwaukee, 2000), 7, 12.

Year	City	Total Population	Black Population	% Increase Black Pop.	% Black Population
1940	Chicago	3,396,808	277,731		8.2
	Cleveland	878,336	84,504		9.3
	Detroit	1,623,452	149,119		9.2
	Milwaukee	587,472	8,821		1.3

1950	Chicago	3,620,962	492,265	77.3	13.6
	Cleveland	914,808	147,847	75.8	16.2
	Detroit	1,849,568	300,506	101.5	16.2
	Milwaukee	637,392	21,772	146.8	3.4
1960	Chicago	3,550,404	812,836	65.1	22.9
	Cleveland	876,050	250,889	69.7	28.6
	Detroit	1,670,144	482,260	60.5	28.9
	Milwaukee	741,324	62,458	186.9	8.4
1970	Chicago	3,366,957	1,102,620	35.7	32.7
	Cleveland	750,903	287,841	14.7	38.3
	Detroit	1,511,482	660,428	36.9	43.7
	Milwaukee	717,372	105,088	68.3	14.7

Adapted from Paul Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee," 232.

Contemporaries and scholars alike often portrayed these new southern migrants as ignorant and unfit for city life. For example, historian George Groh argued that many southern blacks were ill prepared for life in northern cities. But, he also said that the cities were either unwilling or unable to adequately care and provide for the new arrivals; there were not enough jobs, the housing was substandard, there was a lack of educational opportunities, and limited or non-existent social programs.¹⁴⁷ In 1960 *The Milwaukee Journal* published a series of articles that examined the conditions of African Americans in Milwaukee. Despite being generally sensitive in its treatment of the subject, the authors often described the new migrants as culturally ignorant of city ways. For example they state that, "a white who moves from a Wisconsin farm to Milwaukee has minor adjustments to make. A white moving from the rural south to Milwaukee has some larger adjustments ahead of him. When a Negro family—as has frequently happened in recent years—leaves a rural southern shack and moves to Milwaukee, the

¹⁴⁷ George W. Groh, *The Black Migration: The Journey to Urban America* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1972).

adjustment sometimes becomes almost insurmountable.”¹⁴⁸ Often the migrants were viewed with suspicion by both blacks and whites in their new cities as northerners interpreted the “migrants’ southern ways” as “signs of laziness, ignorance, and dangerousness.”¹⁴⁹

However recent scholarship demonstrates that many of these migrants made stops in towns and small cities on their way to the large urban centers. Thus they were “better prepared for life in urban America than we are accustomed to believing.”¹⁵⁰ Even with lower levels of education and lower status jobs, southern migrants were “more likely to be employed, had higher incomes, and were less likely to be on public assistance” than their northern counterparts.¹⁵¹ In addition southern migrants tended to have stable families with more married couples that lived together, fewer children born out of wedlock, and more two-parent homes. This was despite claims that migrants’ “standards of housekeeping, moral traditions, the role of the male in the family, the importance placed on housing as a status symbol...and other factors sometimes vary from the accepted standards of the community.”¹⁵² There is no doubt that many migrants struggled, and many of these may have returned to the South, but some number found at least marginal success in northern cities.

In Milwaukee all of the themes described above were quite evident. Prior to 1955 many of the people who migrated had made at least one prior move, often from rural setting to town or small city. The migrants were a mix of agricultural and semi-skilled workers who probably had broader employment experience due to these moves than is

¹⁴⁸ “Housing Woes Caused by Variety of Factors” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1960.

¹⁴⁹ Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration,’” 218.

¹⁵⁰ Trotter, ed. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective*, xi.

¹⁵¹ Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration,’” 218-219.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 220; “Housing Woes Caused by Variety of Factors” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1960.

typically portrayed. After 1955 more people came straight to Milwaukee from their homes in the South, many of them influenced by friends and family already in the city. Institutions such as the church, social groups, and entities that helped migrants find jobs like the Milwaukee Urban League, also played a role in where migrants settled. Migrants to Milwaukee were often motivated by southern racism, but this was generally secondary to the economic oppression they faced in the South. Once in Milwaukee migrants found improved educational and economic opportunities, but also faced similar problems to what they experienced in the South including segregation, occupational limitations, problems with housing, and discrimination in general.¹⁵³

Early accounts of black migration tended to portray the migrants as mindless workers who moved north simply because they were forced by the conditions in the South. However many scholars, from Nell Irvin Painter to James Grossman, emphasize that migrants were not passive, but rather made conscious choices to move in order to improve their social and economic situation. The process of migration gave people power and “Milwaukee’s black migrants had this kind of positive effect on their own lives.”¹⁵⁴ Amiri Baraka asserts that migration “was a decision Negroes made to leave the South, not an historical imperative” and that this decision was part of blacks reinterpreting their place in America. Ultimately he argues that this was the same kind of movement that made jazz possible.¹⁵⁵ In his final assessment Hamilton writes that, “Milwaukee proved to be the ‘semi-Promised Land’ for black migrants.”¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless

¹⁵³ For a more detailed look at the motivations and experiences of African American migrants to Milwaukee see Hamilton, “Expectations and Realities” and Paul Geib, “From Mississippi to Milwaukee”.

¹⁵⁴ Geib, “From Mississippi to Milwaukee,” 230.

¹⁵⁵ Baraka, *Blues People*, 96.

¹⁵⁶ Hamilton, “Expectations and Realities,” 84.

this large influx of southern African Americans had a profound impact on the black community in Milwaukee, the city as a whole, and ultimately Milwaukee's jazz scene.

Black Milwaukee in the 1950s

Historically the land area of Milwaukee has been small. As Milwaukee's population increased dramatically in the late 1800s and early 1900s the city became extremely crowded. In fact, in the 1920s Milwaukee was second only to New York City in terms of population density.¹⁵⁷ The African American district was even more densely populated than the city at large and the rapid migration of southern blacks that began with World War II pushed the area beyond the established boundaries. Despite efforts to expand Milwaukee's land base by annexing surrounding communities, housing discrimination and other factors confined the black population of Milwaukee to a rather small area of the city that became known as the "inner core." This area led a polar existence because it contained some of the worst housing and was home to many of the worst social and economic conditions in the city but at the same time it was the heart and soul of the African American community.

These conditions were not unique to Milwaukee. Before finding a job southern migrants had to find a place to live, and the black neighborhoods in northern cities were generally in the worst areas, had dilapidated housing, and lacked facilities.¹⁵⁸ After World War II there was a severe housing shortage in Milwaukee that city officials worked hard to overcome. The city built several housing projects intended for veterans and began an aggressive annexation policy that expanded the area of the city

¹⁵⁷ John McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 45.

¹⁵⁸ Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration,'" 219.

dramatically. This eased the pressure on housing overall, but due to tactics such as redlining, blockbusting, and race based housing covenants, even those African Americans who could afford to move found it very difficult to find housing outside of the inner core.

In the 1950s an already grim housing situation in the inner core deteriorated even further as the African American population increased dramatically. As Mayor Frank Zeidler said in 1953, “The lack of bare shelter has disappeared, but there is a tremendous amount of substandard housing in which people should not be living.”¹⁵⁹ Prior to 1950 whites still made up the majority of residents in the part of the city that was considered the African American district. However, beginning in the early 1950s blocks that had at least seventy-five percent black residents began to emerge. By 1960 “a somewhat contiguous area of high black concentration became evident.”¹⁶⁰ Of the twenty-six census tracts that made up the inner core in 1960, nine were highly segregated (an average of eighty-six percent black residents) and twelve more were segregated (an average of sixty-six percent black residents).¹⁶¹ Crowding was also a problem as there were significantly more people per housing unit in black dwellings than white (see Table 3). In addition significantly more blacks than whites lived in housing that was old and rundown (see Table 4).

¹⁵⁹ Jack Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee: A Segregated City” in *Unequal Partnerships: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment in Postwar America* edited by Gregory Squires (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 182-183.

¹⁶⁰ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 21.

¹⁶¹ O’Reilly, *People of the Inner-Core North*, 8-9.

	Nonwhite	White
1940	3.4	3.3
1950	4.8	3.27
1960	4.1	3.17
1970	3.8	2.96

Source: Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 23.

	White	Nonwhite
Dilapidated and deteriorating structures	14.4%	44.7%
Structures built prior to 1939	69.0%	93.4%
Six or more persons per unit	8.7%	24.1%
One or more persons per room	7.5%	23.1%

Source: Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 24.

In the late 1940s city officials became more concerned with the state of the inner core located just north of downtown Milwaukee. The fiscal conservatism practiced by the Socialist governments of the 1920s through 1940s meant that very little had been done to maintain or redevelop the business district and the residential areas of the inner city. When Frank Zeidler, also a Socialist, became mayor in 1948 he committed to easing the crowding and shortage of quality housing in the city. Unlike most “downtown centered” redevelopment plans, Zeidler believed the key was to expand the city to create a decentralized metropolis that would take the pressure off the inner city. For Zeidler improved housing, especially public housing, was a key component of his plan. He hoped to create public housing on the periphery of the city for low-income residents that

¹⁶² Because census data at the time did not always distinguish between African Americans and nonwhites in general, the terms are often used interchangeably in the literature. In Milwaukee during the 1950s, blacks made up more than ninety-five percent of the nonwhites of the city so it is fairly safe to use the nonwhite data to describe the black population. For a discussion of this see O’Reilly, *People of the Inner-Core North*, 8.

would be relocated due to slum clearance.¹⁶³ However, this plan failed to materialize as boundaries in the region “hardened in the 1950s and as they did, became even more jealously guarded along class, and increasingly racial, lines.”¹⁶⁴

Ultimately, the focus on slum clearance and blight removal would have the greatest impact on the African American community. As black neighborhoods became more and more crowded and the housing stock continued to deteriorate, city officials and community leaders became convinced that blight removal was the key. The city engaged in studies and surveys to determine the nature and extent of the ‘blighted’ areas of the city and determined that the inner core was by far the worst. This area paid the lowest property taxes (\$9.93 versus a city average of \$47.32 in 1950), but required the most services. Crime was a problem as there were nearly fifteen times as many arrests in “a slum-blight area” as a “good area.” In addition health problems were significantly higher, especially rates of tuberculosis.¹⁶⁵ The studies and reports of the 1950s would greatly shape and impact urban renewal policies and practices of the 1960s.

As early as the late 1948 an attempt was made to deal with some of the problems of housing and ‘blight’ in the African American district. African Americans seized upon the city’s push for post-World War II housing to address housing issues in the black community. During World War II a housing project had been planned for black defense workers, but these plans were shelved when the war ended. However the project was given a new emphasis as part of blight clearance efforts. Even members of the black community were calling for blight elimination as an editorial in the *Milwaukee Globe*

¹⁶³ McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier*, 131-138.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁶⁵ William Manly, “Boundaries Wide for City Slum Area,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 14, 1954; William Manly, “Slum Dwellers Pay Up in Misery, Not Taxes,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 21, 1954; William Manly, “Slums Cost City, Yes, but Dweller Pays Most,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 23, 1954.

stated, “The proposed elimination from the so-called Lapham Park section of the city of blight, has met with the hearty appreciation of members of the immediate community.”¹⁶⁶ But this designation of the Sixth Ward (‘the black ward’) as the primary blight area of the city strengthened existing racial prejudices and beliefs that African Americans did not have the same values and interest in maintaining their homes as whites did. This had a lasting impact on Milwaukee redevelopment as city officials targeted black neighborhoods as the areas most in need of blight removal.¹⁶⁷

The Hillside Terrace housing project was built in 1948 and all 232 of its units were full by the end of the year. For those families that moved in this was welcome relief from the high rents and low standard of housing they had previously endured. However, in order to make space for this housing project numerous dwellings and businesses along the south side of Walnut Street had to be removed. As Kusmer and Trotter point out, throughout the country federal and state public housing projects provided housing for many African Americans, but “they failed to compensate for destruction of dwellings defined as ‘slums,’ ‘blighted,’ or ‘unfit’ for human habitation, including many buildings housing African American civic, religious, professional, and business organizations.”¹⁶⁸

Reuben Harpole, who lived in the area said, “That’s a sore spot with me.” He said important members of the community like Bernice Lindsey, the executive director of the North Side YWCA, owned property there that was taken away. In addition Harpole continued, “That Hillside housing project removed my grandfather, and us, away from

¹⁶⁶ “Survey Recommends Huge Program on Blight Elimination,” *The Milwaukee Globe*, July 10, 1948.

¹⁶⁷ Eric Fure-Slocum, “The Challenge of the Working-class City: Recasting Growth Politics and Liberalism in Milwaukee, 1937-1952” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2001), 447. For a discussion of these stereotypes see the eleven part series “The Blight Within Us...” in *Milwaukee Journal*, March 1954.

¹⁶⁸ Kusmer and Trotter, eds., *African American Urban History Since World War II*, 8.

there, and my mother had to purchase a [new] home. And so when they built the Hillside housing project, that was a deliberate move to try to control the African American community—to try to keep them from moving into other parts of the city.”¹⁶⁹ This was the first of many projects undertaken by the city in the name of urban renewal that affected African American homes, businesses, and institutions.

In 1957 work was begun on the Hillside Redevelopment Project, which affected the black business district south of Walnut Street between North Sixth Street and North Eleventh Street. The goal was to replace substandard buildings with better housing. However over 1400 people and dozens of businesses had to be relocated. The property owners were told they had to sell their businesses and properties or they would be taken through eminent domain.¹⁷⁰ This project created conflict within the African American community as many people approved of the blight removal while others opposed the fact that the city was going to buy the properties, but not the businesses. This meant that business owners who rented their property, or those who could not find a good spot to relocate, would not be compensated if they lost their business. Ultimately this undercut the economic options and growth potential for business in the community as the business landscape was further constrained.

Alderwoman Vel Phillips, who was a leader in the campaign for open housing in Milwaukee, called the project both “our challenge and our opportunity,” but “she was wholeheartedly in favor of urban renewal in this particular project.”¹⁷¹ In the end, although many of the removed residents were eligible, very few of them were able to

¹⁶⁹ Author interview with Reuben Harpole, April 26, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Vick, “From Walnut Street to No Street,” 98-99.

¹⁷¹ “Hillside Property Purchase to Begin this Fall; Little Opposition is Noted,” *The Milwaukee Defender*, May 29, 1957.

secure housing in the new project and ended up crowding into substandard housing in the surrounding neighborhood. In addition for many of the business owners this was the end of their enterprise as they either could not secure a new location, or were not able to remain close enough to their usual customers.

While poor housing conditions and the upheaval created by early urban renewal projects were the principal issue of the 1950s, they were not the only symptom of a community that was both restricted in its attempts at progress, and undergoing major change. War work had spurred the late migration to Milwaukee in the early 1940s and it was industrial jobs that continued to pull migrants throughout the 1950s. After major employers such as A.O. Smith and Allis-Chalmers opened their doors to black employees during World War II the heavy industry of Milwaukee became a source of jobs for many newcomers.¹⁷² These jobs were generally the lowest level positions and advancement was difficult, but they were a step up from the uncertainties of southern agricultural work.

The workers engaged in semi-skilled industrial jobs began to form a version of the black middle class. Many of these workers were relatively new arrivals that combined the wages of husband and wife and managed to acquire a little property where they raised their families. This group fell between a lower class of the unemployed and impoverished and an upper class of professionals, many of who were college trained. Though they experienced very little mobility, often due to racism and job discrimination, they worked hard and took care of their families, though remained “largely invisible between the underclass and the ‘black bourgeoisie.’”¹⁷³

¹⁷² Geib, “From Mississippi to Milwaukee,” 233-234.

¹⁷³ Hamilton, “Expectations and Realities,” 14.

Despite the presence of industrial jobs, unemployment was still high among African Americans. In 1950 unemployment rates were 9.4% for nonwhite men and 8.9% for nonwhite women versus 2.7% for white men and 2% for white women. And for those fortunate enough to find a job the vast majority of workers, approximately eighty percent, were employed in unskilled, semi-skilled, and service jobs. The other twenty percent held white-collar or professional jobs.¹⁷⁴ Employers often blamed the low numbers of African Americans in policy-making positions or visible jobs on a lack of training and education. They claimed a lack of qualified individuals, but often prospective black employees did not apply because they did not think they had a chance of getting hired.¹⁷⁵ By 1960 little had changed in the percentages of white-collar and professional jobs. There were a higher total number of people in these positions, but that was a function of population increase rather than a shift in employment practices. In fact the nonwhite unemployment rate rose to 11.5 percent in 1960. There was a slight rise in income over the decade, but African American workers still lagged far behind their white counterparts.¹⁷⁶

In explaining the economic condition of the black community, scholars and contemporaries placed much of the blame on the black migrants who they considered unprepared to participate in the urban economy due to having less education and skills than their predecessors.¹⁷⁷ Washington and Oliver wrote that the population increase in the 1950s “was not the growth of an economically secure community but rather the

¹⁷⁴ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Black Milwaukee*, 78.

¹⁷⁵ “Discrimination Over Jobs Found Widespread Here,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1960.

¹⁷⁶ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Black Milwaukee*, 78; O’Reilly, *People of the Inner Core North*, 23. In 1949 the average nonwhite family income was 61 % of white family income. By 1960 that number had risen to 72%.

¹⁷⁷ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Black Milwaukee*, 3; “Racial Problems up With Negro Increase,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 23, 1960.

growth of a segregated community characterized by high unemployment, poor housing, declining education facilities, and few opportunities for the mobility so characteristic of the white community.”¹⁷⁸ But, employment issues were only one component of the declining economy.

In the 1950s it became harder to maintain businesses in the Bronzeville area. As noted above many businesses had to close as a result of the Hillside housing projects. In addition the buying power of the neighborhood was declining. As Milwaukee annexed the communities that surrounded it many white residents of the inner core began to move to the periphery. In addition the G.I. Bill, suburban development, and affordable mortgages offered by the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Association, made it easier for white Milwaukeeans to move to the suburbs. This meant that fewer white people shopped in the Walnut Street and North Third Street business districts. And as stores and malls moved to the fringes of the city, many middle-class blacks began shopping there as well. The result was that only lower income African Americans were left to patronize the black businesses in the district.¹⁷⁹

Lack of education was often blamed for the problems that faced migrants in Milwaukee. However their children, along with all African American students, faced a Milwaukee public educational system that did not provide an education for black students commensurate with the education of white students.¹⁸⁰ The spatial segregation that created the African American district of Milwaukee meant that the schools in the

¹⁷⁸ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Black Milwaukee*, 4.

¹⁷⁹ Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration,’” 222; Vick, “From Walnut Street to No Street,” 75.

¹⁸⁰ For a much more detailed look at African American education in Milwaukee see Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Bill Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010).

community were segregated as well. Sociologist Charles O'Reilly argues that, "the fact that in large Northern cities Negro children long attended *de facto* segregated schools means that they were isolated from other pupils as effectively as in the 'separate but equal' schools struck down by the Supreme Court in 1954."¹⁸¹ Students in *de facto* segregated schools were far behind their white counterparts in all measures of educational attainment. Black children, boys especially, were significantly behind in age-grade placement, attended fewer years of school, had much higher drop out rates, and the black community had a much higher rate of functional illiteracy.¹⁸²

According to O'Reilly "school dropouts and failure to go on to higher education represent both a waste of talent for the total community and frustration for the individuals who fail to achieve academically."¹⁸³ There were some signs of improvement in the 1950s as students began to see some value in getting an education. One man said that there was a time when black youth saw crime or hustling as their only option to make good money and "there wasn't much incentive for him to stay in school and behave himself."¹⁸⁴ In the 1950s the job market loosened up slightly for educated blacks, which provided an impetus to stay in school. In addition the city made an effort to hire black teachers, though these teachers also faced discrimination and most ended up in predominately black schools.¹⁸⁵ During this decade school officials began to address some of the educational problems, but the massive protests over education in the 1960s demonstrate that their efforts were found wanting.

¹⁸¹ O'Reilly, *People of the Inner Core North*, 73.

¹⁸² Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 60-64.

¹⁸³ O'Reilly, *People of the Inner Core North*, 84.

¹⁸⁴ "Discrimination Over Jobs Found Widespread Here," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1960.

¹⁸⁵ "Schools Here are a Reflection of Largely Segregated Housing," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 29, 1960.

In addition to problems with housing, employment, and education, the migration of southern blacks exacerbated social problems in Milwaukee. A *Milwaukee Journal* article addressed the increase in the percentage of African Americans in the city between 1950 and 1960 and wrote that, “this modest statistic alteration in the city’s racial composition has created problems and aroused emotions disproportionate to the extent of the change.” The article goes on to posit the idea that if there had been a similar influx of Australians the city would have “managed without difficulty.”¹⁸⁶ Hamilton further argues that northern whites’ lack of experience with blacks may have created hostility as the black population became more visible.¹⁸⁷ However it is clear that discrimination took place in Milwaukee in the late nineteenth century when the black population was very small, so greater visibility could only have increased already existing hostility. Historian Stewart Tolnay says that as the number of African Americans grew, northern whites may have enlisted “additional discriminatory measures...to maintain the status quo,” which suggests strategic race segregation.¹⁸⁸ In Milwaukee this discrimination was evident in some areas such as housing, employment, and private clubs, but unlike the South there was little discrimination in the courts, voting, or public transportation. In other areas, such as public swimming pools, entertainment venues, restaurants and other public spaces, the situation was less obvious.¹⁸⁹ The discrimination also included subtle indignities such as ignoring a patron, while overt racist sentiments were withheld. The open-housing marches of the 1960s would later expose these deeply rooted racial attitudes.

¹⁸⁶ “Racial Problems Up with Negro Increase,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 23, 1960.

¹⁸⁷ Hamilton, “Expectations and Realities,” 54-55.

¹⁸⁸ Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration,’” 221.

¹⁸⁹ “Sometimes It’s the Little Things That Show Up as Race Friction,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1960.

White leaders also had concerns about the morals of Milwaukee's black residents. In 1948 there was a scandal involving white teenage girls and black men who supposedly came together to listen to "bebop, an extreme form of jazz" and engage in sex orgies. Mayor Zeidler called it "the worst wave of sex orgies in Milwaukee history."¹⁹⁰ Though officials seemed to acknowledge that the girls were complicit in their behaviors, there is no getting around the fact that they were consorting with black men. Incidents like this often led white society to assume the worst of all African American residents.¹⁹¹ White Milwaukeeans often referred to the "Negro problem" which constituted "a higher crime rate, the greater percentage of Negroes on relief, the amount of vandalism and juvenile delinquency, the poor housing, the disproportionate rate of illegitimacy, the undercurrent of violence in some dingy taverns and on some crowded streets."¹⁹² But what many white people did not realize is that most black residents also abhorred these problems and searched for ways to mitigate them. However, the vast majority of money for roads, lighting, playgrounds, schools, and other services was diverted to the outer parts of the city, which left the inner core prone to further deterioration.¹⁹³

By the late 1950s the Zeidler administration had turned much of its focus on social problems in the inner core to its taverns. There had been several incidents between tavern goers and the police that brought attention to the sheer number of drinking establishments in the African American district.¹⁹⁴ A study commissioned by the mayor's

¹⁹⁰ "Nab Juveniles with Negroes," *The Telegraph-Herald*, October 15, 1948; "More Arrests in Orgy Probe," *The Telegraph-Herald*, October 17, 1948.

