

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN- EAU CLAIRE

REINVISIONING MILWAUKEE: ANALYSIS OF *MILWAUKEE JOURNAL* COVERAGE
AND CITY CLUB OF MILWAUKEE RECORDS REGARDING REDEVELOPMENT, 1945-
1970

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Abstract

The city of Milwaukee saw drastic structural changes following the Second World War. *Milwaukee Journal* editorials and articles from the postwar period up to 1970 provide insights and criticisms about modernization efforts under proposal in Milwaukee. In particular the newspaper gave voice to specific concerns about the city's structural integrity and identity. As a media outlet, these articles influenced their readership and reflected a more widespread fever for redevelopment. The ultimate agenda of this paper was to analyze the finer details within the articles, including the underlying arguments and ideologies affecting city development. To better understand the processes of city planning and urban renewal in Milwaukee, City Club of Milwaukee records were also accessed; particularly those concerning municipal planning and the Civic Federation. Documents from the City Club helped expand the dialogue of city development in Milwaukee between 1945 and 1970, by providing a supplementary perspective.

Historiography

Previous scholars have written about the development and history of Milwaukee during the period under study from 1945-1970. To begin John M. McCarthy wrote *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960*. McCarthy's research focused on Milwaukee politics of growth, consolidation, and decentralization including an analysis of the growth of Milwaukee suburbs and Milwaukee's Socialist Party, which is of particular concern to my research.¹ Next there is *Greater Milwaukee's Growing Pains, 1950-2000: An Insider's View* written by Richard W. Cutler. Cutler's book documented Milwaukee politics concerning city services like the sewer system, the freeway, responses to the urbanization of the Milwaukee metropolitan region and consolidation.²

Additionally an article titled "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s" by Eric Fure-Slocum examined similar topics regarding Milwaukee redevelopment, including the discourse on the 1947 bond referendum.³ Fure-Slocum emphasized the importance of the bond referendum because it decided whether or not the city took on debt to finance redevelopment projects under proposal; this paper took a stand similar to his article, *Milwaukee Journal* discourse regarding the bond debate was particularly heated and Fure-Slocum's work is an important documentation of the postwar period in Milwaukee.⁴ "Critical Junctures, Long-Term Processes Urban Redevelopment in Chicago and

¹ John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

² Richard W. Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee's Growing Pains, 1950-2000: An Insider's View* (Brookfield, Wisconsin: The Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001).

³ Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s," *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 257-305.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Milwaukee, 1945-1980” by Joel Rast was an additional article that detailed postwar civic development.⁵

General histories of Milwaukee include Bayrd Still’s early book *Milwaukee: The History of a City*, which provides a comprehensive narrative of the city’s settlement up until the 1940’s; however the book did not address many of the topics under study within this research due to this timeframe.⁶ John Gorda’s book *The Making of Milwaukee* provided a further history of the city from its early settlement through the 1990’s.⁷ Gorda’s postwar history of Milwaukee invariably included the city’s development, growth, and changes to its civic and cultural landscape.⁸

This research aimed to examine Milwaukee’s civic redevelopment from 1945 to 1970 through a far narrower lens than Still or Gorda. In particular the *Milwaukee Journal* and the City Club of Milwaukee were examined to illustrate the complexities of the postwar development discourse in Milwaukee. Ultimately this research was closely related to that of Fure-Slocum however it studied a broader time frame, not limited to the 1947 referendum and this research included a different approach to the themes by specifically examining the *Journal* and the City Club.⁹ The ultimate contribution of this research was its analysis of an influential period in Milwaukee growth and developmental politics. There is not enough written about the political and cultural intricacies of urban redevelopment in Milwaukee during the second half of the twentieth century. The decisions and advancements undertaken during this period have ramifications in Milwaukee to this day. Not only was the structural landscape of the city altered,

⁵ Joel Rast, “Critical Junctures, Long-Term Processes Urban Redevelopment in Chicago and Milwaukee, 1945-1980,” *Social Science History* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 393-426.

⁶ Bayrd Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948).

⁷ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Brookfield, Wisconsin: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Eric Fure-Slocum, “Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s,” *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 257-305.

buildings constructed and demolished, monuments erected, parks preserved, taxpayer money spent, and loans issued, but fundamental notions of cityhood were challenged.

Introduction

Following the Second World War, the United States increasingly turned its attention away from the battlefield and onto the perceived architectural, aesthetic, and social ills facing American cities. “While our victorious armies are imposing democracy on millions in Europe and the far east, local government here at home is a reeking shambles of corruption, incompetence, waste and misrule,” stated Robert S. Allen, author of “The Washington Merry-Go-Round.”¹⁰ Some observers questioned why the central cores of American cities no longer reflected the prosperity and world standing America had achieved during this period.

Between the years 1945 and 1970, the modernization and redevelopment of American cities occupied national concern. Since the terminology often evoked related to this issue, that of beautification, modernization, and redevelopment, remain difficult to universally define, some asked what city improvements should entail and to what end. For instance, should there be a greater concern for improving the living standards in metropolitan areas or should emphasis be placed upon creating desirable scenery?

Voices could also be heard challenging the civic development projects under proposal. Critics contested that modernization efforts, funded by taxpayers, would leave cities in large amounts of debt while leaving actual problems unsolved. Milwaukee, with its strong history of Socialism, served as an interesting battleground for this debate.

¹⁰ Robert S. Allen quoted in Arville Schaleben, “Not So Fair Is America’s Fair City,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 16, 1947.

