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From Walnut Street to No Street:
Milwaukee's Afro-American Businesses, 1945-1967

by

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death opened up the position. He retired in 1963.

Occasionally over the years Elsie had cooked or catered for the rich and famous. While on tour with her father in California, she had catered dinners for movie stars, including Clark Gable. Later on she would work for many of the "old money" Milwaukeeans, including the Uhleins. In the 1950's she organized her own catering business. She took courses at the Milwaukee Area Technical College in business and stenography, and started a business that lasted until 1966. The majority of her clients continued to be the more affluent white populace along Milwaukee's Lake Michigan.[12]

Elsie Miller was not the only black caterer in Milwaukee, but most of the black-owned food services were in restaurants in the heart of the business traffic on Walnut Street. A dozen such restaurants existed along the nine block stretch in the 1950's. While appealing for black patronage, these restaurants also had a mixed race clientele.[13]

Clara's Restaurant, at 722 West Walnut was in business from 1919 to 1957. Clara Turner, originally from Kasopolis, Michigan, came to Milwaukee at age 16, following her sister, who was recently married and working at a Milwaukee restaurant. Clara worked as store stocker for a couple of years before meeting Harry, her future husband, who worked as a chef on the railroads out of Chicago. After marrying in Michigan, with only $10.00 total from wedding presents, they lived in Chicago for a short time before returning to Milwaukee. Deciding to venture into the restaurant business, they tried two other locations before they settled at the 722 West Walnut location. Along with the restaurant, Harry ran a pool hall across the street at 725 Walnut Street until his death in 1957.[14]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Shadd, 1950-51, pp. 75, 103.
Shadd, 1953-54, pp. 53, 83. These include the listings under chicken shack, chili parlors, and restaurants.

Clara's cuisine was "soul food," which she had to learn to cook, as she was unfamiliar with southern style cooking. The restaurant's clientele varied, from sports notables, like the Milwaukee Braves and nationally known musicians, local and national politicians, to a house of "ill repute" which called for delivery and pick up orders.[15]

After her husband's death in 1957, Clara decided to retire, since the restaurant business was changing in Milwaukee. At "the bottom of the hill," in downtown Milwaukee, Afro-Americans were taking advantage of their increasing social freedoms more frequently and dining elsewhere; also fast food chains were becoming part of the landscape. And by 1958, the south side of Walnut Street had been razed for urban renewal and the freeway.[16]

[illegible]

Unlike food services, personal services, such as barbers, beauty shops and funeral homes served an exclusively Afro-American clientele. In other cities, before and shortly after the turn the century, black barbering had an elite white clientele, which changed over to a mostly black clientele after the turn of the century. But in Milwaukee, with its smaller late arriving black population, there never developed a tradition of an old black elite serving an old white aristocracy. Black barber numbered around twenty throughout the 1920's and 1930's and then with the post-war migration they steadily increased to thirty by 1960. These barbershops served the needs of the black community exclusively.

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[14] Joyce Henry, niece of Clara Turner, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 3 March 1993.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

One of those black barber entrepreneurs who wanted to be his own boss was: Eugene Burns Matthews, Sr. Matthews came to Milwaukee from Alabama in 1924 and ultimately became one of the city's best known Afro-American barbers. He built up his savings by working two shifts at Falk Corporation, and later on for A.O. Smith, where he also often worked two shifts. In 1946, with his overtime pay and a loan from Columbia Savings and Loan, Milwaukee's only black bank, Matthews opened his own place inside a drugstore at Eighth and Lloyd Streets. [17]

Matthews had as many as three barbershops at one time, at Eighth Street and North Avenue, Twenty-seventh and Burleigh, and Teutonia and North Avenues. Along with making a good living for his family, Matthews trained many for the barbering trade. And just as the black church was often more than a church, Matthews barber shop was more than a barber shop. In many ways he operated a social institution that provided a network of news, helped to organize community activities, and assisted individuals. It was in Matthews's Eight Street Shop where Felmers

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[17] Fredric Matthews, businessman, son of Eugene Burns Matthews, Sr., interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 13 March 1993.

Chaney, present president of the local NAACP, was persuaded to apply to the Milwaukee Police Academy and where friends gathered to help Vel Phillips, later Milwaukee's first black and first woman councilperson,with her college funds.[18]

Milwaukee had no Afro-American-owned funeral home until 1919, when Daniel W. Raynor, started a small mortuary which lasted until the 1930's. In 1924 Carl Watson and Emile O'Bee established the O'Bee Funeral Home, which is still in business as of this writing. Ernstine O'Bee,wife of Emile, came to Milwaukee from Upilinki, Michigan in 1948. Arriving with a Michigan mortician's license, ready to practice with her husband, she ran into a road block when the state of Wisconsin used a technicality to require her to take additional schooling. She complied, cleverly serving an apprenticeship under her husband. In 1952, she became the first woman in Wisconsin to receive a degree in Mortuary Science.[19]

The O'Bee's lived upstairs above their first four funeral parlors until they occupied the present one at 24th and Center. They started out in a residence on Fifth Street; then they moved to an Eighth Street address, when a church bought the building. The next location was at Seventh and Reservoir, a combination church and funeral home. In 1948 they moved their business to "main street"--617 West Walnut Street--practicing at that location until 1960, when they had to move because of the inclusion of the street's south side for urban renewal.[20]

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[18] Fredric Matthews interview. His father also played semi-professional black baseball, especially in either Beloit or Rockford.

Felmers Chaney, retired MPD Officer, NAACP Milwaukee Chapter President, interview by author, tape recording, Milwaukee, 15 April 1993.

[19] Trotter, pp.80-81.

Ernstine O'Bee, businesswoman, interview by author, tape recording, Milwaukee, 12 March 1993.

O'Bee originally delivered funeral notices to the nearby churches on foot, seeing no need to publish them in the newspapers until later with the growing and expanding Afro-American population. With that growth came other symptoms of a decline in the sense of community. She recalled inviting police officers on the beat in her neighborhood to come in and warm up and talk on cold winter days. But when the new younger officers came on the beat, and she made the same offer, they did not know how to react and looked at her as if they were going to arrest her.[21]

One of the most traditional Afro-American businesses in Milwaukee, even older than the funeral home, was the fuel and ice business. William "Willie" Jones, a War World One veteran, born in Mississippi in 1897, came to Milwaukee in 1914 and operated an ice and coal business for several years on Walnut Street. He also ran a pool hall across the street. From 1930 to 1960, he and his wife Fosteria owned the Hillcrest Hotel, one of Milwaukee's Afro-American hotels. The Hillcrest had sixty-eight rooms, with a rather elegant decor of stained hardwood walls gracing its dining rooms and meeting halls. An old mansion, the building had hallways adjoining other less elegant quarters that made up the rest of the hotel. Rounding out the Joneses' substantial real estate holdings were several residential rental properties, a bowling alley, and a tavern at 738 West

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

Galena Street. But their prize holding, in addition to the hotel, was one of Milwaukee's premier "black and tan" jazz clubs, the Congo Club which operated from 1936 to 1940 at 808-810 West Walnut Street. Mr Jones and others owned the club, but the owners did not manage the business. Jones' real estate dealings made him into something of a banker. He provided the start-up financing for several other taverns; in addition he acted as liquor distributor for these businesses.[22]

Despite the prominence of black businesses along the Walnut Street thoroughfare, this neighborhood was still an area of transition by mid century. Before the black migration, this had been the main area where Milwaukee's Russian Orthodox as well as many of the Reformed Jewish population had made their homes, along with synagogues and businesses to serve their community. During the 1940's and 1950's, this predominantly Jewish population was steadily being replaced by a growing Afro-American one. During this overlap, the two groups affected each other, particularly in the social and economic spheres.[23]

Although animosity has been recorded between the Jewish and Afro-American communities in other Northern cities, notably New York and Chicago, Milwaukee has not had a history of the same. The friction between the two groups in Chicago and New York came about at this time because of business competition and hiring practices. White businesses located in the black communities of Chicago and New York would not hire blacks in their retail stores. As a result, blacks boycotted white businesses, many of which were Jewish owned. While both the Afro-American and Jewish groups suffered persectution, the competition for jobs, business, and housing, all exacerbated by the hard times of the Depression, made for heightened tensions between blacks and Jews during the 1930's.[24]

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[22] Fosteria Jones, retired businesswoman, widow of William Jones,interview by author,Milwaukee, 22 January 1993.

[23] Trotter, p.6.

In Milwaukee, Jews had settled on and around Walnut Street at the turn of the century, but by the late 1920's the Jewish population had begun to leave the area, shifting its borders from Wright and Brown Street on the North and South, and Seventh and Twentieth Streets on the East and West, to the old northwest part of Milwaukee, around Keefe and Lloyd Streets, between North 40th and 64th Streets. Before 1920, the borders of the Afro-American community had edged up to Walnut Street on the north from the Downtown area bordered by Kilbourn Avenue on the south.The respective east and west borders were Third and Seventh Streets. By the end of World War Two the borders had shifted north and west, moving up to Highland boulevard on the South, North Avenue on the north side and out to Twelfth Street on the west. But Walnut Street "retained a distinct flavor of its own" through the 1940's and even into the 1950's, with its decidedly mixed Jewish and Afro-American businesses. An old timer, interviewed about Walnut Street, believed that by 1930, the ideological battles of the earlier Jewish immigrants had given away to secular business interests, that ideas were no longer exported from the street only " ... chopped liver, fish, corned beef, sabbath loaves and cake."[25]

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[24] Drake St. Claire and Horace R. Cayton, Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City (Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1945, update 1970) pp. 244-45,445-446.

Cheryl Greenberg, Or Does It Explode?: Black Harlem in the Great Depression (Oxford University Press, New York, 1991) pp. 118, 136.

Jewish owned businesses-Walnut Street-1945

619 Walnut Street-Peterman and Company-junk

624 Walnut Street-Auto Acceptance Corp.-service dept.

634 Walnut Street-Isadore Weiss-grocery

704 Walnut Street-Regal Theater-Sidney Margoles

725 Walnut Street-Rotter Brothers-bakery

900 Walnut Street-Silverstein-grocery and meat

902 Walnut Street-Gallas Fish Market

912 Walnut Street Jewish Forward-newspaper

923 Walnut Street-Carl Bach-deli

1000 Walnut Street-Jacob Goldberg-drugstore

1101 Walnut Street-Emil Blaskovic-meats

1108 Walnut Street-Nathan Skortinsky-tailor

1122 Walnut Street-Edward Bernard-drugstore

1130 Walnut Street-Daniel Mckensie-Modern Shade-manufacturing

1132 Walnut Street-Hubert Polzer-jewelry

1210 Walnut Street-Lewis Cohen-physician

Names and businesses from Wright's Directory of Milwaukee, 1945.

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[25] Louis J. Swichkow and Lloyd P. Gartner, The History of the Jews of Milwaukee (The Jewish Publication of America, Philadelphia, 1963) pp. 326-328.

Jewish owned businesses-Walnut Street-1956

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600 Walnut Street-Wiegand Drugs
703 Walnut Street-Julius Nashbar-lawyer
704 Walnut Street-Sidney Margoles-Regal Theater
801 Walnut Street-Cut Rate Food Market
900 Walnut Street-Reich's Food Market
902 Walnut Street-Gallas Fish Company
922 Walnut Street-Walnut Street Kosher Meat Market
1000 Walnut Street-Goldberg Drugs
1023 Walnut Street-Laacke Company-awning manufacturer
1024 Walnut Street-Badger Paper Excelsior Co.-paper manufacturer
1039 Walnut Street-Big Milt's Super Value Bar-tavern
1101 Walnut Street-Blaskovics Inc.-poultry wholesaler
1122 Walnut Street-Scheren Drugstore
1125 Walnut Street-Ritten and Taxen Barbershop
1128 Walnut Street-Ruby Leather/White Horse Barber
1129 Walnut Street-Sydney's Furniture Store
1130 Walnut Street-Modern Shade and Linoleum Co.
1132 Walnut Street-Herbert Polzer-jewellery
1138 Walnut Street-Bentley's Clothes and Jewelry
1200 Walnut Street-Palay's Men Shop
1201 Walnut Street-Harry Branovan-shoe store

These two lists of Jewish owned businesses on Walnut Street are taken from City Directories of the posted years, and looking at the ethnic names of the businesses and verifying those names with two persons who lived in the neighborhood, Samuel Gershaw, who lived and worked in the neighborhood in the early 1940's and Nella French who lived in the neighborhood in the 1950's.This is only a partial list of Jewish owned businesses from the area. In a video about Walnut Street, part of the Jewish Archives of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, there appear to be as many as 248 Jewish groceries in the city in 1946-48, (Passover Magazine, March 1980, p.11) many of them likely still in the original area, and many more in the transplanted area northwest of Walnut Street.

