Daniel Schauer
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The Longest Bridge:
Religion, Ethnicity, and Milwaukee's Civil Rights Movement, 1967-1968

Fr. Groppi leading a civil rights march, 1968. Reproduced with permission of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

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Chapter I- Introduction

Speaking at a civil rights march in Detroit in 1963, Martin Luther King observed, "We must come to see that de facto segregation in the North is just as injurious as the actual segregation in the South."[1] His words proved to be distressingly prophetic. Four years later, the racial turmoil and violence that had plagued the South, that some may have been able to dismiss as a southern issue haunting the old Confederacy and not America as a whole, burst into the national consciousness in a series of riots in northern cities. For Milwaukeeans looking eastward, it seemed that the intangible force of a riot was marching towards them with great tempo and inevitability and before the summer heat faded away, the pot would boil over in a local riot.

In the context of the 1967 riots, the civil rights movement, and in many ways the turmoil of the 60's in general, Milwaukee was a backwater, an unspectacular tributary branching off the great torrents of upheaval and change. Sure enough though, Milwaukee had the problems that King spoke of, which stemmed from, in the words of 1960's historian, Mark Lytle, "long-standing grievances," and the fact that "all of the symptoms of social pathology-overtly, crime, disease, and despair-were at worst in the black ghettos."[2] However, traditionally, Milwaukee took its cues from the broader national context not visa versa, it is hard to imagine Milwaukee's riot taking place had it not been for the riots in Detroit and Newark. In comparison though, Milwaukee's riot almost seems more a sideshow. Forty three died in Detroit, in Milwaukee, only four. The Detroit

[1] Stanford University, "Landmark Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.," http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Speech_at_the_great march_on_detroit.html (accessed 19 February, 2007).

[2] Mark Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 230.

riot required police, National Guard, and paratroopers to suppress it, in Milwaukee no federal forces were called in, National Guardsmen were called in but played only a limited role. The riot was relatively small and largely contained by the police force.

The chapters in this paper will examine what the city of Milwaukee was like in the 1960's including the relationships between different groups, descendants of European immigrants, and blacks, products of northern migration. Tied closely with examining ethnic groups is a look at religion in the city, nicknamed, "the City of Steeples," due to the role of Catholicism in defining the community, and how changes in the Church affected it. The civil rights movement's progress in Milwaukee regarding school desegregation and other issues will also be addressed. An event of great importance, the July 1967 riot, its suppression, and aftermath will all be explored in detail. Finally, Fr. Groppi, the young priest who became the face of movement, and his legendary open housing marches into the segregated South Side, which altered the city in profound ways to this day, will be examined.

Because events in Milwaukee were typically reactions to events in larger cities, civil, police, state, and military, authorities had adequate time to craft a response to any civil disturbance, which in some ways had become a local obsession. Civic leaders, led by Mayor Henry Maier "began preparing for it fifteen months before it occurred by working out elaborate contingency plans."[3] While calls for addressing the roots of the problems in the inner-city were in fact given a sympathetic ear by the mayor, the media, and many religious leaders, due to what had transpired in Watts, Newark, and Detroit;

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[3] David Boesel and Peter Rossi, eds. *Cities Under Siege: A Anatomy of the Ghetto Riots, 1964-1968* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 106.

such problems were put on hold. Dealing with the seeming immediacy and fear of an apocalyptic riot dominated courses of action and public attention.

Demographics and history also shaped the course of the civil rights movement in Milwaukee in important ways. Ethnic communities, be they Polish, German, Irish, etc. were very much a part of the fabric of the city, and many ethnic neighborhoods were as sharply defined in 1967 as they were in 1907.[4] It was commonly joked that the 16th Street Viaduct, a bridge over the Milwaukee River, was the "longest bridge in the world," because it, "linked Africa to Poland."[5] Even with the passage of time and with younger generations having no tangible links to the homeland of their ancestors, ties to ones culture and group were strong. While Milwaukee was, and is, often described as a very "German" city, in the 1960's, it was the Poles who represented the most recent wave of immigration, around the turn of the century, and had the greatest sense of ethnic loyalty, despite the fact they, too, had been established in Milwaukee for several decades and thoroughly assimilated.

Prevalent in Milwaukee's white-ethnic communities (Polish, and to lesser extents Irish, German, Italian, and South-Slavic) was an old-school brand of clericalism and deep devotion to the Roman Catholic Church, despite the fact that this was fading fast in other northern cities. In the turbulence of the 1960's, the rank-and-file of Milwaukee's Polish Catholics depended on the Church to be a pillar of stability in a sea of change. For Poles, the Church had been the protector of the people during the centuries of Russian, Prussian, and Austrian domination; it became the first safe harbor for them as new immigrants to

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[4] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild. *Wisconsin's Past and Present: a Historical Atlas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 33.

[5] Richard Haney "Wallace in Wisconsin: The Presidential Primary of 1964," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 61 (1978): 259-267.

America, it was the rallying point of the community in terms of social clubs and schools. Polish neighborhoods poured their resources into building grand, elaborate, churches, and parochial schools. The very thought of leaving these parishes behind or sharing them with outsiders was distressing. Milwaukee's ethnic Catholics hoped to weather the 1960's by relying on the time-tested unity of community and Church.

Perhaps symptomatic of Milwaukee's strong Catholicism, the man who became the face and voice of the civil rights movement in the city was a priest, Fr. James Groppi. On the surface, it may have seemed that Groppi, an ethnic-Catholic himself, as well as a man with a passion for civil rights and social justice spawned by the Gospels, was precisely the sort of figure who would be respected by all and could forge understanding, and racial harmony. Indeed, with Fr. Groppi setting the pace, the civil rights movement in Milwaukee gained steam. Unlike leaders who felt that the best way to deal with racial issues was a strong police force, Groppi was a radical in the true sense of the term, seeking to address the root causes of the city's racial divide regarding housing, schooling, and jobs. Groppi's civil rights playbook contained some fairly standard fare, such as pushing for school desegregation, and some more unorthodox efforts, such as going out into the suburbs and picketing the homes of judges who belonged to organizations lacking in racial diversity. His alleged involvement in the riot and his crusade for open housing though would bring him into direct conflict with the South Side Catholics.

In forcing racial issues to the forefront of public consciousness though, Groppi quickly emerged as the ultimate divider, a source of tension in a city marked by ethnic divisions and religious devotion. To be sure, the slow and steady progress of the movement and the credibility of Groppi were dealt a severe blow in the July 30, 1967

riot, setting the stage for confrontation between the civil rights activists and whites on the South Side. Groppi and company did eventually change laws but were unsuccessful in changing the attitudes of many.

This paper will utilize a variety of sources in an interdisciplinary manner. This includes monographs relating to ethnicity in America, especially regarding Poles. Monographs pertaining to civil rights and race riots to put Milwaukee in a broader national context are used, as are scholarly articles relating to Catholicism with an eye on changes in the Church resulting from the Second Vatican Council and the Church's focus on social issues in the 1960's. Key among the sources to be used will be materials related to James Groppi, including letters of support, and hate mail he received. Additionally, memoirs by police will be used. Perhaps most important of the primary sources though will be Milwaukee newspaper articles from the period which played a key role in defining the riot and its aftermath to Milwaukeeans. Indeed, the day of the riot Milwaukee papers were covered with headlines and pictures of the chaos in Detroit. The next day, reporters would be able to print a local story. In the end however, it was not the riot, but its aftermath, the open housing marches, which would define the civil rights movement in Milwaukee to the present day.

Chapter II- A Tale of Two Neighborhoods

The popular image of Milwaukee, prior to the racial conflicts that rocked it in the 1960's, though also to a certain extent still present in the popular imagination today, is that it is a city defined by, "its peaceful small-town atmosphere, its provincialism, and its Germanic heritage of honest government and good beer."[6] Reporting in the wake of the July 1967 riot, *Time* certainly concurred with this perception, further describing the city as, "traditionally well-disciplined." Thus had it not been for the soul-searching that the riot and civil rights movement demanded of Wisconsinites, the turmoil of 1967 would have seemed a strange anomaly indeed.

Just as one must dig under the surface to understand why the black populace of "disciplined" Milwaukee was so angry and increasingly impatient by the mid-60's, one must do similar digging to understand another vexing anomaly; why Milwaukee became the "Selma of the North," and one of the most segregated cities in the nation.[7] Furthermore, one wonders, why is it that in Milwaukee the face of opposition to the civil rights movement was not white-robed Klansmen, Confederate apologists, or even so much browbeating police, but rather working-class Polish-American Catholics? Why did a group, which one could hardly consider intimately tied to America's history of slavery, Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crowe, allow its image of being hardworking, faithful, community, and family oriented folks, to be tainted with such associations? What prompted such actions as singing Dixie in Polish for segregationist candidate George Wallace on a campaign swing through their neighborhoods, considering the

[6]"Groppi's Army," *Time Magazine* (26 September 1967) http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,941133,00.html (accessed 15 November, 2006).

[7] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, 27.

