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## ➔ A REPORT ON PAST DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN MILWAUKEE, 1835-1999

A REPORT ON PAST DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN MILWAUKEE, 1835-1999

Ruth Zubrensky, July, 1999

### INTRODUCTION

This is a report on past discrimination against African-Americans in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Discriminatory practices took place as far back as the 1830s when African-Americans first arrived in this frontier village and spanned more than a century and a half. The object of this report is to describe the many forms and guises that discrimination took against African Americans in Milwaukee with the underlying assumption that discriminatory practices prevented full participation in the broader society with a detrimental effect on both the white and black communities.

This is not to say that all race relations were unsatisfactory because that would be erroneous. There were always some positive relationships and dealings between whites and blacks. Although discrimination took a terrible toll, depriving the community of the latent talents within the black community, it was only one aspect of African-American life. This report covers only the pervasive and harmful aspects of race relations describing how and when discrimination took place by various governmental bodies, businesses, organizations, institutions, and individuals including:

- the State of Wisconsin denied African-Americans the right to vote until 1866;
- certain hotels, theaters and restaurants started the practice and continued to discriminate against African-Americans for many decades;
- African-American residents were seldom considered for

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  - ▶ June (2)
  - ▶ May (3)
  - ▶ April (14)
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employment other than for personal service, domestic, and laborer jobs;

- most manufacturing companies discriminated against blacks in hiring, training and promotions leading to a belated entry of blacks into the skilled trades, administrative and managerial jobs;
- hostile workers' attitudes brought about certain exclusionary trade union practices;
- discriminatory real estate and government practices and the use of racially restrictive covenants caused most African-Americans to live in a confined/segregated part of town;
- after World War II white flight brought increasing residential segregation and the devaluation of homes and property in the central city;
- exclusionary zoning practices and opposition to moderate income housing resulted in an "iron ring" of white suburbs around Milwaukee;
- African-American children were increasingly segregated in the Milwaukee public schools and almost all black teachers were assigned to these same schools.

#### Selected Statistics, 1989-1999

The accumulated evidence offered in this monograph points to the fact that discrimination led to poor conditions for a sizeable segment of Milwaukee's African-American community. Current selected statistics show a high level of poverty -- 39.2 percent in 1989 -- and tied for the highest rank compared to several other major cities shown below.

#### Selected Cities -- Percent of Black Families Living in Poverty, 1989

Milwaukee	39.2%
Minneapolis	39.2%
Cleveland	35.6%
Detroit	32.0%
Chicago	29.7%

A recent University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee study showed that in 1990 the rate of black poverty in Milwaukee was the most severe out of 14 Frostbelt cities studied and that other cities and metropolitan areas did not have as great a decline in black family incomes as in Milwaukee. During the period 1970 to 1990 real family income for blacks in Milwaukee dropped from 65.1 percent to 39.5 percent of white family income.

Other economic statistics from this study ranked Milwaukee very low

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#### About Me



 [Leon Todd](#)

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or the lowest on indices involving the city's black population stating in the concluding section:

Perhaps the most stunning finding of this report is how, on indicator after indicator, Milwaukee 'leads' the Frostbelt in racial inequality and measures of economic distress in the black community.

In 1992 black unemployment was 22.7 percent, one of the highest rates in the country. The rate was both the second highest out of 44 cities and also the second highest in terms of disparity with whites. The white unemployment rate in Milwaukee was 3.9 percent. Black unemployment was nearly six times that of whites. (By 1997 black unemployment had dropped to 16.9%.)

Milwaukee and its suburbs consistently ranked among the nation's most racially segregated communities, termed "hyper-segregated" in a 1989 University of Chicago study. Less than 2 1/2 percent of African-Americans lived in the suburbs surrounding Milwaukee. Within the city itself few black families lived outside a historically confined area on the north side of town.

Milwaukee's lending institutions had one of the poorest records of mortgage loans and home repair loans to African-Americans. Milwaukee's minority mortgage loan denials compared to white denials were the highest among 50 largest cities. In 1994 one in three minorities who applied for home loans was turned down compared to one in thirteen white applicants.

Finally, Milwaukee ranked last among 14 Frostbelt metropolitan areas in the rate of minority ownership of businesses.

The above statistics show that many African-Americans in Milwaukee ended up living under slightly worse conditions than their counterparts in other northern cities and under substantially worse conditions than their white counterparts in the Milwaukee area.

### UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF MILWAUKEE

Milwaukee had some uniquely bad conditions. How did this happen?

Milwaukee's history points to certain variables that seem to have made matters worse for African-Americans. There is no smoking gun - - no definitive proof -- but certain characteristics and community attitudes seem to have contributed to the fact that many African-Americans in Milwaukee remained far behind in living conditions and economic opportunities in Milwaukee.

#### High Concentration of European Immigrants

One of Milwaukee's unique characteristics has been its concentration of European immigrants, one of the highest concentrations in the country. At first the German and Irish were the two most populous

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ethnic groups in Milwaukee. In 1850 the Irish population was 4,350 and the German population was 10,070 compared to an extremely small African-American population of around 100. Beginning in 1860 people of German heritage became more dominant; by 1895 they constituted roughly 50 percent of Milwaukee's population. These German immigrants had varied backgrounds. Many came from Germany with skills and a strong work ethic and went on to become the founders of large breweries, manufacturing concerns, and clothing companies in Milwaukee. Some contributed heavily to the labor movement and socialist influence in the city.

Members of many immigrant groups, including Italians and Greeks, started arriving in greater numbers toward the latter part of the 19th century. Polish immigrants made up 20 percent of the City's total population of 285,315 in 1900.

In 1910 Milwaukee was tied with New York City in having the highest concentration of immigrants in the country; 78.6 percent of Milwaukee's residents were either foreign born or had foreign-born parents. The African-American population was only .3 percent of the city's population of 373,857 in 1910. Although immigrants' attitudes towards African-Americans varied, the majority adopted the prevailing racial prejudices and stereotypes of the times. Immigrants, too, were discriminated against, but to the extent that racial discrimination was more virulent against African-Americans, immigrants won out in the competition for jobs and housing.

#### Low Rate of Philanthropy

German, Polish and other immigrant groups had thrifty tendencies and conservative values. .. One venerable Milwaukee Journal reporter, Richard Davis, characterized this trait as especially "belonging to families of German descent...Gifts on the scale that other cities expect of wealthy citizens are painfully lacking." The same Milwaukee Magazine article expanded on these early attitudes: "The German notion was that you keep your family strong, you pass the money from father to son...[y]our primary obligation wasn't to the community.... old Milwaukee was a small town where civic progress was never so important as passing on your riches to the family."

Strong family and ethnic identification and penurious habits produced conservative political attitudes as well, even among socialists. Socialist mayors, who held office on and off for fifty years from 1910 to 1960, were fiscally conservative, eschewing the issuance of bonds or taking on long-term debt.

To some extent Milwaukee was behind other cities. In 1910 Milwaukee was cited as allowing an excess of dilapidated housing. In 1915 Milwaukee was found to have the lowest number of hospital beds among seven mid-size cities studied. Tuberculosis and typhoid occurred in the most run-down sections of town where most blacks lived. Through womens' clubs, churches, lodges and fraternal organizations the African-American community provided whatever health and social services it could at the turn of the 20th century.

#### Small African-American Population

For over a century Milwaukee's African-American population was extremely small (see table below). Milwaukee's black population did not exceed 1.5 percent of the city's population until World War II and only climbed to 3.4 percent in 1950. African-American migration did not occur in any great numbers until after World War II in the 1950s and 1960s.

#### Selected Years --Milwaukee's African-American Population

	Number	Percent of City's Population
1890	449	.2%
1900	862	.3%
1910	980	.3%
1920	2,229	.5%
1930	7,501	1.3%
1940	8,821	1.5%
1950	21,772	3.4%
1960	63,458	8.4%
1970	105,088	.4.7%
1980	146,940	.23.1%
1990	191,255	.30.5%

Compared to Chicago, Milwaukee was not a major regional financial or trade center or major railroad terminus. Milwaukee was an insular community and its small African-American population reflected the same kind of isolation. A comparison with Chicago's African-American community shows Chicago with an African-American population of 233,903 in 1930 when Milwaukee's African-American population was just 7,501. The large number of blacks in Chicago gave them a certain amount of economic clout as well as voting power and political representation five or six decades before this happened in Milwaukee.

#### DISCRIMINATION BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

History has handed down the name of the first black man to arrive in Milwaukee in 1835. His name was Joe Oliver, and although he was a popular figure, he was nicknamed "Nigger Joe" already a demeaning and humiliating epithet. He worked for two years as a cook for Solomon Juneau, Milwaukee's first mayor, when Milwaukee was only a small trading post. Thereafter a slow trickle of African-Americans came to Milwaukee including both free men and women and escaped slaves.

The first African-American settlers were by and large self-sufficient and hard working according to William T. Green, the first black historian and first black attorney to practice in the Milwaukee County court system. In 1895 Green described these first African-American residents in a newspaper article commissioned by the Milwaukee Sentinel:

Some were fugitive slaves...men who will in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties rise, throw off a galling yoke and strike out for freedom...[they] are of a stamp superior to those who patiently bear the burden...nearly all [of whom were] thrifty and industrious.

### Voting Rights

Equality in Wisconsin did not come easily to early African-American free men or former slaves. Although Wisconsin never allowed slavery and had an active abolitionist movement, and although most Wisconsin citizens opposed slavery, "...they also felt that blacks were inferior to whites and they had no desire to integrate ...these attitudes shaped the debate over black suffrage..." Blacks were not allowed to vote during a span of approximately thirty years before and after the Civil War.

As Wisconsin took steps to become a state (it had been part of the Northwest territory), a proposal before the Constitutional Convention of 1847 was designed to give the right to vote to 1) white male citizens, 2) foreign residents who intended to become citizens, and 3) certain Indians. At the urging of a few idealistic delegates who wanted free black men to be able to vote, an attempt was made to remove the word "white." As a solution, the first Constitutional Convention agreed to put the issue of black suffrage to a statewide vote in a separate article. However, both the proposed constitution and the black suffrage article went down to defeat. A second Constitutional Convention was called, and this time it was agreed that after the constitution was approved and the first State legislature met, representatives could delete the word "white."

At the first State legislative session, a majority of representatives decided to hold a separate statewide referendum in 1849, deleting the word "white" from the constitution only if approved by a majority of voters voting on the day of the election. Although the statewide count was favorable to the deletion of the word "white," election canvassers, reflecting either a conservative or prejudicial bent, ruled that the referendum had failed on the grounds that "less than half of all voters casting ballots at the election voted on the suffrage issue."

This disenfranchisement deeply rankled the African-American community. In 1855 a mass meeting was held in Milwaukee to protest the denial of suffrage. Those attending vowed to gain enough signatures to petition the State legislature to give them this basic right. Signatures were collected state wide over a period of two years (by that time African-Americans lived in almost every county of the State), and finally the State assembly and senate voted to put the issue back on the ballot. Two more referenda were held, in 1859 and in 1865, but both times black suffrage lost.

This untenable situation came to a head when Ezekiel Gillespie, a black Milwaukee resident and 25-year employee of the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railway Company, was turned away from the election booth. He sued election officials and he, and his well-known white lawyer, Byron Paine, prevailed before the Wisconsin Supreme Court in the case of Gillespie vs. Palmer in 1866. The Court ruled that blacks should have been allowed to vote since the state wide referendum of 1849. The Milwaukee Sentinel reported that in a municipal election the week following the Court's decision 26 African-American males voted in a local election.