The Walnut Street area immediately following World War Two continued to develop its distinctive dual identity. At one and the same time it was the black main street of Milwaukee and traditional home of Jewish merchants who continued to serve not only their own clientele, but black and white gentiles as well. Black-Jewish relations remained amicable: evidently there was enough business to go around in the growing Afro-American community and Jews willingly hired blacks to work in their shops and businesses. One of the long standing connections between the Jewish business community and the Afro-American community came through the local movie theater, the Regal at 704 West Walnut Street. Originally named the Rose Theater in 1916 after its rebuilding, the theater was the site of old silent movies and traveling Yiddish troupes that appeared into the early 1920's. After going through several owners and a foreclosure in 1932, the theater was bought as a partnership in 1938 by a prominent Milwaukee Afro-American attorney, James Dorsey, and a Jewish businessman, Samuel Ludwig. The building was managed by a Jewish couple, Sidney and Sylvia Margoles, who later purchased the Regal and ran it until it closed in 1956. The Margoleses were accepted as part of the Afro-American community, providing black citizens a place to see movies and other entertainment without fear of prejudice or discrimination.[26]

Vivian Beckley, born above her father's barbershop (Eugene

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[26] William A. Vick, “ The History of a Neighborhood By Way of a Theater,” (Seminar Paper, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1991) pp. 4-6,18.

Matthews, Sr.) on Walnut Street, remembers men with pushcarts full of fruit going down the street, shouting out the sale of their wares. Her brother, Fredic Matthews recalls that one of his first jobs was working for an Orthodox Jewish family on Friday nights and Saturdays, so they could observe their Sabbath Day. Donald Jefferson, another native Afro-American Milwaukeean, worked part time at Celo's Clothing and Jewelry on Walnut Street, owned by Louis Putterman, while he was going to college in Milwaukee, from 1952 to 1956.[27]

The number of Jewish-owned businesses from 1940 to 1965 was fairly constant along Walnut Street, but with the demolition of the south side of Walnut Street for the construction of a nursing home, public housing and urban renewal, many businesses were displaced or closed. The majority of these businesses were delicatessens, fish markets and drugstores, with a few manufacturers or wholesalers.[28]

Economic and social connections between the Afro-American and Jewish communities seemed to be the rule rather than the exception in Milwaukee. The foregoing examples tell only of a fraction of the interaction, which needs further exploration. Therefore the Milwaukee examples suggest that Black-Jewish relations do not fit a prescribed model, and there is a need to look at every city on an individual basis. Political interaction, particularly with the Milwaukee branches of the Urban League and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, has also not been examined. Although after the formation of the local chapter of the Urban League in 1919, there was some concern by the Afro-American paper of the time, The Blade, that accepting the former Jewish Settlement House on Ninth and Vine and turning it into a black institution (renamed the Abraham Lincoln House) constituted a mutual acceptance of segregation. In the late 1960's, however, the Jewish Anti-Defamation League was initially involved with the NAACP and Father Groppi in demonstrating for a controversial county-wide open housing law.[29]

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[27] Vivian Beckley, Milwaukee Teacher, Interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 8 February 1993.

Fredic Matthews, Milwaukee Businessman, Interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 13 March 1993.

Donald Jefferson, Milwaukee Social Worker, Interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 19 November 1992.

[28] The business listing are from the Milwaukee City Directories of 1944-45 and 1956. A combination of looking at the ethnic names of the businesses and verifying with two who lived in the neighborhood, Samuel Gershaw, who worked in the neighborhood in the early 1940's and Nella French, who lived in the Walnut Street neighborhood in the 1950's.

During World War Two and after, mainstream Milwaukee began to take notice of the Afro-American "Bronzeville" overlooking downtown, although not for the same reasons that attracted many Afro-Americans from both the Deep South and the nearby metropolis of Chicago and other cities. While mainstream Milwaukee looked at Bronzeville as a place for, and a containment of, those who lived there, blacks were building a community--if not a permanent economic infrastructure, then a social and cultural refuge that resulted in part from its isolation. Those returning from war overseas after 1945, or coming up from the towns and fields in the South found both excitement and opportunity in Milwaukee's Bronzeville. It was a place of transition, influx, and diversity, a more cosmopolitan place than ever before or since. The black-owned jazz and blues nightclubs and community taverns were a vital part of that scene.

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[29] Schmitz, p. 23.
Trotter, p. 107.
Michael Grover, " All Things To Black Folks: The Milwaukee Urban League, 1919-1980" (M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May, 1994?)
Jack Salzman with Adina Back and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, eds., Bridges and Boundaries: African-Americans and American Jews (George Braziller, Inc., New York, 1992).
John Bracey and August Meier, "Towards a Research Agenda on Black and Jews in United States History,"Journal of American Ethnic History, Spring 1992, vol. 12, No. 3, p.63. The first book is a collection of essays on the political interaction, both positive and negative between Afro-Americans and American Jews, the latter a discussion on the development of further historiography and topics of the same two groups.

Chapter Two: "All That Jazz" on Walnut Street

It is late, after midnight, on a Saturday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the summer of 1951, and Walnut Street is bustling with activity. Along with the taverns and restaurants, clothing and record stores are still open at this late hour. A mixture of both Afro-American and white people walk up and down the street, checking out music clubs. A group sings acappella outside of a record store to promote their latest release, with teenagers of both races listening to the singers and to the records in the stores.[1]

During the early 1950's a number of record shops could be found on Walnut Street, most notably: Arthur Gibson's at 707 West Walnut Street, a late night haberdashery, which also had a large record section; Shorty Moore's Bop Shop at 612 West Walnut, owned by one of Milwaukee's first Afro-American radio announcers; and Harlem Records at 919 West Walnut, first run by Mannie Maudlin, Jr., who was the first Afro-American to have a daily radio show, on WEMP-AM in Milwaukee. Harlem Records was later run by Charles and Clara Bruce.[2]

Maudlin, while serving in the Army in Texas during 1943, applied for an announcer's job there; after being told "we don't put niggers on the air" he convinced the station manager to hire him--but only after Maudlin agreed to make his program sound like it was originating from Chicago and consented to come to work through the back door. After the war Maudlin returned to his native Chicago, and worked as a radio announcer at Chicago's WSBC, where he conducted "man on the street" interviews and played jazz and blues records distributed by Chicago's Chess Record Company.

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[1] Dave Luhrssen, " Walnut Street Rhythm" Milwaukee Magazine , August 1993. The atmosphere setting and much of the following in this chapter was researched by the thesis author and written for an article for the magazine by Mr. Luhrssen.

Richard G. Carter, journalist, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording 8 October 1993.

[2] Mannie Maudlin Jr., radio announcer and producer, interview by author, tape recording, 10 November 1991.

Negro Business Guide of the State of Wisconsin , 1950-51, p.83.

Going north to Milwaukee in 1951, Mannie opened his record shop which became a vital institution on Milwaukee's black main street. Sometimes open all night on weekends, the shop was crowded with both black and white teenagers listening to records or the groups themselves promoting their latest recording. In 1953 Mannie returned to Chicago and worked at two other stations until 1969. In that year he came back to Milwaukee, and he not only worked at four other stations over the years:WOKY, WAWA, WELT, WYMS, but he also trained hundreds of women disc jockeys and announcers, especially in blues music, and he produced a syndicated blues program that aired in ten cities.[3]

Mixed in with the Afro-American businesses on Walnut Street were a few Jewish-owned delicatessens and taverns, along with other retail stores. Probably the most notable of those businesses was the Regal movie theater, or "the flicks" as it was affectionately called. As a cultural institution, it was more than a theater. After its Saturday night late show it staged an amateur night with a jitterbug contest, showcasing local black youth, taught by local black musicians, who had given up the road during the 1930's but remained active on the local scene. They played in local Walnut Street clubs, often jamming with nationally known talent, who stayed at their homes while in town. Downtown (white) Milwaukee, with its big hotels at the bottom of the hill, was not taking in Afro-American guests, not yet anyway.[4]

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[3] Mannie Maudlin,Jr., interview.
Milwaukee Journal , 10 April 1983.
" Golden Jubilee Tribute to Mannie Maudlin Jr., 1939-1989," program liner notes.

Afro-American owned or managed jazz and blues clubs had been a part of Milwaukee's Bronzeville since the late 1920's. The Metropole, commanded the jazz scene in Milwaukee at that time. In 1936 the Club Congo became the "in place" until the early 1940's. The Club Congo, not unlike Harlem's Cotton Club, made an impression on mainstream Milwaukee. In 1939, the Milwaukee Journal featured an article on "Milwaukee's Harlem," which went into detail about the atmosphere of the club, complete with its doorman, hat check girl, and a head waiter escorting patrons to their tables. These "black and tan" clubs were named for the mixture of black and white clientele, the latter making up fifty percent or more of the patrons, many of whom came to Bronzeville to let down their hair and spend big money in the "exotic" clubs. The Congo's regular band was Tommy Fox and His Clever Little Foxes. Open for a short time following the Congo, was the Plantation Club, with its regular band, J.D. King and His Brown Groovers. But the Plantation's business did not last beyond World War Two.[5]

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[4] William A. Vick, "Milwaukee's Afro-American Owned Jazz Clubs, 1935-67," seminar paper, Spring 1992.

[5] John Chilton, Who's Who Of Jazz: From Storyville to Swing Street , (DaCapo Press, New

Two of the longest lasting Afro-American owned jazz and blues clubs were the Flame and Moon Glow. The latter begun business in 1930. The Moon Glow's original owner was Robert "Calumet Slim" Freeman, who started out working in Milwaukee in 1928 as a laborer. By 1930 he had opened up a restaurant and later a tavern at 1222 North Seventh Street. The Moon Glow did not appear in city directories until 1945, but it was a jazz and blues center well before then. Mr Freeman took deed to the club's building in 1948 from a Mrs Rose Plakow. Freeman and his wife Maimie, lived next door at 1220 North Seventh Street, where they also ran a rooming house.[6]

Advertised as Milwaukee's oldest "black and tan" in 1948, it featured a great variety of jazz and blues music. Blues recording artist of the day such as "Gator Mouth" Moore and Aberinne Jones of Decca Records performed there, among many others. The Moon Glow offered an intimate setting, as the building was rather narrow and deep. One would enter the club and see the stage at the end of the narrow building. A huge upright piano permanently held center stage, being too heavy to move when not

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York, 1985) pp. 99,105.

Wright's Directory of Milwaukee , (Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee) 1936, Street Index, p. 1570; 1937,p.2107: 1938,p.1627; 1939,p.1639; Business listings, 1940,p. 2213.

Wright's Directory Of Milwaukee , Business listings, 1942, p.2250; 1944-45,p.2247.

"Milwaukee's Harlem Is A Busy Changing Community," Milwaukee Journal , 26 November 1939.

Milwaukee Sentinel, 26 November 1939.

New York Harlem's Cotton Club of the 1920's, it should be noted, differed from the Milwaukee clubs in that it admitted only white patrons.

[6] Wright's Directory of Milwaukee , 1928-1948.

1934 Milwaukee Telephone Directory, Yellow Pages Restaurant listings: 1946, p. 375.

Quit Claim Deed (Milwaukee County Register of Deeds,Milwaukee, vol. 723, p. 151, document # 832724)15 April 1915.

needed.[7]

Milwaukee's other larger and perhaps better known jazz and night club was the Flame, located at 1315 North Ninth Street in a building called Barden Maennerchor Hall, just two short blocks west and one block north of the Moon Glow. Situated on the bottom end of a bend in Ninth Street, the square two story building measuring about fifty feet square, lay corner wise,pointing like a diamond, at the bend in the street. The Flame's business took up the entire first floor of the building. In 1946, the building's owner was Milton Babbitz, who either owned or managed several taverns on the north side of the city at the time. The building was later bought by the Elk's Club #115 in 1949, who used the upstairs level for their meetings.[8]

The Flame's business owner, James "Derby" Thomas, who came to Milwaukee in 1922, was a promoter and "impresario" for acts and arranged for halls and for performances during the 1930's and early 1940's. The promotion business did not pay all the bills, however, as he also worked at the Heil Company, saving money to open the Flame in 1945. Locally well known musicians like Jimmy Dudley, Leonard Gay, Betty Conley, and others were regulars at the Flame and the aforementioned Moon Glow as well. Listings in the Afro-American paper, The Milwaukee Globe, of

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[7] Milwaukee Globe, 6 November 1948.
Insurance Maps of Milwaukee (Sanborn Map Company, 115 Broadway, New York, 1910) v.3, plate 279.

