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Polish American Reaction to Civil Rights in Milwaukee, 1963 to 1965

by

Stephen M. Leahy

I. POLISH AMERICAN REACTION TO CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION, 1963-65

The attitude of Polish Americans toward Civil Rights legislation has remained one of the lasting controversies in recent Polish American history. Sources differ about Polish Americans and their reactions to race, especially in the City of Milwaukee during the 1960s. Researchers often cite electoral results from the 1964 Wisconsin presidential primary as evidence. Frank Aukofer's 1968 journalistic account notes that Alabama governor and segregationist presidential candidate George Wallace had a warm welcome in the predominately Polish South Side of Milwaukee. Richard C. Haney argued in 1978 that Polish Americans deserted Governor John W. Reynolds, who won the Democratic primary, making the 1964 contest a referendum on Civil Rights. In Volume 6 of *The History of Wisconsin* series, William F. Thompson argued that voting analyses by Richard C. Haney and Michael Rogin perpetuated a myth that blue collar ethnics supported Wallace. Thompson states that large crossover votes in Milwaukee suburbs coupled with a low turnout to vote for favorite son candidates led to Wallace's success. Thompson argues that neighborhoods with lower percentages of Polish and blue collar voters gave Wallace higher percentages. James S. Pula cites

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Jim Brey and the financial support of the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley Foundation.

the same evidence in arguing that Polish Americans were no more racist than other ethnic groups “despite their stereotypical label as racists.” Yet, that stereotypical perception continues to the present. According to a footnote in a recent book review by Thaddeus Radzilowski, an unnamed radical professor tells classes “that Polish Americans are the most racist people on earth.”¹

Historians outside of scholars of Polonia acknowledge the need for studying reaction to Civil Rights protests. A historian of the American South, Charles Eagles, notes in a recent historiographical essay that most works on Civil Rights approach the subject from the point of the “movement.” Eagles compares the study of Civil Rights to the study of the Cold War. Like John Lewis Gaddis’s analysis of Cold War studies, Eagles argues that “movement” scholars lacked detachment and failed to understand the opposition. To avoid “abnormal history,” Eagles calls for scholars to study Civil Rights opponents and “the silent majorities of both races.” Similarly, Pula notes in his 1992 Fiedorczyk Lecture that few scholars have examined whether ethnicity functioned as “the basis for racism.” In one respect, Catholic historian John T. McGreevy has studied Civil Rights opposition in his 1996 work *Parish Boundaries*, which shows how northern, urban Catholics reacted to African American migration in the twentieth-century.²

Milwaukee’s Civil Rights historiography from 1963 to 1965 comes primarily from the movement perspective. Frank A. Aukofer’s journalistic account clearly shows its sympathies for Civil Rights activists. John T.

¹Frank Aukofer, *City With a Chance: A Case History of Civil Rights Revolution* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1968), 56, 110; Richard C. Haney, “Wallace in Wisconsin: The Presidential Primary of 1964,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 61 (Summer 1978), 259-278; William F. Thompson, *Continuity and Change* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1988; The History of Wisconsin Series edited by Thompson), Vol. 6, 732; James S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 131. Pula gives specific instances of Polish Americans being described as racists in “Polish-Black Relations: Ethnic Tensions During the Civil Rights Movement,” the Fiedorczyk Lecture, Central Connecticut State University, 1992, 9. John Bukowczyk’s 1987 history of Polish Americans argues that they competed with African Americans for power and urban resources. See John Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of the Polish-Americans* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), 128-129; Thaddeus Radzilowski, “Review of Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago’s Packinghouses, 1904-1950 by Rick Halpern,” *Polish American Studies*, Vol. 59 (Autumn 2002), 108-111.

²Charles W. Eagles, “Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 66 (November 2000), 815-816, 844-848; Pula, “Polish-Black Relations,” 11; John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

McGreevy, William F. Thompson, John Gurda, Patrick D. Jones, and Stephen Grant Meyer focus mostly on the Civil Rights movement, although McGreevy provides an anecdotal sample of three local opposition letters in Milwaukee. Two sources that cover the opposition to Civil Rights focus on the leaders. Political scientist Richard C. Haney studied the George Wallace campaign in 1964 primarily from the perspective of the candidate, a small number of activists outside of Milwaukee County, and voting returns. Former Mayor Henry Maier's autobiography attacks every negative comment made about his administration and race relations.³ Focusing on leaders and voting results presents a skewed understanding. Activists constitute a small atypical sample of opinion. Voting results cannot necessarily be related to ethnic groups, nor does a vote for a candidate automatically translate into support for a particular issue. Finally, it cannot be assumed that any ethnic group voted proportional to their numbers for a political candidate.

II: THE POSSIBILITIES OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Primary sources documenting the average person's position on Civil Rights often reside in the documentary collections of prominent politicians and other public figures. During the 1960s, Henry S. Reuss and Clement J. Zablocki represented the city of Milwaukee in Congress. Henry Maier served as the mayor of Milwaukee from 1960 to 1988. Constituents wrote letters on the issues of the day. Expecting a reply, these correspondents almost always included a return address. Clement J. Zablocki intensely examined his constituent letters, and his staff considered them to be the pulse of the district.⁴ These letters also function as an unscientific public

³Aukofer, *City With a Chance*; Thompson, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 6, 390-392; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 198-206; John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999); Patrick D. Jones, "'The Selma of the North': Race Relations and Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee, 1958-1970," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002; Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher's, Inc., 2000), 189-196; Henry W. Maier, *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous: An Autobiography* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1993), Haney, "Wallace in Wisconsin."

