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Grassroots and Community Activism Within Milwaukee's Black Community: A Response to Central City Renewal and Revitalization Efforts in the Walnut Street Area, 1960s to 1980s

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GRASSROOTS AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM WITHIN MILWAUKEE'S

BLACK COMMUNITY: A RESPONSE TO CENTRAL CITY

RENEWAL AND REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN THE

WALNUT STREET AREA, 1960s TO 1980s

by

Madeline M. Riordan

A Thesis Submitted in

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ABSTRACT

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor Arijit Sen

Many researchers and scholars have explored the Black urban experience and have often

chosen to focus on the systemic and institutionalized forms of racism that affect different aspects

of Black lives. Descriptions of central city lives as told by Black central city residents are starkly

similar to the descriptions of Black residents of industrialized cities throughout the United States.

Fragments of the Black urban experience are contained in discussions of the effects of urban

renewal efforts, including "redevelopment" and "revitalization," beginning most heavily in the

1940s. Looking back at urban renewal designs and strategies from the 1940s through the 1980s is

crucial to beginning to understand the entirety of the Black urban experience. Much of the

literature on urban renewal focuses on the ramifications of legislative programs and the factors

that influenced decision making at multiple levels, primarily the individual, the community, the

larger city, and within public and private spheres. These pieces, however, do not tell the entire

story, and tend to leave out the influence that grassroots and community groups within central

city Black neighborhoods had over the revitalization of their immediate environments. While

some scholarship does engage with Black agency, it, again, tends to focus on what is happening

to local Black populations, not on what is being done *by* Black community members. This thesis

focuses on a particular Black community and how their actions created change and, thus, contributes to the evolving discussion of the Black urban experience.

It is important to investigate Black grassroots and community groups in order to come to a fuller understanding of a crucial piece of the Black urban experience and to challenge a still predominant viewpoint that the Black urban population was largely idle in terms of taking action to influence their surroundings. In addition to exploring this marginalized history, this thesis seeks to add to the narrative of Milwaukee's Black population, whose voice has repeatedly and intentionally been overpowered, and to expose a small portion of the structural and institutional racism and disadvantage those in power have historically exposed this country's Black population to.

In order to accomplish these objectives, this thesis will examine the creation of Milwaukee's Bronzeville, the subsequent destruction of this community that accompanied urban renewal efforts, and the response of Black residents to this destruction. This thesis will focus on the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc., whose primary goal was to save the integrity of a particular Black neighborhood through the preservation of housing and the integration of residents into decision-making roles. To fully understand how Milwaukee fits into the narrative of urban renewal experiences in the United States, preeminent scholars such as Gilbert Osofsky, James R. Grossman, Arnold R. Hirsch, Thomas J. Sugrue, David M.P. Freund, Katherine McKittrick, and Mindy Thompson Fullilove will be referenced as they have laid the groundwork for how certain decisions came to be racialized to harm Black central city residents and the effects that urban renewal efforts had on existing Black communities. In addition, scholars that have studied the City of Milwaukee, such as John Gurda, Joe William Trotter, Jr., Patrick Jones, and Paul Geib, will be utilized to piece together pieces of the Black urban experience that, to an

extent, have already been explored. Archival materials from governmental entities and the

Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc. will be utilized to showcase first-hand accounts of

events and to emphasize the narratives of this particular Black community.

These existing documents and pieces of scholarship help to uncover one community's

response to central city revitalization efforts in the post-industrial city of Milwaukee. They are

pieced together to expose a contradiction to the predominant view of the Black population while

emphasizing how outside factors work together to negatively influence environments and

populations deemed unfit or undesirable. Instead of perpetuating the acceptance of erasing

certain components of the Black urban experience, this research project seeks to give space to

discuss the activism among Black residents that took place in one urban setting while advocating

for the inclusion of Black histories into the history of Milwaukee. It is the hope of this author

that this research project will encourage future scholars to engage with the Black urban

experience in a way that emphasizes the activism of the Black community and exposes racism

within structural and institutional entities that subdue and omit the Black voice.

To

my parents,

my sisters,

my teammate,

my daughter,

and all those that helped edit this document

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACW…………………………………………………………...Artists Concerned in WAICO

FEPC……………………………………………………Fair Employment Practices Committee

FHLBB…………………………………………………..Federal Home Loan Bank Board

HOLC…………………………………………………..Home Owner's Loan Corporation

HUD…………………………………………………...…..Housing and Urban Development

I-43……………………………………………………………...……..Interstate 43

MUL………………………………………………………….Milwaukee Urban League

NAACP…………………………...National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NAREB…………………………………………….National Association of Real Estate Boards

NHP………………………………………………………National Housing Partnership

RAT……………………………………………………….……….Remove All Trash

VISTA……………………………………………………….Volunteers In Service To America

WAICO…………………………………………….Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc.

WWI…………………………………………………………………..World War I

WWII………………………………………………………………………World War II

YMCA……………………………………………………..Young Men's Christian Association

<center>**Chapter One**</center>

<center>**The Black Urban Experience: Reconnecting Black Histories to City Histories**</center>

Black voices have traditionally been left out of discussions regarding Black[1] experiences, especially during instances of cultural upheaval. One such instance of this historical disregard is that of the Black urban experience during the years comprising national and local urban renewal projects. Although formalized federal urban renewal legislation ceased to gain much backing after the 1970s, scholars are still attempting to understand the ramifications of urban renewal projects that began in the 1940s. Research on this subject continues to be relevant because ideas about the Black urban experience are changing, new urban renewal efforts continue to affect residents, and there is much to learn from the histories that come out of cities affected by urban renewal.

This particular thesis research project engages with a small neighborhood in the City of Milwaukee surrounding a once thriving thoroughfare, Walnut Street, and the actions that residents took to deal with the consequences of urban renewal. Although this case study is only a small example of the many urban renewal projects that took place from the 1940s through the 1980s, it begins to bring to light the activism of Black residents in influencing their immediate environment. However, to fully comprehend urban renewal as a movement, it is important to explore the context of urban renewal in a broader, national sense.

To inform my preliminary background research, I explored concepts brought to light by Gilbert Osofsky, focusing on Harlem, James R. Grossman and Arnold R. Hirsch, focusing on

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[1] This author has chosen to capitalize the term "Black" throughout this document. The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition, Chapter 8, Rule 8.39 states "common designations of ethnic groups… are usually lowercased unless a particular publisher or author prefers otherwise." This particular author prefers the capitalization of the term "Black" as it refers to a cultural and political formation of people, not a skin color. "White," on the other hand, is not capitalized due to negative ties with white supremacy groups, such as the Klu Klux Klan.

Chicago, and Thomas J. Sugrue and David M.P. Freund, focusing on Detroit. Not only are there demographic similarities between cities like Milwaukee, Harlem, Chicago, and Detroit, but there are also similarities in larger matters, particularly when discussing housing discrimination. It is through the examination of these particular scholars that these matters become increasingly apparent. Osofsky, Grossman, Hirsch, Sugrue, and Freund focus primarily on the economic and political landscapes that shaped the Black urban experience in these cities. In order to fully understand the ramifications of these landscapes, one must delve into the reasoning behind certain decisions and the effects that they have on those impacted by them, in this case, Black Americans.[2]

Exploring these larger issues reveal loftier themes that arise out of urban renewal projects, such as the deliberate "killing" of certain sections of the city, designated as urbicide by Katherine McKittrick, and the emotional impacts of demolition and displacement, designated as root shock by Mindy Thompson Fullilove. McKittrick and Fullilove utilize the discussions that Osofsky, Grossman, Hirsch, Sugrue, and Freund engage with, but take the conversation a step further by exploring how legislation and decision making have historically been conducted and how residents, especially Black residents, were directly affected, both physically and mentally.

Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto and Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration by Gilbert Osofsky and James R. Grossman respectively, discuss the migration of Black people from the South to the North for employment opportunities and due to their desire to escape racial and social rejection and violence. Gilbert Osofsky focuses on the community of

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[2] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940 – 1960*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), & David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Harlem in New York City for his examination of the housing situation that Black people faced

when they chose to settle in this location. In the late 1800s, Harlem became Manhattan's first

suburb, transforming from a shantytown to a modern urban center filled with transportation,

lighting, and contemporary sanitation facilities. Land was cheap and residents and contractors

had high hopes for the area. In areas of Harlem that did not become part of this initial wave of

development, Europeans and Black Southerners settled.[3]

While Black individuals and families traditionally lived in the less attractive

neighborhoods on the outskirts of residential areas, affluent Black people pushed for integration

into the more prosperous areas. With the continued influx of Black people from the South,

housing space was in high demand. Because of the predominant social perception of migrating

Black people, many white residents, including those European immigrants that generally lived in

the same areas as Black individuals and families, did not want to live in close proximity to this

incoming Black population. Consequently, a massive exodus of people occurred, opening up

residential space for Black people to settle.[4]

Osofsky finds that due to the high rents landlords charged Black tenants, Harlem was

transformed, once again, from an area of prosperity to an area containing slum-like conditions.

The "slum-like" conditions Osofsky references include, but are not limited to, the overcrowding

of housing due to the accommodation of lodgers, inability to keep up with sanitation, lack of

attention towards physical housing needs, and higher rates of death from diseases. These

conditions forced the decline of Harlem and thrust Black residents into unstable and unhealthy

living conditions, stifling their ability to become independent. To combat some of these

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[3] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 75.
[4] Ibid., 9 & 109.

conditions, Osofsky discusses the creation of social service agencies in Harlem, and the entire state of New York, to aid Black residents in their escape from the cycle of instability.[5]

While Osofsky recognizes the negative impacts that certain conditions, such as those present in Harlem, had on Black bodies, what he fails to emphasize and discuss in depth are the implications of race relations on Black people as both individuals and as entire communities. Osofsky continues to perpetuate the dominant view of white scholars: Black people had control over their immediate environments and slums were created because of Black resident's lack of desire, not because of systemic racialized practices. In addition, his discussion of the creation of social service agencies to aid Black people in escaping the "cycle of instability" perpetuates the conversation regarding the incapability of Black people to help themselves. It also emphasizes the need for larger societal interventions when, in fact, the environments of Black residents were created by those in power, mainly white individuals.

James R. Grossman focuses on the main reasons behind the migration of Black Southerners to Chicago - increased independence and to escape racial oppression they continued to experience - through the eyes of the migrants themselves. To Black Southerners, Chicago represented stable employment, higher compensation, freedom from racial criticisms, and good schools for children.[6] Journeys to the North were often fraught with legal and social ramifications for Black people attempting to leave the South. Many Southern Black residents were fearful of white violence, social ridicule, and the unknown of leaving their Southern roots. These reservations caused many Black people to stay in the South, appeasing the whites that sought to keep them there.[7] In an attempt to put the claims of Southern whites to rest, many Black migrants reached out to Chicago social service agencies, churches, and employers for

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[5] Ibid., 135-136.
[6] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 16-17.
[7] Ibid., 22-23 & 99.

financial resources and the guarantee of employment opportunities upon arrival. Although there were organizations in Chicago designed to help migrants find employment and housing, racism still existed within these sectors.[8]

While Osofsky chose to focus on Harlem's housing, Grossman looks at the racial tensions that Black people experienced in Chicago's employment sector, particularly when Black workers were used as strikebreakers, or temporary employees, and when Black workers refused to join unions. Each of these situations created and exacerbated tensions between white and Black workers portraying Black employees as "usurpers" of white jobs during strike times and outsiders when refusing to join unions. In addition to the negative perceptions that Black workers faced in Chicago, they encountered ongoing job and financial insecurity, which, in turn, prompted the creation of social service programs, as discussed in Osofsky's work.[9]

By using the viewpoint of the Black migrant in this work, Grossman is able to integrate a discussion of personal perceptions of the process of migration into a conversation about the hardships faced upon arrival in Chicago. Grossman is also able to discuss the incorporation of grassroots organizing through structured aid given to new Black migrants in order to combat some of the negative racial ideologies faced in Chicago. He also suggests that, while there were hurdles to jump over, Black migrants played a more active role in their decisions to leave the South, which relied heavily on the transference of information from the North to the South. Grossman's discussion begins to make the move from Black residents in the North being depicted as passive actors in a larger urban evolutionary story to active participants in collective social and economic decisions that affected the Black community in the years that followed the Great Migration.

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[8] Ibid., 116.
[9] Ibid., 170-174, 210 & 221.

Both Osofsky and Grossman look at the Black urban experience through the lens of the Great Migration and the years surrounding that particular movement of bodies. Other scholars focus on the Black urban experience in post-industrial cities in the years that followed the Great Depression and the end of World War II (WWII). Arnold R. Hirsch does so in his work <u>Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940 – 1960</u> as does Thomas J. Sugrue in his work <u>The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit</u>.

Many scholars assume that racial ideologies manifested through the ghetto were fixed and unchanging. Arnold R. Hirsch, however, through his exploration of Chicago, concluded that ideas and perceptions of the ghetto and its inhabitants are constantly being "renewed, reinforced, and reshaped."[10] He argues that ideologies and perceptions of the ghetto and its Black inhabitants are formed by white citizens and expressed through legislative and municipal regulation, yielding a racially segregated city. Instead of focusing on actions that Black residents took to create their communities, Hirsch focuses on the white population of Chicago and argues that it was this particular population that enabled the creation of Chicago's "second ghetto" by maintaining and perpetuating racial segregation.[11]

White residents largely opposed urban renewal plans that included the construction of low-income housing in white neighborhoods because they saw incoming Black residents as a threat. Consequently, plans were stalled and displaced Black residents were relocated to already existing Black communities where living conditions were no better than the communities they left.[12] Some areas predominately occupied by Black residents were "reclaimed" by whites for

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[10] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, xii.
[11] Ibid., 23-39.
[12] Ibid., 136-137.

middle-class residential neighborhoods. These actions effectively reinforced residential segregation and white self-interest.[13]

While much of Hirsch's argument is novel and adds to the discussion of the effects of white people exerting power over the Black population in a crucial way, he focuses so extensively on the power of white people over Black residents that personal accounts of Black resistance get lost. Hirsch's exploration only allows for a piece of Chicago's physical and demographic structure to be explored, thus, giving white people in power additional influence by erasing particular chunks of this time period.

Thomas J. Sugrue focuses his research on post-WWII Detroit and suggests that accumulating circumstances, such as white flight and deindustrialization, were the causes of negative racial tensions in central cities. This viewpoint strays from popular discussion of the time that conversely sees these as outcomes of racial tensions. As many scholars suggest, Black individuals and families disproportionately suffered the negative consequences of economic decline following the end of both World War I (WWI) and WWII. In terms of housing in Detroit, Black residents suffered at the hands of whites through the use of violence, intimidation, and legislation that continued to force them into dilapidated, crowded, and unsafe neighborhoods.[14]

Sugrue discusses some tactics used by Black residents to ensure the manageable expansion of their neighborhoods and communities, but recognizes that many white homeowners saw these tactics as threats to their own stability. Accordingly, racially discriminatory practices, such as redlining and the creation of semi-political activist groups like Neighborhood Improvement Associations, were utilized to keep Black persons out of white neighborhoods.

[13] Ibid., 157-160.
[14] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 4-8.

Sugrue finds that urban decline was ultimately a perfect storm resulting from economic and political decisions made on multiple levels, including institutions, groups, and individuals.[15]

Sugrue points to the fact that the urban crises of the 1960s, such as deindustrialization and white flight, were evident in central cities during preceding decades. He highlights Black-led organizations that fought against the seemingly resolute situations into which Black residents were thrust and environments in which they were contained. Sugrue also finds a way to integrate many aspects of the Black urban experience into this work while taking the Black perspective into account, which had been largely missing from prior scholarly pieces.

Using Sugrue as a jumping off point, David M.P. Freund continues the exploration of race relations in terms of economics and politics, focusing on housing in Detroit. He centers on two main ideas throughout this book: the definition of race is constantly evolving and the ways in which racism is manifested are also continuously changing. Whites in the 1960s were preoccupied with homeownership, property, and neighborhoods, which affected the ways in which they viewed Black people. Freund suggests that racism of the 1960s was not based on physical differences, but rather the notion that Black people "posed a threat to communities of white property owners."[16] Freund states that this particular manifestation of racism was fueled by governmental decisions that created residential segregation, in the form of suburbs, and perpetuated the perception that inequality was merely a manifestation of market forces.[17]

As in Hirsch and Sugrue's books, Freund points to tactics that were used and implemented by governmental entities to ensure that residential and racial segregation were preserved while absolving themselves of any racist burdens associated with these practices. Not only was the government absolved of the accusation of being racist, but white homeowners could

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[15] Ibid., 11, 38 & 214-215.
[16] Freund, *Colored Property*, 12.
[17] Ibid., 9.

be as well because apparently neutral market forces, not personal attitudes or beliefs, explained

any changes within the city. By using the entity of "the market," whites were able to, once again,

deny the existence of racism in certain practices while also denying the concept of white

privilege in the housing market.[18] The discussion of property from this particular lens adds to

previous conversations of residential segregation in post-war cities by concentrating on specific

tactics used by the government and citizens, particularly white citizens, to justify certain actions.

However, what is missing is the presence of Black voices and their experiences and

interpretations of the housing market, legislative tactics, and, ultimately, residential segregation

in the City and suburbs of Detroit.

      Gilbert Osofsky, James R. Grossman, Arnold R. Hirsch, Thomas J. Sugrue, and David

M.P. Freund lay out many aspects of the Black urban experience upon settlement in Northern

cities that had a profound impact on their daily lives. What can be further explored, however, are

the actions and structural forces that created a Black sense of place and the physical effects that

these experiences had on Black bodies. Katherine McKittrick seeks to fill that void in her article

"On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." Her research suggests that the ways in

which Black communities are spatially configured are intertwined with "practices of domination

and deliberate attempts to destroy a Black sense of place."[19] McKittrick points to the history of

Black persons in America and the structural constructions of what it means to be labeled as

Black, which equates to being a body "without." Through this perception, Black bodies are seen

as being incapable of having certain rights, whether that is rights to land, rights to freedom, or

rights to social inclusion. These lacks of rights form the ideas behind the fluctuating definition of

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[18] Ibid., 37, 207 & 249.
[19] Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social and Cultural Geography*, *12*(8), December 2011, 947.

racism, the creation of specified places for Black cultures, and the structural denial of a place for Black people within the larger United States society.[20]

Time and time again, policies have been put into place to erase the rich history and culture of America's Black population, whether it is during the times of slavery and plantations or through the continual imprisonment of Black bodies.[21] McKittrick also identifies instances of urbicide as examples of the historical erasure of a Black sense of place. She defines urbicide as "the deliberate death of the city and willful place annihilation" and suggests that Black communities suffer disproportionately from urbicide by means of environmental, social, and infrastructural decay.[22] In this way, a Black sense of place is destroyed by the physical and psychological destruction of the spaces that Black people have been forced to inhabit.[23]

One way in which the concept of urbicide is exemplified is through the historical upheaval known as urban renewal. This mid-1900s movement was expressed as uneven development in central cities, which solidified seemingly natural "links between [B]lackness, underdevelopment, poverty, and place."[24] During this urban renewal time period, Black communities, those "without," were specifically targeted and, thus, urban renewal acts became racialized and continued to shape the environments of Black people, facilitating the definition of a Black sense of place. The perspective of McKittrick is crucial to the conversations surrounding urban renewal efforts of the past, present, and future as it calls for a reformation of our current knowledge of systems that affect Black people.[25] The concept of urbicide can aid scholars in this

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[20] Ibid., 948-949.
[21] Ibid., 952 - 955.
[22] Ibid., 951.
[23] Ibid., 947 & 951.
[24] Ibid., 951.
[25] Ibid., 955.

reformation when looking at how cities came to produce their current physical structure and how decisions of the past have placed and forced Black people into their current situations.

Mindy Thompson Fullilove delves into the psychological effects of urbicide surrounding the urban renewal years in her book Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It. As a psychiatrist, Fullilove attempted to conceive of a term that would fully capture and portray the emotional pain that accompanies displacement from the point of view of those who directly experience it. It is through the exploration of the personal histories of those displaced, predominantly because of urban renewal projects, that she coins the concept of "root shock."[26] Fullilove broadly defines root shock as "the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem."[27] While this particular terminology is quite general, she breaks this concept up into multiple "levels" so that the reader can fully grasp the concept and the magnitude of root shock.

Fullilove begins with the level of the individual, stating that root shock manifests itself as "a profound emotional upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual's head… [which] undermines trust, increases anxiety about letting loved ones out of one's sight, destabilizes relationships, destroys social, emotional, and financial resources, and increases the risk for every kind of stress-related disease…"[28] At the community level, root shock physically destroys neighborhoods and the bonds created in neighborhood settings. Fullilove notes that community level root shock spreads out among members of the destroyed community to other areas of a social or geographic space; even if areas are recreated with the same individuals, the negative effects of the initial upheaval are irreparable. She also notes that it

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[26] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Ballatine, 2004), 3.
[27] Ibid., 11.
[28] Ibid., 14.

is not only those directly affected by events that lead to root shock, but rather, entire societies and future generations are affected.[29] Without looking at the social, economic, cultural, political, and emotional losses of Black America, the overall impacts of urban renewal efforts cannot be fully understood.[30]

This thesis research project engages with many of the concepts introduced and explored by Osofsky, Grossman, Hirsch, Sugrue, Freund, McKittrick, and Fullilove while focusing on the City of Milwaukee, the Black community centered around Walnut Street, and the activism that residents exhibited in the face of the urban renewal destruction. The concepts that each of these scholars engage with informed the initial research for Chapter One of this work, guiding further examination of specific institutions on multiple scales directly related to the housing market and its influence on Black mobility and a Black sense of place. On a national level, institutions such as the HOLC, the FHLBB, and the federal government itself, adopted practices that directly contributed to the continued segregation present in the housing market. Similarly, on a local level, city governments and area residents collaborated to guarantee the continued confinement of Black populations. This research mirrors some of the discussion of what took place in Harlem, Chicago, and Detroit, participating in a conversation with Osofsky, Grossman, Hirsch, Sugrue, Freund, McKittrick, and Fullilove's research. However, it also takes several pieces of their scholarship a step further to include the Black voice, Black experiences, and Black activism present in the City of Milwaukee.

