

“Things are not going to settle down.”

The Struggle for Fair Housing in Milwaukee in the 1960s

William Bradley

12 May 2023

1 Introduction

Wisconsin has a diverse political history: in the 1860s, there were near-simultaneous riots against a slave catcher in Janesville¹ and against the Union draft in Port Washington²; a century later, the state elected both anti-Communist firebrand Republican Joseph McCarthy for the U.S. Senate and liberal Democrat Gaylord Nelson for governor; today, Democrats control all but one of the row offices, including the governor's office, but Republicans control the Legislature, and each party controls one U.S. Senate seat. One reason for the state's electing both parties' politicians is its strong regional polarization. The cities of Madison and Milwaukee are very liberal, the small towns in the Driftless region fairly balanced but moving rightward, and the rural areas elsewhere staunchly conservative.

While such polarization is common for swing states in the Midwest, the great difference between Wisconsin and its neighboring states lies in the suburbs of Milwaukee. Demographically and politically, many of the suburbs of Milwaukee are far more conservative and White than comparable suburbs of other large midwestern cities. This is especially true of Ozaukee and Washington counties to the north and northwest, and Waukesha county to the west. This paper explores how the history of racism in housing policy in the city of Milwaukee has affected the political and demographic makeup of the metropolitan Milwaukee area over decades. It gives an overview of the work of activists, including the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council, Father James Groppi and Alderwoman Vel Phillips, as they clashed with the Milwaukee mayor, the Common Council, and racist citizens. During 200 consecutive nights in 1967 and 1968, members

¹ "He Came for the Slave. Janesville's War-Time History Recalled by the Death of William A. Eager. A Slave-Holder's Exciting Visit to the Bower City in 1861," *Wisconsin Historical Society* 1861, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Newspaper/BA5650>.

² "Resistance to the Draft in Wisconsin. The Ozaukee County Riot," *Wisconsin Historical Society* 1862, [wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Newspaper/BA6958](https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Newspaper/BA6958).

of the Youth Council brought their demands for fair housing to the White neighborhoods of Milwaukee.³ During the height of these protests in 1967, after her fair housing bill was once again defeated, Alderwoman Phillips promised the city council that, “Things are not going to settle down.”⁴ Ultimately, the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council was highly successful in calling attention to housing discrimination and in propelling passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act and the Milwaukee fair housing law. However, **this paper finds that these achievements failed to overcome the long-lasting discriminatory effects of government policies like redlining, restrictive covenants, and exclusionary zoning.** As a result, Milwaukee remains the most segregated metropolitan area in the United States.⁵

2 Segregation in Milwaukee City

In first half of 20th century, the federal government implemented policies that promoted housing discrimination. These policies effectively circumvented the 1917 Supreme Court ruling, *Buchanan v. Warley*, which had struck down a Louisville racial zoning ordinance that had restricted the ability of Black citizens to purchase property.⁶ In the 1920s, the Institute for Research in Land Economics and Public Utilities led by Professor Richard Ely at the University of Wisconsin promoted racist assessments of property values.⁷ This idea was implemented

³ Margaret Rozga, "March on Milwaukee," *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007), <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

⁴ *Milwaukee Common Council meeting regarding open housing legislation, September 19, 1967, Wisconsin Historical Society* (1967).

⁵ Marc V. Levine, "The State of Black Milwaukee in National Perspective: Racial Inequality in the Nation's 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas. In 65 Charts and Tables," *Center for Economic Development Publications* 56 (2020), https://dc.uwm.edu/ced_pubs/56.

⁶ "Buchanan v. Warley," ed. U.S. Supreme Court (1917). <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/245us60>.

⁷ "Ely, Richard Theodore, 1854-1943," *Wisconsin Historical Society*, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS1614>.

following passage of The National Housing Act of 1934.⁸ This Act established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) which fully embraced racist housing policies. For example, the FHA in conjunction with the Home Owners Loan Corporation surveyed cities in the 1930s and developed residential security maps which allowed banks to assess home mortgage repayment risk by neighborhood.⁹ Neighborhoods deemed high-risk included predominantly Black residents. These high-risk neighborhoods were identified in red on maps, and this process was referred to as redlining (Figure 1).