¹⁹¹ An article in the *Milwaukee Journal* argued against this very phenomena saying, "Blanket indictments of a group because of the shortcomings of some of its members are not warranted." "Housing Woes Caused by Variety of Factors," May 24, 1960.

¹⁹² "Adjustments to North Yield Social Problems," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 30, 1960.

¹⁹³ "Private Business Fails in 'Direct' Slum Attack," *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 4, 1954.

¹⁹⁴ "Urge Taverns to Aid Police: Near Riots on Lower North Side Lead to the Request," *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 15, 1958.

office found that there were 354 taverns in the area. It declared that the problem is not the taverns themselves, but rather “the physical condition of the building, the character and attitude of the people who operate them, the behavior of the people who frequent them and their concentration in given areas that are prone to cause trouble.”¹⁹⁵ A *Milwaukee Journal* report estimated 550 taverns and said that, “drinking at the taverns is a source of much of the trouble with the police.” But it also mentioned that “taverns are the only social center that many of the neighborhood residents know” and wondered if reducing them would really solve any problems.¹⁹⁶ This assault on taverns was effectively an assault on jazz as Bronzeville taverns was the primary place to hear live jazz.

In an interesting study of black Milwaukee tavern culture, Frank Samuels discusses how minorities are spatially segregated within the city. This segregation isolates them from the larger social and economic life of that city, but also allows for a certain autonomy within the community. He says that blacks develop different behaviors and survival strategies that may or may not constitute a ‘culture,’ but “that the neighborhood tavern, as a social institution, is particularly significant to the social organization and processes in the urban Negro ghettos.”¹⁹⁷ A number of these taverns, which played a role that other community institutions could not, also had live music, often jazz. But, as became evident in the 1960s, these taverns, and the areas surrounding them, were marked for urban renewal projects that resulted in their eventual removal. This removal had a profound effect on the jazz scene and altered the entertainment landscape as clubs were forced to move or shut down.

¹⁹⁵ 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, 1960), 14.

¹⁹⁶ “Adjustments to North Yield Social Problems,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 30, 1960.

¹⁹⁷ Frank Samuels, *The Negro Tavern: A Microcosm of Slum Life* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1976), 2, 8.

The taverns were just one element of an interesting admixture of northern and southern culture that emerged in black Milwaukee in the 1950s. Even though established African Americans decried the manners and morals of newcomers, or called for efforts to help or acculturate them, elements of southern culture were making their way into Milwaukee's black society.¹⁹⁸ However, it was not necessarily a smooth transition. As Amiri Baraka describes, the migration of southern blacks created two black cultures in northern cities:

But the exodus produced not only a huge disparity between large groups of Negroes but opened up a space for even larger disparities to develop. There was now the Northern Negro and the Southern Negro, and the "space" that the city provided was not only horizontal; it could make strata, and disparities grew within the group itself. The Northern industrial city had given new form to the Negro's music; it had also, equally, proposed new reactions for him psychologically, which would soon produce new sociological reactions.¹⁹⁹

However, this clash of intra-racial class and cultural practices allowed for two overlapping features that brought the seemingly disparate groups together: eating establishments, where broader dietary commonalities remained obvious, and a nightlife that featured the 'new forms of music,' in this case jazz and blues. Some of the most popular restaurants in Bronzeville, such as Larry's Chicken Shack and Bill Mosby's chicken and barbecue joint Bill's Better Batter, were southern in nature.²⁰⁰ These restaurants often stayed open all night to cater to the jazz crowd. And this crowd may have been divided along class (and racial) lines, but when it came to the nightclubs all

¹⁹⁸ "The Loneliness of the New Comer in Milwaukee," *The Milwaukee Defender*, October 26, 1957. This editorial argued that Milwaukeeans were unfriendly and did not welcome new migrants. It perpetuates the image of the backward, unprepared migrant struggling in the big city: "The Negro migrant needs our help. And we need his—desperately! After all, the adjustments he will have to make are colossal, strenuous, and difficult...He is almost a helpless victim of the mass resentment engendered by his forced ghetto living...Only by alert and rapid adaptation of program can we lead these moving masses to put down their roots in our community, thought and life."

¹⁹⁹ Baraka, *Blues People*, 121.

²⁰⁰ Harpole interview, April 26, 2012. Larry's Chicken Shack was formally called Larry's Frozen Custard, but according to Harpole locals referred to it by its colloquial name.

groups “claimed them as a part of their own personal geographies.”²⁰¹ In this way, participants in the jazz community integrated southern cultural influences into northern patterns of life.

Despite the problems in the African American community, in the 1950s it was still very much a community. Many bemoaned a lack of leadership, but there indeed were local leaders in the community.²⁰² There was the tailor and business owner C.L. Johnson, YWCA executive director Bernice Lindsey, Reverend Fisher of St. Marks A.M.E., bankers Ardie and Wilbur Halyard, attorney James Dorsey, and others. However, many of these leaders were members of the established black bourgeoisie and often could not, or chose not to, relate to the new migrants. Perhaps this is why so many within and without the African American community felt there was a lack of leadership. Nonetheless, there was culture and that helped hold the community together. There was art, music, sports, social groups, religious institutions, and various entertainment options. Indeed, there was jazz. And while jazz may have had a limited impact on the community as a whole, for those who participated in the jazz world, the impact was profound.

Jazz in 1950s Milwaukee

Jazz reached its pinnacle in Milwaukee in the late 1940s and early 1950s. There were about two-dozen clubs that offered live jazz several nights a week during the 1950s that were very much a part of the social scene. In fact Walnut Street, the heart of Bronzeville and the location of many venues, was known by locals as “The Scene.” People got dressed up just to walk up and the down the street; even if they could not

²⁰¹ Adam Green, *Selling the Race*, 61.

²⁰² “Racial Problems Up with Negro Increase,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 23, 1960.

afford to really live it up, they still tried to look the part.²⁰³ Most Bronzeville clubs did not charge a cover and would let customers nurse a drink all night long. The jazz clubs were just part of the larger entertainment milieu as there were other taverns, the Regal movie theater, dancehalls, pool halls, restaurants, and record stores.²⁰⁴

But for many, jazz was the draw and the restaurants and other entertainment options just completed “The scene.” Guitarist and Milwaukee jazz legend Manty Ellis said, “Man you could find everything. Oh man, there was just clubs, and music all over the place. Guys were coming like, Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt...all the guys from Chicago used to come up.” Ellis was in his early twenties when he used to frequent “The Scene”: “Oh man, that’s all I did. Work a day job and stay out half the night” playing jazz in the clubs or just hanging out.²⁰⁵ For blacks in Milwaukee, and many whites as well, this was the center of the local entertainment universe.²⁰⁶

Not all the clubs were located in Bronzeville however. By the 1950s the African American district had expanded due to migration and early urban renewal projects. As the neighborhoods moved north and west and buildings were razed, jazz clubs cropped up in these new territories as well. Also, there had long been a thriving downtown jazz district. Mostly located on Third Street—only a few blocks south of Bronzeville—and Wisconsin Avenue, these downtown clubs drew the best local and national talent. Many of these venues were owned or controlled by organized crime—which could make it hard

²⁰³ Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012.

²⁰⁴ For more on Bronzeville entertainment see Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville* and Vick, “Walnut Street to No Street.”

²⁰⁵ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

²⁰⁶ For a lively, if somewhat fictionalized portrait of Bronzeville in this era see Dave Lührssen, “Walnut Street Rhythm,” *Milwaukee Magazine*, August 1993.

to get a gig—but once in the door they treated the musicians well.²⁰⁷ Some downtown club owners and managers may have been resistant, but these clubs almost certainly had black staff members, and black musicians like Manty Ellis played there frequently.²⁰⁸

Another important aspect to Milwaukee jazz in the 1950s was that the musicianship was had reached an impressive level. In fact this period may have had the best group of musicians playing locally over the span of several years. There were a number of established musicians such as saxophone players Jimmy Colvin, Leonard Gay, and Bobby Burdette, trumpeter Frank Gay, and pianist Loretta Whyte who were still on top of their game. At the same time a new crop of very talented musicians such as pianist and saxophone player Billy Wallace, organist Beverly Pitts, saxophone player Bunky Green, pianist Willie Pickens, and pianist and guitarist Manty Ellis were on their way up. In addition a vast array of national touring talent came through the city, often for extended stays. Sometimes these musicians would bring their whole group, but at other times they would have Milwaukee musicians back them up. Ellis said that many touring jazz musicians came here. “Milwaukee was a hub,” he recalled. “We were featuring more jazz here than just about any place in the country. And I rubbed shoulders with all of them.”²⁰⁹ In this way local jazz artists were able to both hone their skills and establish a national reputation, at least among other jazz musicians. As jazz musicians moved

²⁰⁷ For an interesting account of the mob and jazz see Ronald Morris, *Wait Until Dark: Jazz and the Underworld, 1880-1940* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980). Though he is writing about an earlier era he argues that mobsters were essential to jazz musicians gaining their fame and popularity. Further he says that the traditional image of ruthless mobsters is overblown especially when it comes to their relationship to jazz musicians. He points out that jazz musicians tended to say that the mobsters had been good to them and paid well. Ultimately he claims that it was mobsters that made jazz as popular as it was.

²⁰⁸ Adekola Adedapo said the downtown clubs were resistant to black musicians, but Manty Ellis, who played in these clubs, refutes this. Adedapo Interview, March 27, 2012; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

²⁰⁹ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

about the country they not only shared ideas about the music, but musicians as well. Some Milwaukee musicians, even those that did not tour, became well known among national jazz circles because of the migratory nature of the music.

In the early 1950s Milwaukee could brag of a vibrant jazz club scene. In this period the Flame and Moon Glow continued to be two of the most prominent jazz clubs in the city. James “Derby” Thomas, the owner of the Flame, moved to Milwaukee in 1922 and worked a number of jobs before he opened the club in 1945.²¹⁰ A German real estate developer and tavern owner owned the building, located at 1315 North Ninth Street, but he sold it to the Elk’s Club in 1949. However Thomas was allowed to maintain his club. Thomas was married to Loretta Whyte, a pianist and organist, who also managed the house band.²¹¹ Whyte was a fine musician in her own right who often played at the Schroeder Hotel downtown and was in Bernie Young’s band for a number of years. The Flame often featured a floorshow that was choreographed by Betty Conley, a dancer out of Chicago, and featured the husband and wife team of Satin Doll and La Cricket. The Flame was arguably the most popular ‘black and tan’ in Milwaukee and on weekend nights the audience was about half white.²¹²

In addition to the house acts and traveling artists, singers, dancers, and comedians, the Flame booked top-notch jazz musicians.²¹³ Some were local, like Jimmy Dudley, Leonard Gay, and Mayme Myrick and others were national. Duke Ellington, who enjoyed performing in Milwaukee, made a handful of appearances at the Flame over the

²¹⁰ There is some question as to this 1945 date. Multiple sources list it as the date the club opened, but then the Flame had a large 10-year anniversary party in late 1957. Either way the club opened sometime in the mid-1940s.

²¹¹ Whyte took Thomas as her last name, but kept Whyte as her professional name.

²¹² Vick, “Walnut Street to No Street, 39-40; *Negro Business Directory of the State of Wisconsin*, M.E. Shadd, ed. (Milwaukee, WI, 1950, 1951, 1952); Amy Silvers, “Thomas Loved Performing Jazz,” *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, May 15, 2008.

²¹³ *The Milwaukee Globe*, June 12, 1948.

years. In 1957 Ellington and members of his band were on hand when Derby and Loretta (Whyte) Thomas celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Flame at the Wonderland Ballroom (another club owned by Derby Thomas). A highlight of the show was when Satin Doll (the dancer) danced to “Satin Doll,” a famous Duke Ellington song, and Ellington and members of the band joined the Bobby Burdette Combo for an impromptu performance.²¹⁴

Unfortunately, even the most successful Bronzeville clubs often struggled to make ends meet. By the late 1950s Thomas was struggling to pay salaries and meet his costs. Then in 1959 the Milwaukee Common Council shut down the Flame when a minor was caught urinating outside after allegedly drinking in the club. Thomas said it would cost him \$1,000 dollars to fight the edict passed by the Council so he just closed the club. A 1959 article about the closing of the club mentioned the wealth of talent that played there, “Not the highest paid, not the biggest names, not the most popular singers and dancers, but always the finest unheralded talent that never failed to ignite applause you could hear for blocks.”²¹⁵ In the mid-1960s Derby and Loretta tried to reopen the Flame at the former location of Thelma’s Back Door, a jazz club that had moved in the late 1950s. However, Derby died later that year and Loretta struggled to maintain the business as redevelopment projects ripped up the street around the club. Loretta Whyte continued to perform until 1990 and lived until 2008.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Miss B. Nash, “High Lites on Your Nite Lights,” *The Milwaukee Defender*, November 11, 1957.

²¹⁵ Jim Koconis, “Milwaukee’s Night Life Chatter,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 14, 1959.

²¹⁶ The sources on this second attempt at the Flame are not real clear, but according to *Wright’s Milwaukee Directory* there was a Derby’s Flame Tavern at 701 W. Juneau in 1964/65 and it was gone in 1965/66. The article about Loretta Thomas makes it sound like it was around longer than that, but this is unlikely; Silvers, “Thomas Loved Performing Jazz,” *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, May 15, 2008.

In 1930 Robert “Calumet Slim” Freeman opened a restaurant that soon became a tavern. In 1945 he named the club Moon Glow, though it apparently had been known for jazz long before then. Moon Glow billed itself as Milwaukee’s “oldest black and tan” and was a rival of the Flame in terms of musicians and audience. Like the Flame, shows at the Moon Glow had a variety of talent including singers, tap dancers, and blues musicians. The club was longer and narrower than the Flame so it probably did not have the same elaborate floorshow, however Betty Conley also worked there for a number of years as a producer and mistress of ceremonies. Though the Moon Glow did not draw quite the national talent the Flame did, all of the best Milwaukee musicians played there and Leonard Gay’s Orchestra was the house band for several years.²¹⁷

Despite its reputation as one of the clubs to go to ‘for the action,’ the Moon Glow, like the Flame, represents the struggles club owners faced to remain viable in the Milwaukee market. First, there was the issue of obtaining a liquor license and then maintaining it against a capricious Common Council. The mob-run joints had a real problem with this as they needed a straight guy to front for them, but even honest business owners ran into problems. The record is murky, but for some amount of time in the early 1950s Derby Thomas actually held the liquor license for Moon Glow despite being owner of the Flame. Then in 1952 the Council suspended the license for thirty days because a woman had “solicited for prostitution” in the Moon Glow—she was arrested for trying to pick up a plainclothes police officer. Fred Myers, the Alderman of the Sixth Ward where the nightclub was located, vouched for Thomas saying there was no way he could be expected to know what the woman as up to. However, and despite

²¹⁷ Vick, “Walnut Street to No Street,” 38; *Negro Business Directory*, M.E. Shadd, ed. (1950, 1952); *The Milwaukee Globe*, June 19 and July 3, 1948.

having to vote three times, the Council overwhelmingly voted against Thomas.²¹⁸

Prostitution issues were a common occurrence in the Bronzeville taverns, sometimes with but often without the cooperation of the owners or managers.²¹⁹

The last years of Moon Glow become murky. Freeman and his wife, jazz pianist Mayme Myrick, lived next door to the 1222 North Seventh Street location and offered furnished rooms in the 1220 North Seventh location. Directory listings for 1950 show that Freeman had furnished rooms, but show 'no return' for the 1222 address. However, we know from the 1952 *Milwaukee Journal* article that Moon Glow still existed at the time. The 1955 directory listings show both addresses as vacant, but by 1960 Moon Glow has reappeared at the 1222 address. However, there is no listing for Robert Freeman at either address. In addition to not being listed in the directories in the late 1950s, there are no mentions of Moon Glow in the local press and no advertisements appear. Moon Glow continues to be listed until 1965, but Freeman makes no more appearances. To further confuse matters Vick, who wrote extensively about Moon Glow and the Flame, says in one place that Moon Glow closed in the early 1960s and in another that it closed in 1966 due to expressway projects.²²⁰

Most likely what happened is that Freeman gave up ownership of the club in the mid-1950s. This could have been due to financial or legal issues, or maybe he simply was ready to get out of the business. Vick notes that after Freeman left there was a succession of owners, though they must have kept the original location until the pressures

²¹⁸ "Suspend Night Club's Permit," *The Milwaukee Journal*, January 16, 1952.

²¹⁹ "Milwaukee News in Brief," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 7, 1973.

²²⁰ *Wright's Milwaukee Directory, 1945-1967*; Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street," 48; William Albert Vick "Milwaukee's Afro-American Owned Jazz Clubs, 1935-1967," (Unpublished paper, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, 1990), 19; *Milwaukee Defender, 1957-1958*.

of Milwaukee's redevelopment projects forced them out in the mid-1960s.²²¹ What is not clear is whether or not the Moon Glow of the early 1960s had live jazz, though the evidence seems to indicate it did not. As late as November 1973 a woman named Irene Spivey Salter was given permission to operate the Moonglow [*sic*] Tavern, now located at 2900 North Twelfth Street, when the previous owner Mrs. Johnnie Mae Jackson had to surrender her license after pleading guilty to soliciting prostitution. To take over the Moon Glow Salter had to transfer the license from her other club, Irene's Club Continental (located at former site of Thelma's Back Door and the brief reopening of the Flame) and close it down.²²² This type of transfer of ownership and possession of licenses was quite common in Milwaukee taverns among both black and white proprietors.

Another common theme among the Bronzeville clubs was frequent name and location changes. Thelma's Back Door is a classic example of both of these. Thelma's was another mainstay in the late 1940s and 1950s and was owned by Thelma and Felix Welch. Pictures show a classy place with a large ornate bar and patrons dressed to the nines. Top local talent such as Jimmy Colvin, Jimmy Dudley, Frank Gay, and pianist Mayme Myrick played there regularly. In addition some high power national figures including Gene Ammons and Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis performed at Thelma's over the years.²²³ Frank Foster, the arranger for Count Basie used to make regular stops at Thelma's to play with Bunky Green in the late 1950s.²²⁴ Thelma's Back Door is a good example of the transient nature of space and name that existed among the clubs at this

²²¹ Vick "Milwaukee's Afro-American Owned Jazz Clubs," 3-4.

²²² "Milwaukee News in Brief," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 7, 1973.

²²³ *Negro Business Directory*, M.E. Shadd, ed. (1950, 1951, 1952); Paul Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville, 1900-1950*; *The Milwaukee Globe*, 1948-1949; *The Milwaukee Defender*, 1956-1958.

²²⁴ Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012.

time. In an advertisement in the 1951-52 Negro Business Directory the establishment was located at 701 W. Juneau. In 1957 it moved to 908 West Center Street and in 1960 it became Thelma's Back Door and Calypso Room. Some time around 1963 Thelma's closed.²²⁵

There were several other Bronzeville nightspots that had jazz, but reflecting the migratory and improvisational nature of jazz and jazz clubs, many of these changed hands and moved frequently. Then as the 1950s progressed tastes changed and there was an economic downturn so the taverns had less and less live music. Nonetheless these venues certainly helped complete "the Scene." But the Walnut Street area was not the only place to hear great jazz. The downtown venues varied in type and environment, but they all drew top talent. The ballrooms and hotel bars of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the Schroeder Hotel, The Wisconsin Roof, and the Pfister Hotel still had jazz several nights a week. There were also several Italian owned restaurants and clubs that had jazz and other entertainments.

Arguably the most interesting of these was the Brass Rail. Formerly Tutz's, the Brass Rail opened in July 1956 at 744 North Third Street and remained there until the early 1980s. In the late 1950s this was a jazz club that had strip-tease dancers, though by 1960 it was a club that had strippers and maybe jazz on occasion. Under the management of Irvin "Izzy" Pogrob the Brass Rail drew an extraordinary array of national talent including, but not limited to, Gene Krupa, Teddy Wilson, and Lionel Hampton in 1957, Buddy Rich, Sarah Vaughn and Louis Armstrong in 1958, and Dave Brubeck in 1959. In between these stars the Brass Rail offered steady gigs to local musicians such as Manty

²²⁵ *Negro Business Directory*, M.E. Shadd, ed. (1952); *Wright's Milwaukee Directory*, (1955-1965/66).

Ellis and Bunky Green. This helped the local jazz community to remain viable even as pressures mounted on the Bronzeville clubs.²²⁶

However Frank Balistrieri, who was the head of organized crime in Milwaukee, owned the Brass Rail and in early January 1960, Izzy Pogrob was found dead. He had been shot nine times in the head and his body was dumped in a ditch in Ozaukee County several miles from his home. At the time theories for his murder were simple robbery, as he was carrying \$1500 in cash on him, or retribution for not paying a Chicago booking agency for some of the musicians he had brought in. Another rumor was that a boxcar of liquor had gone missing and Balistrieri accused Pogrob of stealing it. Regardless of the reason, Pogrob's murder was never solved and the Brass Rail never booked the same level of jazz talent.²²⁷

Other downtown clubs also booked high level national acts. For example Scaler's, located at 610 North Third Street, hosted stars like Chet Baker and Jo Jones in the mid-1950s. Max Roach did a weeklong stint in 1959 at Curro's located a couple blocks north of Scaler's at 821 North Third Street. Ramsey Lewis also appeared at Curro's during one of his many visits to Milwaukee. In fact Herbie Hancock got his start at Curro's when he was called in from Chicago to fill in for the pianist in a quintet fronted by Donald Byrd and Pepper Adams. Apparently they liked Hancock's playing so much they fired their regular pianist. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the Showboat Café at 618 East Clybourn had musicians such as Illinois Jacquet, Dizzy Gillespie, the

²²⁶ "Krupa Here, Pee Wee Hunt Next," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 8, 1957; Joe Boyd, "Rich Drums to Beat Band at Brass Rail," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 17, 1958; Jim Koconis, "Milwaukee's Night Life Chatter," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 22 and 28, 1958 and February 7, 1959; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012; Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012.