Menomonee River the "Mason-Dixon Line," and greeting civil rights marchers with burning effigies and chants of "We want slaves!"?[8]

As much as Milwaukee was the *Deutsche-Athen* (German Athens) in its history, architecture, and culture; after World War II, "Milwaukee's Germans suburbanized as quickly as their recently purchased Fords and Chevys would carry them."[9] True enough; in 1967 the city still had a strong German flavor and Mayor Henry Maier and other city political and business elites proudly clung to their German-American identities, however, in terms of strength of connection to the ethos of the Old World, the Poles had them trumped. By and large, the Germans came to Milwaukee early and in great numbers, facilitating quick prosperity. Anti-German stigmas, products of the two World Wars, while obviously not oppressively harsh in Milwaukee, further accelerated the drive of Germans out of their ethnic-enclaves, into the suburbs and anonymous Americanism.

As the German-Americans vacated their districts, blacks filled the void in the old neighborhoods. "The movement of Negroes…coincides with the withdrawal of white persons; these areas are inevitably the oldest and most deteriorated parts of the city."[10] These African-American North-side neighborhoods became known as "Core" and were bisected by streets with names like by "Teutonia Avenue." Also noteworthy is that Fr. Groppi's North-side parish was St. Boniface, named in honor of the patron saint of Germany, famous for hacking down pagan altars with an ax and urging his followers to accept martyrdom rather than use violence against their persecutors.

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[8] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, 27.

[9] Robert Ostergren and Thomas Vale, eds. *Wisconsin Land and Life* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 394.

[10] Wisconsin State Historical Society, "The Housing of Negroes in Milwaukee: 1955," http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1098 (accessed 2 December, 2006).

The story of blacks in Milwaukee predates statehood. The city was a stop on the Underground Railroad, and in the Antebellum Era the state as a whole had strong abolitionist leanings. Though it is also worth mentioning that even in those early days, animosity existed between white-ethnics and African Americans. During the Civil War, "an Irish mob lynched an African American man."[11] Northern migration had been the main source of black population growth in Milwaukee during the 20th century; spiking during the World Wars and not slowing down in the post-war period. As whites moved out and blacks moved in, the Core expanded northwards and westwards. By the 1960's, two-thirds of Milwaukee's blacks had been born elsewhere, and 96% of them lived in the deteriorating neighborhoods of the Core. While the Core grew, it was still quite compact and geographic growth did not correspond with population growth, which went from 9,000 in 1940 to 62,000 in 1960.[12] Consequently, while African-Americans had a presence in the city for over a century by the 1960's it had for much of the time prior being a token one. Therefore, by 1967, like the Poles, blacks were a relatively new ethnic group to the Milwaukee scene, living in a compact ethnic community, and often competing for the same blue-collar jobs, and striving to improve their circumstances.

A 1955 report on housing in the Core painted a dismal picture of life there. In every measure of success and prosperity, the African-American community was lagging behind the rest of the city, from life expectancy, automobile ownership, income and availability of hot water, right down to the number of electoral outlets in a residence. It sympathetically concludes by attacking, "the prejudiced individual who insists that Negroes be kept segregated…denies the Negroes the possibility to differentiae

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[11]Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, 27.
[12] Ibid.

themselves through free and selective settlement and then insists that the homogenized slum which results is because 'they are all alike.'"[13] It is hardly surprising that schools and business reflected the pitiable housing conditions. In an interesting precursor to the social justice emphasis of Catholicism which would come to the front-burner in the 1960's, embodied by figures like Groppi, the 1955 study, essentially a plea for change and action, was headed up professors and nuns from Marquette University and Alverno College, with sociology students doing much of the leg-work.

One thing both Poles and African Americans may have agreed upon was that compared to the Core, the South Side represented a slice of the American dream. Blacks were eager to have the right to leave the slums and live there, and Poles felt that such intrusions from outsiders would lead to a paradise lost. Half a century prior to 1967 however, the South Side was not so different from the Core. A state health report on the area, which prior to Polish settlement had been an undesired and underdeveloped void, oozed with prejudice, commenting that, "the Hebrew and the Slav, according to popular belief, are poisoning the pure air of our otherwise well regulated cities, and if it were not for them there would be no filth and no poverty… The 12th and 14th wards are more than any others of the region of the modern cave dwellers."[14] Just as blacks were funneled into the dilapidated old German neighborhoods, Poles were funneled into the unattractive desolate southern areas of the city.

Polish immigrants, typically lacking any skills beyond farming, had no choice but to take dangerous unskilled labor jobs and a subordinate position to the city's Anglo and German elite. Common derogatory epithets used against the Poles included, "Pollack,"

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[13] Wisconsin State Historical Society, "The Housing of Negroes in Milwaukee: 1955," http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1098 (accessed 2 December, 2006).
[14] Ostergren and Vale, 278.

"Hunky," and "Slav." In the first half of the 20th Century, Poles, like Irish and Italians, had to contend with xenophobic and anti-Catholic prejudices, which occasionally morphed into hysterias. Despite these tribulations, the response of the South Side community was to fervently assert their American patriotism while still taking great pride in their Polish identity. This was not too difficult considering that supporting the Polish nation was synonymous with supporting Allied victory in both world wars. American identity was best expressed in wartime. The flags went up, stars-and-stripes and blue flags "that carried a star for each of the neighborhood's American fighting boys." In 1967, with the Vietnam War raging, it was observed that South Side boys didn't go to college, they went into the military.[15] An indication of the strength of the Polish identity is that Polish-Americans born in the span from 1931-1945, 45.5% spoke Polish in the home, even for those born between 1946 and 1960 a still substantial number, 24.9% were raised speaking Polish.[16] Parochial schools and cultural clubs further ensured that the old language had a place in the community.

By the 1960's, the Polish-American community had truly emerged from a past of being the victims of prejudice and discrimination, though the shadow of those days still loomed large. Another haunting specter of times past was Poland's own troubled history. Older Poles recalled a time prior to the treaty of Versailles when their nation did not appear on maps; it had been partitioned by the Prussian, Austrian, and Russian Empires and suffered under their heavy yokes. Even worse was Poland's more recent past of Nazi and then Communist control. The result of this history of subjection was that, "a sense of

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[15] David Maraniss. They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America October 1967 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 103.

[16] Roediger, 154.

oppression in Poland," existed among Polish-Americans, "even into the third and forth immigrant generations."[17]

With some fairness, the old Polish South Side in its post-World War prosperity heyday is often remembered as quite idyllic. Blue-collar life was hardly without its struggles, but the strides Milwaukee's Polish community had made were astounding, seemingly exponential with each generation further removed from the homeland. Home ownership was vital and rates of it were extremely high. It was noted that the "Poles desire for property ranked them highest among Milwaukee's ethnic groups in terms of residential ownership."[18] Houses and yards, though small, were often picturesque and treated as the embodiments of the American Dream that they were. Many homes were inhabited by a young family, with a small section reserved for grandparents. In a nod to their agrarian past, few yards were complete with a tidy garden, and some yards even had livestock, rendering each Polish-American home not just a workingman's residence, but a productive little hobby-farm.[19]

The economic heart of the South Side was Mitchell Street, the "Polish Downtown." Another important local landmark was Kosciuszko Park, named for the Polish hero of the American Revolution and a favorite gathering spot. It was a necessary stop for any politician campaigning for Polish votes, including Lyndon Johnson. The real crown jewels of the neighborhood though were the churches. There were many but the most notable were St. Stanislaus and the great domed basilica of St. Josephat, the largest church in the archdiocese. The grand exteriors and ornate interiors of these

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[17] Roediger, 104.
[18] Ostergren and Vale, 279.
[19] Maraniss, 105.

buildings spoke greatly of the neighborhood's priorities while not revealing the relative poverty of the first generation of immigrants that built them.

Animosity between the Polish and African Americans was, in the early days, a foreign concept to both communities. In the beginning, Polish attitudes towards blacks were simply indifferent. In 1920's race riots in Chicago, the Polish community stayed neutral, viewing it as fight between WASPs and blacks, none of their concern. Indifference quickly gave way to antagonism though. The upwardly mobile Poles bought into the belief that their group would "have to develop its self-image…in more or less a conscious counterpoint to the stereotype of the 'nigger-scab.' Poles who had so little going for them except their white skin…stressed the image of the black scab in order to distinguish themselves from the blacks with whom they shared the bottom of American society."[20] Thus from the earliest days of immigration, the seeds for what would become the briars of racial intolerance in 1967, had been planted.

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[20] Roediger, 15.

Chapter III- The City of Steeples

It is easy to understand why Milwaukee is often referred to as the, "City of Steeples." The skyline is short on high-rise commercial buildings, but well enough populated by the rising towers of churches. It seems, in the streets of Milwaukee, one is never far from the shadow of a church. Likewise, for Milwaukee Catholics in the 1960's, the local church never seemed far from the vast shadows being cast from Rome where the Second Vatican Council was convening, and preparing, arguably, the most significant changes for them since the Council of Trent. For much of American history, the Church had been both a great monolith. This image was formed in light of the fact that the faithful seemed to march in lockstep with their leaders, when bishops spoke on issues of faith and morals, they were speaking for tens of thousands. This sort of unity and cohesion had in fact been one of the primary fears of nativists in the 1850's and beyond. American Catholics, on the surface, were the very picture of obedience and loyalty. Half jokingly, their mantra was referred to as, "pay, pray, obey (and stay)."