[8] Milwaukee County Registrar of Deeds, vol. 2213, p.257,15 March 1946.
Milwaukee County Registrar of Deeds, vol. 2630, pp. 9-12, 22 June 1949: vol. 2630, p. 14, 24 June 1949.
Insurance Maps of Milwaukee (Sanborn Map Company, 115 Broadway, New York, 1910)v.3, plate 279.

December 11, 1948 had the Steeple Chasers dancing to Leonard Gay's band at the Moon Glow-- while at the Flame, Betty Conley was Mistress of Ceremonies of an eight piece band, supporting no less than eight nightly floor shows. A 5:00 A.M. breakfast show was advertised at the Flame for New Year's Day, implying that they were open all night New Year's Eve.[9]

The Flame boasted a full staff to help their patrons enjoy the shows. In 1950, according to the Chicago Defender, you would find Etta Wright greeting you at the door, with Burnell Sutton checking your hat and coat. Once at your table, either LeNora Strong, Martina Bracey, Nellie Wilson or Frances Smith would take your order. Billed as band leader and playing jazz organ was Loretta Whyte,with Mayme Myrick,as well, taking her turn at "tickling the ivories." Mondays were the entertainers' night off, followed by "Celebrity Night" on Tuesdays at the Flame, where for many years such noted stars as Duke Ellington or Count Basie performed. In fact, Duke Ellington and his band came to the Flame many times, including a special 1957 appearance to help celebrate the Flame's anniversary. At a less exalted level, not entirely divorced from vaudeville, the Flame might serve up such acts as Princess Tina, a "shake artist," and Billy McAllister, a female impersonator.[10]

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[9] Loretta Whyte Thomas, retired musician and widow to James Thomas, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 9 July 1993. Mrs. Thomas begun her career in the late 1910's , arriving in Milwaukee in 1928, playing jazz organ until her retirement in the late 1980's.Her repertoire was quite extensive, the bands she performed with, could not be "stumped" until the early 1970's.

Wright's Directory , 1944-45, name index, p.102.
Milwaukee Globe , 11 December 1948, p.4.

[10] Chicago Defender, Milwaukee edition , 30 December 1950, clippings from Mattie Belle Woods, then editor of the Milwaukee edition of the Chicago Defender, not to be confused with Mary Ellen Shadd, who was editor of the later separate Milwaukee Defender .

Elizabeth Pierce interview.

Along with presenting their own acts, the Flame or Moon Glow rented their facilities to black social clubs who arranged “matinees,” usually on Sunday afternoons. These affairs ran the gamut from amateur hours to nationally known entertainers. In many cases these social clubs provided their own exclusive entertainment; in fact as early as 1932 black clubs were founded for the sole purpose of providing high class recreation for their members.The club memberships numbered from anywhere between eight to fifteen people. Usually divided along gender lines, the social clubs had names such as the Chatterboxes, the Flamingoes, Milwaukee Ladies, and the Les Belle Femmes, for women. Examples of the men’s clubs names were the Top Hat Club and the Variety Boys.[11]

The social clubs would invite each other to various social functions and outings, such as trips to Chicago or formal dances, complete with formal dress for the ladies and tuxedo and tails for the men. Leonard Gay and Jimmy Dudley, among other Milwaukee musicians, would play at many of these dances, usually located at the separate Afro-American Booker T. Washington YMCA on Walnut Street.[12]

Milwaukee Defender, 9 November 1957.
Milwaukee Globe, 6 November 1948, p.4.

[11] Buchanan, pp. 114-115, 17,118.
Milwaukee Courier,Special Supplement, 11-17, February 1974, p.9.
Milwaukee Sepian, 17 February 1951, p.1.
Mary Ellen Shadd, ed., Negro Business Directory to the State of Wisconsin, 1950- 51, pp. 59-60, 62,64.
Dempsey Travis, An Autobiography of Black Jazz (Urban Research Institute Inc., Chicago, 1983) pp. 244-45. Milwaukee’s smaller Afro-American population, whose social and other clubs numbered in the hundreds, was a smaller version of Chicago, where as many as 2500 work-related or social clubs visited jazz and dance halls in the 1930’s and 1940’s.

[12] Eleanore Montgomery, retired, daughter of James Dudley, Milwaukee, interview by author, tape recording, 6 November 1991.

Much of the funds needed to put on these affairs came from the Sunday jazz matinees performed at the Flame and Moon Glow. Social clubs would sponsor and sell tickets to the performances to members of the other social clubs, who would patronize each other's matinees, usually insuring a sellout for just about every matinee. Put on three or four times a month, and starting at two or three in the afternoon, the matinees kept the jazz clubs busy. At times the matinees were sold out months in advance, especially when a "big name" performance date occasionally fell on a social club's sponsor day. Both the jazz clubs and social clubs did well in these joint ventures, as the social clubs usually worked on a percentage of the take from the liquor proceeds. While the social clubs originated as outlets for free time and entertainment, they also helped people in dire need, with activities such as fund raising for families who lost loved ones and possessions in a fire. By 1959, there were 160 listings of social, religious, and fraternal organizations in the Afro-American area, the majority of them being social clubs.[13]

While national jazz and blues musicians could not be posted on the marquee continuously for these clubs, the local talent sometimes had a

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Janice Gay, Milwaukee Public Schools, daughter of Leonard Gay, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 16 November 1991.

Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; photo archives.

[13] Mr. William Mosby, retired businessman, interviews by author, tape recordings, Milwaukee, 23 October 1991; 25 October 1992.

Eleanore Montgomery interview.

Elizabeth Pierce interview.

Milwaukee Glob e, 11 December 1948.

Milwaukee Courier , Special Supplement, 11-17, February 1974, p.22.

Mary Ellen Shadd, ed., Negro Business Directory to the State of Wisconsin , 1959, pp.41,43,45.

Even though staying with his family became his main reason for quitting the road, he did not miss out altogether playing with some of the great jazz musicians of the time. During the time that his band was the mainstay at the Moon Glow, as well as playing in other clubs like the Flame, many musicians came to Milwaukee to perform with him. His daughter Janice Gay has memories as a child of musicians staying at the house when they came to town to perform in Milwaukee. It was taken for granted to see famous musicians at their home.[15]

Leonard was one of the black business entrepreneurs of the 1950's as well. By 1952, he was in partnership with a grocery store at 602 West Brown Street, taking full ownership a few years later. He played part time, and he worked at the grocery store part time, but by 1962 the store had become a full time endeavor at its new location, 1801 West Wright Street. Mr Gay learned the butchering trade, and made a locally famous sausage that even his competition bought to sell at their stores. Mr Gay ran the business until his death in 1975.[16]

Another part of Leonard Gay's legacy was his influence on others in the local entertainment industry. He arranged the majority of the music he

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[14] Janice Gay interview.

Albert McCarthy, Big Band Jazz (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1974) pp. 20, 28, 103-104, 121-124, 126, 164.

Ms Gay related the story of when she was three years old, when her father greeted her at the train station after a road trip and she did not recognize him. It was then he decided to quit the road. After his death, she found a letter telling of the decision between his love of jazz and family, but not regretting it.

[15] Janice Gay interview, 16 October 1991.

[16] Ibid.

performed at the clubs, as well as arranging for several other musicians. At one time his basement was full of sheet music from his arrangements. Along with his band he also helped organize a dance chorus of women, supervised and choreographed by Elizabeth Pierce, whose stage name was Betty Conley. For the many years she performed at the Moon Glow, as well as serving as its Mistress of Ceremonies.[17]

Betty Conley came to Milwaukee via Chicago about 1931, well versed and educated by Hal Thompson in piano music and many varieties of dances, including tap, soft shoe, and acrobatic styles. While in Chicago she even worked for a brief time for the Music Corporation of America, Inc. (MCA), the largest talent agency in the world at the time, which eventually owned Universal Studios. Her main reason for coming to Milwaukee was to find a smaller community for her child, her mother, and herself to live and work in.[18]

Initially she found her first job in Milwaukee a bit disappointing. She worked for Mr Swan Carter, who owned a place called the Entertainer's Club (614-618 West Vliet Street). The outside of the place looked like a drab house, with the interior little more than a large room with a small bar, some small tables and chairs, and a small elevated platform for a stage, featuring only a four piece band. Six to seven women dancers took turns, accompanied by the band.

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Elizabeth Pierce, retired dancer and choreographer, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 15 October 1991.

Shortly after Conley began work at the club, a Milwaukee County Sheriff came by to see about rule and crowd enforcement. Apparently, as Conley was a light skinned Afro-American, it was rumored she was white, and Caucasian women were not supposed to be dancing in these clubs in that part of town. The sheriff questioned her about her racial background, which she took affront to; the sheriff asked if she could dance for him sometime, implying an obvious double meaning. She replied that the only time he could see her dance was there at the club, after paying an admission cover like everyone else. Activities other than jazz music and drinking were apparently taking place at the club, as it was later raided and closed down. The day of the raid, Conley was not at work, being told by someone with connections to law enforcement to take that day off.[19]

Working for a time at both the Congo and Plantation clubs, Conley was in a good position to persuade her contacts in the music and dancing world of Chicago to come up to Milwaukee. Like Leonard Gay, she helped elevate the image of Milwaukee as a jazz locale. Ranging from little things like painting the dancers' shoes with aluminum radiator paint to big things like bringing professional choreography to dance routines, she exposed local entertainers to big time tricks of the trade and helped them enhance their acts.[20]

Arrangements and rehearsals for an evening's entertainment started about two in the afternoon; Betty worked with Leonard Gay and another local musician, Claude Dorsey, putting together songs and dance steps for the night's routines. They used the basic half and whole steps, and featured her well known style of acrobatic dancing to the songs. The songs were a variety of the basic thirty-two bar blues songs with a chorus. While working at the Moon Glow and Flame for many years, Conley augmented her income at several of the downtown theaters, dancing under contract at the Riverside and Warner theaters, as well as at the Roof Gardens of the Wisconsin theater. Later as dance work became scarce, she waited tables at several restaurants and other taverns in town, as well as on the outskirts of town, including a white owned restaurant, known for its back room gambling, on Blue Mound Road.[21]

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

Another jazz musician who eventually settled in Milwaukee was James "Jimmy" Dudley. Born on June 11, 1903 in Hattisburg Mississippi, he moved during early childhood to St. Louis, Missouri with his father.He was educated in both St. Louis and Milwaukee. While in school in Milwaukee, he met his future wife, Viola Newell, with whom he had two daughters. He was classically trained in violin and cello, but as a young man he switched to saxophone, the instrument which brought him fame. During the 1920's he worked out of Detroit with Everret Robbin's band, the McKinney Cotton Pickers, and he also toured with Eli Rice's band. In 1932, he stopped touring to give more time to his family, but this did not deter him from his music. Records show him playing at the Moon Glow from

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[21] Ibid. Mrs. Pierce had married earlier, meeting her husband at one of the clubs she worked, who was initially involved with the gambling game of policy, but later went to work at the American Motors Plant in Milwaukee.

1934 to 1942 and beyond, as well as playing with Bernie Young's Band in 1942. Known as the man who could play two saxophones simultaneously, he performed at the Flame and later at small clubs and taverns as well.[22]

Eleanor Montgomery, James Dudley's daughter, remembers going to Saturday morning rehearsal at the Moon Glow. She and her sister would sit with the wives and children of band members, and while sipping soda and munching potato chips, listen to the rehearsal for that night's performance. Like Janice Gay, Eleanor remembers people like Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington staying at their home, and having to sleep at a relative's house when they gave up their bedroom for these guests.[23]

These local and nationally known musicians played at the Moon Glow and Flame until their closings in the early 1960's. While the two clubs were where the taxi cabs took people from downtown when asked "where the action was," outside pressure either from other competition or other sources were making business difficult at the Flame in the early 1960's. James and Loretta Thomas had to run the Flame's business out of the Moon Glow location for a month after the city fined and revoked their liquor license at the time. A minor had supposedly been served liquor at the Flame and then urinated on the side of the building. The fine and revocation notice were enforced, but no charge was leveled at the minor for public exposure or urination.[24]

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[22] Eleanore Montgomery interview.
McCarthy, pp. 21, 121.
Chilton, pp. 99, 105.

[23] Eleanore Montgomery interview. By the late 1950's Jimmy Dudley had to work at a lamp shade factory to make ends meet.