### Joshua Glover, Fugitive Slave, and Sherman Booth

After the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 slave holders were given far more power to hunt down and reclaim former slaves to be returned to the slave-holding states. Federal Commissioners were empowered to determine who was a fugitive slave and "the Negro would be allowed to say nothing in his own defense." Thus the right of habeus corpus (the right to have one's detention or imprisonment reviewed in court) was denied and henceforth African-Americans could "be kidnapped, their goods confiscated and they themselves relegated to slavery" Members of Milwaukee's African-American community held "the first meeting of colored people in the state of Wisconsin" as reported in the Milwaukee Daily Sentinel and Gazette, vowing to: "pledge ourselves to come forward at any alarm given and rescue our fugitive brethren even unto death."

In 1854 a riveting event took place in Racine and Milwaukee with the capture of a fugitive slave, Joshua Glover. Upon Glover's transfer from the Racine to the Milwaukee County Jail, a white abolitionist, Sherman Booth, organized a protest mob outside the jail. The crowd stormed the jail and was able to free Glover from his cell. He was then able to escape to Canada. Booth, however, spent several years fighting charges against him for "having aided and abetted, at Milwaukee, the escape of a fugitive slave from the deputy marshal, who had him in custody." He took his case up to the Wisconsin State Supreme Court which ruled in his favor that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 did not apply in Wisconsin.

The Booth case became a celebrity case after it was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The highest court of the land overturned the Wisconsin State Supreme Court stating it erred in declaring the U.S. Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 inapplicable in Wisconsin. The larger issue of how far the reach of slavery would be extended in the United States, later to cause the Civil War, was joined in this local case. Following the Glover incident, a number of African-Americans who were fugitive slaves living in Milwaukee, fled to Canada or other areas where they thought they would be safer.

### Racial Attitudes Before the Civil War

The doctrine of white supremacy and black inferiority, with its component of physical and mental subjugation, was widely accepted even in the north during the time of slavery. The north, in fact, was never far behind the south in private attitudes that whites were superior to blacks.

A Milwaukee County Circuit Court judge described how blacks were looked down upon in pre-Civil War days: “free Negroes wandered over the country and were stigmatized as belonging to a servile race.” Even Abraham Lincoln stated in 1858: “...I, as much as any other man, am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”

There were a number of recorded incidents in Milwaukee in the 1840s and 1850s where African-Americans were the target of discrimination. In particular, there were hostile feelings on the part of the Irish, who were in competition with blacks for unskilled jobs.

In 1861 a knifing and a lynching occurred in Milwaukee after two Irishmen made demeaning and derogatory remarks about two black men seen in the company of two white women (there were eight interracial marriages listed in the 1860 Census.) One of the white men was knifed, and one of the black men was lynched. According to Attorney William T. Green’s history, this incident “aroused the ire of the lower class of whites, and frightened by threats of extermination many of the colored people moved away.”

#### DISCRIMINATION AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

In the first decades after the Civil War, there were a handful of black professionals and business men and women in Milwaukee who made a living off of a white clientele. However, towards the end of the century as the color line was drawn, whites no longer patronized these businesses and more blacks had to look to their own community for customers and clients. African-American businesses remained small mom-and-pop shops, including barbers, taverns, eating establishments, and rooming houses that served black customers. For over a century, the African-American business community was composed mainly of small retail establishments. In 1910 Milwaukee’s African-American community consisted of 48 professionals and proprietors out of a population of 980, including 4 lawyers, 4 doctors, 4 saloonkeepers, 5 retail dealers, 14 music teachers and musicians and 13 barbers and hairdressers.

A majority of blacks were dependent on the white community for employment, real estate transactions, business financing, and professional services. William T. Green mentions the fact that black business people sometimes put their investments in the names of white men, “on account of the prejudice against which they would have to contend.” One of the exceptions and the most successful black businessman of his day was John L. Slaughter. He became a partner with a white entrepreneur in running a gambling house, and a hotel and restaurant. He left Milwaukee for Chicago after the first Socialist Mayor, elected in 1910, cracked down on gambling and tried to clean up the “bad lands.”

In cities with larger African-American populations than Milwaukee blacks formed banks, insurance companies, nursing homes, and funeral parlors. In Chicago “between 1900 and 1910 members of Chicago’s African-American community ran restaurants, barber and beauty shops, funeral establishments, and other businesses to form ‘a new middle class.’” Milwaukee had few such establishments, however,



and its middle class remained extremely small.

## Discrimination in Public Accommodations

After the Civil War, the U.S. Congress and the states ratified the 13th and 14th Amendments guaranteeing constitutional rights to former slaves. But after Reconstruction and the withdrawal of Federal troops from the south in 1877, a host of local and state laws were enacted requiring the separation of the races for example on buses and railroad cars. These Jim Crow statutes calling for the segregation of blacks were upheld by a series of U.S. Supreme Court rulings culminating in the famous 1896 case of Plessy vs. Ferguson, which codified the doctrine of “separate but equal.” Segregation already in practice was made legal in schools, trains, buses, restaurants, parks, pools other institutions.

In the south former slaves were increasingly subjected to lynchings, intimidation, physical violence, and disenfranchisement. As conditions worsened, many former slaves headed north, following the railroad lines to Chicago, Detroit and other cities to find employment and a better way of life. Milwaukee was not well known in the south and therefore experienced little migration. From 1870 to 1900 Milwaukee’s African-American population increased by only 686 people -- hardly enough to be noticed in a thriving metropolis of 285,315 people.

And yet racial lines hardened. This was true across the country. Historian Kenneth L. Kusmer, writing about Cleveland, concluded that:

By the late 19th century there was the acceptance of racial stereotypes and the emergence of a new ‘scientific’ racism which swept the white community. The new racism pictured the Negro as inferior to the white man in most respects (physical endurance and musical ability usually excepted) and morally deficient. Blacks were becoming stereotyped by popular writers and scientists alike as ignorant, lazy and immoral.

Although northern attitudes were not so different than southern attitudes in opposition to social equality for blacks, there was a political commitment in the north to protect African-Americans’ civil rights. By 1885 seven northern states had passed civil rights acts, but Wisconsin was not one of them. The need in Wisconsin soon became apparent due to an increasing number of racial incidents. A number of discrimination cases in Wisconsin occurred during this period of heightened racial tensions.

In the early summer of 1886, two young colored men were refused a drink ‘in one of the best saloons’ in Milwaukee.” [Other incidents outside of Milwaukee included] “Frederick Douglass had been refused hotel accommodations in Janesville; [black teachers were turned away at Madison hotels]...

The first legal challenge to an act of discrimination was initiated In

Milwaukee in 1889. Owen Howell, a black railway porter and well-respected resident of Milwaukee, purchased a ticket by messenger to the Bijou Opera House, a downtown theater. "When he appeared to take his seat in the parquette, the head usher refused him admission and tried to send him to the gallery. Within weeks, Howell had hired an attorney and filed suit."

The Howell case became the impetus for an effective protest movement by the black community. A call went out to raise funds for a legal challenge and to hold a convention to organize a state Civil Rights League. When the convention was held in Milwaukee in 1889, a convention resolution listed a number of grievances, among them:

discrimination in certain hotels, restaurants, barber shops, public inns and places of amusement' and by certain life insurance companies, and the absence of Negroes in permanent state jobs of any consequence.

Howell v. Litt was decided in 1890 by an all-white jury which awarded Howell \$100 damages. The decision written by Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge, Daniel H. Johnson, stated that to the best of his knowledge "...this [was] the first effort to exclude any man on account of his race or color from any place where anybody was permitted to go" and ruled, "all men...must be treated as though they belonged to one race."

Immediately thereafter an organized effort began to gain enactment of a law outlawing discrimination in public places. Attorney William T. Green and others drafted such a bill and lobbied for it during the 1891 State legislative session. The original version called for all public accommodations to be open to all persons alike with a minimum fine of \$25.00 for violations. At the legislative hearing racist remarks were made and the bill was watered down. But the senate rejected even that weakened version.

At a Republican state convention held in 1892 in Milwaukee, pro-civil rights resolutions were passed including one denouncing "the outrages and the prejudices abroad in the 'north and northwest."

A public accommodations statute was finally adopted in 1895 but the final version contained only a \$5.00 fine not enough to deter further discrimination or counteract prevailing racial prejudices. Shortly after the act was passed an incident occurred in a Milwaukee restaurant where an African-American, Isaac T. Bryan, was not served by a waiter. He took the case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court which remanded it back in Bryan's favor. But the law could go only so far in changing peoples' attitudes.

Thomas R. Buchanan, a University of Wisconsin Milwaukee master's student, who researched Milwaukee's African-American history from 1880-1940, noted the changes in social relations at the end of the 19th century:

By the turn of the century, Milwaukee blacks were treated with indifference or hostility. The benevolent paternalism and street-nodding familiarity that had once seemed to characterize relations

between blacks and whites in the city had given way to a cold and formalized pattern of race relations. Persons of color, no matter how refined or wealthy, were segregated in areas of social contact between the races.

### New Century Continuing Discrimination

Numerous racial incidents were reported in Milwaukee in the first decades of the 20th century. One was the refusal of the General Federation of Women's Clubs to seat black delegates at its convention held in Milwaukee. Another was the refusal of the new Schlitz Palm Garden Restaurant to serve an African-American customer, John J. Miles, the long-time head waiter at the Plankinton House Hotel and one of the most well-regarded blacks in Milwaukee. Miles took his case to court and won a verdict of \$5.00 in damages. While unwilling to serve black customers, the Schlitz Palm Garden hired black jazz musicians to perform as entertainers.

Interracial marriages were another source of tension. Attorney Green opposed and lobbied against two bills that would have outlawed interracial marriages. Several similar bills were introduced up to 1927. Racially mixed couples were increasingly subjected to police abuse, insult, and harassment.

History Professor Joe William Trotter, in his definitive book on Milwaukee blacks, 1915-1945, asserts that:

Growing animosity against interracial marriages and couples constituted one of the clearest signs of an expanding color line in Milwaukee. Police harassment became more common and some state legislators attempted, though unsuccessfully, to enact laws prohibiting interracial marriage in the state.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organized a local Milwaukee chapter in 1915 to challenge on-going discrimination and segregation. The NAACP chapter publicly charged that most restaurants and theaters violated the public accommodations law, that some restaurants charged exorbitant prices to discourage African-American patronage, and that theaters and hotels often excluded blacks by saying that the house was sold out, or that all rooms were taken.

The Butterfly Theater refused to sell tickets to blacks and the Davis Theater discriminated by segregating blacks in the balcony in 1919. In 1920 black customers filed a racial discrimination suit against a Chinese restaurant that had denied them service.

In 1918 the Milwaukee NAACP had one success. It became aware that the Mairdale Tuberculosis Sanitarium, a state-supported institution in Wauwatosa (a well-to-do suburb), had initiated a policy of separating black and white tuberculosis patients. The NAACP was able to get the separation of patients reversed.

Members of the local NAACP chapter, ministers and leaders of other black organizations protested several articles appearing over the years in the Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel that portrayed African-Americans in stereotypical and demeaning ways in news articles and photographs. In 1919 an article appeared in the Milwaukee Journal ridiculing a black worker by observing: "All-de-while Rastus boy am a-whistlin' and a -hummin' and a-seemin' to do anythin' but workin'."

In 1921 the NAACP published a public protest against hostile articles that had appeared in the Milwaukee Sentinel, Milwaukee Journal and Wisconsin News. The organization charged that the Journal "highlighted black crime and rarely covered black achievements or acts of heroism or bravery...they also objected to headlines and stories in the Sentinel of 'alleged interracial sex incidents, in a manner that would produce public outrage against blacks.'"

Derogatory portrayals of blacks in the daily press contributed to stereotypical attitudes and prejudices. Intentionally or not press coverage influenced and was often translated into negative feelings toward African-Americans especially in employment decisions.

#### DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT

Historically, African-Americans in Milwaukee faced widespread employment discrimination. The 1850 territorial census listed fifty-two black workers. About half were semi-skilled and a few were owners of establishments -- a grocery store (or stand), a milliner shop, a barber shop. Hardly any were listed in job classifications that would indicate they worked in the industries of the time, e.g. the breweries, flour mills, docks, iron works, or boot and shoe establishments.

It is important to note that before the Civil War African-Americans had worked in many skilled jobs on the plantations of the south. Numbers of slaves were construction workers, artisans, and skilled craft workers. In instances where slaves were able to buy their way out of slavery or managed to escape to freedom, they were unable to offer those skills in the free labor market. Most employers shared national prejudices and stereotypes and would routinely hire white workers over black workers.

In addition, white workers were often unwilling to work with blacks, being covetous of their jobs and resentful of competition. After emancipation former slaves were often deprived of their ability to use the skills they possessed.

An instance of this happened in Milwaukee. In 1850 there were 14 black barbers according to the census of that year. Blacks seemingly dominated the local barbering trade. But as immigration increased and as competition overwhelmed the small black community, the 1870 census showed only two black barbers and only two semi-skilled workers, with the large majority of blacks working in personal service or menial jobs.

Black workers were almost completely relegated to low-level jobs as

porters, waiters, domestics, cooks, and common laborers. Manufacturing industries in particular did not hire African-American workers until World War I.

The construction industry occasionally hired black men as laborers on the stereotypical belief that they could stand the heat better than whites.

In 1870 African-American males were still excluded from Milwaukee's major industries of the times: flour milling, slaughtering, meat packing, tanning and the breweries. William T. Green, writing in 1895 reported that, "in the great brewing industries of Milwaukee only a single, solitary Negro is employed." At the turn of the 20th century Milwaukee had a growing iron and steel industry but only a handful of African-Americans were hired and then mainly as strike-breakers as a result of a steel strike that occurred in 1898.

The following statistics indicate that Milwaukee's manufacturing companies may have been more reluctant to hire African-Americans than comparable type companies in Chicago. In 1900 in Milwaukee only 2.6 percent of black men worked in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits. In the same year in Chicago there was a substantially higher percentage "about 8 percent of Chicago's black male population worked in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits."

Employment gains were hard to come by in Milwaukee and were sometimes reversed. In 1906 the new ownership of the Plankinton House Hotel discontinued employing blacks as waiters and in other service occupations on the grounds that they were inefficient. Greeks and other immigrants were hired instead. Illinois Steel Company, located in the Bay View section of Milwaukee, had employed a few African-Americans as strike-breakers in 1898 but by 1910 they were all gone. According to historian Trotter, "by 1910 there were no blacks left in any of the city's blast furnaces and rolling mills."

Trotter's book summarizes these trends:

Prior to World War I, African-Americans were relegated to the bottom of Milwaukee's urban economy for two interrelated reasons. First, a tremendous influx of foreign-born labor filled the unskilled labor demands of the expanding urban-industrial system. Second, the racist attitudes and practices of both industrialists and labor unions blocked black entrance into industrial jobs.

African-Americans got their first chance to work in manufacturing jobs in any numbers at the beginning of World War I when job opportunities opened up because of expanding war industries and the cutting-off of European immigration by the U.S. Congress once World War I broke out in Europe. Employers, needing to fill labor shortages, began to hire African-Americans for the first time. Several Milwaukee firms sent labor recruiters to the south to recruit and hire African-Americans. Blacks were eager to take factory jobs, even at the lowest level and even if it meant giving up previously held skills, because of the prospect of long-term employment and better wages. In Milwaukee black males were hired in the iron, steel, slaughterhouse,

tanning and meat packing industries for the first time during World War I where white European workers had once been the newcomers.

Once hired, blacks still had trouble breaking down racial barriers. They were inevitably hired in the foundry, hired for “colored” jobs, subject to lower pay, and denied training and promotion opportunities. Labor historian Robert Ozanne did research on the large Allis-Chalmers plant in West Allis, Wisconsin, an industrial suburb, finding that:

When immigrants from Europe learned the English language, they gradually were permitted to transfer into other departments and to be promoted to foremen’s positions. Blacks, by contrast, were hired into the foundry and kept there. For example, in 1941 Allis Chalmers had 101 blacks in its foundry whose seniority dates indicated that they had begun work during World War I and the early 1920’s. They had remained in the foundry in the intervening years.

A survey of industry taken at the end of World War I found that blacks were employed in only about eleven of the city’s more than 2,000 manufacturing companies. The six companies that employed the largest number of African-Americans were Plankinton Packing, Albert Trostel Leather, Pfister-Vogel Tannery, Allis-Chalmers, Falk Manufacturing and the Milwaukee Coke and Gas Company. The latter company laid off 50 black workers in 1928, foreshadowing a steep rise in unemployment during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The survey also found that Milwaukee manufacturers took a mixed view of African-American workers reflecting both satisfaction and stereotypes about black workers:

On the one hand, industrialists praised blacks for delivering satisfactory service during the war emergency. On the other hand, employers perceived Afro-Americans as unsteady and incapable of adapting to the requirements of factory employment...

One employer praised black workers:

they are superior to foreign labor because they readily understand what you try to tell them. Loyalty, willingness, cheerfulness...quicker, huskier, and can stand more heat than other workmen.

In 1930 there were 161 skilled African-American male workers holding such jobs as bricklayer, carpenter, craneman, electrician, stationary engineer, foreman, ironmolder, machinist, mechanic and millwright. Six women were classified as skilled workers, holding jobs as forewoman, baker, and tailor. Some women owned their own boarding houses and other service establishments. But the vast majority of black women worked as domestics.

Labor Unions

Before World War I neither labor unions or the Socialist Party, two important social movements in Milwaukee representing workingmen, had much to do with African-Americans. This reflected the fact that blacks were not part of the industrial workforce until decades later and that these movements exhibited the prejudicial attitudes of the times.

For instance, the titular head of the Socialist Party in America, Victor Berger, (a long-time resident of Milwaukee and later U.S. Congressman from Milwaukee), gave a speech in which he offered the opinion that blacks were of a lower race.

AFL unions deliberately banned African-Americans from many crafts and trades through exclusionary clauses in their constitutions and by-laws. As far back as 1892 the International Association of Machinists (IAM) had a national policy and an initiation rite that allowed only whites to become members. Although Milwaukee's IAM Lodge 66 was opposed to such discrimination, they followed the national organization's dictates of accepting no black member until well after World War II.

African-Americans were used as strikebreakers off and on from the 1890s to the 1930s. In 1898, the Illinois Steel Company's Bay View Works (part of Milwaukee) used strike breakers against striking workers who were protesting a reduction in wages. Strikebreakers, whether white or black, often caused violence, and black strikebreakers exacerbated racial tensions and damaged their reputation in the minds of white trade unionists.

Trotter concludes:

Blacks entered the factory only as a result of exceptional personal contacts with influential whites or as strikebreakers...the largest number of blacks to enter pre-World War I industries did so as strikebreakers.

Milwaukee Socialist Mayor Dan Hoan, 1916-1940, was instrumental in preventing Illinois Steel Company's Bay View Works from once again using strikebreakers in 1919. In 1922 the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Company brought in about 35 black strikebreakers. Mayor Hoan pressured the owners of the company to halt further importation of black workers, knowing that labor unrest was erupting in other cities because of racial strife under similar circumstances.

In the 1920s a separate black asphalt pavers local was organized in Milwaukee after it became clear that African-American street pavers were not allowed to join all-white locals or become journeymen. The Asphalt Workers' Local 88 met and passed a resolution directed to the issue of discrimination imploring the Wisconsin State American Federation of Labor: "to use all possible influence toward lifting the ban on colored workers said to exist in some of the organized trades."

The bartenders' union also refused to admit African-Americans but offered to help form a separate black local. Mayor Hoan went on record as saying, "I don't like segregation in theory but colored locals

are better than no locals among colored people and may be a step on the road to united locals.” His statement was no doubt made in deference to white workers’ hostility towards working with black workers. But Hoan was not unsympathetic to blacks and later served on the local NAACP Board of Directors.

With the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the mid 1930s, black workers who held jobs in industry were actively recruited into plantwide, industrial unions in contrast to the long-standing exclusion from AFL craft unions. In the late 1930s the Wisconsin Edition of the CIO News consistently attacked racial discrimination by AFL unions such as the boilermakers, plumbers, machinists, and the railway brotherhoods. As the reputation of unions was enhanced in the black community, many African-Americans became active members and officers of CIO local unions. Jacob Friederick, long-time secretary-treasurer of the AFL council also did his best to gain employment for black workers.

### The Great Depression

During the Great Depression, African-Americans were in double jeopardy faced with widespread layoffs along with widespread exclusion from jobs because of race.

An open-and-shut case of discrimination occurred during the 1930s in the brewery industry, located in the 6th ward at 3rd and Vliet Streets near where most blacks lived. After prohibition was repealed in 1933, the breweries were brought back to life with the creation of over 6,000 jobs. The Milwaukee Urban League (MUL), an organization established in 1917 to provide social work and find jobs and housing for African-American migrants, tried to open up jobs in the brewery industry but were told that the industry was not interested in hiring blacks.

In 1938 William Kelley, Executive Secretary of the Milwaukee Urban League, together with Ralph Metcalfe, then a student at Marquette Law School (and an Olympic Medalist and later U.S. Congressman from Chicago’s south side) tried to break down such racial barriers. But the breweries would not alter their anti-black hiring practices even after the MUL and the local NAACP appealed to the local Alderman and the Mayor.

The Depression decimated the African-American labor force with the absolute number of black male workers dropping from 2,797 in 1930 to 1,382 in 1940. The women’s labor force, composed mostly of domestic household workers, dropped from 841 in 1930 to 539 in 1940.

In 1940 the unemployment rate for African-Americans in Milwaukee was second highest compared to four other selected cities, below.

Selected Cities -- Percent of Black Males Seeking Work, 1940

- 1) Philadelphia--33.7%
- 2) Milwaukee--29.3%
- 3) New York--19.3%
- 4) Chicago--6.7%
- 5) Detroit--15.7%



This high unemployment rate of 29.3 percent for Milwaukee's blacks at the end of the depression was indicative of more severe conditions for blacks in Milwaukee than a number of other cities in the north, and was to foreshadow continuing high levels of unemployment for the next fifty years.

#### Fair Employment Practices Committee Hearings

Before World War II discrimination on the part of most Milwaukee companies was widespread. It took the federal government's intervention at the beginning of World War II to turn the situation around. Companies that were producing war material for the war effort and were government contractors being paid by federal tax dollars became subject to national scrutiny.

First came effective pressure from a national black labor leader, A. Phillip Randolph, President of the Sleeping and Pullman Car Porters Union, who demanded an end to discrimination by war contractors across the country. He threatened a massive march on Washington, D.C. in order to pressure President Franklin D. Roosevelt to respond. Eleanor Roosevelt, a friend of Randolph's, also urged her husband to take action. FDR rose to the occasion by issuing a famous Executive Order Number 8802, mandating that henceforth government contractors would be prohibited from discriminating in employment. He then established a national Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), whose members went on to hold regional hearings to gather evidence around the country about discrimination and to gain voluntary compliance from war contractors to reverse their previous discriminatory practices.

In December 1940 the Milwaukee Urban League had already started to make a survey of black employment in the city's defense industries and found that only 28 blacks were employed in the 56 companies surveyed. During the summer and fall of 1941 William Kelley of the MUL and Attorney James Dorsey, representing the local NAACP, compiled sworn affidavits from men and women who had been denied jobs in some of the big companies in Milwaukee.