There was, however, voices of dissent, fast becoming a crescendo, in the ranks of this united front. The sweeping changes of the Vatican Council in Rome were quickly changing the playing field, and the rules, of religion. It was on this new and unfamiliar ground that different Church factions would duke it out over the issue of the day, civil rights. Thus what transpired was, "between 1964 and 1967 two distinctly Catholic visions of church, community, and authority, clashed in the streets, parishes, and Catholic schools of northern cities. More traditional Catholics resisted what they perceived as the destruction of their communities…Catholic liberals on the other hand, questioned the

traditional parochial structures while becoming active participants in local civil rights coalitions."[21] Nowhere was this more apparent than in Milwaukee.

In its embrace of the modern world, the Vatican Council seemed to be lending its support to liberal Catholics, clergy and laymen alike, who had felt that, the parochial, hierarchical, and ethnically polarized, parish structure, needed an overhaul, something of a reformation. Milwaukee for example, in addition to its Polish parishes on the South Side, had "Italian," "Irish," "German," and "Croatian," parishes in other areas. While this had been a dominant, and popular, tradition since the early days of immigration, "the American church had long perceived this to be at odds with its own self-image as a miniature melting pot."[22] The time was ripe for a clash between conservatives who saw the Church as their neighborhood parish, built by the sweat of their ancestors' brows, and liberals, who saw the Church not as building or hierarchy, but as a force for social change. These were people who felt more at home singing the hymns of social protest than in the tongues of the old world and marching for civil rights, rather than in Marian processions. Indeed, it was to the point that, "For activist clergy…the definition of a successful parish became its ability to address social justice issues," and, "Better educated progressives were uncomfortable about the vestiges of ethnic loyalty still felt by laggard elements in the Catholic population."[23]

1965 proved to be the fulcrum year on which the Church turned. It was that year that many of the Council's directives, liturgy in the vernacular, and the priest facing the

[21] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 4, (Summer, 1994): 221-254.

[22] D.E. Pienkos. "Politics, Religion, and Change in Polish Milwaukee, 1900-1930," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 61 (1978): 179-209.

[23] Philip Gleason, "Catholicism and Cultural Change in the 1960's," *The Review of Politics*, (1972): 91-107.

congregation, among them, went into effect. In the Polish parishes, the high Baroque altars and austere communion rails were preserved as if they were waiting out a fad, waiting for the Church to return to its senses. Fr. James Groppi, the son of Italian immigrants, who had been a zealous crusader for the cause of Civil Rights ever since working with poor blacks as a seminarian, took a much different approach. His North Side parish, St. Boniface, quickly gained a reputation for lively and contemporary ecumenical worship, where old traditions were out and Gospel spirituals, hand clapping and even dancing during Mass was in. Much of this was, in Groppi's view, an effort to acknowledge realities; the future of St. Boniface was not the remaining meager handful of German-Americans who founded the parish, but rather the African-Americans who dominated neighborhood demographics. Groppi's groundbreaking pastoral initiatives were supported by his immediate superior, Fr. Eugene Blediorn who observed that, "The time is now to prove that the Catholic Church is not a white Church which happened to located within a Negro ghetto."[24] Indeed, "Liberals linked Groppi's program with Vatican calls to reinvigorate the church."[25]

Groppi's irreverent disregard for the old liturgy, and the pushing of the boundaries of Councilor changes, were not well received in other camps. An organization of self described blue-collar Catholic men wrote him, warning that "Rebellion is the primary tenet of communism." Even harsher was a letter from a former white parishioner at St. Boniface who protested, "Whites have been chased out of their homes by Negroes,

[24] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 4, (Summer, 1994): 221-254.

[25] Ibid.

and now you are desagrating [sic] the church they built."[26] Traditionalists were angry enough with what Groppi was doing at St. Boniface, that it is no surprise what rage they would muster when he burst from influencing his parish to the national Catholic scene! They anxiously waited for ecclesial authorities, in the form of Archbishop of Milwaukee, William Cousins, to reign in the impertinent young priest.

For the conservatives, early signs were promising. The Archbishop seemed to be adopting a strategy similar to that of his colleges in the Boston hierarchy, maintaining "neutrality," in the civil rights arena. In practice, this protected traditional ethnic enclaves, be they Irish in south Boston or Poles in south Milwaukee, from liberal activism. This policy resulted in the archdiocese blocking a group of priests from joining in the 1963 March on Washington, considering such actions to be "rash and imprudent."[27] In 1965 however, the Bishop did not stand in the way of Groppi joining in Civil Rights protests in Selma; Groppi in turn, was joined by a handful of liberal priests and nuns from across the country, giving a very visible Catholic presence to the Civil Rights movement. The experience convinced Groppi that civil rights was the great moral issue of the age, and that it was his duty to fight for them in Wisconsin just as he had done in the Deep South, a view he voiced three years later when he informed CBS news cameras that, "Clergymen have a responsibility to become involved in politics, if there is violation of Christian teaching in the political order."[28]

Groppi's policies at St. Boniface, and activities in Selma were one thing. His new crusade for Civil Rights and church reform in Milwaukee was quite another. Fr. Groppi

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[26] Ibid.

[27] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 4, (Summer, 1994): 221-254.

[28] *Milwaukee Journal*, 18 September 1967, p. 1.

skyrocketed to fame as "the most publicized white leader in the black revolution"[29] Groppi had urged blacks to boycott segregated schools and set up a "Freedom School" at his parish. As had been the case in 1963, Church authorities intervened, halting Groppi's activities, worried that telling children to boycott school was sending the wrong message. Perhaps he was ready to start taking orders and cool down, but the firebombing of the NAACP office by the KKK, only two blocks from St. Boniface, redoubled Fr. Groppi's resolve to get involved.[30] He turned his sights on passing an open housing ordinance; his target would be the all-white, mostly Polish, mostly Catholic, South Side. *Time* declared that "Groppi leaped into the issue like an avenging angel."

Groppi had harsh, thinly veiled, words for his brother priests on the South Side who were growing worried by his increasingly radical initiatives. Groppi called them out, embarrassing them in the media by referring to their refusal to preach on the issue as "cowardice."[31] Groppi no doubt felt frustrated that the South Side priests were not living up to what he saw as their duty to fight segregation. In theory, it was reasonable to assume that South Side priests could have accomplished Groppi's goals; after all, the priests there represented the community's best and brightest. "Among the Poles, clergymen played a far more important role as community leaders then they did among non-Poles, who tended to be dominated by lawyers, businessmen, and other professional persons."[32] Surely it was to Groppi's great dismay when a South Side priest, Father Witon, openly sided with community members against Groppi.

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[29] Philip Gleason, "Catholicism and Cultural Change in the 1960's," *The Review of Politics*, (1972): 91-107.

[30] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, 78.

[31] *Milwaukee Journal*, 18 September 1967, p. 1.

[32] D.E. Pienkos. "Politics, Religion, and Change in Polish Milwaukee, 1900-1930," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 61 (1978): 179-209.

In a South Side rally, Witon spoke out saying, “We as individuals have the right to stand up for what we believe in. If he (Groppi) has the right to march for his convictions we have the same right…we are willing to stand up and fight.” It was even rumored that Fr. Witon had declared opposition to “letting anybody who is black come to the South Side,” though he ardently denied this. Witon did, however, chastise folks at the rally who, “use such words as ‘nigger’ and ‘jig’ and phrases such as ‘Father Groppi’s got to go.” Fr. Witon repeated what was becoming a common refrain for respectable conservatives, clergy and laymen; they were not opposed to civil rights, but rather, to Groppi’s methods. After speaking, Fr. Witon led residents to various South Side churches in a prayerful procession.[33] Witon’s words and actions however proved to be an expectation, rather than the rule. Priestly opposition to Groppi and civil rights was almost never vocal or overt; rather it often came in the form of silence and omission. At a banquet honoring Archbishop Cousins, the absences of eight South Side Priests was glaring, and newsworthy, as was the fact that Groppi did not show either. The 400 priests present tried to alleviate the situation with humor; one suggested that future celebrations should be transferred, “to a good old solid German parish like St. Boniface. That’s where the action is.”[34] The next day a younger crowd rallied in the South Side against Groppi. No doubt following Fr. Witon’s example, they “stopped in front of churches to offer silent prayers ‘for the rehabilitation of Father Groppi.’” The young men also pledged non-violence in the future and in no uncertain terms told out of town neo-Nazis who had been joining the anti-Groppi protests to stay out of the South Side.[35]

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[33] *Milwaukee Journal*, 14 September 1967, p. 18.
[34] *Milwaukee Journal*, 16 September 1967, p. 14.
[35] *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 September 1967, p. 2.

Still, the damage had been done. Even if South Side clergy were personally opposed to racism and segregation, "Catholic parishes had sanctified particular neighborhoods, fostering a territorial sense of community thought the urban North."[36] The tight-knit parish centered community which they, and to a greater extent their predecessors, had cultivated, had created a siege mentality among ethnic Catholics. "Defense of the parish, of the city within the city by immigrant groups, and of the all-white neighborhood thus matured together…Identification with whiteness would eventually turn on the defense of home and neighborhood…due to the fact that blacks were also distrusted because they were overwhelmingly Protestant, it is unsurprising that rank-and-file Catholics and their parish leaders often aided agitation to keep neighborhoods white." [37] In other words, practices and attitudes which had begun in the 1800's as a defense and support system against anti-Catholicism and xenophobia had, by the 1960's morphed into a reactionary backlash against civil rights, accentuated by Groppi's combative, with-me-or-against-me approach. Many folks who did not particularly care for racism or segregation still opposed Groppi and his marchers since they saw them as the vanguards of the demise of the church and community that had, been everything to many South Siders.