Local black high school musicians, who played in some of the jazz bands were allowed on stage during performances at the clubs, but had to exit the businesses between sets and wait outside or be accompanied by an adult while in the club. During the 1940's and early 1950's this next generation of jazz and blues musicians were getting experience and being taught by Leonard Gay, Jimmy Dudley, and Bert Bailey, among others.[25]

Frank Gay, no relation to Leonard Gay, also a native Milwaukeean, who played the trumpet beginning in the ninth grade, was inspired by his cousin Holder Jones who played in a Dixieland band and later taught music.Frank Gay joined the black music union right out of high school in 1948, playing with the local Bernie Young's Band. He also played trumpet with Leonard Gay's band at the Moon Glow or Flame. Since he was under age, he had to stay on stage or step outside the back door between sets.[26]

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[24] Loretta Thomas interview. This and other attempts to revoke his license during the 1950's, particularly concerning individuals who tried to solicit prostitution in the club, while showing prompt police work, put the blame on the owner of the establishment rather than the solicitor. Thomas implies that the growing white owned night club industry may have played a role in applying pressure on black clubs that attracted such a large white clientele.

Milwaukee Journal , "Penalty Voted For Night Club" 16 January 1952. Then Alderman Fred Meyers of the Sixth Ward argued against any suspension of Thomas Derby's license.

[25] Shadd, ed., Negro Business Directory , 1950-51 p.5.
Schmitz, p. 113.

[26] Frank Gay, retired businessman and musician, Milwaukee, interview by author,tape recording , 17 June 1993. Mr. Gay is from a family of trumpet players. Although his cousin helped with his interest in music, years earlier, during the early 1940's, his interest in girls got beer thrown in his face by a waiter, for trying to peek at the dancers at the Congo Club, located in a basement on Walnut Street.

An interview in November 1982 by Dr. Walter Weare of Jack Caryl, a white trumpet player, revealed that Caryl started in jazz, by going to the Congo Club during his high school prom and listening to Leonard Gay. Later he got into the Black Union's after hours location and played sets with Gay and others. Leonard Gay was so impressed with Jack's playing, he asked special permission from the white union to have Jack play with the black band for some performances in Cincinnati, filling in for a trumpet player who had dropped out.

Frank Gay performed with many famous Milwaukee musicians, such as Bunky Green, Willy Pickens, and Bobby Burdett, who could write music from "ear" not having to see the sheet music. Gay toured with several bands in the late 1950's, including the earlier mentioned Bernie Young's, whose white booking agent got gigs for the band all over the state of Wisconsin. The out-of-town performances were almost always for white audiences in such places as Ripon, Green Bay, Clintonville and Marshfield. Private homes or estates booked the band as well, Frank Gay recalled a stage being set up on a huge lawn in front of a mansion and a caterer serving pancakes at midnight.

By 1960, Frank wanted off the road, and he took up the barbering trade. About five years later he owned his own shop, and with his growing family and business responsibilities, Frank played only sporadically after that.[27]

Bands performed not only at the clubs, but the Booker T. Washington YMCA, originally located on Walnut Street, and the Lapham Park Social Center, just north of Walnut, as well as being featured as a house band for the Milwaukee Urban League sponsored social funtions. The Regal theater, Milwaukee's Black Community movie house at 706 West Walnut Street, had amateur nights, sometimes with jitterbug dance contests, sporadically on Friday or Saturday nights after the late show.[28]

As suggested in Chapter One, the Regal theater is a good example of one of the many Jewish business connections to the black community, but it is also a microcosm of the social and economic history of the Walnut Street district. The building at 704-706 West Walnut Street was originally the location of a much smaller building in 1910, named the Olympic Theater, which seated only 270 patrons. By 1916 the Olympic was razed to make way for the five-hundred seat Rose Theater, whose architect, George Zagel, designed several buildings on Walnut Street and throughout the Milwaukee area. The Rose's marquee featured anything from silent movies, during the week, to traveling Yiddish troupes on the weekends, with the later distinguished Hollywood actor Paul Muni performing at the Rose for a short time in 1917. The Columbia Theater at 10th and Walnut, along with the Rose were the main theaters for Yiddish stage productions, as well as the vaudeville and silent movies during this period. The Rose went through several owners, including, Isaac J. Rosenberg, the president of the Beth Israel congregation and Liberty State Bank, who owned the Rose from 1917 to 1926.[29]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Milwaukee Sentinel , 27 October,1939; 3,5,11,17,19,24 November 1939; 1,15 December 1939.

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[29] Swichkow, p. 333.

James Rankin, member of the Theater Historical Society, interview by author, Milwaukee, 18 April 1991.

Larry Widen and Judi Anderson, Milwaukee Movie Palaces (Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1986) pp. 10, 158.

Wright's Directory of Milwaukee (Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee, 1910,1913 1917) p. 815, p.2030, p.1924.

Insurance Maps of Milwaukee (Sanborn Map Company, 115 Broadway, New York, 1910,update 1926) v.3, plates 248,264.

Quit Claim Deed (Milwaukee County Register of Deeds, Milwaukee, vol. 632, p. 525, document # unknown) 26 March 1910.

Warranty Deed (Milwaukee County Register of Deeds,Milwaukee,vol. 688, p.71, document# 793943) 18 February 1914.

Special Guardian Deed (Milwaukee County Register of Deeds, Milwaukee, vol. 728, p. 120, document # unknown) 10 March 1916.

Jerome Lawrence, Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni (G.P. Putnam's and Sons, New York, 1974)pp.68-69.

Newspaper clippings, unknown paper unknown date (Milwaukee County Historical Society Library, Milwaukee) Theater history microfilms, 1900-1960. The clippings list the Rose and

Rosenberg closed the theater in 1923, and in the late 1920's and early 1930's it passed through several other ownerships, mortgages, and businesses, including a car dealership and garage. The Milwaukee County Sheriff foreclosed on the property in late 1932. Subsequently the Polish Association of America (PAA), a south side Milwaukee Catholic fraternal organization, which may have held one of the many mortgages, took possession of the property. A glass dealership, Rudoy, H. and Sons, Inc., rented the building until 1937.[30]

Evidently someone was able to persuade the PAA to remodel the building into a movie theater again. In September 1938, Samuel Ludwig, an old-time local property owner, and James W. Dorsey, a prominent Afro-American lawyer in Milwaukee's Bronzeville, leased the property and agreed to remodel the theater. Terms for the lease were for five years, but Dorsey and successor Victor Ludwig took deed to the property in April 1948.[31]

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the vaudeville acts and films.

[30] Switchkow, p. 315.
Wright's Directory of Milwaukee, p.2343;1925,p.2425;1926,p.2522;1927,p.2672;1928,p.2715;1929,p.2304;1930,p.2410;1931,p.2627;1932,p.2278; 1937,p.2530.
Warranty Deeds (vol. 735, p.304, document #872348, 10 March 1916; vol. 879, p. 282, document# 1072940, 1 December 1920; vol. 1143, p.33, document# 1405575, 4 January 1926).
Indenture of Lease (vol. 1134, p. 129, document# unknown) 5 January 1926.
Affidavit (vol. 1278, p.458, document#unknown) 27 September 1928.
Quit Claim Deed (vol. 1321, p. 229, document# 1763888) 31 October 1928.
Sheriff's Deed on Foreclosure (vol. 1390, p.439, document # 1930103) 13 December 1932.
Dorothy Fintak, National Secretary of National Fraternal Life, interview by author, Milwaukee, 21 November 1991. The company's original name was the Polish Association of America, changing its name in 1970. The company handled mortgages during the studied time period.

[31] Mrs. Sylvia Margoles, widow of Mr. Sidney Margoles and former owner of the Regal theater, interview by author, Milwaukee, 18 March 1991.
Indenture of Lease (Milwaukee County Register of Deed, Milwaukee, vol. 2192, pp. 398-400,

The remodeled theater, now named the Regal, likely after the famous Regal in Chicago, got quite a going over. A ticket booth rested beneath a new marquee angled over the sidewalk. Plush red curtains graced the ticket window and the screen, and forty inch wide red carpeting ran down the aisle of the theater. All new projection equipment was bought for the theater. These changes were needed, as the earlier businesses during the 1930's had left the building in serious disrepair, with even a car from one of the previous businesses found underneath the stage.[32]

When the theater opened in 1939, Dorsey and Ludwig turned the management over to Barney Sherman, who owned a local movie chain, named Esstee Theaters, and also ran a pharmacy at 3501 West Villard Street. Early shows at the Regal were an odd mix of "race films" with "an all colored cast," mixed at times with all Jewish programs, featuring Yiddish comedy or other acts in Yiddish.[33]

During the early 1940's management of the theater came under the stewardship of Sidney Margoles, who along with his wife Sylvia, are remembered with fondness by the Afro-American neighborhood which they served with loyalty and fairness. Buying the management rights to the

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document # 2606655) 10 December 1942.

[32] Indenture of Lease, (vol. 21292, pp.386-397) 10 December 1942.
Mr. Andrew Reneau, Milwaukee County Court Commissioner, interview by author, Milwaukee, 16 April 1991. Mr. Reneau was a law partner with Mr. Dorsey for a short time in the early 1940's.
Warranty Deed, (vol.2599, p. 370, document #2851456) 17 April 1948.

[33] Mrs. Sylvia Margoles interview, 18 March 1991.
Wright's Directory of Milwaukee, 1942, p.1052: 1945, p.1129.
Milwaukee Sentinel 27, October 1939; 3,5,11,17,19,24 November 1939; 1,15 December 1939.

Regal from Mr Sherman in 1945, Sidney purchased the building in full by October 1950, with help from a silent partner, Sylvia's brother, Gene Posner.[34]

The Regal became the place to go for children and teenagers on weekends, where they could spend practically the whole day watching a triple feature of westerns and cartoons, although Sidney did offer comic books as incentives to clear the theater for the next show. The theater was rented for civil and social talks for the local black youth as well. Afro-American track star Jesse Owens came to speak to black youth at the Regal in the early 1950's. Along with a talk from Owens, a rather graphic film on the danger of venereal disease was shown with nurses in attendance for the weak in stomach and heart. Showings during the week were of a more mature fare, with a mixture of musicals and melodramas, along with a growing number of "race films," featuring all black casts. These films constituted a special genre produced exclusively for the Afro-American populace. In addition to black actors some of the films had black directors and producers like Oscar Micheaux and other early black film makers.[35]

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[34] Wright's Directory of Milwaukee , 1945, p.771;1947, p.837.
Sylvia Margoles interview, 18 March 1991.
Warranty Deed (vol. 2809, p. 237,238,document# 2980926) 19 October 1950.

[35] Mr. Clarence Conrad, retired projectionist, interviewed by author, Milwaukee, 2 April 1991. Mr. Conrad, born in 1899, worked as a projectionist from 1929-64.

Sylvia Margoles interviews, 18, 21 March 1991.

Mr. Ted Hardie, owner of film distributor company, interview by author, Milwaukee, 20 March 1991.

Trotter, p. 201. The mention Trotter makes of the Regal was that "Many Afro-Americans ,especially middle class blacks , refused to patronize the Regal 'because of noise caused by children' and the lack of supervision."

Mr. Rueben Harpole, Jr., Senior Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, interview by author, Milwaukee, 2 April 1991.

Mr. Margoles went to extremes at times to keep the business going and entertain the neighborhood. In 1947, when a huge snowstorm closed up Milwaukee, and Margoles and his

The popular amateur nights became the training ground for the likes of pianist Billy Wallace, along with Bunky Green, Willy Pickens, Phoenix Newborn, and even for a short time, saxophonist Frank Morgan; all had been taught by the aforementioned Leonard Gay, Jimmy Dudley, and Bert Bailey.[36]

Sidney Margoles hired local Afro-American teenagers to work as clerks at the candy counter, as well as ushers and cashiers at the ticket booth. Among those who got their first jobs at the Regal were: Sara Scott a cashier, who became a legendary principal in the Milwaukee Public School system, with a school named after her; O. C. White, disc jockey and community leader, worked as an usher; and Alexander Mitchell, with the Milwaukee Urban League, worked as an usher and ticket taker.[37]

The projectionist job, however, was filled during most of the years by a white person, Clarence Conrad, a member of the Projectionist Union Local Number 164. Sidney wanted to fill the job with an Afro-American, possibly during 1952, when Mr Conrad was leaving the Regal to work elsewhere, but the idea did not sit well with the union. Oscar Olson, the

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projectionist, Clarence Conrad, were stuck at the theater for three days, they used a sled to retrieve films from the distributor, out at 25th and Clybourn, along with provisions, to last out the storm. On holidays the Margoles would bring turkey, ham, baked goods,and sandwiches for their patrons.