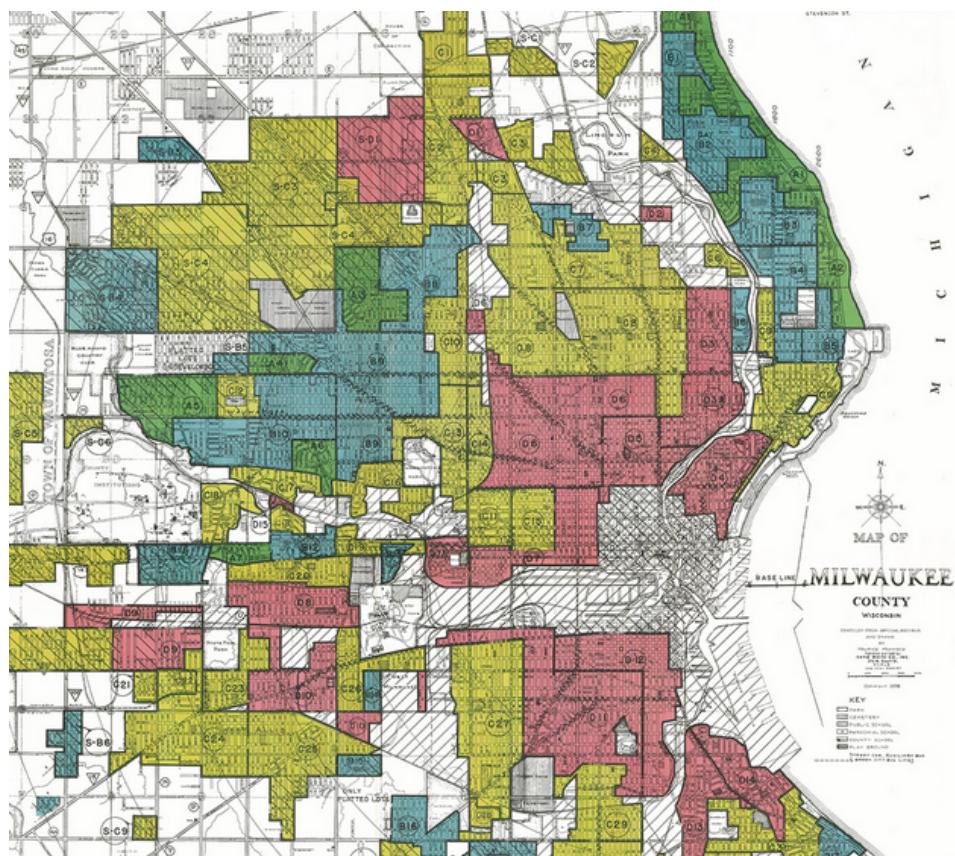


Figure 1: Redlining map of Milwaukee, 1938. <https://www.wiscontext.org/how-redlining-continues-shape-racial-segregation-milwaukee>.

⁸ "National Housing Act (1934)," (2016), <https://livingnewdeal.org/glossary/national-housing-act-1934/>.

⁹ Leah Foltman, "How Redlining Continues To Shape Racial Segregation In Milwaukee," (2019), <https://www.wiscontext.org/how-redlining-continues-shape-racial-segregation-milwaukee>.

As Robert Smith, a history professor at Marquette University explained in 2020:

...redlining referred to the process by which financial institutions made determinations about what neighborhoods and what potential homeowners were the safest risks.

Overwhelmingly, African Americans and African American communities are deemed higher risks, and there were literally red lines drawn on maps to create boundaries and determine where your mortgage would be more expensive and where your insurance costs would be higher.¹⁰

By judging some neighborhoods to be excessively risky for banks to make home loans, the practice of redlining directly contributed to disinvestment, loss of opportunity to build wealth, and poverty in Black neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The Housing Act of 1937 further promoted segregation by establishing racially divided public housing.¹¹

Black Milwaukee residents could conceivably have escaped the effects of redlining if it were not for racially restrictive covenants. In 1926, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of racially exclusionary zoning.¹² As a result, Black residents of redlined neighborhoods in Milwaukee were systematically excluded from the opportunity to move to predominantly White parts of the city and surrounding counties where they could have purchased homes and built wealth. The first of these racially restrictive covenants in the Milwaukee area was introduced in the Washington Highlands development in Wauwatosa, a Milwaukee suburb, in 1919.

¹⁰ Jean-Gabriel Fernandez, "Redlining, Racial Covenants and Suburbia: How Milwaukee Became a Hyper-Segregated City," *Shepherd Express* (2020), shepherdexpress.com/news/features/redlining- racial-covenants-and-suburbia-how-milwaukee-became/.

¹¹ "The United States Housing Act of 1937," ed. U.S. Congress (1937). <https://archive.org/details/Housingact1937>.

¹² *Racial covenants, a relic of the past, are still on the books across the country*, NPR (2021).

At no time shall the land included in Washington Highlands or any part thereof, or any buildings thereon be purchased, owned, leased, or occupied by any person other than of the white race. This prohibition is not intended to include domestic servants while employed by the owner or occupant of any land included in this tract.¹³

The FHA endorsed racially restrictive covenants in 1936 when it stipulated in its Underwriting Manual for home loans that, "Recorded deed restrictions ... should include... prohibition of occupancy of properties except by the race for which they were intended." In keeping with this recommendation, Fox Point Gardens in suburban Milwaukee in 1940 stipulated the following in deeds (Figure 2):

—47. No person of any race other than the Caucasian race shall use or occupy any building lot, or building, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant.

Figure 2 Fox Point Gardens restrictive covenant 1940. Wisconsin Historical Society,
<https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/march/id/1474>.