When regional FEPC hearings were held in Chicago in 1942, two days were devoted to hearing evidence against five Milwaukee companies. For example, three witnesses testified of their experience at Nordberg Manufacturing Co. The three tried to apply for work but were unable to do so when a watchman told them to "scram." Others testified that the Allis-Chalmers Company had hired blacks only in the foundry for a number of years; that Harnischfeger Corporation informed blacks they did not "hire Negroes"; that A.O. Smith had not hired blacks in twenty years; that Heil Company (whose owner, Julius Heil, was then Governor of Wisconsin) had no black employees.

The FEPC found discriminatory employment practices in all five companies which included:

the placing of restrictive job orders with the United States Employment Service and private employment agencies....seeking "only

white or only Gentile workers.”

All five companies were cited for racial discrimination and directed to:

give written notice...advising that each plant will accept applicants for all classifications of employment without regard to race, color, creed or national origin.” The FEPC ordered them to refrain from further discrimination.

Following this order these companies started hiring African-Americans, slowly at first, but ultimately to hire many thousands.

## POST WORLD WAR II - JOB HIRING AND BREAKING BARRIERS

After World War II many thousands of African-American workers were hired into unionized and better-paying jobs. But even then there were previous discriminatory arrangements and residual patterns from past discriminatory practices.

### Private Industry

Blacks were paid lower wages, were confined to “colored lines of progression,” were subject to “last hired, first fired” provisions, and most were denied job bidding and training opportunities.

One foundry, for example where half the employees were black -- some of them with 30 years’ seniority -- had never had a black foreman. The union had never been able to obtain acceptance of a contract clause guaranteeing equality of promotion.

Discrimination was still widespread in the 1950s. For example there were no African-Americans in the large-scale printing industry or brewery industry or at the large automaker company, American Motors Corporation. There were no blacks working in banks or insurance companies. Black real estate agents were not admitted to the Milwaukee Board of Realtors until 1965 and had to form their own organization, the Milwaukee Realist Association.

At the same time a large grocery chain had almost no black supervisors. Six grocery stores, operated by Kohl’s Food Company, were boycotted over the firing of a black assistant manager. The action was called off when the company agreed to alter its training and promotion practices.

The large Allen Bradley Corporation was picketed because of its

personnel practices which, knowingly or unknowingly, resulted in only a handful of blacks in a work force of over 6,800. The U.S. Office of Federal Contract Compliance gained a settlement from Allen Bradley to alter its policy of hiring new employees upon recommendation from its current employees, a policy that had the effect of perpetuating an all-white work force.

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination and began to make a major difference, blacks were still relegated to lower-level jobs. As late as 1979, 15 large Milwaukee manufacturing companies reported that two-thirds of their black employees held low-paying, unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, compared to only 29 percent of their white counterparts.

Employment discrimination because of race continued to be a problem for African-Americans. Six cases are cited here as typical of cases handled by the State's Equal Rights Division over the years.

1976 - AMC failed to notify a black female applicant of job openings for two years. The Corporation was required to offer the applicant the next available factory job with all rights, privileges and wages she would have earned from the date of her original application until the date she was hired.

1977 - A black person and a white person applied on the same day, at the same place and to the same person for a welding job. The black person established race discrimination after the white person with less welding experience was hired with the promise to be trained later and was assigned to jobs for which he had no experience

1977 - A black applicant for a Bicentennial Aide position established a [clear-cut] case of discrimination by showing better qualifications than the four white persons hired.

1986 - In a seniority based layoff, 14 of Milwaukee County's 26 white fire fighters were laid off while all seven non-white fire fighters were laid off. Milwaukee County offered no evidence that its reliance on seniority was related to successful employment as a fire fighter.

1988 - A company deliberately screened blacks out of the application process by voice identification over the phone. The company's hiring procedures were found to be designed to maintain a segregated workforce.

1994 - The term "nigger" is commonly understood to be racially derogatory, particularly when used by white people in reference to

black people. The word is intimidating by its nature and shows an intent to discriminate on the basis of race. The use of the term cannot be excused on the ground that black employees sometimes use it themselves. A restaurant worker won her case against a restaurant for using racially derogatory remarks.

## The Building Trades

After World War II an occasional African-American managed to get into the skilled building trades in Milwaukee. Most were excluded, as exemplified by the Willie Blue case, where Willie Blue was denied membership in the Plasterers Union although he had all the credentials from an out-of-state local. The Milwaukee County Circuit Court described the circumstances in the 1954 *Blue v. Schaffer* ruling:

The denial by a trade union local of full membership to a black tradesman from an out-of-state sister local was discriminatory, as was the local's subsequent grant to him of limited membership while his skills were "investigated."

In 1957 the Milwaukee Bricklayers Union denied membership to two African-Americans on account of race. The local NAACP chapter took this case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court in *Ross v. Ebert*. The Court ruled in that case that unions were voluntary organizations and that the State's Fair Employment Practices law did not cover unions. The State legislature quickly amended the law to prohibit discrimination by unions.

Nonetheless exclusionary practices continued. As early as 1963 the Milwaukee NAACP picketed a meeting of the North Central States Apprenticeship Conference in Milwaukee protesting racial discrimination in the skilled trades.

In 1966 Cecil Brown, Jr., was hired by the Wisconsin State Industrial Commission to help recruit African-Americans in Milwaukee into the building trades. Years later, testifying at a Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District hearing in 1990, Brown, stated that 90 percent of union membership came from lateral transfers (as was denied Willie Blue). His contention was that contractors hired brothers, cousins, and step-sons, and no tests were required. The 250 African-Americans who were good carpenters or plumbers, who Cecil Brown had recruited, did not get these opportunities.

In a 1970 decision in *Crockett v. Green*, U.S. Federal District Judge John W. Reynolds found a strong historical pattern of discrimination in the Milwaukee building trades noting that only 1 percent of craftsmen were black. The Federal Court ordered the City to open up its hiring practices with respect to the skilled trades.

In 1993 a Wisconsin State Legislative Audit Bureau conducted an audit of the Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards. It found that the Bureau had not enforced the administrative code requiring joint apprenticeship committees take specific steps to create opportunities

for women and minorities. In 1993 one building trade union had a low of 4 percent black journeymen; another trade had a high of 9.9 percent black journeyman.

Lack of minorities and women in the skilled trades and lack of minority construction contractors came under scrutiny in a study commissioned by the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District entitled, A Study to Identify Discriminatory Practices in the Milwaukee Construction Marketplace, which came to be known as the Conta Report. This was a comprehensive survey of the barriers to minority business formation in Milwaukee with particular focus on construction.

#### Low Business Formation

A number of studies were quoted in the Conta Report. One such study summarized the number and types of black businesses in Milwaukee in 1967:

Out of a total of approximately 260 Negro-owned businesses, 200 or 77 percent were in services and eating and drinking retail trade. There were no businesses represented in manufacturing and only a few in the wholesale trade...

In general black businesses had not penetrated into insurance, industrial production or hard-good industries and with only a small presence in the construction industry. And here, "Milwaukee lagged proportionately to other cities in minority construction firms. For instance, Milwaukee had less than 1/2 the proportional representation [to minority population] in construction businesses as Kansas City."

Other studies cited in the Conta Report told of lack of access to business capital as the major impediment to business formation:

Most of our black contractors are severely under capitalized. For this reason, they must often pay cash for materials and find it difficult to take advantage of available quantity discounts...Limited cash makes it difficult for these contractors to meet their payroll on time, making it difficult to keep good workmen.

Bill Lawrence, a local black business owner, stated that banks refused to provide sufficient working capital for minority business enterprises (MBEs.) Curtiss Harris, then Executive Director of the Minority Business Development Corporation, described ways that MBEs were nosed out of competition--"often prime [contractors] would ask MBEs to quote in areas outside their own specialization and refuse to allow the contractor to bid in areas where they could do the work. Another technique was to modify the contract after bid so that the MBE was no longer low bidder."

Lack of business loans also had to do with lack of collateral and the undervaluing of property in the inner city. The fact that whites fled the inner city, refusing to share "social space" with non-whites, meant stagnated or devalued property values and dramatically reduced the amount of business loans that could be secured by someone living in the central city (see the Housing Discrimination section for a fuller

explanation.)

In December 1985 the city of Milwaukee passed a minority business ordinance which, if approved in a citywide referendum, would have set a 28 percent goal for city contracts to go to minority owned businesses. During the Common Council committee hearings extensive testimony was taken regarding the “persistent pattern of racial and sexual discrimination which has prevented minority business enterprises from gaining a fair share of contracts and subcontracts for construction, supplies and materials in both the public and private sectors.” In spite of ample evidence, the referendum was defeated in April, 1987.

### City and County Hiring Practices

As in construction African-American workers rarely attained higher level jobs in city and county employment. Employees were heavily concentrated in low paying, custodial or other jobs that required few skills. Blacks held almost no supervisory positions.

In 1974 a class action suit was filed in U.S. Federal District Court by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers Union against Milwaukee County for discrimination in hiring, promotions, and transfers in the case of Johnnie G. Jones, et al. vs. Milwaukee County. Johnnie Jones had been a cook at the County Infirmary since 1955. In 1972 he applied for a promotion to a higher-paying cook’s job but was disqualified because county officials claimed he could not meet the writing standards, a claim Jones disputed. Other employees had been nurses aides and cafeteria workers for twenty to thirty years without transfers or promotions. The use of the civil service “rule of three” (where only the top three candidates for a job are considered) had resulted in practically no minorities gaining access to higher level jobs. In 1979 U.S. Federal District Judge Myron Gordon ordered the County to remedy past discrimination in most job categories -- in office, clerical, craft, protective services, official administrative, and professional jobs, including the Sheriff’s and Corrections Departments. The result was a \$5 million settlement in the form of a consent decree known as the Jones Consent Decree. It changed for the better the methods used by the County to hire and assign its personnel. Jones died in 1994, praised by his contemporaries for his quiet quest for justice.

In 1970 there were only 3 percent African-Americans on the Milwaukee Police Department. A race discrimination lawsuit was filed in 1972. In 1974 U.S. District Judge John W. Reynolds ordered hiring quotas for the Department of 40% minorities. During the period in which the Department was trying to meet its goals a counter suit was filed by white police officers claiming reverse discrimination (still pending.)

From 1975 through the 1980s the City of Milwaukee tried to diversify its workforce by hiring minorities, but in 1989 the City’s new Employee Relations director acknowledged that most hiring was at lower-level jobs. The City did not have its first black department head until 1988 after John Norquist was first elected Mayor in 1988. In 1989 Howard Fuller, (former secretary of the State Employment Relations Department and former Superintendent of Milwaukee Public

Schools), gave credit to Mayor John Norquist “for bringing Hispanics and blacks into the political structure.”

## Decline of Manufacturing/Growth of the Service Sector

During a period of about 30 years, from 1950 to 1980, a stable, black working class developed in Milwaukee. Over the course of those years African-American men and women as a whole progressed from occupying mostly low-level laborer’s jobs to a good representation in the growing service sector (including protective services) and in the administrative, support, and clerical fields. However, once the manufacturing base of Milwaukee’s industries started to decline in the late 1970s deteriorating economic and social conditions set in.

At a 1981 Congressional hearing called by former Congressman Henry Reuss (D., Milwaukee), testimony was given as to projected plant closings and relocation plans involving many thousands of layoffs.

After this “de-industrialization” Milwaukee County District Attorney, E. Michael McCann found his office dealing with an increase in crime and drugs in the 1990s. He cited “the loss of 40,000 manufacturing jobs that hit Milwaukee’s minority community especially hard.” Thousands of African-Americans who had been hired during the good times were laid off. Most of these displaced workers lost their union benefits. Almost none of those who were in their forties and fifties were able to find comparable work and wages. The loss of manufacturing jobs was devastating to the African-American community and led to: 1) a sharp rise in unemployment; 2) a rise in percent living in poverty; 3) a decline in home ownership; and 4) an increase in other pathologies (crime and drugs mentioned by McCann.)