The *Milwaukee Journal* and the City Club of Milwaukee

This research will examine the discourse of civic redevelopment in Milwaukee through the *Milwaukee Journal* and records from the City Club of Milwaukee. Coverage of issues relating to the structural development of Milwaukee was collected from the years 1945 to 1970. In addition, several editorials published in the *Milwaukee Journal* between 1945 and 1960 were analyzed in particular detail. These selected editorials include “Fighting the Postwar Blues,” 1947; “Not So Fair Is Milwaukee’s Fair City,” 1947, and “Our Shabby Downtown,” a series of six articles published in 1959. The viewpoints expressed in the articles and editorials reflect the newspaper’s perceptions of the city and their arguments for future development.

City Club of Milwaukee records concerning municipal planning and the Civic Federation were gathered to examine their involvement with matters of redevelopment. These documents provide an excellent documentation of construction and planning under way in Milwaukee. The research concluded that *Milwaukee Journal* coverage favored large scale rebuilding efforts in the downtown area. Moreover City Club of Milwaukee documents dealt primarily with community beautification efforts, notably along the river and lakeshore.

Background- the Bond Debate and Calls for Consolidation in Milwaukee

This research begins in Milwaukee following the Second World War. The post-war period in Milwaukee, as in the rest of the United States, saw a marked concern with the integral well being of cities. One matter of particular concern in Milwaukee was whether or not the municipal government should finance large scale redevelopment projects through bonds. In 1947 adjacent articles were published in the *Milwaukee Journal* authored by members of the Improve Milwaukee NOW Committee¹¹ and the Keep Milwaukee Debt Free Committee,¹² political organizations that represented opposing sides of this bond debate in Milwaukee. On the one hand, William George Bruce from the IMNC asserted Milwaukee needed bonds to accomplish its development goals.¹³ Bruce stated,

Our annual allotment of \$3,800,000 for the long term program plus an additional two-odd millions for schools, street repair, waterworks projects and urban rehabilitation are not solving and will not at any time in the future solve the problem... Milwaukee is now in worse physical condition than at the time of the depression.¹⁴

The opposing article, written by Frank P. Zeidler, cautioned readers; he argued bonds would put Milwaukee in debt and asserted the city's relative freedom from making interest payments had financed many of its social programs.¹⁵ Essentially, the KMDFC positioned the debate to be those concerned with qualities of living against those in favor of city financed construction and development.¹⁶

In actuality, proponents of redevelopment often attempted to balance civic greatness and quality of living for the average person. Under the encouragement of President Eisenhower, the

¹¹ Hereafter abbreviated as the IMNC.

¹² Hereafter abbreviated as the KMDFC.

¹³ William George Bruce, "Shall Milwaukee Issue Bonds to Finance Its Improvements?: 'Yes,' Says Bruce, Because Present Policy Can't Give Us the Policy We Need," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Frank P. Zeidler, "Shall Milwaukee Issue Bonds to Finance Its Improvements?: 'No,' Says Zeidler, Because We'll Get More by Staying on a Pay as We Go Basis," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

¹⁶ Ibid.

federal government created ACTION¹⁷ in an attempt to halt the spread of blight in urban areas.¹⁸ According to a press release statement by David C. Slipher, an officer in the organization, the program's intent could be described as follows: "The ultimate objective of planning for Renewal is the enhanced well-being of the individual- of all individuals. This objective must not be sacrificed in the name of Renewal."¹⁹ This emphasis on the well being of the individual also correlated with increased demand for community involvement in the processes of urban redevelopment through volunteerism. In effect, the underlying philosophy held that it was in the best interest of every member in the community to create a desirable environment in which to live.

In Milwaukee, Mayor Frank Zeidler and members of the City Club of Milwaukee responded to the financial demands urban renewal and redevelopment arose by advocating in favor of metropolitan consolidation. Following the end of the Second World War developers constructed housing on inexpensive, available land in the townships surrounding Milwaukee's periphery.²⁰ This migration to the outskirts of Milwaukee marked a change from its highly concentrated population before the war; consequently Zeidler and the Milwaukee Common Council attempted to annex land within these townships in order to "protect Milwaukee's tax base and political power."²¹

Phelps Wyman, a member of the City Planning Committee for the City Club of Milwaukee and the secretary of the Citizen's Lakefront Committee, wrote to the *Milwaukee*

¹⁷ An organization standing for American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods.

¹⁸ ACTION, press release, Citizens in Action: "President Eisenhower Applauds Aims of Non-Political Council," Monday, November 15, 1954 at 1pm and after, National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

¹⁹ Urban Renewal Research Program, "A Program of Research in Urban Renewal for the American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods," National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

²⁰ Richard W. Cutler, *Greater Milwaukee's Growing Pains, 1950-2000: An Insider's View* (Brookfield, Wisconsin: The Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2001), 22.

²¹ Ibid.

Sentinel concerning the issue of metropolitan consolidation.²² His letter stated that “Existing municipal boundaries should be ignored and the whole region planned as if it were a single municipality.”²³ Additionally the City Club’s secretary, Leo Tiefenthaler, gave his backing to consolidation efforts during the 1950’s and evoked the famous words of Daniel Burnham: “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood... remember that a logical diagram once recorded will not die.”²⁴ The City Club essentially supported consolidation if it expanded Milwaukee’s tax base; likewise it could not have been a mere coincidence that talks of land consolidation arose during years of economic stress.²⁵ For instance, the City Club had advocated as early as the Great Depression for the annexation of surrounding suburbs and unused land into the city of Milwaukee.²⁶ This annexation and consolidation program would have served several functions for city planners; notably it would have created the larger tax base needed to finance the redevelopment of a metropolis.