Catholics on both sides in Milwaukee became increasingly impatient, and suspicious of each other, disagreements were escalated with the passions that only religion can provide. Traditional minded-Milwaukee Catholics, hurt and confused by changes in society and religion, wrote to Groppi. One women suggested that in these

[36] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 4, (Summer, 1994): 221-254.

[37] Roediger, 169.

tumultuous times, he retreat from politics and return to the old devotions, "March for something like the Blessed Lady instead of all the mess you are bringing down on us Catholics." Another letter writer felt betrayed, telling Groppi that, "You are supposed to have a divine vocation directed by Heaven and yet, when the chips are down, you succumb to the thinking of a bunch of radical low-lifes!" One man wrote in, still bitter about Groppi's trip to Selma, saying it "allowed, 'communist leaders…to divide the Catholic population…segregation, birth control and civil rights are issues that are held up…in order to destroy unity." [38]

On the other hand, a visiting Boston priest sided with Groppi and fired back that, "(Groppi had) unmasked the hypocrisy of the lily-white Catholic community….As Milwaukee is the prophetic voice of our nation today, so St. Boniface is the prophetic voice of the Church."[39] Other liberal Catholic intellectuals were asking, "Whether national parishes really foster vibrant Christianity or merely preserve ethnic identity and thereby promote racial discrimination?" Describing a similar situation going on in Chicago at the time, one liberal Catholic wrote, "The Civil Rights issue may…represent the possible loss of a home, the transformation of a familiar neighborhood into a ghetto, a threat to family , community and, not least of all, to the Church itself…They consider themselves good Catholics, yet utterly reject integration. And they are particularly bitter towards priests, bishops and organizations who tell them they are in conflict with their religion. 'Since when?' they retort." [40]

[38] John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 4, (Summer, 1994): 221-254.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

Polish conservative Catholics had spoken, the silence of their clergy spoke volumes, and Fr. Groppi and his allies were shouting their message loud and clear. All eyes turned to Archbishop Cousins as Milwaukee became not only a political, and racial, but religious battleground. Both liberals and traditionalists anxiously looked to, appealed to, and demanded from Cousins, action and support. The stakes had seemingly risen as the high as the steeple of the Archbishop's cathedral itself.

Chapter IV-The Real Enemy

In Archbishop William Cousins, Father Groppi had found a powerful ally, and yet at the same time, a cautious, reluctant, and restrained one. Cousins was a Chicago native who was appointed Archbishop of Milwaukee in 1958. His reputation as a jovial and kindly leader preceded him, and he was greeted upon arrival in Milwaukee by hundreds of cheering supporters at the train station. It must have been impossible for any spectator to that scene to foresee the controversies that would rock Milwaukee's Catholic community less than a decade later. Not long after his arrival, the popular new Archbishop was called away to Rome to join in the Second Vatican Council.[41] In Cousins' absence, control of the archdiocese was entrusted to the Auxiliary Bishop, Roman Atkielski.

Atkielski had been the de-facto leader of the Church in Milwaukee for many years prior to Cousins' arrival, more-or-less, taking charge of Church affairs when Archbishop Kiley was "immobilized by deteriorating health," in the mid 1940's.[42] Atkielski, surprisingly one of the first, and few, prelates of Polish descent in the United States at that time, comfortably resumed the helm. He took his cues from Cousins' initial attitude of "neutrality" in civil rights issues, most notably the blocking of priests from going to the March on Washington in 1963. He defaulted upon the old-school absolutist leadership style, and respect for ethnic parishes, that had for so long held sway in the city. As the 60's transpired, Cousins and the Council deliberated upon doctrines in Rome. Back in Milwaukee, however, the situation was changing rapidly, in ways unimaginable in 1958.

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[41] Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Former Archbishops: Archbishop William E. Cousins," http://www.archmil.org/bishops/bishopcousins.asp (accessed 24 March, 2007).

[42] Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Former Archbishops: Archbishop Moses Elias Kiley," http://www.archmil.org/bishops/bishopkiley.asp (accessed 24 March, 2007).

In 1966, the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee (MUSIC) launched boycotts of the public school system, demanding integration. “Some clergymen were arrested for symbolically blockading the schools,” including Fr. Groppi who was part of a human chain blocking vehicles at a construction site where a new school was being built.[43] Bishop Atkielski was becoming increasingly alarmed by the behavior of Fr. Groppi and a handful of other priests and nuns who were becoming progressively more active in protest movements.

The rank-and-file Catholic community of Milwaukee did not feel a pressing need to get involved in the school integration controversy. After all, they had, without complaint, been fully supporting their own parallel system of parochial schools while still upholding their obligations to pay taxes for the public school system. Fr. Groppi though had thrust the issue into their consciousness, acting in concert with the priests of Milwaukee’s five inner city, “black,” parishes. He declared that all the facilities on their church properties could function as “freedom schools,” places for black children to go and learn while the boycott of the public school system was in effect. A spokesman for the Bishop warned that if Groppi and company proceeded with it, they would be in “direct disobedience of the ecclesiastical authority.”[44] A day into the boycott, an angry and shaken Bishop Atkielski summoned Groppi to his office and ordered him to fall into line explaining that, “If I break the law, or allow others to break a law, what kind of authority will I have?”[45] All the activist priests involved reluctantly complied.

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[43] Wisconsin Cartographers’ Guild, 78.

[44] Myron Ratkowski, *What Really Happened: A Police Report* (Milwaukee: Nine Mugwump Publishers, 2003), 20.

[45] Ibid.

Bishop Atkielski's heavy-hand had forced a victory, but it was a Pyrrhic one. Even Myron Ratkowski, a conservative Polish-American Catholic, police captain, and Groppi critic, commented that, "the Bishop showed contempt for the prudent work in the civil rights movement and its complexities."[46] Liberal Catholics and civil rights leaders were irate with the bishop's authoritarianism. A group of faculty at Marquette University, the local Catholic intelligentsia, so to speak, issued a statement on civil rights, which among other declarations, said that protests "can involve some dramatic action which would incidentally bear with it a violation of a law."[47] In effect, the declaration claimed that the moral law can, in select circumstances, take precedence over civil laws. Then, in a previously unheard-of show of defiance, a group of about 125 protestors from Marquette, consisting of faculty, including some priests and nuns, as well as students, picketed in front of the Bishop's residence in response to his suppression of clergy from participating in the "Freedom Schools" and boycott.[48]

Upon Archbishop Cousins' return from the Vatican Council it was apparent that not only had the situation in Milwaukee changed, but so had the Archbishop himself. He had been energized by the council's new ideas and calls for a renewed focus on social justice. Also, he indicated sympathy for Groppi's activism. Bishop Atkielski quietly faded into the background; his influence over Cousins was diminished and clearly, Groppi's days of taking orders from Atkielski had come to an end. With every picket, protest, speech, and rally, Groppi's fame was spreading, increasingly putting the

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[46] Ratkowski, 19.

[47] Marquette Faculty Association for Interracial Justice, "Marquette University Statement on Civil Rights," 20 October 1966.

[48] Ratkowski, 19.

Archbishop in a more and more precarious position. The July 31 riot provided a bountiful windfall of rhetorical ammunition for opponents of Groppi.

Whether or not Groppi had any role in encouraging the riot, it would have been fair to expect that in the wake of such violence and destruction, he would lay low, let the situation cool off a bit. Fr. Groppi, however, felt that rather than stain the reputation of the movement, the riot had forced it to the forefront, and compelled whites to reflect upon Milwaukee's racial issues. The smoke and tear gas of July had scarcely dissipated when Groppi began his campaign to force an open housing ordinance through the political pipeline, targeting the all white South Side with a campaign of marches. The tight-rope Cousins had been walking was getting thinner. While the Polish community had indeed adamantly been maintaining an all-white neighborhood, they had been content to stay out of the fray in the Church and city, as long as they were left alone, now that was all about to change. Groppi had no intention of following the Archbishop's cautious example; he was prepared to rattle a sleepy hornet's nest into an angry swarm.

Two nights of marches into the Polish neighborhoods, beginning August 28, 1967, had revealed an ugly, previously unseen, face of the South Side community, and the Archbishop was compelled to speak on the matter. Appearing on television, he mildly criticized some of what Fr. Groppi and the Youth Council had done claming that "rights are neither gained nor retained by a disregard for the rights of others." Furthermore, Cousins deemed that while the first march had called attention to a real civil rights issue, "a second night of demonstrations, therefore, served little or no purpose." Despite the Archbishop's opinion on the folly of a second march, Groppi planned to continue such demonstrations indefinitely; over two-hundred more would follow! The Archbishop

focused most of the rest of his speech on the South-Siders. He admonished the large numbers of folks who reveled "latent prejudices," and whose "jeering and verbal abuses turned into bottle throwing and physical threat." He attacked the "thousands gathered…engaged in a dangerous satisfying curiosity," who by their very presence had increased the tension, and gave credit to "residents who minded their own business."[49]

Right or wrong, Groppi was unquestionably a catalyst in Milwaukee for strong feelings and even violence. The Archbishop had tried to maintain duel respect for the feelings of conservative and Polish Catholics as well as the civil rights activists with whom he sympathized. Both sides though were trying the patience of Cousins. The angry crowds of South Siders, turning to violence and racist ideology, were clearly out-of-line with Church teachings on social justice, and an embarrassment to Catholics at large. Yet at the same-time, that community had always championed orthodoxy and the place of the Church in their society, supporting it financially with great sacrifice if need be, and by his office, Cousins was to be an advocate, and shepherded so to speak, for that community.