The following statistics demonstrate these deteriorating conditions in the black community between 1970 and 1990:

- increase in unemployment from 8.2 percent in 1970 to 22.7 percent in 1992;
- increase in the rate of concentrated extreme poverty among 14 Frostbelt metropolises from 6th place in 1970 to 14th place in 1990;
- a drop in home ownership from 33 percent in 1970 to 29.7 percent in 1990.

## DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING

Historically Milwaukee’s African-American population lived on the northwest side of town. Living in a circumscribed area of town was not necessarily by choice. African-Americans were not free to assimilate as members of other ethnic groups were because of such discriminatory devices as:

- discrimination in renting to blacks recorded as early as 1905;
- widespread use of racially restrictive covenants dating back to

1910 (a provision in a deed that the property could not to be sold, leased or rented to anyone other than of the Caucasian race.)

- real estate board policy that confined blacks to a certain area of town dating back to 1924;
- segregation in City public housing dating back to the 1930's;
- denial of Federal Housing Administration home mortgage guarantees in many areas of the city dating from the 40s to the 60s;
- discriminatory urban renewal and relocation policies dating back to the 1950s;
- redlining by banks, lending agencies, and insurance companies (defined as the systematic refusal by a bank, lending institution or insurance company to issue mortgage loans, home-owner repair loans or insurance on property in a defined geographical area.)

A number of conditions set the African-American community apart in terms of housing. Members of the community were easily identified and discriminated against because of the color of their skin; they could not escape the enclave they were confined to as members of other ethnic groups could; and they were subject to adverse federal, state, and local governmental policies and practices that prevented access to housing throughout the community.

#### Housing Discrimination Before World War II

The first African-American settlers and families in Milwaukee were relatively dispersed living in three areas of town: 1) the East side, 2) the foot of E. Water Street near the Milwaukee River, and 3) the West side of town between 2nd and 6th Streets and Kilbourn and Michigan Avenues. By 1870 there had been a consolidation of the black population, at which time 76 percent of families and individuals lived west of the Milwaukee River. One cause was the formation of the first black church, the St. Mark's African Methodist Church, whose congregation moved into the old German Evangelical Lutheran Church on the corner of 4th Street and Kilbourn Avenue in 1869. St. Mark's Church became a center of social and religious life for many members of the black community.

In addition to the draw of St. Mark's, other reasons for moving to the near West side may have been the unavailability of housing in other parts of town due to discrimination, rental costs, or lack of proximity to work.

William J. Vollmer, a Marquette University master's student who researched black history from 1835-1870, ventured these reasons:

this grouping together was probably brought about to a great degree by the [black] man's sense of lack of physical security caused by his almost complete political impotency, an attitude of open hostility on the part of the immigrant population, and a feeling of desertion by the local abolitionists.



As early as 1905 the black-owned newspaper in Milwaukee, The Advocate, pointed to whites' reluctance to rent or sell to blacks:

Men will not rent to decent, respectable Negroes a house--even though the latter are in a position to pay with equal regularity as much rental as any other class of whites.

By 1915 African-Americans were moving north to homes previously occupied by Germans and later by Russian Jews. The old Jewish district north of State Street was already identified as a slum.

The intentional segregation of African-Americans can be traced to a meeting of the Milwaukee Real Estate Board in 1924 when the members discussed: "the advisability of restricting the Negro population in a certain area on the West side....The members say that the Negro population of the city is growing so rapidly that something will have to be done."

#### Restrictive Covenants

The use of racially restrictive covenants became a widespread real estate practice by 1910 to keep African-Americans from buying property or homes or renting in white neighborhoods. Local NAACP Attorney George Brawley made a survey of the plats (maps of housing subdivisions) filed with the Register of Deeds Office of Milwaukee County in the early 1940s. He estimated that 90 percent of the subdivisions which had been platted in the City of Milwaukee since 1910 contained some type of restrictive covenant that pledged the owner not to sell or rent to anyone other than Caucasian. He stated that in other parts of the city there were "gentlemen's agreements" not to sell or rent property to blacks except within the area bounded by W. North, W. Juneau, N. 3rd and N. 12th Streets. Such clauses and agreements were also directed against Jews.

In 1935 the Wisconsin State legislature refused to outlaw restrictive covenants on the grounds that to do so might "destroy vacation resorts on Wisconsin lakes by opening them up to blacks." It was not until 1948 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Shelley v. Kramer that states could not enforce restrictive covenants; that is, states could not be in a position of enforcing private discrimination. In some cases however, these clauses were not removed from the deeds even decades later thus still carrying a message of exclusion.

#### Black Area of City Established

"The area between 3rd and 8th, Juneau and Wells was the first identifiable black neighborhood. It was sometimes called 'Little Africa' because there were so many black people there. A couple of newspapers even referred to the area around 5th and Wells as 'Nigger Alley.'"

In 1930 African-Americans made up 26.2 percent of the Second Ward

and 56.5 percent of the Sixth Ward. These two wards, together with the Ninth and Tenth Wards accounted for 93.7 percent of the black population. However, whites were still in a majority in all but the 6th ward. Black residential areas continued to be significantly interspersed with white residential areas.

However, there was a clear differential in housing conditions. A 1939 Works Projects Administration "Real Property Inventory" reported that 58.7 percent of houses in the African-American community were either in need of major repairs or classified as unfit for human habitation and that two-thirds of the houses had been built before 1900. The "Real Property Inventory" listed only 1.5 percent of the residential structures in the district as having been built after 1920, in contrast to 29.5 percent for the city.

### Dilapidated Housing and Need for Public Housing

During the early 1920s a college-educated African-American couple, Wilbur and Ardie Halyard, arrived in Milwaukee and found crowded conditions and dilapidated housing around them. They went on to establish Milwaukee's most successful black business of that era, the Columbia Building and Loan Association. They were motivated partly by the indignity of seeing that African-American families were being excluded from the City's first low-income housing project, the Garden Homes Project built with City funds between 1921 and 1923.

When the Halyards complained to Mayor Hoan about this official insult, he countered with the suggestion that they establish a building and loan association to aid black families in financing home mortgages. The Halyards went on to form such an institution but not without resistance. The task of getting a license dragged on for two years -- they had to use political connections and back-door channels to gain access to the Governor before they could get a charter in 1925.

The next battle over access to public housing came in 1935 over admittance of African-Americans to the federally funded Parklawn Housing Project. Sixth Ward Alderman Sam Soref wanted a public housing project built in his ward where most African-Americans lived. White taxpayers and real estate interests organized an opposition campaign. White families who owned the land that was being considered for the project held out for an unreasonably high price and challenged the use of federal funds claiming that slum conditions did not exist in the Sixth Ward. Over the objections of some African-American leadership the Parklawn Project was built on the (then) far northwest side of town with an exclusionary policy against blacks even though federal funds were involved.

In 1937 a coalition of social workers, African-American leaders, and the Chief of Police appeared at a series of meetings to promote the building of public housing. They all testified that bad housing conditions caused increased incidents of tuberculosis, delinquency, crime, and prostitution in the African-American community. These arguments held no sway with the chairman of the Milwaukee City Council's housing committee, who made derogatory remarks about African-Americans at a hearing called to discuss the issue.

Protests on the part of black community leaders over exclusion from

Parklawn ended in a small victory when six black families were admitted in 1937, hardly enough to make a dent in the need for decent housing.

## Housing Discrimination After World War II

After World War II returning African-American GI's were particularly eager to take their place in a democracy where racial and religious identities did not matter. But coming back to Milwaukee, many of these hopes were shattered. In 1949 there was an ugly incident when a returning black veteran and his family tried to rent a trailer home in Greenfield, Wisconsin, a working-class suburb. A group of trailer park residents formed a threatening mob to try to prevent the family from moving in. It took Bruno Bitker, a member of the City's Commission on Human Relations, to quell the crowd and calm the residents down. The "incident" was resolved, but was a harbinger of the virulent white hostility toward housing integration that would manifest itself in citizens' protests over the next several decades.

The inability of African-Americans to move freely throughout the city made overcrowding and the overuse of property inevitable. A study of housing conditions was done in 1946 by the Citizen's Governmental Research Bureau in which it found "67.7% of the dwellings occupied by Negroes in Milwaukee are in need of major repairs or are unfit for use, compared with 6.5% of the dwelling units occupied by the city's white population." Conditions had worsened since 1939 when the WPA "Real Property Inventory" found 58.7 percent of housing in need of major repairs.

After World War II black migration from the south put further stress on already inadequate housing conditions. Public housing advocates had long advocated that the Hillside Public Housing Project be built in the Sixth Ward (not raising the issue that this would increase housing segregation.) City Development Director Richard W. E. Perrin made some candid remarks about the location of the Hillside Project which, he said, was built on the near north side, "because the aldermen felt -- foolishly, I am sure -- that we would have to keep the Negroes where they are."

As early as 1951 there was an organized effort to prevent further public housing, which was in reality an anti-black effort. A Public Housing Referendum committee distributed flyers and literature and ran anti-public housing ads in the Milwaukee Journal. Perrin reported what he believed was behind the movement:

If the truth were known, general public housing for families as distinguished from that for the elderly has always had connotations of [black] occupancy...that is where the whole opposition stemmed from in the beginning. It was less an argument of opposing housing for people of low incomes as it was of opposing housing for [blacks].

By 1960 the City Housing Authority had built only 1,880 public housing units -- this was less than half the average number of low-income housing units built per 1,000 residents for 15 other large cities. In 1969 former Mayor Frank Zeidler (socialist mayor from 1948

to 1960) continued to criticize the city for not doing enough to relocate and build public housing.

Frank Zeidler himself was a victim of white racist hostility in his bid for reelection in 1956. A vicious and completely fallacious rumor circulated that Zeidler had taken City money to buy billboards in the south urging blacks to move to Milwaukee. Although he won the election, Zeidler did not run again in 1960. He was known as “soft” on the issue of race and he said he had had enough. Before leaving office, Zeidler appointed a prestigious commission which published a series of reports and recommendations on the social problems of the inner city.

### Profiteering in the Area

The Zeidler commission report included the finding: “that the landlords who held property in the Inner Core had let it fall into a condition of disgrace and that they charged unconscionable rents.” The commission tended to blame the landlords and not the residents: “the blame was placed at the doorsteps of the men and women who owned the buildings and left them in such a state of disrepair.”

In 1963 Alderwoman Vel Phillips, who was Milwaukee’s first black alderman, 1956-1971, complained that absentee landlords were making a profit in the Second Ward, which she represented, “because they get by with little or no maintenance.” Dr. E.R. Krumbiegel, City health commissioner, said major violations in the area included garbage and rubbish nuisances, insufficient ratproofing and defective heating units.

Absentee landowners of large number of properties often blamed the tenants for broken windows, roaches and litter, but as Father Patrick Flood, then an inner City Catholic priest, stated:

while programs aimed at making poor families better housekeepers are necessary, this need is far outbalanced by the need to eliminate the social injustices that produce these conditions.

### Federal Housing Authority Policies

For 20 years the Milwaukee office of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) followed the national policy of not insuring home mortgage loans to African-Americans in all-white neighborhoods or in blighted neighborhoods effectively blocking access to insured loans throughout the city.

The FHA sponsored mortgage insurance program systematically channeled funds away from minority neighborhoods, bringing about a wholesale disinvestment in the black community during the 1950s and 1960s. FHA policies facilitated white flight to the suburbs and was one of the significant factors leading to the massive shift of the white population to the suburbs.

In 1967 FHA changed its policy both locally and nationally and started

to actively encourage lenders to make FHA insured loans in the inner city. But it was too late. Whites had fled refusing “to share residential space with blacks on a permanent basis.” In addition, expressway construction to the suburbs further encouraged a mass exodus of whites. From 1950 to 1970, the percentage of whites who lived in the “inner city north” plummeted from 80.9 percent to 12.7 percent.