In 1948, when the U.S. Supreme Court reversed itself and ruled in *Shelley v. Kramer* that racially restrictive covenants were unconstitutional, segregation enforced by racially restrictive covenants in the greater Milwaukee area was well established and not readily undone.¹⁴

¹³ Reggie Jackson, "A White Utopia: How a segregated Milwaukee created the arrogance of suburbia," (2020), <http://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/featured/white-utopia-segregated-milwaukee-created-arrogance-suburbia/>.

¹⁴ "Shelley v. Kraemer," ed. U.S. Supreme Court (1948). <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/334us1>.

By the mid 1960s, government housing policies had taken a major toll on Black urban neighborhoods. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his speech in support of fair housing at Soldier Field in Chicago on July 10, 1966, noted that:

We are here today because we are tired. We are tired of paying more for less.

We are tired of living in rat-infested slums... We are tired of having to pay a median rent of \$97 a month in Lawndale for four rooms while whites living in South Deering pay \$73 a month for five rooms. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children... Now is the time to cure the cancer of racial segregation. Now is the time to get rid of the slums and ghettos of Chicago. Now is the time to make justice a reality all over this nation. Now is the time.¹⁵

In 1968, the Kerner Commission, in response to urban rioting in several U.S. cities, reported that non-White families in central cities in the United States were more likely than White families to pay higher rents in the form of a “color tax” in order to live in dilapidated and overcrowded housing.¹⁶ The Kerner Commission concluded that the main causes of substandard housing for Black residents were poverty, which prevented new investments in Black neighborhoods, and racial discrimination, which prevented Black residents in urban areas from moving to better housing. The Kerner Commission noted that housing discrimination and racial segregation

¹⁵ Martin Luther King Jr, (1966), <https://housingforwardva.org/news/fwd-141-martin-luther-king-fair-housing/>.

¹⁶ Kerner Commission, *Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968).

https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/kerner_commission_full_report.pdf?file=1&force=1.

prevented equal access to employment and educational opportunities. In reference to housing discrimination, the Kerner Commission's report stated that, "a single society cannot be achieved as long as this corner stone of segregation stands." The Kerner Commission recommended "enactment of a national, comprehensive, and enforceable open occupancy law."¹⁷

3 Protests and Protesters

A key figure in the fight for fair housing in Milwaukee was Milwaukee Common Council alderwoman Vel Phillips, the first Black woman to serve on Milwaukee's Common Council. Phillips was well-versed in Milwaukee racial politics, having spent her early childhood living on Milwaukee's south side before her family moved to the all-Black Bronzeville neighborhood.¹⁷ Popular among both the city's Black community and many liberal women in the Democratic Party, Phillips used her coalition to lobby the other members of the Council for open housing in the late 1950s and early 1960s. On March 20, 1962, Phillips first introduced her fair housing bill. Her bill stated, "It is to be the policy of the city of Milwaukee to assure equal opportunity to all persons to live in decent housing facilities, regardless of race, color, or national origin."¹⁸ Her bill was defeated 18-1 by her all-White, all-male Common Council colleagues. She would introduce her bill annually throughout the early-mid 1960s, always with the same result. The fifth time, in 1967, Phillips significantly weakened her proposal—while it would still prohibit discrimination on race and ethnicity, "inquiries as to family, marital, financial and business status were permissible." Mayor Henry Maier signed her bill into law, with the caveat that 51% of

¹⁷ Kitonga Alexander, "Vel R. Phillips: A Woman of Many Firsts," (2022), <https://milwaukeebronzevillehistories.org/items/show/9>.

¹⁸ PBS, "Vel Phillips: Dream Big Dreams," (2015), <https://www.pbs.org/video/wpt-documentaries-vel-phillips-dream-big-dreams/>.

Milwaukee's suburbs had to pass open housing bills before it could take effect.¹⁹ (Not only did this effectively stonewall Phillips's bill, it was also a violation of state law.) In addition to being almost uniformly opposed by her Common Council colleagues, Phillips received many letters in strong opposition to her fair housing proposal, many of which were filled with racist tropes and White supremacist language (Figure 3).²⁰