The civil rights activists on the other hand, while not necessarily Catholic, or even religious at all, were indeed, in-line with the social justice values that had been emphasized by the Vatican Council and which were near and dear to Cousins' heart, and yet at the same time, they had exhibited tendencies for flagrant disregard of both police and Church authority. They had adopted a no-compromise rhetoric that was so rigid that it may have been, in fact, undoing its own progress, not unlike building up a tower by taking stones from the base and putting them on the top. Siding with Groppi had been hard enough before the riot; afterwards, with even liberal leaders like Mayor Maier publicly and vocally losing faith in the civil rights movement, it took real guts to do so.

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[49] Ibid, 99.

To Cousins' credit though, that was exactly what he ended up doing. Totally shedding his earlier position of "neutrality," he emerged as a whole-hearted supporter of the civil rights movement, though with more restraint and patience, in dealing with South Siders and other opponents than Groppi had been.

At the same time, as the fury of the open-housing marches intensified, Cousins was displaying a new kind leadership, less hierarchical than Bishop Atkielski had once exhibited. A September summit of priests sheds light on the direction Cousins was going on the issue. He was viewing his role as Archbishop, less and less as a supreme authority, and more and more as "part of a team," and, he opined, that, "the right to disagree was part of the life of the Church."[50] He strongly requested, though did not compel, that the priests of the diocese join him in supporting Groppi.

While not all priests where with him regarding Groppi and civil rights, the next day it became clear that a strong majority were. In the wake of the summit, the priests' senate voted 21 to 7, "to support William E. Cousins in refusing to take action against Father James E. Groppi, a militant civil rights leader." While some priests argued that Groppi's "methods and techniques," were "imprudent and too provocative." For the most part, the priests' senate had adopted the social justice and civil rights mantra that Cousins had brought back with him from Rome, and Groppi had been toting all along. In their official statement of support the priests said that, "the tenor of the times demands urgency and outspoken frankness…Social revolutions do not wait for calm committee action. Father Groppi's actions have turned the spotlight on a degree of community apathy."[51]

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[50] *Milwaukee Journa*l, 15 September 1967, p.1.
[51] *Milwaukee Journal*, 16 September 1967, p. 1.

Still, in the spirit of anti-Groppi priest Fr. Witon's comments against open housing and declarations that if Groppi and NACCP were going to march, so would South Siders, 650 neighborhood whites marched on the Archbishop's house to demand he discipline Groppi. Cousins refused to see the mob, but promised to "consider its demands." The next day the scene was repeated. This time, Cousins emerged with a bullhorn and challenged the crowd; he warned them that they were, "being diverted by emotion and mob psychology into fighting a straw figure while the real enemy goes unscathed."[52] The Archbishop exhibited such eloquence that the mob's anger gave way to applause and the marchers peacefully left the area.

Cousins had struck a chord and at last found his voice in the scheme of the civil rights movement. Rather than giving into anti-Groppi pressure, or turning in anger on his South Side flock, he would implore that all people of good conscience join in fighting, "the real enemy." The real enemy, in his eyes, was an opaque blend of social, political, and economic, apathies, inequalities, prejudices, and hatreds that had been festering in Milwaukee for so long, and stood in the way of social justice for all people. In the wake of the marches on his house, Cousins again took to the airwaves, declaring that, "Father Groppi has become an issue himself. People are so disturbed by his actions that they lose sight of the cause for which he is fighting—that of freedom and human dignity. As Christians, we favor the same cause, but many are being sidetracked into a hate campaign directed against one man."[53]

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[52] Stephen Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door* (Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2000), 193.

[53] "Support for Ajax," *Time Magazine* (22 September 1967) http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article0,9171,837329,00.html (accessed 6 March, 2007).

Still, there was a backlash. *Time* magazine voiced that Groppi had “infuriated,” Milwaukee Catholics and shed some light on the difficulties the Archbishop was up against. “In recent weeks, however, Cousins has admitted that he has been under strong pressure to discipline Groppi; the chancery office has been besieged with hate letters and telephone calls; some Catholics have quit the church, while others have organized a campaign to withhold contributions.”[54] This hostile response was hardly surprising. Cousin’s progressive leadership style had been a mixed blessing; his de-emphasis on his own authority had created an atmosphere in which angry Catholics were, if not comfortable, certainly capable of, defying his civil rights positions.

Clearly, the July riot had changed everything. Because of the lawlessness, conservatives could argue that in opposing Groppi, they were not so much opposing civil rights as defending law and order, protecting the peace. In doing so, they could cite Police reports in which officers alleged that only a few months prior to the riot, Fr. Groppi got into an altercation with police. Police claimed they saw Groppi “throw punches and kick at officers and yelled ‘Start the riot!’”[55] Furthermore, angry demonstrations had been unknown in the South Side until Groppi began marching there. Cousins, Groppi, and the civil rights movement at large, would have to press on into the fall of 1967, with the long-hot summer, and especially Milwaukee’s July riot, hanging from their necks like the proverbial albatross. The violence of July/August had nearly proved to be a crippling blow to the civil rights movement. Fair or not, the open housing marches and the riot were being viewed as opposite sides of the same coin.

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ratkowski, 45.

Chapter V-Milwaukee's Inferno

It should come as no surprise that amidst the intense, racially charged, divisiveness of 1967 Milwaukee, even loud and angry words were at times drowned-out, by something even uglier and far more tangible, violence. The two incarnations of this were the riot in the city's Core, and the response to Groppi's open housing marches a few weeks later. Both the civil rights movement, and the whites attempting to persevere the status quo on the South Side, faced at the very least, catastrophic embarrassment, due to angry and impetuous people who had little trouble between taking rhetoric, twisting it a bit, and translating it into grim realities.

It is hardly surprising that the first of Milwaukee's ethnic enclaves to erupt into violence was the all black Core on the North Side, which, after decades of political, economic, and social, marginalization, had become a veritable tinder-box. A 1968 study of the riot, by the Milwaukee Urban League, identified the main causes for the riot the previous year. 75% of those arrested cited "anger with police," 65% of them also attested to anger over "racial discrimination in employment," and 68% emphasized "racial discrimination in housing."[56]

Research done regarding the opinions of whites is also quite telling. The Urban League studied the judgments of whites arrested during the riot, the majority of who were arrested for carrying a weapon and/or violating the curfew. It is not clear from the surveys if the white arrestees had armed themselves out of fear and in the name of self-defense, or rather, had taken to a sort of "John Wayne" vigilante mentality. A police radio communiqué from the height of the rioting may shed some light on the motivations of

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[56] Karl Flaming, *Who "riots" and why? Black and white perspectives in Milwaukee (*Milwaukee: Milwaukee Urban League, 1968), 47.

some declaring that, "Two white-males with rifles in the 2900 block of North." Irregardless of the reasons behind being taken, white attitudes were very different from those of black arrestees. Nearly a fourth of white arrestees and the white control population surveyed, believed that "outsiders" possibly even communists, had a hand in agitating the North Side violence. A significant percentage of whites further blamed "civil rights people," and a "lack of strong black local leadership." The biggest culprit though according to both white arrestees and a white control group was "the failure of (black) parents to control their children."[57]

Perhaps the most disturbing information to come out of the extensive post-riot study was that 54% of black arrestees felt that, "Negroes have more to gain…by resorting to violence in the civil rights movement."[58] The most troubling data collected from the white surveys was that overwhelmingly the white community's solution to race concerns was "more police power," police power being the very thing that had enraged so many blacks to begin with! In essence, many blacks felt they had nothing left to loose and violent militancy was the future of the civil rights movement, while many whites, rather then addressing the root causes of trouble in the core preferred to treat only the symptoms with an even stronger police presence.

Police, government, civil rights leaders, and the community at large all knew a riot was coming. Throughout the summer of 1967, police noted that any cooperation or communication with North Side blacks had come to a halt. Conversely rumors, tips, and warnings from white residents; stories of strange cars, mysterious meetings, black store-owners hiding merchandise, and shadowy outsiders being seen around the city, reached a

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[57] Flaming, 48.
[58] Ibid.

fever pitch. In May, a nun assigned to a parochial school on the North Side contacted police and on the condition of anonymity, warned that Fr. Groppi was a threat to law and order. Later that month, Hugh O'Connell, the district attorney issued a press release which further ratcheted up the climate of fear.