At their core most attempts to reorganize and re-conceptualize the city stemmed from an honest concern for societal well being. During the 1950’s, emphasis on redevelopment had even changed popular conceptions of what defined an architect. According to redevelopment authorities like General Frederick A. Irving, the president of ACTION, architects were responsible for creating a community’s aesthetic desirability, thereby giving it stability.²⁷

However redevelopment efforts were not without their questionable motives. For instance, an

²² Phelps Wyman, “Rehabilitating Milwaukee,” a note to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* editor, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 9, 1946.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Tiefenthaler as qtd in John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 206.

²⁵ Phelps Wyman, “Rehabilitating Milwaukee,” a note to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* editor, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 9, 1946.

²⁶ John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 44-45, 92-93, 206.

²⁷ “Action Urged on Housing Improvement: President of New Non-Partisan Council Asks New Jersey Groups to Support Program,” press release: “News from Action: American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods, Inc.,” National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

excerpt from a speech made by Cotton Northup before the Construction and Civic Development luncheon for the US Chamber of Commerce stated,

... For one thing, a large and responsible group of concerns in the building industry, with the aid of some of our publisher friends, is developing an ambitious plan for selling the public on the desirability of modernization and improvements and on the overall need for urban conservation. We lumber dealers are working closely with them. We understand that the advertising council is interested in giving this program its valuable support.²⁸

Such statements evidence the necessity of thinking critically, as Northup's statement appeared to reflect a deeper concern with industry profits than the loftier goals of societal betterment. In summation, financial considerations affecting Milwaukee's redevelopment discourse should be considered likewise with a discerning palette.

Before an examination of the *Milwaukee Journal*, a more general history of Milwaukee should be included to place the time frame under study within perspective. The postwar period saw massive demographic changes including the doubling of housing units located within the Milwaukee metropolitan area between 1940 and 1970, a clear sign of postwar growth and veterans' housing demand.²⁹ Postwar demographic changes included large scale migrations into surrounding suburbs and migrations into the city's core. Prior to the Great Depression Milwaukee remained divided along ethnic lines; Milwaukee's wards were largely populated by various ethnic groups including those of German, English, Slavic, Irish, and Jewish ancestry, while "Mexicans, Italians, Greeks, and Afro-Americans- lived in the low-cost areas near the central business district."³⁰ In the years following the Second World War, there were large shifts in population that altered the ethnic landscape of Milwaukee. Historian John Gorda noted a 1960

²⁸ Excerpt from Cotton Northup's talk before the Construction and Civic Development luncheon of the 42nd annual meeting of the US Chamber of Commerce held at Washington's Mayflower Hotel, "Office Memorandum To: Mr. Heisfell, From: Breckenfeld," National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

²⁹ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Brookfield, Wisconsin: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 326.

³⁰ Joe William Trotter, Jr, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 42.

census of a neighborhood in Milwaukee's north side that reported African Americans accounted for 8.2 percent of the nearby population, a percentage that increased to 82.4 percent by 1970.³¹ Migrations to and from the city, including the expansion of the suburbs, played a definitive role in Milwaukee politics during this time period and influenced the dialogue within the *Journal* and the City Club.

³¹ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Brookfield, Wisconsin: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 320.

***Milwaukee Journal* (early postwar years)**

A *Milwaukee Journal* article titled “Fighting the Postwar Blues” appeared on March 30, 1947. It carried a large illustration of three men on top of a skyscraper; a profile of the cityscape is visible below, half covered by blueprints.³² Beneath the illustration appeared a statement: “Skyscrapers and Big Industry aren’t enough to make a city. It needs flesh and blood on its civic bones.”³³ *Milwaukee Journal* staff member Jerry Mason wrote “Fighting the Postwar Blues” at a time when concern focused upon the condition of Milwaukee’s civic landscape and architecture. In fact, “Fighting the Postwar Blues” appeared the same month the *Milwaukee Journal* published articles authored by the Keep Milwaukee Debt Free Committee and Improve Milwaukee NOW Committee. Mason’s argument favored the Improve Milwaukee NOW Committee’s approach to civic redevelopment.

Overall, the redevelopment of Milwaukee was justified through one central argument: Milwaukee needed to compete with other cities or fall behind.³⁴ The article suggested that a city’s standing correlated with its structural development and amenities rather than its relative absence of debt, which was valued by the Keep Milwaukee Debt Free Committee.³⁵ Justifications in favor of civic redevelopment abound, for instance an unnamed civic leader is cited as saying,

The people of this town are rich and prosperous but our city is tired and old. We have to make it a better place in which to live. It’s not enough to have just a good, dollar-making physical plant. We are still using the library, museum, zoo and auditorium built for a city half our present size. The equipment for graceful living is shabby, small and inadequate. We need better equipment so that every citizen can live a richer, more fruitful community life.³⁶

³² Jerry Mason, illustration by Carl Rose, “Fighting the Postwar Blues,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

³³ Jerry Mason, “Fighting the Postwar Blues,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Frank P. Zeidler, “Shall Milwaukee Issue Bonds to Finance Its Improvements?: ‘No,’ Says Zeidler, Because We’ll Get More by Staying on a Pay as We Go Basis,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

³⁶ Jerry Mason, “Fighting the Postwar Blues,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

The article contended that Milwaukee had historically elected public officials reluctant to finance city improvements; Mason stated this debt-free Milwaukee had led to a poor quality of life in the city.³⁷ He asked,

Then who are these people talking about a tired old city? They are simply Americans who know that there is a difference between living and existing. They are people who say that good credit is meaningless unless you use it. They say that the bum on the street corner, too, is usually debt free. They say that the indefinable product named culture is just as important as a sewerage system.³⁸

The excerpt therefore blamed politicians and argued their values were outdated. It asserted fiscal conservation had led to Milwaukee's lackluster cityscape and advocated for civic redevelopment financed by the city.