### Disinvestment

White flight resulted in enormous loss in property values in the black community. It produced the suppression of “housing wealth” due to the fact that the vast majority of whites would not live in the same neighborhoods as blacks and would not bid on or purchase housing in the inner city. The loss was estimated at \$2.2 billion by Professor Gregory Squires, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who did a mathematical analysis to estimate the magnitude of the loss. As Squires explained:

Home ownership is the largest investment and the major source of capital accumulation for most families. When artificial barriers, like discrimination block families from purchasing a home or limit the value of that home, the costs are severe for the individual family members and the larger community of which they are a part.

Squires pointed out a further consequences of the devaluation of housing was the inability to secure business loans:

The scarcity of business loans in minority neighborhoods was attributed to relatively low housing values in the central city indicating that start-up business owners [in the inner city] may have little equity in their houses, something lenders consider as collateral for a business loan.

### Open Housing Legislation

Hard and fast segregation was never the choice of a majority of black citizens in the city. A 1965 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee survey, sponsored by the University of Wisconsin Extension, queried 438 African-Americans in Milwaukee on the subject. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents thought that blacks and whites should live on the same blocks together, another 27.4 percent thought they should live in the same neighborhoods, and only 2.6 percent thought that blacks and whites should live in different neighborhoods. Given the choice, black Milwaukeeans would not have chosen to live apart.

Open housing became the key issue around which African-Americans rallied in the 1960s. In 1961 Attorney Lloyd Barbee, who was then the president of the Wisconsin NAACP (later to become a Wisconsin State Representative), led a 13-day sit-in at the State Capitol in Madison to highlight the need for a state fair housing law.

Another black leader, Coneff Taylor, secretary of the Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations, made an impassioned plea for open housing in 1963. He described the humiliations caused by discrimination against blacks, "who suffer acutely from the stigma put on them when they want a room in a motel or a sandwich at a lunch counter. This stigma injects poison continuously into the relations of whites and blacks.

In 1963 Alderwoman Phillips introduced for the first time an open housing ordinance in the Common Council for the first time calling for the prohibition of discrimination in the sale or lease of housing in the city. She introduced the bill four times thereafter, but it was always defeated 18 to her 1 vote. (Phillips was the only black alderman.)

After Lloyd Barbee's election to the State legislature (1964-1977), he introduced a fair housing bill at the State level which was passed in 1965. Although the Mayor of Milwaukee, Henry Meier (1960-1988), favored County and State open housing legislation, he opposed the City acting alone. He took the legal stance that with the introduction of Barbee's bill at the State level that this preempted the Milwaukee City Council from acting on the subject. An Assistant City Attorney wrote an opinion to this effect with the Mayor's blessing. The Mayor dragged his feet on a City ordinance wanting suburbs to pass fair housing ordinances first, otherwise he felt white flight would only escalate.

The State's Fair Housing Law contained so many exceptions that only about 25 to 33 percent of the City's housing was affected. Plus the law did not allow housing testing until 1980, a recognized way of apprehending landlords or property owners in the act of discrimination, (testing is done by trained testers, usually a black and a white couple similarly situated, who go in to apply for an apartment within a short time of each other to see if there is a difference in treatment.)

With the national Fair Housing Act of 1968 pending, the Common Council could no longer postpone the inevitable and passed an open housing ordinance on December 12, 1967 which duplicated the State law. Largely through the urgings of Jerris Leonard, all the suburbs surrounding Milwaukee followed suit in 1967-1968 (with one or two exceptions.) But there was no activity under any of these suburban ordinances.

The County was even more recalcitrant. Starting with the introduction of a fair housing resolution by County Board Supervisor Isaac Coggs in the 1960s, seven or eight attempts were made to gain passage of such a law. It took 25 years before the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors finally approved a fair housing ordinance in 1992.

Lack of commitment to equal access to housing was an intractable problem because of lack of white leadership's willingness to take a stand on this issue. By the mid 1960s a number of civil rights organizations had formed in Milwaukee to respond to racism on this and other fronts including growing segregation in the schools, the court system, bad police-community relations and black powerlessness.

In 1965 the civil rights leader Father James Groppi and the NAACP

Youth Commandos picketed the home of Circuit Court Judge Robert C. Cannon because of the judge's membership in the all-white Eagles Club of Milwaukee (the Eagles had an all-white membership provision written into its national by-laws.) The Eagles Club was the social gathering place of aldermen, union leaders, and judges as well as City, County, and other elected officials forming an "old-boys" network that excluded African-Americans. Demonstrators objected to the possibility of coming before a judge who seemed prejudiced against them by virtue of his membership in an all-white organization.

In 1967, the NAACP Commandos went on to crusade for Vel Phillips' open housing ordinance marching for 145 nights. During marches to the South Side, "much hostility toward the demonstrators was displayed; 38 arrests were made, mostly of white hecklers" who threw rocks and taunted the protesters.

In July 1967 a riot broke out in Milwaukee when numbers of black youths and adults descended upon upper Third Street, breaking windows and looting, with three people killed in the melee. According to the famed Kerner Commission Report the Milwaukee riot amounted to a "serious disorder" on one day with the remaining days classified as having minor levels of violence. Overall, the Kerner Commission Report attributed the cause of riots across the country to anger with the conditions of racial oppression and economic deprivation that had been allowed to fester in ghettos for 60 years.

Interviews concerning the Milwaukee riot were conducted with 387 people eight months later, supervised by five social scientists at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The interviews revealed a vast difference in opinion between blacks and whites on both the causes of and solutions to the riot. Blacks saw the causes as job discrimination, bad housing, police brutality, and poor education. They saw solutions as better housing, better education, and better jobs for blacks. Whites saw the causes as abnormal behavior, the failure of parents to control their children, and agitation by local civil rights leaders and "outsiders" including black nationalists and communists. They saw solutions as more police power and stricter control over firearms.

Attitudes of a large number of whites were openly hostile; they were immediately angered over the events of the summer and the pending passage of an open housing ordinance. An organized opposition developed mainly on the South Side which was able to amass 27,000 signatures petitioning the Common Council to refrain from passing an open housing ordinance or else put such an ordinance to the test of a popular vote in the form of a citywide referendum. A challenge to the constitutionality of such a referendum was made by Attorney Len Zubrensky representing a potentially aggrieved party. He enlisted the aid of the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court to quash such a referendum. James Otey, the complainant, represented the class of blacks who would be subject to housing discrimination if the referendum passed. In 1968 District Court Judge Robert Tehan issued a permanent injunction against holding such a referendum on the constitutional grounds that it would be in violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

In his lengthy decision the Judge made some observations about

housing discrimination against blacks in Milwaukee:

Race is a factor of almost transcendent significance [when black] home buyers or lessees, wishing to leave the inner City, are faced with barriers of discrimination which few have been able to overcome. When housing outside the inner City is sought, attributes otherwise crucial in choosing buyers and tenants, such as ability to pay, educational background, demeanor, reliability and stability, are not even investigated by sellers and landlords after the color of the applicant is discovered.

Black leaders identified other frustrations in Milwaukee. In 1967 the Rev. Walter B. Hoard, president of the local NAACP, and a relative newcomer to Milwaukee, observed in an interview:

Milwaukee is 20 to 40 years behind the average city this size in civil rights. Coming to this area from the east, Milwaukee is the most conservative place I've ever been.

Larry Harwell, vice-chairman of the Organization of Organizations, came to a similar conclusion: "...the white community is really apathetic to the problems of the Negro. The white man will not go too far." Other black leaders lamented the paternalistic attitudes, the fact that the white power structure thought it knew what was best for the black community and the lack of consultation with members of the black community about economic and political issues that affected them.

A 1970 study, "Black Powerlessness in Milwaukee Institutions and Decision-Making Structures," documented the lack of formal authority, influence, and discretionary use of funds available to African-Americans. There were no African-Americans in policy making positions in business and industrial concerns, law firms, banks, stock brokerage firms and insurance firms; no blacks serving as presidents, financial secretaries, or business representatives of local unions. There were only five blacks elected to City, County or State public office out of 121 from the Milwaukee area. Not enough to affect urban politics.

#### Urban Renewal and Relocation Policies

Public policies did little to overcome overcrowded and dilapidated housing conditions, and these conditions were never adequately addressed by the City according to Professor Robert Beckley, former Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He summarized the ups and downs of housing policies at the local level as having an extremely negative impact on the inner city. Roughly 10,000 units of public housing and subsidized units were created by 1977, but close to 17,000 were torn down for urban renewal and expressways, for a net loss of 7,000 housing units. As early as 1966 a Milwaukee Journal article concluded that "urban renewal... was responsible for forcing many families into moving out of one slum into another."



Between 1974 and 1986 Mayor Henry Meier attracted \$160 million to the City of Milwaukee under federal revenue sharing programs. He was very good at bringing in federal funds according to his successor, Mayor John Norquist (elected in 1980), who made mention of this in his innovative book, *The Wealth of Cities*. Under Mayor Meier federal revenue sharing went toward revitalization of neighborhoods, including large sums spent on such items as street lighting. But Meier's administration was fraught with fights with the federal bureaucracy over federal guidelines. He resisted the concept of maximum feasible participation of the poor.

In addition, the City Housing and Redevelopment Authority under Mayor Meier carried out inequitable relocation policies when it came to moving African-American families who were to be displaced because of construction of public housing and urban renewal. African-American were almost always relocated within the inner city and were sometimes returned to a situation of doubling-up and overcrowded conditions. Black families were not given alternatives to finding housing throughout the community. Relocation practices were inequitably applied as illustrated in the following example.

A sample of African-American families displaced by Hillside and Lapham Park Public Housing Projects showed that all were relocated within the inner city. By comparison, families forced out by the lower Third Ward's urban renewal project, a predominantly white area, were dispersed throughout the City.

Richard Perrin stated at the time that: "most Blacks did not want to move from the core area because they wished to remain near the persons with whom they were used to associating." This kind of racial stereotyping led to unequal policies in the distribution of relocation services. The City's failure to carry out a policy that would help find alternative housing in other parts of the city strengthened the strong segregative patterns that already existed in Milwaukee.

At a later date the County's rent assistance program was found to have maintained waiting lists that provided preferences for white homeseekers. The Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council brought suit against the County in the U.S. Federal District Court in the case of *Holland v. Milwaukee County* (1980). Such practices, however, remained an issue, with whites having many more housing choices than minorities within the metropolitan housing market.

#### Private Real Estate Practices

Discrimination in the private real estate market included hundreds of cases of refusals to rent or sell to minorities in spite of fair housing laws on the books. Private rejections together with hundreds of cases of block busting and "panic selling" (the practice of inducing homeowners on particular blocks to sell their homes quickly, often at a loss, by creating the fear that prospective buyers would be African-Americans and would bring a loss of property values) and racial steering (the practice of real estate agents showing white customers homes in all-white neighborhoods and not in integrated or transitional neighborhoods) were widespread. Since 1978 the Metropolitan

Milwaukee Fair Housing Council, a group formed to tackle the problems of housing segregation, has handled 2,462 individual complaints within the City of Milwaukee and has taken a number of cases to County and U.S. District courts where they have won monetary awards for victims of housing discrimination.

### Disparity in Home Mortgage Loans and Home Insurance

A Pulitzer Prize winning series of articles in the Atlanta Constitution in 1988 found Milwaukee with the highest black-to-white mortgage home loan rejection rate in the country with blacks being rejected four times as often as whites. This information was alarming and raised the question whether the City of Milwaukee itself was depositing tax dollars in banks that failed to make mortgage loans to minority residents. Subsequently with assistance from the City of Milwaukee, a Fair Lending Coalition was formed to gain greater cooperation from banks and lending institutions in offering home loans and home repair loans under the Federal Community Reinvestment Act.