⁴Interview, John H. Sullivan (with the author), September 30, 1991; interviews, Ivo Spalatin (with the author), April 11, 1988, June 2, 1988. Copies of these interviews can be found in the Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Margaret Carpenter, Clement J. Zablocki: Democratic Representative from Wisconsin. In *The 93rd Congress* edited by Ralph Nader, (Washington: Grossman Publishers, 1972), 6.

opinion poll. The correspondence is readily available, as Reuss's and Maier's papers are on deposit at the Area Research Center of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Zablocki's public papers are open to scholars at Marquette University.⁵

Scholars have commonly used maps in their studies of Civil Rights and race relations. Since history is about events happening at a time and place, it makes sense to map out these changes over time, especially as scholars often describe neighborhoods as "defended space" or as defined by parish boundaries. J. Mills Thornton III presents maps in his study of three key Alabama communities during the Civil Rights era. John T. McGreevy concludes his 1996 work *Parish Boundaries* by documenting how one Philadelphia Irish American Catholic parish became predominantly African American during the 1940s. William F. Thompson in *The History of Wisconsin Series* uses maps to detail increasing African American populations in Milwaukee, Madison, Racine, and Beloit.⁶

The new technology of Geographical Information Systems offers the opportunity to analyze geographic data in a detail unimagined before computers. GIS allows scholars to place historical events on a map, much like a push pin can be placed on a paper map. By using GIS, scholars can push "multiple pins" into the wall, allowing for analysis of "pins" with similar locations or other embedded information like date, ethnicity, and opinion on Civil Rights, or even comments made on a letter. By holding the cursor over a particular pin, a scholar can immediately recall all information embedded in a location. These pins can be overlaid to traditional information like census tracts, city boundaries, and electoral districts. The software allows scholars to highlight differences and similarities by color and shape. Classes on Geographical Information Systems are often taught at colleges and universities. Members of the public may take brief seminars offered by colleges or by entrepreneurs.⁷

⁵Milwaukee, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Golda Meir Library, Area Research Center, Henry S. Reuss Papers (hereafter Reuss Papers); Milwaukee, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Golda Meir Library, Area Research Center, Milwaukee (Wis.). Mayor. Records of the Henry W. Maier Administration (hereafter Maier Records), 1960-1988; Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Marquette University, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Clement J. Zablocki Papers (hereafter Zablocki Papers).

⁶J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 249-261; Thompson, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 6, 308, 312-313, 345.

⁷More information about the University of Wisconsin Madison Land Information and Computer Graphics Facility training courses can be found at:

To create push pins for a computerized map, one technique is to go to a historically significant location, take a Global Positioning Satellite reading, and place it on a map. "Geocoding" offers a less time consuming method to place a multitude of addresses on a map. To "geocode," first a person must acquire a computerized street map similar to that of Mapquest.com or Google maps. For the purposes of this study, I have acquired two maps of Milwaukee County from the University of Wisconsin Madison Land Information and Computer Graphics Facility. After compiling data related to an address (much like a junk mail firm) into an Excel or .xls spreadsheet, the scholar converts the data into a Dbase IV or .dbf file, the official standard spreadsheet file for "geocoding." Then, a GIS program like Arcview will place the addresses on a map. Then, scholars can examine data based on its display on the map or how it appears in the displayed table. Since Milwaukee renamed and reordered its street numbers and names during World War II, it is still possible to place old addresses on to a new map even with expressway construction. Only minor changes such as Mitchell Street becoming Historic Mitchell Street, South 16th Street becoming Cesar E. Chavez Drive, and North Third Street becoming Martin Luther King Drive complicate geocoding Milwaukee addresses.

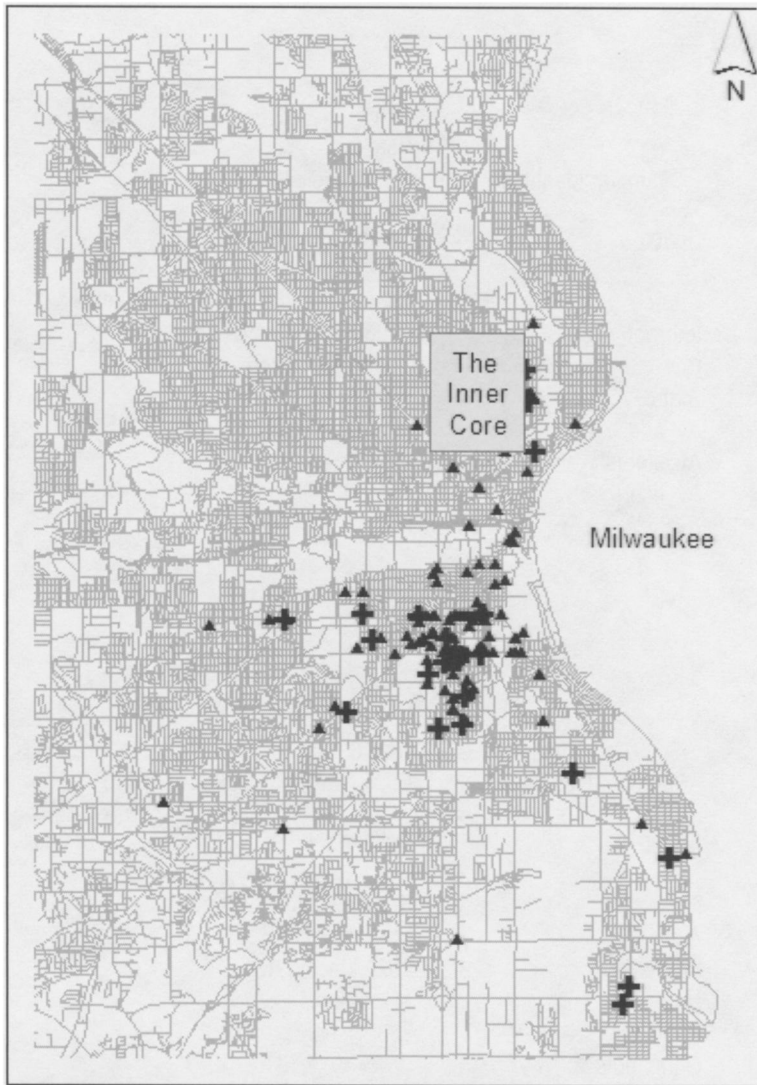
III: USING GIS TO EXAMINE THE PROBLEM

The 1946 jubilee book, *We, the Milwaukee Poles*, offers one of the best snapshots of Milwaukee's Polonia. In addition to describing prominent churches, cultural institutions, and political figures, Polish American businesses advertised in the publication—often asking people to visit them at their addresses. Figure 1 lists addresses culled from *We, the Milwaukee Poles*, augmented by address information from telephone directories at the Milwaukee Public Library and zip code information from the United States Postal Service's online zip code locator. Map 1—a map of these addresses—shows what Polish Americans thought of as their space in terms of religion, culture, and business in 1946. Figure 2 and Figure 3 reveal the type of information contained in a single point on a GIS map. This allows for further inquiries. For example, spatial analysis could be made on type of business. Map 2—a detail of Map 1—reveals not surprisingly that the bulk of most of

<http://www.lic.wisc.edu/training/>, accessed: August 30, 2005. ESRI Press has published three books containing essays and maps spatially analyzing historical data dealing with race and ethnicity. See Anne Kelly Knowles, ed., *Past Time, Past Place: GIS for History*, (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2002); David Herzog, *Mapping the News: Case Studies in GIS and Journalism*, (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2003); Cynthia A. Brewer and Trudy A. Suchan, eds., *Mapping Census 2000: The Geography of U.S. Diversity* (Redlands, CA: ESRI Press, 2001).