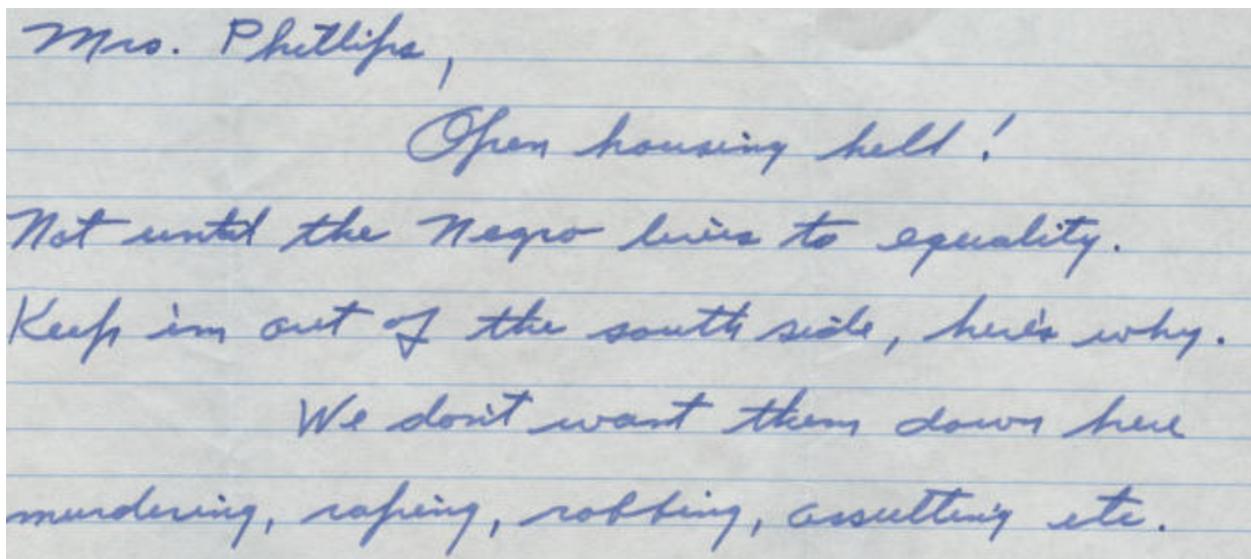


Figure 3 Letter in Opposition to Alderman Vel Phillips' Fair Housing Proposal

Wisconsin Historical Society,

<https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/march/id/2354/rec/6>

Working in parallel with Vel Phillips' fair housing efforts were the Milwaukee NAACP's Youth Council and their advisor, Father James Groppi. Groppi, a Catholic priest and lifelong Milwaukeean, had cut his teeth fighting against segregation in Milwaukee public schools, and

¹⁹ "Otey v. Common Council of City of Milwaukee," (1968), law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/281/264/1575275/.

²⁰ "Letter in Opposition to Alderman Vel Phillips' Fair Housing Proposal," Wisconsin Historical Society, <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/march/id/2354/rec/6>.

then bringing attention to Milwaukee judges' membership in a White-only fraternal organization. He marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. at Selma in 1965 and taught in a Montgomery Freedom School thereafter.²¹ Groppi had shown he had the experience and courage to be a leader of civil rights demonstrations in Milwaukee. As the advisor to Milwaukee's NAACP Youth Council, Groppi led area Black youth in efforts against job discrimination and school segregation. It was the NAACP Youth Council's work for fair housing, however, that became their defining struggle. The Youth Council's first engagement in fair housing came in the case of Ronald Britton, a Vietnam veteran who had been denied housing by a White landlady out of fear of "what would (her) neighbors think?". Britton approached Groppi, who then organized Youth Council members to support Britton through peaceful demonstrations, including singing Christmas carols to the prospective landlady during the holidays.²² Groppi also offered the Youth Council's help to Vel Phillips, who was 4 years into her fair housing advocacy with the Common Council, without any success.

When Groppi organized a march for fair housing in Milwaukee on August 28, 1967, Vel Phillips and the Youth Council were the backbone of his team of almost 200 protesters who marched across the 16th Street Viaduct bridge.²³ The bridge spanned the Menominee River Valley, which acted as the "dividing line between the White and Black communities" in Milwaukee. Although the mayor had quickly sent a large police response when Black Milwaukeeans rioted over jobs, education, and housing the month before,²⁴ 5000 White south-siders jeering, assaulting, and lobbing eggs, rocks, and feces at demonstrators only led to the

²¹ Rozga, "March on Milwaukee." *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007). <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

²² Rozga, "March on Milwaukee." *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007). <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

²³ Rozga, "March on Milwaukee." *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007). <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

²⁴ "Civil Disorder of 1967 ", *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, emke.uwm.edu/entry/civil-disorder-of-1967/.

institution of a curfew and a days-long moratorium on night marches—in effect, punishing the peaceful protesters for the counter-protesters' violence.



Figure 4: "Protesters for Fair Housing," September 8, 1967, *Wisconsin Historical Society*, wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM97930

Despite the hostility they faced, as well as the opposition from mayor Maier, Groppi and the Youth Council resumed marching 2 days later, and marched for 200 nights, through March 1968 (Figure 4).²⁵ The marches grew steadily, peaking at 5000 protesters facing as many as 13,000 in the south side mob.²⁶ The Youth Council's marches caught the attention of Martin Luther King, Jr., who sent a telegram to Father Groppi on September 4, 1967 (Figure 5).

²⁵ "Protesters for Fair Housing," *Wisconsin Historical Society* (1967), wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM97930.