²²⁷ "Nightclub Man Slain!," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 8, 1960; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012; "From the Sentinel Files," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 8, 1970.

Nat Cole Trio and others.²²⁸ This demonstrates that Milwaukee in the 1950s was a destination for some of the best jazz musicians in the country. Part of this was its proximity to Chicago, but even moreso it was because the jazz community at the time could support both local and national talent.

These clubs could not always book national talent so they also hired the best local musicians. And though some musicians have claimed it was hard to get in if you were black, this was not the case for the elite musicians.²²⁹ For example Manty Ellis had a seven-day a week gig at Curro's for quite some time. In fact it was at Curro's that Ellis made the full time switch from piano to guitar. He said he was playing piano with Jimmy Colvin's group, but he felt like he was cheating on his guitar so he would bring it in and practice during breaks. One night he was practicing before the show started and Colvin told him to just play guitar that night. The band went without a piano player and Ellis never looked back.²³⁰

Other downtown clubs like the Lamppost, the Downtowner (also a strip joint owned by Balistreri), The Scenic Lounge, Fazio's (also had mob connections), and Basin Street booked lots of local talent, black and white, like pianists Frank DeMiles and Claude Dorsey, trumpeter Dick Ruedebusch, and sax player Berkeley Fudge. While there was certainly a division between black and white musicians, and the bands were rarely integrated, this was not set in stone.²³¹ By the late 1950s things began to loosen up

²²⁸ *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 10, 1954; Ralph J. Gleason, "Rhythm Section," *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 19, 1959; *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 4, 1959; Bobby Tanzilo, "Jazz clubs upped old Milwaukee's hipster quotient," OnMilwaukee.com, November 8, 2004, accessed July 7, 2012, <http://onmilwaukee.com/music/articles/jazzpast.html?viewall=1>; *The Milwaukee Globe*, 1948.

²²⁹ Adedapo Interview, March 27, 2012

²³⁰ Rich Mangelsdorff, "Profiles in Jazz: Manty Ellis," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 3, 1980. Ellis held this gig while working ten-hour days at Heil Co. as a sheet metal technician and raising a family.

²³¹ "Places to Go and People to See," *The Milwaukee Star*, May 9, 1970; Corenthal, *The Illustrated History of Wisconsin Music*, 370-375

as white and black musicians jammed together in some of the Bronzeville clubs.²³² This became an important learning environment especially for white musicians that wanted to play bebop and hard bop rather than the dance music they generally played for paying gigs. There were other clubs such as The Tonic and Rickey's Birdland scattered around Milwaukee, but Bronzeville and the downtown clubs were really the two jazz hubs at the time.

In the 1950s three important themes emerged among Milwaukee's jazz musicians. The first was a slow passing of the torch from the stars of the 1940s to the rising crowd of the 1950s and beyond. Musicians like Leonard Gay, Jimmy Dudley, Holder Jones, Loretta Whyte, and Bert Bailey continued to play, but more importantly they helped give rise to the next generation of talent. Bert Bailey had been the leader of the popular 1930s band Bert Bailey and his Brown Buddies that provided the start for Jimmy Dudley and Claude Dorsey among others. Other musicians like Frank Gay, Jimmie Colvin, and Dorsey formed a bridge from the older generation to the new, as they were still quite active throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. Many of these musicians had played with some of the superstars of jazz and were able to pass on wisdom to the young players. Colvin for example played with Charlie Parker, Don Redman, and Wardell Grey over the years before settling down in Milwaukee.²³³ Frank Gay, who played with the Bernie Young band and Leonard Gay when he was young, then played with young musicians like Bunky Green, Willy Pickens, and Bobby Burdette as they were getting started.²³⁴

²³² Anonymous Interview, March 30, 2012. Kaye Berigan and Jack Caryl, white trumpet players, were some of the first local musicians to be allowed to sit in on Bronzeville jam sessions. Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012; Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street," 49n26.

²³³ H. Clayton Bynum, "About Town," *The Milwaukee Defender*, February 14, 1957.

²³⁴ Tom Tolan, "Milwaukee Barber Frank Gay Doubled as Jazz Musician," JSONline, January 20, 2012, accessed July 3, 2012, <http://m.jsonline.com/137806213.html>.

Another musician with a short career in Milwaukee, but a lasting impact, was Dick Ruedebusch. Though he led a Dixieland style band he gave a start to some standout musicians like Jack Carr, Lee Burrows, and especially Sig Millonzi.²³⁵ This theme of passing the torch happened again in the late 1960s and 1970s as the new stars of the 1950s passed on their knowledge to the next generation. And that generation is currently repeating the process yet again with a group of young talented musicians, so this is a theme that continues.

The rise of the 1950s crowd also continued a theme that seems particularly strong in Milwaukee. For most local musicians there comes a time when they have to decide whether to settle down in Milwaukee, or pull up stakes and try elsewhere. It appears that very few musicians have made Milwaukee their base while continuously touring. Some have tried it, but few if any have made it last. Many of the musicians of the 1950s faced this decision. There have been a few musicians like Jimmy Colvin and Leonard Gay who chose to settle in Milwaukee after being on the road for a number of years. Others like Frank Gay and Manty Ellis were from Milwaukee, tried the road for a while, but ultimately returned home. Gay toured locally, generally playing for white audiences in small Wisconsin towns and Ellis went on the road with Stanley Turrentine and Sonny Stitt.²³⁶ There were some who seemed to end up in Milwaukee by accident. Rahsaan Roland Kirk was one of those, though he only stayed for about six months before moving on. Hattush Alexander was another—he came for a short gig and ended up staying for more than thirty years. Many of the musicians who stayed like Berkeley Fudge and Frank DeMiles never really considered the road to be a viable option.

²³⁵ Michael Drew, "Dick Ruedebusch Colleagues Honor Memory with Music," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1969.

²³⁶ Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street, 50; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

For those who stayed, an overwhelming number of them did it for family. Leonard Gay met his wife in Milwaukee and though he toured for a few years after they married, he gave up the road when he came home one time and his three-year old daughter did not recognize him.²³⁷ Berkeley Fudge got married at nineteen and had four children. He tried touring for a little while, but the realities of family life drew him back home. Fudge would travel east to New York and Philadelphia during the five or six week shut downs at the auto plant where he worked, but otherwise remained in Milwaukee.²³⁸ For others jazz was just part of who they were—it was an important part, but so was family and career.²³⁹ And finally, for many the road was just too unsure, too hard a life, and they preferred the security of the known jazz landscape in Milwaukee.

Yet others left Milwaukee for good soon after their careers showed promise. For many of the young musicians in the 1950s there was a strong need to break out of Milwaukee and test their fortunes elsewhere. Bunky Green is an extremely talented saxophone player who got his start in the Teenage Big Band with other stars-to-be like Frank Morgan, Willie Pickens, and Billy Wallace. In the early 1950s Bunky, Pickens, and Reuben Harpole went to New York City. They stopped at Small's Paradise—a mecca for bebop at the time—so that Pickens and Bunky could try to sit in on a jam session. They did not get to play, but Lou Donaldson, a star in his own right, introduced Bunky to Charles Mingus who gave him a job on the spot.²⁴⁰ Throughout the 1950s Bunky bounced in and out of Milwaukee—in fact in 1957 he announced he was bringing his family back. But by this time he had established a national reputation and could not

²³⁷ This story may be apocryphal, but it comes from interviews with Janice Gay, Leonard's daughter, by William Vick and John Schneider.

²³⁸ Rich Mangelsdorff, "Profiles in Jazz: Berkeley Fudge," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 17, 1980.

²³⁹ Anonymous Interview, March 30, 2012.

²⁴⁰ Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012.

be bound by Milwaukee.²⁴¹ He soon left and eventually became director of jazz studies at the University of North Florida while continuing to tour and produce albums.

Billy Wallace is another fine musician who got his start in Milwaukee in the late 1940s. He started out playing saxophone before he discovered that he had an almost preternatural ability at the piano. His skill and drive were a profound influence on Manty Ellis who marveled at his technical skill even at a young age. Ellis said Wallace was brilliant, “a harmonic genius, an Art Tatum type.”²⁴² Wallace left Milwaukee in 1951 at the age of 21 to work in Chicago with Illinois Jacquet’s band. Eventually he ended up in Denver and played with superstars like Johnny Griffin, Sonny Rollins, Max Roach, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis along the way.²⁴³ Willie Pickens is another pianist from that very talented group that moved on to Chicago. He stayed there, and like Bunky Green became an educator at Northern Illinois University. He also played on a number of albums and continues to play to this day. This phenomenon of musicians leaving Milwaukee for Chicago and especially New York continues, though most at least maintain ties to Milwaukee and return often to play. In this way Milwaukee’s small jazz community is part of the pipeline that connects directly to jazz hubs like Chicago and New York.

The last theme links the two previous themes in a very practical way. The reality is that very few jazz musicians get rich playing jazz—in fact the vast majority cannot even make a living solely as performers. This was, and is, very much the case in Milwaukee. Those that felt the call to make their living as musicians had to leave the city

²⁴¹ *The Milwaukee Defender*, August 3 and November 16, 1957.

²⁴² Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

²⁴³ Bill Milkowski, “Old Friends Come Home to Play Jazz,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 28, 1979.

to do it. For those that chose to stay this often meant working day jobs that had to pay a decent wage. It appears that it may have been possible in the 1940s to make it solely as a musician in Milwaukee, but even in the 1950s this became very hard to do. And in later decades it was virtually impossible. Many became educators of some sort, either teaching in the schools or teaching music.²⁴⁴ Manty Ellis worked a number of day jobs before eventually becoming a force in the jazz program at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. Berkeley Fudge and a number of other local musicians soon joined him there.²⁴⁵ Others became businessmen. Leonard Gay bought into a grocery store in 1952 and by 1962 had retired from music to run the store full time. His sausage became well known and was sold all over Milwaukee.²⁴⁶ Frank Gay became a barber and owned a barbershop from 1965 until he retired in the mid 1990s.²⁴⁷ By the late 1950s it was clear that no one in Milwaukee was going to get rich playing jazz and this certainly was not going to change as things got harder in the ensuing decades. Urban renewal and redevelopment projects affected the physical landscape, and the economic decline, unemployment, and poverty caused by deindustrialization caused the jazz community to shrink, thus constraining the options for musicians.

Interestingly, the migration of southern African Americans that was so prevalent in 1950s Milwaukee did not encourage longstanding impacts on the jazz scene. It appears that few if any of these later migrants were musicians and most did not have the resources to get involved as club owners or managers. The people who dominated the jazz scene were either earlier migrants who had established themselves, or native-born

²⁴⁴ Anonymous Interview, March 30, 2012; Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

²⁴⁵ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

²⁴⁶ Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street," 44.

²⁴⁷ Tom Tolan, "Milwaukee Barber Frank Gay Doubled as Jazz Musician," JSONline, January 20, 2012, accessed July 3, 2012, <http://m.jsonline.com/137806213.html>.

Milwaukeeans. And while one might expect the increased African American population to have expanded the jazz audience this did not happen.

One reason is that many of the new migrants could not afford to spend their limited pay in the jazz clubs. While taverns still proliferated and were heavily patronized, most had jukeboxes where people could get their musical fix for much cheaper. Also, changing tastes meant that there were simply fewer people interested in jazz. Finally, the white audience that had made the black and tans so popular had drifted away as many moved to the outskirts of Milwaukee and the suburbs. Many of them still patronized the downtown clubs and new clubs that emerged on the periphery, but few would make the trip into the deteriorating African American district. There were still a number of jazz clubs in 1960, and many of them had music several nights a week, but the downturn in the local economy coupled with an upturn in local redevelopment projects meant that many of the clubs were on thin ice. The spatial dislocation created by Milwaukee's urban renewal projects in the 1960s coupled with a loss of industrial jobs meant that the venues were limited and the patrons had fewer dollars to spend on entertainment.

The 1950s were a period of transition for the city of Milwaukee, and for jazz. At the same time as the city embarked on development projects and dealt with a large influx of African Americans from the South, the nature of jazz and its audience began to change. With the advent of swing in the 1930s jazz became America's popular music for both blacks and whites, however when bebop replaced swing in the late 1940s and 1950s much of the jazz audience moved away as the music required more work to enjoy.²⁴⁸

Randy Sandke argues that after World War II the "focus of the art world shifted from

²⁴⁸ Collier, *Jazz*, 207-208.

Paris to New York, and for the first time in its history, America began to take its role as cultural arbiter seriously.” Thus less value was placed on the vernacular arts and more emphasis was placed on ‘higher culture.’ Correspondingly jazz came to be considered high art and musicians were encouraged to push the limits of jazz. This meant that the general public, “in their never-ending thirst for music-as-entertainment, increasingly turned away from jazz toward new and simpler forms of danceable music.”²⁴⁹ Thus, as jazz lost its black audience in the 1950s the inner city clubs shut down and the music moved into clubs in the suburbs and white neighborhoods.²⁵⁰ This was also true in Milwaukee as the loss of audience and the pressures of redevelopment projects meant jazz clubs had to shut down or move. And as we will see this meant that jazz in Milwaukee was about to experience a major change.

²⁴⁹ Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet*, 108-109.

²⁵⁰ Collier, *Jazz*, 208.

Chapter 3

“Stormy”²⁵¹

Transition – Urban Renewal

In 1966 Penny Goodwin was a singing waitress at the short-lived Nauti-Gal Restaurant on Milwaukee Street in downtown Milwaukee. At the time her prospects were dim. For example two individuals who would become her most important supporters thought she was a lousy singer. But by 1971 she had improved enough to get a gig in the Crown Room at the Pfister Hotel.²⁵² Around that time Milwaukee pianist Ray Tabs saw her performing at Alfie’s on the north side of the city and decided to bring her in to sing with his trio. That began a fruitful musical relationship that lasted through the late 1970s. Tabs proved to be an excellent teacher, who Goodwin says, “brought me a much longer way than the few voice training lessons I’ve had here and there.”²⁵³ The group enjoyed a successful run at Sardino’s on Farwell during the mid-1970s. Enough so that it appears Tabs at least, and maybe Goodwin, was the rare Milwaukee musician making enough money to live comfortably and provide for his family.²⁵⁴

In 1974 Goodwin released her debut album *Portrait of a Gemini*, with Tabs on keyboards. The album was much more an example of 1970s soul than jazz, but the jazz elements are certainly evident. Interestingly, Seymour Lefco, a Milwaukee dentist with a handful of song writing credits, wrote two of the hits on the album specifically for Goodwin. Lefco, known as the “Jazz Dentist,” became an important figure in Goodwin’s

²⁵¹ Pianist Buddy Montgomery, who moved to Milwaukee in the late 1960s, included this song on his album *This Rather Than That* recorded in Chicago in 1969 for Impulse! Records. Milwaukee guitarist Manty Ellis appears on this track and one other on the album. Organist Melvin Rhyne, who moved to Milwaukee in the early 1970s, also appears on several tracks.

²⁵² Dave Novick, “Penny Good Worth Hearing,” *The Milwaukee Courier*, April 10, 1971.

²⁵³ Beth Slocum, “Discouraging Word Didn’t Faze Singer,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 26, 1974.

²⁵⁴ Larry Van Goetham, “When Ray Starts to Play, Night Spot is Quiet Spot,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 31, 1973.

life despite telling her in 1966 to quit singing. In fact Lefco fronted the money for Goodwin to record her album and organized her concerts. Lefco is an interesting Milwaukee character himself. As a dentist he treated a veritable who's who of jazz greats including George Shearing, Oscar Peterson, Anita O'Day, Ray Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, and Gerry Mulligan. Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown have recorded several versions of Lefco's songs, especially "You Look Good to Me." The story is that Lefco, who is white, had the African American Brown over for dinner in 1945 and they became friends. At some point Brown gave Lefco the music to "You Look Good to Me" so that he could write the lyrics.²⁵⁵ Lefco pointed out this interesting relationship of a white dentist writing lyrics for African American performers by joking that Goodwin, "objects. She says I don't write black enough for her. She says it comes out too Jewish."²⁵⁶

Around the time *Portrait* was to be released Goodwin discussed the difficulties of making the big time. She said it was less about talent and more about connections. "It is hard to make the big time. If it happens, beautiful. If it doesn't...I won't die. Because I love what I am doing."²⁵⁷ Goodwin had a successful run through the 1970s, performing in most of the major clubs in Milwaukee, but never did hit the big time. At some point it all must have become too hard, no longer fulfilling, or simply financially untenable because Goodwin decided to go back to school to be a teacher. And again Lefco was there to support her, if not financially then certainly emotionally, as Goodwin got her Bachelors and Masters degrees and became a Social Studies teacher at Roosevelt Middle

²⁵⁵ Amy Rabideau Silvers, "Lefco Could Clean Your Ivories and Tickle Them Too," *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 31, 2006.

²⁵⁶ Beth Slocum, "Discouraging Word Didn't Faze Singer," *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 26, 1974.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

School of the Arts.²⁵⁸ Later, Goodwin founded Generations in Jazz, an organization that brings together talented Milwaukee Public School students with professional Milwaukee musicians.²⁵⁹ In this way she was able to bring together the two passions of her life, music and teaching.

Goodwin's story is emblematic of the transitions that took place in the Milwaukee jazz scene during the 1960s and 1970s. As Goodwin was getting her start in the late 1960s most of the jazz clubs of the earlier generation were gone. Certainly the vast majority of the Bronzeville clubs no longer existed and the venues of the era reflected the movement of African Americans north and west of the original black district. This was partially due to redevelopment projects, partially economics, and in no small part a reflection of taste. In live performances Goodwin was primarily a jazz singer, though she sang in a variety of styles, picking songs because they moved her, not because of their genre. But her recording, *Portrait of a Gemini*, is pure 1970s soul. This reflects the changing tastes of this generation of Americans, especially the black audience. They would go to a club to hear jazz, but when it came time to purchase music, they tended to favor rhythm and blues and soul. Finally, Goodwin represents the passing of the torch that has been prevalent in the Milwaukee jazz community. First she succeeded with the support of Tabs and Lefco, and then she later found a way to give back to young musicians.

Some of the changes of the 1960s may have been inevitable, but in Milwaukee urban renewal and expressway projects played a significant role in creating a new jazz landscape in the city. On this landscape the jazz clubs were much more widely dispersed

²⁵⁸ Amy Rabideau Silvers, "Lefco Could Clean Your Ivories and Tickle Them Too," *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 31, 2006.

²⁵⁹ Jim Higgins, "Young Jazz Students Take Good Notes," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 2, 1991.

than they had been in Bronzeville so that each club became a discrete entity rather than part of a larger community. This spatial dislocation meant that patrons and musicians could no longer easily move from club to club, but rather had to make choices and decisions about where to go and how to get there. This was part of the process that undermined the jazz scene of the 1950s and forced the jazz community to reimagine the jazz landscape in the 1960s.

This chapter explores the urban renewal projects that Milwaukee undertook from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s and how they affected the African American community and jazz. It is in this period that the processes that created a vastly different jazz landscape were fully realized. At this time the African American and jazz communities were forced to accelerate the reinterpretation of their lives and this chapter details the mechanisms behind these changes. The chapter begins with a description of reasons for the redevelopment projects, what they did, and what the outcomes were. Next it looks at some of the major trends in the African American community during the 1960s and gives a brief description of some of the protests and tensions of the period. Finally, the chapter examines the jazz scene of the 1960s and how it changed over the course of the decade due to the influences of urban renewal, economics, and changing tastes in entertainment.

Urban Renewal and Expressway Projects in Milwaukee

Cultural studies and histories of Bronzeville tend to tell a simplistic version of the effect that Milwaukee development projects had on the neighborhood. The story

generally goes as follows: Bronzeville was thriving then the city came in and knocked down the buildings, put in a freeway, left people to fend for themselves, and the area has been struggling to come back ever since.²⁶⁰ In addition there is always a thinly veiled notion of race to these stories that belies the element of class. There is some truth to the way these tales are told as a disproportionate number of black residents were affected, but they tend to downplay the process of urban renewal and the years of study and analysis that went into the projects. Often class, as in working class or poor neighborhoods, determined the location of the projects as much as race. As the *Milwaukee Courier* argued in 1965, “urban renewal projects are greatly determined by economic and political influence.”²⁶¹ However, in Milwaukee this meant that the traditionally African American part of town with its high level of substandard housing and low level of political clout was situated in the heart of many of the redevelopment projects.

Throughout his terms as mayor (1948 – 1960) Frank Zeidler tried to mitigate the effects of outmigration and the lowered tax base that resulted from an increasing number of poor residents in Milwaukee. His goal was to make the city more attractive through slum clearance and redevelopment that focused on good housing. The Milwaukee Common Council also endorsed slum clearance, but “pushed the nonresidential construction agenda of the Greater Milwaukee Committee” that delayed public housing in favor of an interstate highway system and a public sports arena, and then branch libraries, public museum, firehouses, docking facilities, and bridges. It should be noted

²⁶⁰ Examples include Ivory Abena Black, *Bronzeville, a Milwaukee Lifestyle* (Milwaukee, WI: The Publishers Group, 2005); Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*; Alexander Shashko, “Blues, Bebop, and Bulldozers: Why Milwaukee Never Became a Motown,” *Wisconsin Academy Review*, accessed July 6, 2012, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.WAR00460003>; “Bronzeville: The Decline of Bronzeville: Urban Renewal and the Carving of Highways”, *MKEBronzeville*, accessed July 5, 2012, <http://mkebronzeville.blogspot.com/2007/05/blog-post.html>. Even Vick’s “Walnut Street to No Street” tells a version of this story, though it is slightly more nuanced.

²⁶¹ “Urban Renewal Term for ‘Negro Removal,’” *The Milwaukee Courier*, June 5, 1965.

that Zeidler also endorsed a number of these projects.²⁶² In 1949 the United States Housing Act, Title I provided federal aid to cities for slum clearance and blight elimination. In 1954 the U.S. Housing Act was expanded to provide for redevelopment, rehabilitation, and conservation and in 1958 the Wisconsin Blight Elimination and Slum Clearance Act provided for the creation of a Redevelopment Authority in urban areas to oversee redevelopment projects.²⁶³ With the state and federal government aid provided by these acts, Milwaukee was set to move forth on redevelopment projects.