History specific to the City of Milwaukee was pulled from geographer John Gurda's book The Making of Milwaukee, historian Joe William Trotter, Jr.'s book Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat 1915-45, historian Patrick Jones's book The Selma of the

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[29] Ibid., 12-16.
[30] Ibid., 20.

North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee, and historian Paul Geib's case study "From Mississippi to Milwaukee: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970." By utilizing these particular pieces of work, specifics to the City of Milwaukee were analyzed and reorganized to articulate the experiences of Black individuals and families in the contexts of migration, employment, housing, governmental actions, and urban renewal efforts. These pieces of scholarship were crucial in incorporating facts and figures into the larger conversation of the Black urban experience. In much the same way, archival materials from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Public Library were utilized to capture the narrative of Milwaukee's urban renewal efforts from the view of those who were directly involved in community activism and the preservation of a Black sense of place.

It is important for scholars, researchers, academics, and everyday citizens to see the complete picture of the ways in which past events have impacted the entirety of society. This view allows us to engage with the full story of events from multiple perspectives, removing stigmas from certain portions of the population and minimizing unfair advantages. A complete picture ensures that similar mistakes will not be re-made and that advances are made for the good of the many, not the good of the few. The uncovering of complete histories can impact future legislation and ensure that decision makers and voters are engaging with legislation geared towards the good of the many, not the good of the few. We should always be working towards creating a scholarship of truth, which is why events of the distant past are continually being revisited.

Through the use of Milwaukee's Walnut Street and the communities created around it, this thesis research project argues that despite popular perception, Black citizens were not idle in the instances when urban renewal projects threatened to displace their community members,

destroy cultural districts, and erase the histories of entire areas and entire groups of people. Instead, under the direction of local residents, neighborhood citizens, community organizations, and decision makers were engaged in actions that impacted the direct environment in ways deemed acceptable to those directly affected. This conversation and exploration will contribute to the creation of a complete history of the Black urban experience in Milwaukee and has the potential to lead futures scholars to explore the experiences, particularly in terms of grassroots and community led activism, of other Black communities throughout the United States.

From South to North: The Great Migration

The Great Migration of Black people from the Southern United States constitutes a period of time from 1910 to 1960 when over six million Black people left the South in search of new employment opportunities and a better life for themselves and their families.[31] The North offered higher employment wages and an escape from Southern sharecropping, social rejection, and violence for Black people.[32]As James R. Grossman discusses in his investigation of the Great Migration in Chicago, many white residents sympathized with migrating Southern Blacks, but ultimately viewed them as "ignorant, degraded, and helpless refugees."[33] The burden of adaptation or adjustment to the accepted way of life, directed by white individuals and institutions, was placed solely on Black migrants. Pieces of Black culture that did not fit into the "norm" of Northern life were looked at unfavorably and led to the snubbing of newly arriving Black migrants.[34] The Chicago *Defender*, a newspaper published by Black Chicago residents, put together a list of "do's and don't's" to inform readers of acceptable and unacceptable

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[31] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 19.
[32] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 21.
[33] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 162.
[34] Ibid., 162-163.

behaviors.[35] This fear of social rejection and the subsequent creation of a set of guidelines can be seen as a negation of the escape from social rejection Black people faced in the South. However, this was often not revealed until Black people had already put down roots in Northern cities and did not necessarily slow the influx of Black migrants. Although the Great Migration took place over the course of fifty years, a large majority of migrants left their Southern roots during the years surrounding WWI and WWII.

Due to the passing of federal migration quota laws, the immigration of Europeans to the United States slowed from over one million in 1914 to fewer than 150,000 in 1925.[36] This decrease in the number of European immigrants created an opportunity for migrating Black people to become employed as laborers in Northern cities. With the onset of both WWI and WWII, the demand for war related goods, such as uniforms, bomb materials, and vehicles, and laborers increased exponentially.[37] While the bulk of Southern migrants settled in large cities like New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia, others chose smaller, but still heavily manufacturing based cities as Milwaukee.[38]

Milwaukee became a logical site for the importing and exporting of goods because of its proximity to both railway lines and waterways. Breweries, flour mills, tanneries, and industrial manufacturing companies established themselves in Milwaukee during the first half of the 20th century, creating a pool of employment opportunities for Southern Black people.[39] From 1910 to 1930, the Black population in Milwaukee grew from 980 to 7,501 and from 1950 to 1970, the

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[35] Ibid., 145-146.
[36] John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, (Brookfield, WI: Burton & Mayer, Inc., 1999), 257.
[37] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 13.
[38] Ibid., 32.
[39] Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat 1915-1945, Second Edition*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), xxxii. & Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 240.

Black population increased from 21,772 to 105,088.[40] Table 1 exhibits the tremendous growth of Milwaukee's Black population from the 1930s through the 1970s.

Table 1. Black Population Growth in the City of Milwaukee, 1930-1970

Black Population Growth in the City of Milwaukee, 1930-1970

Year:	Total Population:	Black Population:	%Black Pop:	%Increase in Black Pop:
1930	578,249	7,501	1.29	236*
1940	587,472	8,821	1.50	18
1950	637,392	21,772	3.40	147
1960	741,324	62,458	8.42	187
1970	717,372	105,088	14.65	68

Source: United States Census Population, 1930-1970. (Paul E. Geib, "The Late Great Migration: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970," *The Journal of Negro History*, 83(4) 1998, 231.

Black Employment

Largely employed in agricultural sectors and as domestic servants in the South, many Black people had to transition to different forms of work, gaining skills in the rapidly growing manufacturing sector with companies like Allis-Chalmers, Bucyris-Erie, A.O. Smith, and Harley-Davidson.[41] These companies specialized in the production of engines, generators, steam shovels, water heaters, and motorcycles.[42] Labor agents roamed Southern cities in search of workers for these growing companies, increasing the Black workforce in industrial jobs to 80 percent by the 1930s.[43]

Milwaukee became a powerhouse of manufacturing materials for the war effort. Utilizing already established companies, such as Allis-Chalmers and Harley-Davidson, goods were

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[40] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 257 & 361.
[41] Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 14-15.
[42] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 164 & 176.
[43] Ibid., 257.

produced for the Allied forces.[44] Plant expansion accounted for $270 million of federal monies to keep up with demands; this expansion augmented the need for laborers and, with many white males enlisted in the armed forces, increased the demand for Black workers.[45] Paired with Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) that prohibited racial discrimination in defense industries, a road was paved for Black employment in Milwaukee. The skills that Southern Black people procured through previous employment as sharecroppers, day laborers, grocery store workers, and the few opportunities open to them in manufacturing positions served them well in the North.[46]

Some Northern employers, however, took advantage of the perceived conditions of Black employment in the South. Many employers were under the impression that because these newly arrived migrants came from Southern states, they had an exceptional ability to work in the heat and, thus, were hired on to work in positions that were "hot, dirty, and low-paying."[47] As an example, the A.O. Smith Corporation became a large producer of bombs during the war. Because of the nature of bomb-making, A.O. Smith laborers were forced to work in an environment that exceeded 105 degrees Fahrenheit and was extremely loud. Mississippi sharecroppers were recruited for these positions based on the belief that they could handle the heat and noise. This recruitment shifted the demographics of A.O. Smith employees to over 80 percent identifying as Black.[48] Other companies hired Black people for the most undesirable positions, such as removing hair from hides at local tanneries, or as janitors, porters, and common laborers.

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[44] Ibid., 308.
[45] Ibid., 310-311.
[46] Paul Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee: A Case Study of the Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970," *The Journal of Negro History*, *83*(4) 1998, 232-233.
[47] Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 12.
[48] Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee," 239.

Promotions for Black laborers were also difficult to come by. Locally based Allis-Chalmers was known for denying promotions to skilled Black laborers based solely on race.[49]

Although many Milwaukee employers practiced some forms of racism in the workplace, the labor shortage in more desirable positions could not be denied and Milwaukee employers began to hire Black laborers more and more frequently. In 1943, a representative of the Milwaukee Urban League (MUL) stated, "For the first time in over a decade Negro labor was actually sought by heavy industry. Today there is hardly a Negro man in Milwaukee who is physically able and willing to work who is not employed."[50] Through the war years, Black people continued to be employed by the industrial and manufacturing firms of Milwaukee and worked their way up to higher positions in companies like A.O. Smith and American Motors.[51]

Following the end of WWII, the demand for war supplies declined and many Milwaukee based manufacturing companies were crippled. Coupled with this decline, the job market became saturated with returning veterans; consequently, Black laborers were no longer in high demand and were often fired to accommodate returning veterans, creating very unstable financial environments for families that relied on this income.[52] By the 1960s, Black male unemployment figures hovered around 10 percent.[53] From the end of the 1960s continuing into the early 1970s, Milwaukee saw over seventy-six companies close completely, leaving over 16,000 workers, Black and white, without a job.[54] With mounting pressure from federal entities, Black people were invited into segments of the labor force that were not traditionally open to them. They were encouraged to apply to become brewery workers, nurses, salespeople, and trolley drivers.[55]

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[49] Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 53 & 167.
[50] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 311.
[51] Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee," 235.
[52] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 258.
[53] Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee," 243.
[54] Ibid., 244.
[55] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 25.

Even with the rise of Black workers in these unconventional fields, many businesses left the central city to create roots in suburbs and outlying areas. From 1960 to 1970, Milwaukee jobs located in the central city declined by over 10 percent as jobs outside of the city increased by over 75 percent.[56] With limited access to personal vehicles and without public transportation lines extended to these areas, unemployment rates among Black residents increased even further. As in Grossman's discussion of neighboring Chicago, each of these occurrences added to the tumultuous financial condition of Milwaukee's Black residents in achieving independence from larger societal ties.

Black Housing and the Creation of the Inner City

Immigrant populations seeking to create their own sense of place in a new area settled into Milwaukee's neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were often made up of several square blocks, which allowed for the maintenance of culture and solidarity and became a source of pride. Milwaukee's inner city was initially inhabited by German, Jewish, Greek, Slovak, and Croatian immigrants.[57] As the Black population continued to rise, they inherited "hand-me-down neighborhoods left behind as early residents moved out to greener pastures."[58] As in Osofsky's exploration of Harlem, Milwaukee's immigrant groups left in massive numbers as the influx of Black people continued to increase, further opening up this central city area for Black settlement. Although this choice in location may seem to be purely that, a choice, other factors influenced where Black people were able to live within the city. Structural racism, which manifests itself in redlining, housing discrimination, labor market discrimination, and social perceptions of race, along with the subsequent deindustrialization of Milwaukee all had significant influences over

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[56] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 27.
[57] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 16 & Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 258.
[58] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 17.

the neighborhoods and areas in which Black people were able to live. In addition, as James R. Grossman suggests, the desire of Black residents to avoid white prejudices combined with aspirations to retain cultural customs impelled Black residents into particular neighborhoods.[59]

While these influences created an environment that generally appeased Milwaukee's white population, Black residents came together to influence the spaces they were forced into to benefit their community as a whole. Black people established businesses, bought homes, created carpools and walking routes to work, and enjoyed a rich culture in the spaces into which they were forced and, ultimately, confined. Neighborhoods throughout the United States that were transforming to be predominately Black were given nicknames such as "Coontown," "Nigger Alley," Nigger Row," "The Black Belt," and "Darktown," to further designate them as areas reserved for Black residents.[60] Figure 1 shows the increase in the Black population in Milwaukee's central city from the 1940s to the 1960s and the areas to which they were contained.

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[59] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 127.
[60] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 11 & 84 & Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 3.
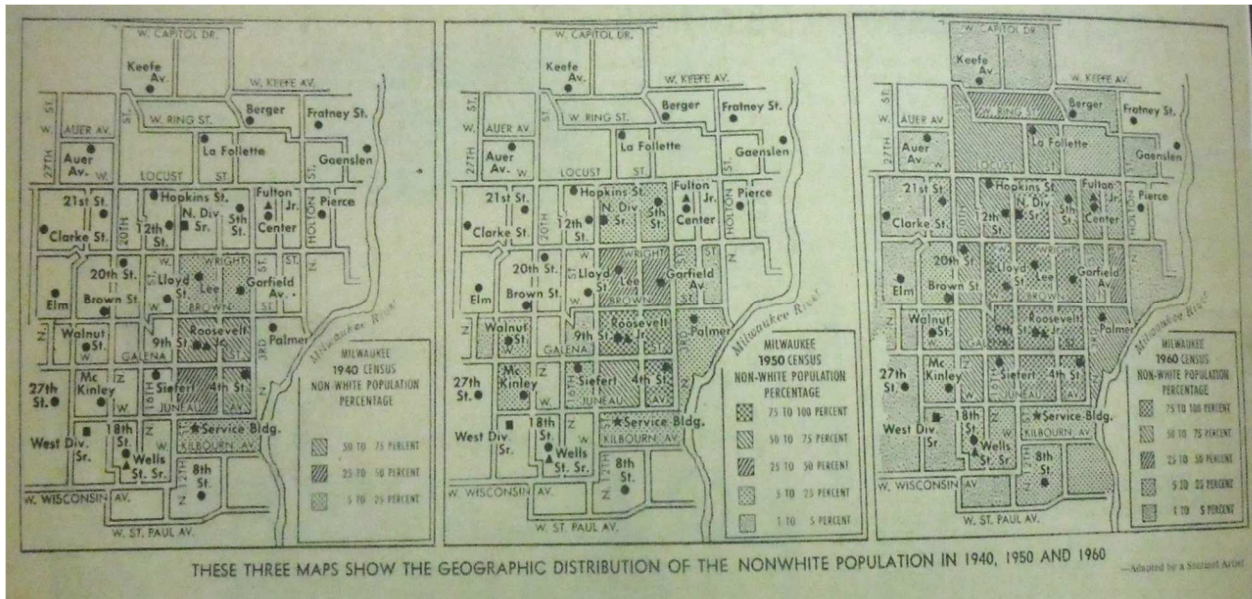
Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of the Nonwhite Population of Milwaukee in 1940, 1950, and 1960. Source: Unknown article title and author, Milwaukee Sentinel, February 8, 1967, Folder 29, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

Milwaukee historian John Gurda suggests, "[w]here the races met, the encounter quickly assumed the oil-and-water character that typified the urban North."[61] White residents did not easily understand Black culture and their "way of life" was seen as something unpleasant, tainting relationships between neighbors and resulting heavily in white flight to the suburbs of Milwaukee.[62] These perceptions were fueled by the dialogue surrounding the influx of Black individuals and families and what effects they would have on surrounding areas. Many left the central city to escape perceived declining property values, increasing crime rates, blight, slum areas, and a failing educational system.[63]

Most prominently, real estate workers and housing reformers perpetuated ideologies suggesting that there was an emerging Black ghetto that was a "pathological, dangerous and

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[61] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 362.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 26.

nefarious place, to be avoided by whites and other ethnic groups."[64] Large organizations, such as

the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), published printed materials for

distribution, warning realtors of the threats minorities posed and pushed the idea that only

homogenized neighborhoods were stable and desirable. As early as the mid-1920s, real estate

boards in Milwaukee approved measures to encourage the maintenance of racial segregation.[65]

Just to the south of Milwaukee, the Chicago Real Estate Board suggested similar housing

segregation ordinances and petitioned the Chicago City Council to prohibit "further migration of

'colored families' to Chicago until such time as the city could work out 'reasonable restrictions'

to 'prevent lawlessness, destruction of values and property and loss of life.'"[66] On a national

scale, the NAREB officially incorporated legal discrimination into its code of ethics by stating

that realtors "should never be instrumental in introducing… members of any race or

nationality… whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the

neighborhood."[67]

     White flight and dominant perceptions of the inner city caused a large amount of homes

to be left vacant. In response, these homes were often sold at low prices and converted into

multi-family dwellings with rooming houses for boarders; other dwellings were transformed into

rental properties or sold to loan associations, realtors, and slum investors. These loan

associations, realtors, and investors then practiced discriminatory procedures, such as restrictive

housing covenants and redlining, using the language described above, to keep Black people

contained to certain areas of the city.[68]

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[64] Kevin Fox Gotham, "Urban Space, Restrictive Covenants and the Origins of Racial Residential Segregation in a US City, 1900-50," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *24*(3) September 2000, 617.
[65] Ibid., 621.
[66] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 174.
[67] Gotham, "Urban Space, Restrictive Covenants and the Origins of Racial Residential Segregation in a US City, 1900-50," 621.
[68] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 19.

Racially restrictive housing covenants were "contractual agreements between property

owners and neighborhood associations that prohibited the sale, occupancy or lease of property

and land to certain racial groups, especially [B]lacks."[69] These housing covenants were often put

into place in newly developing subdivisions or suburbs, but were also used within the city to

negatively impact the mobility of Black people during the early half of the 20th century.[70]

Redlining is defined as, "the avoidance and/or withdrawal of financial investments in some urban

areas and the concentration in other urban or suburban areas."[71] Banks, savings and loan

organizations, and insurance institutions have been charged with utilizing redlining tactics to

keep Black homeownership rates down and to disinvest in neighborhoods deemed undesirable,

subsequently making homeownership less attainable.[72]

One tactic linked to redlining was the creation of "Residential Security Maps" by the

Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB).

These maps were created in 239 different cities, including Milwaukee, to appraise real estate risk

levels with each section of the city being assigned a grade. Each grade corresponded with a

color, first grade (A) represented by green, second grade (B) represented by blue, third grade (C)

represented by yellow, and fourth grade (D) represented by red, hence the term redlining. Figure

2 displays the coloration designation legend from a Residential Security Map of Milwaukee from

1938.

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[69] Gotham, "Urban Space, Restrictive Housing Covenants and the Origins of Racial Residential Segregation in a US City, 1900-50," 617.
[70] Ibid., 618.
[71] Gregory D. Squires, Ruthanne DeWolfe, and Alan S. DeWolfe, "Urban Decline or Disinvestment: Uneven Development, Redlining and the Role of the Insurance Industry," *Social Problems*, *27*(1) 1979, 79.
[72] Squires, DeWolfe, & DeWolfe, "Urban Decline or Disinvestment," 79 & Gregory D. Squires and William Velez, "Insurance Redlining and the Process of Discrimination," *The Review of Black Political Economy*, *16*(3) 1988, 64-65.
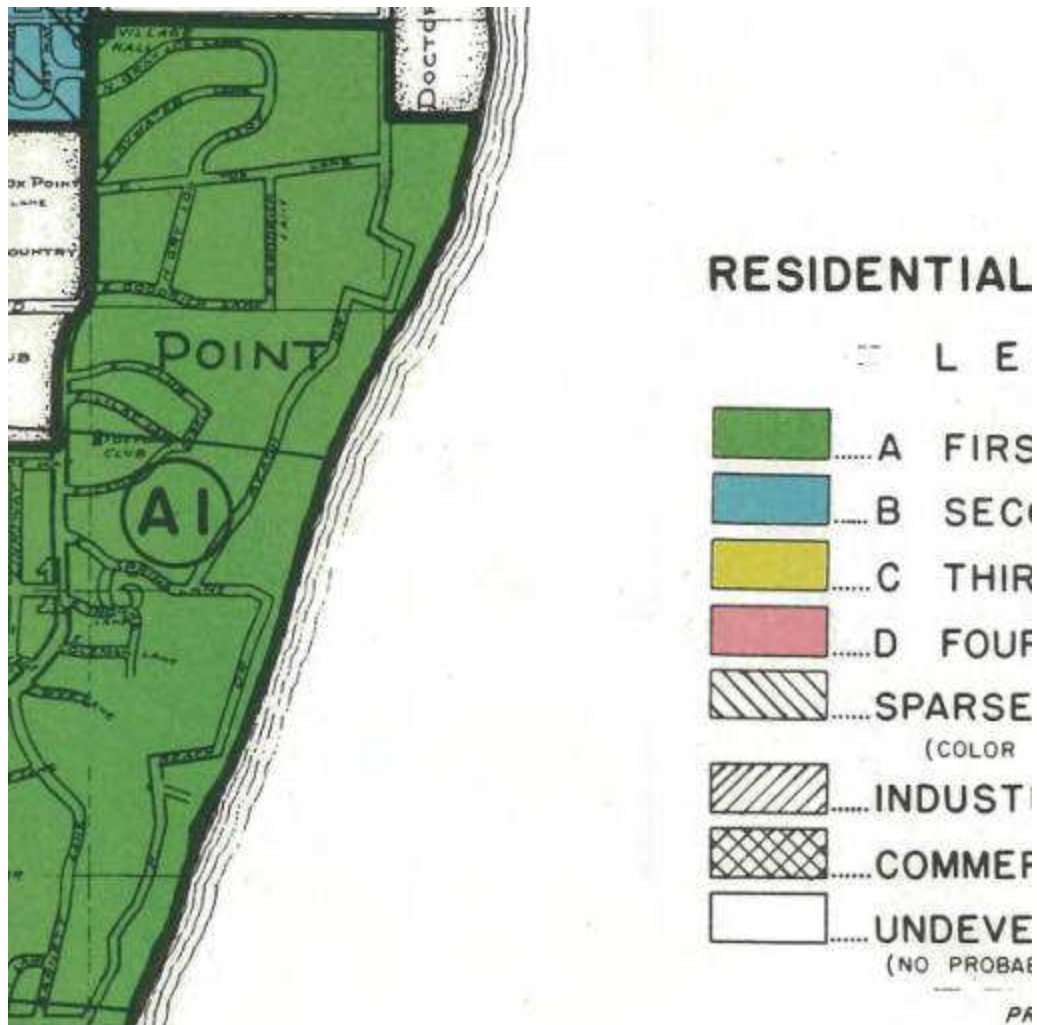
Figure 2: 1938 Milwaukee Residential Security Map Coloration Designations.
Source: Map of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin: Residential Security Map, United States
Federal Home Loan Bank Board, Division of Research and Statistics, 1938, University
of Wisconsin-Milwaukee American Geographical Society Library Digital Map
Collection.

Coloration determination was based on the "age of [area] buildings, their condition, the

amenities and infrastructure in the neighborhood… the level of racial, ethnic, and economic

homogeneity, [and] the absence or presence of 'a lower grade population,'" in most cases, Black

individuals and families.[73] Additionally, those areas rated third (C), or yellow, and fourth (D), or

red, contained residents who were unlikely to receive mortgage approval or home loans for the

purchasing of properties, even if properties they were interested in purchasing were outside of

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[73] Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 43-44.

the areas in which the resident currently resided. Similarly, those interested in developing land or

properties contained within the third (C) or fourth (D) grade were often denied the financial

backing for construction projects. As a result, Residential Security Maps were highly effective in

creating further racial segregation and exacerbating the decline of certain sections of the city.[74]

Figure 3 displays the entire 1938 Residential Security Map of Milwaukee, clearly indicating a

fourth (D) grade for the section of the municipality known of as the inner city.