²⁶ Rozga, "March on Milwaukee." *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007). <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

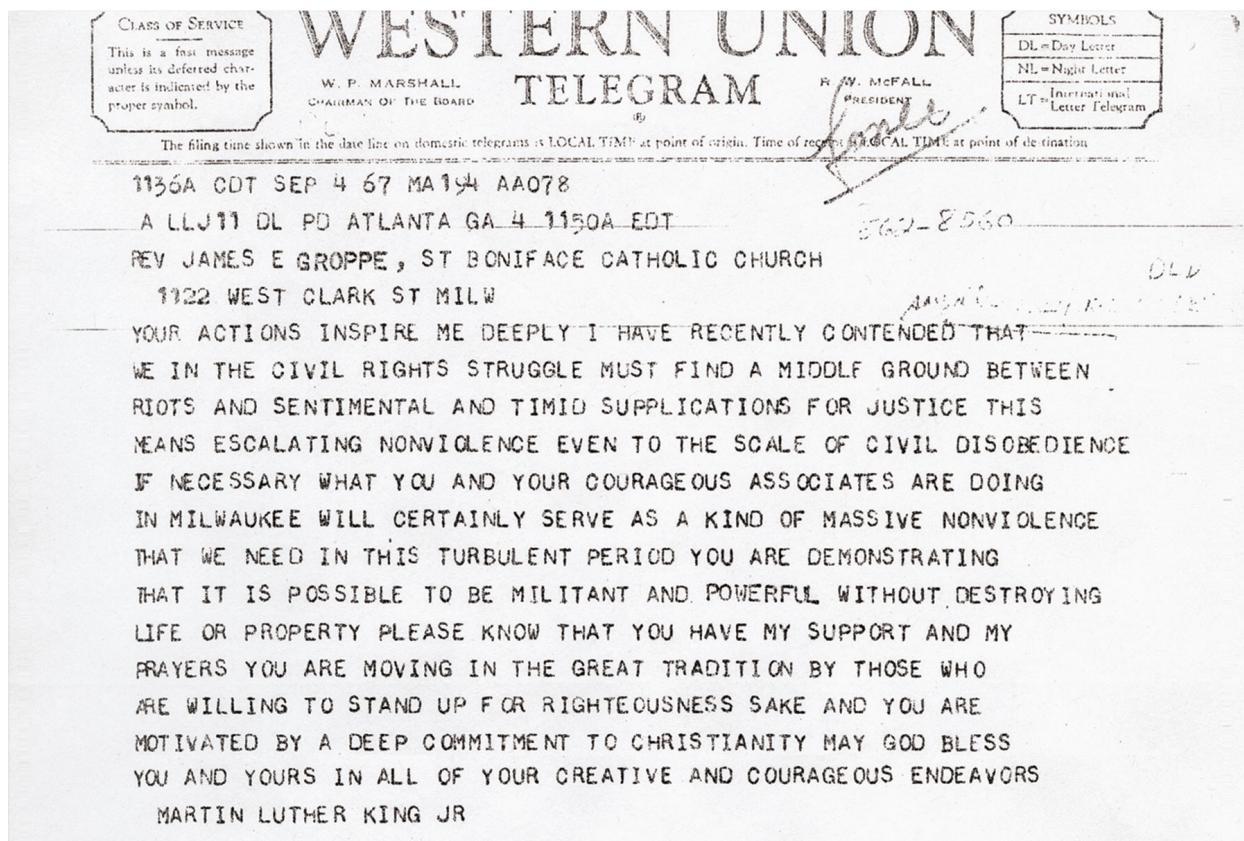


Figure 5: Telegram from Martin Luther King, Jr., to Father James Groppi, September 4, 1967, *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (90):4, 2007.

Groppi's fair housing work was also noticed by Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota as he urged inclusion of a strong fair housing provision in new civil rights legislation being debated by the Senate in February 1968. Senator Mondale referred specifically to Father Groppi and the Milwaukee marchers as he argued for a three-phase process in the law that would eventually cover most housing units throughout the country.²⁷ Senator Mondale wrote to Father Groppi,

²⁷ Walter Mondale, "Congressional Record," (1968), https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay/#_ftn35.

saying “Your contribution to this effort, whether we are defeated or are successful, has been most significant, and I do appreciate it.”²⁸

While the fair housing marches helped sway a coalition of local clergy to support fair housing, they did not change votes at the Common Council nor reverse entrenched White racist ideology in Milwaukee. The marches were halted in late March, 1968, as the Youth Council considered other ways to bring about change.²⁹ That change would come within a week in a devastating form.

Martin Luther King’s assassination on April 4, 1968 caused profound local and national shifts in sentiment and action on housing rights legislation. In Milwaukee, all previous nonviolent marches were dwarfed by the 15,000 person march of Blacks and Whites to mourn King’s death.³⁰ Nationally, the outpouring of grief and anger resulted in the passage of the landmark Housing Rights Act on April 11, 1968. This federal legislation made it illegal to discriminate, based on race and other factors, in the sale, rental, and financing of most housing. The federal law had an immediate impact in Milwaukee. The bill that the Common Council had passed in 1967, nominally to desegregate housing, had only applied to a small minority of homes, and was seen by Black residents as at best a half-measure. The Fair Housing Act demonstrated to Black Milwaukeeans that change was finally happening, and showed the Common Council that stonewalling was no longer tolerated. Outrage over Martin Luther King Jr.’s death also focused public pressure. Another issue that increased Black anger was the collection of petitions from White Milwaukeeans over a resolution that read

²⁸ Walter Mondale, "Letter to James Groppi," *Wisconsin Historical Society* (1968), https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay/#_ftn36.