Thomas Cripps, Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942 (Oxford University Press,New York, 1977)Chapters Three, Seven and Twelve deal with the first black motion pictures made independently of Hollywood for expanding Afro-American urban audiences, first during the silent era in the 1910's and1920's and the second migration during and immediately following World War Two. These films were a reflection, especially in Bronzevillle Milwaukee, of forming a sense of identity from their experience, rather than from the mainstream, which not until well after World War Two, did "Hollywood" even begin to shed black stereotypes.

[36] Reuben K. Harpole, Jr., interview, 2 April 1991.

[37] Sylvia Margoles interview, 18 March 1991.

union's business agent at the time, refused the request, not on racial grounds, he claimed, but because of union seniority rules. Mr Margoles wanted the union to make an exception and tried in vain to make the union leaders change their mind. Apparently there were some Afro-Americans in the projectionist's union, but it is not clear where they worked.[38]

Afro-American musicians, on the other hand, had strength in numbers and formed their own union to deal with discrimination and to provide sickness and death benefits. This came in the form of the American Federation of Musician's Union Local #587. White musicians in Milwaukee had chartered a union as far back as 1896, Local Number 8, which existed under the American Federation of Musicians (A F of M), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (A F of L). Since the A F of M was affiliated with the early AF of L, a racially exclusive craft union, Afro-Americans were excluded from the A F of M, or otherwise told to set up separate black unions affiliated with the A F of M. Milwaukee's Afro-American music union Local Number 587, not chartered until 1924, was set up as "a separate self-governing and self operating body of the main union." Original charter members of 1924 numbered seven.[39]

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[38] Sylvia Margoles interview.

Mr. Gene Posner, brother of Sylvia Margoles, interview by author, Milwaukee, 1 April 1991.

Mr. Clarence Conrad, interview, 2 April 1991.

The information on this incident is currently anecdotal, Mrs. Margoles and Mr. Posner remember the incident occurring and being in the local newspapers but are unclear on exact dates. Checking with the National Labor Relations Board, the Projectionist's Union , as well as the Urban League and NAACP find no record on file.

[39] Negro Business Guide to the State of Wisconsin , 1950-51, p.74.

Alexander DePalme, American Federation of Musicians official, phone interview by author, Milwaukee to New York, 21 October 1991.

The AF of M position on race seemed ambiguous at times. Advertisements in trade publications and papers called for separate black or white musicians under its listings, while at one time the union cancelled a convention in Florida because the state's strict segregation laws were to be enforced. Many of the local Black separates were subordinate to the white locals, but in Milwaukee that appears notto have been the case.[40]

Local 587's longest standing president was Clarence Jackson, who served as president from the early 1950's until the black and white unions merged in 1966. Clarence Jackson, born in Mansfield, Ohio in 1908, played seven reed instruments, including the baritone, bass, and tenor saxophones, as well as the clarinet. Leaving home to perform on the road, Clarence landed a job in New York City with the Jonah Jones band. Playing for a time for the Barnum Bailey Circus Band, Jackson toured the country, including Chicago and Milwaukee, where he chose to play with local bands like the Chicago Nightingales and with Bernie Young's band in Milwaukee. In 1939 he met Irene, his wife to be, and after a short two-week courtship they were married. With this short courtship and her membership in the somewhat conservative African Methodist Episcopal Church, Irene was warned "not to take up with a git fiddler" (musician). Irene Jackson had come to Milwaukee from Kansas in 1935 to attend Marquette University, but with times hard, she took jobs doing domestic work, and later received a degree from the University of Wisconsin,

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[40] George Seltzer, Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians (Scarecrow Press Inc., Metuchen, New Jersey, 1989) p. 109.
Robert D. Leiter, The Musicians and Petrillo (Bookman Associates,Inc., New York, 1953)p.92.

Milwaukee.[41]

During World War Two, Clarence worked as a supervisor at A.O. Smith Company, a position that paid good money, much more than most musician's pay. Clarence left Bernie Young's band for a steady job, as did other musicians. Remaining in the union after the war, he did perform occasional gigs, but preferred to help manage the union, becoming its president in the early 1950's, and remaining on the board for some years after the merger of the black and white unions in 1966.[42]

The functions of the union were to sign up visiting bands so they could work while in town, collect dues and fees for the operation of the union and payment for benefits for its members, and act as mediator between the band leaders and musicians and their job source (usually the club); between the band leaders and their sidemen over wages; and between the band leader and his employer, again usually the club owner. Local unions could not always count on support from the national union, probably a reflection of racism and the fact that jazz and blues music were not considered a proper part of the mainstream. Because of this, jobs would be hard to come by, causing some to resort to accepting illegal underpayment, or to make secret agreements with club owners so they could work.[43]

As for being a meditator between the club owner and the musicians in matters of payment, Local 587 was known to assist in those situations. When Dizzy Gillespie and his band played the Flame, Mr Thomas apparently defaulted on his payment to Dizzy and his associates. This left Dizzy and his group stranded in town without traveling money. The union placed Mr Thomas on a default list, until he paid the band their wages. The group stayed at the rooming house run by Secretary of Local 587, which doubled as the separate black union's location and "after hours" club where local and traveling jazz and blues musicians could see other musicians compete, learn, and play without having to please an audience, except their peers.[44]

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[41] Irene Jackson, retired social worker, interview by author tape recording, 22 October 1991.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Charles Nanry, ed., American Music: From Storyville to Woodstock (Transaction Books, New Brunswick,New Jersey,1972) "A Theory of the Jazz Community" by Robert A. Stebbins, pp. 122-123.

The location of the black music union changed over the years. In 1936 it was situated at 645 West Vliet Street and then moved to 836 West Walnut for a short time in 1939-40, before moving to 737 West Galena Street, also the location of a rooming house for musicians run by Mr Art Dawson. "Musicians and Entertainers Rest" on a weather beaten sign, announced the location of the union in a red brick two story building sitting on the southeast corner of Galena Street. The building's outside appearance gave little clue to the interior's action, especially after the city's main places closed for the night.[45]

Activity did not start until around 2 A.M., after the bars and other downtown clubs and halls closed up. One could not get into the union building those nights unless you had a union card or someone could vouch for you. Inside, the place looked like a family's living room, complete with a couple of couches, a worn linoleum floor, and an archway leading into what was normally the dining room. With lighting at a minimum, a couple of upright pianos could be seen, with a jukebox in a corner of the room, complete with a choice of jazz and blues tunes, like "Maple Leaf Rag" and "Fire House Blues." An all black crowd, but mixed in gender would show up--ten to twenty during the week, but on weekend the place was packed with nearly a hundred. Card games were played until enough musicians arrived to begin a "cutting session."[46]

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[44] Evans Wood, retired, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 30 September 1991.

[45] Wright's Directory , 1937, p.1456;1939,p.1508;1942,p.1460;1949p.61.
" Here's a Ticket to a Jazz Session of Hottest Jazz Players in Town," Milwaukee Journal , 5 December 1941.

Internationally known musicians played at "Art's" after performing for the public earlier for three to four hours. Then they would find a second wind and play usually until dawn. The locally famous played with the internationally famous. Jimmy Dudley played saxophone with the likes of Louis Jordan, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Cab Calloway, and Lionel Hampton, among many others. Other local musicians during the 1940's, like drummer Evans Woods, a native Milwaukeean, who grew up around the corner from "Arts," opened with whoever was in town at the late night "sessions." After he got "warmed up" with the visiting band, the band's own drummer would usually take over. Then he would get his chance to "watch the masters." Over the years he met Lionel Hampton, Jimmy Dorsey, Lucky Thompson, and Charlie Parker at these sessions.[47]

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[46] Milwaukee Journal , 5 December 1941.

[47] Evans Woods interview.
Milwaukee Journal , 5 December 1941.

Following World War Two, management of the after club-union changed hands, under the auspices of "T. Joe" Thomas, the Secretary of Local 587. "T.Joe" Thomas, before arriving in Milwaukee, had been on the train circuit between New Orleans and Chicago, which had a separate car for the bands during the trips up and down the route. Along with his musical work, he and his wife Ruth, opened a restaurant and later a self-service laundry on Walnut Street. They branched out into other catering and hospitality services, and opened other taverns, and did a good business setting up block parties and providing the musicians to play at them.[48]

Local 587's location changed twice during the 1950's to 713A West Center and later to a place on Villard Street, before merging with the white local in 1966, with its headquarters at 87th and Greenfield.[49]

Unions since the 1950's had begun to integrate and merge, including the separate branches of the AF of M, which became mandatory after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But with merging came the possibility of a loss of identity, position and influence. It was also painful to integrate with those who turned you away in the first place. Many Afro-American union officers were fearful of losing their positions and jobs in the union. Talks to bring together the Los Angeles local took three years.

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[48] Ms. Carol Thomas, journalist, daughter of Ruth Thomas, interview by author, 30 October 1991.

[49] Wright's Directory , 1955,name index, p.1369.
Negro Business Guide to the State of Wisconsin , 1950-51, p.89.
Don Neitzel, Secretary of Local Number 8, American Federation of Musicians, interview by author, 18 October 1991.

Chicago's black local took nearly three years to merge with its white local. Black officials were concerned with the total absorption of the their local and its substantial funds as well. Only one Afro-American was elected to the Chicago board after the merger. Kansas City's black Local held out until the building they had used for headquarters was declared a national landmark, as so many Afro-American jazz and blues players had performed there. Nationally, only ten black delegates out of a possible 1096, were present at the AF of M convention by 1975.[50]

Milwaukee had similar problems; many musicians felt that they could not secure as many "gigs" with the onset of the merger. A call to the black union always meant someone was looking for a black musician or group; with the merger, it seemed that whites were getting the gigs that formerly went to blacks. After the merger, payments from a transcription fund used to compensate musicians who played at non profit functions were greatly reduced. Insurance premium fees went up sharply, causing some to go independent, but the union still tried to collect dues from those who had dropped their union membership.[51]

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[50] George Seltzer, Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians (Scarecreow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey, 1989)pp. 109, 114.
Donald Spivey, Union and the Black Musician: The Narrative of William Everett Samuels and Chicago Local 208 (University Press of American Lanharn, Maryland, 1984)pp. 15-16, 66-67.

Martha Artis, jazz singer and teacher, Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 5 February 1993. Martha Artis lived and performed in Kansas City from 1961 to 1975, during the merge of the two unions. During the late 1950's Martha Artis and other musicians created at Jon and Lou's Lounge at 823 W. Walnut, a "Blues Monday" which started at 6 A.M., with performances sometimes past closing time. This drew quite large crowds and other places took on the practice as well. Ms. Artis also helped out budding young jazz musicians. She accompanied native Milwaukeean Manty Ellis, now a well known jazz guitarist to some of his first professional gigs to small bars on then Third Street, such as Trocadero Club at 1425 North 3rd Street.in the late 1950's.

[51] Martha Artis interview.
Evans Woods interview.

Other after hours places popped up in the area during the 1940's. A place called the Cleff Club at 1241 North 3rd Street was raided by police in 1946 for liquor violations. According to the Milwaukee Journal, the club was "frequented by musicians after the licensed places closed." The place must have been very popular, as the raid netted 102 arrests, of which nearly a quarter were white patrons. Several paddy wagons were needed to haul those arrested, with patrons dancing to the jazz band, featuring Claude Dorsey, Herbert Hannah, and James Dudley, while waiting to be taken in and booked.[52]

Another well known after hours place was called Casablanca, run by Eva Hill, who managed a rooming house at an old mansion at 1641 North Fourth Street. The club was in the basement, with many jazz greats from out of town performing there, including Louie Armstrong and Billie Holiday. The Casablanca lasted from the late 1940's to the early 1950's, ultimately closing up because of "outside pressure." Plainsclothe police, both off and on duty, had been part of the audience for years at Casablanca, but they also closed up the nightclub.[53]

Jazz and blues music during this time had always been considered on the margins of the music world, with musicians a part of that margin.

Frank Gay interview.

[52] Milwaukee Journal ," Club Raid Before Dawn Nets Police 102 Patrons", 21 May 1946.

[53] Martha Artis interview .

Wright's Directory , 1947-1967, the 1641 North 4th Street address was just south of Walnut Street, listing show Eva Hill as manager of a rooming house until the middle 1960's, although she was not owner of the property.