Arguments founded upon similar calls for change led to the creation of the '48 Corporation, an organization that was directly involved with planned redevelopments in Milwaukee.³⁹ Involved with the organization's efforts were banking and finance representatives, media companies, and other interests including retail and industrial businesses.⁴⁰ The civic redevelopment proposed by the '48 Corporation required Milwaukee to take out bonds and enter debt. Mason depicted the '48 Corporation in a very positive manner while according to him, the city's fiscally conservative politicians were said to have come from a tradition

... reared on the motto of thrift and independence. During the depression, when the Federal government offered half the money for civic improvements, Milwaukee turned it down. No, sir, we don't need anybody paying half our bills. If we want to do something, we'll do it ourselves. Nothing got done. The city got out of debt. Buying nothing, patching and re-patching its clothes, it got by... the '48 Corporation think they can take care of that by having their city sell bonds and get money for new clothes.⁴¹

³⁷ Jerry Mason, "Fighting the Postwar Blues," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s," *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 266.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 265-266.

⁴¹ Jerry Mason, "Fighting the Postwar Blues," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

Simply put, Milwaukee's public officials of the past were parodied and depicted as scruffy, stubborn, outdated, and impractical. Mason asserted the '48 Corporation's membership consisted of Milwaukee's upper echelon and thus stood to be taxed the most for beautification projects.⁴² It was additionally stated that the '48 Corporation worked on a primarily volunteer basis and its membership acted out of concern for the city.⁴³ In summation, "Fighting the Postwar Blues" was intended to read as an urgent criticism of Milwaukee's cityscape. However, the article reads as more of an advertisement than an unbiased report on the future of city planning in Milwaukee and the '48 Corporation's role.

On March 16, 1947, prior to Mason's article, another editorial in the *Milwaukee Journal* advocated for redevelopment. Arville Schaleben, the journalist responsible, asked: "Is Milwaukee, debt free and thrifty, better than Chicago, debt laden and profligate?"⁴⁴ The article went on to call Milwaukee "shabby" and quoted excerpts contributed by *Milwaukee Journal* writer Richard S. Davis: "Milwaukee sits in complacent shabbiness on the west shore of Lake Michigan like a wealthy old lady in black alpaca taking her case on the beach. All her slips are showing, but she doesn't mind a bit."⁴⁵ Davis's excerpt was taken from an article titled "Milwaukee: Old Lady Thrift" which he contributed to an anthology that documented perceived problems facing specific American cities titled *Our Fair City*.⁴⁶ Schaleben's article has received a great deal of attention from previous researchers. Eric Fure-Slocum noted that the excerpt from Davis was reprinted by the *Milwaukee Journal* just prior to the vote described earlier in the

⁴² Jerry Mason, "Fighting the Postwar Blues," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Arville Schaleben, "Not So Fair Is America's Fair City," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

⁴⁵ Richard S. Davis quoted in Arville Schaleben, "Not So Fair Is America's Fair City," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

⁴⁶ Richard S. Davis, "Milwaukee: Old Lady Thrift." Edited by Robert S. Allen (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1947).

paper on whether the city should fund redevelopment with bonds.⁴⁷ In effect, the *Journal* and the article's author had attempted to create a public stir in favor of bonds for redevelopment efforts.

Historian John M. McCarthy also noted the "Lady Thrift" article in which Davis was quoted; McCarthy stated the successful vote held during April of 1947 to finance city development through bonds was due in part to favorable media coverage and campaigning from the '48 Corporation.⁴⁸ Schaleben's article which appeared on March 16, 1947 incorporated key excerpts from Davis's original arguments into the editorial, arguments which must have appeared convincing enough to warrant this reprinting.⁴⁹ A theory confirmed through the lasting impact of the article, McCarthy noted: "A now locally famous story in a 1947 issue of the *Milwaukee Journal* referred to Milwaukee as "Dear Lady Thrift."⁵⁰ Notable excerpts from the Richard Davis article include such statements:

It must be kept in mind that what is called scandal in Milwaukee would be no more than a so-what in other cities of comparable size. A little error of commission or omission unfailingly draws the sternest rebukes from the press, particularly the *Milwaukee Journal*, which has gained a redoubtable reputation locally as the counselor and guide of men in public life... However, the *Journal* is not alone in its sharp impatience with even the smallest wrongdoing. Alert and active organizations such as the City Club hold a similar attitude. The City Club is not social but follows the general pattern of the Town Club in New York. Its most intense interest is economy with the tax money, but its watchfulness

⁴⁷ Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s," *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 257-260.

⁴⁸ John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 128.

⁴⁹ Arville Schaleben, "Not So Fair Is America's Fair City," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

⁵⁰ John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 128.

includes anyone who might harbor ill intentions. The nature of Milwaukee being what it is, economy in government must always be a live issue in the town.⁵¹

This characterization of the City Club and the *Journal* as fiscally responsible and equally influential components of Milwaukee's political and structural makeup are relevant to note. It suggests that these organizations would voice redevelopment proposals that are conservative in their use of tax money. However the *Journal* appeared to have changed its viewpoints in this regard during the time period under examination. Davis provided further characterizations of Milwaukee as "Lady Thrift" within his article as well:

Tight and prosperous, yes, but the old girl has her contradictions. When her heart is touched, she will dig into her bulging reticule and give generously. But for the most part she is anything but soft. If city funds are the subject, she habitually puts on a flinty and defiant look. She bites even the nickels to make doubly sure of their metal before she tucks them away. She thinks (and votes) as a liberal most of the time, but she consistently acts as the most cautious conservative. She's an honest, good-humored, lovable old girl, but an odd one and no mistake.⁵²