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[74] Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 44 & Freund, Colored Property, 113-114.
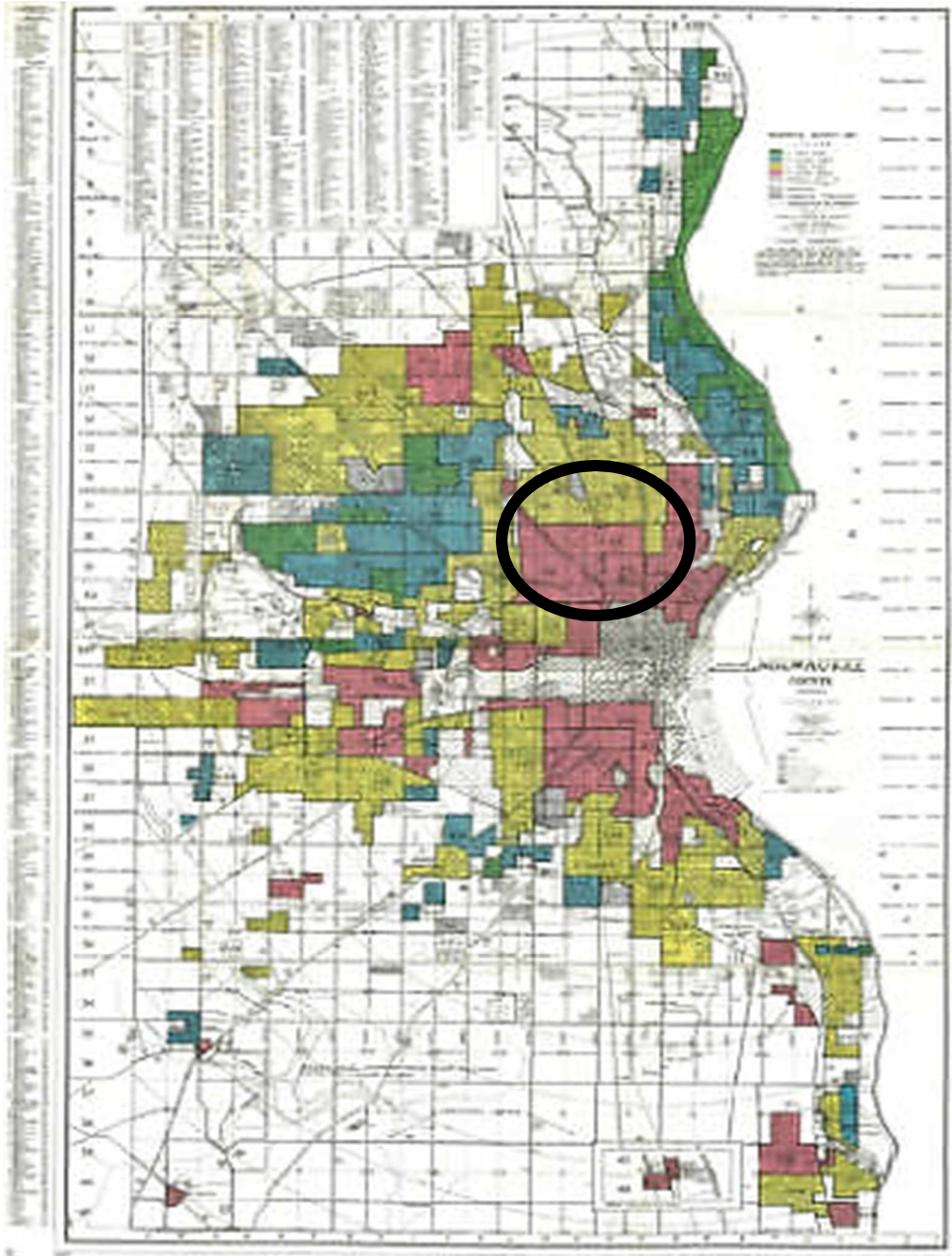
Figure 3: 1938 Residential Security Map with Inner City Demarcation. Adapted
from: Map of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin: Residential Security Map, United States
Federal Home Loan Bank Board, Division of Research and Statistics, 1938, University
of Wisconsin-Milwaukee American Geographical Society Library Digital Map
Collection.

As David M.P. Freund discusses, Residential Security Maps represented a "fundamental transformation in the way that whites' racial preferences shaped the [housing] market."[75] By utilizing large organizations, such as the HOLC and the FHLBB, the desires of white citizens were expressed through state-regulated and state-funded systems that directly influenced how people bought homes, who was able to purchase homes, and what sections of the city homes could be purchased. These organizations, in turn, were able to manipulate the conversation regarding racial discrimination and exclusion in the housing market from that of a segregationist ideology to a product of economics.[76] The actions of the HOLC and FHLBB continued to fuel negative views of Milwaukee's Black population by creating racially segregated conditions in order to perpetuate the dominant perception of the Black populace manifested through white ideologies.

The inclusion of these types of policies coincided with a change in the discussion of race and place. The presence of Black bodies in certain areas was now connected with the physical deterioration of neighborhoods, rising crime rates, and many other negative attributes through the use of specific jargon.[77] Central cities were now being referred to as the "inner city" or as "slums" based on the presence of a condition coined "blight." The definitions of these terms were plagued with negative connotations and were thrust upon the Black community with little hesitation. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the terms "inner city," "slum," and "blight" in the following ways:

Inner City: "the central section of a large city where mostly poor people live"[78]

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[75] Freund, Colored Property, 115.
[76] Ibid., 115-116.
[77] Gotham, "Urban Space, Restrictive Covenants and the Origins of Racial Residential Segregation in a US City, 1900-50," 621.
[78] Merriam-Webster, s.v. "inner city," accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inner%20city.

Slum: "an area of a city where poor people live and the buildings are in bad condition" or "a very untidy place"[79]
Blight: "something that causes harm or damage like a disease" or "a damaged condition"[80]

What is interesting to note is that the term "blight" can be said to have the ability to take on two different implications: the blight of people and the blight of physical structures.[81] The use of these terms in everyday discourse directly contributed to the perceived conditions of these labeled sections of the city and the people who lived in them, primarily Black residents.

At the time that this shift in discourse was occurring, roughly 2 percent of Black people owned their own homes while the remaining 98 percent were forced to rent from landlords.[82] Studies have concluded that the 2 percent of Black people who did own homes often paid more than the value of their homes when purchasing in Black neighborhoods.[83] While these rates did increase in the decades that followed, the percentage of Black homeowners pales in comparison to that of white homeowners.[84] In addition to the structural tactics used to specifically ban Black people from homeownership, such as white real estate workers refusing to work with Black clientele, restrictive housing covenants, and redlining, Thomas J. Sugrue points to the issue of finances. Black individuals were faced with the reality that they were paid much less than their white counterparts and were often the first to be let go in times of economic strife. In addition, a large percentage of Black residents' paychecks were devoted to overpriced rental options.[85] Table 2 shows the percentage of Black homeowners versus white homeowners in the City of Milwaukee from the 1940s through the 1980s.

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[79] Merriam-Webster, s.v. "slum," accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/slum.
[80] Merriam-Webster, s.v. "blight," accessed November 5, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blight.
[81] Rachel Weber, "Extracting Value from the City: Neoliberalism and Urban Redevelopment," *Antipode*, *34*(3) July 2002, 521-522.
[82] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 19.
[83] Sunwoong Kim, "Race and Home Price Appreciation in Urban Neighborhoods: Evidence from Milwaukee, Wisconsin," *The Review of Black Political Economy*, *28*(2) 2000, 10.
[84] Geib, "From Mississippi to Milwaukee," 241.
[85] Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 34.

Table 2. Black Home Owners and White Home Owners for the City of Milwaukee, 1940-1980

Year		Owner Occupied	Percent
1940			
	Black	141	2.0
	White	52,760	98.0
	Total	52,917	100.0
1950			
	Black	1,195	5.0
	White	78,750	95.0
	Total	79,945	100.0
1960			
	Black	3,853	6.0
	White	108,018	94.0
	Total	111,871	100.0
1970			
	Black	9,076	9.0
	White	102,487	91.0
	Total	111,983	100.0
1980			
	Black	15,482	11.0
	White	96,966	89.0
	Total	114,205	100.0

Source: Paul E. Geib, "The Late Great Migration: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970," *The Journal of Negro History*, *83*(4) 1998, 241.

Accordingly, Milwaukee's Black residents were forced to rent homes and to occupy the spaces offered to them, creating a large demand for a small number of units in a specified area. This, in turn, allowed landlords to raise rent anywhere from 30 percent to 200 percent, as they knew Black people did not have many other housing choices. In Osofsky's exploration of Harlem, he found that Black residents paid, on average, $3 more per room, per month than their white counterparts.[86] Although specific figures for Milwaukee were not found, it can be assumed that discrepancies between Black and white renters were comparable to those found in Harlem.

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[86] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 136.

Black renters often had to take in lodgers in order to pay this exorbitant rent, severely cramping living quarters and creating an unsanitary environment.[87]

Milwaukee was also plagued with a large number of absentee landlords who, once they rented their aging structures to Black individuals and families, stopped paying attention to their properties based on the undesirable locations and the color of the renter's skin. This fact only contributed to the decline in the physical features of the property and the market value of homes that Black people were forced to live in. These dilapidating homes also affected the larger aesthetic value of the neighborhood, causing other landlords to disinvest in and under-maintain their properties.[88] These racialized influences forced Black people "deeper and deeper into the most dilapidated sections of the urban housing market."[89] In 1946, 67 percent of Milwaukee's Black population lived in homes that were seen as unfit or largely dilapidated.[90]

By the 1960s, the inner city expanded to six times the size of the area it covered in the 1950s.[91] Conditions within the inner city rapidly declined as the housing stock continued to age, resources became more and more scarce, and poverty increased. Addressing these issues would quickly become controversial and thoroughly debated at the expense of Milwaukee's Black community.

Milwaukee's Urban Renewal

White flight in the housing market coalesced with deindustrialization during the mid-twentieth century to trigger a significant loss in Milwaukee's central city tax base. This loss directly caused the decline of funding for social services and public schools, impacting crime

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[87] Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 70-71.
[88] Weber, "Extracting Value from the City," 521-522.
[89] Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 21.
[90] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 358-359.
[91] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 24.

rates and increasing the number of boarded up homes and vacant lots.[92] A 1939 survey

conducted by Works Progress Administration found that only 7 percent of the homes contained

in Milwaukee's inner city were in good physical condition, while more than 75 percent were

considered substandard.[93] This deterioration of the central business district and surrounding

residential neighborhoods was not unique to Milwaukee. Cities across the United States were

feeling the effects of the culmination of WWII and the abandonment of the central city by

businesses and white citizens. By the late 1940s, governmental entities, both local and federal,

were forced to take action.

Milwaukee's local response came in the form of the 1948 Corporation, later known as the

Greater Milwaukee Committee. This group was formed as a non-partisan, non-political, non-

sectional group aimed at community improvement, particularly through the construction of

"quality of life projects" such as a sports arena, a professional baseball stadium, libraries, and

museums.[94] On a larger scale, the federal government ratified Title I of the Housing Act in 1949,

which encouraged central cities and central business districts to engage in the revitalization of

"decaying" urban areas. More widely known as urban renewal, this program caught the eyes of

city planners, mayors, social welfare leaders, journalists, private business owners, and the

general public who saw this program as an opportunity to restore cities to their former glory.[95]

While each of these groups and individuals imagined urban renewal projects differently, initial

thoughts surrounding urban renewal suggested that these efforts would be effective in "clear[ing]

and rehabilitat[ing] 'slums' and 'blight' and [would] build new modern housing, commercial,

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[92] Ibid., 27.
[93] Ibid., 20.
[94] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 347.
[95] Jon Teaford, "Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath," *Housing Policy Debate*, *11*(2) 2000, 443-444.

and institutional complexes in postwar central cities" utilizing federal funds.[96] These efforts were seen as a means to increase central city property values and tax revenues, to create better living conditions for the poor, and to help cities become more economically viable.[97] As Arnold R. Hirsch and David M. P. Freund suggest, the increased involvement of the government reinforced racial segregation and allowed it to become a permanent part of city life. Prior to formalized legislation targeting slums and blight in central cities, agreements amongst realtors and landlords, restrictive housing covenants, and redlining were the most influential forces in determining the residential patterns of Black community members. As governmental entities put urban renewal legislation into place and shaped public policies regarding redevelopment, the interests of private supporters trumped moral obligations to "voiceless" central city residents, mainly low-income Black residents. [98] Thus, while the romanticism of urban renewal projects lasted through the first few years, these ulterior motives were soon uncovered and it was discovered that these projects sought to continue to intentionally destroy a Black sense of place and perpetuate racial segregation and discrimination.

As with discourse regarding the inner city, terminology included in urban renewal legislation was fraught with powerful meanings. In addition to the inclusion of the term blight and slum, renewal is defined as "the state of being made new, fresh, or strong."[99] This term suggests that the areas slated for urban renewal projects were dead or in the process of dying, which heavily influenced the standards created by federal and local officials in order to create a "healthy" city. Local leaders used the amount of perceived blight present to determine which

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[96] Samuel Zipp & Michael Carriere, "Introduction: Thinking through Urban Renewal," *Journal of Urban History*, *39*(3) 2012, 359.
[97] Teaford, "Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath," 445.
[98] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 254-255 & Freund, Colored Property, 109.
[99] Merriam-Webster, s.v. "renewal," accessed November 8, 2015, http://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/renewal.

neighborhoods to demolish in the name of renewal efforts. Thus, blight became the "primary justification for creative destruction."[100]

The term creative destruction has been used in various contexts to explore many facets of the economy, particularly when discussing properties of capitalism. Rachel Weber, Urban Planning and Policy Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, refers to this creative destruction in her article "Extracting Value from the City: Neoliberalism and Urban Redevelopment." She cites the desire of local municipalities to dispose of degraded properties, or blight, to make way for new investment opportunities. These projects were put in place without regard to the people, places, and businesses that were directly affected. Ordinances and statues were crafted to intentionally define blight in vague ways so that essentially any reason for the destruction of a building or property was justified.[101] Planners from the American Public Health Association justified decisions by referencing specific characteristics, such as the age of buildings, population gain and loss, structural deterioration, and health statistics, to determine what blight was and where it was happening. Other urban reformers also cited the "high correlation between poverty and congestion… and disease and death."[102]

Using these techniques, blight was often disproportionally found in areas that housed non-white residents. The people that made these area-wide decisions were far removed from the immediate environment and, thus, validated their decisions for destruction because of the positive impacts renewal was supposed to have on the economic viability of the central city. In this way, creative destruction was utilized to manipulate larger public perceptions of urban renewal efforts while having the completely opposite effect on those that were directly impacted

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[100] Weber, "Extracting Value from the City," 526.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 143.

by these decisions.[103] These tactics were put into place to justify urban renewal ventures in cities throughout the United States, including Milwaukee.

Milwaukee Mayor Frank P. Zeidler was elected to office in 1948 on the platform that he would not add any debt that would affect Milwaukee's shining credit rating. However, he quickly acknowledged that the problems of the inner city, including the withdrawal of businesses, were too much for the City to handle on its own. While he initially borrowed approximately $13 million in 1948, this amount quickly increased as project after project suggested by the 1948 Corporation and other entities were approved in the name of urban renewal. Large projects intended to bring visitors and their money back to the city were completed, including a convention arena in 1950 and Milwaukee County Stadium in 1953.[104] In addition, in order to accommodate potential tourists and those residents living in outlying suburbs, the State Highway Commission planned the first segments of a six-lane highway, the Interstate 43 (I-43) expressway, and construction was begun in March of 1952.[105] As was the case in many cities experiencing large amounts of urban renewal construction, the creation of interstates and highways coincided with the razing of large numbers of housing structures deemed unfit. However, what these roadways were often used as were "handy devices for razing slums," as discussed in Thomas J. Sugrue's The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit. A 1950 *Milwaukee Journal* article called the North Side of Milwaukee a "dilapidated, overcrowded tinder box."[106] In response, Mayor Zeidler ordered 10,000 housing units to be torn down.[107] By masking urban renewal projects as progressive approaches to central city revitalization, larger issues, such as the displacement of thousands of individuals and

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[103] Weber, "Extracting Value from the City," 526.
[104] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 348.
[105] Ibid., 330-332.
[106] Ibid., 359.
[107] Ibid.

families, were largely ignored. In addition, state highway commissions had no legal obligation to assist displaced residents in finding alternative housing options.[108] Instead, the housing that remained became increasingly overcrowded and decrepit.

Many local state and real estate entities, such as the HOLC and the NAREB, continued to push for the bulldozer approach to derelict housing, stating that rehabilitation would "only perpetuate bad land patterns and provide no lasting solution" to urban blight.[109] These entities argued that by completely eliminating blighted structures and, in turn, blighted people, the possibility of blight enduring in central cities would be lessened dramatically.[110] It can be argued that the opinions of these entities prevailed and bulldozers continued their reign of destruction. Not surprisingly, these bulldozers meant an increase in Black people seeking out alternate housing options and overcrowding already packed dwellings in Black neighborhoods throughout the United States, Milwaukee being no exception.

As more and more residents became displaced due to these projects, negative sentiment towards urban renewal gained steam. The federal government responded by passing the Housing Act of 1954 that sought to switch the aims of legislation from renewal to redevelopment. However, large projects requiring the extensive demolition of existing neighborhoods and structures continued to dominate approved urban renewal "improvements." A new terminal was completed at Mitchell Field in 1955, the State Teachers College and the University Extension were combined to create the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1956, and the War Memorial and Milwaukee Art Center opened their doors in 1957. In addition to the construction of the I-43 expressway that was already taking place, the Park East Freeway was added to Milwaukee's transportation plans in 1958. Ground was broken for the construction of the Park East freeway

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[108] Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 47-48.
[109] Weber, "Extracting Value from the City," 527.
[110] Ibid., 527-528.

and hundreds of homes and businesses along Fond du Lac Avenue were demolished.[111] To fund

the continued expansion for these expressways, the City of Milwaukee solicited 90 percent of the

costs from the federal government.[112] By 1956, Mayor Zeidler increased Milwaukee's debt to

over $55 million.[113]

Although some saw these large projects as triumphs in the name of urban renewal, out of

the 10,000 units of unfit housing torn down, only one low-income housing project, Hillside

Terrace, was constructed to house displaced residents. The construction of Hillside Terrace, and

many other proposals throughout the United States, were met with heightened resistance from

one section of the public because of the population that they would be housing: displaced Black

individuals and families. Popular societal views of the time place Black people in a precarious

position. Black residents were essentially kicked out of their homes due to "increasing blight,"

the "improvement" of the downtown area, and the creation of an expressway for primarily white

users. At this same time, they were not provided with many other housing options as they were

barred from living in newly constructed buildings and properties and no additional public

housing was being created because of pressure from the larger community. Public housing

geared towards senior citizens and returning veterans, on the other hand, was met with little

outside opposition.[114] Housing discrimination continued due to larger societal pushes to control

the housing options that Black residents had.

The absence of Black representation in the political realm further contributed to the

negative consequences of the choices made by those in power. By 1956, only one Black

individual held a political position of power in Milwaukee: Vel Phillips. Phillips was

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[111] Howard, Needles, Tammen, & Bergendoff Consulting Engineers, <u>Milwaukee County Expressway Commission: Lake Front Expressway</u>, March 1963, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Golda Meir Library.
[112] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 332.
[113] Ibid., 346-347.
[114] Ibid, 359.

Milwaukee's first female and first Black alderman on the Common Council and remained so for the next twelve years.[115] While Phillips attempted to uncover many of Milwaukee's legislative shortcomings in topics relevant to its Black population, white males she served with on the Common Council often suppressed her ideas and her voice. Gradual political progress in terms of Black representation and the Black voice, paired with white labor market domination and discrimination in the housing market, continued to contribute to the difficult situation for Milwaukee's Black community. Consequently, urban renewal projects that had a negative impact on primarily Black areas of the city continued.

After years of large projects focused on creating and expanding tourist attractions and existing Milwaukee staples, Mayor Frank P. Zeidler committed himself to the clearance of slum areas and the creation of public housing as "basic obligations of a civil society" and stressed that a "city is greatest which cares best for its submerged people."[116] Instead of using blanket federal solutions, Mayor Zeidler attempted to utilize local government entities, such as the Housing Authority and the Common Council, to analyze neighborhoods and find local solutions to local problems. Mayor Zeidler claimed that if inner city problems were increasing, the "entire community shared the blame for its prolonged tolerance of wretched living conditions."[117] This opinion was not widely shared, with many people in power taking the stance of "ignore [Black people]… and maybe they'll go away."[118]

To explore the specific problems of Milwaukee's inner city and to find potential solutions, in 1959, Mayor Zeidler commissioned a study to focus on what he termed the "social problems of the inner core." This study explored many topics, including public welfare, problem

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[115] Ibid., 361.
[116] Ibid., 363.
[117] Ibid., 365.
[118] Ibid., 363.

families, education, community facilities and programs, housing, and law enforcement, while

noting that these topics and the problems uncovered were not entirely unique to Milwaukee.[119]

While the boundaries of the inner city changed over time, Zeidler's study committee defined it as

Keefe Avenue to the north, Juneau Avenue to the south, the Milwaukee River and Holton Street

to the east, and Twentieth Street to the west.[120] Figure 4 represents the designated boundaries of

Milwaukee's inner city, as defined by Zeidler's Study Committee.