FIGURE 1
Addresses taken from *We, the Milwaukee Poles*.

Parish	Internet Search (www.superpages.com)	City	ST	ZIP	<u>We the Milwaukee Poles Address</u>	Page#
St. Stanislaus	524 West Historic Mitchell Street	Milwaukee	WI	53204	S. 5th & Mitchell Sts.	4
St. Hedwig's	1702 North Humboldt Avenue	Milwaukee	WI	53202	E. Brady St. & N. Humboldt	8
St. Hyacinth	1414 West Becher Street	Milwaukee	WI	53215	W. Becher & S. 15th St. (NE corner)	11
St. Vincent de Paul	2114 West Mitchell Street	Milwaukee	WI	53204	S. 21st & W. Mitchell St.	13
St. Josaphat (Basilica)	2333 South 6th Street	Milwaukee	WI	53215	S. 6th & W. Lincoln Av.	16
Ss. Cyril and Methodius	2427 South Fifteenth Street	Milwaukee	WI	53215	S. 15th/16th & Windlake Av.	18
St. Casimir	924 East Clarke Street	Milwaukee	WI	53212	N. Bremen, E. Clarke, & N. Well Sts.	20
St. Mary of Czestochowa	3055 North Fratney Street	Milwaukee	WI	53212	3055 N. Fratney St.	24
St. John Kanty	978 West Dakota Street	Milwaukee	WI	53172	(South of St. Josaphat and Ss. Cyril)	25
St. Adalbert	1800 Sixteenth Avenue	S. Milwaukee	WI	53172	Becher & S. 19th Sts.	27
St. Barbara	3300 West Becher Street	Milwaukee	WI	53215	2075 S. 32nd St.	29
Blessed Sacrament	3100 South Forty-First Street	Milwaukee	WI	53215	S. 41st & Oklahoma	30
St. Alexander	3344 South Sixteenth Street	Milwaukee	WI	53215	S. 16th S/S. 15th Pl & W. Holt Av.	32



Map 1: Addresses in *We, the Milwaukee Poles*

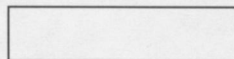
Legend

+ Churches

▲ Businesses

— Streets

4



Miles

FIGURE 2

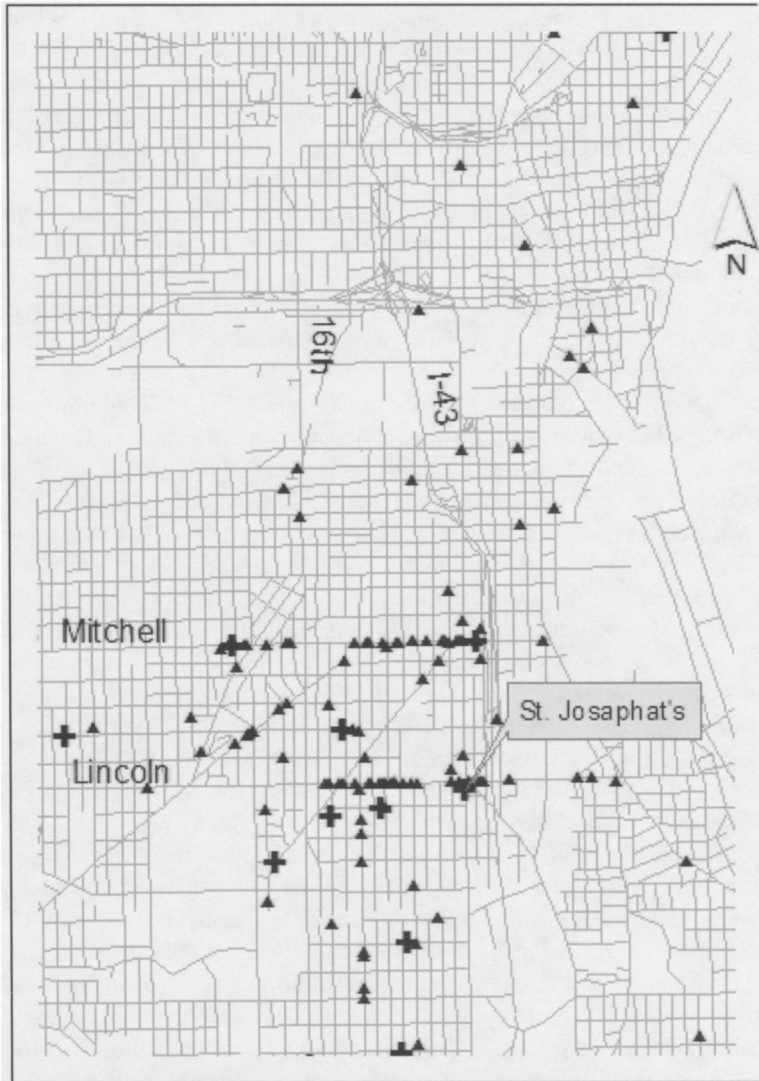
Sample "Identify Results" click for Polish Churches, 1946.

<u>Shape</u>	<u>Point</u>
Church	Ss. Peter and Paul National Catholic
Internet_s	1308 Fifteenth Avenue
City	South Milwaukee
State	WI
Av_add	1308 FIFTEENTH AVENUE
Av_status	M
Av_score	100
Av_side	R

FIGURE 3

Sample, "Identify Results," click for Polish Businesses, 1946.