Meanwhile in the late 1950s Mayor Frank Zeidler became increasingly concerned with problems in the inner core of Milwaukee and commissioned a study to examine the situation. This study provides evidence that the targets for redevelopment had elements of both race and class, “The area houses not only the major portion of the nonwhite population of the city, but also many of those who are economically deprived or socially unacceptable elsewhere.” According to the report to the mayor, 19.1 percent of the 105,647 residents of the inner core were ‘nonwhite’ as compared to a 3.6 percent ‘nonwhite’ population for the city as a whole. The study estimated that ninety percent of the nonwhite population of Milwaukee lived in the inner core and was especially highly represented in a few census tracks.²⁶⁴

The study looked specifically at 3,600 families within the inner core and found that over sixty-two percent of the parents were born in southern states, the majority of fathers were in semi-skilled or unskilled labor, and the majority of mothers performed

²⁶² Richard M. Bernard, “Milwaukee: The Death and Life of a Midwestern Metropolis” in *Snowbelt Cities: Metropolitan Politics in the Northeast and Midwest Since World War II*, edited by Richard M. Bernard (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 172-173.

²⁶³ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives* (Milwaukee, 1964), 11-12.

²⁶⁴ 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, 1960), 1, 8.

assembly or domestic work. There was a high rate of residential density or crowding in the area at eighty-two people per acre versus fifty-six per acre for the rest of the city. Rather than high-rise developments the density was due to cramming two or three dwellings on one lot, which left virtually no open space. Many of these dwellings were “economically and functionally outmoded structures” with pest infestations, garbage problems, defective plumbing, and poor housekeeping.²⁶⁵ Like many city officials the report placed a fair amount of blame on residents as it said, “It is thought that one of the many reasons inner core homes are in neglected condition is that Negroes customarily put no high prestige value on the visiting patter which would make cleanliness and orderliness of homes a matter of pride. Most of the inter-personal relationship between colored people in the area takes place in bar rooms, halls and on the streets. This naturally accelerates the deterioration of homes.”²⁶⁶

Such spurious claims aside, the report to the mayor did recommend several socially conscious and relatively race neutral, or at least race aware, ways to help improve the inner core. In other words it did not call for simple measures like razing the area, moving out trouble makers, or increasing law enforcement, but rather advocated working within the community to raise awareness of problems, to improve education, increase employment opportunities, and to raise health and housing standards.²⁶⁷

However, this report was released right at the end of Mayor Zeidler’s term and it appears little was made of it. When Mayor Henry Maier came into office in 1960 he dismissed

²⁶⁵ Mayor’s Study Committee, *Final Report*, 4-17. The study of 3,600 families was conducted in the area bounded by W. Juneau Ave on the south, the Milwaukee River or N. Holton St on the east, W. Keefe Ave on the north, and N 20th St on the west. It should be noted that this is a much larger area than what we are calling Bronzeville, but it does encompass that neighborhood.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7, 10, 17, 18.

²⁶⁷ Mayor’s Study Committee, *Final Report*, 20-31.

the report as “an incontrovertible (and almost indigestible) mass of facts, figures, statistics and bleak reports.” By 1964, plans were in the works for several heavy-handed redevelopment and expressway projects designed to stop the spread of blight and improve transportation.²⁶⁸

Of course redevelopment projects had begun long before then. As early as 1952, after a seven-year battle, the Common Council voted to approve a twenty-four mile 172 million dollar freeway system. At the time the project was estimated to be finished in 1966 or 1967.²⁶⁹ As noted in Chapter Two, the Lapham Park and Hillside housing projects were put in place in the 1950s at the expense of many homes and businesses. In 1958 the Common Council approved the North Belt extension of the freeway, but asked for modifications because of the large number of people that would be affected by an expressway placed immediately north of North Avenue.²⁷⁰ In 1961 the Community Renewal Program was authorized and two redevelopment projects began in the lower Third Ward and Hillside neighborhood. At this time the lower Third Ward was largely Italian American and the Hillside neighborhood was predominately African American. By 1964 these projects and others like them were in full swing.²⁷¹

The general goal of Milwaukee’s urban renewal plans was “the replacement of dilapidated structures by modern, useful buildings serving a wide variety of purposes.”²⁷² However it appears that a majority of the plans were focused more on the removal of blight than on replacing buildings. In fact there are swaths of the near north side of

²⁶⁸ Maier quote is in John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 365.

²⁶⁹ William Norris, “X-Way Plan Again Wins Council Vote,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 31, 1952.

²⁷⁰ “Okay Routes for Freeways,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1958.

²⁷¹ *Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*, 12-13; Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 366-367.

²⁷² Department of City Development, *Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program Summary Analysis* (Milwaukee, 1964), 1.

Milwaukee that are still empty today after the blight clearance of the 1960s. In a report on anticipated relocation needs the city broke down the workload as follows: urban renewal projects 9.1 percent, public housing 5.6 percent, code enforcement 37.9 percent, general public improvements 4.1 percent, and expressways 44.3 percent.²⁷³ Within some of these general areas there were plans for rehabilitation and rebuilding, but it would prove to be inadequate. And in light of the fact that the vast majority of the structures were removed for freeways, some of which were never built, one can see why blight removal actually increased the housing pressures in the inner core.

Relocation was the biggest problem for both residents and city officials. Despite granting approval of the expressways in 1952 no one had thought to perform a study about the relocation of the people in the path of the freeway projects. In 1957 the expressway commission finally ordered a study after Mayor Zeidler asked if they had a plan to deal with the estimated 20,000 people who would be displaced.²⁷⁴ The study looked at a seven-mile stretch of highway and when it was released in 1959, it estimated that 12,000 people and several hundred businesses would be forced to move over the course of five years. The area studied was the heart of the inner core and both Walnut Street and the Third Street business district would be affected. A housing shortage was inevitable, especially for black residents. At the time Milwaukee had approximately 5,300 vacant residences, but it was estimated that as many as 10,000 families would eventually be displaced. Furthermore, some number of those 5,300 vacancies would be

²⁷³ Relocation and Management Associates New York, *City of Milwaukee, Community Renewal Program: A Relocation Analysis* (New York, 1964), 32, 38-39.

²⁷⁴ "Survey Urged on Relocation," *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 29, 1957.

off limits to African Americans as housing covenants and redlining were still in full effect in Milwaukee.²⁷⁵

In 1962 the *Milwaukee Journal* ran a series of articles on the displacement of residents due to expressway and renewal projects. The first two articles painted a slightly rosier picture of the relocation process than one might expect. It pointed out that many of the people displaced by the Hillside project in 1957 were able to find low rent housing and that the total number of families to be displaced was lower than earlier estimates. It even quoted Arthur Gibson, who owned a popular hosiery and jazz record shop that was originally located on Walnut Street, “Oh, my rent is higher. My apartment costs more too—but business is much better. You might say I moved north with the people...and the city paid for my moving.”²⁷⁶ But in this case Gibson was one of the lucky ones—he received compensation and was able to find a good place to reopen his store. Subsequent articles in the series pointed to the problems that African Americans faced in trying to relocate. Because of discrimination most stayed in the area, some even moving into the path of ensuing projects. Richard Perrin, the director of city development, said there should not be a problem because as whites moved out of the northwest side it would open up space for blacks. But many blacks were hesitant to move into these areas because of the social pressures and hostility they might face. In addition there was the cost factor. Expressways were by far the biggest cause of displacement, but there was “no agency with legal responsibility to find alternate housing for these families as there [was] for

²⁷⁵ Paul Salsini, “Freeway Will ‘Evict’ 12,000 in Five Years,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 20, 1959.

²⁷⁶ Richard Vonier, “Displaced by Renewal Families Find Home,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 2, 1962.

those forced out by urban renewal or public housing projects.” In the end some families moved north and west, but many stayed crowded in the same areas.²⁷⁷

In 1964 the city commissioned a study to analyze the relocation of the 6,600 residents and 959 businesses that would be dislocated by projects between the years of 1963 and 1972. The study contains demographic and economic data that indicates that class and race were a factor in the areas targeted for development. For example, in Milwaukee 47.1 percent of whites lived in housing units worth less than \$15,000 and seventy-six percent of the whites to be relocated fell in this category. For nonwhites, 86.4 percent lived in housing units worth less than \$15,000 and 90.8 percent of those to be relocated were in this category. In addition, 38.1 percent of whites made less than \$6,000 per year and 55.1 percent of relocatees were in this bracket. Among nonwhites, 61.5 percent made less than \$6,000 and 71.6 percent of those to be relocated were in that category. These statistics indicate that economic class in addition to race was a factor in redevelopment project placement.²⁷⁸

However, race became a bigger factor in issues of rehousing and compensation, than in who was targeted for relocation. It is true that only 1.9 percent of the city’s white households were being relocated versus sixteen percent of nonwhite households, but the citywide population was so overwhelmingly white, and housing covenants sufficiently restrictive for nonwhite residents, that these numbers are not surprising. When it comes to rehousing dislocated residents the study says, “The greatest housing imbalance is in the supply of nonwhite, owner occupied housing units valued at less than \$15,000, and for rental units under \$40 a month.” The bulk of nonwhites being relocated would have been

²⁷⁷ Richard Vonier, “House Hunting Negro Faces a Difficult Task” and “Freeways Rate First in Displacing People,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 3 and 5, 1962.

²⁷⁸ Relocation and Management Associates, *Relocation Analysis*, 29-31.

looking for housing in this price range. In addition, rehousing was further complicated by the fact that the typical nonwhite Milwaukee family made \$4,842 per year versus the typical white family who made \$6,664. Compensation was also an issue in that generally only the owners of buildings, not tenants, got compensated. Tenants may have been eligible for moving expenses, but they had to meet certain qualifications such as having a three-year lease. In a population that moved frequently, as did the residents of the inner core, a three-year lease was rare. Ultimately the study indicated that there was enough housing available in the city, but left it up to the community (and the federal and state government) to figure out how to help those that needed it.²⁷⁹

That help was late in coming and inadequate in its effect. It was not until the late 1960s that a city official really questioned what was happening to displaced families. About halfway through his five-year term on the expressway commission Leonard Zubrensky saw a documentary on public television about what was happening to Milwaukee's displaced residents. This motivated him to finally speak up on their behalf and push for help in finding and paying for new places to live. Though his term was coming to an end in 1969 he felt the process was moving in the right direction.²⁸⁰ But for many it was too late. By 1969 Milwaukee faced a housing shortage, especially on rental properties and houses for larger families. A big part of this was the widespread displacement of families that outpaced new construction in the city by a large margin.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 32, 33, 60, 84-86.

²⁸⁰ Paul Hayes, "Few Lobby For Uprooted Families," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 26, 1969. Though the article does not say it the television program was almost certainly a documentary called "Pretty Soon Runs Out" that aired in April of 1968 on WMVS Channel 10.

²⁸¹ Chris Lecos and Sig Gissler, "Shortage of Family Rental Housing Nears Crisis," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 26, 1969.

An article in the *Milwaukee Journal* on the housing shortage opened with this line, “For more than a decade public programs and private enterprise have carved a path of destruction, in the name of progress, through Milwaukee’s heart and left it with a housing problem that may take years to solve.” According to the article between 1960 and 1968 more than 16,500 housing units were destroyed, 12,400 of these due to freeways, urban renewal, and other public programs. Another 1,982 were razed in the first nine months of 1969. And because the expressway projects did not require it, seventy-nine percent of the 16,544 families were without relocation help. As one would expect the poor were most affected and the result was crowding. Those families without help “doubled up and tripled up...and they are to be found in basements and attics.” There was public housing built during the period, but most of it went to the elderly. The city of Milwaukee was also in a bind as the state and county offered no help in relocating people even though they were a main driver of the development projects.²⁸² White residents, who had more options, tended to move to the periphery of the city while the elderly moved into the new public housing projects. But by the late 1960s, housing conditions were no better for inner core residents. African Americans had moved north and west, thus expanding the core, but they still faced many of the same social and economic issues.

Perhaps because there was little organized protest, there is a sense of inevitability to the events surrounding urban renewal in Milwaukee. People had marched on city hall to protest the clearing of buildings for the Hillside housing project, but by April and May of 1957 newspapers were reporting that the plans were received warmly. Even attorney

²⁸² Chris Lecos and Sig Gissler, “Freeways Carve Paths of Destruction,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 27, 1969.

James Dorsey, one of the attorneys who filed suit to try to halt the Hillside project, seems to have given in to the inevitable. The case, *David Jeffrey Co. v. Milwaukee*, was decided by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in favor of Milwaukee and allowed the city to acquire property in the interest of blight removal and urban renewal.²⁸³ There were also protests against the north belt of the expressway in the 1950s largely due to the impact it would have on the North Avenue business district.²⁸⁴ Ultimately these were successful as the project was abandoned.

In the 1960s under the administration of Henry Maier the city turned its development efforts toward the downtown business district. Former Mayor Zeidler criticized this move saying “the city needs a more sophisticated type of planning that includes economic and social planning, as well as physical planning.” He argued that because of these policies black residents were being forced to remain in the ghetto.²⁸⁵ Black leaders also attacked the administration and its lack of interest in African American residents and accused Maier of hoping the problems would just go away.²⁸⁶ In the late 1960s activists were much more successful in blocking later freeway projects, but by this time the major damage had been done. Most of what was halted was spur projects, and often the result was that land had been cleared and stub ramps built and these remained in place for years after.²⁸⁷

There are several possible reasons for the lack of organized protest. One may be the supposed leadership void in the African American community, or more specifically

²⁸³ John F. Cook, “The Battle Against Blight,” *The Marquette Law Review* 43(1960): 450.

²⁸⁴ “Survey Urged on Relocation,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 29, 1957; “Okay Routes for Freeways,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1957.

²⁸⁵ Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee,” 186.

²⁸⁶ “Trends Discussed in Negro Housing,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 11, 1963.

²⁸⁷ “Milwaukee Freeways: Park Freeway” *WisconsinHighways.org*, accessed July 8, 2012, <http://www.wisconsinhighways.org/milwaukee/park.html>.

the disconnect between black leaders and working class residents. For example Attorney Dorsey said that once he realized the Hillside housing project was going to happen he turned his attention to the concerns of black business owners, but did not seem to worry about displaced residents.²⁸⁸ Another problem may have been the piecemeal nature of the projects. Since they took place over an extended period of time and in several dislocated areas, it may be that protest movements simply never generated the energy needed to grow into a real grassroots effort. Additionally, there may have been some misunderstanding about the effects of these projects. Many residents were rightfully happy about the notion of having the worst areas of their neighborhoods removed, but they may not have been fully aware of the consequences of these projects. Finally, and most importantly, in the 1960s the organizational leaders of the black community were fully entrenched in other protest efforts against school segregation and in favor of open housing. These protests may have diverted effort and attention away from the redevelopment projects as they affected a larger share of the African American population, though redevelopment certainly increased the need for an open housing policy in Milwaukee.

Urban renewal and expressway projects exposed the economic and political—and thus racial—divide between city officials and the residents and business owners that were being displaced. In many regards city officials capitalized on the limited options those most impacted could muster as the projects progressed. From a coldly economic and practical matter it was politically easier to place the freeways and housing projects where they ultimately appeared. Because of where it was located the land would be relatively cheap. City officials reconciled knocking down most of the buildings that were razed

²⁸⁸ “Blight Parley is Quiet One,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 11, 1957.

because they were substandard and beyond rehabilitation. And the residents that were displaced were mostly poor or lower middle class and a large percentage African American, thus they had the least legal and political clout of any groups in the city to object to the projects. So with the bottom line in mind and the hope of a rapid timeframe to complete the projects, officials made the most politically expedient and callous choices.

However, there were several matters officials failed to recognize. First, they were destroying a community, two communities in fact. They tore apart the cultural and economic heart of the African American district of the city, but they also displaced many longtime German-American and Jewish residents that remained from the early decades of the twentieth century. German immigrants initially settled in the area and were followed by Jewish immigrants when the Germans moved further west in the city. Many Jewish residents also moved out as the number of African Americans in the area increased, but some number of the earlier inhabitants still remained. In razing these neighborhoods city officials did not take into account the importance of place in an individual's life. Officials may have seen a 'blighted' run down structure that was more than fifty years old, but for the residents that was home. The landscape that officials erased had special significance in the lives of the people that inhabited it.

Landscape archeologists Arthur Bernard Knapp and Wendy Ashmore identified four themes of landscapes that apply to the way residents and communities interact with physical space: landscapes as memory, as identity, as social order, and as sites of transformation. Their description of the way people engage with the landscape is especially fitting for the way residents of Bronzeville interacted with their neighborhood:

Beyond *habitus*, however, people actively order, transform, identify with and memorialize landscape by dwelling within it. The environment manifests itself as landscape only when people create and experience space as a complex of places. People's sense of place, and their engagement with the world around them, are invariably dependent on their own social, cultural, and historical situations.²⁸⁹

This is certainly the case in Bronzeville and part of the reason the violence of the urban renewal projects had such a profound effect on the community. For residents the physical landscape of Bronzeville was tied to their identity and social order and its destruction undermined their sense of community.

Next, city officials made assumptions about the relocation of residents and businesses that ignored the realities of racism and discrimination in Milwaukee. Officials saw a vacancy rate of seven percent in the city and assumed that there was plenty of housing for displaced families to move into.²⁹⁰ Newspaper articles at the time portrayed officials as merely misguided or negligent at worst, but one has to wonder if callousness or indifference to issues of race was at the root of their decision-making. Officials failed to take into account the difficulty black residents faced when looking for housing outside of the inner core. Even white residents faced problems as they were forced to sell the houses they owned and then many ended up renting at high rates. In the end officials were blinded by the numbers and believed that relocation would be a simple process. But the reality belied this as many inner core residents ended up back in substandard housing as that was all they could find.

Officials did not take into account the economic impact the projects would have on the community. A significant number of businesses were displaced, often without

²⁸⁹ Arthur Bernard Knapp & Wendy Ashmore, eds., "Archaeological Landscapes: Constructed, Conceptualized, Ideational," *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, 1-32 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 13-19, 20-21.

²⁹⁰ Richard Vonier, "Displaced by Renewal, Families Find Home," *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 2, 1962.

sufficient compensation to allow them to reopen elsewhere. The 1959 study conducted by the city found that the seven-mile stretch of expressway would move twenty-two small factories and 426 businesses.²⁹¹ This hurt business owners because they were compensated for the space their business occupied, but not for the business itself. Also, if the business owner rented the space, the landlord was compensated for the building but the tenant received no compensation for his or her business.

Further, this move did not just hurt the business owners, but also employees. Jobs were lost when businesses failed to reopen, and sometimes a new location became difficult for employees to get to. Finally there was a more systemic impact on the economy of the African American community. At one time Third Street and Walnut Street had thriving professional, retail, and entertainment businesses. When these were displaced the new businesses were more spread out and dislocated. As Reuben Harpole said, “The Third Street and Upper Third Street Association was second only to the downtown shopping centers. They had automobile franchises up and down Third Street, as well as several other stores, furniture stores, clothing stores, five and dime stores, banks, all up and down Third Street. And when that expressway came through it killed that area. Killed it!...All the people left.”²⁹² Thus, as hard economic times hit in general there was no longer the synergy generated by a central business district. People now spent their money where it was convenient, which meant that it did not necessarily end up back in black hands.

²⁹¹ Paul Salsini, “Freeway Will ‘Evict’ 12,000 in Five Years,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 20, 1959.

²⁹² Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012.

Black Milwaukee in the 1960s

The African American migration to Milwaukee of the post-World War II era continued through the 1960s. During the decade the black population grew from 62,458 in 1960 to 105,088 in 1970, a sixty-eight percent increase. Blacks now made up 14.65 percent of the total population of Milwaukee.²⁹³ The increase in population coupled with displacement from urban renewal and expressway projects meant that the African American district expanded significantly. Throughout the 1960s, white residents in border neighborhoods increasingly moved to the periphery of the city or the suburbs.²⁹⁴ As they left blacks were able to take up much of the housing. The result was that by the early 1970s the boundaries of the black residential area were Sherman Boulevard on the west, Villard Avenue on the north, the Milwaukee River and Holton Street on the east, and State Street on the south.²⁹⁵ Some of the housing in this expanded area was of newer stock, but African Americans still occupied significantly more older and deteriorating structures than their white counterparts. In addition blacks still had higher rates of occupancy and low rates of homeownership. By 1970 only 3.5 percent of nonwhites (and most of these were not black) lived outside the central city.²⁹⁶ Thus the housing pressures, and much of the discrimination of the 1950s still existed.

In the early 1960s some Milwaukee factories began to move to the South in search of cheaper wages.²⁹⁷ This began a slow decline in the number of relatively high paying industrial jobs in the city, a trend that would continue for the next two decades. Nonetheless in the 1960s employment opportunities and wages for blacks were better in

²⁹³ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 44.

²⁹⁴ Bernice Buresh, "Residents Seek to Halt Panic Selling," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 26, 1968.

²⁹⁵ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 56.

²⁹⁶ Norman, "Congenial Milwaukee," 191.

²⁹⁷ "Arkansas City Lures Plant from West Allis," *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 22, 1962.

Milwaukee than they were in the South. Also there were an increasing number of black professionals and business owners.²⁹⁸ In 1970 Wesley Scott, the director of the Milwaukee Urban League, said there was opportunity for better employment, but “the ceiling was low.”²⁹⁹ During the decade some African Americans were able to reach a property owning middle class standard. Notwithstanding, black family income was still only seventy-three percent of white family income and 24.9 percent of black families versus 8.1 percent of all families fell below the poverty line. In 1970 the unemployment rate in Milwaukee was four percent for males and 4.4 percent for females, but for blacks it was 8.3 percent for males and 8.2 percent for males.³⁰⁰ So while there were opportunities for black workers, black family income still lagged significantly at the end of the 1960s.

Largely due to residential segregation, the schools remained quite segregated in the 1960s. This *de facto* segregation would be the impetus for one of the largest protest movements in Milwaukee in the 1960s as blacks fought for fair integration of the schools. Several elementary schools were nearly one hundred percent black in their enrollment. Similarly, Roosevelt Junior High and North Division High School also had virtually one hundred percent black enrollment. These schools are located in what had historically been the heart of the black district. Throughout the 1960s though, as the population increased and African Americans began to move west and north, there was a rapid increase in the number of black students in schools in these areas as well. For example Washington High School, located on Sherman Boulevard, was 0.2 percent black in 1964, 12.3 percent black in 1970, and 59.5 percent black in 1975. African American teachers

²⁹⁸ Geib, “From Mississippi to Milwaukee,” 242.

²⁹⁹ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 287.

³⁰⁰ Washington and Oliver, *Historical Account of Blacks in Milwaukee*, 79.

also faced segregation as approximately seventy-five percent of black teachers in 1966 taught predominately black students. The predominately black schools tended to be quite crowded as well as twenty of the 117 public schools had one fourth of the city's school enrollment.³⁰¹ These conditions, coupled with insufficient resources, meant that the education in the *de facto* segregated schools tended to be inferior in nature.