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[119] 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, April 15, 1960*, i - ii.
[120]Ibid., 5.
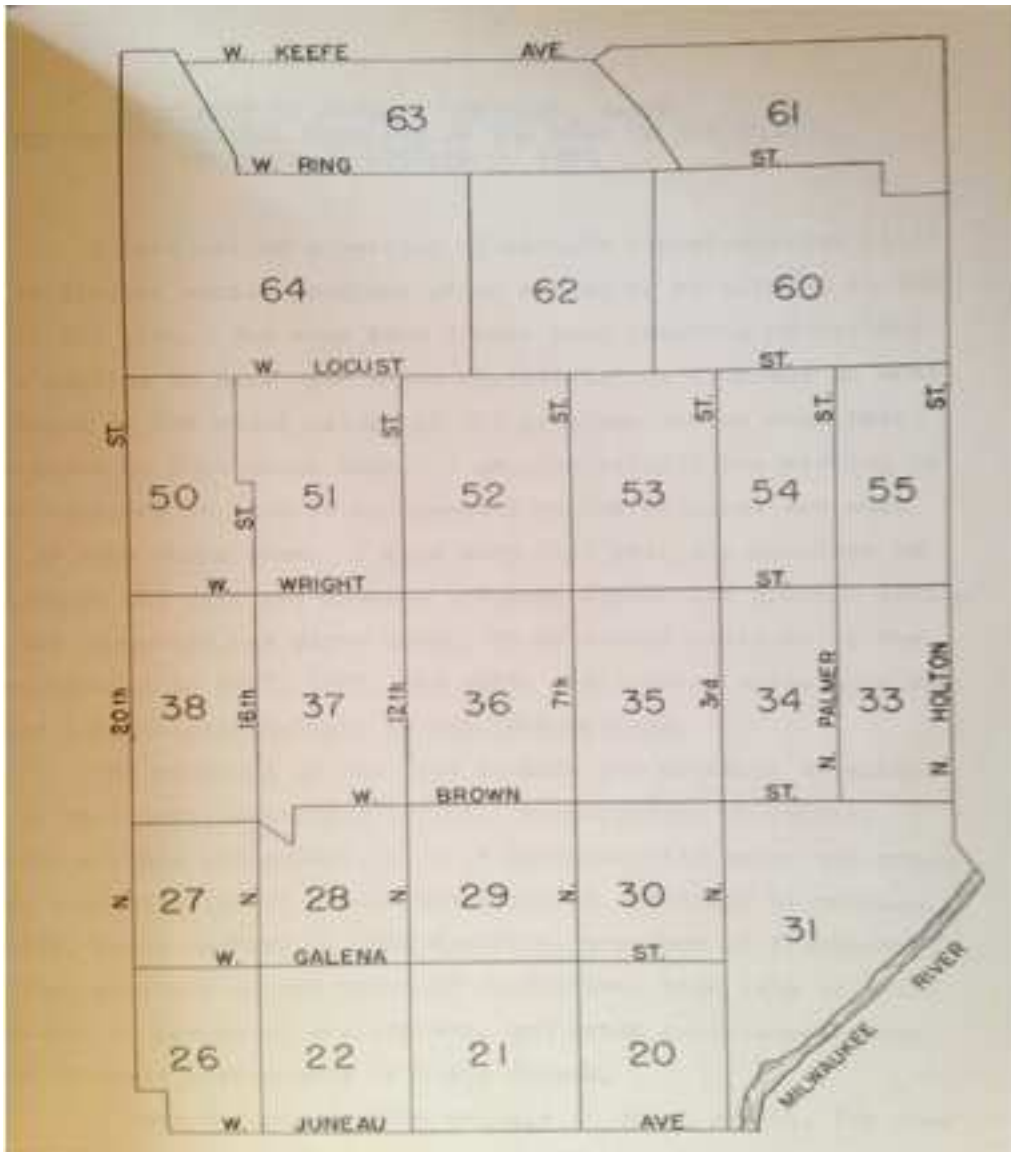
Figure 4: Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City Boundaries of the Inner City Map. Source: Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core Area of the City, *Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee, April 15, 1960*, Annex A.

In terms of housing, the final report lists several reasons why the housing stock in the inner core was in a state of decline. These reasons include the devaluation of cleanliness and orderliness of homes by Black residents, absentee ownership, zoning laws, over-occupancy and overcrowding, real estate and mortgage discrimination practices, and the absence of private

construction interest. [121] In order to combat these ills, the Subcommittee on Housing Conditions

and Availability suggested that the city create additional studies and reviews to determine

specifics related to zoning laws, the regulation of tenants versus landlord responsibilities,

property taxes, mortgage and real estate practices, and displacement due to urban renewal

projects. It also explicitly states "…housing segregation is the fundamental human relations

problem in [N]orthern urban communities. The pattern of housing segregation denies the Negro

his place in society. To deny him free access to housing of his choice is contrary to

democracy."[122] This study also recognizes that "facts and figures alone do not adequately

describe the problem of housing in the inner core area because it is affected by experiences and

attitudes" including both the attitudes of those who live in the "inner core" and those looking at

inner city residents from the outside.[123] Those conducting this study were fully aware that

personal attitudes have an impact on problems in the inner city. However, the study itself

continues to contribute to these negative perceptions stating that "Negroes customarily put no

high prestige value on… mak[ing] cleanliness and orderliness of homes a matter of pride."[124] No

effort was made by this particular study to understand why this might be the case. Thus, through

this study, negative perceptions were perpetuated through the lack of a full understanding of the

immediate environment of Milwaukee's Black residents.

This study commission praised Mayor Zeidler for his unique approach to clarifying and

seeking out solutions to area problems. Zeidler was also commended for utilizing 100 individuals

from various professions and backgrounds to undertake the many aspects of the study. Specific

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[121] Ibid., 17.
[122] Ibid., 27.
[123] Ibid., 17.
[124] Ibid., 18.

backgrounds and demographics of these professionals, however, are not available within the study itself.[125]

Initially commissioned by Mayor Zeidler, this report was not finalized until his successor, Henry W. Maier, took office in 1960. As such, many of the enlightening facts and suggestions that were uncovered and discussed within the study were disregarded. Mayor Maier insisted that Zeidler's study findings were an undeniable "…mass of facts, figures, statistics, and bleak reports."[126] Additionally, Maier did not share the same sentiments about local involvement in social issues as his predecessor. Instead of attempting to utilize local entities to solve the city's problems and save money, he stressed that only through the engagement of the federal government could Milwaukee save itself. Maier wanted to rely more heavily on federal monies and federal legislation.[127]

Public and private development continued as Milwaukee gained the Marine Bank headquarters in 1962, a new home for its Public Museum and County Zoo, both in 1962, and the Mitchell Park Horticulture Domes between 1964 and 1967.[128] The Interstate Highway System continued to expand and over fifty-six additional miles were added to plans by 1967, bringing the total construction mileage to just over eighty.[129] To accommodate these additional miles, 14,219 homes were demolished, displacing innumerable individuals and families, over 50 percent of which were Black.[130] Again, this position was not unique to Milwaukee. Nationwide, the majority of neighborhoods demolished by urban renewal efforts housed the nation's Black population. Out of an estimated 2,500 neighborhoods razed by urban renewal efforts in 993 cities

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[125] Ibid., 1-2 & 33-34.
[126] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 365.
[127] Ibid., 365.
[128] Ibid., 354.
[129] Ibid., 332.
[130] Jones, *Selma of the North*, 25.

nationwide, 1,600 of them were Black communities.[131] Thus, urban renewal became known as "Negro removal" and came to symbolize the erasure of entire histories of the Black people that inhabited these spaces.[132]

While he continued to ignore the need for public housing, Mayor Maier attempted to establish a "blight line," pushed for the construction of a luxury high-rise apartment complex named Juneau Village, and authorized the demolition of entire square blocks around Marquette University and Haymarket Square on the North Side for university expansion and industrial and commercial redevelopment.[133] As discussed in Hirsch's investigation of post-WWII Chicago, many of these projects can be viewed as reclamation of space for middle-class residents' consumption instead of being used to restore spaces for those displaced by construction, primarily poor Black residents.

Though some saw Milwaukee's redevelopment projects as pitiful in comparison to other large cities, residents complained the "city was going too far… reducing every project area to rubble and then starting over from scratch" and that there was no input from those who were directly affected.[134] While there was a significant opposition movement brewing, it was eclipsed by the push for school desegregation in the City of Milwaukee and throughout the nation.[135] As in cities nationwide, the creation and expansion of businesses, expressways, local social service agencies, and arbitrary housing resolutions were only pieces of the revitalization puzzle in Milwaukee.

Conclusion

[131] Fullilove, *Root Shock*, 4 & 20.
[132] Teaford, "Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath," 447 & 456.
[133] Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 367.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

Though many of the same themes and arguments from existing scholarship concerning post-WWII cities are similar to those found when looking at post-WWII Milwaukee, it is important to look at cities individually as the manifestation of these themes and arguments can be drastically different. Milwaukee's Black population was impacted heavily by structural racism in the form of restrictive housing covenants, redlining, housing discrimination, labor market discrimination, and social perceptions of race. Each of these components impacted the areas of Milwaukee in which Black people were permitted to live. As businesses and white central city residents began migrating out of the downtown area into suburbs, Black residents were unable to join, perpetuating racial segregation in housing. Thus, when federal urban renewal legislation was passed and concentrated in areas of close proximity to the aging downtown area, Black community members were disproportionately affected. The creation, and subsequent destruction, of Black neighborhoods was not based on decisions of the Black people who resided there, but rather were shaped by white ideologies contained in the foundation of housing related issues.

Central to Black housing in Milwaukee is the concept of urbicide, or the deliberate death of the city. The portions of Milwaukee that were targeted for urban renewal projects were considered as areas of heightened blight without truly investigating the assets that each area may have contained. The general public began to accept the idea that blight was undesirable and needed to be removed as quickly as possible. Therefore, Black neighborhoods became targets for demolition just as much as the people that resided in them. Large construction projects that consumed square blocks erased the histories of the demolished buildings themselves, but also the histories of the people who settled and lived there. This deliberate destruction of physical structures lends itself directly to a discussion of the deliberate destruction of history, especially the history of Black inhabitants. Omitting low-income housing from the conversation, urban

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renewal projects were seemingly met with little resistance, as they generally did not affect those who controlled the larger conversation, or those in power, mainly white individuals. Black residents were seemingly left without an influential voice and the deliberate killing of their neighborhoods, urbicide, continued and persistently influenced the Black sense of place in Milwaukee.

Through the research conducted for Chapter One, it is clear that an extremely significant element is missing from the conversation regarding the Black urban experience in Milwaukee: the histories and personal experiences of Black residents. Excluding these voices, histories, and narratives from the discussion of post-WWII Milwaukee and the city's urban renewal projects only adds to the popular perception that Black residents were inactive in matters that directly affected their environments. It also continues to perpetuate the ideology that Black community members did not care about their residences and neighborhoods. Even though much of the current literature continues to disseminate this information by also excluding the experiences of the Black resident, this thesis seeks to bring the narrative of Milwaukee's Black population to the forefront and disprove much of the discussion included in urban renewal literature portraying Black residents as idle. I will do this by analyzing Milwaukee's Walnut Street area from its creation through the early 1980s.

Chapter Two focuses heavily on the creation of the vicinity known as Bronzeville and attempts to give testament to sense of community pride contained within its borders. Although this neighborhood was created through the forceful manipulation of Black bodies, it came to represent something much larger. It signified the solidified creation of a Black sense of place in the City of Milwaukee, a place where Black residents felt that they truly belonged. Bronzeville residents were able to open their own businesses, become members of Black community

organizations, and create a neighborhood identity of their own. Unfortunately, this community was literally torn in two by the construction of Milwaukee's interstate highway. Little regard was given to the area, including the businesses and homes that were located there, or the Black bodies that resided and conducted business there.

Chapter Three will continue to dispel widespread views about the Black community by emphasizing the local activism undertaken by those who remained after Bronzeville was torn apart. This activism will be highlighted using a discussion of the community organization named the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc., or WAICO. WAICO leaders engaged with local community members to reestablish a Black sense of place in a modified area and to support the needs of individual residents. Although additional proposed urban renewal projects threatened to displace even more of the area's residents, WAICO fought against these initiatives to maintain their place in Milwaukee as well as prove that Black residents had a voice, an opinion, and a strong backing. As the support for WAICO projects increased, the organization took on the creation of local low-income housing for residents that had been displaced by the continued presence of bulldozers and groups determined to rid the city of blight and dilapidated structures. While WAICO hit major roadblocks in their quest to create as many alternative housing options for Black residents as they hoped, they were successful in producing a large number of units for displaced community members.

It is through the exploration of these highly active communities surrounding Walnut Street, both before and after Milwaukee's interstate highway decimated their neighborhoods, that a more complete history of the city's Black residents can be uncovered and put into the contexts in which they belong. This will guide and contribute to research that is still being conducted regarding the Black urban experience in the years leading up to and surrounding urban renewal

projects throughout the United States by shining the light on a primarily Black neighborhood that took matters into their own hands to directly influence their environment.

The combination of Chapters Two and Three also bring an important feature to the conversation regarding the Black urban experience: place matters. In terms of grassroots and community led activism, the specific location, or place, in which these types of organizing occur can have a significant impact on the success or failure of the effort. For example, if a group of individuals attempt to create an organization based around community involvement in a place where neighbors are far spread and the has been no history of community activism, that particular group of people will have an extremely difficult time finding success. On the other hand, if the groundwork has been laid for active community participation over several years and community members are familiar with one another's wants, needs, and desires, that same group of people has a higher chance of becoming successful in their attempts. Thus, it can be said that place has meaning and that place directly affects the type of organization that can be created as well as the interventions and the strategies that can be effectively employed within the organization.

Chapter Two

Walnut Street: Milwaukee's Bronzeville

         While Chapter One discusses the structural and societal forces that Black residents were

confronted with during the years in which they chose to settle in the City of Milwaukee, and

throughout the United States, the available research does not express the entire history of the

Black urban experience. Uncovering and explaining the structural and societal influences merely

allows the reader to grasp the full power and extent of pressure that outside voices had over

environments that they, themselves, did not inhabit. Although many scholars stop at this initial

uncovering of material, this is problematic because facts, figures, and accounts that are already

available do not tell the entire story. The exploration of the environments that Black residents

inhabited and the inclusion of personal accounts and descriptions are crucial to the conversation.

These additional pieces of information help not only scholars, but the general public as well,

understand the entirety of the Black urban experience and begins to uncover evidence used to

dispel popular views of Black residents as indifferent to environmental changes and idle when

changes taking place negatively affected them.

         To uncover a large piece of Milwaukee's urban experience from the perspective of its

Black population, one must look at the space in which three-fourths of the city's Black

population resided in, Bronzeville.[136] The general term "Bronzeville" is often used to describe

areas in Northern cities that are segregated into sectors of color bounded by customs and laws.[137]

Sociologist Horace R. Cayton explains that the use of the term "bronze" to refer to skin color

was preferred by many Black people due to the negative connotations linked to the terms

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[136] Paul H. Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville, 1900-1950*, (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 7.
[137] Genevieve G. McBride and Stephen R. Byers, "The First Mayor of Black Milwaukee: J. Anthony Josey," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, *91*(2) 2008, 2.

"Negro" and "Black." In addition, by using the neighborhood name "Bronzeville," Black residents hoped to remove some of the stigmas that went along being designated a "Black neighborhood."[138]

Like many other United States cities that boasted their own Bronzeville, Milwaukee's Bronzeville grew quickly. In 1930, Highland Boulevard, Walnut Street, Third Street, and Twelfth Street bound Milwaukee's Bronzeville, all of which were designated as a fourth (D) grade or as undeveloped on HOLC[139] maps. By 1960, the area expanded north to Keefe Avenue, east to the Milwaukee River, and west to Twenty-First Street.[140] As the area encompassed by the term "Bronzeville" increased, the amount of structures contained in the area increased as well. On HOLC maps, these additional homes and buildings contained only a third (C) or fourth grade, designation. Figure 5 illustrates the expansion and movement of the Bronzeville community from 1905 through the 1940s.

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[138] Mutope Johnson, "The Old Heart of Milwaukee's African American Could Beat Again," *Urban Milwaukee*, August 18, 2013, http:// http://urbanmilwaukee.com/2013/08/18/bronzeville-the-old-heart-of-milwaukees-african-america-could-beat-again/, Accessed February 22, 2016.

[139] Map of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin: Residential Security Map, United States Federal Home Loan Bank Board, Division of Research and Statistics, 1938, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee American Geographical Society Library Digital Map Collection.

[140] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 7.
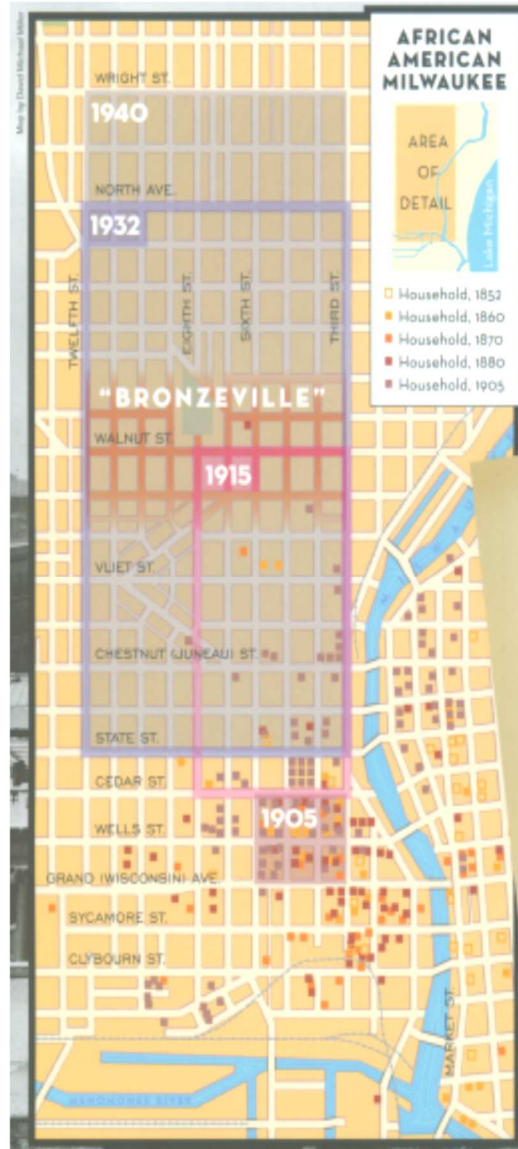
Figure 5: Map of Milwaukee's Bronzeville, 1905-1940s.
Source: Genevieve G. McBride and Stephen R. Byers,
"The First Mayor of Black Milwaukee: J. Anthony Josey,"
The Wisconsin Magazine of History, 91(2) 2008, 2.

Though the creation of Bronzeville was heavily influenced by those in power through

legal regulations and targeted discourse, Black people residing in this area created their own

sense of place and community within their controlled borders. As Katherine McKittrick suggests,

Black geographies can be said to be connected to "practices of domination" that "shape, but do

not wholly define, [B]lack worlds."[141] Instead, in many cases, Black residents took these practices of domination and created a sense of place in their confined spaces within the city. Milwaukee's Bronzeville was a prime example.

Milwaukee's Bronzeville was compromised of Black owned and run businesses, entertainment venues, churches, social service agencies, and social clubs, many of which lined its main road, Walnut Street.[142] Neighborhood businesses allowed for local commerce and employment opportunities while aiding in the creation of an environment that allowed for close social relationships, community support, and shared resources. Bronzeville became a lively, flourishing hub for collaboration, communication, and community even though race and discrimination continued to play a factor in the lives of Black residents.

By exploring the Black sense of place that Black Milwaukeeans created in Bronzeville, a small piece of their culture and history can be promoted and reinforced in contrast to the many instances of the erasure of Black history. The assets of the Bronzeville community and the people that compromised the area's population refute the views that Black people lacked a sense of pride in the spaces that they inhabited and, thus, these views can be largely dismissed within the City of Milwaukee. This particular exploration of Milwaukee's Bronzeville opens the door for additional research into the Black urban experience in cities throughout the United States. It is the hope of this researcher that this project will promote the exploration of the Black urban experience in additional sectors of Milwaukee's economy and city limits over a larger period of time. Not only will this promote the Black urban experience of the past to be revisited, but it will also encourage researchers to look at the ongoing urban experience from the perspective of those who are directly affected by the urban environment.

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[141] McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," 947.
[142] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 8.

Creating Community: Laying the Foundation for a Black Sense of Place

To accommodate the ever-increasing Black population during the periods of the Great Migration, churches became the cornerstone of survival for many Black individuals and families. St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal Church, Calvary Baptist, St. Benedict the Moor Mission and School, the Church of God in Christ, and the Greater Galilee Baptist Church served Black people in the Bronzeville area by addressing spiritual, social, and economic needs. Places of worship provided opportunities for socialization and aided in the establishment of schools, employment agencies, and social welfare groups.[143] In one account of the role of the church in resident's lives, a congregant of the Church of God recalled her mother, the minister's wife, "…help[ing] many people, those that had no homes to live in, those that had no food, those that had no clothes. She went around the street gathering up wayward children… [Our] home was always open to all strangers."[144] Not only was this type of social service instrumental in bringing bodies into the church, these services helped keep families afloat, especially newly arrived individuals and families from Southern states.

Churches represented more than just a spiritual meeting ground. They served as a place where Black culture and Black community could grow and offered a safe place for Black people to discuss issues present in their everyday lives. Before and after services, church congregations gathered together and exchanged information, shared resources, and provided support for one another "sort of like a beehive" oftentimes "without even asking for it."[145] In some circumstances, as discussed in Osofsky's exploration of Harlem, churches also played a role in the development of the physical environment. Churches often invested heavily in local real

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[143] Ibid., 8 & 25.
[144] Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 132.
[145] Fullilove, *Root Shock*, 119-120.

estate, either buying structures to conduct their services in or to house Black residents having

difficulty finding other housing options. Unlike Black individuals, Black churches could not be

barred from purchasing property covered by restrictive housing covenants. Thus, churches

became a vector through which Black residents were able to gain access to certain sections of the

city that they would normally have been banned from living in.[146] Churches became a main

staple in the Bronzeville community in each of these ways and continued to provide support for

residents as the borders continued to grow.

Not surprisingly, the vast needs of community members put a large amount of pressure

on churches, parishioners, and ministers. To aid in dispersing the burden, all-Black social clubs,

such as Les Belles Femmes, the Top Hat Club, and the Variety Boys, were formed. These social

clubs held fundraisers and events to raise money for various endeavors, including supplying

families in need with the funds to purchase possessions for their homes or to support their

livelihoods after losing a loved one.[147] The number of these clubs rose rapidly and by 1953,

there were eighty-seven social clubs listed in the Negro Business Directory.[148] Both the church

and social clubs served to promote the needs of the Bronzeville community through providing

basic needs for area residents, but they also became organizations that helped Black residents

realize that a better life was attainable through community cohesion.