<u>Shape</u>	<u>Point</u>
Business	Roman B. J. Kwasniewski
Activity	Photographer
Address	1024 Lincoln Ave.
N4	Milwaukee
Page	283
Comments	
Av_add	1024 LINCOLN AVE.
Av_status	M
Av_score	77
Av_side	R

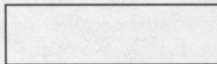


Map 2: Detail of Addresses in *We, the Milwaukee Poles*

Legend

- + Churches
- ▲ Businesses
- Streets

1



Miles

Polish American businesses sat along Mitchell Street and Lincoln Avenue. Historically, Polish Americans lived near churches as each city formed its own Polonia.⁸ While the Polish Americans moved increasingly to the suburbs during the 1960s and 1970s, in the absence of census data a map of the historically Polish Churches can stand as an outline of Polish American Milwaukee. This second map also shows the strong Roman Catholic and Polish National Catholic character of the area. These two maps give a sense of what Polish Americans saw as their own “space” or what scholars call a “mental map.”

John Gurda’s excellent history of Milwaukee provides a summary of the city’s Civil Rights era. From 1950 to 1970, Milwaukee’s African American population grew from 21,772 to 105,088, going from 3.4 percent to 14.7 percent of the city’s population. Restricted to a limited, but growing portion of the North Side, African Americans lived in substandard homes and attended substandard schools. Urban redevelopment programs built houses for whites while demolishing residences in the Inner Core. Bounded by Holton St. to the east, Keefe St. to north, 20th St. to the west, and Juneau St. to the South, this area was known as “the Inner Core.” Most accounts of the Polish American reaction to these demographic changes focus on the 1964 Democratic presidential primary. In that election, Alabama Governor George Wallace openly campaigned for Polish American votes. At one campaign stop, an estimated 700 people serenaded Wallace by singing *Dixie* in Polish at Serb Hall, a campaign mecca for all politicians. Favorite son and Open Housing advocate Governor John W. Reynolds won the Democratic Primary, but Wallace did better than expected. Nationally, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.⁹

Based on letters in the Reuss and Zablocki Papers, few Milwaukeeans cared about Civil Rights prior to 1963. Of the twenty-two correspondents, fourteen expressed opposition to Civil Rights legislation. Of the twenty-two letters in the Zablocki Papers from 1949 to 1963, fourteen opposed Civil Rights, six supported, and two requested information. Two did not have return addresses. The first letters supporting Civil Rights, including one self-described African American, called for expelling the South from the United States. Later opposition correspondence supported States Rights or condemned Earl Warren. One letter specifically spoke in racial terms, calling for the impeachment of Earl Warren before he destroyed the “white race.”¹⁰

⁸Pula, *An Ethnic Community*, 124-128.

⁹Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 360; Thompson, *Continuity and Change*, 312, 350-352, 728-733; Haney, “Wallace in Wisconsin,” 268-275.

¹⁰Dora Hofer to CJZ, February 9, 1961, folder “Justice, 1961,” box General Correspondence 23; James Cameron to CJZ September 6, 1956, folder “General File

Making a generalization about Reuss's papers is difficult, since most likely his collection is not complete. Only two letters remain extant, both from leaders of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.¹¹

After President John F. Kennedy called for passage of a Civil Rights bill on June 11, 1963, Rep. Clement J. Zablocki's constituents developed a steady interest in the issue. That year, 101 people wrote Zablocki about Civil Rights. There are no letters in the Reuss papers dating to 1963. Thirty-five expressed opposition, while 63 called for supporting Civil Rights. Two correspondents asked for information, and one sent a mixed message. Most supporters demanded that Zablocki sign a discharge petition to bring Civil Rights legislation directly to the House floor. Map 3 shows that near the confines of Milwaukee's South Side Polonia, nearly an equal number supported and opposed Civil Rights. Of the thirty five opposing letters, four letters expressed general opposition to Civil Rights. Of those citing reasons, three cited dislike of the Civil Rights leadership while another three complained about protests against segregation. Eight argued that the bill either destroyed freedom or installed Communism. Nine people made racist arguments, complaining about miscegenation and lazy, uneducated African Americans. Eleven called for protecting property rights or allowing landlords to rent to whomever they pleased. Since many Polish American homes were known as "Polish bungalows" with basement rental apartments, this *may* offer a key to understanding early Civil Rights opposition in Milwaukee.¹²

The constituent interest continued until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its signing on July 2. Locally, the April 7, 1964 Wisconsin Presidential Preference Primary focused the debate on the issue. Despite the opposition of the Democratic National Party establishment, and the predominately Polish American Milwaukee County Citizens Committee, George Wallace won 255,136 votes and 34 percent of the total vote.¹³ The

C," box General Correspondence 9, Clement J. Zablocki Papers, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. All summaries of constituent letters in the Zablocki Papers come from the relevant years in the following Series: General Correspondence, Gov Files, and Legislation Files. Letters from outside of Milwaukee County have been omitted.

¹¹Mrs. Wilbur Hayward to Henry S. Reuss, September 29, 1955; Eddie Walker to HSR, April 30, 1959, folder 1, box 26, Henry S. Reuss Papers.

¹²Gurda, *Making of Milwaukee*, 173-174.