²⁹ Rozga, "March on Milwaukee." *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007). <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

³⁰ Rozga, "March on Milwaukee." *Wisconsin Historical Society* (2007). <https://uwm.edu/marchonmilwaukee/march-on-milwaukee-essay>.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee SHALL NOT enact any ordinance which in any manner restricts the right of owners of real estate to sell, lease or rent private property.

Under a state statute, the Council had thirty days to either pass the resolution or hold an election on it. They chose the latter option. A Black Milwaukeean, James E. Otey, sued the Common Council, arguing that the resolution would violate the Fourteenth Amendment. The U.S. Supreme Court had ruled only eleven months earlier in *Reitman v. Mulkey* that a similar California ballot initiative was unconstitutional.³¹ The district court judge agreed, and issued a permanent injunction against the referendum.¹⁶ The pent-up anger among Black residents over issues such as this had political consequence in the spring 1968 election, resulting in nine of the nineteen Common Council seats electing new representatives. Of the nine districts that elected new aldermen, six were in majority-Black wards. Clearly, Black voters, angry about the city's moves against integration and emboldened by the passage of the Fair Housing Act, revolted against their representatives at the ballot box. The mayor was also overwhelmingly defeated by a more liberal challenger who won every ward, including Vel Phillips's majority-Black ward. Voters cared far more about the mayor's perceived intolerance for rioting and violence than they did his views on social issues.³²

Using the momentum from the Housing Rights Act, and with a changed political

³¹ U.S. Supreme Court, "Reitman v. Mulkey," (1967). <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1966/483>.

³² Chris Foran, "In a year of strife, Milwaukee re-elected a mayor with 86% of the vote. Yes, 86%" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (2018), www.jsonline.com/story/life/green-sheet/2018/03/27/year-strife-milwaukee-re-elected-mayor-86-vote-yes-86/454891002/.

landscape that now included public support from the previously resistant mayor Maier, Vel Phillips quickly drafted even more robust fair housing language than was included in the federal law. Phillips' proposal banned discrimination for privately owned rental units with as few as 3 units.³³ The Milwaukee fair housing legislation easily passed the Common Council, 15-4, on April 30, 1968, and was effective immediately, in contrast to the federal law's 1970 timeline. With the new local and federal fair housing laws, it appeared that Milwaukee's worst days of housing discrimination and segregation were in the past.

4 White Milwaukeeans Flee to the Suburbs

When asked why his views on fair housing changed, Mayor Maier explained that if he had enacted a city-wide fair housing bill before the federal Fair Housing Act, White Milwaukeeans skeptical of integration would have fled to the suburbs, which had no laws banning redlining or racial covenants. This would have led to effective segregation in Milwaukee, nullifying the purpose of such a law and bleeding the city's tax coffers dry. Once the federal law took effect, it applied to cities and suburbs equally, he explained, meaning that White flight would not occur from Milwaukee to its suburbs. "There will be no place to run," he told the Milwaukee Journal.³⁴

There was a place to run—many places, in fact. As *de jure* segregation—and even some *de facto* segregation—waned in Milwaukee, realtors continued to feed into White residents'

³³ Chris Foran, "Milwaukee gets a strong open-housing law, a surprise to all but the woman who fought for it," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (2018), jsonline.com/story/life/green-.

³⁴ Lawrence Lohmann, "Maier To Advocate Broad Housing Law," *Milwaukee Journal* (1968), archive.org/details/news-article-milwaukee-journal-published-as-the-milwaukee-journal-april-13-1968-p-1.

fears of integration and declining property values. Blockbusting, also known as “panic selling,” was the practice of fomenting reactionary racial politics in White neighborhoods, causing many residents to sell to the blockbusters as quickly as they could at below the market price. The blockbuster then sold the property at a large profit to others—often minorities—and often with very unfavorable lending terms. According to Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Silva, who ran the “Area Stabilization Project,” a local neighborhood organization to stop White flight, most White residents fleeing out of Milwaukee did so because they were misinformed, not prejudiced. Mrs. Silva said that Whites living in integrated neighborhoods were “directed out of [them] by Realtors who act as though they are performing a service,” and that “to suggest that entire blocks panic because of racial prejudice is insulting to both races.” However, according to one employee of a Wisconsin state civil rights division, at least seven real estate firms were involved in blockbusting, and they used both rhetoric about plummeting home prices and played into their White targets’ already existing racial biases—or as she put it, they would foment fears about the “character of the area concerned.” At the time she was interviewed, none of the real estate firms had been charged with wrongdoing, even though blockbusting had recently been made illegal in Wisconsin.³⁵ Although blockbusting was outlawed in 1968, it had long-term effects on urban vs. suburban demographics, and resulted in high rates of poverty loss by Black residents due to foreclosure from the predatory lending terms.