The sense of community and support created through congregations and social clubs

trickled down to other parts of the Bronzeville neighborhood. Black owned businesses began to

pop up, especially along the area's main thoroughfare, Walnut Street. Entertainment became the

core of what Bronzeville was known for. During the 1940s, Jazz and Blues clubs were plenty and

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[146] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 115.
[147] William A. Vick, "From Walnut Street to No Street: Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses, 1945-1967,"
Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1993, 42.
[148] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 9.

served as a channel for Black self-expression. Many called this area "Milwaukee's Harlem" due to the popularity of entertainment options, especially Blues and Jazz music venues.[149] Record stores, such as The Bop Shop (612 W. Walnut St.) and Harlem Records (919 W. Walnut St.), served as meeting grounds for music lovers, both Black and white. Live entertainment at taverns, such as the Rose Room (604 W. Walnut St.), Savoy (710 W. Walnut St.), 700 Tap (700 W. Walnut St.), and Jon and Lou's (823 W. Walnut St.), showcased this music up-close and personal.[150] Milwaukee attracted nationally known performers like Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Nat "King" Cole, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington.[151] As in cities across the nation, these Black performers were not able to stay in white-run hotels and often ended up staying at the homes of Bronzeville residents or above the taverns and venues that they played at.[152]

A neighborhood staple, the Regal Theater (704 W. Walnut St.), formerly known as the Rose Theater, became much more than a place to see movies. In 1938 Prominent Black lawyer James W. Dorsey remodeled the theater and began showing films with all Black casts.[153] By 1950, the theater was sold to Sidney Margoles who increased the theater's film selections to include westerns and cartoons, drawing in Black families for triple features.[154] The theater was rented out for social events, civil talks, and educational purposes. In the early 1950s, Black track star, Jesse Owens, visited the Regal Theater to speak with local Black youth. Amateur nights were initiated for local acts and the Regal became a venue for local teenagers to learn the art of

[149] Dave Luhrssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," *Milwaukee Magazine*, August 1993, 32.
[150] Ibid., 33.
[151] Ibid., 35.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid., 33.
[154] Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses," 52-54.

jitterbugging, a popular form of swing dancing. [155] Margoles also hired local teenagers to work as

clerks, ushers, and cashiers.[156]

The successes of these entertainment venues paved the way for other Bronzeville

businesses to open their doors. Many restaurants, lounges, and drive-ins opened along Walnut

Street, seeing large spikes in business when accommodating the after-hours crowds.[157] Some of

the restaurants that lined Walnut Street included Tompkins Ice Cream Parlor (816 W. Walnut

St.), Deacon Jones Chicken Shack (537 W. Walnut St.), Clara's Restaurant (722 W. Walnut St.),

and Boatner's Chili (709 W. Walnut Street). Other businesses, such as real estate agencies

(Johnson Agency – 921 W. Walnut St.), barbershops (Deluxe Barber Shop – 939 W. Walnut St.),

law firms (Theodore Coggs, Attorney at Law – 635A. W. Walnut St.), clothing stores (Bentley's

Clothing and Jewelry – 1138 W. Walnut St.), grocery stores (Silverstein Grocery Store – 732 W.

Walnut St.), laundromats (T. Joe's Self Service Launderette – 718 W. Walnut St.), and mechanic

shops (Jones Service Station – 603 W. Walnut St.), dotted Walnut Street during Bronzeville's

prime.[158] In the 1950-1951 edition of the <u>Negro Business Guide to the State of Wisconsin</u>, thirty-

five taverns, twenty-seven restaurants, fifteen beauty shops, twelve barbershops, twelve grocery

stores, eleven auto repair shops, five laundromats, and eight attorney locations were found to be

owned and run by Black individuals and families throughout the City of Milwaukee, many of

which were located in Bronzeville.[159]

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[155] Ibid., 36.
[156] Ibid., 54-55.
[157] Luhrssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," 34.
[158] Luhrssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," 33. & Ivory Abena Black, *Bronzeville: A Milwaukee Lifestyle*, (Washington DC: The Publishers Groups, LLC, 2005), "In honor of…" page at front of book.
[159] Mary Ellen Shadd, *Negro Business Directory of the State of Wisconsin, 1950-1951*, Published by Mary Ellen Shadd, Milwaukee, WI, 1951, 45-97.

Though many of the businesses contained in Bronzeville were owned and operated by Black residents in the 1940s (109) and 1950s (210), Jewish-run establishments still existed.[160] The difficulties Black residents faced when attempting to coexist with other white populations did not exist to the same extent with area Jewish business owners. They willingly hired Black employees in their delis, fish markets, and drugstores.[161] The patronage at Black and white owned establishments crossed color lines and these venues served as a place where skin color seemingly did not matter.

Applying and acquiring the licenses for businesses in the area did not follow this same trajectory. In comparison to their white counterparts, Black occupants who desired to open their own businesses often had to jump through additional hoops to acquire business loans and licenses.[162] In some instances, white businessmen approached Black businesses that were having difficulty obtaining licenses with proposals to provide a front to obtain licenses and would split the profits. One such example was Dason's Tavern on Fifth Street and Center Street. Owner Arary Charles was having difficulty receiving a liquor license even though his establishment was ready to open its doors. Ronald Silverman, a Jewish businessman looking to get into the tavern business, heard of Charles' troubles. Silverman approached Charles and his wife with a proposal of Silverman taking over the management of Dason's and Charles remaining the owner of the establishment. This front for Dason's liquor license proved successful and the tavern's doors opened in 1951.[163]

In the instances where white partners did not approach Black businessmen, other ways of financing a business needed to be utilized. Black social clubs often put up the money for venues

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[160] Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses," 13.
[161] Ibid., 27-32.
[162] Ibid., 77.
[163] Ibid., 77-79.

to open for business and continued to support them by hosting special events, charging members of other social organizations for tickets, and providing compensation for national and local acts out of their own pockets.[164] Amusement companies also provided the means for businesses to receive small loans. These companies would provide businesses with a small amount of money in addition to in-house entertainment, such as jukeboxes and pool tables, under contracts that lasted anywhere from three to ten years. A percentage of the revenue generated by these types of in-house entertainment was appropriated to the amusement companies, often at high rates. However high these rates were, in the face of relegated economic prospects, they offered a way for businessmen and women in Bronzeville to keep their doors open.[165] Sometimes these revenues were also used for charitable purposes, helping out organizations or individuals in their time of need.[166] Other times, less than legal activities were used to finance daily operations.

While gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution were prevalent in Bronzeville, policy games were the most frequent forms of "vice" found in the area. In these games, players picked any amount of numbers between one and seventy-eight with the chance to win more money the more numbers you picked and got correct. The winning policy numbers were picked each day from as far away as Covington, Kentucky, and were wired to Milwaukee for final payouts.[167] In 1948, the *Milwaukee Journal* found that there were approximately eleven illegal "wheels" operating within the city, generating over $1 million annually.[168] The *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* estimated between 150 and 200 men were employed as wheel operators, pickup men, counters, checkers, writers, and runners for Milwaukee's policy gaming, with 5

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[164] Luhrssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," 34.
[165] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 9.
[166] Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses," 66.
[167] Matthew J. Prigge, *Milwaukee Mayhem: Murder and Mystery in the Cream City's First Century*, (Milwaukee, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015, 91-92.
[168] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 57.

percent of the city's population accounting for over 50 percent of the gambling that occurred within its limits.[169] Not only did policy games offer a source of employment for local residents, but they also helped Black owned businesses gain startup capital by hosting these types of amusements and receiving a certain percentage cut of the revenues.

Over time, these illegal activities became an economic and social institution in the neighborhood. Although both rich and poor and Black and white individuals utilized the institution of wagering, it began to take on its own stereotypes depending on what type of wagering participants were involved in. White people were seen to engage in clean and respectable types of betting, such as horse racing, while Black people were seen as those who engaged in the dirty, lazy forms of gambling, such as policy games. These stereotypes reinforced the racial divide and brought about an increased police presence in Black communities throughout the United States to put a stop to this dishonorable form of gambling.[170] Although this forced policy games further and further underground, they remained an integral part of the Bronzeville community.

In the latter years of Bronzeville's existence, locally based Columbia Savings and Loan, a Black owned and operated banking institution, offered Black business owners additional financial backing. Keeping financial resources within the Bronzeville community allowed Black businesses to thrive and made it possible for business owners to make a decent living without running the risk of meeting racial discrimination in terms of financing.[171]

Black owned businesses were opened and supported by many hours of overtime worked by Black men and women. The establishment of community businesses represented the philosophy that many Black migrants brought with them on their journey North, a "pull yourself

[169] Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses," 86.
[170] Ibid., 65-68.
[171] Black, *Bronzeville*, 15.

up by the bootstraps" ethos.[172] Hard work was not snubbed in Milwaukee's Black community

and was often a characteristic passed on to younger generations. The children of businessmen

and women worked at their family's establishments after school and on the weekends. Business

owners who did not have children or other family members in the area hired local teens and area

residents to fill the empty roles at their establishments. During and immediately following the

Great Depression, this internal hiring practice became more and more crucial. By 1940, "51

percent of [Black] men were unemployed, with 29 percent of them actively looking for work."[173]

By hiring employees from the immediate neighborhood, financial resources were maintained

locally, social ties were strengthened, and community cohesion increased.

In addition to providing job opportunities, the larger community engaged area youth in

the direct environment to keep them out of trouble and to provide them with an opportunity to

connect with their emerging sense of self. As stated earlier, youth artists were invited to perform

at the Regal Theater for small community events, as well as larger social gatherings. Local high

school student musicians were often invited to showcase their talents at area jazz clubs and were

mentored by Leonard Gay, Jimmy Dudley, and Bert Bailey, native jazz and blues musicians who

had gained notoriety on city, state, and national scales.[174] The MUL put together sporting events

to provide Black youth with positive role models. Professional boxer, Baby Joe Gans, was

brought to Milwaukee's Bronzeville to train Black youth who were interested in boxing. Ethel

Brunner, the first Black employee at Lapham Park Social Center, taught Bronzeville girls

modeling and dancing and created a program to teach girls how to play baseball.[175] The

Northside Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at Sixth Street and North Avenue was

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[172] Johnson, "The Old Heart of Milwaukee's African America," 4.
[173] Ibid., 5.
[174] Vick, "Afro-American Businesses," 49.
[175] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 73.

constructed in the late 1950s to provide a space for youth and adults to occupy themselves in positive ways, such as field trips, after school and evening classes, and social activities.[176] Leaders in the community looked to these types of activities to bring youth together and to teach them skills to create a better life for themselves and for their families.

Suitable educational opportunities were also important to local residents and families. Adolescents attended one of ten area schools: Fourth Street, Siefert, Lloyd Street, St. Francis, Ninth Street, Roosevelt Junior High, St. Benedict the Moor, Lincoln High, North Division High, or Girls Tech.[177] All of these schools, with the exception of Siefert and St. Francis, predominately served Black students. Because of the hypersegregation of Milwaukee, even though federal school desegregation was mandated through 1954's Brown vs. Board of Education, Bronzeville schools remained 90 percent Black by 1960.[178] The ethos of hard work followed Black students into the realm of education. Students seeking higher instruction attended Milwaukee Technical School at night while working during the day, which was typical of area high school students as well.[179]

To solidify themselves as an entity with their own set of customs and regulations, Bronzeville residents unofficially elected their own mayor, J. Anthony Josey, in 1945.[180] Although not officially recognized by local or federal government, Josey served as the "official 'greeter' for the district, leader of social affairs, unofficial spokesman of the [Black] population, and 'friend in need' to any and all of his constituents."[181] Josey was instrumental in Bronzeville's participation at the polls and fought against the negative portrayal of Milwaukee's Black

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[176] McBride & Byers, "The First Mayor of Black Milwaukee," 12. & Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 85.
[177] Johnson, "The Old Heart of Milwaukee's African America," 7.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.
[180] McBride & Byers, "The First Mayor of Black Milwaukee," 4.
[181] Ibid.

population in the *Milwaukee Journal*. He solidified a public apology from the local publication

for their racially biased news judgment, including revealing of the race of criminals only when

the criminal happened to be Black.[182] Josey also promoted patronage at local Black owned

businesses and believed that having neighborhood businesses that employed local community

members was a way in which the Black community could develop "powerful institutions" that

would represent a "long step in the solution" to the problem of racial inequality.[183] J. Anthony

Josey became a real estate agent to adequately represent and advocate for potential Black

homeowners. He also served as a mentor to Bronzeville's youth as an advisor to an all-boy's

baseball team and spearheaded additional activities for youth groups at the Northside YMCA.[184]

Josey's commitment to Milwaukee's Bronzeville was unwavering.

While he pushed for community progress, particularly political and economic strides, J.

Anthony Josey was largely against instances of intentional racial separation. Assigning Black

social workers, nurses, and probation officers to Black clientele and the creation of the MUL's

all-Black social center were steps in the wrong direction in Josey's mind. In addition, as Black

voters shifted from the support of Republican candidates to the support of Democratic

candidates, Josey stood fast as a faithful Republican, even as Republican candidates became

progressively conservative.[185] Despite Josey's seemingly contradictory stances when compared

to the larger Black population, Bronzeville residents stood behind him and hailed him a

champion of Black causes until his death in July of 1957.[186]

Bronzeville's physical environment reflected the pride that community members began to

feel as housing options and economic prospects were strengthened. Streets and sidewalks were

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[182] Ibid., 5.
[183] Ibid., 3.
[184] Ibid., 12.
[185] Ibid., 10-12.
[186] Ibid.,12.

free of clutter and the frequency of street crimes was low.[187] Green spaces were utilized for community picnics and get-togethers to keep the community strong.[188] Relationships with the police force were generally positive with many active officers frequenting local businesses and nightclubs both during and after their shifts.[189]

Each of these pieces of the Bronzeville community contributed to the creation of a center for Black culture, but they also allowed for a community to develop economically and socially. Because of the discrimination that Black residents continually faced, they understood that in order to survive they would need to band together to push one another up instead of drag one another down. Neighbors in this area were close, so close "that if a kid did something naughty on one end of the block, his parents would already know about it by the time he got home."[190] Many residents were able to sleep and go to work without locking their doors and some even slept outside when the weather was too hot.[191] Residents looked to one another for aid in raising children, finding employment opportunities, borrowing money for bills or car repairs, and for help when a member of the family had fallen ill. Community became more than neighbors, community became family.[192] Though the majority of Milwaukee's white population saw Bronzeville as a successful containment of the Black community, others saw the area as a space for budding opportunity and the creation of a solidified sense of place. This feeling, however, would not last.

The End of the Line

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[187] Luhrssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," 32.
[188] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 85.
[189] Luhrssen, "Walnut Street Rhythm," 33.
[190] Joe Ahlers, "Bronzeville: Past, Present and Future," mke Newspaper, February 22, 2007, 8.
[191] Geenen, *Milwaukee's Bronzeville*, 8.
[192] Black, *Bronzeville*, 12.

Urban renewal and redevelopment projects of the 1950s and 1960s quickly expanded to include major parts of the sizeable area that Bronzeville now comprised. Most notably, the continued growth of the I-43 expressway, the use of eminent domain practices, changes in city codes, and continued designation of blight threatened the homes, businesses, and community that area residents worked so hard to create. While the total number of Bronzeville homes and businesses destroyed for the construction of the expressway is unknown, by visualizing the total amount of space needed for a six-lane roadway, exits and on-ramps, and construction materials and machines for the over twenty-five blocks of Bronzeville, one can begin to grasp the enormity of the devastation.

In addition to initial freeway plans, the construction of the Hillside Housing Project, one low-rent housing development, was undertaken in 1948 on the south side of Walnut Street. Bounded by Sixth Street, Ninth Street, Galena Street, and Vliet Street, this project was completed by 1955.[193] However, what started off as a one-building housing project grew into a full-blown redevelopment project by 1957. The main objective of the Hillside Redevelopment Project was to demolish dilapidated and substandard buildings in the area, like many other urban renewal projects plans. What makes this particular project worth noting is that this development was located in the middle of the Black business district. This region of Bronzeville contained ninety-nine businesses, over 47 percent of the total number of Black owned businesses in the area. While business owners were given control over the sale of their businesses and the land they were built on, if they could not find a buyer in the allotted amount of time, the city would take their properties through the use of eminent domain.[194]

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[193] Ibid. , 19 – 20.
[194] Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses," 98.

In addition to businesses, 414 families and 126 boarders, of which 98 percent were Black, were displaced through the demolition of the structures deemed unfit for inhabitation.[195] Many of these displaced residents were, in fact, eligible to become inhabitants in the Hillside low-rent housing development, but were pushed out due to the 318 returning veterans and reunited families, many of whom were white, competing for 222 housing units.[196] This overcrowding and competition led many displaced Black families to leave the community they knew and loved to seek housing, employment, and business opportunities elsewhere.

Only a small fraction of those Black residents displaced chose to live in housing projects constructed through urban renewal plans. These housing projects, such as Seaway Terrace, located at 4601 South First Street, well to the south of Bronzeville, and Zander Terrance, located near Green Tree Road and Teutonia Avenue, well to the north of Bronzeville, were situated in unfamiliar areas and inhabited by unfamiliar people. Seaway Terrace contained only four residents from the Bronzeville area while Zander Terrace contained only six.[197]

To attract displaced residents to other housing options located throughout the city, Milwaukee's Housing Authority sent advertisements and invitations to dislocated inhabitants, but received little to no response.[198] Citing a 1960 collaborative study between the MUL and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Wesley Scott, MUL representative, stated that displaced Black residents were often willing to relocate to other parts of the city, but were only willing to do so if they were guaranteed social acceptance.[199] At this particular time in history, as in decades past, social acceptance could never be guaranteed.

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[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid., 100.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid., 101.

In 1959, Milwaukee's Land Commission Chief Researcher, Robert Ducharme, stated that most of the residents displaced by urban renewal efforts continued to live within a two-mile radius of their original residences.[200] Milwaukee's Housing Authority and Department of City Development suggested that, "…people from the center of the city don't want to move to the extremes of the city…" and would rather not face the unknown of a new area and the potential for continued racial discrimination.[201] Thus, overcrowding in remaining area homes became increasingly prevalent, further exacerbating the housing crisis in Bronzeville and in the Black community as a whole.

By 1966, compensation for displaced homeowners and business owners was increased to include the market value of the property, moving expenses, personal property losses, and additional incidentals. While this may have seemed like a step in the right direction by the government, there was no entity put in place to aid these displaced homeowners and businesses in finding alternative locations to relocate. In addition, this new regulation did not compensate displaced residents who were renting their homes.[202]

Aldermen George Whittow and Clarence Miller suggested another approach to housing displaced residents in 1966. In their approach, instead of constructing new structures for displaced families to live in, the city would buy existing vacant homes in the inner core and rent them to individuals and families who had been displaced. When the amount of rent an individual or a family paid equaled the purchase price of the home, the home would then be donated to the resident or residents. However, due to continued freeway expansion, the housing stock of the inner city continued to dwindle and this plan never came to fruition.[203]

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[200] Ibid., 105.
[201] Ibid., 100.
[202] Ibid., 105.
[203] Ibid., 102.

Instead, Black residents who had been displaced were left to utilize whatever resources they could find. As stated above, this often led to overcrowding in the homes that still existed in the area. It also led to an increase in the prevalence of the characteristics assigned to the term blight discussed in Chapter One: the age of buildings, population gain and loss, structural deterioration, and declines in certain health indicators. The continued prevalence of these characteristics in the central city designated them as disposable areas along with the people that inhabited them. Little regard was given to the Black people who were being displaced.

Urban Renewal as the Destruction of a Black Sense of Place and Root Shock

Not only does this description of Bronzeville serve as an example of the erasure of the Black sense of place, it also serves as one of the many examples of urban renewal projects creating root shock. As Katherine McKittrick suggests, Black communities are configured spatially to reflect "practices of domination and deliberate attempts to destroy a Black sense of place."[204] The individuals and groups that bought property, practiced eminent domain, and made the plans for urban renewal projects and the construction and expansion of the freeway did so without thinking much about the businesses and families that would be affected by the demolition required for these projects. When an outcry was heard from the general public, those in power dismissed accusations as trivial in comparison to the great amount of good urban renewal projects would bring to the City of Milwaukee. Additionally, it can be said that perhaps those in power were threatened by the sense of culture and community support that was present in the Bronzeville area. Black residents were conducting a majority of their monetary interactions amongst themselves, a Black Alderwoman was elected to office, the area had its own "mayor," neighbors relied on one another for emotional and monetary support, schools were

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[204] McKittrick," On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," 947.

centrally located and made up of community members, and social clubs and organizations were formed and provided a foundational support for the community as a whole. It is conceivable, then, that other communities, largely the white community, saw Bronzeville as a threat to their continued domination and sought to legally destroy it through urban renewal projects and the placement of the I-43 expressway.

This occurrence follows McKittrick's argument and lends itself to a discussion of urbicide, or the "deliberate death of the city and willful place annihilation."[205] By forcing Black residents into the spaces that made up Bronzeville and then destroying those places years later, it can be said those in power put the act of urbicide into action. It is no coincidence that the freeway was constructed through a vibrant Black community. It is no coincidence that several Milwaukee landmarks are currently situated in areas that once contained Black residents. These roadways and landmarks were deliberately placed in these areas by deeming them slums and finding blight through the creation of fluid manifestations of what blight was. By allowing for this fluidity in term, blight took on a wide variety of meanings and encompassed a wide variety of structures and, at the same time, people. This blight was found in deliberate areas, setting up an environment for "willful place annihilation" and the destruction of the Black sense of place that had been created there.

Mindy Thompson Fullilove looks at the destruction of the Black sense of place and urbicide from another light. She uses the term root shock to describe the emotional upheaval that urban renewal projects caused within those whose sense of place was destroyed. Fullilove explores this root shock on the individual level and the community level. Within the individual, root shock has negative effects on trust, relationships, social, emotional, and financial resources,

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[205] Ibid.

and personal health and anxiety levels.[206] While there are relatively few personal accounts of

Bronzeville's root shock on the individual level in recorded history, the sheer number of Black

people displaced can attest to the negative effects of root shock that Fullilove describes.