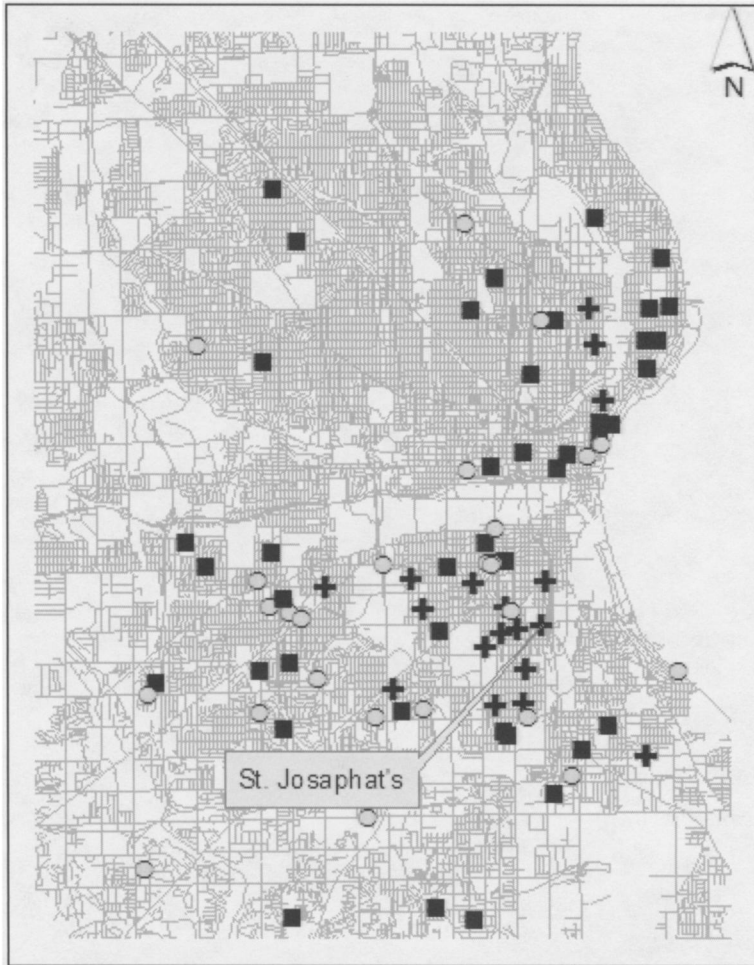
¹³Haney, "Wallace in Wisconsin," 271, 275-276; Thompson, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 6, 729-733. Interestingly, none of Wallace's Democratic National Convention delegate candidates from the Milwaukee area Congressional districts had Polish names. See Wisconsin, Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, *Wisconsin Blue Book*, 1966, 730.

FIGURE 4
Excerpt of Summarized Data from "Civil Rights Legislation,
March," box Leg 1964 1, Zablocki Papers.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Bessie Comstock	2409 S. 83rd St.	Milwaukee	3/15/64	opposed to equal accommodations
P.N. Eckholm Raymond and Dorothy Schell For Wallace	4032 N. Downer Ave. 5569 Angle Lane Milwaukee	Shorewood Greendale Milwaukee	3/16/64 3/14/64 3/22/64	Does not want FEPC Discrimination is a sin Vote for Wallace and against demonstrations, "particularly 'open housing"
J. Berns	5636 N. 41st St.	Milwaukee	3/23/64	Wants strong civil rights bill
A. L. Szybokoski	No address		3/25/64	Sarcasm in favor of integrated schools
Richard Lynch	4221 N. 35th St.	Milwaukee	3/23/64	Against civil rights bill
Ray E. Haber	5378 S. Elaine	Cudahy	3/22/64	Dictatorial bill
Norbert Kowalicki	4702 N. 74th St.	Milwaukee	3/24/64	Voting for Wallace; sick of sit ins

constituent letters lend support to conclusions that Polish Americans were less likely to support Wallace. There is no spatial relationship between the voters mentioning Wallace and their support or opposition to Civil Rights. Map 4 shows letters mentioning George Wallace. Figure 4 presents an excerpt from the author's summarized data during the primary campaign. Zablocki had 21 letters mentioning George Wallace. Thirteen had views opposed to Civil Rights, while eight opposed Wallace or supported equality. The two anonymous letters—not surprisingly the more virulently racist—mentioned support of Wallace. Only five correspondents had Polish names.¹⁴ Three opposed Wallace, expressing dismay that Polish Americans were accused of supporting the Alabama governor. The two others expressed opposition to sit-ins and Open Housing. Of the 13 letters supporting Wallace, the correspondents opposed the Civil Rights bill, big government, or restrictions on property rights. That is, they did not want African Americans living next door or renting their apartments. Reuss received one

¹⁴For the purposes of this paper, someone who identifies themselves as Polish or has a Polish last name will be considered Polish. While this is not a precise determination of Polish ethnicity, it is worth using in the hope that it is more right than wrong.