The article's fame was actively encouraged by the *Milwaukee Journal*. For instance, Davis's characterization of the city was evoked the following year during their coverage of Milwaukee historian Bayrd Still's speaking tour.⁵³ In contrast, Still stated he preferred Milwaukee's older nickname: "the city with a conscience."⁵⁴ Ironically the late 1940's saw history repeat itself in Milwaukee; structural redevelopment projects were advocated to attract residents, not dissimilar

⁵¹ Richard S. Davis, "Milwaukee: Old Lady Thrift." Edited by Robert S. Allen (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1947), 190-191.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "City's Past Is Recalled at Historical Parley: Dr. Bayard Still Takes Societies on Speaking Tour, Cites Factors of Our Success," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 20, 1948.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

to the early village of Milwaukee's encouragement of residency through building structural amenities like warehouses.⁵⁵

In conclusion, early *Milwaukee Journal* sentiments are explained through their stances on city funded redevelopment, views additionally shared by the '48 Corporation and the Junior Chamber of Commerce.⁵⁶ However, interestingly the Journal's stance had not always been opposed to Milwaukee's debt-free politics: "For the Journal, the leading media force behind this campaign, this position marked a change from just five years earlier when the newspaper had publicly called for a debt-free metropolis."⁵⁷ Therefore a possible association between the *Journal* and the '48 Corporation's membership could be a reasonable conclusion.

⁵⁵ Bayrd Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948), 22-32.

⁵⁶ Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s," *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 265.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Later Coverage: “Our Shabby Downtown” Series

Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter authored a series of six articles for the *Milwaukee Journal* detailing the condition of Milwaukee’s downtown in 1959.⁵⁸ The first article carried the headline: “Avenue Stroll Unfolds Story of Deterioration: Many Buildings Are Old and Dirty, Upper Windows Unwashed; Some Structures Sag, and ‘Vacancy’ Signs Sprout Along the Principal Street of Milwaukee.”⁵⁹ As the headline alluded, the article dissected aesthetic and historical qualities of buildings Wells and Gladfelter encountered in the downtown. The main concern of the series seemed to have been creating change in Milwaukee’s downtown by shaming readers with its grotesque and at times humorous descriptions.

While the articles did note some positive qualities, the majority of their content devoted itself to exposing the grimy details of Milwaukee’s underbelly. Throughout the article many structures and the street-side facades to downtown city blocks got described as “shabby.”⁶⁰ In fact, ‘shabby’ appeared, more generally, as a key term used by the *Milwaukee Journal* to sum up the city’s downtown; the terminology tied “Our Shabby Downtown” to the previous 1947 articles. Another *Journal* article agreed with the classification ‘shabby’ when it advertised the series and stated it would be a worthwhile read for every Milwaukeean.⁶¹ The “Our Shabby Downtown” articles repeatedly drove the shabbiness of the downtown area home; they highlighted the many facets of city life that had changed since its founding, but insisted Milwaukee had remained much the same architecturally.⁶² Wells and Gladfelter stated,

⁵⁸ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...I: Avenue Stroll Unfolds Story of Deterioration,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 21, 1959.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “Milwaukee: ‘Shabby’ Is the Word for Downtown of Our City,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 21, 1959.

⁶² Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...I: Avenue Stroll Unfolds Story of Deterioration,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 21, 1959.

Some of the buildings were here a century ago when Milwaukee was a small, frontier city and most of the land now within its borders was planted to corn and wheat... Milwaukeeans who have thought about the matter have accepted the fact that the city's downtown is small and unimpressive in relation to Milwaukee's population. But take a stroll around the area. Look, not at the bright shop windows or the modernization of the building fronts that has occurred in some areas, but at the dingy upper stories.⁶³

Such references to Milwaukee's past as a frontier city and its historic fiscal conservatism also paralleled earlier arguments for redevelopment and modernization made by Jerry Mason in the *Milwaukee Journal*.⁶⁴ Could this series of articles have been another attempt by the *Journal* to sway readers in favor of city funded redevelopment projects? After all, the message is clear, but did Wells and Gladfelter carry ulterior motives?

Although such questions cannot be easily answered they constitute excellent subjects for future research. The *Milwaukee Journal* had supported the efforts of the '48 Corporation and devoted editorials in support of using city bonds to finance redevelopment during the 1940's.⁶⁵ The *Journal* continued to push for developmental intervention by reporting on the 'shameful' and 'shabby' conditions of the downtown area. The early articles in the "Our Shabby Downtown" series focused their arguments on characterizing the downtown area and many specific buildings in an outmoded manner.⁶⁶ For instance, they made specific mention of the building that once housed the Avenue Bar, noting, "The upper story of this old building still announces that friendship can be found there but the doorway to the club was locked and all the friends departed three years ago."⁶⁷ Essentially this description gave *Milwaukee Journal* readers the impression that parts of Milwaukee had become a ghost town. Another excerpt carried a

⁶³ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...I: Avenue Stroll Unfolds Story of Deterioration," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 21, 1959.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s," *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 265.

⁶⁶ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...II: Milwaukee's History Not All in Museum," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 22, 1959.

⁶⁷ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...I: Avenue Stroll Unfolds Story of Deterioration," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 21, 1959.

more sarcastic tone, attacking how unfashionable Milwaukee's development had been; it noted a building on a block which was: "...there when Abe Lincoln was in the White House. Its owners originally called it the Excelsior building, but the awe struck natives standing in the mud would have none of such fancy names. The building was made of iron, wasn't it? So call it the Iron block."⁶⁸ These descriptions in the "Our Shabby Downtown" series clearly strove to condescend a Milwaukeean's civic pride through humiliating characterizations, hopefully leading to a public outcry in support of redevelopment and urban renewal.