At the community level, Fullilove's description of root shock includes the physical

destruction of neighborhoods and the emotional bonds that are created in neighborhood settings.

Through the exploration of Milwaukee's Bronzeville, this community's root shock is not hard to

see. The I-43 expressway cut Bronzeville almost perfectly in half, cutting off one side of the

neighborhood from the other and destroying everything in between. The business thoroughfare,

Walnut Street, did not escape this community incision. Because residents were unable to cross

six lanes of traffic to get to either side of the expressway for their needs, both emotional and

tangible, relationships, businesses, and livelihood suffered. The continued demolition of homes

and businesses in the area exacerbated these effects and Bronzeville, as a whole, would never

exist again. Fullilove fully anticipates this ongoing effect of root shock stating that entire

societies and future generations will be affected by this upheaval.[207] Although pieces of

Milwaukee's Bronzeville still exist, along with the name itself, the area has not been able to

recreate the prosperity and sense of community cohesion that it once had in the immense amount

of space that the area encompassed.

What Chapter Two also highlights is the importance of institutions in the creation,

maintenance, and destruction of an urban community. Milwaukee's Bronzeville, for example,

was influenced by many different institutions that shaped the history of its existence.

Bronzeville's social institutions, such as families, the community, churches, social clubs, and

businesses, regulated acceptable behaviors of area citizens and created a set of expectations for

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[206] Fullilove, *Root Shock*, 14.
[207] Ibid., 16.

individuals. These institutions banded together to ensure that area residents were granted basic living necessities by providing support, guidance, resources, and employment opportunities to positively encourage and assist the environment they were a part of.

Other institutions, such as governmental entities and certain media outlets, were instrumental in the destruction of Bronzeville. In partnership with the media, governmental bodies were able to portray Bronzeville as an area with a large amount of blight and hardship to garner support for the massive amount of demolition that occurred in the neighborhood. These institutions were able to manipulate the narrative of the Bronzeville community in conjunction with the narrative of the City of Milwaukee to create a conversation that supported their end goal of bringing a tax base back to the central city. At the same time, this narrative masked the reality that urban renewal projects were successfully and diligently destroying a vibrant, cohesive community and displacing thousands of local residents. Governmental institutions then often denied responsibility for locating or creating alternative housing options for these displaced residents. When these institutions did take action to create housing, the location of these options were highly controlled and heavily influenced by social institutions far removed from the Bronzeville community, in this case, the city's white population. The exploration of these different types of institutions in various contexts can add to urban histories and the historical scholarship of cities in a way that helps to uncover the interplay between institutions and how certain institutions became more valued and influential than others.

In the case of Milwaukee's Bronzeville, the social institutions of family, community, churches, social clubs, and businesses are often left out of the conversation of the Black urban experience. In particular, the creation of grassroots and community led organizations as institutions within the Black community during the time of urban renewal has been

predominately ignored. Milwaukee's Black community did not let the physical destruction of their space become the blueprint for their cultural and community destruction. The late 1960s marked a pivotal moment in the Black community - a movement towards the integration of grassroots and community led movements as social institutions. The community members involved in this movement were committed to the revitalization and redevelopment of Black neighborhoods and sought to emphasize the voices of those who had been displaced by urban renewal.

Chapter Three discusses the actions of a community led organization, the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc., or WAICO, in working to change the perception of the "slice" of Bronzeville that this particular group of inhabited and represented. Chapter Three focuses on the evolution of WAICO from a five-member group to a full-blown community organization that attracted the support of other Milwaukee organizations, businesses, leaders, and members of the general public. Initially focused on preventing bulldozers from demolishing an ever-depleting housing stock through the physical improvement of their neighborhoods, WAICO quickly become a large player in the area's housing market. Through these actions, WAICO sought to become a voice for area residents, to fight against negative social perceptions of Black residents, and to fight for their sense of place in a changing city.

Chapter Three

From Root Shock to Community Collaboration:

Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc.

Due to federal urban renewal legislation and local manifestations of this revitalization and redevelopment movement, many of Milwaukee's Black residents, both individuals and entire families, were uprooted and forced to define a new sense of place within a city they had inhabited for years. The construction of the I-43 expressway decimated the existing community of Bronzeville that housed three-fourths of Milwaukee's Black population. These residents spent the better half of the early 1900s creating a thriving and united community in which they increasingly took pride. However, with the appearance of urban renewal projects, this community was split into smaller groups in pockets of the city. While some Black residents were able to stay in their homes and continue to run businesses, they were cut off from the larger Black community that they had worked for many years to create. This fission of Black kinship no doubt had an effect on Black Milwaukeean's sense of place and led to many of the characteristics of root shock described in Chapters One and Two. Even though the considerable destruction of the Black community had these extensive negative effects, the pockets of Black residents that were created did not sit idle. Instead, Black residents looked to one another for support and made the decision to work together to preserve the remaining areas of their community and to prevent further demolition and subsequent displacement. One such instance of this continued community cohesion is demonstrated through the creation of the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc., or WAICO.

Located on the west side of the I-43 expressway construction project, the newly deemed "Walnut Area" spanned an area of nine blocks by three blocks and included hundreds of existing structures. Mirroring the greater Bronzeville community, Walnut Area residents were committed to one another and the area in which they resided. In response to urban renewal projects that were threatening their area, residents came together to form WAICO. This community led organization focused on neighborhood development through physical improvements, such as garbage pickups, rat abatement, the removal of abandoned vehicles, the updating of residences, and the promotion of their area as a thriving community. The early successes of these types of initiatives spurred the growth of the organization's mission to include the construction of new housing opportunities in the area. It was the hope of WAICO that displaced Bronzeville residents would relocate to what was left of the Walnut Street area, but also that current residents would remain in the area. While there were many successes in the endeavors of WAICO, there were many roadblocks that WAICO faced.

Chapter Three explores the WAICO story utilizing multiple perspectives, including organizational members, the organization's two presidents, and community stakeholders, such as Congressman Henry S. Reuss, Milwaukee Mayor Henry W. Maier, and Willis and Lillian Leenhouts, local architects. This chapter will argue that the societal perception of Black residents as lazy, dirty, and indifferent is incorrect and unfounded as evidenced by the Walnut Area neighborhood. It will also argue that despite structural influences, forward progress for Milwaukee's Black community was possible through the engagement of the Black community itself. It is through this community engagement that Walnut Area residents attempted to hold on to a Black sense of place and prevent additional instances of root shock within its borders. By

exploring WAICO and its initiatives, the history of the Black urban experience in Milwaukee can reach the potential of being a more comprehensive history of the time period.

Establishment and Evolution: The Forward Progress of a Community Group

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, urban renewal efforts throughout the nation negatively affected the Black population. This occurred through the massive displacement of individuals and families and the destruction of a large portion of their economic base. While some affected by urban renewal allowed decisions made by those in power to continually affect them, many Black people worked to take the preservation and revitalization of their culture and community back into their own hands. It is no secret that Milwaukee's dominant Black community, Bronzeville, and central business hub, Walnut Street, were ripped in half by freeway construction and other urban renewal projects. But what is less widely known is that there was an early effort to sustain a sense of community and gain control over neighborhood issues. This was expressed through the creation of the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc., or WAICO.

In advance of a formalized community organization, a small cluster of residents from the 1800 block of North Eleventh Street banded together to form the North Eleventh Street Improvement Club in 1959. This club worked to clean up glass and trash from their block's streets and sidewalks and engaged children by asking them to be neighborhood "sheriffs" and "deputies," monitoring block activities. Two years later, the 1700 and 1900 blocks of North Eleventh Street joined the club and started to put pressure on the city to remove vacant and dilapidated homes and buildings from their blocks. By 1962, as the North Eleventh Street Improvement Club gained steam, they changed their name to Citizens for Progress to indicate that their efforts were put into place to push the community forward. In addition to a name

change, they expanded their club by offering woodworking and sewing classes, participating in

MUL's Neighbor-to-Neighbor Program, and were asked to join Mayor Henry W. Maier's

Citizens Participation Subcommittee.[208]

In early 1965, a group of five Milwaukee residents, James Richardson, Jimmie Davidson,

Katherine Brewster, Wesley Hutchins, and Eugene Walker, approached University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Urban Affairs Professor, Dr. Warner Bloomberg, Jr., to provide an

eight-week community leadership training for Citizens for Progress and other community

leaders.[209] This training was aimed at giving individuals the tools to improve the economic

vitality and overall livelihood of their neighborhood through community self-help initiatives.[210]

Following the completion of this training, these five residents, combined with the input of local

organizations Citizens for Progress, Central City Association, St. James Methodist Church, and

Christ Presbyterian Church, formed the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc., or WAICO, on

April 1, 1965. WAICO's main goal was to improve the physical appearance of the area bounded

by Eleventh Street, Twentieth Street, Walnut Street, and Brown Street.[211] In the years following

the establishment of WAICO, the organization expanded its impact area southward to include

Galena Street; in total, the WAICO area included nineteen square blocks and over 800

structures.[212] On Milwaukee's HOLC maps, every block and structure contained within

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[208] Brief History of WAICO: WAICO Celebration Festivities, April 12, 1975, page 2, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[209] The WAICO Story, 1970, page 1, Folder 26, Box 1, stapled to typed letter to "Member" dated May 23, 1970, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & WAICO Executive Committee Meetings, Undated, Page 1, Handwritten chart of attendance, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[210] The WAICO Story, page 1, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[211] Ibid.
[212] The WAICO Area Conservation Report, Undated, page 1, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

WAICO's designated boundaries were given a fourth (D) grade, designating the entire area as an extremely risky space to invest in.[213] Figure 6 illustrates the boundaries of WAICO's target area.
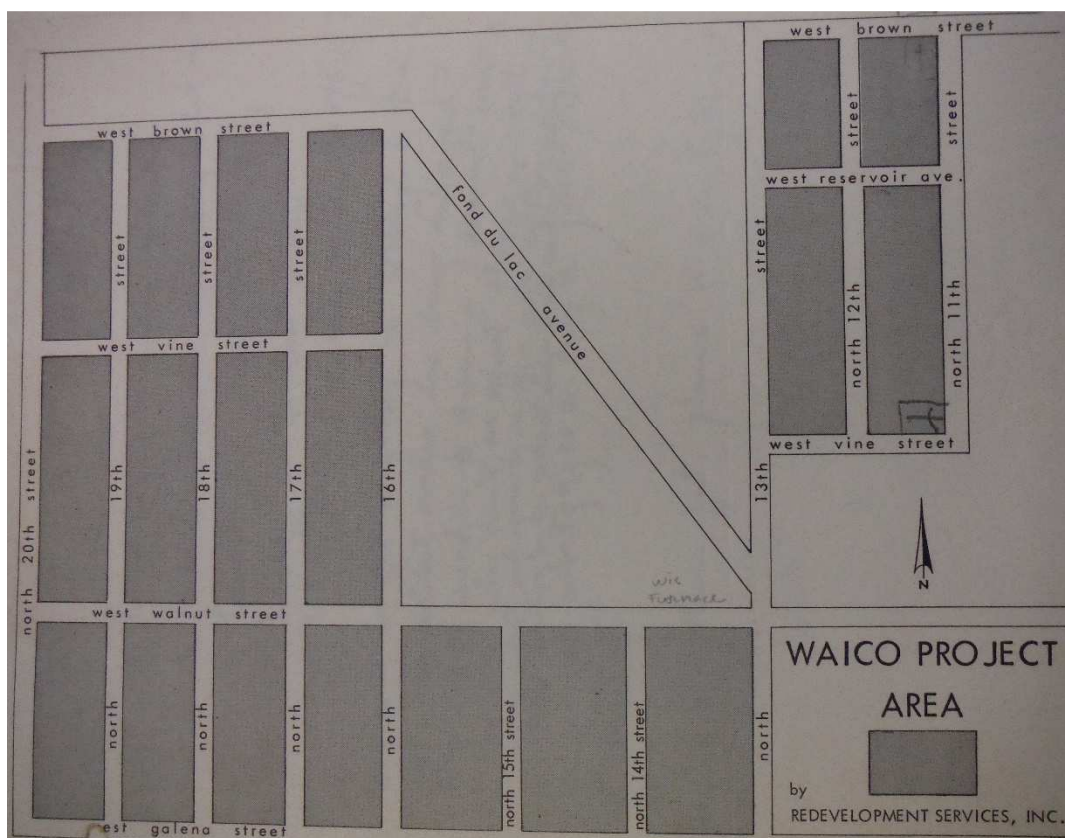

Figure 6: WAICO Project Area Map. Source: "WAICO Project Area," undated, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records, 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

WAICO leaders decided that in order to be taken seriously they must establish their own Constitution and By-Laws. In their written Constitution, the stated purpose of WAICO is "…to improve the living conditions of the area in which we live, or the property, and to see that neighborhood problems are solved by neighborhood people."[214] Members were to be "[a]ny interested person who lives, or owns property, in the WAICO area, or anyone interested in

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[213] Map of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin: Residential Security Map, United States Federal Home Loan Bank Board, Division of Research and Statistics, 1938, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee American Geographical Society Library Digital Map Collection.

[214] Constitution of the Walnut Improvement Council, April 1, 1965, Page 1, Folder 22, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

joining who is acceptable to the Executive Board, is eligible for membership."[215] The

establishment of these guidelines clearly emphasized the motivation for WAICO: improving the

lives of area residents while engaging with whomever may advance this ultimate goal.

WAICO leaders focused the organization's early efforts on keeping the bulldozers that

accompanied urban renewal projects to limited spaces within their established boundaries. In an

article in the Sunday, January 9, 1966 edition of *The Milwaukee Journal*, WAICO President

Eugene P. Walker is quoted as saying, "…we (WAICO) understand that it is possible in urban

renewal not to have to tear down everything, and only to do spot clearance."[216] To identify the

properties that warranted demolition, community members and WAICO leaders went property-

to-property to identify area structures that were in serious need of attention. Of the 800 structures

located in the WAICO area, most were constructed before 1920 and, by 1960, 42 percent of the

structures considered to be residential dwellings were found to be in "dilapidated" or

"deteriorated" condition.[217] After an initial list was compiled, WAICO members came to the

realization that many of the structures deemed dilapidated could be spared through the physical

improvement of their exterior and interior conditions. In addition, waste management would

need to be improved upon, abandoned cars would need to be removed, and a minimum standard

would need to be set for the upkeep of vacant lots.[218] It would be through these projects that

WAICO could impact the decisions of city leaders and reduce the amount of blight found in their

neighborhood. Accordingly, bulldozers and demolition tactics would be used only as a last resort

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[215] Ibid.
[216] Chris Lecos, "Group Seeks to Bar City's Bulldozer," Milwaukee Journal, January 9, 1966, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[217] Ibid.
[218] The WAICO Story, page 1-2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

for the structures that could not be saved. WAICO leaders saw these initial steps as forward

progress away from the displacement of Black residents due to urban renewal projects.

In order to accomplish these initial goals, WAICO leaders looked to engage area

residents in revitalization and cleanup efforts. President Walker sent personal letters to area

property owners stressing the importance of becoming a "united voice" in order to keep the fate

of neighborhood homes in their hands.[219] Walker urged area residents to become associate

members of WAICO for one dollar, to become a voting member by contributing five dollars, or

to directly contact WAICO officials.[220] By doing so, the organization could hear the voices and

opinions of the neighborhood to determine the types of improvements and developments desired

by the people who lived there.[221] WAICO also reached out to the youth of the area by involving

them in Saturday morning trash pickups and in the promotion of the organization itself. Youth

could be seen wearing WAICO buttons, answering questions about WAICO, and actively

collecting garbage from area yards. [222] It was with the help of these active youth that WAICO

began to make improvements on the physical exterior and interior structures of resident's homes.

By August of 1965, WAICO had either completed or had begun work on over seventy-five

properties in the area and began advertising "WAICO AT WORK" signs to increase community

awareness of WAICO projects.[223] By directly involving residents of all ages, power and a sense

of pride was given to the individuals who occupied the neighborhood and could feel as though

their voice was being heard amongst the noise of the bulldozers that decimated many of the

spaces that surrounded them.

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[219] "Dear Property Owner…," December 6, 1966, page 1, typed letter from Eugene P. Walker, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.
[222] "Your neighbors at WAICO House…," undated, page 1, handwritten flyer, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[223] "Progress Report," Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

In the early months of 1966, WAICO decided to more aggressively push their agenda

with a five-point plan to conserve the WAICO area. This "Five Point Conservation Plan"

consisted of making low-interest rate loans available for WAICO residents to improve the

physical conditions of their properties, razing all buildings unfit for habitation, clearing and

sodding all vacant lots in the WAICO area, helping the city plan new construction, and

adequately lighting area streets.[224] These five goals became the cornerstone of WAICO's work

moving forward and helped to officially form Operation Green, which aimed at sodding city-

owned vacant lots for small "pocket parks," and Operation Remove All Trash (RAT). In order to

reach these goals, WAICO enlisted the help of their members, but also reached out to new

community resources, such as Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) affiliates whom were

workers serving as a part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty programming. In this

same year, four individuals agreed to serve one year as VISTA volunteers with WAICO to fulfill

the needs of the organization that could not be met by the Board of Directors or Executive

Committee, all of whom were also volunteers.[225]

Along with the Five Point Conservation Plan, 1966 saw WAICO focusing much of its

effort into the positive engagement of youth and improving the well being of area occupants.

Resident Rosella Rogers was instrumental in creating WAICO's Young People's Organization,

which served over 100 young ladies by teaching manners, housekeeping, cooking, and sewing.[226]

Additionally, children from the City's Neighborhood Job Corps were given paid positions to

work on WAICO projects. Inquiries into the welfare of area families were done by board

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[224] WAICO Newsletter March 1967, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[225] WAICO Minutes from the Executive Board Meeting, September 3, 1966, Folder 1, Box 6, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[226] "Announcing Waico's First Newsletter," Page 3, Folder 22, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

members in cases where parents or their children had not been heard from or seen over a period of time.[227] WAICO also sought to expand their youth programming by creating a Youth Committee to organize dances and other activities for local teens to participate in.[228] By engaging youth in a positive way, WAICO residents thought that they could keep them out of trouble and teach them skills that would last a lifetime.

In the hopes of spreading the word of their work and goals, WAICO established a newsletter for members. This first newsletter, distributed in September of 1966, outlined the successes of Operation Green and Operation RAT, the immense amount of housing improvements made to structures in the area, and the direction WAICO hoped to move in the future.[229] The distribution of WAICO's newsletter caught the eye of Milwaukee's 7th Ward Alderman and President of the Common Council, Martin E. Schreiber. Alderman Schreiber wrote a letter to WAICO acknowledging their "constructive" work and asked the organization to add additional blocks to their coverage area: from West Galena and West Brown to North Twentieth and North Twenty-Seventh Streets. WAICO accepted this proposal and took it as a challenge to continue to be an active participant in neighborhood conservation.[230]

1967 saw a continued effort of WAICO to locate owners of vacant buildings and to work with the City of Milwaukee to either tear down these properties or establish that they be kept to a certain standard of upkeep.[231] At this time, WAICO presented a plan to Milwaukee's Common

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[227] Minutes from the Board of Directors Meeting, June 18, 1966, Folder 1, Box 66, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives & WAICO Minutes from the Executive Board Meeting, September 3, 1966, Folder 1, Box 6, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[228] "Announcing Waico's First Newsletter," Page 3-4, September 13, 1966, Folder 22, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[229] Ibid.

[230] "Announcing WAICO's Second Newsletter," October 1966, Page 2, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[231] Minutes Board of Director's Meeting, January 28, 1967, Folder 29, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

Council in the hopes of decreasing the spread of blight into their neighborhood. This plan built on the already launched Five Point Conservation Plan, but added the establishment of a WAICO office to keep residents informed of projects and initiatives and the creation of a formalized in-depth survey of all structures included in the area. If accepted by the Common Council, WAICO would be able to participate in a housing program enabling low-income families to purchase homes that had been rehabilitated to last a minimum of thirty years, allowing WAICO members to become property owners.[232] While these expansions were already informally being implemented by WAICO, the organization hoped that by gaining the endorsement of the Common Council, WAICO could establish itself as a more formalized organization, allowing the group to access resources that had been out of reach in prior years.

In 1967, WAICO's Executive Committee and Board of Directors voted to become a nonprofit organization and to purchase a home from a local attorney for use as a formal office and living quarters for a needy family. Although the purchasing of this home meant significant on-site rehabilitation, it also meant that WAICO would be the only group in Wisconsin that had rehabilitated a home without any outside federal aid.[233] With the help of WAICO members and other community organizations, the upstairs portion of the WAICO house became move-in ready and a significant amount of work was lined up for projects in the downstairs portion.[234]

Although the organization continued to expand, WAICO's focus on the direct community organizing did not waiver. Area wide jubilee celebrations and parties were hosted by various WAICO residents and organizations to highlight the positive impacts that the organization was

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[232] WAICO Area Conservation Report, Page 1, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[233] Minutes Board of Director's Meeting, September 30, 1967, Folder 29, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[234] "Dear WAICO Member…" October 8, 1967, Folder 22, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

having on both the neighborhood and the city.[235] In March of 1967, for example, WAICO's

Operation Green was publicly recognized and received the grand prize in Mayor Henry W.

Maier's Beautification Contest. As a result, Operation Green was awarded an additional

monetary grant of $2,000 by Milwaukee's Common Council to utilize on continued sodding

projects.[236]

Mayor Henry W. Maier became a critical component in the support of WAICO projects.

In addition to the recognition of Operation Green, Mayor Maier attended several of WAICO's

progress celebrations. At one of these such progress celebrations, Mayor Maier stated, "[t]he

problems of the central city are solved by the people in the neighborhoods whose pride and

fighting spirit overcome these problems" and cited the WAICO area as one of these

neighborhoods.[237] This statement marks a contrary declaration to Mayor Maier's approach to

neighborhood revitalization efforts from the time he took office in 1960. This flip in opinion

could be attributed to the shift in urban renewal jargon from renewal to revitalization or could,

perhaps, be due to mounting pressure from Milwaukee residents to decrease the amount of

spending and demolition that accompanied urban renewal projects. While Mayor Maier's support

was crucial to the longevity of the organization, it was through the support of less visible, but

still vital, outsiders that WAICO continued to thrive and grow.