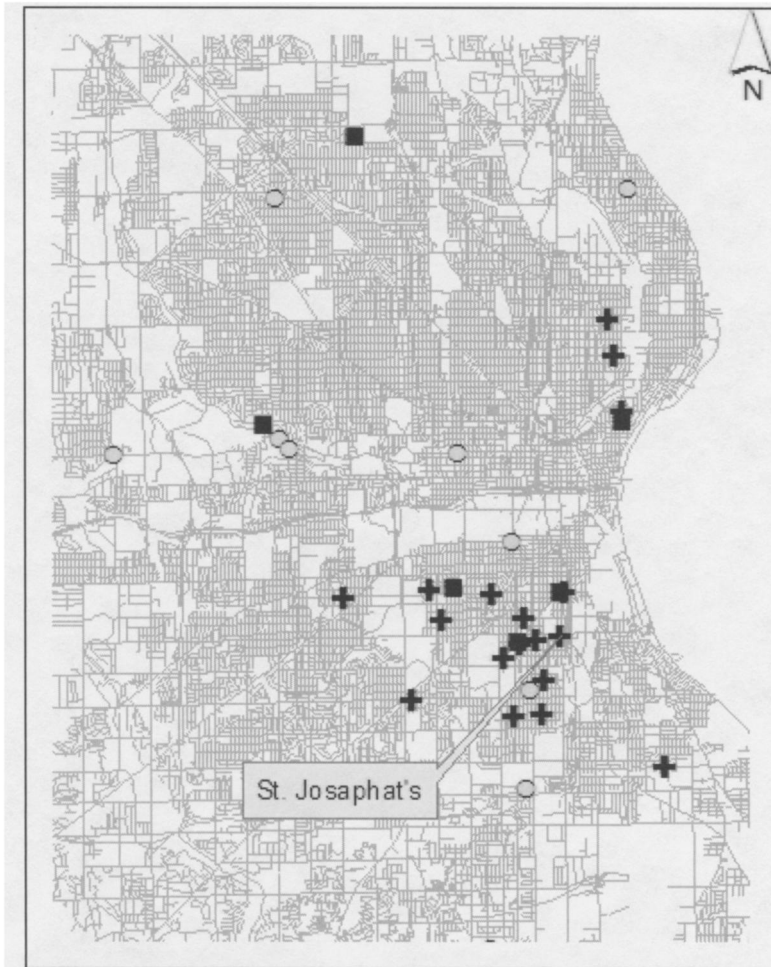
Map 3: Constituent Correspondence, 1963

Legend

- For Civil Rights
- Against Civil Rights
- +
- Streets

1

Miles



Map 4: Constituent Letters Mentioning Wallace, 1964

Legend

**Constituent Letters
Mentioning Wallace**

- For Civil Rights
- Against Civil Rights
- ⊕ Churches
- Streets

2.5



Miles

FIGURE 5
CJZ Correspondents on Civil Rights, 1964

<u>Attitude</u>	<u>% 1964 Correspondents</u>	<u>% Polish Correspondents</u>
Opposed to Civil Rights	56 percent (118 total)	40 percent (12 total)
In Favor to Civil Rights	27 percent (57 total)	40 percent (12 total)
Mixed (for equality, but against Open Housing)	5 percent (10 total)	10 percent (3 total)
Requesting information (bill copies)	12 percent (26 total)	10 percent (3 total)

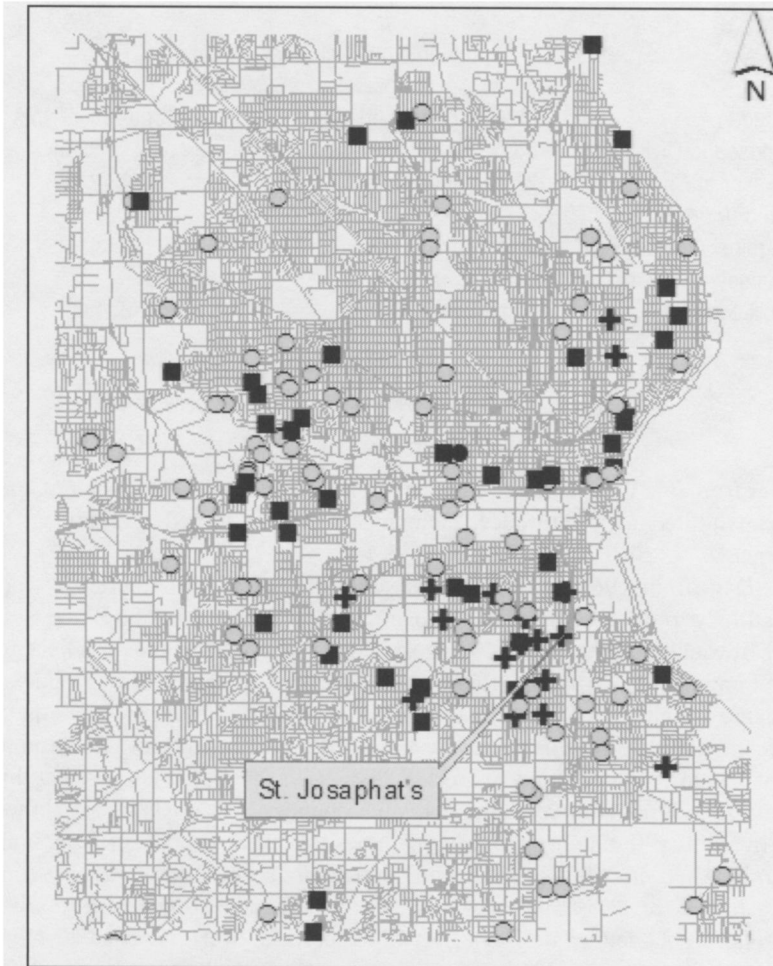
Source: Civil Rights folders from Leg Files, Gov Files,
and General Correspondence Files, 1964, Zablocki Papers.

letter from one Wallace supporter near the southern border of the Inner Core. She exhibited racist attitudes, including a call for forced resettlement to Africa.¹⁵

Data from 1964 correspondents suggests that Polish Americans were less likely to oppose Civil Rights than the letter writer from the South Side of Milwaukee County. Map 5 suggests that Civil Rights legislation became a community wide issue. Figure 5 shows that opposing correspondents became a majority in 1964. Based on name recognition, thirty letters or 14 percent came from Polish Americans. Twelve Polish American correspondents equally opposed and supported Civil Rights. Figure 5 shows that this contrasts with overall correspondents who opposed Civil Rights legislation by over a two to one margin. Map 6 shows that there is no spatial relationship between this “Polish American” correspondence on the issue. By contrast Map 7 reveals that Wauwatosa was a hotbed for opposition to Civil Rights. Of 27 letters in 1964, 18, or 67 percent, were opposed to Civil Rights. Six letters or 22 percent supported Civil Rights. It is difficult to make comparisons with Reuss’s correspondence, since his collection contained only four percent of Zablocki’s total correspondence. Reuss’s eight 1964 letters demanded the protection of Civil Rights activists in Mississippi. Three had Polish names, and they all favored of Civil Rights legislation.

Map 8 of the 1965 Zablocki correspondence shows that constituents supported the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by roughly a two to one ratio. Seven supporters had Polish last names or identified themselves as Polish American. Most letters contained simple endorsements of the proposed law,

¹⁵Gertrude Warone to HSR, April 1, 1964, folder 2, box 26, Reuss Papers.