Progress was painfully slow. Even higher income African-Americans who earned over \$60,840 were found to be “more likely to be denied a loan than those white applicants with incomes at or below \$41,000.” The City Comptroller’s annual audit of financial institutions continues to find Milwaukee had the greatest racial disparity between black and white home loan rejections among the nation’s 50 largest cities, together with the highest rate of home improvement loan rejections in the country. Partial explanations include the high number of single parents in the African-American community who loan agencies do not regard as good credit prospects. A long-time political reporter, Jack Norman, cited other reasons: whites had an extremely low rate of mortgage denials and many blacks earning \$12,000 per year are not good prospects.

A landmark case of home insurance redlining emanated from the City of Milwaukee in 1990. A lawsuit was filed in the U.S. Federal District court by the City of Milwaukee, Attorneys William Lynch and James E. Hall, Jr., representing the ACLU, the NAACP, ...challenging the home insurance policies sold by the American Family Insurance Company. The attorneys filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of eight Milwaukee homeowners, including City of Milwaukee Alderman Marvin Pratt, for redlining minority neighborhoods charging that the company sold lower-grade homeowners insurance in the inner city. In addition, documents were filed showing that white agents were told by their superiors, both orally and in writing, to avoid selling insurance to blacks.

The merits of the lawsuit were first rejected by the U.S. District Court in Milwaukee, but on appeal the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago ruled that inferior insurance policies or charging more money for less coverage in a confined geographical area amounted to a violation of the U.S. Fair Housing Act of 1968. A monetary award of \$5 million was granted to compensate the homeowners and \$9.5 million was granted for housing programs in Milwaukee. The settlement also required the company to make major changes in its products and business practices. Mayor John Norquist praised the settlement noting that, “the degree the money is perceived as a penalty, it will have an encouraging effect on the rest

of the industry.”

## DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

Housing discrimination, white flight, and Milwaukee School Board policies made school segregation inevitable. African-American children became a majority of the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system over the course of four decades after World War II.

In 1950 black school-aged children made up a negligible percent of pupils in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system. From 1950 to 1960 many African-American families migrated to Milwaukee at the rate of 4,000 to 5,000 persons a year -- many from the south. Black segregated schools in the south were notoriously inadequate, being woefully underfunded, with inadequate facilities, and shortchanging black children by closing schools two months earlier than for white children. “Separate but equal” schools were found to be completely unequal in the famous 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (thus overturning the *Plessy* case of 1896). Southern schools were ordered to desegregate “with all deliberate speed” and later northern schools were included. Although desegregation and quality education were not tied together, it was hoped that the *Brown* decision would bring equalization of resources, integration, and quality education for black children. The Milwaukee School Board had to face a new set of problems.

In 1955 a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee professor, Dr. C.L. Golightly, became the first African-American to be elected to the Milwaukee School Board. He was an early proponent of school integration, believing it would be beneficial to African-American children. However, a majority of the Board did not go along with him; the majority felt no obligation to integrate the schools.

One of the more discriminatory manifestations of the Board’s policy was the practice of busing black children “intact” to outlying schools. Starting in 1957 when inner city schools were being remodeled or were overcrowded, African-American children were bused “intact” from overcrowded schools to “host” schools where they were taught in their own classrooms with their own teachers and kept separate for lunch periods and on the playground.

By 1960 the Milwaukee School Board had information contained in the 1960 U.S. Census that 24.9 percent of nonwhite 11-year-old boys in Milwaukee were underachieving in their schools compared to 6.6 percent of white boys. But the School Board did not allocate staff or resources to try to stop this disturbing trend and continued its policy of promoting children to the next higher grade-level regardless of educational attainment (still an issue). Many black children dropped further and further behind due to School Board’s inattention and inaction.

By the 1962-1963 school year, black school-aged children comprised 24 percent of the MPS system. In 1964, in protest over the fact that black school-aged children were becoming more and more segregated, State Representative Lloyd Barbee organized the Milwaukee United for School Integration Committee (MUSIC), which conducted a three-day boycott of MPS by black parents and children. MUSIC set up “freedom

schools” and recruited ad hoc teachers, including many sympathetic whites, to teach in these schools.

A Milwaukee Urban League statement in 1965 pointed to the increasing segregation of not only the children but the teachers:

86.5% of Negro teachers and 90.3% of Negro students are assigned to schools in the area bounded by Capitol Drive on the North, 27th Street on the West, Wisconsin Avenue on the South and Lake Michigan on the East; a situation which reflects a predominant assignment of Negro teachers to ‘Negro’ schools.

In 1965 a major study of the school system was commissioned by We-Milwaukeeans, a group of white businessmen and African-American leaders, and the Milwaukee Urban League (MUL). The MUL issued a statement and a series of recommendations on how to correct injustices in the school system including:

- discontinue intact busing of classes and teachers from overcrowded black schools;
- permanently assign black students and teachers from overcrowded schools to underutilized schools (mainly in outlying neighborhoods);
- halt plans to build Francis Parkman Junior High School on 17th Street as inevitably leading to an all-black enrollment; and
- assign African-American teachers to mixed and predominantly white schools to enable student and faculty to overcome stereotypes.

#### Desegregation Lawsuit and Court Order

Many of the above recommendations were ultimately mandated by a federal court order 10 years later, but a decade passed without the School Board taking action on the growing problem of segregation. In one instance, C.L. Golightly and several other school Board Members proposed the permanent assignment of black children on an experimental basis to white schools where they were being bused temporarily because of renovation to their former schools. A majority of the Board voted “no” even though the plan would have brought a small measure of integration and would have saved money as well. In the years before the desegregation court order of 1976, Milwaukee Public Schools built more than 75 percent of its new schools in white neighborhoods. During much of that time the white school population was declining.

From 1965 to 1978 a legal battle ensued. In 1965 Attorney Barbee filed a lawsuit in U.S. Federal District Court on behalf of 32 African-American parents and children and nine white children (amended in 1968 to include a class of children represented by Attorney Irvin Charne) charging a denial of the children’s right to an equal educational opportunity by virtue of Milwaukee Public School Board’s policies and actions.

In 1976, in order to address the growing trend toward majority-black schools, State Representative Dennis Conta succeeded in gaining statewide legislation allocating general state revenues to pay for the cost of school busing to suburban school districts (interschool busing.) This legislation gave both black and white families transportation aid if they enrolled their children in school districts where integration would be enhanced. This program was incorporated into the state statutes as Chapter 220, a program that was to play a major role in interdistrict busing (to the suburbs) and intradistrict busing (within the city.)

Also in 1976 U.S. Federal District Judge John W. Reynolds heard the desegregation lawsuit against the Milwaukee School Board brought by Barbee and Charne on behalf of black and white school children. After hearing testimony, the Judge ultimately ruled that the Milwaukee Public School system was illegally segregated in violation of the 14th Amendment and must develop a plan to desegregate the schools. Some of the evidence of deliberate segregation included:

- as the black school-aged population increased in a given school district, “the board squeezed boundaries inward, keeping the black schools black, instead of redrawing boundaries to distribute blacks over several schools;”
- the School Board made more room in existing schools in the inner city by building temporary or permanent additions or utilizing substandard classrooms;
- basement classrooms were utilized to a higher degree in black schools than white schools;
- when Auer Avenue school was judged to be overcrowded in the 1950s, the School Board installed temporary classrooms on the playground; fifteen years later the temporary classrooms were still in use;
- almost all African-American teachers were assigned to inner city schools;
- fewer teachers in predominantly black schools held master’s degrees than in white schools;
- in 1968 school buildings in the inner city averaged 71.8 years of age compared to 33 years for schools with 90 percent white attendance;
- when white children were bused to other schools because of remodeling or overcrowding they were often mixed with children in the new schools while the children from black schools were kept separate.

After Reynolds’ desegregation order the school system: 1) started a massive program of intra-school busing under Chapter 220 of the State statutes, and 2) established specialty schools in order to gain the 25 percent to 65 percent black student attendance at all schools as ordered by the court. Judge Reynolds appointed John Gronouski, former Postmaster General under President John F. Kennedy, to be special master over the schools. All but 13 schools were in

compliance with the 25%-65% African-American student percentages within a few years.

However, the court could not stop white flight. In less than seven years the percentage of minorities in the school system exceeded 50 percent and demographers accurately predicted minority attendance would go higher in the immediate years ahead.

Another persistent problem in the schools was negative attitudes of some teachers and administrators who had racist misconceptions that black children could not learn as much as white children. Attitudes such as these were unwittingly reflected by a top Milwaukee Public School administrator, Theodore Kummerlein, who made the following statement:

You would be amazed at the aspirations of some of these youngsters of limited ability aspiring to go into college, to go into some of the professions, and you know very well that their abilities are limited and they can't do it.

#### Discrimination in Suburban Housing and Education

In June 1984 the Milwaukee School Board, wishing to stem the tide of increasing segregation and knowing that the demographics pointed to a much higher percentage of minorities in the years ahead, filed a federal lawsuit against 24 suburban school districts to try to gain area wide school integration. The Milwaukee Public Schools hired the law firm of Irvin Charne with co-counsel, the Hogan & Hartson law firm, Washington, D.C., later joined by the NAACP, charging the suburbs with maintaining all-white school systems in the Milwaukee metropolitan area and perpetuating a pattern of housing segregation. In 1987 after two years of negotiations and 10 days of court testimony, an out-of-court settlement was reached which involved busing of upwards of 4,500 African-American students to suburban schools at state expense under Chapter 220.

One purpose of the lawsuit was to stop suburban school boards from rejecting Chapter 220 students who wished to transfer from the City's public school system. Another purpose was to gain more minority teachers in the suburbs. In 1987 when the suit was settled, there were only 29 African-American teachers and professionals out of 3,460 persons working in those capacities in the suburbs (less than 1 percent). In addition, the NAACP insisted that part of the desegregation settlement include a housing component to encourage "nontraditional" home purchases by making home loans available at reduced interest rates for those who would move to enhance integration. The Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council was chosen to administer the program.

The patterns of housing discrimination in the suburbs was the subject of intensive research preparatory to the desegregation court case. It was found that all of the suburbs surrounding Milwaukee engaged in one or more of the following official acts as testified to at the trial:

- villages and city councils passed exclusionary zoning ordinances requiring large homes, large lots and other expensive amenities;

- planning departments and village councils rejected many low- and moderate-income housing developments which had been approved by the Southeastern Regional Planning Commission, the conduit for U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department subsidies;

- villages opposed extending sewers to some proposed publicly subsidized housing projects in order to stop their construction;

- some publicly subsidized projects gave preferential treatment to applicants from all-white suburbs.

Years before the trial started suburbs had regularly raised square footage requirements on new homes, prohibited three-bedroom homes, enacted other “snob” zoning requirements and other devices to forestall changes in demographics. Suburban residents did not hesitate to express themselves against publicly subsidized housing developments and regularly voiced opposition at public hearings, particularly if a piece of property were owned by an African-American developer using such arguments as “might become a slum” or “would attract large families” or “would look like Milwaukee.” Some school boards entered the debate over low- and moderate-income housing by passing resolutions opposing any zoning changes to permit moderate income housing developments.

From all the evidence brought forward during the desegregation trial, it was the experts’ opinion that race was an important consideration in all of these activities, which inevitably led to lily-white suburbs and all-white school systems surrounding Milwaukee.

Respondents’ lawyers countered these arguments by citing evidence that blacks preferred to live near friends and family, that transportation was a problem in the suburbs and that there were more alternatives for low-cost housing in the inner city. One respondent’s lawyer recounted that in several cases when given a choice to move to the suburbs most African-American families either did not want to move or moved to the suburbs only to return to the City.

In 1991, 11 out of 18 Milwaukee suburbs had fewer than one percent African-Americans living within their borders; only two suburbs had as high a percentage as five to seven percent minority residents.