However, many of Milwaukee's local musicians became part of the black middle class mainstream, opening businesses or taking an industrial job after a stint on the road. While neighborhood taverns have been a part of Milwaukee's heritage--an extension of the city's brewery businesses--for the black businessperson to open and finance a neighborhood tavern or other businesses, one sometimes had to deal directly or indirectly with part of that margin, the black lottery game of "policy."

Chapter Three: The Luck of the Draw

Although sometimes an embarrassment to Milwaukee's black middle class, the illegal gambling game of "policy," or the "numbers game," which flourished in the black community during the late 1920's through the 1940's, was a mainstay of black popular culture and a functional response to marginalized economic opportunity. Policy was essentially a folk-oriented lottery. Bets as small as a penny stood to win $5.00 , or in some cases as much as a $100.00. During the Depression, $5.00 could feed a family for the better part of month, and $100.00 could make one rich. The money pumped into Milwaukee's policy game, estimated by sources from $400,000 to $1,000,000 a year at its post-war height (the exact amount will likely never be known) was part of an informal (underground) economy that involved other illegal activities such as bootlegging and prostitution. But policy itself was non-violent, and the net profits by the policy "kings" in Milwaukee were often invested into "above ground" real estate and retail businesses, particularly taverns.[1] Neighborhood taverns, of course, have been a part of Milwaukee's mainstream heritage since the nineteenth century, and after the repeal of prohibition they reappeared everywhere.

Part of the growing black business class wanted to share in that heritage. But it was not an investment without risk, and credit from conventional sources was limited at best. It is not surprising, then, that the policy game became something of a social and economic institution in the black community, providing everything from financial credit to charitable contributions. It also took on political meaning, as the white community sporadically (and hypocritically perhaps) called for campaigns against gambling and vice in the black community. What follows is a brief history of the origins of policy and its beginnings in Milwaukee, including the perceptions of mainstream Milwaukee and how the Afro-American community dealt with those perceptions.

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[1] Milwaukee Journal , 18 July 1948. The Journal put estimates of policy at the $1,000,000 mark.

Milwaukee Sentinel , 21 August 1948. The Sentinel put estimates at closer to $400,000. Trotter, p. 206, from Black Metropolis , v.2, p.527.

Lotteries, which had been run by some local and state governments in the eastern part of the country in the early 1800's, became part of that period's reformer agenda in trying to make gambling part of a consumption of leisure tied to a work ethic, but the lottery offered the possibility of not having to work at all. Therefore, policy became associated with idleness and laziness, reinforcing class and racial stereotypes. By the middle of the nineteenth century, with its association with the lower economic classes, considered both uneducated and superstitious by the upper classes, gambling had taken on a dual image among those in power. The privileged saw gambling as a respectable part of their culture, like going to Saratoga Springs for a summer of betting on the horses. But those same privileged saw gambling by the poor as dangerous.[2]

Part of the policy culture involved dream books. Originally published for examining a dream's meaning, they began to list why objects and actions in those dreams were reasons to pick certain numbers for the policy/lottery. Dream books were widely available in Milwaukee at the beginning of the century and were recirculated at some second hand stores. Titles like "Aunt Sally's Policy Player's Dream Book," "The Three Witches," or "Combination Dream Dictionary" told readers what numbers to choose from, what dreams successful bettors had used, what objects, proper names, birthdates, etc., to consult, and when or how much to wager. Dreams and the lottery became a way of life for some in the lower economic classes. They provided the illusion of the power to determine the future with small investments of money.[3]

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[2] Ann Fabian, Card Sharps, Dream Books and Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th Century America (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York,1990)pp. 112, 151.

Milwaukee was not a stranger to gambling. In the 1890's, black and white residents openly engaged in horse race betting and other gambling. Indeed one of the leading gamblers of the day was an Afro-American from Virginia, John. T. Slaughter, who settled in Milwaukee and owned and operated a saloon and gambling house from 1893 to 1908. At the peak of the progressive movement, Slaughter and other gamblers were forced out of business by a reformist county district attorney and the new socialist mayor. The roaring 1920's witnessed the resurgence of gambling, but now with a larger and more segregated black community, there appeared a racial division in the style of gambling: horse race betting and other games of chance in the white community, policy in the black community.[4]

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[3] Fabian, pp.120, 126-27, 136-137.
Milwaukee Journal , " Policy! That's a Real Game: Negro Pastime Educates and May Bring You Riches-Maybe," 23 February 1929.

[4] Buchanan, "Black Milwaukee," pp.22-29; Robert W. Wells, This is Milwaukee (Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1970) pp. 136-142. Used by Trotter, pp.19-20.

The racial separation of gambling was confirmed by the Judge Neeley Report in 1948, one of the outcomes of the investigations into gambling influence and the Milwaukee Police Department. Both communities in Milwaukee had been extensively engaged in gambling, reinforcing an American axiom: that a large segment of the population could engage in illegal activity without police problems if the police were a part of the activity. Investigations into policy gambling inevitably resulted in concern over police corruption. New York City, at the turn of the century, saw policy "writers" being frank at hearings, as the police were the object of inquiry, not the gamblers. Milwaukee's 1948 John Doe investigation (discussed later in this chapter) began as of the result of charges of police complicity in policy by the Milwaukee Journal.[5]

Although policy was not as extensive in the Milwaukee's black community in the 1920's as in New York City's Harlem or Chicago's black metropolis, it was run similarly to Chicago's game. Policy "runners" had operated openly in Milwaukee in the late 1920's, even soliciting bets door to door, but the system moved further underground by the early 1940's. Bets were taken in pool halls, taverns, or in alleys hidden from street view. As many as fifty runners took an order of three numbered sequences, giving a copy of those numbers to the bettor. These runners kept a book from every wheel, as customers would have their preferences, and runners did not wish to decline an offer, as they got up to twenty-five cents for each dollar collected. Drawings were held twice a day with three wheels the norm in the area, with as many seven to eleven during 1948 when new operators wanted a "piece of the action." Done on the run, drawings shifted from place to place to avoid detection, and by the late 1940's were even done in moving cars at times. Results of the previous night's and the present day's drawings were printed on slips and given to writers and runners, who handed out the results to those who had wagered earlier. Originally the winning numbers were selected from a marker on a spinning wheel, but by the early 1940's that system had changed as well. A drawing was the order of the day by that time, with sheets of paper numbered from 0 to 77 placed inside unmarked opaque identical black rubber tubes, either pulled out of a box or randomly selected off of a table. These drawings were usually performed and supervised by the policy writers, as they were considered the most independent, working for all the policy organizations or "wheels." Drawings would be scratched if the slip books and money did not meld.[6]

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[5] Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (Harper and Row, New York, 1945,1962) p. 331.

Fabian, p.142.

Milwaukee Journal , 9 January 1949.

Policy was being played in the black community by the 1920's, and although not likely started by Clinton "Joe" Harris, he became the best known of Milwaukee's policy "kings" even while keeping a low profile. Born in Atoka, Tennessee in 1899, Harris came to Milwaukee in 1920, finding work first as an "expressman" and later as a laborer at a steel company before opening a billiard parlor at 1435 North Sixth Street in 1932, the location being listed as a tavern after prohibition's end. In 1935 he bought a tavern at 711 West Walnut Street, which became his supposed base of operations for policy in Milwaukee. [7]

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[6] Milwaukee Journal, 23 February 1929.

Milwaukee Journal, "Congo Tavern Loses License: Owner Denies Policy Charge; Council Against Rotating Committee," 25 March 1941. Legislative Reference Library Clipping Files-Vice or Pornography Microfiche. The article tells of police charges of the nightclub being a "hangout for policy players and a gathering spot for prostitutes." But no charges were brought against the owner (listed as Albert Knox) for either of these practices. The period of the revocation is not mentioned in the article, which can be from thirty days to permanently.

Milwaukee Sentinel, 18 August 1948.

Milwaukee Sentinel, "Policy Lowdown: It's Played on Run In Sixth Ward," 28 August 1948.

Norris Atkins, retired construction worker, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, 13 November 1992. Mr. Atkins had a number of professions, baseball player in a black league, pool hall owner, and a counter for Harris's policy game during the late 1930's.

Clinton Harris's investments into the pool table and tavern business, either as a starting point or as part of policy, paid off for him. He had a net worth of $70,000 to $100,000 in 1947, which included at least nine properties;among them a tavern (the 711), an amusement company (Harris Amusements), a livery company (Apex Livery, a taxi cab service) and later a car wash. Those and other holdings were part of the TEV Corporation, held by Clinton, Earl Harris his son, and Vasselina LeVert, a business partner with the firm until 1946.[8]

Divorced by his first wife Lillie in 1947, Clinton remarried in 1948 to Violette Harris, who had come to Milwaukee in 1941 from Clara Turner's hometown of Kasopolis, Michigan. Working for a time at her friend's restaurant, Violette also worked as the first Afro-American secretary at the offices of the Allis Chalmers Company in Milwaukee.[9]

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[7] Milwaukee City Directory , 1925, 1932, 1937.

Milwaukee Sentinel ,1 September 1949, "Highlights of Judge Neelen's Report" Legislative Reference Library, Gambling Microfiche File, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Milwaukee Journal , 9 December 1960.

[8] Milwaukee Sentinel ," Joe Harris Wheel King, Divorce Suit Reveals," 16 August 1948. The Harrises' divorced over charges by Lillie Harris of Clinton having "once giving her a black eye,and associating with other women." Clinton Harris had also owned an unlicensed taxi company (Apex Livery), which he gave control to his son Earl, in the early 1940's after charges of using the taxi company for policy running.

After their marriage in 1948, Violette helped manage the Harris Amusements business, going with Clinton to help with collections and upgrading the records in the machines. When Clinton Harris died in December 1960, Violette inherited his real estate and other business interests. During the middle 1950's and 1960's, the Harris Amusement Company (started before World War Two) had jukeboxes and/or pool tables in anywhere from fifteen to twenty taverns at one time in Milwaukee's Afro-American community. Although the largest Afro-American-owned amusement business in town, Harris considered herself a small operator compared to the two major white juke box companies in town, run by Doug Opitz and Clarence Smith.[10]

Taverns and restaurants are considered two of the riskiest businesses to enter, so getting a loan from a bank would have been difficult, even if one were not Afro-American and relatively new to business and the community. Fees and licenses for taverns and restaurants were raised periodically, especially during and following World War Two. This is where the amusement companies added to the profit margins of many black-owned taverns, restaurants, and barbershops as well, which also

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[9] Violette McFarland (formerly Harris), retired businesswoman, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, Milwaukee, 30 July 1993.

[10] McFarland interview.

Caspar Lyday, retired businessman, interview by author, Milwaukee, tape recording, Milwaukee,5 November 1992.

Milwaukee Journal , 9 December 1960.

Also in the early 1950's "amusement " business listings was a juke box business named Bronzeville Music Company, with Raymond Bates, propretorier; what little information available on this business, was that it was alledged to be white owned.

Milwaukee, she joined other downtown members to spearhead action on reapportionment by going door to door in both the black and white communities. The immediate problem concerned a confusing referendum on reapportionment. A yes vote meant the voter wanted to keep the status quo, a nay vote meant one wanted to change the law. After wearing out three pairs of shoes in a victorious campaign for reapportionment and the forming of a new Second District, Ms. Phillip decided (after her husband declined) that she would run for election as councilwoman in the new district.[2]

Phillips had grown up on Walnut and Tenth Streets, above Goldberg's Drugstore, and had come from a very middle class black family, who were proud to be in the community and always worked for its advancement. In turn, the community had helped finance Vel's education, including a scholarship (from the Elks) enabling her to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 1951 she received her law degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she meet her husband, Dale. She was the first Afro-American woman to receive a law degree from the University, and she and her husband were the first married attorney team to practice before the federal court.[3]

The new city ward plans, drawn up at least three times in four years became official in 1954. Entering the aldermanic race for the newly formed Second District in 1955, Vel again "pounded the pavement" winning a special spring election in 1956. On the Common Council until 1971, she has since served as Wisconsin's Secretary of State and as a judge. While a Common Council member, her main concern was proper housing, both public and private, as she realized that much of the Afro-American populace was being displaced by the urban renewal which she had initially promoted. Pushing for a fair housing law for the city, which would allow anyone to buy a home wherever they could afford it, became her main concern as she despised segregation and did not want public housing to be looked at as merely black tenements.[4] The fight for decent, fair, and open housing for black homes and businesses, which had been a part of the struggle for equal treatment under the law, intensified during the late 1950's and became the major civil rights issue in Milwaukee by 1967.