O'Connell wrote that he had received information from three NAACP Youth Council Members that, "A map had been drawn up showing the areas where the riot would take place. It was decided that homes of certain public officials would be bombed by Molotov cocktails." The youths had gone on to warn the DA that Groppi was present at the meetings and "was encouraging a riot."[59] As soon as O'Connell's statement hit the press, the three youths in question retracted their statements, but the damage had been done. Shortly thereafter, three vacant houses in the Core went up in flames. Police and fire officials suspected Molotov Cocktails and began surveillance of Groppi. Groppi's "Commandos" responded by upping the ante and bricking detective cars seen tailing the priest.[60] Cold-War style tensions had taken hold, relations between black residents and police had become dangerously adversarial.

On the surface, a riot may seem like an utterly spontaneous orgy of destruction and violence. In reality, the race riots of the 1960's; to an extent fit a similar pattern. Like Shakespearian tragedies, the actors, the locations, and the plot, may allow for some degree of variations, but the formula was the same. In Milwaukee, police, press, citizens, and rioters themselves had difficulty pin-pointing an event that was the exact cause of the riot. It turned out to be a trivial and arbitrary event. The night of July, 29-30, "a police sergeant came upon a fight in the street between two Negro women." Youths in the

[59] Ratkowski, 58.
[60] Ratkowski, 59.

vicinity then turned on the officer, back-up was brought in, and curses lobed at the police turned into bottles and rocks. Police commanders ordered patrols into black-neighborhoods doubled.[61] In the wake of this, rumors of a coming confrontation spread through the Core like wildfire. Throughout the North Side, reports came in of vandalism, small fires, looting, and menacing groups of youths roaming the streets. Like a bizarre game of "whack-a-mole" it seemed that as soon as police responded to one disturbance reports of another would come in. Anarchy had set in, the riot had begun.

Myron Ratkowski, a Milwaukee police officer who played an active role in combating the riot maintained that, "our officers were aware of the seriousness of the situation and cautioned themselves not to trigger the crowd into unlawful acts…no one has been able to find any single incident where police could be held responsible or blamed for the actions of the crowd."[62] Still, while police may have intended to remain stoic and professional, they were on edge. A combat-mindset had taken hold among the cops, Ratkowski writes about his efforts to "secure weapons for the troops out on the street. Formalities, judicial process, and protocol went out the window as we sniffed out and located the cache of firearms such as rifles and shotguns." [63] Police officers, armed only with obsolete World War I era .38 caliber revolvers, quickly assembled a formidable arsenal, commandeering rifles and shotguns from cooperative sporting goods stores and metamorphosing from officers of the peace to a paramilitary force.

It was impossible for police to decipher which people out on the streets were eager to riot, which were opportunists waiting to take advantage of the chaos and loot, and which were simply part of the great throng of curious onlookers, who had been

[61] Ratkowski, 59.
[62] Ratkowski, 65.
[63] Ratkowski, 64.

bombarded with riot hype and hysteria for so long and who had heard every possible perspective on riots, everything from that they were the means to liberation over the system to that they were shameful, self-destructive exercises in futility. Either way, many young Core residents were not about to miss their chance to see the actual embodiment of the idea that had possessed the city like a demon for months.

Mayor Maier and police Chief Harold Brier teamed up to put their meticulous riot battle-plan into action. Brier had initially promised that Milwaukee cops could contain the riot however, "At 2:00 A.M, when he got word that several of his men had been shot by a 'sniper,' he changed his mind. On the chief's advice, the mayor at once declared a state of emergency and asked the governor to send in the National Guard."[64] Even with troops on the way though, Brier was determined that the Milwaukee Police Department would take the lead in squashing the riot.

Still, even for a veteran cop, the prospect of entering a riot zone can be horrifying. On those four summer nights of violence in Milwaukee, the air would have been thick with the smoke of burning buildings mingled with tear-gas. Rocks, bottles, and bricks would have been flying indiscriminately. Factor in the exhaustion of officers whose shifts should have ended hours prior and those who had been called out of their homes in the middle of the night to respond, knowing the anxiety and fear their loved ones were grappling with, no doubt recalling that officers fell in Detroit. The sounds of sirens and taunting mobs provided a constant din only to be shattered by sporadic gun-fire. The rules of engagement were hazy and it was nearly impossible to differentiate between the curious and the malicious gathering in ever increasing numbers on the streets. Groups of angry young blacks would swell in number and march down the avenues; some would be

[64] Ibid.

breaking windows and starting fires. Police were stretched thin trying to respond to dozens of rumors and false alarms of rapes, robberies, and sniper attacks. At least one sniper was indeed active though at one point during the riots, killing an officer standing in the glow of a street light, with a high-powered round, and even firing on Chief Brier's command post; Brier immediately ordered that electricity to the area be cut off.[65] Radio messages from the first, and worst, night of the riot, hint at the fearsome and confusing situation officers found themselves in.

"12:46 a.m. We've got a large group of punks who need some attention…

2:03 a.m. Send ambulance. One dead already. Send ambulance. 134 W. Center. Man shot in head by sniper…

2:10 a.m. Second and Center. Tear gas and ambulance. We're shooting at house…

2:15 a.m. Request for ambulances to stand by. Fourth and Garfield. Ambulance, Second and Center, hurry, hurry."

"Mayor Henry Maier began a 10-day curfew and called in 4,800 National Guard troops with armored vehicles. The disturbance resulted in 3 deaths, 70 injuries…and worsened interracial conditions."[66] Indeed, the mayor and the police took draconian measures to subdue the disturbance. All gas stations, bars, and sporting good stores were ordered closed indefinitely almost immediately, and even with the four day long disturbance quelled, the city remained a ghost own, under curfew for several more days. The National Guard barricaded the Core and patrolled the streets. Suburban police

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[65] Ratkowski, 113.

[66] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, 78.

departments prevented anyone from entering or leaving Milwaukee. 1,740 people were arrested during this period, mostly for violating the curfew.[67]

Among them was none other than Fr. James Groppi, who steadfastly declared that he had nothing to do with the riot yet proved to be his own worse enemy with his increasingly apocalyptic comments on race relations. "Father James Groppi, the militant civil rights leader…announced 'this is not a riot, it's a revolt."[68] In the end, however, the riot had nothing to do with the mainstream civil rights movement. Any participants in the violence who saw it as such were tragically misguided. The anger and rage of the rioters at large essentially wreaked havoc on their own community, with "the Urban League headquarters, the Black Muslim Temple, and twelve storefront Negro Churches," being among the buildings taking heavy damage.[69]

Within weeks of the riot, Groppi and the Commandos began organizing their campaign of open housing marches; the timing could not have been worse, or better, depending on one's perspective. As the long hot summer gave way to fall, the mayor, the police, Church leaders, and city residents were all on edge with one question dominating their thoughts, who was Father James Groppi? Was he a peaceful crusader for social justice, a violent and divisive revolutionary, an egotistical glory-hound, or just an ordinary man who saw injustice and could not stay silent? Did the civil rights movement seek to "over-come" or "over-run?" The answers to these questions would lay not in the broken glass and burnt houses of the Core, but rather on the other side of the 16h Street Viaduct, the symbol of Milwaukee's segregation and the "longest bridge" in the world.

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[67] Boesel and Rossi, 105.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Boesel and Rossi, 103.

CHAPTER VI- A Bridge Too Far?

South Siders would have been able to hear the chaos, the sirens and gunshots, of the riot, and yet, the events across the river may-as-well have been a world away. If there was any doubt for those residents that the civil rights movement was synonymous with trouble, it was dashed. When word came of Groppi's plan to lead the Commandos out of the Core, and instead of protesting authorities, march against the ordinary people, panic set in. "The residents there were not able to adapt to different conditions, the status quo being the rule," and they were determined to defend it to the bitter end.[70]

In addition to fears, real and imagined, of implementing change, lawlessness, and destruction of community, South Siders felt unfairly targeted by Groppi's latest campaign. Mayor Maier, whose legitimate passion for urban reform had been jaded by the riots and Groppi's publicity, vocalized their concerns. "Fearing further loss of the city's tax base, he insisted that Milwaukee could not enact anti-discrimination legislation unless suburban communities and the county followed suit." Maier asked, "Wouldn't it be logical to have open housing in the suburbs to absorb some of the poor?"[71] Looming behind these remarks is the fact that he was up for reelection in 1968, and civic minded South Siders voted in droves. Of course, while South Siders may have, to an extent, represented the promise of America, in that a once oppressed immigrant group had risen to some degree of prosperity, and the blue-collar Catholics were hardly the primary culprit for Milwaukee's racial issues, their record and motives were hardly immaculate.

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[70] Ratkowski, 167.

[71] Stephen Meyer, *As Long As they Don't Move Next* Door (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 190.

Milwaukee's lone African-American alderman, Vel Philips had tried, unsuccessfully, on four occasions, to pass an open-housing ordinance.[72] It had not gone unnoticed by civil rights activists that the strongest opposition came from the Polish-American aldermen who, "for years steadfastly refused to permit any public housing on the all-white South Side."[73] Thus, in addition to the instinct to preserve a tight-knit and respected, ethnic and religious community, there were other, more contemptible, factors in opposition to open housing. The working-class South Siders had a lot invested, both financially, and in terms of personal pride, in their homes. To them, the arrival of any blacks in their territory presented a, "there goes the neighborhood" scenario. There was a great financial stake in preventing integration of South Side.