African Americans faced an image problem in 1960s Milwaukee. No longer an invisible minority, the black population had grown significantly enough to now register on white Milwaukee's consciousness. But people still tended to see African Americans as a homogenous group and allowed racial stereotypes to over generalize the entire community. For example, when a black migrant murdered three people in 1952, the chief of police claimed that recent black migrants committed eighty percent of all major crimes in the city.³⁰² In many of the discussions on blight in the city, officials tended to blame residents for the state of their neighborhoods. In fact in 1966 Richard Perrin, the director of city development, claimed that even if all the blight in the city were removed it would come back because the "slum-makers" would still be there. He argued that the problem was the movement of unskilled migrants to the city who then could not find jobs and lived off of welfare. Mayor Maier echoed these comments to a certain degree and suggested that federal government should "provide enough incentives to encourage distribution of the poor across the nation that would be better than concentrations in the urban slums."³⁰³ The majority of Milwaukeeans tended to see black residents in these terms, as either criminals, or poor, unskilled slum-makers living off welfare.

³⁰¹ "Teachers Involved in Defacto Segregation," *The Milwaukee Courier*, April 30, 1966.

³⁰² Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 292.

³⁰³ "Should Unskilled Migrants Be Allowed to Come Here?," *The Milwaukee Courier*, April 30, 1966.

Thus it is evident that race consciousness became more prevalent in politics and the social life of Milwaukee in the 1960s. This was not helped by the election of Mayor Maier who tended to ignore or downplay the problems of the inner city. In most cases Maier blamed the state or federal governments for failing to spend enough money on poverty programs, rather than addressing the problems themselves.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, Frank Aukofer, a Milwaukee journalist who wrote about the unrest of the 1960s, argues that Milwaukee residents in general failed to see the forest for the trees. They were always looking at the symptoms or the outcomes rather than the cause, the protestors rather than what they were protesting, the actions rather than the root problems. He believed that the majority of Milwaukeeans felt that if the outward manifestations of the problems went away, then so would the problems. Or at least they could go back to ignoring them like they had all along.³⁰⁵ It was in this context that the protest movements of the 1960s emerged in Milwaukee.

As the black population of Milwaukee increased so did the institutional life of its community. Established social clubs, church and religious groups, and civil rights organizations teamed with new organizations that emerged in the 1960s to organize social protests on many fronts.³⁰⁶ Protests over the shooting death of Daniel Bell in 1958 and against Fred Lins, a sausage producer in the inner core who was also on Maier's Community Social Development Commission in 1963, demonstrated that new leaders with new levels of organization were rising to the fore.³⁰⁷ Also in 1963, a group of thirty-

³⁰⁴ Bernard, "Milwaukee: The Death and Life," 177.

³⁰⁵ Frank Aukofer, *City With a Chance* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co., 1968).

³⁰⁶ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 294.

³⁰⁷ Daniel Bell was an unarmed black man who was shot at close range in the back by police after a chase. The police tried to cover their actions by planting a knife on Bell. At a meeting of the Community Relations Social Development Committee, a committee created by Maier in an attempt to

four leading black citizens published a statement in Milwaukee newspapers that was critical of Mayor Maier for failing to address the serious racial problems in the city and for seeming to favor a slow program on civil rights. There was also a voter registration drive “designed to punish at the polls public officials who are unresponsive to civil rights demands.”³⁰⁸ Then in late 1963 a group was organized to protest the *de facto* segregation of schools in Milwaukee. This group, led by attorney Lloyd Barbee, formed the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) in February 1964 and called for a boycott of Milwaukee schools on May 18, 1964, the ten-year anniversary of *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education*.

MUSIC’s demands were for an open transfer policy, the end to intact bussing, and a denunciation of school segregation by the school board. In the 1960s Milwaukee ‘integrated’ schools by bussing black children from a black neighborhood school to a white school, where they were taught in isolated classrooms. They also had separate lunch periods and recess times so there was effectively no contact between white and black students. The first boycott was quite successful as 11,000 black and white students attended alternative “Freedom Schools” rather than go to class. In June of 1964 seventy protestors blocked busses that were transporting black students to white schools. However, the school board only gave in on the open transfer policy, which effectively just made it easier for white students to leave transitioning schools. In 1964 Barbee also filed a federal desegregation lawsuit and by 1966 the battle over school integration had largely become a legal one. The suit dragged on until 1976 when United States District

stem racial trouble, Lins attributed much of the problems of the inner city to ignorant migrants from the South.

³⁰⁸ “Mayor Gets Criticism of 34 Negro Leaders,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 25, 1963.

Judge John Reynolds ruled that Milwaukee intentionally maintained segregation in the schools.³⁰⁹

Father James Groppi, a white Catholic priest from Milwaukee, joined MUSIC after participating in demonstrations in Selma, Alabama. Groppi soon became advisor to the state and local chapters of the Youth Council of the NAACP. Groppi and the Youth Council targeted the Eagles Club, of which many local politicians and leaders were members, for their discriminatory membership policy. The Eagles argued that they were a private club, but the Youth Council insisted that political figures should resign as a symbolic gesture. To make their point the protestors marched from the Eagles headquarters downtown to the house of Eagles member and liberal judge Robert Cannon in the white suburb of Wauwatosa. This move made sure that African Americans and their demands for redress to major issues was no longer invisible. It also brought out a small, but violent, racist subset of the white population. Like the school integration case this showdown ended up in a legal battle where Wisconsin Attorney-General Bronson LaFollette threatened to end the Eagles' tax-exempt status if they did not cease their discriminatory practices. However, it was not until 1980 that the Milwaukee chapter officially let blacks join.³¹⁰

Now fully aware of the discontent of African Americans in Milwaukee and their willingness to express their demands, whites in Milwaukee looked at the summer of 1967 with trepidation. Many feared a riot similar to what took place in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles in 1965. Soon after Newark and then Detroit exploded in

³⁰⁹ Bernard, "Milwaukee: The Death and Life," 177-178; Trotter; *Black Milwaukee*, 295-296, Aukofer, *City With a Chance*. Again for a much more detailed account of the entire fight for educational equality in Milwaukee see Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle* and Bill Dahlk, *Against the Wind*.

³¹⁰ Bernard, "Milwaukee: Death and Life," 179; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 296; Aukofer, *City With a Chance*.

violence in mid and late July 1967, Milwaukee had its moment. There was no clear trigger, but it is believed that the police breakup of a fight (coincidentally at a club that often had live jazz) in the early hours of July 30 may have been the impetus. That night at around 9:45 black youths began smashing windows and burning buildings at the corner of Third Street and North Avenue. The violence only lasted around five hours, but three people died, about a hundred were injured including many policemen, and 1,750 people were arrested. Maier quickly called in the National Guard and instilled a strict curfew that was kept in place for the next ten days. A few days later police killed a black man named Clifford McKissick, which exacerbated black frustration with the police, but there was no further violence.³¹¹

Maier's actions, the strict curfew, quick deployment of National Guard troops, and the closing of taverns, liquor stores, and gas stations, were credited with quelling the riot and hailed by everyone but Milwaukee's black community. The riot prompted a broad coalition of black activists, many of whom were normally at odds, to come together to create the Common View Group. They blamed the white power structure for not including blacks in their strategies to 'help' the black community and for doing very little to ameliorate the problems. Maier offered a thirty nine-point plan to help black economic development, but thirty-two of these points required state or federal action. The Common View Group came back with thirty points of their own that they believed the mayor could take action on. The two sides never came together. The 'riot,' and Maier's ensuing complacency in addressing black needs, led African Americans in Milwaukee to turn towards the Black Power Movement to address their social justice issues. Soon

³¹¹ Bernard, "Milwaukee: Death and Life," 180; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 297-298; Aukofer, *City With a Chance*.

after, many blacks became more focused on self-determinism than integration and equality.³¹²

There was one more major protest in the 1960s that gets to what was probably the single largest underlying problem in the black community, the lack of adequate housing. Vel Phillips was the first African American and the first woman on the Milwaukee common council when she was elected in 1956. She immediately took up black housing needs and introduced a citywide open-housing law to the council. It, and the four subsequent bills she introduced, was defeated 18-1. In 1966 Father Groppi and the Youth Council began picketing the houses of aldermen to demand an open housing law. In August 1967, just a month after the ‘riot,’ Groppi and the Youth Council (now led by the Commandos who organized in response to violence against protestors), decided to make a symbolic march to the all white, working class south side. This meant crossing the Menomonee River Valley on the Sixteenth Street Viaduct—called by activists “the longest bridge in the world” because it separated “Poland from Africa.” The first night the marchers endured vicious taunts from approximately 5,000 to 8,000 whites, but there was little violence. The second night it was much worse as 13,000 counterdemonstrators waited for them and hurled eggs, bottles, rocks, and firecrackers in addition to insults. The marchers retreated only to find their headquarters firebombed when they returned.³¹³

Rather than back off, the Youth Council decided to keep up the pressure and marched for 200 consecutive nights. This earned them national media attention and

³¹² “Storefronts Smashed by Crowd Here,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 31, 1967; “Area of Riot Tense: Sniper Fire Goes On,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 1, 1967; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 298. See Aukofer’s *City With a Chance* for much more on the ‘riot.’ Aukofer had been in Detroit covering the riot there and some people in Milwaukee blamed his piece in the July 30th issue of the *Milwaukee Journal* for instigating the riot. Maier himself blamed agitators, especially Father Groppi, for putting things in motion.

³¹³ “8,000 Taunt Marchers on South Side,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 29, 1967; “22 Hurt in South Side Melee,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 30, 1967.

turned a negative light on Milwaukee now described by some as the “Selma of the North.” In December 1967 the common council adopted an open housing policy, but since it duplicated state law, it had no teeth. Maier insisted that open housing was a metropolitan issue and that a policy would do no good if the suburbs did not also allow open housing. However after Martin Luther King’s assassination in 1968 and twelve suburbs had passed their own policies, Maier proposed a bill with stronger enforcement provisions. Soon after the common council also voted to accept Model Cities funds from the federal government to help rebuild black neighborhoods. However, the Model Cities program was fraught with problems and spatial segregation and discrimination remained well entrenched in Milwaukee.³¹⁴

The developments in Milwaukee in the 1960s did not happen in a vacuum. For example during the 1950s and 1960s urban renewal projects razed 780 acres in St. Louis and destroyed 33,000 housing units.³¹⁵ Throughout the country expressway and development projects displaced and physically divided communities, destroyed businesses, drove up housing prices, and ultimately destroyed community cohesion.³¹⁶ Another lesser-known tragedy of urban renewal witnessed construction projects in black communities that blatantly denied black workers access to the construction jobs, particularly after equal employment was codified in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Bernard, “Milwaukee: Death and Life,” 180-181; Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee,” 188-189. For a much deeper look at the civil rights protests in Milwaukee, especially the open housing movement, see Patrick Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

³¹⁵ Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 111.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

³¹⁷ David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, eds., *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 2010).

Of course the 1960s were a time of massive civil rights and anti-war protests and demonstrations throughout the country. This era saw formerly underrepresented and marginalized people assert their right to full participation in American society. But it was also a time of racial conflict, social instability, and increasing poverty, especially in the cities. As the events of the 1960s unfolded in Milwaukee, they affected life on every level, not the least jazz and especially the jazz landscape.

Jazz in the 1960s

Culture, and especially music, can represent a way of examining and interpreting the history of a community. As George Lipsitz says, “The dialogic processes that link music so powerfully to memory have made popular music an important register and record of the history of urban renewal.”³¹⁸ In this way we can look at how jazz was recreated on the new urban landscape to glean an idea of what development projects did to the jazz community and the community at large. One major outcome of urban renewal throughout the country is that it destroyed black neighborhoods leaving residents “displaced and dispossessed.” Again Lipsitz maintains, “One of the hidden histories of racism in the United States lies in the loss of neighborhoods and the support structures they provided to communities of color.”³¹⁹ In Milwaukee one of these support structures was music and entertainment. But, as we have seen jazz and community are constantly moving, always improvising, so though redevelopment projects disrupted jazz in Milwaukee, and dealt the Walnut Street scene a deathblow, jazz survived these tumultuous times.

³¹⁸ Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 107.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

Some of the clubs from the 1950s still existed in the early 1960s. Clubs like Mayme's Ebony Bar and Thelma's Back Door, at its new location, were far enough outside of Bronzeville to avoid early redevelopment projects. Others like the Pelican Club (1241 North Third Street), Celebrity Club (1546 North Twelfth Street), and Chateau Lounge (1249 North Third Street) were in the heart of Bronzeville, but may have stopped hosting live music around this time. It is highly likely that they switched to jukeboxes as that became a much more economical way to offer music to club patrons.³²⁰ Another Bronzeville club, Max's Tap, demonstrates the high rate of mobility that characterized some jazz clubs. Originally owned by a white man named Comisky and located at 1655 North Third Street, the club was bought by Jimmy Rancher and renamed Rancho's. By 1964 Rancher had moved the club to 835 North Teutonia Avenue and in 1970 the club was known as Rancho's Northtown and located at 3222 North Green Bay Avenue.³²¹ In the late 1960s several clubs either moved or opened in this general area that was significantly north of the old Walnut Street district.

The Basin Street Show Lounge provides an interesting bridge between the Walnut Street scene and the downtown clubs in this era. Located at 1339 North Third Street it was a little bit south of Bronzeville and a few blocks north of the downtown clubs, so it fell between the two major jazz hubs of the 1950s. But, the club was not only a spatial bridge; it also bridged a gulf between two ends of the jazz spectrum. Rahsaan Roland Kirk was an African American multi-instrumentalist known for his experimental and diverse musical style. Kirk's main instrument was the tenor saxophone, but he played a variety of saxophones, flutes, and other wind instruments including many that he

³²⁰ Green, *Selling the Race*, 56-57; For a description of the jukebox business in Bronzeville see Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street, 71-75.

³²¹ Vick, "Walnut Street to No Street," 124; *Wright's Milwaukee Directory* (1960, 1964/5, 1970).

invented. He was also known for playing several instruments at once. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, and though blind he spent the late 1950s and early 1960s essentially bumming around the Midwest. He landed in Milwaukee late in 1959 and lived for three months above the Basin Street Lounge.³²² While there he played several performances as he honed the unique style and sound that would make for a fairly successful, if unusual career. What is odd about his story is that during this period the Basin Street was known for its Dixieland jazz shows.³²³ So this club that was known for a type of music that was primarily enjoyed by a white audience hosted a black experimental musician who remained beloved, and claimed, by the Milwaukee black community despite his brief stay.³²⁴

Many of the downtown clubs from the 1950s were also still thriving in the early 1960s. Curro's and Fazio's still had jazz, but the Brass Rail and Downtowner were primarily strip joints at this point. The Red Room at the Schroeder Hotel and the Crown Room at the Pfister Hotel were still classy venues that booked local and national talent. Devine's Ballroom, which had booked major talent for its dances in the 1930s and 1940s still existed, but it was booking less and less national talent. Located in the Eagles Club in this period, the ballroom featured more fox trot and waltz music and local singers in the 1960s.³²⁵ Devine even tried rock and roll and the ballroom was the kickoff site for

³²² John Kruth, *Bright Moments. The Life and Legacy of Rahsaan Roland Kirk* (New York: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2000), 48-49.

³²³ *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 4, 1959.

³²⁴ Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012; "Place to Go and People to See," *The Milwaukee Star*, May 9, 1970. The Milwaukee black press is full of articles about Kirk in the 1960s and 1970s, and Kirk came through town several times including playing Summerfest on July 24, 1970.

³²⁵ Robert Wells, "Decline in Ballroom Dance Puzzles George Devine," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 4, 1962.

Buddy Holly's ill-fated Winter Dance Party tour in 1959. Nonetheless, Devine was still booking big bands like Stan Kenton and Glen Miller in mid-1960s.³²⁶

In the mid to late 1960s it becomes easier to tease out the record of who was playing where. Several black newspapers emerged in this period and they chronicled the local jazz scene on a more consistent basis than the *Milwaukee Journal* or *Milwaukee Sentinel* did. Two things emerge when we look at this period. One is that there was still quite a bit of live jazz in the city by both local and national talent. The second is that a large amount of it was no longer in the Walnut Street area. There were a few clubs there, but most of the black clubs moved north and west as the African American neighborhoods expanded in that area. A number of other clubs also opened on the east side, downtown, and even the western parts of the city and suburbs. Thus as urban renewal and expressway projects took their toll the jazz landscape became more dispersed. The spatial separation of the jazz clubs undermined the way the jazz community had interacted during the height of the Bronzeville scene, but it did not mean that jazz was to become obsolete. The community simply had to renegotiate the spaces that were available, and create something new out of the changed landscape.

Essentially the jazz clubs that opened in the mid to late 1960s either focused on local talent or tried to book big national acts. The Ad Lib was one of these and it made a big splash when it opened on Friday, June 10, 1966. The first group to play there was Julian "Cannonball" Adderly's Quintet, which was a very successful group that primarily played hard bop. Cannonball, as everyone knew him, was a huge Bunky Green fan, and

³²⁶ Mitchell Drew, "A Show Business Desert? Beertown Isn't Quite That," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 9, 1967.

would always ask after him whenever he ran into a Milwaukee jazz musician.³²⁷ The Ad Lib was located at 323 West Wells in a former army-navy surplus store, but had been redone in gold and red and was quite “plush.”³²⁸ Over the next couple of years national acts such as Ahmad Jamal, Thelonius Monk, Stan Getz, and Lionel Hampton played gigs that ranged from three to eight nights.³²⁹ However, the club was owned by Frank Balistreri, and like so many of his other clubs converted to a strip club in late 1967. But, they still had jazz. For example, Rahsaan Roland Kirk and the Ramsey Lewis Trio had weeklong gigs there in 1971.³³⁰

Two new downtown clubs that were located across the street from each other booked major national jazz talent, but were not exclusively jazz clubs. The Attic, located at 641 North Second Street primarily hosted rock bands, but periodically had some of the biggest names in jazz. In October 1966 Count Basie performed at the Attic. That same weekend Duke Ellington performed at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (UWM) Ballroom. So on one weekend Milwaukee hosted arguably the two most successful African American big bands of the 1930s in town. And later that week Milwaukee native Woody Herman also had his band at the Attic.³³¹ But, despite booking some of the biggest name big bands as well as successful combos like those led by Dave Brubeck and Stan Getz, the Attic had to book rock and roll acts to make money.³³² It is clear that by the late 1960s the people of Milwaukee, black and white, reflected the changing tastes of the decade and tended to put their entertainment dollars toward other types of music.

³²⁷ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

³²⁸ Michael Drew, “Modern Jazz Swings at Newest Club,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 11, 1966.

³²⁹ *The Milwaukee Courier*, July 23, 1966, Sept 17, 1966, July 15, 1967.

³³⁰ *The Milwaukee Courier*, May 29, 1971, July 3, 1971.

³³¹ *The Milwaukee Courier*, October 8, 1966 and October 15, 1966.

³³² Michael Drew, “Jazz Club or Parking Lot? It Depends on the Trend,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 10, 1967.

The Scene, located across the street from the Attic at 624 North Second Street, booked mostly rhythm and blues artists to make ends meet.³³³ However the situation was a little different as the band that was drawing huge crowds was a local band called Lee Brown and the Cheaters. This band was organized by drummer Vic Pitts and had several musicians who had studied at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music.³³⁴ But when the Cheaters or other rhythm and blues bands were not playing at the Scene major jazz talent like Ray Charles, Duke Ellington, and Miles Davis were performing.³³⁵ In April of 1968 Wes Montgomery played a weekend gig at the Scene, which is interesting for a number of reasons.³³⁶ First, Montgomery died of a heart attack at the age of forty-five a mere two months after this performance. Second, Montgomery and Manty Ellis were good friends and whenever Wes was in town they would hang out. Ellis said they would eat fried chicken, ice cream, and cake; “he would smoke cigarettes and tell me not to.”³³⁷ Finally, Wes’s brother Buddy, a keyboard player, was in the combo. Buddy moved to Milwaukee in 1969 and had a major impact on the local jazz scene. Another moment of notoriety for the Scene occurred in 1967. On the night of July 29 there was a scuffle outside of the club involving black and white residents. Though it was fairly minor the police were called and the crowd dispersed. Some said that this might have been one of the incidents that contributed to the unrest of black youths in the inner core that eventually led to the “riot.”³³⁸ Though this is impossible to prove, it does show how

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Alan Posniak, “Badger Beat,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 5, 1967.

³³⁵ *The Milwaukee Courier*, September 10, 1966, March 13, 1971; *The Milwaukee Star*, February 17, 1968.

³³⁶ *The Milwaukee Star*, April 6, 1968.

³³⁷ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

³³⁸ “Storefronts Smashed by Crowd Here,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 31, 1969.

entertainment intersected with the reality of late 1960s Milwaukee as the tensions of black and white relations in the city intruded into a night's entertainment.

Teddy's was another major club in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Located at 1434 North Farwell on the Upper East Side, Teddy's booked a combination of jazz, blues, and rock bands. In fact the rock band Canned Heat recorded a live album there in 1971. Major blues artists like Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters performed there as did jazz luminaries such as Freddie Hubbard, Horace Silver and Charles Mingus.³³⁹

Often when national acts would come in town for extended gigs they would spend their days at the music store owned by Manty Ellis. Ellis said he did not sell much, but he got to play with all of the best talent that came through Milwaukee. Musicians like Eddie Harris, Lionel Hampton, and Lou Donaldson and their band members would spend the day jamming at Ellis's shop when they were in town for gigs at Teddy's. Ellis said he also got Dizzy Gillespie to agree to do a workshop when he was in town for a week at Teddy's. Unfortunately, Teddy's too gave in to changing tastes and economics and in 1975 the owner converted it to a discotheque. He said he could no longer pay the costs to bring in national talent and decided the \$25,000 conversion made more economic sense.³⁴⁰ The loss of Teddy's was a big blow to the Milwaukee jazz scene because it had booked some of the best local groups like Manty Ellis, Berkeley Fudge, and Buddy Montgomery in addition to the national acts. It also happened at a point when few, if any, Milwaukee clubs were bringing in top jazz musicians as jazz in Milwaukee went through an early 1970s swoon.

³³⁹ Pinkham, *Milwaukee Jazz Profiles*, 84.

³⁴⁰ "Discotheque Dancers at Teddy's on Farwell," *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 19, 1975.

A number of clubs that primarily booked local talent opened in the 1960s. The first of these, and the longest lasting, was the Main Event opened by James ‘Jimmy’ Mack. As detailed in the introduction Mack first opened the club just north of Bronzeville in the early or mid-1960s. When Mack moved the club in late 1966 he took out several ads in the *Milwaukee Courier* to advise his patrons that the Main Event was back in business at the new location.³⁴¹ The Main Event is noteworthy not only because its several moves were so symbolic of the high mobility of jazz clubs in Milwaukee, but also because the club lasted as long as it did. However, it is hard to determine how much, if any, live jazz the club featured over its last several years.