Present-day segregation in the greater Milwaukee area has been reinforced by exclusionary zoning. Even in the absence of racially restrictive covenants, which were officially outlawed in 1948, other forms of exclusionary zoning remain in effect to this day. For example,

³⁵ "US Accused of Blockbusting Ploy," *Milwaukee Journal* (1968), archive.org/details/news-article-milwaukee-journal-published-as-the-milwaukee-journal-november-11-1968-p-19/.

zoning laws in many middle- and upper-class neighborhoods allow for only more expensive single-family homes. In addition, setting minimum lot sizes further increases the costs of housing. By driving up the cost of housing, exclusionary zoning effectively restricts the ability of many Black citizens to afford housing in predominantly White communities in the counties surrounding Milwaukee. The net effect has been to maintain segregation.

5 The Timing of the Great Migration in Milwaukee

The delayed timing of the Great Migration in Milwaukee compared to other urban areas also contributed to segregation by effectively trapping poor Black residents in the city. The difference in timing of the Great Migration to Milwaukee compared to other Midwestern cities can be estimated crudely by looking at how quickly the number of Southern-born Black residents reached half of its eventual peak. By this metric, it took until around 1960 for Milwaukee to get halfway through the Great Migration. Cleveland, Ohio had already reached its midpoint before 1940, and Chicago and Detroit reached theirs during the 1940s. Because of this delayed Great Migration, the Black population of Milwaukee was expanding just as industrial jobs were collapsing.³⁶ As a result, a large Black middle class did not develop in Milwaukee to the extent it did in other northern cities. This further trapped many Black residents within impoverished city neighborhoods.

The timing of White flight was also delayed by 10-20 years as a result of the entrenched institutional racism that delayed fair housing and school desegregation. Comparing a plot of the

³⁶ James Gregory, "Mapping the Great Migration (African American)," *America's Great Migrations Project, Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium / University of Washington*, depts.washington.edu/moving1/map_black_migration.shtml.

population of Milwaukee city (Figure 6) and its suburbs to a similar graph of Cleveland (Figure 7), another Rust Belt city with a large Black population, it is evident that the start of White flight happened in the 1950s for Cleveland but in the 1970s for Milwaukee.³⁷

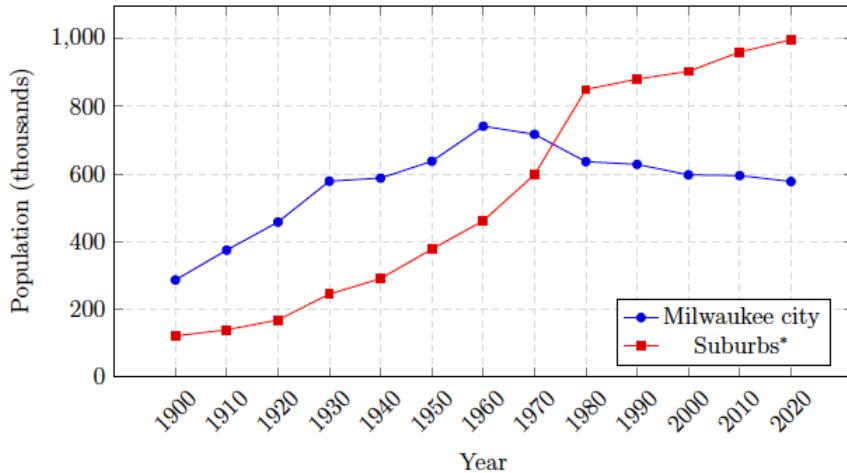


Figure 6: Population over time of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the surrounding suburbs

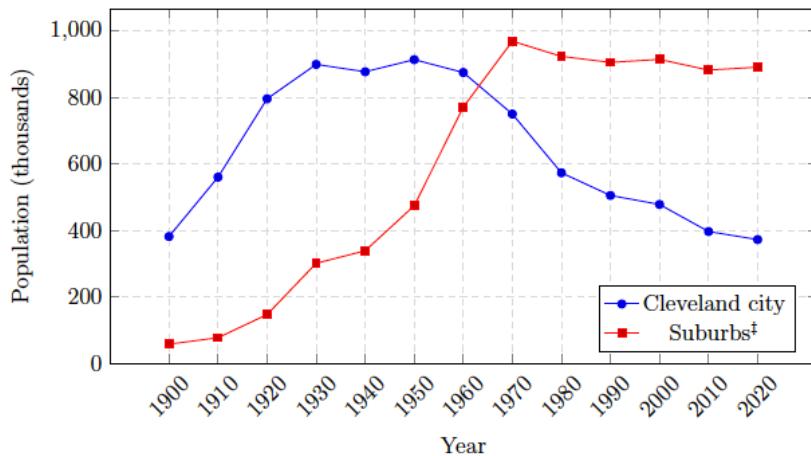


Figure 7: Population over time of Cleveland, Ohio and the surrounding suburbs

³⁷ US Census Bureau, "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990 (" (1995), web.archive.org/web/20170722093454/https://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/wi190090.txt.