After Wells and Gladfelter successfully shamed their readership, they imagined the exchanges that would occur if a Milwaukee native showcased the city to an out-of-towner.⁶⁹ The article praised the view of the city from the lakeshore and noted that it would be an excellent location to take a visitor you wished to impress.⁷⁰ In the end however, Wells and Gladfelter advised: "Your best bet, if you're still trying to impress that fellow from out of town, is to have him keep his head down and keep walking."⁷¹ It can be gathered from such criticisms of Milwaukee that the *Journal* associated a community's appearance with its prosperity, desirability and its values.

Later articles in the series continued with a negative approach, with the fourth article opening with the headline: "Here's to Grandpa! He Built 'Em to Last." It diagnosed Milwaukee with, to use Wells and Gladfelter's words, an "architectural hangover."⁷² They stated,

In the downtown area it's obvious who built Milwaukee: Grandpa. The big rush of downtown building came 60 to 80 years ago, when women wore long skirts, men drove fine horses and architects loved gimcracks and gingerbread. The skirts have lifted, the horses are

⁶⁸ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...II: Milwaukee's History Not All in Museum," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 22, 1959.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...IV: Here's to Grandpa! He Built 'Em to Last," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 25, 1959.

gone but the buildings remain. There is no need for a Milwaukeean to go to the history books to see what architecture was like in the gay nineties. All he need do is stroll around the central city. If all the cupolas that remain there from the last century were placed side by side, they'd stretch from the spike helmeted Brumder building (1896) to the A.P. Button clock (1892) and back again.⁷³

Characterizations like these continued until the final article in the series reflected on the current redevelopment situation: "Some of those most interested in Milwaukee's downtown are optimistic about its future for a pessimistic reason: The area has declined so far, they feel, that the only way it can go now is up. Others disagree. The deterioration of downtown will continue indefinitely, they say, unless something drastic is done."⁷⁴ The article never truly sides with either the imagined pessimist or optimist but it called into question the value of talks surrounding Milwaukee's downtown redevelopment. For instance, popular skepticism that planners could "argue for years over whether to build a single new building and for still more years about where to put it" was given voice in the *Milwaukee Journal*.⁷⁵ Wells and Glasfelter proposed that family ownership of property had become an obstacle for redevelopment; stating families frequently held onto their properties and sought to make massive profit.⁷⁶ A developer named George Bockl, criticized the expensive cost of property values downtown, and stated they had served as a deterrent for locating his business in Milwaukee.⁷⁷

Wells and Gladfelter voiced a deeper concern with the anatomy of Milwaukee's physical layout than just architecture. They quote Zeidler, the mayor of Milwaukee at the time, who stated: "If you can't revive mass transit you can't revive downtown. I don't look for much rebuilding as long as we rely on automobiles to bring the people downtown. It's physically

⁷³ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...IV: Here's to Grandpa! He Built 'Em to Last," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 25, 1959.

⁷⁴ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, "Our Shabby Downtown...VI: Blight Stirs Talk- but What Else?," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1959.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

impossible to accommodate all of those who want to come and park their cars without paying a fee.”⁷⁸ These further considerations serve to complicate an understanding of *Milwaukee Journal* coverage on city redevelopment during the later years under study. It should be noted that Wells and Gladfelter wrote the article well before major concern for historical preservation existed, so it remains difficult to ascertain their exact attitude towards the historic architecture in Milwaukee. It would appear however that the reporters took concern with the lack of maintenance and relevancy some buildings had by the 1950’s rather than their mere age alone.⁷⁹ On a similar note, did the journalists consider bulldozing city blocks for the construction of a freeway a positive change?⁸⁰ The article described the construction plans in neutral terms; it noted some observers foresaw benefits for businesses and a reduction in the number of blighted areas as possible effects from the planned freeway.⁸¹ In effect, freeway construction demolished many blighted areas but the effort to relocate those displaced by the demolition of neighborhoods would host new problems for the city in years to come.⁸²

The *Milwaukee Journal* compounded its coverage of the city’s scant structural amenities in another 1959 article, “Her Plight Tells Need of Housing.”⁸³ It noted Richard W. E. Perrin, the executive director of the Housing Authority, who stated Milwaukee’s deficient public housing had historical roots: “During the depression, every other city was in Washington with a tin cup, and getting it filled to overflowing, but Milwaukee sat back, issued scrip and tried to solve the

⁷⁸ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...VI: Blight Stirs Talk- but What Else?,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1959.

⁷⁹ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...II: Milwaukee’s History Not All in Museum,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 22, 1959.

⁸⁰ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...VI: Blight Stirs Talk- but What Else?,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1959.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Evelyn Petshek, “Memorandum To: Members of the City Plan Commission,” Records of the Henry W. Maier administration, 1960-1988, Milwaukee Area Research Center.

⁸³ Jack W. Kole, “Her Plight Tells Need of Housing,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1959.

national depression all by itself.”⁸⁴ With this the *Journal* pointed its finger at the legacy Milwaukee’s debt-free policy once again placed upon its architectural landscape. The article, authored by Jack W. Kole, cited a lack of public housing available for the elderly and for large families unable to afford the higher rent payments on private apartment complexes.⁸⁵ However, the ’48 Corporation had won support from the JACBH and other organizations concerned with the public housing shortage during the 1947 referendum by compromising to allow for city funded public housing; but Fure-Slocum stated: The housing priorities promoted by the JACBH and others, presumably advanced by the creation of the Improve Milwaukee Now Committee, were absent from the 1948 Corporations ‘planned action campaign of modern civic aggressiveness.”⁸⁶ Therefore, Perrin’s placement of blame on the debt-free policies of early twentieth century Milwaukee were less well founded.