External individuals and organizations actively sought out opportunities to participate in

area efforts as they recognized the impacts that WAICO projects were having on the

neighborhood's physical space. Robert G. Irwin, head of the private consultation firm

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[235] Minutes Board of Director's Meeting, July 15, 1967, Folder 29, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[236] WAICO Newsletter, March 1967, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[237] Neighbor 2 Neighbor, December 1965 Newsletter, page 9, Folder 22, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

Redevelopment Services, Inc., worked with WAICO on a pro-bono basis to aid in the creation of programming for stimulating property improvements; Architects Willis and Lillian Leenhouts advised the group and worked with other organizations and City of Milwaukee officials to determine the physical needs of multiple blocks in the area.[238] Robert Sutton of Sherwin-Williams Paint Co., James L. Walsh of Walsh Sheet Metal, Inc., the Eleventh Street 4-H Club, Steinman Lumber Co., and Miller Lumber Co. donated their time and resources to continue to complete block inspections, create signage for the organization, and contributed paint and timber for improvement projects.[239] University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Professor, Warner J. Bloomberg, Jr., whose encouragement helped community leaders form the organization, hailed WAICO as "a pioneer… in problem areas which plague our urban civilization" and continued to be actively involved in the organization as a consultant and a member.[240] With the help of key community players such as this, WAICO received the boost that it needed to launch itself into full-scale revitalization projects.

Carrying on the Roots of Bronzeville's Community Support

The establishment of a community led organization followed in the evolutionary path of the community engagement of Bronzeville residents. The social clubs, churches, businesses, and familial ties that existed in Bronzeville before the construction of the expressway laid the foundation for larger organizations to exist. In addition, the relationships that existed within the larger Bronzeville community did not disappear as the structures that were consumed by urban

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[238] Lecos, "Group Seeks to Bar City's Bulldozer," Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[239] "Progress Report," August 21, 1965, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[240] Neighbor 2 Neighbor, page 9, Folder 22, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

renewal projects did. This groundwork made it possible for the establishment and rapid growth of WAICO and was the basis for the types of strategies WAICO used to engage community members. WAICO's continued commitment to area residents made it easier for the larger community to buy into the mission and vision of the organization. Furthermore, as area residents had already witnessed the potential devastation that urban renewal projects could carry out, they were eager to put a stop to further demolition and destruction. It was through these precursors that WAICO began the task of preserving their neighborhood through the engagement of residents.

By basing the organization's mission on continued community unity, WAICO was able to engage community members in ways that were meaningful and substantial. Children were not only encouraged to participate in educational programming and social activities, but they were also active in spreading the word about neighborhood projects. Older residents with specific skills became teachers for other adults as well as adolescents. Physical improvements to structures and the cleanup of vacant lots and sidewalks were clearly visible to the naked eye. This visibility, paired with the engagement of community members, made area residents eager to do more. It also encouraged other community organizations, businesses, and political leaders to become more active in area efforts. These strategies were used as a way to fight the demolition of local structures, both residential and business related, to aid in the preservation of a sense of place and clearly demonstrate the active role that Black community members took in the protection of their neighborhood. As a direct result of this grassroots, community led activism, it was only three years after the organization's establishment that WAICO was approached to take on larger projects within the area continuing to combat the negative effects of urban renewal projects on the Black community.

Organizational Growth into the Housing Market

Although WAICO continued to focus on the rehabilitation of area structures,

organizations that supported WAICO pushed for them to become involved in other aspects of

revitalization efforts. In early 1968, Robert G. Irwin from Redevelopment Services, Inc.,

suggested to President Walker that WAICO involve themselves in the development of fifty to

sixty new homes in the area with mortgages not to exceed $100 per month. Irwin felt that this

new phase of WAICO could be possible due to federal and state legislation changes and the

establishment of Midtown State Bank, a local financial institution run by Black professionals. At

the same time, WAICO would not be responsible for fee payments in relation to development

projects because of public agency appropriations or the advancement of funds from lenders.

Irwin urged the Board of Directors to seriously consider this as a next phase in WAICO's

organizational development.[241]

By January 15, 1968, WAICO's Board unanimously voted to launch this new aspect of

their organization in the hopes that these new homes would be sold to present homeowners in

older homes. These older homes could then be used for public housing or for families displaced

by other urban renewal projects. Initial hopes for the project also included the use of

Milwaukee's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Youth

Council to provide security patrols and to help with the construction of the homes themselves.

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[241] Letter from Robert G. Irwin of Redevelopment Services Inc. to Eugene Walker, January 4, 1968, Page 1-2, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

Unemployed inner city residents would thereby also gain skills through employment as builders and tradesmen.[242]

The *Milwaukee Journal*'s March 31, 1968 article reveals that in as few as three months, WAICO had obtained sites and financial backing for the construction of their model homes with projected dates of May 15 for groundbreaking and July 1 for completion. After securing these sites and backing, 100 letters were sent to property owners in the area who lived in the most substandard structures to see if they would set prices for their properties for WAICO acquirement and redevelopment. In the seven days following the distribution of these letters, twenty-one residents had responded favorably to WAICO's proposition.[243]

The location for the construction of these new homes was easy to determine. Because of the considerable clearance that accompanied the 1958 plans for a Park East Freeway, a large triangle shaped area was left barren in the heart of the WAICO area. With the help of Mayor Henry W. Maier and many other WAICO supporters, this area quickly became WAICO's first redevelopment project area. The exact boundaries of this triangle area are displayed in Figure 7.

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[242] "50 New Inner City Homes Sought," January 15, 1968 article from the Milwaukee Sentinel, Folder 28, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[243] "Core Area Improvement Group Gets Sites for 2 Model Homes," March 31, 1968, Milwaukee Journal, Folder 28, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
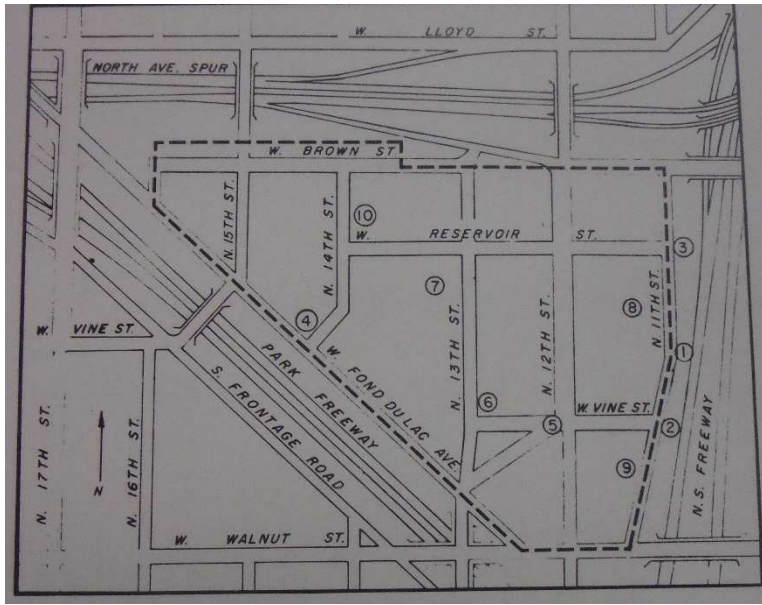
Figure 7: WAICO Triangle Area Map. Source: "WAICO Housing Development Sound Study," October 1, 1973, Page 18, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

As this project would become WAICO's largest undertaking, WAICO leaders revived an earlier organization, Citizens for Progress, to concentrate efforts on communication between residents and Milwaukee's City Planning Department. WAICO wanted to ensure that residents' desires for the area were heard and retained Citizens for Progress to push for the redevelopment of this area with low-income housing options that could be utilized by existing residents.[244] It was through the undertaking of this large project that the WAICO area moved from being designated as a demolition district to a stabilization district.[245]

Even with this new project, WAICO's commitment to its residents was unwavering. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., a scholarship fund was formed to create

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[244] "The WAICO Story as of July 15, 1969," Page 3, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[245] Outline for WAICO Policy Considerations, June 26, 1968, Page 1, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

opportunities for low-income WAICO area children.[246] Although some of these funds ended up

being used for home repairs and repainting structures by the Jaycee's and Marquette University's

Young Republicans Club, a large portion of the scholarship fund was used to pay summer camp

fees for low-income children in the area.[247] With a $2,500 grant from the Social Development

Commission, President Walker formed and supervised two baseball leagues for young teens.

Local volunteer teachers provided classes in art, music, pet care, and storytelling for young

children were held at the newly renovated WAICO House.[248]

Further public attention was drawn to the WAICO area during a weekend of $2 tours of

area homes, gardens, churches, and schools. These tours brought in residents from across the city

in hopes of drawing attention, as well as funding, to localized redevelopment projects.[249] While

smaller projects, such as the tours, were being organized and completed, WAICO residents

continued to paint homes at the rate of 100 per year, worked with the City Health and Building

Inspection Departments to tear down almost 100 buildings, and were instrumental in the passage

of ordinances regarding vacant lots and abandoned vehicles.[250] No matter what the project or

how big the work load seemed to be, area residents were constantly reminded that without one

another, these projects would not occur and bulldozers would ultimately reach their borders.

1969 saw a change in leadership at WAICO; James Richardson, an Executive Committee

member, was elected as President. In a letter to WAICO members, Richardson assured affiliates

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[246] WAICO Weekly Board Meeting April 6, 1968, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[247] WAICO Board Meeting August 3, 1968, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[248] Report of the WAICO Teacher's Luncheon, November 23, 1968, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[249] Tour A: City Churches, Schools & Gardens, Folder 38, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee & Tour B: City Homes & Gardens, Folder 38, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[250] WAICO Newsletter November 1, 1968, Page 1, Folder 32, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

that "membership and projects will expand in scope and imagination" and that WAICO would continue to be community collaboration in action.[251] This collaboration was showcased in a groundbreaking ceremony in March of the same year for the model homes at Eighteenth Street and Walnut Street discussed a year earlier, as well as a renovated duplex available for sale.

These newly constructed and renovated residences would be used to combat the housing shortage. As a very serious example, while rehabilitating homes in the area, one WAICO contractor, Bill Schwartz of Custom Design, reported that twenty-seven people were removed from a two-bedroom home in which all of them claimed residence.[252] A study of the area showed that an average of 8.6 Black people lived in each household.[253] This overcrowding not only threatened the structural safety of area homes, but also often created unsanitary living conditions. It was the hope of WAICO that with additional housing options available, the threats that accompanied overcrowding would be diminished. In addition to the safety benefits, these supplementary homes, along with others that were designed for the area, would produce over $53,000 per year in property taxes, a goal of federally funded urban renewal programs already in place in Milwaukee.[254] While only two home were constructed and one rehabilitated, they proved that WAICO was able to accomplish urban redevelopment projects in half the time and with one tenth of the costs used in other Milwaukee urban renewal projects.[255]

During the latter months of 1969 and early months of 1970, WAICO focused its attention on the Triangle Area, completing a marketability study with the help of the Stefaniak Group and

[251] "Dear WAICO member…," December 18, 1968, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[252] 35th Meeting of Architects Concerned in WAICO May 19, 1970, Folder 25, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[253] "Is This Your Block?" 1970, Folder 4, Box 13, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[254] "Group Asks $250,000 to House Poor" Milwaukee Journal, October 31, 1969, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[255] To WAICO Board Members from Redevelopment Services, Inc., Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

the Department of City Development; this study was supported by Mayor Henry W. Maier and

many Milwaukee Aldermen and was used to determine what types of developments would thrive

in that particular setting. The study revealed what WAICO and area residents hoped it would:

that this area should primarily be used for residential development.[256] In January of 1970,

WAICO was awarded a county owned tract of surplus county land at North Eleventh Street,

which would later be known as Phase I of WAICO's redevelopment initiative.[257] With the help

of an anonymous backer, the WAICO Triangle redevelopment project was finally able to

commence on several lots that previously held vacant buildings.[258] In addition to this anonymous

backer, individuals throughout Greater Milwaukee were called upon to provide aid in real estate,

legal issues, architecture, and engineering.[259] For WAICO, these projects marked "the start of

building what WAICO hope[d would] be an ever more beautiful neighborhood with lots of new

homes among many more improved homes in 'self-help urban renewal.'"[260]

By 1969, WAICO's member list grew to 204 individuals and companies, providing a

significant amount of financial backing. These members spanned from Pewaukee to Madison,

Wauwatosa to West Allis, and as far away as Topeka, Kansas; Scarsdale, New York; Braintree,

Massachusetts; and La Mesa, California.[261] Additional resources came from the local gas

[256] WAICO Newsletter October 1, 1969, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & WAICO News July 22, 1969, Page 1, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & "The WAICO Story as of July 15, 1969," Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[257] "Triangle Rebuilding Blocked," Milwaukee Sentinel, September 19, 1970, Folder 24, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[258] "WAICO Homes Start Saturday" March 25, 1969, Northwest News, Page 3, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[259] Letter to unknown recipient from James Richardson, June 11, 1969, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[260] WAICO Mini-Parade Fourth Anniversary and Ground-Breaking Ceremony, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[261] Member List, June 1969, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

company who donated an oven to the WAICO house, a local Garden Club who donated $1,000 for tot lot construction, and a $30,000 grant from the City of Milwaukee for a playground.[262]

Bohemian Hall, an older structure in the area on Twelfth Street and Reservoir Street, was purchased by a wealthy individual and donated to WAICO. This structure would be used as a Community Center for all types of activities, emphasizing youth programs and staffed by Urban Affairs students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.[263] After several years of working with WAICO, twenty people, most of whom were architects, formed Architects Concerned in WAICO (ACW) and pledged $950 worth of time per month to aid in the redevelopment of the WAICO area. ACW members wanted to create spaces comparable to those that existed in outlying suburbs, complete with sizable lots for large families and a place where residents felt secure and could continue to progress in a positive direction.[264] All of these combined efforts became pieces of the forward evolution of the organization and the community as a whole.

Although WAICO had come across its fair share of roadblocks in the previous five years, nothing would compare to the obstacles it would face as a major player in Milwaukee's central city redevelopment. By the late 1970s, Milwaukee County voted to sell thirty-nine parcels of land to WAICO for $20,000 to use for the development of twenty homes.[265] However, upon further exploration by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), WAICO would be unable to build any new homes on these parcels of land due to the lack of housing in the city for those that would be displaced by the demolition of the parcels. While HUD looked at the entire city, it neglected to look at the housing that would be demolished in the WAICO area,

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[262] WAICO News July 22, 1969, Page 1, Folder 23, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1980, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[263] WAICO Newsletter October 1, 1969, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[264] The WAICO Story 1965-1970, Page 3, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[265] "Homesite Purchase Backed," Milwaukee Sentinel, November 26, 1970, Folder 38, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

most of which was vacant, leaving WAICO with $20,000 and no land options for the start of

Phase I.[266]

WAICO as a Powerful Voice

The expansion into the creation of housing while keeping a firm commitment to area

residents marks a significant leap for the Black community contained both within the WAICO

area and City of Milwaukee as a whole. The city had never seen such a powerful advocate with

connections to other community leaders for the creation of low-income housing and the

promotion of Black residents' desires in the planning process. Although the leap that WAICO

took from repainting and revamping existing homes to becoming financially invested in the

creation of new housing was a large one, the support that the organization gained from area

residents, organizational members, and organizational affiliates aided them in making decisions

that kept the direct community in mind.

The strategy of seeking and accepting outside support is reminiscent of a tactic used to

start businesses in the original Bronzeville area. Just as Black business owners accepted outside

support from white businessmen and women, WAICO was willing to integrate outside

community organizations and individuals who showed a commitment to the preservation of the

neighborhood and, thus, a Black sense of place. It can be assumed that WAICO leaders knew

that to continue to have a significant impact on the Black community, they would need to be

willing to accept outside aid in several realms including planning and finances. Because of their

commitment to the larger community, they were willing to do so while maintaining the integrity

of the organization's mission. WAICO was also extremely successful in promoting the small

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[266] "WAICO Effort to Build Homes Snarled by Housing Paradox," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 7, 1971, Folder 24, Box 65, Charlotte Russell Partridge and Miriam Frink Papers 1862-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

victories of the Black community and pushing the organization's accomplishments into the spotlight, fostering Black voices and Black activism.

As in the response to the growing strength of the Bronzeville community, obstructions from outsiders and other entities seeking to develop land in the WAICO area threatened the forward progress of WAICO development projects. Companies and corporations began to take notice of the potential for land development for urban renewal projects in the WAICO area and worked diligently to secure the land for these projects. The desires and needs of area residents would not be incorporated into these projects, just as they had been disregarded when construction projects were planned for the Bronzeville area. The similarities between the strengths and ultimate demise of Bronzeville and the roadblocks that WAICO encountered as it, too, gained strength cannot be ignored. But even as these outside forces sought to satisfy their own interests, the organization and area residents remained steadfast and committed to their neighborhood and one another.

Milwaukee: A Model City?

Shifts in the strategies that the federal government employed meant that WAICO received a boost from a federal program put into place in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson called Model Cities. Much like previous urban renewal legislation, Model Cities was "designed to remove or arrest blight and decay in entire sections and neighborhoods, and to improve the quality of life of the people who live in these sections and neighborhoods through a concentration of Federal and local programs."[267] This program required that a city receiving a Model City program designation would address ten overall objectives:

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[267] Letter to Mayor Henry W. Maier from Robert C. Wood January 16, 1967, Page 1, Folder 1, Box 117, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

1) To rebuild or revitalize slum and blighted areas
2) To expand housing
3) To expand job and income opportunities
4) To reduce dependence on welfare payments
5) To improve educational facilities and programs
6) To combat disease and ill health
7) Reduce the incidence of crime and delinquency
8) To enhance recreational and cultural opportunities
9) To establish better access between homes and jobs
10) To improve living conditions for the people living in these areas[268]

While Milwaukee Mayor Henry W. Maier twice pushed for the approval of the Common Council to apply to become a Model City in 1967, it was not until March of 1968 that they ultimately approved the act of applying for federal dollars.[269] By the end of 1968, Milwaukee received an assurance of $40 million in Model Cities funding for urban redevelopment projects.[270] It was not until the 1970s, however, that WAICO received any sort of financial assistance from the Model Cities program. In early 1970, the organization received $135,000 for general operating costs, a small portion of the total amount WAICO was promised for future projects.[271]

It was also during this time that the plans for the Park East freeway were being heavily scrutinized by court officials. Although WAICO had already conducted several studies of the Triangle area, HUD ordered additional environmental impact assessments and WAICO took another hit. Due to the total enclosure of the Triangle Area by proposed freeways, HUD determined that the site was unsuitable for residential development. These findings were not

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[268] Letter to the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee from George W. Whittow and Richard W.E. Perrin April 3, 1967, Page 3, Folder 1, Box 117, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[269] WITI-TV Statement on Model Cities May 14, 1967, Folder 1, Box 117, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & Unknown author, "From the civil rights trenches to City Hall," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 1, 2007, http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/32420014.html, Accessed September 30, 2015.
[270] Unknown author, "From the civil rights trenches to City Hall," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 1, 2007, http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/32420014.html, Accessed September 30, 2015.
[271] "I understand that WAICO's Model Block Cluster proposal…," 1970, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

represented in any studies WAICO had previously piloted. This new study was conducted in direct response to the desires of many local stakeholders for the construction of large structures and compounds for companies to bid on in hopes that big businesses would return to the City of Milwaukee. In response, WAICO President, James Richardson, stated that the environmental hazards found have been hazards that "[B]lacks have been forced to live with for decades with little concern about air and noise pollution… If [B]lacks will not be allowed to seek housing they want in neighborhoods near freeways… where do they go?"[272] Henry S. Reuss, Democratic Wisconsin Congressman and supporter of WAICO, wrote a letter to George Romney, then Secretary of HUD, to look at WAICO's case personally to determine whether or not Romney could overturn HUD's decision.[273]

By June of 1972, George Romney sent HUD representatives to Milwaukee to evaluate the Triangle Area Phase I and assured Henry S. Reuss that their findings would be used to either help WAICO find other suitable land for redevelopment or would review an additional application for this land "showing how the environmental problems can be mitigated."[274] On July 14, 1972, HUD reversed its decision, pending the adoption of noise abatement standards.[275] With the promise of financial backing for noise abatement berms from Model Cities, WAICO was able to focus their attention, once again, on land acquisition and the relocation of area residents to move forward with the first phase of redevelopment: constructing 107 housing units.[276]

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[272]Chris Lecos, "[Unknown word] Shatters a Dream," Milwaukee Journal, April 19, 1972, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[273] Letter to The Honorable George Romney from Henry S. Reuss, May 12, 1972, Folder 26, Box 13, Reuss, Henry S. Papers 1839-1982, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[274] Letter to Henry S. Reuss from George Romney, June 7, 1972, Folder 26, Box 13, Reuss, Henry S. Papers 1839-1982, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[275] Letter to James Richardson from Leonard E. Church, July 14, 1972, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[276] Kusis, Ron, "Officials praise new HUD director" & "WAICO project begins to move," New Day, Model Cities Newspaper, September 2-15, 1972, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

The successes of WAICO thrust them into the national spotlight during a conference

entitled "Lessons Learned Through Model Cities" held in Chicago in October of 1972. Model

Cities Associate Director, John H. Givens, Jr., called WAICO "a success story in grass-roots

development" and acknowledged that WAICO had been working to rebuild their community

long before Model Cities even existed. Along with President Richardson, WAICO was

represented at this conference by their partners in redevelopment, SPA/REDCO and Recht,

Goldin & Siegel.[277] Discussions during the Chicago conference allowed WAICO to realize that

they were not the only Model Cities project facing barriers and were asked to visit two

redevelopment projects in other cities to advise their staff.[278] WAICO leaders returned to

Milwaukee with a new sense of pride and more determination than ever to ensure the

development of new housing options for WAICO residents.

By the end of 1972, Model Cities had given WAICO $546,000 for the development of

WAICO's Triangle Area, which they used to buy land, tear down properties, relocate individuals

and families, and pay a small WAICO staff of six people.[279] Out of the fifty-two properties

WAICO needed to acquire for total razing for Phase I, only three remained out of WAICO's

financial control. These three properties were owned by individuals who had acquired the

properties from deceased relatives and by individuals who had no interest in retaining the

property. Thus, by late 1973, WAICO acquired these estates.[280] Finally, after years of work, on

September 25, 1973, it was determined that WAICO's Phase I project satisfied all of HUD's

[277] "Focus national attention on WAICO," New Day Model Cities Newspaper, September 30 – October 13, 1972, Folder 17, Box 3, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[278] WAICO Rap-Up Walnut Improvement Council Newsletter, October 20, 1972, Folder 35, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[279] Ibid.