6 Conclusions

The youth protests of the 1960s in Milwaukee unfortunately failed to produce lasting improvements in integration. Although the Fair Housing Act explicitly states that, “it shall be unlawful to refuse to sell or rent... a dwelling to any person because of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, or national origin,”³⁸ implementation of this seemingly straight forward law has been incomplete. The ability of federal authorities to enforce the Fair Housing Act was initially quite limited in that they could only attempt to mediate discrimination complaints; formal legal action could not be undertaken.³⁹ In addition, the law’s co-author, Walter Mondale, explained, in an essay he wrote at the time of the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, that, “The law has suffered from neglect. The public servants tasked with implementing it have often forgotten – or refuse to pursue – its ultimate goal of building an integrated society.”⁴⁰ Lack of aggressive enforcement of the Fair Housing Act likely explains, in part, findings from the U.S. Census Bureau in 2019 which showed that the three counties surrounding Milwaukee (Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington) had less than 2% Black residents.⁴¹

The limitations of the Fair Housing Act mean that the legacy effects of redlining, restrictive covenants, and exclusionary zoning live on in modern-day Milwaukee. In 2005, for example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development published a study of

³⁸ "Fair Housing Act," ed. U.S. Congress (1968). <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fair-housing-act-2>.

³⁹ Charles Lamb, *Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960* (2005).

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/housing-segregation-in-suburban-america-since-1960/DD7C74EAC263355C425D4838C2F23D75>.

⁴⁰ Walter Mondale, "The Civil Rights Law We Ignored" *New York Times*, April 10, 2018 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/10/opinion/walter-mondale-fair-housing-act.html>.

⁴¹ Jackson, "A White Utopia: How a segregated Milwaukee created the arrogance of suburbia."

discriminatory housing practices nationally which found that, "the greatest share of discrimination for Hispanic and African-American home seekers can still be attributed to being told units are unavailable when they are available to non-Hispanic whites..."⁴² And, in 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development reached a \$200 million settlement with Associated Bank because of redlining affecting Black and Hispanic residents of the Milwaukee and Chicago metropolitan areas.⁴³ Also in 2017, the Federal Reserve published a study documenting contemporary persistent negative effects of redlining on homeownership rates, house values, and rents.⁴⁴ The long-term effects of housing discrimination explain why greater Milwaukee remains the most segregated large metropolitan area in the United States with the highest Black poverty rate, the highest portion of Black students attending hyper-segregated schools, and the fourth highest infant mortality rate.⁴⁵ In addition, housing discrimination has likely had a major influence on wages and wealth. A Black male worker in Milwaukee has an income that is 59.7% on average that of a White male worker, and nationally, segregation has contributed to an almost ten-fold racial wealth gap that in 2016 was on average \$17,600 for Black families versus \$171,000 for White families on average.⁴⁶

The freedom to seek housing in the neighborhood of one's choosing is a fundamental right in a free society. Because housing helps determine economic opportunity, health, and

⁴² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, " Discrimination in Metropolitan Housing Markets: National Results from Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3 of the Housing Discrimination Study (HDS) " (2005), <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/hsgfin/hds.html>.

⁴³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD & ASSOCIATED BANK REACH HISTORIC \$200 MILLION SETTLEMENT OF 'REDLINING' CLAIM," (2017), https://web.archive.org/web/20170308221250/https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=%2Fpress%2Fpress_releases_media_advisories%2F2015%2FHUDNo_15-064b.

⁴⁴ Federal Reserve, "The Effects of the 1930s HOLC "Redlining" Maps " (2017), <https://www.chicagofed.org/publications/working-papers/2017/wp2017-12>.

⁴⁵ Levine, "The State of Black Milwaukee in National Perspective: Racial Inequality in the Nation's 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas. In 65 Charts and Tables."

⁴⁶ "Systemic Inequality," (2018), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/systematic-inequality/>.

education, securing the right to fair housing was one of the major goals of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. In Milwaukee, much of the battle for fair housing was waged by young people through the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council. Former Milwaukee youth protestor, Greg Stanford, recalled in a 2015 interview that, “The idea among a lot of young people, myself included, was we’re going to make the world better.”⁴⁷ And they did do just that in the form of the Fair Housing Act. The main goal, however, to end housing discrimination and segregation in greater Milwaukee, will only be achieved when hearts and minds change for the better.

⁴⁷ PBS, "Vel Phillips: Dream Big Dreams." <https://www.pbs.org/video/wpt-documentaries-vel-phillips-dream-big-dreams/>.