It would ultimately appear that the condition of Milwaukee’s downtown circa 1959 had not improved since 1947, the year “Not So Fair Is America’s Fair City” had appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal*. Regardless, Kole drew attention to the horrible conditions which faced those unable to decently afford privately owned housing:

The old woman trudged up the ramshackle stairs to her room. She paused on a landing to watch the rays of the sunset pierce a dirt stained window facing W. State st.

She opened a worn leather purse and counted \$2.53. That must last me for four days until my next old age assistance check arrives, she thought.

The room was small and dark, without a window. In the summer, it was stifling, and the air was so heavy at times that the widow had trouble breathing.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Jack W. Kole, “Her Plight Tells Need of Housing,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1959.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Eric Fure-Slocum, “Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s,” *Social Science History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 275-282.

⁸⁷ Jack W. Kole, “Her Plight Tells Need of Housing,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1959.

The above quote illustrated the *Journal's* coverage of issues related to civic redevelopment that dealt with standards of living rather than proposals of an aesthetic nature. This suggests that the newspaper's desire to affect positive change for Milwaukee city residents was not going to be achieved by simply shaming city residents with descriptions of decay in the city, but also needed to expose the dire situations in which some city residents lived on a daily basis.

City Identity

*The now popular concept of the city as a disposable container,
to be replaced at a profit every decade or every generation,
in order to feed an expanding economy,
denies the most valuable function of the city as an organ of social memory;
namely, its linking up the generations,
its bringing into the present both the usable past and the desirable future.*
-Lewis Mumford⁸⁸

The above quote describes an interesting concern facing cities in the modern age: that of city identity, which architecture defines to a large extent. The previous sections addressed a fraction of the dialogue that appeared in the *Journal* regarding the downtown buildings in Milwaukee and their aesthetic appearance. Architecture and aesthetic features of Milwaukee's cityscape have influenced a sense of civic pride and cultural identity worth exploration. The architectural history of specific towns and cities have frequently focused on the relationship between people and their environment. *The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island: 1640-1915* drew upon historical maps and accounts from residents, newspapers and visitors; it pieced together details like the initial settlement and subsequent structural planning of the city, and provided insights into the daily lives of Newport inhabitants.⁸⁹ Analysis of the structures in Newport included a notation of the architects and owners behind the buildings, qualitative descriptions of the interior and exteriors, and mention of the architectural styles that influenced buildings.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The Urban Prospect*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 161-162.

⁸⁹ Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J Scully Jr., *The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island: 1640-1915* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1967), 85-94.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 140-146.

A later book entitled *Architecture and Regional Identity in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1870-1970*, analyzed architecture's influence on community identity and the establishment of a city's culture.⁹¹ Author Lance V. Bernard described the evolution of architecture in the San Francisco Bay region, he explained how the region's architecture originated, developed into its own distinct style, and in part, defined the city's identity.⁹² It described the history of the Bay Tradition during the post war years in the following way,

The rise in population and the demand for more schools, housing, office space, and other structures made the Bay Tradition more than simply a domestic idiom for the well-to-do. Using the International Style's basic forms and technology, Bay Tradition architects applied their sensibilities to non-residential works as well. Not only did Bay Area modernism become more visible and identifiable as a regional paradigm, but it also came to epitomize a distinctly Western suburban lifestyle, based on the same cultivated appreciation of a clement nature that the Bay Tradition's creators noted.⁹³

Notably, during the same period Milwaukee witnessed debates over its debt-free policy, San Francisco similarly experienced underlying societal factors like population changes, influence the city's course in postwar years. Prior to the authoring of Bernard's book, Albert L. Furth, a guest speaker for a luncheon of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce stated,

Transit is not the only case in point. The entire subject of Bay Area urbanization must be a matter of area concern. It should be noted that when a modern industrial corporation looks about for a site for a new plant, it is interested in far more than the simple old requirements of suitable land, fuel, water supply, shipping facilities, and manpower. Modern management concerns itself with the total environment in which its people will work and live, and those people are becoming more and more discriminating.⁹⁴

Furth had noted a predicament foreshadowed by Mason's 1947 article in the *Milwaukee Journal* and addressed by civic leaders of Milwaukee during the 1966 Executive Conference on

⁹¹ Lance V. Bernard, *Architecture and Regional Identity in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1870-1970* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 1-10.

⁹² Ibid, 11-65.

⁹³ Ibid, 95.

⁹⁴ Albert L. Furth, speech: "The Second Earthquake is Now," speech at luncheon for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and Board of Fire Underwriters of the Pacific, April 18, 1956, National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

Beautification years later: a city's structural amenities could alter the flow of capital into a city and affect the impressions of visitors and citizens alike.

City Club of Milwaukee: County Executive Conference on Beautification

Returning to the thesis of this research, it was asserted that the *Milwaukee Journal* favored large scale rebuilding efforts in the downtown. A claim supported by editorials and articles from the period that advocated for city funding to accomplish redevelopment goals. The second half of the thesis addressed the City Club of Milwaukee, emphasizing the organization's involvement in community beautification efforts centered upon the river and lakeshore.