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[2] Ms. Vel Phillips, judge and attorney, interview by author, 12 April , 7 November 1993.
Milwaukee Journal , 30 December 1953.
Milwaukee Journal , 2 February 1954. The plan for redistricting went through at least three changes and was brought to the Common Council as many times before passage.

[3] Milwaukee Journal , "Negro Woman Enters Race: First To Seek Election to Common Council in Spring Election," 3 October 1955.
Vel Phillips interview.

Milwaukee's steps for urban renewal following World War Two came from Chicago. Chicago was suffering, as were the great majority of cities in the United States, from a shortage of decent housing. In the process of urban renewal, developers virtually ignored the last item. Private groups, like the Metro Housing and Planning Council (MHPC), lobbied Chicago's elite power base to make redevelopment easier for private enterprise concerns. The MHPC wanted a public agency to purchase the land, then condemn, clear,and prepare the properties so they could purchase them at a fraction of their original cost.[5]

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[4] Milwaukee Journal, "Fifteen Reelected to Common Council Seats," 5 April 1956. Vel Phillips interview. Ms. Phillips also said that Mayor Frank Zeidler shared her concerns, and during his last four years in office she was able to visit his office two to three times a week.

Additional political maneuvering showed its hand in the Illinois State House and Chicago's City Hall. The Chicago Housing Authority, originally formed under independent control to provide housing for low income families, came under the control of Chicago's City Council during the years 1947-1949. These changes allowed the Chicago City Council to select areas to be cleared for public housing which became redevelopment areas for private companies. The area they chose was Chicago's Black Belt. 6

Resistance by Chicago's white ethnic groups, many of whom were only first generation Americans, kept Chicago's City Hall from allowing third to sixth generation Afro-Americans from expanding into other areas of Chicago. At the same time, prominent Chicago black politicians were more concerned with the graft from policy and jitney cabs than with challenging the status quo. These actions and inactions made Chicago's Afro-American population that much more frustrated and bitter. They wanted better housing, but they also wanted the opportunity to choose where to live, rather than submit to being warehoused in high rise apartments.[7]

The Afro-American newspaper, The Chicago Defender, allegedly had become much more moderate in the 1940's, with too much reliance on white business advertising, and a dependence on the Democratic Party. Therefore the Defender came down on the side of the developers. The Chicago City Council even repealed an existing anti-discrimination ordinance, the developers making the claim that they could not proceed without some degree of discrimination.[8]

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[5] Arnold Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960 (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1983) pp. 102-104.

[6] Hirsch, pp. 149-151, 223, 240, 252.

[7] Hirsch, p. 129.

By the middle 1950's, further up the shores of Lake Michigan, Milwaukee's private interests were trying to change the eminent domain laws as well, promoting urban renewal as a means of eliminating blight in the city. Reports and charts from the city's housing and health departments had shown how blight was slowly spreading throughout the central city. Two interpretations of the city's eminent domain and public use laws were being argued. The city saw eminent domain and public use of seized property as well served when slums and blight were eliminated, regardless of what happened afterwards. The other interpretation argued that the term "public use"referred to highways, parks and other public facilities, and that to sell seized land to another who would profit through redevelopment was not in the public interest.[9]

Code changes were promoted for the Milwaukee Health Department, with broader terms to make it easier to condemn properties. The arguments of Chicago's developers were echoed in the Milwaukee Journal:

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[8] Hirsch, pp. 127, 249.

[9] Milwaukee Journal ,14 March-April 6 1954, p. 5. This information is from a reprint of a series run in the Milwaukee Journal at the time entitled, " The Blight Within Us" authored by William J. Manly , the Real Estate Editor of the Milwaukee Journal .

"...government and private redevelopers can go no further until the question (of eminent domain) is resolved...Slum land costs are very high. Private operators can't condemn land as the city can. Assembling land for a project often is terribly difficult and costly. So are demolition and replanning. Governmental help in these, along with financial assistance, is considered necessary for any major job." [10]

The last of these Milwaukee Journal articles on blight acknowledged that the "Negro Problem" had not been associated with blight. And Mayor Zeidler in 1952, wanted a study done to show there was no relationship between property values and racial identity, citing similar studies done in San Francisco and Los Angeles which found no correlation between black residents and a decline in property values. But while the newspaper articles pointed to blight throughout the city and blamed it on improper zoning laws and poor land use, not racial and cultural differences, they cited the Hillside area bounded by Sixth and Eleventh, and Walnut and Galena Streets, an area 98 percent black, as an example of the worst blight in the city. The series of articles ended with a Milwaukee Journal editorial praising Chicago's "...bold plan for improvement " in its struggle to control blight.[11]

Neighborhood associations who wanted to be part of the bidding and planning process for their areas were told they would receive no special treatment, and must compete with other potential developers. These associations (Midtown Neighborhood Association and We-Milwaukee, the latter a biracial group) wanted to be recognized by the redevelopment authority so they could be eligible for funds to rehabilitate their own neighborhoods.In the meantime, the developers were either receiving or waiting on funds from congressional appropriations to build on cleared property.[12]

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[10] Ibid., pp. 11,12,13.

[11] Ibid. pp. 7,8,9,14.

As early as 1948 urban renewal had come to the Hillside area in the form of a low rent housing project erected just south of Walnut Street. By 1953, the inclusion of the entire south side of the street from Third to Tenth Street was being considered for additional housing and urban development. A mixed racial business group, The Walnut Street Advancement Association, made up of mostly Afro-American retailers and professional people on the street, were upset over their lack of input and influence concerning the fate of their neighborhood. They registered their protest at Milwaukee City Hall in a demonstration led by Attorney James Dorsey, with eighty people in attendance, including Sam Nicolet of V&V Foods (a white businessman), attorney Theodore Coggs, Ms. Clara Turner, Emile O'Bee, and Richard Lewis, all of whom had businesses on the street. Alderman Fred Meyers of the Sixth Ward attended the protest meeting as well.[13]

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[12] Milwaukee Journal "Core Group Unable to Get On Land," 14 March 1969. The article tells of the associations wanting recognition, while the Milwaukee School of Engineering was waiting for money to build a 3.5 million dollar library classroom.

Milwaukee Sentinel, "Low Income Housing Goal of Midtown Area Group," 14 March 1969.

[13] The Milwaukee Courier , 17 February 1973. This information is from a supplement of article and photos from either the Chicago or Pittsburgh Courier in 1953, which the Milwaukee Courier reprinted with captions and information on the photos for Black History Month.

Another part of the expansion of the urban renewal plan was the Hillside Redevelopment Project, which got under way in 1957. The project area was bounded by North Sixth and Eleventh Streets on the east and west, and West Walnut and West Galena Streets on the north and south sides. This project was placed right in the middle of the black business district, an area that included 99 businesses and a sizable number of residents. Indeed, the program had to relocate 414 families and 126 roomers--a total of over 1400 persons, 98 percent of whom were Afro-American. Getting rid of many substandard buildings in the area was one of the main objectives of the plan, and while many of those displaced were eligible for public housing, these business owners and residents were required to be veterans or to have at least two years residence in Wisconsin to be eligible for that housing. It turned out that 253 families and 65 veterans were eligible for 222 housing units. Thus while new and better housing was replacing blighted housing, it made for overcrowding and forced many in the black community to obtain housing outside their neighborhoods, not an easy task given the racial discrimination in housing. The businesses and homeowners of the Hillside area were told that they were responsible for the selling of their businesses and properties, and they would be given up to two thousand dollars for moving expenses; otherwise the city would take the properties through eminent domain. The city would not sell the land back to them in small parcels, but only by whole blocks. These terms angered many of the businesses, as they could not afford to buy the properties back

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in that manner, and as discussed in chapters one and two, many closed up as a result. The Milwaukee Common Council discussed plans for a new shopping area along Walnut Street, but the plans were never formally approved and nothing was ever built. [14]

The "221" federal loan program, funded by the Federal Housing Association (FHA), was to supply financial assistance to those displaced by urban renewal. This program provided for long term loans (up to forty years) with no down payment. More than 2,000 families were thought to be eligible for the loans. But by the end of 1962 only 321 residential units, located in projects on South First Street, and the other at Teutonia Avenue and Green Tree Road, outside the black community, were purchased. Those eligible originally had only sixty days upon receipt of a certificate to make arrangements and move into available housing. Otherwise the housing units could be rented out by someone else. The program was later changed to give priority to those originally granted housing certificates.[15]

Housing projects built for those displaced by urban renewal or the freeway were full of people, but only a fraction of them were the displaced residents. Seaway Terrace, at 4601 South First Street, was 88 percent occupied in 1962, but only four residents were part of the originally displaced. Zander Terrace, located near Green Tree Road and Teutonia Avenue had only six displaced residents.[16]

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[14] Milwaukee Sentinel ,"Housing Promised in Hillside Plan," 28 May 1957.
Milwaukee Journa l,"Hillside Plan Gets Support" 28 May 1957.
Milwaukee Journal, "Hillside Housing Plans Explained", 11 July 1957.
The Milwaukee Defender, "Hillside Property Purchase to Begin This Fall: Little Opposition is Noted,", 29 May 1957.
The Milwaukee Defender , "Hillside Plan Given Go Sign," 3 August 1957. The Milwaukee Defender was a Afro-American owned and edited paper in business for a few years in the late 1950's, and while the paper supported the new housing, there was also concern for those displaced.
Alderwoman Vel Phillips knew many of her constituents were upset about the displacement, and called the Hillside project both "our challenge and our opportunity" and did not want the housing projects to be seen as purely tenant type solutions.
"Frank Zeidler Papers, 'Hillside, Lapham Park Redevelopment,1956, 57, 59'"Milwaukee Public Library Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Box 198, folder 3. A map from the Housing Authority of Milwaukee for the proposed redevelopment of the area above and below Walnut Street clearly shows a business district shopping area along Walnut between Fourth and Eight Streets.

[15] Milwaukee Journal ,3,4,5 April 1962.

Milwaukee's Housing Authority said they had advertised and sent out invitations to those displaced, but receive little or no response. Department of City Development/Housing Authority (DCD) officials gave the reason for such little response as the following: "Its very simple, people displaced from the center of the city don't want to move to the extremes of the city... If I could take the same type of project and build it at the Hillside location (between North 6th, North 11th, West Walnut, and West Galena Street), I could fill it with displaced families for rentals less than $100 per month."[17]

Richard Perrin, director of the DCD, said it was of his opinion "that most Negroes did not want to move from the core area, because they wished to remain near the persons with whom they were used to associating...." Corneff Taylor, an Afro-American and Director of Milwaukee's Commission on Community Relations, (a division of DCD) made the observation that white families were moving out of the "core" and that ironically prejudice was making room for expanding black families.[18]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Milwaukee Journal , 4 April 1962.

[18] Milwaukee Journal 3 April 1962.
The Negro In Milwaukee: Progress and Portent, 1863-1963 , Milwaukee Commission on

In any case, black citizens found themselves in a bind. Many may have preferred to remain in their neighborhoods, but the homes were being destroyed. In retrospect we can see that more than houses and businesses were lost; it was also the sense of a neighborhood, the uprooting of social and cultural traditions. Many also may have preferred to leave the area, but they were justifiably fearful of what they might encounter. Some aldermen opposed relocation of Afro-Americans outright, using the argument that their white constituents were already paying too much in taxes for welfare and received no federal aid themselves. According to Wesley Scott of the Milwaukee Urban League, the Afro-American community was willing to relocate anywhere in the city. He cited a study the MUL had done with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1960, looking at sixty-six families facing displacement. All sixty-one were willing to relocate in a mixed racial area, and thirty-one were willing to relocate in mixed racial housing. But all would do this, only if guaranteed acceptance and "no trouble." Mr. Scott pointed out that while whites displaced from the Third Ward had been placed throughout the city, blacks were kept in the "core" area, citing eighteen families as an example.[19]

Community Relations, 1963. This booklet published for the Milwaukee Commission on Community Relations in 1963 illustrates the city's misconceptions. The report shows the black employment numbers increased during the decade of 1950 to 1960. However, it does not show the ratios of black to white employment and other crucial numbers. Quotes from the pamphlet echo what Mr. Richard Perrin said in the above statements. "Despite this outward movement of a venturesome few, however, the major Negro population growth still occurs with this 'core area.' This suggests that Negro families, much as the other ethnic groups which earlier settled in the community, prefer to live near friends and friendly institutions. Add to this tendency, restrictive practices which confine Negroes with the older and more or less designated area, and overcrowding results with its many social problems...We must also realize that Negroes of low income, still unaccustomed to life in a Northern city, do not have a long heritage of culture and an ethical tradition on which to build their lives."

[19] Milwaukee Sentinel ,5 April 1962.