Poles had been late comers to the American experience, and of all the groups in Milwaukee, had been the most recent to emerge triumphant from the grimly oft-repeated fight with blacks to avoid being consigned to the bottom wrung of American society. Polish opposition to civil rights was, in this respect, different from that of southern WASPs, whose society had traditionally demanded deference from blacks and had suppressed them with Jim Crowe laws and the Klan. Poles did not see blacks as the descendants of slaves who needed to be put in their place, but rather, as potential rivals in the job market, a latent threat to property values, and an impending harbinger of the decline of community, law, and order. In adopting such views, they had gained sympathy for the ideals of southern-segregationists.

In 1964, Poles had, in large numbers, backed segregationist candidate George Wallace, much to the embarrassment of the Wisconsin Democratic establishment. In one

[72] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild. , 78.
[73] Thomas Sanders, "The Milwaukee Marcher," https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/sammann/Archive_Vol_9.doc?uniq=epwjz1(accessed 26 March, 2007).

of the most bizarre examples of cultural diffusion in American politics, throngs of South Siders sang Dixie in Polish to Wallace on his campaign swing through their area.[74] Wallace returned the warm feelings declaring that “if he lived outside of Alabama, he would choose the South Side.”[75]

In response to white fears in the wake of the riot, and in defiance of black opinion, within a matter of days, Chief Brier took the initiative in creating an elite paramilitary group of officers, the new outfit was dubbed the Tactical Enforcement Unit, but everyone knew it as the “TAC Squad.” Heavily armed TAC teams would be “almost invincible and incapable of being defeated.”[76] TAC would be mobile, aggressive, and geared towards nipping anything resembling a riot in the bud. While the presence of TAC Squad roaming the streets, like avenging marshals out to clean up the Wild West was comforting to many white residents, blacks and liberals were infuriated. The ACLU, the Black Panthers, NAACP, and the Urban League all registered their disgust.[77] In addition to the dubious necessity of around-the-clock riot watch, TAC Squad was to respond to any and all violent crimes in the city. Additionally, TAC, led Sgt. Frank Miller, set out on a crusade to police morality. They cracked down on vagrancy, panhandling, intoxication, pot, lewd and lascivious behavior, prostitution, and unmarried cohabitation with great zeal.

Miller’s hard-charging style was popular with white residents but earned him the disdain of a loose group that gruff police veteran Ratkowski described as “civil rights marchers, anti-war activists, East-Side radicals and the under-ground newspaper the

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[74] Richard Haney “Wallace in Wisconsin: The Presidential Primary of 1964,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 61 (1978): 259-267.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ratkowski, 106.
[77] Ratkowski, 111.

Kaleidoscope, along with a variety of 60's hippies and sex perverts."[78] TAC Squad was the iron-fist of conservative Milwaukeeans who were mad-as-Hell about affronts to the status quo and were not going to take it anymore. In an ultimate display of irony however, the bulk of TAC Squad's energy was quickly diverted from the campaign against "perverts," hippies, and civil rights radicals, and turned against its own base of support, the traditionalist South Siders. After Groppi's first march to the area, it became clear that only TAC would be capable of maintaining order on the South Side. Officer Miller and Father Groppi, two men with nothing but disdain for each other, found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having their fates entwined.

The marchers, ranging in number from 20 to 650, and accompanied by TAC, adopted a routine ritual. They would rally at St. Boniface parish where Groppi would give them a religious pep-talk and then set off south through the black neighborhoods. The route took them past the mostly sympathetic territory of Marquette University and to the bridge, the 16h Street Viaduct, which spanned the entire Menomonee River Valley. The sidewalks on both sides of the bridge were sometimes so thick with hecklers that the Commandos would march in the road; this was just a preview of what awaited them on the other side. The march would take them across, or at times down, Mitchell Street, the "Polish Downtown." Banners on places of business warned the marchers, "Niggers & Clergy! Pray for Forgiveness!" and "Niggers…Fix Up Your Homes and Yards."[79] The route meandered past churches where outdoor icons and statues of Polish kings and saints watched in silence and where people had prayed that Fr. Groppi be disciplined by

[78] Ratkowski, 119.
[79] *Milwaukee Journal*, 16 September, 1967, p.1.

Cousins. Finally they would reach, their destination, Kosciusko Park, in the shadow of St. Josephat's basilica, the two landmarks being the very heart of Polish Milwaukee.

On August 29, 1967, the statue in the park of General Kosciusko himself, mounted and brandishing a saber, seemed to lead the multitude of opposition. Up to 13,000 people had gathered in the park, burning Groppi in effigy and chanting "kill…kill…kill"![80] Sometimes Groppi and company would make it to the park, and he would stand on a picnic table and give a speech, this time though, opposition, in the form of bricks, bottles, rocks, and firecrackers, was so intense, that even TAC Squad feared for their lives and the 200 marchers turned around, vowing to return tomorrow. During that second, and most frightening, of the marches, the entire procession was chased out of the South Side, not safe until they reached the bridge where TAC was able to set up a perimeter to hold back the hordes with raised shotguns and teargas. Even the North Side offered no safety though; a white Chevrolet passed by, firebombed Youth Council Headquarters and sped off.[81] The Commandos snapped and unfairly blamed the police resulting in a desperate melee. While TAC had been vilified as an occupying force in the Core, the officers had saved their lives, bearing the brunt of the bricks and bottles, ensuring their right to free-expression. Giving credit where it was due, Groppi did "acknowledge the good work and protection given them by the police."[82] Future marches would be harrowing and dangerous, but never would the peak of terror that was seen on August 29 be surpassed.

Opponents of integration, seeking to retain some level of respectability, realized that the atmosphere they had cultivated was creating a monster. Any moral high-ground

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[80] Meyer, 191.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ratkowski, 129.

and political capital that anti-open housing forces had gained in the wake of the North Side riot was squandered. The mayor and South Side leaders had gambled that they would be able turn anger on Groppi almost exclusively, in contradiction to everything the Archbishop had said about fighting "the real enemy." Their blame Groppi argument even resonated from the halls of congress where Clem Zablocki who represented the South Side, claimed that his district was "not so much anti-Negro as anti-Groppi."[83]

Still, in addition to a scathing condemnation of the counter-protesters by Archbishop Cousins on TV and in Catholic newspapers, the Milwaukee Journal weighed in that the counter-protests were indeed racially motivated, asserting that, "The shameful bigotry shown by whites…was a rejection of everything Americans and Christians should stand for. The sight of children with their parents joining in chants of hate was enough to sicken decent people."[84] Just as Fr. Witon had had to learn how to walk the frightfully fine-line between rallying the neighborhood to defense of home and parish and keeping racist elements marginalized, South Side aldermen, the long-time bulwark against open-housing, found themselves in the same precarious position. Six of them wrote letters to the parochial schools imploring that school authorities and parents establish a 9:00 p.m. curfew for teenagers, whose hot-headed antics, especially disregard for the authority of the police, was bringing shame to the neighborhood.[85]

The mayor however had his own curfew plan in mind to restore order. For the second time in three months, a state-of-emergency was established in Milwaukee and Mayor Maier, in the name of restoring order, "declared a thirty-day moratorium on night

[83] Support for Ajax," *Time Magazine* (22 September 1967) http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article0,9171,837329,00.html (accessed 6 March, 2007).
[84] Meyer, 192.
[85] *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 September 1967 p.1.

demonstrations."[86] Groppi, ill from exhaustion, protested the ban, and a police-double standard, both of which had been aimed at suppressing the civil rights activists. To be sure, when blacks had rioted in July, the authorities had brought the hammer down on them, when South Side whites showed the same tendencies towards lawlessness and violence, police had shown far greater leniency in terms of arrests.

Under pressure from the ACLU, NAACP, and amidst rumors that Martin Luther King himself would join Groppi in a march, the mayor backed down on the curfew. King never came, but he did send Fr. Groppi a supportive letter, which said, among other things, that, the young priest was, "willing to stand up for righteousness sake and you are motivated by a deep commitment to Christianity."[87]

Media scorn, and even condemnation from Archbishop Cousins, had been unable to put a stop to South Side counter-demonstrations. Moral was low on the police force, but the men of TAC were professionals and were going to be there to protect the marchers as long as the demonstrations continued. It was apparent to all that Mayor Meyer was going to drag his feet on open housing until state or federal action was taken on the matter, as had been his hope all along. As for Fr. Groppi, despite the threats, assaults, curses, and criticism being fired at him, to say nothing of nearing complete exhaustion, the radical priest vowed the marches would continue for "five more years," if need be.[88] There was no reason to suspect he was anything but dead-serious. At last, under growing pressure from businessmen, worried that the image of racism and violence was hurting the city's economy, Meyer and the council begrudgingly agreed to form a

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[86] Meyer, 192.

[87] Thomas Sanders, "The Milwaukee Marcher," https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/sammann/Archive_Vol_9.doc?uniq=epwjz1(accessed 26 March, 2007).