Other clubs that tended to cater to black musicians, though certainly not exclusively, popped up all over the north and northwest side of Milwaukee. Brothers Lounge opened at 2879 N Holton and had a fairly successful run well into the 1970s. The groups here tended to be organ trios like Beverly Pitts’s band and guitar trios like the combos of George Pritchett and Manty Ellis. Often a singer like Charlene Gibson or Betty Moorer would join these trios.³⁴² Another club based on the organ trio was the Green Living Room at 29th and North. Opened by Will Green, a very talented local organist and pianist, in 1965, the club basically existed to give Will Green a place to play.³⁴³ Unfortunately, Green did not get the turnout he needed to make the club a success and he soon started appearing in other clubs.³⁴⁴ At some point he may have converted the Living Room into a recording studio that he allowed musicians to use for

³⁴¹ *The Milwaukee Courier*, April 15, 1967, April 22, 1967.

³⁴² *The Milwaukee Courier*, June 24, 1967, March 1968, December 12, 1970; K.E. Berigan, “Jazz Jaunts,” *The Echo*, June 1967.

³⁴³ George Poehlman, “Jazz Word,” *The Milwaukee Courier*, April 24, 1965.

³⁴⁴ “Freddy the Nite Owl,” *The Milwaukee Courier*, August 8, 1966; *The Milwaukee Star*, August 19, 1967.

free.³⁴⁵ However, there is no indication that any records produced there received any regular play.

Tina's Lounge at 1748 West Fond du Lac was just west of the Bronzeville area and featured a wealth of local talent in the 1960s. Will Green's trio played there as did the Berkeley Fudge Quartet. Tenor saxophone player Bobby Burdette and his group played there frequently and earned a very good reception. Bobby Burdette and drummer Dick Smith, who Manty Ellis called one of the greats, were from Mississippi and recalled a time when they could not vote in the Magnolia State.³⁴⁶ Ellis said Smith's problem was that he was twenty years ahead of his time. "We used to just listen to him and wonder what is he doing?" Ellis talked to Bunky Green after Dick Smith died and Bunky said "Man I'd go up on the stage and I had practiced and practiced, and I come down off the stage, and I'd have played, I thought I played my heart out, and I'd look at Dick Smith and he'd look at me like 'Man you ain't playin' shit.' I could not understand what he was talking about, but you know what, he was telling me the truth."³⁴⁷ Then in 1966, after years out of the jazz scene, Jabbo Smith began his comeback at Tina's playing piano and valve trombone.³⁴⁸

Like Tina's, Ted's Blue Note located at Sixth Street and Keefe Avenue, hosted many of Milwaukee's best jazz musicians. Ted's billed itself as 'Milwaukee's Jazziest Lounge' and had live music five or six nights a week. The trio of Beverly Pitts on organ and Bob Hobbs on drums played there regularly. In 1966, a top notch combo led by

³⁴⁵ "Will Green Offers Free Use of Musical Facilities," *The Milwaukee Star*, December, 5, 1970.

³⁴⁶ George Poehlman, "Jazz Word," *The Milwaukee Courier*, March 13, 1965; *The Milwaukee Star*, January, 7, 1967; "MKE Entertainment," *The Milwaukee Courier*, April 17, 1965; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

³⁴⁷ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

³⁴⁸ Chip Defaa, *Voices of the Jazz Age*, 211.

Berkeley Fudge on saxes and including Frank Gordon on trumpet, played every Tuesday and Thursday night. Organist Bill Gibbs's trio held down the weekend spot for a couple years.³⁴⁹ In 1967 Ted's appears to have undergone a change in ownership as the name was changed to Champion's Blue Note Lounge.³⁵⁰ It is hard to discern what the new owners did with the club as there are no more advertisements or write ups about the lounge in the press after the name change.

In the late 1960s Teutonia Avenue, which runs north by northwest out of what was the heart of the black community in the 1950s, became a jazz corridor of sorts. However, due to the dislocation imposed by redevelopment projects the distance between clubs was significantly longer than it had been during the heyday of the Bronzeville clubs. The Bamboo Room at 2219 North Teutonia Avenue anchored this corridor on the south end and KG's at 4861 North Teutonia Avenue was its north end. The Bamboo Room location was just south of North Avenue, which was emerging as the African American business district as development projects took effect and the black neighborhood expanded. KG's was three and a half miles north and beyond the African American district at the time. About three quarters of mile north of the Bamboo Room was Rancho's (at 2835 North Teutonia Avenue until 1970) and Mr. Leo's Music Box (2815 North Teutonia Avenue), which became Ronnie K's in late 1966.³⁵¹ However, the king of the strip was Alfie's, two and a half miles north of the Bamboo Room and at the far reaches of the black neighborhood.

³⁴⁹ *The Milwaukee Courier*, July 23, 1966, August 13, 1966, October 15, 1966.

³⁵⁰ *The Milwaukee Courier*, September 23, 1967.

³⁵¹ *The Milwaukee Courier*, November 12, 1966.

The Manty Ellis Trio plus Berkeley Fudge on saxophone and vocalist Charlene Gibson opened Alfie's in August of 1967.³⁵² The Ellis trio was the mainstay at the club for the next three years, though Fudge would go on to his own gigs and the singers would change. In January of 1968 Betty Moorner of Chicago came up to sing and by March of that year Sonya Davis was the vocalist.³⁵³ In 1970 Ellis was still going strong with Moorner back at vocals, but the end was coming soon.³⁵⁴ Ellis describes the situation thusly, "Alfie's. I made that. It did okay for a long time. They had internal problems, not business problems. Like, the mob. Which, I had no qualms about working for the mob. They kept me busy. I got out of there just in time. I was working seven nights a week..."³⁵⁵ Alfie's was under the umbrella of Frank Balistreri's empire, though John Fazio owned it and John Volpe Jr. held the license. When Alfie's got into trouble over the license, Volpe Jr. threatened to pull his license and management let him go. Since they needed someone who did not have mob ties to hold the license they had a meeting that included Ellis, the star of the club. However, it dawned on Ellis that the point of the meeting was to convince him to get the license and run the club. He got out and the club soon ceased operations.³⁵⁶ While it was hard for Ellis to lose a regular gig, his refusal allowed him to maintain autonomy over his career and life and ultimately was the best decision.

There were a handful of other clubs in the 1960s that tended to book more white performers and had a predominately white audience. Fazio's on Fifth was still in

³⁵² *The Milwaukee Star*, August 19, 1967.

³⁵³ *The Milwaukee Courier*, January 13, 1968, March 16, 1968.

³⁵⁴ *The Milwaukee Star*, April 4, 1970

³⁵⁵ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

³⁵⁶ "State Sues to Dissolve Alfie's Inc.," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 26, 1969; "Count Dismissed in Alfie's Case," *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 4, 1970; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

business though they had stopped booking national talent. Tony Fazio said that Milwaukeeans would not let him get away with charging a cover so the most he could offer an out of town act was \$1,500. However, many artists charged as much as \$5,000.³⁵⁷ So Fazio's booked local talent and had dinner theater and Broadway revues because it was more affordable.³⁵⁸ Similarly Curro's, which had booked national talent like Ramsey Lewis, Illinois Jacquet and Pepper Adams earlier in the decade made the switch to primarily local musicians like pianist Frank DeMiles in the late 1960s.³⁵⁹

Another important club was the Tunnel Inn at 779 North Front Street, just across the river on the east side of downtown. From 1959 until 1964 Dick Ruedebusch and his band held court there and drew phenomenal crowds. They played what was loosely called Dixieland, though with a fair amount of elements from the swing era, and took advantage of white Milwaukee's affinity for historic jazz. Ruedebusch got his start playing in Woody Herman's band and played in a fast, full bore, infectious style that translated to his band.³⁶⁰ Members of the band like clarinetist Chuck Hedges, guitarist Dick Eliot, drummer Jack Carr, bassist Lee Burrows, and especially pianist Sig Millonzi, went on to have a profound impact on the Milwaukee jazz scene for years to come. It is also important to note that many of these musicians like Millonzi and Burrows were instrumental in facilitating black and white musicians crossing the color line.³⁶¹ The Ruedebusch band left the Tunnel Inn sometime in late 1964 or early 1965 and the club

³⁵⁷ Michael Drew, "Jazz Club or Parking Lot? It Depends on the Trend," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 10, 1967.

³⁵⁸ "Revue Scheduled at Fazio's on Fifth," *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 20, 1962.

³⁵⁹ Anonymous Interview, March 30, 2012.

³⁶⁰ There is a clip of Dick Ruedebusch and the Underprivileged Five on Sid Caesar's show in 1963 on YouTube, accessed July 16, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Di0RQ3nXEdY>.

³⁶¹ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012, Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

struggled to survive. By 1967 it had become a spy-themed restaurant called the Safe House.³⁶²

By all accounts Ruedebusch lived life to the fullest and there is a great story about him in Florida in 1965. He was playing a gig in the Lounge at the Cape Colony Inn in Cocoa Beach, Florida while The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra played in the main ballroom. Charlie Shavers, a black trumpet player, was in the Dorsey Orchestra, but was not allowed in the bar due to Jim Crow discrimination. During breaks Shavers would stand in the kitchen and listen to the combo that Ruedebusch was in while the bartender slipped him drinks. Ruedebusch knew about this and decided to make the most of Shavers's supply line by extending his break. On "Lazy River," the band's big showstopper, Ruedebusch played fifteen choruses, as opposed to the usual two, and blew the crowd away.³⁶³ In addition he probably allowed Shavers a couple more drinks before he had to go back to work. Unfortunately, Ruedebusch's lifestyle caught up with him and he died of a heart attack in 1968 at the age of forty-two. Despite his short life, he left a lasting impression on the Milwaukee jazz community through his band members.³⁶⁴

Two themes emerge from this look at the clubs of the 1960s, one is the spatial dislocation of the jazz landscape, and the other is the continuing imprint of race on the jazz community. Both of these relate to urban renewal projects and the developments of the 1960s in the black community in particular, but also Milwaukee as a whole. Jazz followed the people and the available spaces. As blacks moved north and west the jazz

³⁶² Mitchell Drew, "A Show Business Desert? Beertown Isn't Quite That," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 9, 1967.

³⁶³ Arnie Koch, "Charlie's Angel," *American Big Band Preservation Society*, April 20, 2011, accessed July 16, 2012, <http://www.americanbigband.org/2011/04/charlies-angel-by-arnie-koch/>. It should be noted that Koch was the manager of the band Ruedebusch was playing in for this story.

³⁶⁴ Michael Drew, "Dick Ruedebusch Colleagues Honor Memory With Music," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 29, 1969.

clubs followed. At the same time the white audience found clubs in predominately white neighborhoods downtown, on the east side, and even in the suburbs. A closer look at these themes show some emerging trends that indicate where jazz was headed in the 1970s.

In many ways jazz appreciation in the Bronzeville of the 1940s and 1950s had been fluid, with a rhythm to it, and above all was democratic. The open street allowed a flow from club to club whose open doors and exciting music beckoned one in. There was as much interaction among the people and between people and the consumption of products such as music, food, drink, drugs, and sex, in the spaces between clubs as there was within the clubs. As urban renewal and expressway projects took their toll on Bronzeville much of this democracy was done away with as the venues became discreet, interiorized spaces of performance and consumption. Because of the spatial dislocation of the jazz clubs of the late 1960s and early 1970s the jazz landscape had become, circumscribed, static, and undemocratic in that the spaces were no longer equally available to everyone. Patrons now tended to go to one club and spend the evening there rather than passing from club to club and spreading the enthusiasm and their hard earned entertainment dollars.

In the late 1960s the clubs were struggling. Despite an active jazz community, and several clubs offering live jazz most nights of the week, it was becoming economically untenable to run that type of club. The 1967 *Milwaukee Journal* series on nightlife in Milwaukee argued that nightclubs were struggling in every city except Las Vegas and Reno-Lake Tahoe. The article, with some merit, blamed television.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ Mitchell Drew, "A Show Business Desert? Beertown Isn't Quite That," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 9, 1967.

Television was certainly a factor, but it was not the whole reason. People still attended taverns, especially neighborhood taverns that provided a space for social interaction, potential business, and a key link in the local information network.³⁶⁶ In Milwaukee some tavern owners acknowledged their role in the community and got involved in grassroots organizing. The Northside Tavern Keepers Association set aside funds for community youth to be distributed by existing agencies such as churches and the YMCA. They also tried to get grants to redevelop disadvantaged commercial areas, to help people start businesses, and to get high school students into a junior businessman's association.³⁶⁷ People still left the home and went to drinking establishments, so it was not television alone that was undermining the nightclub scene.

Major contributing factors were economics and changing tastes. In the 1960s people were spending less money on going out to clubs for live music. This happened across the country and across most musical types; Milwaukee was not alone in experiencing these changes. In addition the competition for entertainment dollars was steep. Milwaukee offered a full spectrum of live music in the 1960s from polka to pop and banjo bands to blues. In the 1960s country music, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues became by far the most popular musical styles. These potentially drew members of the jazz community that were young and liked to dance. At the same time the city was still greatly impacted by immigrant culture and ethnic-specific music continued to draw its faithful.³⁶⁸ And for the jazz faithful there were new options outside of the nightclubs to hear quality live jazz.

³⁶⁶ Samuels, *Negro Taverns*.

³⁶⁷ "Tavern Owners Unveil Program to Help the Core," *The Soul City Times*, January 1, 1969.

³⁶⁸ Michael Drew, "Music of the Old Country Helps Little Bars Flourish," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 12, 1967.

Summerfest, which held its inaugural event in 1968, grew out of the many ethnic festivals held each summer in Milwaukee. Immediately Summerfest drew some of the biggest names in jazz to Milwaukee, thus providing an alternate venue to the nightclubs that could no longer afford this level of talent. In the late 1960s and early 1970s such jazz luminaries as Bunky Green, Ahmad Jamal, Ramsey Lewis, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderly, and Sarah Vaughn performed there.³⁶⁹ In addition Summerfest was an opportunity for local musicians like Beverly Pitts, Berkeley Fudge, Manty Ellis, Sig Millonzi, and many others to play as opening groups for the big names.³⁷⁰ Like Summerfest, the Lakefront Festival of the Arts also hosted major national acts such as Erroll Garner, George Benson, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Charlie Byrd, and Dizzy Gillespie.³⁷¹ Despite not having a jazz program in the 1960s UWM drew some major talent to its ballroom including Ramsey Lewis, George Shearing, The Modern Jazz Quartet, and Duke Ellington.³⁷² And for local musicians country clubs, festivals, dances and weddings, and ethnic and religious centers like the Jewish Community Center and Italian Community Center provided places to play and be heard outside of the traditional nightclub setting.³⁷³

One outcome of the displacement of jazz clubs was the loss of a learning environment. Jazz is very much an art based on apprenticeship. You can learn the notes, chords, and technical skills on your own through extensive practice, but it takes the cauldron that is the combo to truly learn the art form. In a 2001 *Milwaukee Journal*

³⁶⁹ *The Milwaukee Courier*, July 27, 1968; *The Milwaukee Star*, July 12, 1969, May 9 1970, May 23, 1970.

³⁷⁰ *The Milwaukee Star*, July 11, 1970; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012, Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

³⁷¹ *The Milwaukee Star*, June 21, 1969; *The Milwaukee Courier*, May 11, 1968, May 9, 1970.

³⁷² *The Milwaukee Courier*, October 15, 1966; *The Milwaukee Star*, March 22, 1969, July 12, 1969, January 30, 1971.

³⁷³ Anonymous Interview, March 30, 2012; Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

article local jazz musicians bemoaned the loss of the learning environment of the clubs, “‘The clubs were laboratories,’ says Vic Soward a drummer...‘They were the real conservatories of the time. You learned the craft under fire. You had to. In the old days, we had apprenticeships to learn music.’”³⁷⁴ This was especially important for new players just honing their craft. Kaye Berigan credits the trumpeter Billy Howell, who let him sit in on the Monday afternoon jam sessions at the Lounge at Ninth Street and Walnut Street, with helping him develop his abilities, especially in the hard bop of the early 1960s.³⁷⁵ But, it was not just new players that took advantage of these opportunities. Often when national artists came to town they would need to pick up local musicians to fill out their combo and thus, “the thriving jazz clubs of the ‘50s and ‘60s allowed [Manty] Ellis and [Vic] Soward to play with some of the greats of their era.”³⁷⁶ As Ellis says, “I walked, and talked, and played, with the giants.”³⁷⁷

In addition to teaching, ‘sitting in’ at these clubs performed another function as it allowed black and white musicians to play together. Kaye Berigan, who is white, used to sit in at some of the black clubs in Bronzeville. He used to go to the Celebrity Club at 1546 North Twelfth Street after playing a gig and sit in with Bunky Green and Lee Burrows, of the Dick Ruedebusch band. Berigan would also sit in at the Polka Dot and the Rag Doll, which was located at 1352 West Lloyd Street. Apparently one door said Polka Dot and the other said Rag Doll, but they led into the same place. Berigan said, “Bobby Burdette was a wonderful tenor player, and he had Loretta Whyte on organ and Jimmy Duncan on drums and you could go in and sit in anytime. I was always

³⁷⁴ Leonard Skyes, Jr., “A Shrinking Class,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 31, 2001.

³⁷⁵ Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

³⁷⁶ Leonard Skyes, Jr., “A Shrinking Class,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 31, 2001

³⁷⁷ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

welcome.”³⁷⁸ Berigan was not the only one that did this. A number of white musicians sat in with black bands in the 1960s including Lee Cowen, Sig Millonzi, Jack Caryl, Ray Tabs, and many more. And as we saw with the after hours clubs, white and black musicians often mixed during jam sessions and other informal performances. But sitting in and jam sessions are different from paying gigs.

When one looks at Milwaukee jazz in the 1950s and 1960s there appears to be a racial divide. Part of this was exacerbated by the situation with the musicians union. As was common in the first half of the twentieth century the musicians’ union in Milwaukee was segregated. In 1924 black musicians formed Local 587, and it remained separate until all segregated unions under the American Federation of Musicians merged in 1965 in the wake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.³⁷⁹ Local 8 was the white union and the two Locals would often have disputes whenever a musician wanted to hire someone of another race. Manty Ellis tells a story about how he and Ray Tabs, a white piano player, helped push the issue in the mid-1960s:

I was part of the reason they merged. I was working with a guy named Ray Tabs and he played [keyboard] and I played guitar and he was getting gigs all over. Way on the south side, just he and I. And 587 called him and asked him why he was using me, couldn’t he get a white guitar player. He called me and said, ‘what the fuck is this. Man that ain’t got nothing to do with it.’ I said man you handle it. He said, ‘okay watch my smoke.’ He called and told them he wasn’t using any of those guys because they couldn’t play what he wanted and he would continue to use me. And they said, ‘we’re going to block you.’ And said, ‘well if you do, I’ll stay in the union but I’ll join Local 587.’ And so he did. And they called him in to the board, and that went national because 587 was a local union just like 8.

³⁷⁸ Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

³⁷⁹ E-mail correspondence with Lew Mancini, AFM Chief Operating Officer, January 24, 2012. “Here’s a ‘Ticket’ to Jam Session of Hottest Jazz Players in Town,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 5, 1941. The subject of Local 587 deserves more research, but it appears that no records of its operations exist. For more on Local 587 see Vick, “Walnut Street to No Street,” 56-82.

In addition to union pressure some club owners and managers did not want mixed race groups, though this became less of an issue in the 1960s when quality of performance became paramount.³⁸⁰

Generally the musicians were willing to work with each other regardless of race. As Manty Ellis said, the jazz community was so small that the black and white musicians all knew each other and intermingled. When asked about a division among racial lines, Ellis denied it existed, but then the more he talked, the more one could see where lines were being drawn as this excerpt highlights:

Shoot I know all the white musicians and they used to come on the north side. And we'd start little businesses together, setting up concerts together, and battle of the bands and all that. Oh man I've known so many guys like Sigi Millonzi, Lee Burrows, Lee Cowen, all of them white musicians, but they all came up and we all mingled together. But then you had all this racial bullshit going on. In the black community we opened our arms. You go in the white community and guys start wanting to know how many white guys you got in your band and how many black guys. I mean, what the hell does that got to do with it?...I encountered that quite a bit. It got to the point where they stopped coming to me because I didn't put up with it. And then it would filter over. You know the white community was acting crazy like that so then the black community started acting stupid. I always had a mixed band. Frank Luther was my bass player and he was a Jewish cat. Some people encountered me outside of a club wanting to know 'how come you don't have a black bass player?' And I said hey that's easy, "Can't none of them play. He can play." That's all that counts.³⁸¹

It is possible the sentiment described above could be attributed to the increasing race consciousness in Milwaukee during the 1960s and that some musicians felt the pressure of interracial conflict. It is also possible that as the jazz landscape changed and the available venues diminished, some musicians and audience members may have felt the need to draw boundaries in an attempt to protect their position.

³⁸⁰ Adedapo Interview, March 27, 2012.