Again blacks found themselves caught in a catch-22 situation: they were contained in an area where homes were being destroyed at the same time they were told to seek public housing where they were not welcome. In 1966 Aldermen George Whittow and Clarence Miller proposed that instead of building new housing, the city buy homes already built and rent them to displaced families and donate the home when the rent equaled the purchase price. But even that plan was cut back, and freeway construction further depleted the stock of housing in the central city.[20]

Also in 1966, a study put together by Milwaukee's League of Women Voters pointed to the problems of displaced people and businesses, as a result of urban renewal and freeway construction. The report mentioned the earlier changes in the eminent domain laws which had allowed the state, county, or city to take land for expansion of the economic base of a city such as parking lots and structures, and which also permitted the expansion of individual industry, if it was deemed crucial to the economic health of the area. This put private industrial interests into play as part of the urban renewal of an area, but took away input of the affected neighborhoods.[21]

If urban renewal, a federal funded local city program, had caused problems for neighborhoods, especially for the Afro-American community,

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[20] Milwaukee Journal "Two Aldermen Oppose Relocating Negroes," 1 November 1966. Milwaukee Journal "City Cuts Back Plans for Resettling Families" 26 November 1966. This was for housing in the Kilbourn Town area west of downtown Milwaukee.

[21] Relocation: A Study of Displaced People and Businesses, by the League of Women Voters of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 1966, p.8. Location: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Area Research Center Manuscripts, Milwaukee Urban League files.

the federally financed freeway construction program only intensified those problems. Moreover, another layer of government, Milwaukee County, was thrown into the mix. Ground breaking officially came in 1952 for Milwaukee's freeway construction, but financing had to be worked out and surveys were urged to help with displaced persons and businesses during the freeway's construction over the years. Mayor Zeidler and the city's urban renewal coordinating committee expressed concern over the lack of a fixed plan by the county's freeway planners for the displaced.[22]

The exact number of those displaced by the freeway could only be estimated, since no one agency was responsible at the onset of freeway construction for finding alternative housing during a blitzkrieg of residential and commercial destruction.[23] County and federal freeway programs referred those who needed help to the City Redevelopment Commission which had been responsible for those displaced by urban renewal. But Redevelopment officials, while sympathetic to the displaced, had neither the staff nor the responsibility to work as closely as they had with the urban renewal displacements.[24]

The North-South stretch of freeway, running from the Milwaukee

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[22] Milwaukee Journal "Mayor Steers as City Starts on Freeway,"18 March 1952.
Milwaukee Sentinel "X-Way Plan Again Wins Council Vote" 31 December 1952. The Milwaukee Common Council voted 19 to 8 to approve the freeway plan. Those against wanted to work out financing, the final plan and approach the federal government for funding.
Milwaukee Journal ,"Survey Urged on Relocation" 29 March 1957.
Milwaukee Journal , 4 April 1962.
Milwaukee Journal. "County Is Landlord With a Difference" , 24 April 1964.

[23] Milwaukee Journal , 4 April 1962.
Milwaukee Journal , 24 May 1964.

[24] Milwaukee Journal , 4 April 1962.

County line south to West Walnut Street and along the west side of Seventh Street and the east side of Eight Street, began its planning and clearance in 1959, with construction continuing through the 1960's and 1970's. Construction caused at least 25,000 people (approximately 7,000 black and white families) city wide to be displaced, with nearly 12,000 persons pushed out of their homes in five years along the northern seven mile stretch of the North-South freeway.[25]

Altogether, 426 businesses were displaced for the North-South freeway: 240 retail--including 57 taverns, 34 grocery stores, 28 furniture/appliance stores, 26 automobile/accessory shops, 16 restaurants; 106 service retailers, including cleaners, shoe repairers, photo studios and theaters; 22 small manufacturers, and 9 wholesale firms, along with 33 vacant buildings. Borchert Field, used by an Afro-American semi-pro baseball team, the Milwaukee Brown Brewers was taken out, along with portions of Carver Park and many other playgrounds.

The large displacement of Afro-Americans on the northern end of the freeway, prompted Corneff Taylor, then the executive director of Milwaukee's Human Rights Commission, to say: "We would like to see those persons who are able to pay for standard housing move anywhere in the city." As the great struggle for open housing later in the decade would reveal, such a course of action was not about to happen. The borders of Milwaukee's Afro-American community in 1960 were moving incrementally, taking in an area primarily between Twenty-seventh Street and Holton, on the west and east; and between Keefe and Wells Street along the north and south. Robert Ducharme, chief researcher for the city's land commission, said that most residents displaced by the earlier urban clearance stayed within a two mile radius of their original residence, with virtually no relocation in the suburbs.[26]

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[25] Milwaukee Journal ,"Freeway Will 'Evict' 12,000 in Five Years," 20 September 1959. Milwaukee Journal , 30 October 1964.

In 1957, Milwaukee Aldermen whose wards would be affected by the planned East-West Freeway along the north side of North Avenue, represented by Martin Schrieber, Vel Phillips and Fred Meyers, asked that the plans be changed, otherwise it "would kill off the North Avenue business district." The plan remained unchanged and was approved by the Common Council in 1958, with a partial clearing of the land involving several whole blocks. That stretch of the freeway was never built, but a "no man's land" of empty housing lots remains to this day as a reminder of a very sad chapter in public policy.[27]

"Just compensation" for displacement by these programs had been broadened by 1966 to include not only the market value of properties, but also moving expenses, personal property losses and other incidentals for property owners and for those renting businesses, but still no compensation for residential renters. And as late as 1965, the federal highway program still had no "feasible method" for family relocation and only an advisory body to help with those displaced. [28]

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[26] Milwaukee Journal, 20 September 1959.

[27] Milwaukee Journal, 29 March 1957.
Milwaukee Sentinel, "OK North Belt X-Way Route," 29 October 1958.

Milwaukee's Urban League pointed out in a memorandum that a new eminent domain law, while allowing for compensation of moving expenses, did so only for those who possessed a written three-year lease, a policy which discriminated against many of the urban poor. Correspondence about these shortcomings in the law were sent to Milwaukee's State Assemblymen and Senators. Mr. Dennis Conta, an Assemblyman from Milwaukee, and other legislators sponsored a bill to correct compensation problems for those without a written lease. They pointed out as well that uniformity was needed for all federal programs, including urban renewal and freeway construction.[29]

This disorganization was demonstrated by the lack of cooperation between the city, county and federal governments. Federal money for relocation programs was being held back because the city had no resettlement plans; the city was upset with the county, since the county had the freeway plans, not the city. A freeway commissioner even lobbied to get everyone together and pass laws to help those displaced. Eventually new laws were passed that had a more liberal relocation payment plan, allowing displaced persons to live in homes bought for freeway clearance for up to two months rent free, with a tribunal set up for appeals for up to a six months stay. But all this happened during the years 1968-1969, after

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[28] Relocation: A Study of Displaced People and Businesses, pp. 9,22.

[29] Milwaukee Urban League files, Box 16, Folder 22, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Area Research Center Manuscripts. These files contain a series of letters, memorandum and newspaper clippings about the problems of displacement and compensation concerning urban renewal and freeway construction displacement.
Milwaukee Journal, "Few Lobby For Uprooted Families," 26 October 1969

much of the freeway had cut its way through parts of Milwaukee's Afro-American community up Seventh and Eight Streets. By this time the houses and businesses were long gone.[30]

Presumptions of those in power in Milwaukee, that the mainstream community preferred continually segregating the Afro-American community, were based on abundant evidence. During the late 1950's and early 1960's, mainstream neighborhood association sprang up in fear of the possibility that they might have Afro-American neighbors. Block busting and panic selling by real estate companies along Milwaukee's Northwest side caused further isolation of the black and white communities from each other. [31]

This further isolation into the city's already blighted areas, caused those who saw conditions worsening, to urge "inner core" land owners to stop the blight which had already taken root well before the population change and shift. Only a few in power talked about the need for housing to be available to anyone throughout the city and suburbs. These few voices in the mainstream were not strong enough, and the black community was caught in a double bind. With the loss of their original neighborhood centering on Walnut Street, they were trying to relocate along the boundaries of their earlier settlement, where they met a confusing discriminatory pattern of white resistance and white flight.

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[30] Milwaukee Journal , 26 October 1969.

[31] Milwaukee Sentinel , "Shouts Exchanged At Area Meetings," 21 June 1959.

Milwaukee Gazette, "Prejudice Rampant In Milwaukee," 10 September 1959. 400 Milwaukee southsiders condemned possibility of public housing being built on the near southside of the city.

Milwaukee Sentinel , 10, 26,30 April 1968; and the Milwaukee Journal 28 April, 1968 and 3 May 1968, ran stories of individual interviews of harassment by real estate agents promoting panic buying.

Fredric Matthews recalled after marrying in the early 1960's that when his wife was looking for a place for them to rent, most people were not shy in commenting and said right to her face "we don't rent to niggers."

The pragmatic Booker T. Washington entrepreneurial spirit which helped Milwaukee's Afro-American community serve itself earlier in the century, when the mainstream would not, had been bent but not broken by the late 1960's as a result of its displacement. But it remains to be seen if that approach, or any single approach,is equal to the challenge of the "second ghetto."

ghetto."[2] This new territory was won block by block, and to the extent that the civil rights movement overtook Milwaukee it came in the wake of the 1967 riot when Vel Phillips, Father James Groppi, and a small army of followers successfully fought the battle for an open housing statute. The result may have been "more housing," rather than open housing, but in any case the expansion of the borders of the black community only reinforced the process of decentralization that had begun with urban renewal and freeway construction. At this same time, profound economic changes also threatened the well being of this expanding community. The post-war growth of black Milwaukee, this "late, great migration," owed its existence almost entirely to the expansion of well-paying, unionized, industrial jobs for black men and women who continued to migrate in large numbers form the South and from other northern cities. Beginning in the late 1960's those jobs began to disappear. From 1968 to 1975 Milwaukee lost 16,000 jobs, most of them industrial, the result of 76 companies closing their doors. And that was only the beginning. [3]

There is another story that could be written here--about the manifold efforts to breathe commercial life back into the black community, beginning perhaps with the Milwaukee Small Business opportunity Corporation, an offshoot of the Small Business Administration and the Civil Rights Act of

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[2] Arnold Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960 (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1983).

[3] William F. Thompson, The History of Wisconsin (Madison, 1988) pp. 202, 217. Noted in Paul Geib's M.A. Thesis "The Late, Great Migration: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970 " pp.112-113.

1964. The MSBOC operated only a scant three years until June 1967, when despite some success at regenerating minority businesses it lost its funding. [4] A myriad of other programs would come and go, victims of government bureaucracy, budgeting for the Vietnam War, and a general sense of malaise.

External forces aside, it also would be interesting to rewrite the internal story, deleting the neighborhood dislocation and racial discrimination while keeping the industrial jobs. As Frank Aukofer wrote in 1968, Milwaukee was the "City With A Chance." Milwaukee may have been uniquely positioned to "take off" and show the way to other cities in the post-war period. The convergence of good jobs and the growth of the black population into a critical mass necessary to support an infrastructure of economic institutions and a base of political power might have pulled off the dream of the "black metropolis," the proud, viable city within a city. Of course, one can become too romantic about ethnicity and community. Presently there is great nostalgia for the old time ethnic neighborhoods, but in the case of Walnut Street it is worth remembering that it was partly the product of racial segregation and not without pathology. More than a few black leaders deplored certain of its features--policy, for example, which fell short in empowering the people--and some leaders openly championed urban renewal. And finally, even under the best of conditions, a bigger and better Walnut Street may have been impossible to sustain, given the onset of the shopping mall and the inability of small retail shops to compete with chain stores. Nowhere has integration worked better than in the consumer markets of America.

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[4] Eddie V. Easley, The Negro Business Man in the Milwaukee North Inner Core , (University of Wisconsin, Extension, Madison, 1967, Regents of University of Wisconsin)

Jones, Negro Business Guide to the State of Wisconsin , 1963-64. During the 1950's through the 1960's the number of black businesses according to this report and the black business guide never went down, but it also never increased. But by 1970, the census showed only 74 self-employed Afro-Americans, down from 151 in 1950.(See Chapter One, pp. 21-22.).

The lasting meaning of Walnut Street is probably cultural-- the creative side of how people made the best out of a bad situation. Whatever the future of ethnic economic solidarity, it is the cultural contributions that will continue to enrich our pluralistic society. In this sense, the artistry born in the black after-hours clubs of Milwaukee commands our attention no less than the mainstream society that has inherited that art.