Map 5: Zablocki and Reuss Letters
on Civil Rights, 1964

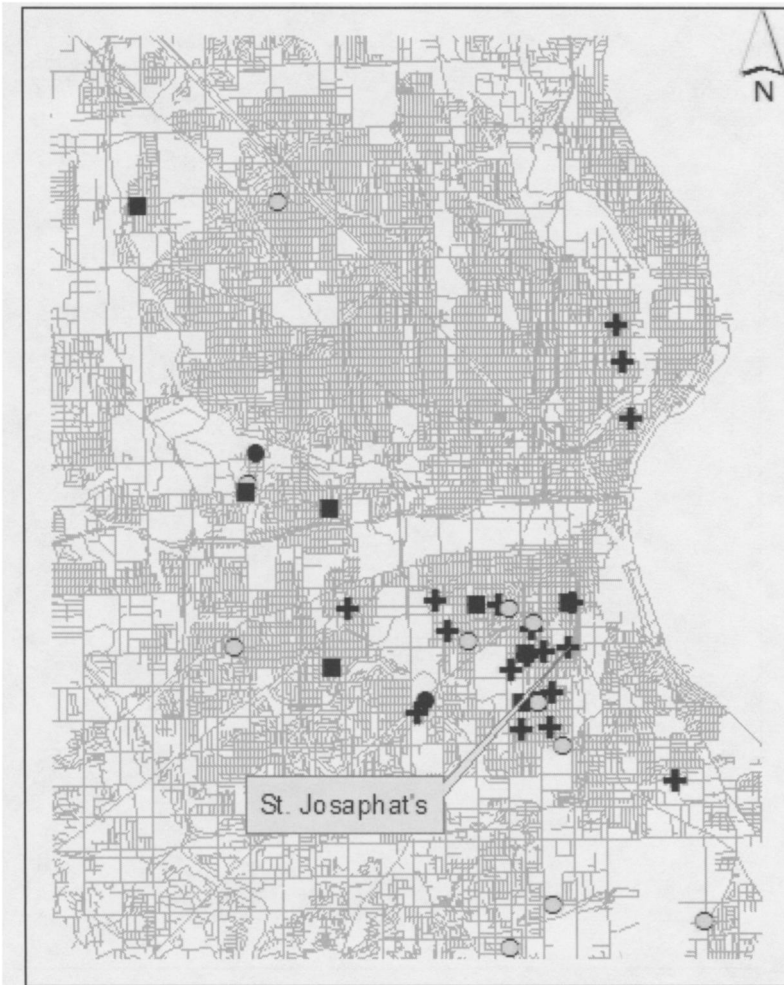
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Constituent Letters

- For Civil Rights
- Against Civil Rights
- ✚ Churches
- Streets

2.5

Miles



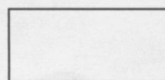
Map 6: Polish American Correspondence, 1964