As early as 1957 Sol Ackerman, City of Milwaukee urban renewal coordinator, received 40 turn-downs from suburbs requesting that they build a small component of low-cost homes for families displaced by expressways and urban renewal.

In the 1970s all suburbs failed to accept their “fair share” of low- to moderate-income housing as recommended by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. Again in 1989, 23 out of 25 suburbs rejected a proposal by the City of Milwaukee to place two units of public housing in each suburb.

Private Acts of Discrimination and Vandalism

For those few African-American families who did move to the suburbs, there were a number of cases of harassment including a cross-burning. In 1965 Mrs. Robert Nord told of her difficulties in building a home in the suburbs, concluding that she could have depended on a white friend to purchase a lot and deed it over to her but, as Mrs. Nord wrote to the Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations: “why should I stoop to obtain that which should be mine by birthright?”

- Wauwatosa

In 1955 Zeddie Hyler, the first African-American to move to Wauwatosa, suffered \$800 damage to his unfinished home and received threatening and abusive phone calls.

At about the same time, Dr. Arthur and Dorothy Nelle Sanders purchased a lot in Wauwatosa hoping to provide their son with a better education. When word got out they were African-Americans, they were offered 10 times the amount they paid for the lot by a Wauwatosa developer who told them “your neighbors do not want you.” The Sanders family had trouble from the beginning including being turned down for a home loan at several banks (even though Dr. Sanders was a World War II veteran) and having their house plans rejected by a building board. They finally felt they had to hire a private lawyer to represent them and with that they were able to build a home and live in Wauwatosa satisfactorily.

Also in Wauwatosa the frame of a publicly subsidized housing project was burned down -- the FBI never found out who did it.

In 1968 the Wauwatosa Common Council turned down nearly \$1 million in Community Development Act funds for fear that acceptance of it would require the building of up to 200 low- and moderate-income housing units. City officials said there was no land available even though a vast track of County-owned land was subject to its jurisdiction.

- West Allis

West Allis, the fifth largest city in Wisconsin, did accept some publicly subsidized moderate-income housing. But once an African-American developer came in with plans to build 35 moderate-income homes the city fought tooth and nail against it. The homes were to be built on County-owned land, but strong opposition surfaced (except members of the League of Women Voters who testified in support of the project.) The West Allis Building Inspector and other residents testified at County Board hearings voicing their fears that large families would move in causing higher taxes, that the schools would become overcrowded, that the design of the houses were incompatible with houses across the street. West Allis insisted on 10 of the houses being built on scattered sites but were unable to come up with these sites for a very long time. During the course of several years the developer was made to change his blueprints time and time again and for one reason or another, finally went bankrupt. The county sold off the land for private housing.



When a few African-Americans moved to a publicly subsidized apartment project in West Allis in the early 1980s, several of them filed a complaint against the apartment manager for mistreatment. The City of West Allis was unable to process these complaints adequately because it had no complaint procedure or staff in place. Yet West Allis had an open housing ordinance on the books and promoted housing integration.

In 1994 a Governor's Housing Conference pointed out that affordable housing opportunities were still nonexistent in the suburbs because of restrictive zoning laws. Panelists pointed out the need for metropolitan wide housing opportunities and transportation for people without cars to enhance employment and housing opportunities throughout the area.

Because of Milwaukee's unique history, higher-income blacks did not move to the suburbs as their white counterparts did in other parts of the country, partly because of all the rebuffs, hostility, and discrimination in the suburbs. To some extent this explains why Milwaukee ranks third highest among 14 Frostbelt cities in its share of African-Americans still living in the city.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that racial discrimination was omnipresent in Milwaukee for over a century and a half. Early and widespread employment discrimination saw companies make routine decisions not to hire African-Americans or to hire them at the lowest-level service, foundry, tannery, and laborers' jobs. In the housing market real estate and governmental practices served to contain blacks in the inner city. The Milwaukee School Board's policies had the effect of segregating African-American children and teachers. Past discriminatory acts by governmental bodies, businesses, organizations, and individuals precluded many African-Americans from full participation in the life of the community. This history helps explain the high levels of poverty and economic disadvantage in Milwaukee's African-American community in the early to mid-1990s.

Although government today has pulled back from trying to solve the problems of poverty and social ills in any massive way, the City of Milwaukee has a good record in delivering basic services, holding the city's budget below inflation, trying to attract more businesses, and encouraging private investment on the theory that "a rising tide lifts all boats." To some extent these strategies have paid off. Signs of progress were reported in several important areas: Bureau of Labor Statistics statistics from 1996 showed that black unemployment declined in both the city and region during the latter half of the 1990s, and through the efforts of the city and public-private partnerships there was a rise in property values in a number of central city neighborhoods.

However, discriminatory practices still are part of everyday life for many African-Americans in Milwaukee. The number of blacks in executive and managerial jobs remains very low. According to a University of Wisconsin Milwaukee economic report comparing 14 northern cities: "No other Frostbelt area ranks as consistently low as Metro Milwaukee in the proportion of minorities and women who own

businesses or are in management.” The study of 14 Frostbelt cities also showed that the Milwaukee metropolitan area ranked last in the rate of minority-owned businesses.

White-owned businesses still do not readily accept African-American companies as subcontractors, suppliers or competitors. John Bowles, president of the Minority Business Contractors Association, recites example after example of unfair dealings with minority contractors and subcontractors. Why did a promising minority-owned steel fabricating company run into severe financial trouble? Steeltech Manufacturing, Inc., a metal fabricating firm, was built in 1991 in the heart of the inner city, employing 200 people. It had great potential but filed for bankruptcy, owing millions of dollars to the city, state and other secured creditors. The answer appears to lie in the fact that it was originally undercapitalized and perhaps ill-conceived by a white-owned company which needed to do business with a minority-owned firm in order to gain a large government contract. Currently the Wisconsin State Department of Commerce and City of Milwaukee are trying to work out refinancing for Steeltech.

White prime contractors who bid and accept public contracts are regularly asked to meet certain minority business enterprise (MBE) goals. But there have been gross abuses when minority businesses are used as “fronts” including when the MBE owner does not make major decisions or sign contracts thus degrading the potential of minority businesses.

- Housing

In housing the segregative patterns of the past have not changed very much. In the southern-most tier of precincts in the city there have never been more than a few black residents. In 1980 only 50 blacks lived in two large census tracts on the city’s far south side. Over the course of the next 10 years only 120 blacks moved in. Although there has always been moderate-income housing on the south side, most African-Americans have avoided moving there, perhaps because of the history of antagonisms including petitions against open housing, the stoning of open housing marchers, south side aldermen voting against public housing, and a number of private home owners and apartment managers practicing discrimination.

Coupled with this is the ongoing and seemingly intractable problem of little housing integration in the suburbs. Federal mortgage guarantees encouraged white flight in the 1950s and 1960s and produced an “iron ring” of white suburbs around Milwaukee. Exclusionary zoning ordinances exacerbated the problem. Such ordinances called for large homes, large lot sizes, spacious set-backs, or two-car garages beyond the reach of most families. Of the 6,503 homes sold in Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington counties in 1997, only 20 homes were “affordable,” according to the Institute for Wisconsin’s Future. The lack of moderate-income housing can be seen as a purposeful method of discouraging lower-income families from moving to the suburbs, including most minorities.

Yet housing opportunities have improved for affluent African-Americans. If a family can afford it, “...you can buy pretty much anywhere you want” according to a prominent black realtor, Ed Smyth.

Still only 2 1/2 percent of African-Americans in Milwaukee live in the suburbs. The vast majority of blacks still live in the hyper-segregated and ever-expanding central city.

- Education

Education is the most serious problem in Milwaukee. Children with severe educational deficiencies have a dim future, and high-school drop-out rates are high. The need to hold students' attention through the high school years -- whatever reforms it takes -- is a must for the school system, composed of around 60,000 African-American children out of a total of 100,000 students. Yet there has been a chronic lack of ability to get the job done. Still pending are the issues of low graduation rates, smaller class size, equality of funding for poorer school districts and the need for school renovation. A \$366 million school renovation referendum was defeated in Milwaukee in 1993 which could have reduced class size. The unwillingness of taxpayers to pay for more teachers, smaller class size, and building repairs partially reflects the fact that a majority of white school-aged children go to private or religious schools and their families have lost interest in funding a public school system that has become majority African-American.

But by the late 1990s there was somewhat of a turnaround. Political leadership of the city threw its support behind new approaches to education, allowing low-income parents to choose private "choice" schools or charter schools for their children. The "choice" program was first passed by the Wisconsin State legislature at the initiative of Polly Williams, an African-American State legislator from Milwaukee, and includes religious schools (upheld by the Wisconsin Supreme Court in June 1997.) Private "choice" schools and charter schools will allow 15,000 to 20,000 children from low-income families to attend alternative schools. If the hypothesis is true that competition from these schools will spur public school reform, then upward to 85,000 children who remain in MPS will stand to benefit. However, there will be a siphoning off of children from more motivated families leaving behind "exceptional ed" and troubled children who will become a higher proportion of MPS enrollment, making it that much harder for public school teachers to teach.

- Employment

On the employment front African-Americans are still subject to employment discrimination by employers witness the fact that several hundred cases involving race discrimination are brought to the Milwaukee office of the State's Equal Rights Division (ERD) and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) every year.

A recent example involved an African-American woman who worked as a food service worker at a Taco Bell restaurant in Waukesha County. She claimed she was not being paid as much or promoted as quickly as were white employees. The ERD found probable cause to believe that Taco Bell violated Wisconsin's fair employment law -- the case was settled out of court.

A more complex example involves a number of complaints filed by African-American employees at the Milwaukee post office. U.S.

Senator Russ Feingold's office (D.,Wi.) undertook an investigation. Also a class action suit was filed by cafeteria workers at the Milwaukee post office against Sodexo Marriott Services, Inc., and Marriott International. After these firms stopped running the cafeteria, African-American employees charged they were not transferred to the firms other operations as were whites.

The overall employment picture is better however. Employment discrimination against African-Americans has waned some, partly due to the tight labor market which has more or less forced employers to come into Milwaukee to find minority workers.

More employers are willing to hire African-Americans than ever before and more are hiring under Wisconsin's welfare reform initiative (W-2). Publicity and public exhortation surrounding this program has convinced some employers to offer job opportunities to African-Americans for the first time. The "work first" focus of W-2 has placed several thousand former welfare recipients, white and black, into community service and real wage-paying jobs.

Due to the dissemination of the black experience by newspaper columnists, historians, and activists in the Milwaukee area, many more people are aware of the handicaps under which African-Americans have labored in Milwaukee. Many political and business leaders understand the need for continuing efforts to help bring blacks into the mainstream.

Economic and demographic projections show that the workforce of the 21st century will be based largely on minority and immigrant workers. To the extent that African-Americans will take advantage of education, job training programs, technical instruction and higher education, those who are willing to stick with a program to advance their education will have a broad array of opportunities.

Also on the positive side is a growing middle-class of African-American in Milwaukee. The 1990 Census shows there were 9,417 African-American men and women in Milwaukee holding jobs as executives, administrators, managers and professionals. These leaders form a core of opinion makers and activists in the City who work for major businesses, government departments, banks, law firms, hospitals, community-based organizations, sports organizations and so forth. These numbers are bound to increase.

At the other end of the economic spectrum, however, both African-Americans and white workers face a larger set of issues of a growing inequality of income and a low-wage economy. If a recession comes, it will hit the the black community first, as it always does. And if the State of Wisconsin follows in the foot-steps of California and Washington by eliminating race as a factor in state contracting, state employment and admissions to the University, this also will have a deleterious effect. It is a tenuous situation, as former Alderman Vel Phillips alluded to in a recent article: "...you take two steps forward, one step sideways and two steps backward. That's what we have to deal with all the time."

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