³⁸¹ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

Milwaukee certainly was not unique in this sort of two-way discrimination. Though the racial barriers in jazz tended to be less than what existed in society in general, throughout the country race was still an issue and both black and white musicians could make a legitimate case for discrimination. White musicians and critics have long argued that there is an anti-white bias in jazz. In 1961 Sonny Rollins, a successful black saxophonist got a lot of flak for hiring Jim Hall, a white guitarist. The success of their recording, however, gave Hall a degree of respectability among black musicians. This reticence to hire white musicians, coupled with a doubt about the ability of white musicians to truly feel the soul of the supposedly African American music, often made it hard for white musicians to get a start in the industry. However, several well-respected black musicians including Dizzy Gillespie argued against the premise that only black people can play jazz, "...if you accept that premise, well then what you're saying is that maybe black people can *only* play jazz. And black people, like anyone else, can be anything they want to be." Nonetheless even some white critics claim that white musicians had no real influence on jazz, despite testimony by black musicians to the contrary.³⁸²

At the same time black musicians complained that white musicians dominated in the best musician polls in the jazz magazines *Down Beat* and *Metronome* in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Leonard Feather, a well regarded critic and editor from this period agreed that it was outrageous that musicians like Louis Armstrong and Billie Holliday were overlooked while at the peak of their abilities and blamed it on racism among the magazine publishers. As an editor he worked hard to end this practice and was successful

³⁸² Collier, *Jazz*, 183-184; Gillespie quote is in Lees, *Cats of Any Color*, 189-194, as is a more succinct quote from Clark Terry, "My theory is that a note doesn't give a fuck who plays it, as long as he plays it well."

enough to be accused of going too far toward favoring black musicians. Black musicians also complained that record companies favored white musicians and awarded them much more lucrative contracts. This may have been true for the most popular white musicians such as Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman, but in general record companies were unwilling to take big risks on any jazz musicians.³⁸³

Ultimately, in Milwaukee the seeming division between black and white bands and black and white clubs, may have actually been more a function of style than race-based discrimination. When asked about this Kaye Berigan said:

The black guys tended to play the more interesting jazz clubs. The white guys tended to play some clubs too [but more frequently dances, parties, balls, etc.]. There was for example a little street across from the Pabst, Front Street, and there were two clubs there. One was the Tunnel Inn where Dick Ruedebusch played a sort of Dixieland thing. And across the path was the Elbow Room and that was a black club. The Tunnel Inn was a white club. I guess, yeah there were definitely black clubs and white clubs. But there were some of us that were welcome in both. The white guys tended to be the readers, so they tended to play the big band, dance things. So yeah, usually the black guys didn't work with the white guys. But it tended to be white guys hired white guys and black guys hired black guys. But it might be because they like their playing better too. But, I'm sure there was prejudice around."³⁸⁴

While admitting that there may have been some prejudice, Berigan is pointing toward style and performance venue as the main factors. White musicians had a reputation for being able to sight-read charts (play a song on the first read-through of the music), while black musicians had a reputation for playing the melody by memory and then improvising on it. Thus the tendency was that white musicians would get the jobs that required more musical precision and adherence to the song as it was written, such as big band performances and dances. The black musicians tended to play in smaller combos, in smaller clubs, where improvisation was the focus. So these musical tendencies paired

³⁸³ Lees, *Cats of Any Color*, 197-198; Baraka, *Blues People*, 100.

³⁸⁴ Berigan Interview, April 19, 2012.

with where clubs were located, i.e. predominately black or white neighborhoods, helped reinforce an unspoken color line.

But jazz in Milwaukee did not happen in a vacuum and the events of the 1960s had their impact on the jazz scene. William Kenney argues that jazz “simultaneously stimulated emotionally charged moments of social daring and sensations of racial reconciliation through ritually ordered rhythm and harmony” and served to affirm for many “that a pluralistic urban society was possible.”³⁸⁵ But, for the majority of Milwaukee’s pluralistic society, black and white, jazz was not going to ease the tensions of the late 1960s. The fact is those events had more of an impact on jazz than jazz had on any sort of racial reconciliation.

The 1967 *Milwaukee Journal* article on the city’s nightlife made an oblique reference to the “current racial disturbances, which have slowed cabaret business.”³⁸⁶ Berkeley Fudge confirmed this in his understated way when he said he did not play much the week after the ‘riot.’³⁸⁷ If nothing else the strict curfew imposed by Mayor Maier would have shut down the clubs for several days. But, it appears that things must have gotten rolling again quickly as the black newspapers are full of listings for jazz shows in late 1967.³⁸⁸ However, the tension in the city following the ‘riot’ and during the 200 nights of open-housing marches must have precluded some potential audience members from crossing into other neighborhoods to hear live music. It seems quite feasible that

³⁸⁵ William Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History, 1904-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), xiv.

³⁸⁶ Mitchell Drew, “A Show Business Desert? Beertown Isn’t Quite That,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 9, 1967.

³⁸⁷ Pinkham, *Milwaukee Jazz Profiles*, 124.

³⁸⁸ *The Milwaukee Courier*, September 23, 1967, October 28, 1967, November 4, 1967, December 16, 1967; *The Milwaukee Star*, August 19, 1967, November 18, 1967, December 2, 1967.

this would have been an added factor in the slow economic downturn of the Milwaukee jazz club scene in this period.

One area where jazz connected to outside events was the rise of the black power movement in the late 1960s. Will Crittendon was a percussionist from Louisiana who moved to Milwaukee in the mid-1960s. He started a production company called Third World Productions and headed up several afro-jazz combos. In an interview with the *Milwaukee Star* Crittendon said, “I am a musician—but a musician cannot just be a musician—he must have a message and my message is for the liberation of Black.” He further said that, “‘INSTANT BLACK IS NOT THE ANSWER.’ By this, he stated that suddenly hating everything white will not help one bit; do something constructive.”³⁸⁹ The goal of the production company was to “develop new musical talent by providing undiscovered musicians with opportunities to make records and personal appearances. The emphasis is on Black performers, according to Crittendon.” Raymond Johnson of New York City and Berkeley Fudge were board members, music directors, and regional representatives. Johnson had played in Dick Ruedebusch’s group before moving to New York and was a composer and arranger.³⁹⁰ Crittendon and his groups played several shows in Milwaukee often for black pride events and to raise money for scholarships.³⁹¹

Jazz musicians also got involved in other educational and scholarship opportunities. For example the UWM Center for Afro-American Culture held a benefit concert where jazz was prominent. The concert proceeds would “help establish a rotating scholarship fund for students in black studies.” And the concert would “chronicle the

³⁸⁹ “Third World Productions Presents Concert,” *The Milwaukee Star*, November 23, 1968, emphasis in the original.

³⁹⁰ *The Milwaukee Star*, February 21, 1970.

³⁹¹ “Crittendon Speaks ‘Artists Should be Revolutionaries,’” *The Soul City Times*, October 5, 1968; *The Soul City Times*, October 19, 1968.

cultural expressions of the African-American from the time of his forced removal from Africa through his American experience.”³⁹² Another example was the summer program organized by the Mary Church Terrell Creative Summer that introduced a number of black children to musical instruments. The program was wildly popular as twice as many kids showed up as there was space for. The program was extended for two months after the funding ran out, but could not be sustained beyond that. The instructors were local professional musicians including Leonard Gay on saxophones.³⁹³

However, despite these efforts to connect jazz and the community it was clear that jazz clubs were in danger. In a 1971 *Milwaukee Star* article Dave Novick wrote that “local jazz needs support.” After lauding local musicians and the venue owners he wrote, “The problem now seems to be the absence of said ‘faithful’ who fail to support these community-minded endeavors, frequently run at a financial loss.” He went on to describe the Blue Monday show at Gentleman Jacks that ran from 3:00 to 8:00 pm and had the Berkeley Fudge trio plus sidemen, which no one attended. He said, “No one needs to spell it out...unless some of the multitude who profess to be jazz fans hereabouts support such efforts now, instead of wailing when they’re gone, things promise to get worse in our entertainment starved community.”³⁹⁴ The press of the early 1970s had less and less about jazz and there were almost no advertisements for clubs featuring live music. This was by no means the death of jazz, but it signaled some major changes that would be realized in the 1970s and beyond.

³⁹² “Concert Will Benefit Black Scholarship,” *The Milwaukee Star*, January 31, 1970.

³⁹³ “Instrumentalists from 8 to 14 Display Talent at Creative Center,” *The Milwaukee Star*, October 26, 1968.

³⁹⁴ Dave Novick, “Places to Go and People to See,” *The Milwaukee Star*, April 29, 1971.

As the effects of urban renewal were being felt in Milwaukee, jazz was changing on a national level as well. Several factors combined to change the audience and the way the music was played during this period. By the late 1950s inner city clubs began to shut down due to a loss of audience and the music moved into the suburbs and white neighborhoods. Also national events affected the music as black musicians began to bring ideas from the civil rights and black militancy movements into the music. The result was that jazz splintered in ways unseen prior to the 1960s. Some musicians continued to play in the hard bop medium of the 1950s, others brought more blues into the music and created soul jazz, while others moved into avant-garde jazz as a reflection of the turbulence of the 1960s. The result was that much of the black audience was alienated and many began to turn to rhythm and blues and soul music for their entertainment needs.

In Milwaukee redevelopment projects exacerbated these changes. Urban renewal and the expressways took their toll on the residences and businesses of Bronzeville and the jazz clubs were physically dislocated from the heart of the black community. As the black neighborhoods expanded north and west the clubs became spatially disjointed, which undermined the flow and easy mobility of the jazz scene of the 1940s and 1950s. This combined with changing tastes in musical entertainment and a diminishing economy meant that the jazz landscape of Milwaukee would be forever changed. African Americans increasingly moved out of the jazz community during this period and the club scene was becoming dislocated and detached. Morris Holbrook, a Milwaukee native, a jazz buff, and a well-renowned professor of marketing wrote, "Then something terrible

happened. Jazz died – or at least it went into deep hibernation for a while.”³⁹⁵ He was describing jazz in the early 1970s when all of his favorite musicians semiretired, moved to Europe, or went to jail.

However, jazz did not die in Milwaukee. It changed, rather dramatically, but the music, the musicians, and the audience lived on. The ongoing practices of community reinterpretation and improvisational living guaranteed survival, even if it meant that some clubs, musicians, and audience members were lost in the process. By the mid-1970s the jazz community had undergone a radical transformation, but it was still viable despite being smaller, more dispersed, and decidedly more middle class.

³⁹⁵ Morris B. Holbrook, *Consumer Research: Introspective Essays on the Study of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), 331.

Conclusion

“Blues for Cramer Street”³⁹⁶

The 1970s and Beyond

On January 28, 2012 Milwaukee Jazz Vision hosted Eastside Jazzfest 4 at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. On the surface this appeared to be just another small jazz concert in an auditorium setting that has become common in the current jazz landscape. However, if one looked a little deeper it became evident that this single evening represented the whole historic trajectory of the jazz community in Milwaukee. From the rise of the Walnut Street jazz scene to the state of jazz in the twenty-first century, all of the themes that have been explored in this thesis were evident on this chilly winter night in Milwaukee.

Milwaukee Jazz Vision (MJV) was founded by four local jazz musicians with the goal of “advancing the development and growth of the JAZZ COMMUNITY in Milwaukee, WI,” through hosting the biannual Eastside Jazzfest, contributing to jazz education, and building a jazz community by promoting the local jazz scene.³⁹⁷ MJV has an eye on the past and a view toward the future even as it promotes the current jazz scene. As such Eastside Jazzfest 4 featured Manty Ellis, one of the oldest jazz musicians in the city, Dan Nimmer, a young local star who has made it big in New York, and a

³⁹⁶ This is an original song written by Brian Lynch and included on his album *Back Room Blues* that was recorded for Criss Cross Jazz on December 30, 1989. The album was a tribute to his days as a jazz musician in Milwaukee and included Milwaukee pianist David Hazeltine. The liner notes say “Blues for Cramer Street” is “an uptempo cooker that flaunts Brian’s bravado chops to the max, an ode to another time and place. As Hazeltine explains, “That was the name of a band we had together back in the late ‘70s and also the name of the street where we lived with a drummer named Scott Napoli. It was kind of a haven for jazz musicians. It was the place where everybody crashed. Our doors were always open to jazz musicians, and we had plenty of them sleeping in various places around that pad.”

³⁹⁷ “About MJV,” *Milwaukee Jazz Vision*, accessed July 19, 2012.

<http://www.milwaukeejazzvision.org/index.php/home/about-mjv>. Emphasis in original.

number of high school and college musicians who represent the future of jazz in the city. On the stage that night one could witness the passing of the torch, the teaching of young musicians by their established elders, that has been key to the Milwaukee jazz community. Also with Ellis, one of the founders of the jazz program at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music (WCM), a number of graduates of that program, and the high school students and instructors involved in the current Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) jazz program, the role of educational programs that came to the fore in the 1970s was readily evident.

The choice of combos also represented aspects of Milwaukee's jazz history. There was Who's Your Daddy, an organ trio, the Manty Ellis's guitar trio, and there was the piano trio of Dan Nimmer. These types of bands were the backbone of the small clubs in Milwaukee in the 1950s and 1960s. The Milwaukee Jazz Vision Student Combo was larger, but still would have fit into a decent size jazz club like Fazio's or the Flame. Also evident in these combos was the aspects of race that developed over time in the jazz community. The majority of the musicians were white, while the Manty Ellis trio was all black and the student combo was mixed. Early jazz bands in Milwaukee tended to be segregated, over time they became more integrated, and in the last thirty to forty years white musicians have outnumbered black.

The setting also reflected a number of themes. The Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, built in 2005, is "a contemporary, cutting edge performing arts education and rehearsal facility for the young people of southeastern Wisconsin" that is home to a number of youth music and theater programs.³⁹⁸ What is most interesting about this space is that it is located at the corner of the former Third Street (now North Dr. Martin

³⁹⁸ Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://www.youthartscenter.org/>.

Luther King Drive) and Walnut Street, or what used to be the heart of black Milwaukee's business district and the eastern edge of the Bronzeville jazz scene. The space that had been cleared by urban renewal, thus erasing part of the jazz landscape, has been recreated and reimagined to reflect the current state of musical education in Milwaukee. It is also fitting that with the current dearth of jazz clubs the evening's proceedings were held in a somewhat antiseptic auditorium setting that indicates the way the majority of jazz performances are viewed today.

A further indication of the state of the jazz community was the rather paltry crowd. The audience was mostly white, middle class, and males outnumbered females, which is a fairly good representation of the jazz listenership in the twenty-first century. The high price of tickets, also a relatively recent development, may have further constrained who attended the event. The result was that only about 100 to 150 people were there to see some of the best Milwaukee jazz musicians, past, present, and future. But, the most important thing is that on this night the music was very good. The musicians were engaged and performed well, and the audience was interested and reacted well. So despite the numerous changes in the jazz community over the decades, on this night it was clear that the Milwaukee jazz community, though small, was still vibrant, vital, and viable.

The African American Community, 1970 to Today

The changes of the 1950s and 1960s continued into the 1970s. The migration of black southerners did not end until the mid-1970s and that, coupled with natural increase in the African American community plus the outmigration of whites, meant that the

percentage of black residents in Milwaukee continued to rise. In 1980 the city was 22.9 percent black and by 2010 African Americans made up forty percent of the city population.³⁹⁹ Redevelopment projects continued into the 1970s though they became more focused on downtown development and less about slum clearance. Projects like the Performing Arts Center in the 1960s, the First Wisconsin Center in 1973, and the Grand Avenue Mall in 1982 indicated a focus on demonstrating the attractiveness of Milwaukee as a community rather than helping the poor and working class. As the loss of industrial jobs increased, things looked quite bleak for inner city residents.

The deindustrialization of the 1970s and 1980s was not unique to Milwaukee. Northern cities experienced a rapid loss of manufacturing jobs for a number of reasons. Outdated factories and equipment, high labor costs, government regulations, and transportation costs meant that factory owners needed to modernize or move.⁴⁰⁰ At the same time there were federal subsidies to move factories to low-wage regions of the United States and incentives to move them overseas that had a particularly strong effect on northern black workers. George Lipsitz writes that, “seniority-based layoffs during the recessions of the early 1970s had an especially disastrous effect on Black workers, many of whom had secured access to skilled jobs only after the passage of civil rights legislation and direct action protests during the 1960s.”⁴⁰¹ This paired with the movement of factories to southern states and the general reduction in manufacturing meant that the northern working class in general, and especially blacks, suffered severe economic distress.

³⁹⁹ Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee,” 191; “State and County Quick Facts,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed July 18, 2012, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/55/5553000.html>.

⁴⁰⁰ Geib, “From Mississippi to Milwaukee,” 244; Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America’s Rust Belt, 1969-1984* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 8.

⁴⁰¹ Lipsitz, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 120.

Between 1968 and 1975 Milwaukee lost seventy-six firms that employed 16,000 people. Then over the period of 1976 to 1992 manufacturing firms in Milwaukee declined by another forty-six percent. Those that did not leave or shut down altogether still reduced their workforce dramatically. For example, by 1980 Allis-Chalmers, one of the city's biggest employers in general and of blacks in particular, had reduced its workforce to 3,700 from a post World War II high of 20,000.⁴⁰² The recession of the early 1980s further exacerbated the problem and manufacturing jobs dropped by another 22.1 percent between 1980 and 1982. In the mid and late 1980s there was a turnaround, but it was not sufficient to offset the losses of the previous two decades, especially for African American workers.⁴⁰³

At the same time as deindustrialization hit Milwaukee full force, there was a move toward conservatism in social programs designed to help inner city residents. In the early 1980s President Ronald Reagan reduced the amount of federal funds that were available to American cities as part of his attempt to curb spending. Then when Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist was elected in 1988 he further reduced the federal money that Milwaukee took as part of his belief in fiscal conservatism. Also Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson made moves to curb welfare expenditures at the state level because he believed the state's "generous" welfare policy was drawing poor people from other states.⁴⁰⁴ Thomas Sugrue argues that, "racialized inequality is, at core, a political problem. Still widespread is the assumption that blacks and whites live apart solely because of personal choice, not because of the enduring effects of public policies that have encouraged racial segregation. Deeply rooted is the belief that unemployment and

⁴⁰² Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee," 244; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 299.

⁴⁰³ Norman, "Congenial Milwaukee," 192-193.

⁴⁰⁴ Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 299.

poverty are the fault of poor people and their deviant attitudes and behaviors, not the consequence of macroeconomic changes that have gutted urban labor markets.”⁴⁰⁵ The loss of manufacturing jobs plus a reduction in social welfare funding meant that Milwaukee’s poor, particularly African Americans, faced a grim reality.

As economic woes deepened many inner city neighborhoods in Milwaukee saw a reduction in population. A few people moved to the suburbs, many more moved further north and west in Milwaukee, and some left the city altogether often returning south to follow manufacturing jobs. Nonetheless unemployment rates skyrocketed and there was a glaring disparity between blacks and whites. In 1986, 25.9 percent of African Americans were out of work versus only 5.1 percent of whites.⁴⁰⁶ In 1990 the black unemployment rate had risen to 31.2 percent and in 2000 the inner city rate was four times the rate of metro Milwaukee. Marc Levine argues that labor market exclusion is a better indicator than unemployment because it “calculates the proportion of the working age population (over 16 years old) that is either unemployed or not in the civilian labor force (in school, not looking for work, disabled, or in prison).” In 2000 that rate was fifty-nine percent in the inner city versus 29.5 percent in the suburbs. Levine asserts that, “Inner city Milwaukee remains a place where the majority of working age males do not hold jobs.” Much of this was due to the fact that the percentage of inner city people working in manufacturing dropped from 40.8 percent in 1970 to 19.2 percent in 2000 without a corresponding increase in employment in other fields.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), xviii.

⁴⁰⁶ Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee,” 196.

⁴⁰⁷ Marc Levine, *The Economic State of Milwaukee's Inner City: 1970-2000*, a report prepared by The University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Center for Economic Development, 2000, 16, 20, 21.

Deindustrialization, unemployment, and relatively lower wages for workers meant there was a corresponding increase in poverty in inner city Milwaukee. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s wages in Wisconsin had been about ninety-four percent of the national average. In the early 1980s that number fell to 89.8 percent even as job contraction was taking place.⁴⁰⁸ Inner city household incomes fell 13.7 percent in the 1980s and 1990s, which meant the median inner city income was forty percent of the metro area and less than thirty percent of the median suburban income. The result of these trends is that poverty rates in the central city increased from 36.9 percent in 1979 to 57.1 percent in 1989. During the 1990s inner city poverty rates fell to 44.3 percent, but this was due to the movement of poor people into neighborhoods on the northwest side of the city. Levine says “there was a spatial ‘rearranging’ of poverty in Milwaukee in the 1990s, rather than a meaningful reduction in poverty rates” as citywide poverty only declined from 22.1 to 21.3 percent during the decade.⁴⁰⁹

The housing issues created by urban renewal and expressway projects continued into the 1970s. One estimate said that 9.7 percent of all housing units had been demolished by 1970.⁴¹⁰ With more federal funds available Mayor Maier was much more successful than Mayor Zeidler had been in convincing the common council to take federal money for public housing. Initially the majority of the housing was for the elderly, but eventually projects like apartment complexes and “Section 8” rent supplements were aimed at the poor.⁴¹¹ However these projects were not enough to offset housing problems in the inner city. In the mid 1980s there was a shortage of low-

⁴⁰⁸ Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee,” 193.

⁴⁰⁹ Levine, *The Economic State of Milwaukee's Inner City*, 24-25, 3-4.

⁴¹⁰ Norman, “Congenial Milwaukee,” 191.

⁴¹¹ Bernard, “Milwaukee: Death and Life,” 182-183.

cost housing and thirty-two percent of households were spending more than half their income on rent. Studies also determined that redlining and housing discrimination were still in practice despite the open housing law.⁴¹² As spatial segregation continued, African Americans remained in the worst housing, and efforts to improve the situation had limited effect such that Milwaukee remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States.⁴¹³

As economic conditions declined in the wake of deindustrialization, social problems in the inner city intensified. The number of female run households increased, as did black-on-black crime especially with the drug-related conflicts of the 1980s. The education of black students continued to deteriorate as a 2001 study found that the African American high school graduation rate in Milwaukee was 34 percent.⁴¹⁴ Similarly, a June 20, 2006 *USA Today* article indicated that based on 2002 and 2003 data the overall graduation rate of Milwaukee Public Schools, which are predominately composed of minority students, was 43.1 percent, the fourth worst of the fifty largest school districts.⁴¹⁵ African Americans continued to protest conditions in the inner city, but their efforts were fragmented and spread among several issues.

In the 1980s there were protests over the killing of Ernie Lacy while in police custody as well as complaints about the lack of African Americans in high ranking and policy-making positions in the city. There were continued efforts to improve black

⁴¹² Norman, "Congenial Milwaukee," 195.

⁴¹³ Tom Tolan and Bill Glauber, "Milwaukee Area Tops Brookings Segregation Study of Census Data," *JOnline*, December 14, 2012, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/111898689.html>.

⁴¹⁴ Jay P. Greene, "High School Graduation Rates in the United States," *Manhattan Institute for Policy Research*, April 2002, accessed November 4, 2009, http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm.

⁴¹⁵ Greg Toppo, "Big-city Schools Struggle with Graduation Rates," *USA Today*, June 20, 2006, Accessed July 19, 2012, http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2006-06-20-dropout-rates_x.htm.

education, but these became splintered as some activists advocated integration at all costs, others promoted Black Nationalist and self-help ideals, and still others became proponents of Milwaukee's school voucher program. In the 1990s African American men and women pushed to reaffirm the importance of black manhood and womanhood and their role in uplifting the community. There was also a push for class solidarity, but the black community still remains somewhat fragmented. In the 1990s the first African American chief of police was sworn in, more blacks were appointed to policy positions, and blacks gained a greater foothold in the political process, but the African American community continues to face significant problems.⁴¹⁶ Ultimately the fragmentation of the black community and its economic woes had a profound effect on the changing shape and nature of the jazz community from the 1970s to today.