[88] Meyer, 196.

panel to examine the issue, though the mayor opined that Milwaukee, "should never, never, have allowed this matter to be placed this high on the city's agenda."[89]

The panel consisted of five aldermen, including Vel Philips who had marched with Groppi on a few occasions. Also represented was one of the Commandos, Lawrence Friend, as well as business, labor, and real estate interests. The Church was also represented, but not by Groppi.[90] The eleven member panel debated the issue hotly over the course of a weekend, concluding with a grueling 19 hour session. Eventually, an open housing ordinance was adopted, but it was a hollow victory. The bill put forth had taken a suggestion from the mayor and exempted "owner-occupied single-family homes." Thus, while on paper Milwaukee was now ready to be desegregated, in reality, nearly everyone on the South Side lived in exempted houses. The odds that the same people who had rallied in the thousands to prevent civil rights marchers from entering their neighborhood would sell there homes to blacks were slim at best. Dismayed by the result, Phillips retorted to the panel, "Thanks for nothing."[91]

During the lull provided by the panel's deliberations, South Siders changed tactics, and the "respectable" forces of status quo such as the Milwaukee Citizens Civic Voice (MCCV), which had, heading Fr. Witon's advice, dropped the name, Milwaukee Organization of Closed Housing, reclaimed their position of leadership in opposing civil rights from the bottle throwing, adherents of their cause. They began a major petition drive for a referendum that would put a two-year freeze on any changes in housing. It never made it to the ballot, "The ACLU fought it in court, and a month after its victory

[89] Meyer, 195.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Meyer, 196.

the issue became moot: Congress enacted a national fair-housing law."[92] Milwaukee's last epic civil rights march would occur in April 1968, in memory of Martin Luther King, 15,000 people of all races participated.[93]

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Wisconsin Cartographers' Guild, 78.

Chapter VII- Conclusion: The Most Segregated City

On the South Side, the Poles are mostly gone now and the neighborhood has transformed in ways unanticipated in 1967. These changes are best seen in the parishes that had been the heart of community identity to the Poles. While one may be hard pressed to find a Polish speaker in the congregation these days, Masses are celebrated in English, Vietnamese, and most commonly of all, in Spanish. For all intents and purposes, many of the churches are in line with the old ethnic-parish model. In a nod to the conservative brand of Catholicism that continues to holds sway in the area, St. Stanislaus Church still offers the Tridentine Mass in Latin as per the 1962 rubrics. The white community which has since mostly left the area for the suburbs has consistently responded with generosity to financial appeals from the churches their forefathers built thus they are all still well attended, and well kept.

On the southern wall of St. Stanislaus, the first Polish church in Milwaukee, is a large, ornate, mosaic of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the "Queen of Poland." Walking the streets though, it is clear that the Polish version of the Madonna has been supplanted by her Latin American alter-ego. Statues of Our Lady of Guadalupe are seen in many of the little yards, and images of her are attached to signs taped to front doors forewarning Mormon proselytizers that "*Este Hogar Es Catolico*" (this home is Catholic) keep away! While the demographics have shifted considerably, it seems that on the South Side, indeed, some things never change.

The inner city parishes, which Fr. Groppi and like-minded priests once viewed as vehicles of social change have faded into memory. Groppi's parish of St. Boniface, the point of embarkation for the famous marches, no longer exists. In the early 1990's the

inner-core parishes were merged, in response to a shortage of priests and declining attendance. Groppi himself eventually left the priesthood due to disillusionment and married his secretary. A letter written by a sympathetic priest in 1967 proved to be quite prophetic, noting that, "His fellow Catholics, priests, and law enforcers have given him no reason to restrain from total alienation and rebellion…Father Groppi hasn't alienated himself from this community. This community has pushed him against the wall."[94] Groppi gave serious thought to converting and becoming an Episcopal priest, but after much soul-searching, he decided that he could leave the priesthood, but never the Catholic Church. With the age of radicalism and civil rights conflicts quickly fading into the past, Groppi fell from the public eye, returning to his old job as a bus-driver to support his wife and young daughters. True to form, he became the head of the bus drivers' union. He died in 1985, a sickly and exhausted man.[95]

After hearing word of Groppi's Las Vegas wedding and abandonment of the priesthood in 1976, TAC Squad commander Frank Miller lamented, tongue-in-cheek, to the papers about not being asked to be the best-man, writing that, "I thought he and I were close friends. After all, I did save him from being thrown over the 16th Street Viaduct on many occasions when he decided to invade Kosciusko Park with his Commandos on those very hairy nights when we both stood a chance of not coming out alive again."[96] During an award for heroism ceremony, in his acceptance speech, the tough-as-nails sergeant lamented, "being depicted as a sadistic, head beating cop, being

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[94] Thomas Sanders, "The Milwaukee Marcher," https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/sammann/Archive_Vol_9.doc?uniq=epwjz1(accessed 26 March, 2007).
[95] Ratkowski, 164.
[96] Ratkowski, 157.

called a pig," and the effect this had on his family.[97] Myron Ratkowski left Milwaukee in 1971 and took a job as chief of police in the suburb of Greendale; in retirement, he became a tireless advocate and apologist on behalf of police officers and dedicated himself to getting the "truth" out about Groppi. His account of the Milwaukee civil rights movement, while biased, to this day remains the only comprehensive, commercially published, monograph dedicated entirely to the topic.

Mayor Maier remains a popular figure in Milwaukee history and his bellicose approach to Groppi in 1967 has not sullied his image as a sincere advocate of urban reform. In retirement he wrote, "As for Groppi and the *Journal*, I believe both were guilty of spiritual violence at a time when the city needed peace after the civil disorders. Groppi was the newspaper's tool to avert calling upon the suburbs for any significant effort to ameliorate central city problems in the aftermath of the riots. The paper took refuge behind Groppi's central-city-only open housing marches."[98] It was against Maier's objections that the 16th Street Viaduct was renamed the, "James E. Groppi Unity Bridge."

Archbishop Cousins passed away in 1988. "While Cousins' involvement in the civil rights movement may seem minimal, it was actually quite helpful. Groppi's actions caused the usually quiet Archbishop to choose sides, and the influential leader chose to support the Civil Rights movement."[99] In many ways, he was the unsung hero of the era, a respected voice for peace and justice that more than once cooled the fires of hate and rage blazing in Milwaukee. His public denunciations of both the North Side Riot and South Side protests, his effort to garner unified support for civil rights from clergy and

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[97] Ratkowski, 124.
[98] Ratkowski, 158.
[99] Thomas Sanders, "The Milwaukee Marcher," https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/sammann/Archive_Vol_9.doc?uniq=epwjz1(accessed 26 March, 2007).

laity alike, as well as his risky defense of the radical Fr. Groppi and ability to call attention to the real problems afflicting Milwaukee, were tantamount to piloting a ship through a frightful hurricane. One can only wonder what the state of race relations in Milwaukee would be today had Cousins not been there to take the young priest in under his wing and if a cleric of Fr. Witon or Bishop Atkielski's anti-Groppi convictions had been in a similar position of influence.

As for Milwaukee, with exceptions, the bulk of the black community still resides in the Core where violent crime is high and standard of living lags. Milwaukee Public Schools have one of the highest drop-out rates in the nation and the city is often dubbed the "Most Segregated," in America. As the mayor predicted, open-housing spurred white-flight to the suburbs and now Milwaukee is a "majority-minority" city, hemmed in by white suburbs. In light of this, one may be tempted to say, pragmatically speaking, that the civil rights movement in Milwaukee and Groppi in particular, failed. This however would paint an incomplete picture. The marches may not have desegregated the South Side, but their impact was far-reaching: "The Milwaukee movement showed that northern blacks, like their southern counterparts, could carry out a campaign of civil disobedience without it turning into an anarchic and destructive riot."[100]

In other words, Milwaukee had been a testing ground for similar tactics to be used in other cities across the country. Also, in provoking rage and violence from South Siders, deep seeded prejudiced emotions were brought out into the public square, for scrutiny and condemnation. In the end, it was the opponents of open housing, rather than its supporters, who took on the image of dangerous rabble-rousers. The marches had forced Milwaukee to acknowledge something that was so apparent but unspoken in the

[100] Meyer, 196.

past, the city had a major race problem. Without such acknowledgment, no solutions would ever be possible.

In the end, perhaps what was most memorable about the turmoil of Milwaukee civil rights movement was Father Groppi himself. The site of a Roman collar around the neck of a civil rights marcher awoke the consciences of Catholics nationwide to their responsibilities towards their fellow man. Prominently standing out however, enabled supporters of the status-quo to make Groppi into a scapegoat. They could attack his efforts without going on the record as against civil rights. This failure to fight the "real enemy," the root causes of race problems, and instead blame the messengers, the marchers, and repress the symptoms with law enforcement, prevented the 1960's from fundamentally transforming Milwaukee.

When the hate-mail poured in, when the glass bottles struck him, and the politicians and police railed against him; any privilege, respect, or status Groppi would have had as white-man, and a man-of-the-cloth, evaporated. Despite being of a different race than his Commandos, Groppi had shared every tribulation of the marches with them, and lived the African American experience in a way few other whites could. He had shown that whites and blacks could work together in the movement at a time when it was in danger of becoming increasingly militant and separatist. Fr. Groppi had taken the lead in helping young blacks channel righteous anger at a failing city and system, into a tireless and mostly peaceful campaign for social justice. Father Groppi did not solve Milwaukee's race problems, but he did not create ones that did not already exist, and he did not ignore them or sugar-coat them either. His marches, as long as they were, may only have been the first steps, but they were also the hardest, and most profound.

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