[280] Letter from Thomas L. Sprewer to William Panagis, August 13, 1973, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

requirements and was awarded $1.8 million in federal funding for the construction of their low-income housing project.[281]

On October 6, 1973, Mayor Henry W. Maier helped WAICO break ground for Phase I of the WAICO Triangle and praised WAICO residents stating, "…this project is a reminder of what people can do in their own neighborhood if they work together under dedicated neighborhood leadership."[282] Maier's speech focused on the collaboration of citizens and government to create change and testified that these 107 units of housing would represent this collaboration long after Model Cities programming ended, which ultimately occurred under the leadership of President Richard Nixon.[283]

The destruction of the Model Cities program, along with the passage of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, which eliminated federal funding for urban renewal projects as well as National Housing Partnership Grants, meant that WAICO lost a significant amount of financial backing.[284] This withdrawal of funds significantly threatened the completion of WAICO Phase I. It also meant that WAICO had to drastically cut back on spending, including paid staff members, travel compensation, consultants, and office overhead.[285]

WAICO received another devastating blow when prices in the housing industry became so inflated that their longtime partners, Recht, Goldin & Seigel, withdrew their support due to rising construction costs that made construction within HUD regulated mortgage limits

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[281] Letter to Mortgage Associates, Inc. from Department of Housing and Urban Development, September 25, 1973, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[282] Remarks by Mayor Henry W. Maier, WAICO Groundbreaking, October 6, 1973, Page 1, Folder 23, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Letter to Henry W. Maier from James Richardson, October 7, 1974, Folder 26, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.
[285] Letter to John Bechler from James Richardson, July 22, 1974, Folder 25, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

impossible.[286] The inflation that was present in the housing market invaded other markets as well as investors and government entities sought to globalize markets and create additional liquidity to attempt to create additional stability and financing.[287] Although their partners withdrew support, WAICO leaders and residents persisted. A new developer, Matt Starck and Sons, was approached and asked to reevaluate WAICO's Phase I for contracting. Although Starck and Sons set their fee at just under $2 million, much lower than Recht, Goldin & Seigel, HUD promised only $1.8 million in financial backing for the project. WAICO leaders dug in their heels and were awarded just under $190,000 from the County to make up for the discrepancy. WAICO benefactor, Mrs. Whyte, donated over $40,000 to help the organization gain letters of credit for continued construction.[288]

With construction finally beginning on WAICO's first full-scale housing project, the organization began to look ahead at what would happen once people moved in. With the help of a $35,000 grant from the City of Milwaukee, three WAICO staff members were retained and focused on two objectives: creating a sense of community for new residents and facilitating the construction of Phases II (36 units) and III (56 units) with the help of community volunteers.[289] By September of 1975, Phase I and its 107 housing units were completed with a 100 percent occupancy rate. New applications were coming in faster than the housing became available. Because of this, James Richardson reached out to political figures, such as Mayor Henry W.

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[286] News Release from Office of Mayor Maier, November 6, 1974, Folder 26, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[287] Weber, "Extracting Value from the City," 529.

[288] "WAICO Programmed for failure?" Milwaukee Courier, November 26, 1974, Folder 26, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & Celebration Festivities, April 12, 1975, Page 3, Folder 26, Box 2, Willis and Lillian Leenhouts Architects Records 1936-1990, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & Letter from Thomas L. Sprewer to John H. Givens, Jr., June 11, 1974, Folder 24, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[289] City of Milwaukee Community Development Agency Elements of Community Development Plan Summary, September 3, 1975, Folder 27, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

Maier and 7th District Supervisor Terrance L. Pitts, in support of WAICO to push for the approval of funds for the construction of Phase II.[290] The desire for public housing options, such as Phase I of the WAICO project, was seen in other cities throughout the United States. As Arnold R. Hirsch uncovers, Chicago's Ida B. Wells public housing project opened with 1,662 units available and 17,544 applications received to fill these units.[291]

Although it took another two years, by early 1978, Phases II and III were approved for funding by HUD and in collaboration with the National Housing Partnership (NHP).[292] Phase II's groundbreaking was scheduled for July 22, 1978, symbolizing the power of community.[293] Although much information is missing from the time of the groundbreaking to the actual grand opening festivities in June of 1981, it can be assumed that issues similar to those surrounding the construction of Phase I were encountered, stalling construction and completion for almost three years. This particular grand opening celebration brought WAICO supporters, including Congressman Henry S. Reuss, Alderman Kevin O'Connor, and the North Division High School Band, together once again to celebrate the accomplishments of this small community in Milwaukee. [294]

While WAICO accomplished these victories with over 140 units of properties constructed for low-income individuals and families, Phase III would not be so lucky. In late 1981, WAICO was denied funding for the construction of an additional twenty units to be

[290] Letter to Henry W. Maier from James Richardson, December 2, 1975, Folder 27, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives. & Letter to James Richardson from Terrance L. Pitts, March 31, 1976, Folder 27, Box 121, Record of the Henry W. Maier Administration 1960-1988, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[291] Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 18.

[292] Letter to James Richardson from the National Corporation for Housing Partnerships, February 27, 1978, attached to Memo from Bob Alexander to Mike dated March 4, 1978, Folder 26, Box 13, Reuss, Henry S. Papers 1839-1982, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[293] Meeting Notice, July 14, 1978, Folder 26, Box 13, Reuss, Henry S. Papers 1839-1982, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[294] "You Are Cordially Invited to the Grand Opening Festivities…," June 21, 1981, Folder 27, Box 13, Reuss, Henry S. Papers 1839-1982, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

designated as low-income housing properties in the WAICO Triangle Area.[295] In order to be

approved, James Richardson and WAICO leaders looked to have Phase III designated as a

facility for the handicapped and elderly. WAICO gained HUD approval and broke ground for a

40-unit housing development, known as Richardson Manor, which was completed in October of

1987.[296]

Although WAICO's goal was to complete 500 units of housing in the Triangle Area, by

1987 183 units of housing were built.[297] This amount of housing units is evidence of the

significance of collaboration on multiple levels, including citizens, neighborhoods, city leaders,

and national leaders, to create positive community change. It is also indicative of the hardships

and difficulties that the WAICO group faced when trying to create housing to accommodate their

growing numbers and the members of the larger Black population that had been displaced.

Though there was a continued need for low-income housing options, larger entities that had

significant influence in the housing market were often successful in stifling those needs.

However, WAICO area citizens did not abandon the needs of the Black community and, instead,

worked together to improve their immediate environment and create better housing options for

themselves, a huge accomplishment for the Black community as a whole.

For the duration that WAICO existed, the organization employed a varied of strategies to

encourage the integration of Black voices into the decisions that directly affected not only their

neighborhoods, but their sense of self, sense of place, and sense of community identity. While

these strategies varied, they had one end goal: the positive promotion and forward progression of

the Black community. By highlighting the accomplishments of WAICO and integrating their

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[295] Letter to Samuel R. Pierce, Jr. from Henry S. Reuss, December 7, 1981, Folder 26, Box 13, Reuss, Henry S. Papers 1839-1982, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee-Archives.
[296] Nettie L. Raasch, "From the Cotton Patch to the Inner City," Page 27, Frank P. Zeidler Humanities Room, Milwaukee Public Library.
[297] Ibid.

narrative into descriptions of the Black urban experience, the predominant view of Black residents as idle and inactive in terms of community transformation can be challenged and perceptions can begin to change.

Conclusion

Though a large split was constructed through the Bronzeville community during the period of urban renewal, many of the positive and progressive characteristics that were present in the neighborhood persisted in the smaller areas that survived beyond urban renewal projects. In order to assure that these areas would remain for area residents, primarily lower income Black people, inhabitants needed to work together to preserve and create better housing options for themselves in the area in which they were most comfortable. The creation of the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc. was a step in the direction of stability for those residents displaced by urban renewal projects, for the residents that lived within WAICO's boundaries, and, ultimately, the Black community as a whole.

Just as churches, social clubs, families, and businesses were social institutions in Bronzeville, WAICO can be seen as a social institution in one of the fragmented pieces of Bronzeville. WAICO employed strategies to influence the way that area residents carried and valued themselves. Initially, WAICO utilized tactics that sought to improve the physical nature of the WAICO area. Trash cleanups, abandoned car removal, and exterior remodeling and repainting were central to the organization's efforts. While these activities were important, they did not overshadow larger strategies aimed at creating a self-reliant community: positive engagement of youth and teens, job skills training, educational programming, and life skills training. Ultimately, WAICO sought to promote the intrinsic value of the Black community

through stimulating the inclusion of the Black voice in many different arenas. The formation of a WAICO newsletter, the continued coverage of WAICO actions by local news sources, and the engagement of public figures with a fair amount of power bolstered their reputation and their efforts and cast a bright light on the positive attributes of the Black community. The commitment of the organization to area residents could not be denied and with each strategy WAICO employed, community members increasingly rallied around them. Buy in from community members was crucial during this time period because of the distrust that urban renewal projects had created.

The root shock that many Black community members felt lingered for years after the initial destruction of their homes and businesses and the displacement they suffered. Even those who were not directly ripped from their homes felt the effects of urban renewal efforts. Because of the close proximity to the construction of I-43, it is safe to assume that many WAICO area residents took on boarders or family members who had been directly affected by demolition projects. Residents of WAICO were also unable to reach what remained of Bronzeville on the opposite side of the expressway. Enduring businesses and residents were virtually cut off from one another, creating a physical and emotional rift and a destruction of a Black sense of place. Thus, creating a sense of continuity, cohesion, and support within the fractured pieces of Bronzeville was important. Residents and neighbors needed to be reassured that further displacement and the effects of root shock would not continue to disrupt their livelihoods. WAICO worked diligently to provide a foundation of support and continuity, with particular emphasis on a sense of place manifested in the housing sector.

The progression of the organization from one that restored homes and the area's physical space to one involved in the creation of housing did come rapidly, but proved to be a task that the

Black community, as a whole, was ready for. By creating new homes for local residents to inhabit, the preservation of a Black sense of place could be realized. These homes would also allow for additional displaced Black community members from Bronzeville to remain in an area where they could feel the sense of community that was present in the larger area. Though this new undertaking took the support of many outside individuals, WAICO was able to maintain ultimate control over project directions. This control was crucial in order to guarantee that the integrity of WAICO's mission was being upheld and that the needs of the immediate community were being met. With direct involvement in the process of housing creation for a targeted portion of Milwaukee's Black population, WAICO was able to negate a stereotype that accompanied being designated as a Black individual.

The involvement of community members outside of the direct WAICO area, especially those individuals that held a fair amount of power, such as Mayor Henry W. Maier, various Aldermen, and Congressman Henry S. Reuss, also marked a shift in the way that Black people were perceived in certain sections of society. WAICO served as a representative of the Black community in local media outlets, most heavily in the *Milwaukee Journal* and the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, but also garnered the attention of federal entities as a Model City project area. While this change was significant for some, for others, stereotypical and negative perceptions of the Black community continued to endure. The continued growth of WAICO's member base indicated that the reach of the organization's efforts and triumphs were being recognized on a national scale. The WAICO area and its residents became a symbol of Black progression for many as it continued to overcome obstacles to create low-income housing for Black residents in Milwaukee.

The completion of Phase I showcased the desire of Black community members to remain in areas familiar to them. While low-income housing constructed through urban renewal projects by outside development firms was created, it was not created in a space familiar to those that were meant to occupy them. Phase I low-income housing options were 100 percent filled to capacity with a waiting list to keep apartments occupied for years to come. This can directly be attributed to the sense of community and belonging that accompanied the Bronzeville neighborhood before it was torn in half and the sense of solidarity that WAICO helped to create. Although Phases II and III did not come as quickly as WAICO had desired and as promptly as they was needed, portions of the initial plans did come to fruition, marking the tenacity of the organization and area residents.

Changes in the various economic markets accompanied shifts in the focus of governmental entities. Instead of being focused on localized urban renewal efforts, the federal government and, thus, local markets, shifted towards a more globalized economy. This meant less emphasis on localized efforts that could potentially cost more and more emphasis on cheaper, far-reaching approaches, including packaged-mortgages and tax exemptions for mass-produced goods and services. With this shift away from community development, WAICO found it more and more difficult to retain long-term partnerships as well as financial backing for projects that would directly benefit the immediate community. It was only through the manipulation of the vision of Phase III of the Triangle Project from low-income housing to housing for the elderly and disabled that it was constructed. After Phase III's completion, the organization found it too difficult to exist as it once had.

Because of the shifts in governmental priorities, Milwaukee's Black community lost a portion of its foundation as the efforts of WAICO became less prominent and decreasingly

viable. Once again, the Black community's needs were pushed aside to make way for what society deemed to be the next step in its evolution. While this larger shift caused WAICO to cease to be a formal nonprofit organization, the exploration of its successes and development are a crucial part of Black Milwaukee's history. The existence of WAICO also demonstrates the retention of the sense of community that was present in Bronzeville before the physical rift of the expressway was constructed. The development of a grassroots, community led organization that represented the interests of Black people and promoted Black solidarity and support in the face of federally sustained destruction of the Black community was a huge asset that deserves promotion and further exploration.

Chapter Four

Conclusions and Implications for Current and Future Research

The exploration of the Black urban experience surrounding and in response to federal and local urban renewal legislation and efforts is crucial to understanding, interpreting, and adding to current scholarship on Black history in Milwaukee. By advocating for a more complete understanding, interpretation, and addition of missing histories, pieces of important Black history can be inserted back into the history of the United States. The examination of Black experiences is important due to the fact that a significant portion of Black history has been left out of current scholarship, either deliberately or unintentionally. This erasure of Black history is detrimental to the Black community as a whole as it continues to portray Black people as largely inactive apart from actions surrounding iconic histories, such as the Underground Railroad and the Civil Rights movement. This stereotypical perceptions of Black people as inactive continues to plague the community today. However, by piecing together a rebuttal to this stereotype, the perception of the Black community as a whole can change. Omitting pieces of Black history is also harmful to current and future generations who will end up losing any connection to this history if they are not recorded before evidence of them is destroyed.

By exploring the existing scholarship of Gilbert Osofsky, James R. Grossman, Arnold R. Hirsch, Thomas J. Sugrue, and David M. P. Freund surrounding New York City's Harlem, Chicago, and Detroit, one gains the perspective that the pressures put on Black communities to settle in certain sections of the city were analogous in cities across the United States. Black residents were forced into sections of the city abandoned through white flight, the use of destructive language, and the manipulation of societal perceptions. Organized groups of realtors,

lawmakers, and Neighborhood Improvement Associations deliberately took action to bar Black residents from sections of the city and used the vitality of the housing market to influence city resident's views. By utilizing these tactics, residential segregation persisted and became a "natural" part of market fluctuations and immediate environments.

As deindustrialization and white flight continued to affect cities across the United States, the federal government took action in the form of urban renewal legislation. Projects deemed as urban renewal targeted specific sections of the city that contained blight and substandard housing. Not surprisingly, these areas were the same areas in which Black communities existed. Thus, urban renewal projects can be seen as a form of urbicide, or the specific targeting of sections of the city for annihilation. By eradicating the blight that existed within cities, Black people and neighborhoods that had been forcefully created would be destroyed and Black residents would be forced to disperse. This demolition destroyed thriving Black communities in an intentional and targeted way. In addition to the physical destruction of Black communities, an internal sense of place was simultaneously devastated. Just as Black communities were working to create cohesive neighborhoods and unity within their forced borders complete with Black-owned businesses and the ability to own homes, their sense of place was destroyed with the passing of urban renewal legislation and subsequent projects. A larger conversation about the negative effects of urban renewal projects did not appear until thousands of structures had been demolished and thousands more residents were displaced.

Accompanying the conversation of the destruction of a Black sense of place is the concept of root shock or the emotional effects that are tied to the physical destruction of the Black community. This physical destruction creates an environment of distrust, anxiety, destabilization, and an increase in stress. Thus, not only did urban renewal destroy the physical

space of Black residents, but it also produced an environment of emotional upheaval for generations to come. All of the scholars referenced in this research project represent a portion of what comprises the entirety of the Black urban experience. Combined, they lay the foundation for future scholars to explore the Black urban experience utilizing some of the same tactics present in their research. It is through the use of these approaches that the history of the Walnut Street area from its creation through the major years of urban renewal initiatives was explored.

In spite of the structural institutions and forces that shaped the Black urban landscape of Milwaukee, Black community members learned to lean on one another to create a safety net of support, helped one another start and maintain businesses, aided one another in the procurement of resources, both financial and material, and created thriving communities of unity and encouragement through hard work and perseverance. Milwaukee's Bronzeville was a prime example of how hard work and perseverance could create community cohesion. Local residents and all-Black social clubs supported Black entrepreneurs so that they could sustain themselves in a white-dominated business sector and to keep financial resources within the forced borders of Bronzeville. In this same vein, area businesses employed local residents and teens to keep employment options in close proximity to living situations and to keep youth out of trouble. These same social clubs assisted area residents in times of financial distress and emotional upheaval. Youth and teen activities were planned with the hopes of providing life skills, athletic opportunities, and a safe place for socialization. Neighbors knew neighbors and worked together to create a stable and productive environment for Bronzeville's Black community. As the strengths and power of the Black community continued to grow, the federal government passed legislation widely known as urban renewal.

Under the leadership of Milwaukee Mayors Frank P. Zeidler and Henry W. Maier, local urban renewal projects consumed a large portion of Bronzeville. The characteristics present in Bronzeville - solidarity, support, unity, and community pride, along with the growing political power of Black residents - can be seen as threats to continued white domination in the city. Thus, local lawmakers and those in power sought out Bronzeville for urban renewal projects and willfully destroyed the Black community that existed there. The larger population saw Milwaukee's urban renewal projects as positive additions to the city's vitality and economic base. As a result, little to no regard was given to the lives and livelihoods that were destroyed by them. Even after the Black community began to "make some noise" in regards to the housing options they were given, decision makers and developers had their own agendas in mind. Displaced residents were given few options to relocate, particularly the option to relocate to a dwelling in close proximity to what was left of Bronzeville. What resulted was the continued overcrowding of an already limited housing stock and sustained negative perceptions and stereotypes of the Black community were also perpetuated due to the continuous use of specific jargon and the targeting of certain areas of the city. However, in response to continued urban renewal projects threatening the displacement of additional Black bodies and the destruction of housing options, a small part of what was once Bronzeville organized their resources to combat the people and machines that threatened their homes and their sense of place.

The creation of the Walnut Area Improvement Council, Inc. (WAICO), a grassroots, community-led organization, marked a significant progression for Milwaukee's Black community as the organization became a powerful voice for the people and kept the desires and needs of local Black residents in mind. WAICO was formed by a group of local individuals seeking to preserve the integrity of their community and the structures that existed there.

Utilizing local residents, WAICO was able to significantly impact the physical environment of their neighborhood through area trash cleanups, targeting specific properties for repainting and general repairs, conducting area walk-throughs to locate abandoned vehicles, and sodding vacant lots. At the same time, WAICO worked to continue to represent characteristics contained within Bronzeville by engaging area youth in ways that would promote life skills, stability, and a sense of kinship. These initial undertakings brought attention to the area and thrust the organization and their efforts into the spotlight.

Before long, WAICO began the task of creating housing options within their borders. With the help of external advocates, several of whom had a fair amount of power, WAICO was able to develop plans for three low-income housing projects for those displaced by previous, current, and future urban renewal projects. While these plans were developed, continued obstacles, changing legislative priorities, and competition from other development firms caused these projects to stall and to be manipulated to fit the conditions of changing regulations. Even though the initial goal of constructing three housing developments for low-income Black residents did not come to fruition exactly as expected, the triumphs of WAICO cannot be denied. They became one example of the tenacity of Black-led organizations and accomplished much of their success utilizing funds and donations generated within the immediate community and through their supporters nationwide. WAICO, as an organization, was able to develop and evolve rapidly while keeping the goal of creating a self-reliant community in the forefront. The organization's commitment to area residents and advocacy for the Black community cannot be denied and should be included in narratives of the Black urban experience.

Not only does WAICO represent a negation of popular views of Black residents during the urban renewal period, it also provides a piece of Milwaukee's Black history that has largely

been left out of existing historical pieces. The exploration of WAICO as a crucial element of Milwaukee's Black history is imperative. Milwaukee residents who were a part of Bronzeville and the WAICO area are rapidly aging. Their experiences and histories must be documented so that researchers and scholars do not lose their understandings and interpretations of urban events completely. By adding Black histories and giving space to document Black voices within discussion of the Black urban experience, the dominant view of history from that of influential white people, can be affected to reflect a more inclusive history instead of the fragments that currently exist as those who write history often do not represent the whole.

In addition, the continued exploration of the Black urban experience representing the Black community aids in exposing structural racism and institutionalized disadvantage that Black residents faced in the past and continue to face today. This includes a discussion about how those in power use certain jargon and expressions to influence the perceptions of the general public. Most importantly, however, the exploration of the Black urban experience with these characteristics in mind serves as a point where the discussion of Black communities can begin to transform into a discussion including the narratives from the perspective of Black residents.

Although other researchers have explored grassroots and community activism within the City of Milwaukee, this thesis marks one of the first attempts to include a discussion of WAICO and the actions the organization took to influence the Black urban landscape within the city into that scholarship. The narrative of WAICO is both important and poignant. While they were able to evolve quickly and with little opposition, the moment WAICO became an active force in the housing market, their forward progress slowed and opposition from developers outside of the immediate environment began to push back on their progression. It can be assumed, that forward Black progression in other markets was met with comparable resistance and similar challenges.

It is the hope of this researcher that through this discussion of WAICO, other aspects of Milwaukee's Black community in sectors apart from the housing market will be explored. Through this, a more complete history of Milwaukee's Black community can be uncovered and the view of Black residents as idle and dismissive will be rejected. It is the job of researchers and scholars to uncover complete truths and this tiny piece of the Black urban experience is an attempt to do just that.

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