Jazz Post Urban Renewal

In the 1970s the changes in the jazz community that were brought about by urban renewal, shifts in entertainment preferences, and a declining economy were fully realized. After a lull in the early 1970s jazz experienced a bit of a resurgence in the middle of the decade. A 1975 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article described this resurgence as the product of the pop and rock crowd crossing over to jazz. For jazz purists the fusion of the 1970s was a musical nightmare, but the jazz/rock hybrid was a financial boon to club owners and the musicians that embraced it. In Milwaukee it also helped bring new people into the jazz community, which then helped enliven a dying club scene. The aforementioned *Milwaukee Sentinel* article highlighted a number of clubs, some that were new, others that had been around before, some had fusion, but still others were making it on straight

⁴¹⁶ Norman, "Congenial Milwaukee," 197-200; Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 300-305.

ahead jazz. However most of the clubs that were highlighted were on the Upper East Side, such as Sardino's Inn at 1617 North Farwell, Pritchett's at 2220 North Farwell, Teddy's at 1434 North Farwell, and Murphy's Landing at 1100 East Kane Place. Others like the Marc Plaza Hotel's Bombay Bicycle Club were downtown, and still others like Club Garibaldi were on the south side.⁴¹⁷ So there was a resurgence, but what goes unsaid in that resurgence is the notion of race.

The jazz that emerged in Milwaukee in late 1970s was becoming more and more white. The musicians, the audience, and the venues began to be dominated by whites as economics and changing tastes in the black community meant that their jazz participation was reduced. The cost of an instrument alone, not to mention lessons or classes, priced some people out of being a musician. There were still black musicians, but they found it harder and harder to find places to play. A 1989 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article highlighted a number of black jazz musicians as part of the newspaper's Black History Month coverage. These musicians pointed out the increasing struggle to find spaces to perform. Gerald Cannon was especially critical of the Milwaukee scene and said that many black musicians had to move to New York to find opportunities. Despite the intimation of discrimination it was not simply racism but a lack of opportunities to play in Milwaukee because fewer venues limited options. In 1989 there were only a handful of places that featured live jazz, but there was a plethora of quality musicians, white and black, in Milwaukee looking for places to play. Many of the musicians said the previous years had

⁴¹⁷ Dave Zurawik, "Jazz," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 10, 1975.

been bad, but they saw hope for the future. Unfortunately, for many these hopes would go unrealized.⁴¹⁸

One of the major reasons for the changes in the jazz community after 1970 was the way jazz musicians learn the music. As detailed in Chapter Three, jazz had been an apprenticeship art where new musicians learned in the fires of the jazz club. In the 1970s there was a transition and people started learning the music in academic settings. In Milwaukee the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music (WCM) was especially important. In 1971 Manty Ellis was selected as the coordinator of a new jazz program headed up by jazz musician and WCM instructor Tony King. Ellis was granted \$78,000 in federal Model Cities funds to get the program up and running. During his tenure the Ellis directed jazz combos had an amazing run of success winning nearly every jazz competition they entered.⁴¹⁹ With local musicians like King, Ellis, and Berkeley Fudge teaching the classes WCM turned out an impressive group that has gone on to influence jazz in Milwaukee for decades. In his book Derek Pinkham, also a WCM student, profiled thirty-four musicians. Of those musicians, at least twenty were either students or teachers (or both) at WCM at some point in their careers.⁴²⁰ This demonstrates how jazz had changed as the music went from something that was picked up, often by ear, practiced, and then tested in a live setting, to something that was learned in a classroom setting. This is not to say that academic trained musicians did not also go out and take their lumps in the clubs, but it does signal a change in who became jazz musicians.

⁴¹⁸ Jeff Bentoff, "Jazz Treasures: Masters of Music Keep Tradition Alive," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 10, 1989.

⁴¹⁹ "Manty Ellis to Head School," *The Milwaukee Courier*, June 12, 1971; Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

⁴²⁰ Pinkham, *Jazz Profiles*.

All of this points to a reconstruction of who makes up the jazz community. Beginning in the 1970s jazz became music for the middle and upper classes. A 1982 study by Harold Horowitz found that participation rates (people who listen to jazz radio, watch jazz on television, buy jazz albums, and go to jazz concerts) increase dramatically based on income and education. In almost all categories (except listening to jazz radio) the participation numbers doubled between lowest and highest income categories and between high school graduates and those with at least some college education.⁴²¹ James Lincoln Collier posits that a white middle-class child is more likely to be exposed to jazz than a black child from the ghetto because the audience today (he was writing in the 1990s) is the white middle class. He goes on to say that it is possible that the black middle class is as interested in jazz as the white, but “their numbers are substantially smaller.”⁴²²

Long-time members of the jazz community in Milwaukee confirm that this is the case. William Campbell, a former Bronzeville resident and friend of Bunky Green, said that people today just want a beat and an easy melody. “They don’t want to have to think” when listening to music.⁴²³ Manty Ellis states the case even more forcefully:

You go into the heart of the black community and you won’t find any jazz. And oddly enough the black community is more ignorant of the culture and the art form, than any other part of the city...It’s not about dancing. It’s about your culture...You should sit down and listen to Coltrane. You’re going to hear every cultural item coming from his heart. That’s why he sounds like he does...It’s the culmination of all aspects of black music. And it comes together and it becomes an elite form of music, which somehow became named jazz, which doesn’t fit it...Here, the elite form of the culture seems to be anti-education. Fuckin’ idiots.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Harold Horowitz, *The American Jazz Music Audience* (Washington, D.C.: National Jazz Service Organization, National Endowment for the Arts, 1986), 19-22.

⁴²² Collier, *Jazz*, 216, 219

⁴²³ Author interview with William Campbell, April 28, 2011.

⁴²⁴ Ellis Interview, June 6, 2012.

Again, much of this can be attributed to changes in taste—and what was available on the radio—as well as the economic downturn of the 1970s and 1980s that helped move jazz out of the black community as black clubs shut down. But, the fact is that jazz used to be a vernacular art form, played for and by people of average standing, and was immersed in the popular culture of the day. As Ben Ratliff argues, “The paradigm has shifted: in its lack of public support, its too-vaunted reputation, its recent character as a mostly educational entity, it’s much closer to museum-vitrine culture than robust, mass-produced, nation-defining flotsam.”⁴²⁵ Jazz is now bourgeois, middle class, the domain of the educated and affluent irrespective of race.

All of the changes that took place in the jazz community caused it to fragment in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Factions emerged based on race, education and background, and even location. In 1980 pianist Buddy Montgomery tried to address this problem by creating the Milwaukee Jazz Alliance Ltd. with the goal of creating a larger jazz audience and fostering growth within the jazz community. In many ways the goals of the Alliance were very similar to the goals of Milwaukee Jazz Vision today. Montgomery felt that “Milwaukee boasts one of the best array of strictly ‘local’ talent anywhere in the country with—like the rest of the jazz centers—not nearly enough work opportunities to sustain even a fraction of them.” The Alliance sponsored an all-star weekend that featured national talent like Art Farmer, Harold Land, Marlana Shaw, and Slide Hampton, in addition to some of the best local performers. The performances took

⁴²⁵ Friedwald, *The Future of Jazz*, 26.

place at clubs in black neighborhoods, the Upper East Side, and downtown.⁴²⁶ However, despite the promise of this endeavor the effects were minimal.

By 1982 the Alliance was dead and the factions firmly entrenched. According to a *Milwaukee Journal* article, “Consistent support from the jazz audience is lacking. And an active sense of mutual interest appears deficient among Milwaukee jazz musicians, as illustrated by the failure of the Milwaukee Jazz Alliance, formed 2 1/2 years ago.” There was a divide between the WCM people, primarily Tony King, and established performers like Melvin Rhyne and Buddy Montgomery. There was also a race-based division as “one veteran observer of various urban jazz scenes says that Milwaukee blacks simply do not congregate at jazz spots like they do in other cities.” Interestingly this racial divide was predicated on location. A three-day jazz showcase held at the Performing Arts Center downtown featuring national and local talent was sparsely attended. Some argued that had it been held at the Jazz Gallery, the main club at the time, the attendance would have been better. But, even the Gallery, with a central location at 932 East Center Street, drew “a proportionately small percentage of black customers.” And ironically, many suburban whites did not feel comfortable going to the Jazz Gallery under the misapprehension that it was in a bad neighborhood. Ultimately people attended the venues where they felt most comfortable, which meant that none of the venues were drawing a large audience.⁴²⁷

As the 1980s progressed the factions seemed to ease as all members of the jazz community had to face up to the reality of fewer club spaces and a shrinking audience.

⁴²⁶ Rich Mangelsdorff, “Jazz Toots Own Horn in All-Star Weekend,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 20, 1980.

⁴²⁷ Kevin Lynch, “Jazz and Milwaukee: Do the Factions Hurt Both,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 17, 1982; Pinkham, *Milwaukee Jazz Profiles*, 100-101.

Chuck LaPaglia opened the Jazz Gallery in September of 1978 and over the next six years managed to book an astonishing array of national talent despite operating on a shoestring budget. Some of the big names that performed there, often more than once, include Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz, Jimmy Smith, Mose Allison, Wynton Marsalis, Chet Baker, and Art Blakey, among others. In addition the Gallery booked the best local talent and even provided a venue for new and experimental musicians. However, even with the high-powered names LaPaglia was able to draw he had to shut down the club in 1984 due to economic problems.⁴²⁸ This left an enormous void in the Milwaukee jazz scene and the music entered another lull.⁴²⁹

In 1988 the *Milwaukee Journal* published an article about the few remaining jazz clubs. Though it tried to put a positive spin on the situation by highlighting the clubs that still existed such as the Jazz Oasis at 2379 North Holton Street, The Estate at 2423 North Murray Street, Chip and Py's at 815 South Fifth Street, and The Speakeasy Lounge at 600 West Brown Deer Road in Bayside, the article really spoke to the dwindling performance spaces and the shrinking jazz community.⁴³⁰ Over the years articles like this have appeared regularly and all tell pretty much the same story: the jazz scene used to be vibrant, but many of the clubs closed down, however there are still some around and

⁴²⁸ Bill Milkowski, "Jazz Mecca: Nightclub Offers Home for Jazz," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 10, 1978. In 2011 the Jazz Gallery reopened one block away from its original location as a collaborative effort between the Riverwest Artists Association and Milwaukee Jazz Vision. The new Gallery does not try to live up to the reputation of the original, but it does offer jazz a few times a month. They also produced a fascinating collection of newspaper collections from the original Gallery that highlight just how amazing the club was.

⁴²⁹ "The Jazz Legacy: Musicians and Aficionados Boost a Great Musical Tradition," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 22, 1987.

⁴³⁰ Eugene Kane, "Still in Session: But Only a Few Clubs Carry on the Struggle to Keep Jazz Alive in Milwaukee," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 3, 1988.

things are looking better for the future.⁴³¹ But the fact is Milwaukee entered a sort of stasis in the late 1980s that has been maintained until today.

Throughout the 1990s there were fewer and fewer clubs and it became a struggle for jazz musicians to find places to play. Jazz was never a good way to make a living in Milwaukee—almost all musicians had to have day jobs—but by the 1990s it was hard to even find regular gigs.⁴³² However musicians found other places to play such as the popular ‘Jazz in the Park’ series in downtown Cathedral Square Park or the on and off jazz clinics and concerts in Washington Park.⁴³³ Jazz increased in popularity in the schools and local groups such as the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) and University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (UWM) Youth Music Ensembles began to get involved in youth jazz. So despite diminished opportunities jazz continued to survive.

The situation in the 2000s is similar to that of the 1990s. There are still limited venues as only two clubs, the Estate and Caroline’s at 401 South Second Street, bill themselves exclusively as jazz clubs. There are other venues such as the Red Mill, Tonic Tavern, O’Donoghue’s Irish Pub, and Mason Street Grill that offer jazz but are primarily restaurants. Jazz advocacy groups such as Jazz Unlimited and Milwaukee Jazz Vision have taken leading roles in promoting jazz throughout the city, and the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music and UWM have strong jazz programs. Perhaps the most

⁴³¹ For example see “Clubs Put Jazz in the Spotlight,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 10, 1989; Leonard Skyes, Jr., “A Shrinking Class,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 31, 2001.

⁴³² On December 2, 1979 the *Milwaukee Journal* ran an extended piece titled “You’ll Never Get Rich: As a Jazz Musician in Milwaukee That Is” that describes how hard local musicians had to work to make ends meet. Author interviews with Adedapo, March 27, 2012; Berigan, April 19, 2012; and anonymous, March 30, 2012.

⁴³³ East Town Association website, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.easttown.com/events/jazz-in-the-park>. Washington Park has an interesting part in Milwaukee’s jazz history. For example Duke Ellington played there in 1966 in front of several thousand people. See “Ellington Blend of Jazz Mellows Crowd of 15,000,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 2, 1966.

encouraging aspect of the current jazz scene is the strength of its youth movement.⁴³⁴ Much like the late 1960s and 1970s a new crop of young talented musicians are taking the opportunity to learn from established local players. In addition to the MYSO and UWM programs, Jazz Unlimited and Milwaukee Jazz Vision offer scholarships to talented youth.⁴³⁵ So the jazz community, which has always been small, may have become even further constricted, but with the quality musicians still around and the growing youth movement chances for survival in the ensuing decades are good.

The large-scale migration of African Americans to Milwaukee had an enormous impact on the black community and the city as a whole. It changed the way African Americans lived, and the way they viewed themselves as part of the city. It also forced the rest of Milwaukee to view the black community in new ways, and to imagine a more pluralistic society whether they wanted it or not. The change was bumpy to say the least, and significant progress still needs to be made, but the effects are undeniable.

Conversely, migration did not have the profound effect on the jazz community that one might expect in light of the changes within the city. Though many jazz musicians were migrants, most of them came earlier than the post World War II migration, or came to Milwaukee for reasons that were not part of the Great Migration. In addition a significant portion of Milwaukee musicians were born in the city, and though many left, most retained their Milwaukee ties. One would expect that the large influx of African Americans would have changed the jazz audience, but because the

⁴³⁴ Adedapo Interview, March 27, 2012; Harpole Interview, April 26, 2012.

⁴³⁵ Jamie Briewick, "The State of Jazz," *On Milwaukee*, January 19, 2011, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.insidemilwaukee.com/article/242011-the-state-of-jazz>; Jazz Unlimited of Greater Milwaukee, accessed May 4, 2012 <http://www.jazzunlimitedmke.org/>.

move came so late other factors such as economics and changing tastes had already begun to undermine the black listening audience. So, while migration forever altered the landscape of the black community and the city itself, it did little to help preserve the jazz community as it had been in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Urban renewal had a more lasting impact on jazz in Milwaukee. Redevelopment projects played a large role in the fragmentation of both the black community and the jazz community. The spatial dislocation created by these projects disrupted the very sense of community within the African American population. By undermining existing businesses and forcing residents to either move into new areas or crowd into substandard housing, the cohesiveness of the community centered on Walnut Street was destroyed. When this happened the Bronzeville jazz community was also forced to reinvent itself. As clubs closed, or moved, the democratic flow of the black jazz scene was broken up into several separate units that threatened the longevity of the jazz community. However, since the majority of urban renewal and expressway projects took place in the inner core, the downtown jazz hub and the emerging Eastside hub were able to help keep the jazz community alive in the city. Thus the process of live jazz moving out of the inner city and into predominately white neighborhoods was realized. In the end the jazz community was forever changed by these projects, but it improvised and lived on.

These economic, geographical, and social changes came to the fore in the post renewal era as deindustrialization and the economic downturn took deeper hold. The African American community became more economically marginalized even as it began to make strides politically and socially. This furthered the fragmentation of the community as people sought to deal with their personal problems as well as the problems

of the group as a whole. At the same time there were changes within the jazz community that whether cause or effect, undermined the black jazz scene in Milwaukee. As the practitioners and audience became more middle class, jazz became the music of an educated, affluent, and predominately white community. Blacks were certainly still a major part, but they no longer dominated the art the way they had in the 1940s and 1950s. The jazz community changed, partly in reaction to events in Milwaukee, and partly due to changes in the larger community, but without question the jazz landscape no longer resembled earlier eras.

Ultimately jazz was not the unifying force that one might hope it could be. The jazz community was simply too small to have a major effect on the city as a whole. Even when jazz was at its peak popularity in the late 1940s and early 1950s the majority of Milwaukee did not pay much attention. Then as tensions grew between black and white Milwaukee in the 1960s, jazz was losing its already tenuous grip on the community. Though jazz may well have been an integrationist force for those who were already in the fold, it did not have the power to sway the majority. In their 1965 study of the black community in Milwaukee, O'Reilly and his colleagues argued that many of the problems between blacks and whites result from a lack of communication and that this communication is constrained by a lack of contact.⁴³⁶ Jazz, along with sports, may have been the best point of contact between blacks and whites as both the musicians and the audience mixed and mingled and had an obvious common ground. But, even with this common ground and an increasingly integrated jazz community, we have seen that factions existed in jazz, let alone the city at large. Ultimately, even the people most fully

⁴³⁶ O'Reilly, *People of the Inner-Core North*, 9.

invested in jazz and the jazz community said that it had very little effect on the general population of Milwaukee.⁴³⁷

Jazz is an improvisatory art. It is fluid, mobile, always in a state of change, always in a creation state, subject to the whims of its makers, and influenced by myriad outside forces. Community too is always in the process of creation and destruction, change and formation, its makers have power, but so too does its destroyers. Community is especially vulnerable to outside forces and it is incumbent on its members to improvise new meanings, values, and sources of power, or it will wither. The forces of migration, urban renewal, and deindustrialization existed in numerous cities throughout the country, and communities in these places had to employ processes of cultural renegotiation that were similar to what we have seen in the Milwaukee model.

In Milwaukee the jazz community and the African American community were subjected to especially strong social, political, and economic forces in the middle part of the twentieth century that demanded constant improvisation and reinvention. Both communities survived these challenges, but had to change in numerous ways so that later versions bore little resemblance to their predecessors. In the end the constant reformation of the communities was aided by their mobility, or fluidity, in both the physical and social sense. And though both communities continue to struggle, they endure.

⁴³⁷ Every one of the interview respondents for this paper said that jazz had little impact on race in the city and that Milwaukee in general did not pay much attention to jazz. All of them attributed this to the small size of the jazz community.

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Appendix: Milwaukee Jazz Clubs

This is a list of taverns, nightclubs, restaurants, and ballrooms that hosted live jazz at some point in their existence. It does not include other performance spaces such as auditoriums, community centers, and outdoor settings. This collection is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather includes the venues that I came across in the process of researching the history of jazz in Milwaukee. This list is generated from a variety of sources including newspaper articles, advertisements, interviews, business guides, and the few secondary sources on jazz in Milwaukee. Because these venues have not been thoroughly vetted, and because clubs changed locations and names frequently, I have chosen not to include addresses. The thesis text does include the addresses of many of the clubs that appear below, but for others it was not possible to determine a correct location. In the cases where there was a name change due to a change in ownership I have listed that club separately. Ultimately, this list is intended merely as a jumping off point that can be used to spur further research into the topic.

The 3 Dolls	Blue Chip Inn
711 Club	Blue Room
Activity Show Lounge	Bobby's Lounge
Ad Lib	Boyd and Davis
Alexander's	Brass Rail
Alfie's	Brother's Lounge
Andy's Tap	Brother's II
Amelia's	The Bullring
Antonio's	Café Melange in the Wisconsin Hotel
Art's	Caroline's
Atrium Lounge	Casablanca
The Attic	Celebrity Club
Avante Garde	Chateau Lounge
Bamboo Room	Chip and Py's
Basin Street Lounge	Christopher's
Blackamoor Room	Cleff Club
Black Steer	Clock Bar

Club 26
 Club Blu
 Club Congo
 Club Everleigh
 Club Milwaukeean
 Club Shamrock
 Congo Club
 Crown Room at the Pfister Hotel
 Crystal Ballroom/Bar
 Curro's
 Desalvo's
 Devine's Ballroom
 Dimitri's
 Don Jackson's Town Club
 Down Beat
 Duke's Place
 East Towne
 Eddie Jackson's Supper Club
 El Matador
 The Elbow Room
 The Elm Grove
 Entertainer's Club
 The (Jazz) Estate
 The Exit
 Fazio's
 The Flame
 Frenchy's
 Gallagher's
 Gentlemen Jack's
 Gold Coast
 The Green Living Room
 Grtiz's Pizzazz
 Harris Lounge
 Hoffman's East
 Holiday House
 Holiday Inn Midtown
 Intrigue Lounge
 Italian Village
 The Jam Room
 Jazz Gallery
 Jazz Oasis
 Jessie Graystone's Bar
 Jimmy Mitchell's 20th Century Bar
 John Hawk's Pub
 Jon and Lou's
 Junior's Bar & Grill
 Kings IV
 Kodric's
 Kokomo's
 Lakefront
 The Lion's Den
 Layton Place
 The Lounge
 Main Event Lounge
 Manning Irish Pub
 The Mason Street Grill
 The Matador
 Max's Tap
 Mayme's Ebony Bar
 Metropole
 Millionaire's Club
 Mint Lounge
 Moon Glow
 Morri's
 The Most
 Mr. Bear's
 Mr. Jimmy's Place
 Mr. Leo's
 The New Lounge
 Niccolo's Lounge
 O'Donaghues Irish Pub
 The Oriental
 Oscar Johnson and Willie Champion's
 Blue Note Lounge
 Packing House
 Pelican Club
 Pink Pig
 Pink Pony
 Pitch's
 Plantation Club
 Playbill Lounge in Ramada Inn
 Polka Dot Club
 Pritchett's
 Pzazz
 Rail's
 Rancho's Club
 Red Carpet Inn
 The Red Garter
 Red Mill Live
 Red Mill West
 The Rhythm Club
 Richard's Retreat

Right Down Front
Riverside Theater
The Roof at Wisconsin Theater
Ronnie K's
Rose Room
Sardino's Inn
Sardino's Surf
Satin Doll Show Lounge
Savoy Tap
Scaler's
The Scene
The Scenic Lounge
Schroeder Hotel
Shaker's
The Ship
Showboat Café
Someplace Else
Something Different
Sportsman Lounge
Stage Door Johnny's

Stefano's
Ted's Blue Note Lounge
Teddy's
Thelma's Back Door
Third Street Pier
Thousandaire's Club
Tic Toc
Tina's Lounge
The Tonic Tavern
Towne Room
Tunnel Inn
Tippin' Inn
Trocadero Club
VIA on Downer
Villa Terrace
Warner Theater
White Horse
White House
Wonderland Ballroom
Wyndam Milwaukee Center