Legend

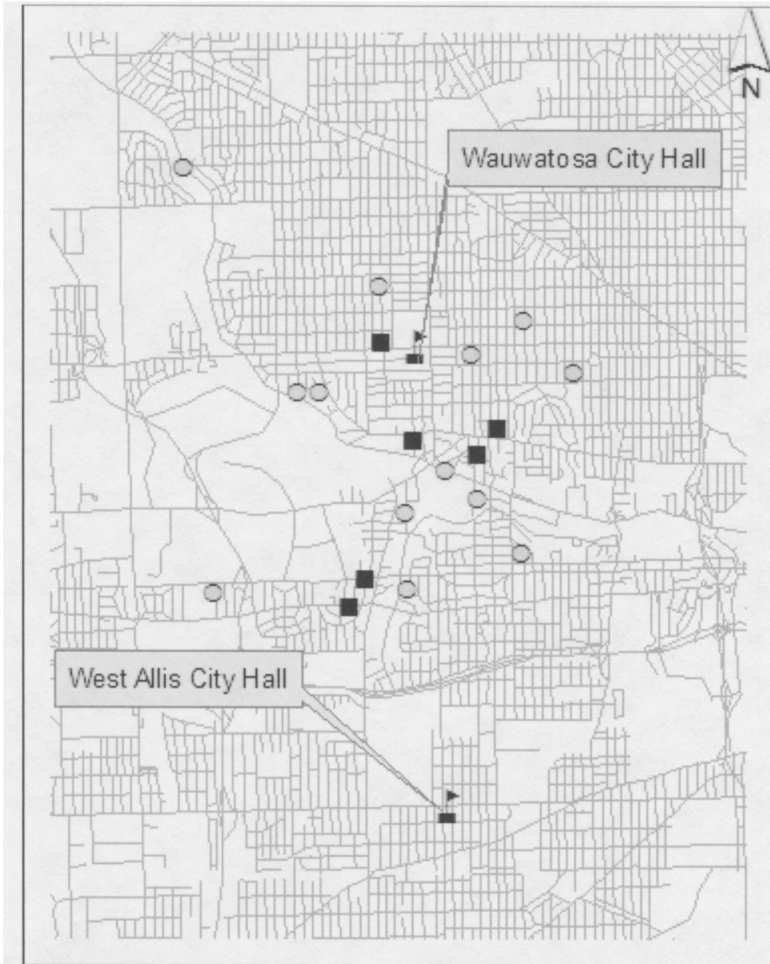
Constituent Correspondence

- For Civil Rights
- Against Civil Rights
- ✝ Churches
- Streets

2.5



Miles



Map 7: Wauwatosa Correspondence, 1964

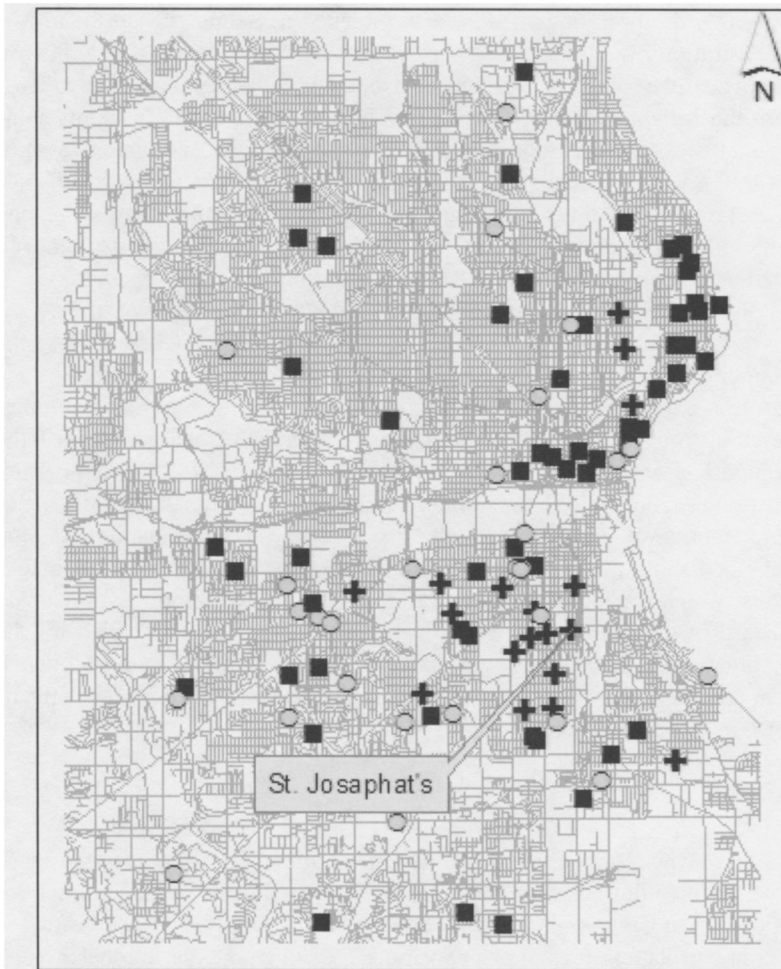
Legend

- For Civil Rights
- Against Civil Rights

0.5

— Streets

□ Miles



Map 8: Constituent Correspondence, 1965

Legend

Constituent Letters

- For Civil Rights
- Against Civil Rights
- ⊕ Churches
- Streets

1

Miles

while two disapprovingly referred to violence in Selma.¹⁶ Map 8 shows a concentration of support along the north east shore of Milwaukee, historically a center of wealthier residents. Also, the Inner Core area roughly across from the Milwaukee River shows support as well. Of the 27 county wide opponents, 22 used similar and relatively sophisticated arguments against this bill. Four had Polish names. They complained that the “emotional” passage of the law would create an unconstitutional *ex post facto* law punishing the South.¹⁷ The consistency of this legalistic argument suggests a coordinated campaign against Voting Rights legislation.

Reuss’s letters show a similar geographic pattern; however, the activities of the Representative’s son stimulated the correspondence. During the summer of 1965, Mike Reuss was arrested in Mississippi after helping stage a protest march. A sheriff’s deputy died of a heart attack immediately after searching the young Reuss, leading to manslaughter charges against the teenager! The charges were ultimately dropped. Of 29 letters from Milwaukee County, 22 letters praised Reuss’s son or offer legal aid. One of these authors was Polish American. Two letters requested federal protection of Civil Rights activists. One Inner Core opposition letter called blacks “rapists,” who made Milwaukee far worse than Mississippi. A previously unheard of group named the “Milwaukee Citizens Council” called for the creation of militia to defend whites in the North Side of Milwaukee. Finally, an anonymous letter sarcastically remarked how happy African Americans were in Mississippi raising trouble.¹⁸

IV: CONCLUSIONS

The maps clearly show that living in historically Polish American space in Milwaukee did not correlate to proportionally higher racist sentiment or opposition to Civil Rights from 1963 to 1965. Similarly, a Polish last name did not correlate to racism or opposition to Civil Rights during these years. People who lived in or near the non-Polish western suburbs of Wauwatosa

¹⁶Mary Williamson to CJZ, March 15, 1965; George Bayer, to CJZ, March 12, 1965, folder, “Voting Rights Legislation, March,” box Leg Files, 1965, 3, Zablocki Papers.

¹⁷Summaries of 1965 Zablocki correspondence come from folders, “Voting Rights Legislation, March,” and “Voting Rights Legislation, April-July,” box Leg Files, 1965, 3, Zablocki Papers.

¹⁸Henry S. Reuss, *When Government Was Good: Memories of a Life in Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 127-129. The summaries of the Reuss letters come from folders 1, 3, and 5, box 26, Reuss Papers. Frank Evans to HSR, August 12, 1965, folder 5; pamphlet, Milwaukee Citizens Councils, undated, folder 3, box 26, Reuss Papers.

and West Allis tended to express greater opposition to Civil Rights. However, living east of the Milwaukee River and north of downtown correlated with support of Civil Rights. Not surprisingly, the “Inner Core” also tended to produce pro-Civil Rights attitudes. While these areas produce sentiments, the timing of the letters revealed that national legislation led to the expression of these sentiments. They cannot be considered the product of local conflicts. Further proof of this can be found in the records of Henry Maier who received one letter in favor of Open Housing in 1963, and none for the next two years.¹⁹ Ironically, as the nation moved toward passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a majority of the letters opposed change. The next year, constituents favored Voting Rights.

Unfortunately, the incomplete nature of the Reuss collection prevents any detailed analysis of the interested citizen in the North Side of Milwaukee County. The incomplete nature of the Glenn Davis Papers complicates studying the reaction to Civil Rights. Because of the Supreme Court decision *Baker v. Carr*, Wisconsin drew new legislative boundaries in December, 1963. The newly created 9th Congressional District constituted Waukesha County, Wauwatosa, and the northern Milwaukee suburbs. Former Representative Glenn Davis returned to power. Like Zablocki and Reuss, Davis supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964. All three men supported the initial House version of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, Davis ultimately voted against the act because it did not require competency in English. Davis’s obviously incomplete papers consist of one cubic foot of documents and microfilmed scrapbooks at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.²⁰

Using GIS is best thought of as a process that constantly leads to new questions. Are opponents of Civil Rights legislation poor or wealthy? Is there a relationship between the value of one’s home and one’s opinion on Civil Rights legislation? What is the attitude of those who rent property? What percentage of these correspondents were Catholic? Protestant? Union members? Property tax information may offer an insight into home ownership issues; however, Milwaukee used paper tax records until 1974. These unwieldy documents—most likely still at City Hall—may offer answers to whether landlords and/or wealthy people supported or opposed Civil Rights.

¹⁹Evelyn L. Petshek to Henry W. Maier, July 30, 1963, folder 29, box 134, Maier Records.

²⁰*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, s.v. Glenn Robert Davis, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/guidedisplay.pl?index=D000102>, accessed: August 30, 2005; Kevin B. Smith, *The Iron Man: The Life and Times of Congressman Glenn R. Davis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 231, 236-237, 257; Wisconsin, Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, , 1966, 18-19.

The City Directories for Milwaukee may offer information on the Milwaukee addresses. Census data may add insight to these maps, but it cannot be presumed that a few hundred addresses cannot represent the opinion of Milwaukee County. Information on Church and Union membership may require new approaches, new data, and of course, new maps. Until these studies are completed, it is clear from the foregoing GIS analysis that the stereotypical view of Polish-Americans as racists is not supported by the data from Milwaukee during the emotional election campaign of 1964.