A general portrait of the city should be examined prior to an examination of Milwaukee's lakeshore and river beautification projects. The County Executive Conference on Beautification at Lake Park Pavilion on April 26, 1966 included numerous presenters on topics related to beautification efforts within the state of Wisconsin.⁹⁵ Speeches made before the conference were available in the City Club of Milwaukee's archival collection and represented perspectives on Milwaukee closer to the end years of the timeframe under study. Included among the speakers was Commissioner of Public Works, Herbert A. Goetsch; Director of Public Works and County Highway Commissioner, Henry B. Wildschut; Milwaukee Junior Chamber of Commerce member Dale L. Radke; Vice-President of Sales at Wisconsin Electric Company, William Wagner; Mid-Town Neighborhood Association member Rudolph Witte; in addition to the general manager of the Milwaukee County Park Commission, Howard Gregg.⁹⁶ Speakers at the conference emphasized the importance of personal accountability and individual involvement in the efforts to renew Milwaukee. Goetsch expressed his view that Milwaukee could claim a reputation for "cleanliness" and stated: "I'm certain that all of you have heard visitors to our community comment favorably on our tree-lined streets and flowering boulevards, the parks and

⁹⁵ John L. Doyne presented at the County Executive Conference on Beautification, "Welcome and Opening Address by County Executive John L. Doyne," April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

⁹⁶ County Executive Conference on Beautification, speeches, April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

parkways, our lakefront, and the cleanliness of our streets and alleys and the neatness of our homes.”⁹⁷ Goetsch described the recent changes that confronted Milwaukee in 1966 such as migration to and from the city, the construction of freeways into the city, advances in technology, including new building materials used in construction projects, as well as urban redevelopment within Milwaukee.⁹⁸ Thus the County Executive Conference on Beautification in 1966 attempted to address many of the make-or-break changes that faced Milwaukee.

Specifically Wildschut described the ill effects of littering upon the scenery surrounding Wisconsin’s freeways.⁹⁹ Another speaker at the conference, Dale L. Radke, described the positive effects of the “Clean-Up, Paint-Up, Fix-Up” program in Milwaukee that encouraged individuals and businesses to clean up the appearance of their building structures.¹⁰⁰ Radke described how the program got paint from the Varnish and Lacquer Association and “excited” thirty homeowners into repainting their homes.¹⁰¹ In essence the conference focused its attention on everyone’s capability for involvement in the efforts to beautify the city and region. William Wagner, the Vice-President of Sales at Wisconsin Electric Company described the positive effects a business could reap when it concerned itself with the aesthetic qualities of its complexes.¹⁰² A sentiment that related to Furth’s earlier speech in San Francisco that described the importance of a community’s cohesion; Furth anticipated the symbiotic relationship between

⁹⁷ Herbert A. Goetsch presented at the County Executive Conference on Beautification, “The City of Milwaukee Enhances Its Beauty,” April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Henry B. Wildschut presented at the County Executive Conference on Beautification, “Highway Beautification,” April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹⁰⁰ Dale L. Radke presented at the County Executive Conference on Beautification, “CU-PU-FU,” April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² William Wagner presented at the County Executive conference on Beautification, “Beauty Can Pay,” April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

businesses and a community.¹⁰³ Wagner specifically championed the positive public relations a company stood to earn by respecting the beauty of surrounding communities. For example, he noted a company known for its beautification efforts at a plant would likely meet little opposition from a community when it expanded.¹⁰⁴

In Goetsch's speech before the conference, Mayor Henry Maier's sentiments on what made a "good city" were quoted: "I want a city in which our institutional representatives are working in a coordinated manner for change to produce the traits of a good city: richness of opportunity, openness, freedom, and the beautiful, hygienic, safe, functional community."¹⁰⁵ Considering the varied segments of society the conference's speakers represented, it appeared that Milwaukee was on its way to this cooperative goal.

This conference can be connected to broader nationwide themes addressed by Albert Furth when he spoke about his opinions concerning the future of San Francisco's development and city planning. Notably the conference reflected similar lines of reasoning when responding to the predicaments and challenges that faced Milwaukee in the period under examination. Furth addressed the need for cities to appear desirable to companies, visitors, and residents alike for instance, lest a city miss out on investment capital, tourism, and a sound tax base.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore Furth favored the use of city planning in San Francisco according to a precise and logical master plan like the one created by architect Daniel H. Burnham, though never realized

¹⁰³ Albert L. Furth, speech: "The Second Earthquake is Now," speech at luncheon for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and Board of Fire Underwriters of the Pacific, April 18, 1956, National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

¹⁰⁴ William Wagner presented at the County Executive conference on Beautification, "Beauty Can Pay," April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Albert L. Furth, speech: "The Second Earthquake is Now," speech at luncheon for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and Board of Fire Underwriters of the Pacific, April 18, 1956, National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

after the 1905 earthquake.¹⁰⁷ Although it was unlikely that those orchestrating the Conference on Beautification were familiar with the Albert Furth speech noted above, the organizations represented at the conference reflected an understanding of the modern city not dissimilar to Furth. Beautification, by the end years of the timeframe under examination had reached center stage in politics.

¹⁰⁷ Albert L. Furth, speech: "The Second Earthquake is Now," speech at luncheon for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and Board of Fire Underwriters of the Pacific, April 18, 1956, National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

Lake Front and River Development

“The beauty of the downtown lake front has been realized, but the esthetic potentials of the city’s principal river have not.” -*Milwaukee Journal*, 1959.¹⁰⁸

Beginning almost immediately after the Second World War, the city of Milwaukee began planning the development and beautification of its lakeshore. In particular the Plan Commission for the City of Milwaukee examined the possibilities of land development on property formerly owned by the Chicago and North Western Railway.¹⁰⁹ By seizing available land, development and beautification goals could be met which envisioned an attractive lakeshore to serve as an aesthetic focal point in the city. The Plan Commission’s report found that some of the segments were too narrow for major development projects; however where space permitted, the report projected other possibilities like: an industrial park, manufacturing, office space, or even a so called “residential oasis to take advantage of the natural beauty of Lake Michigan.”¹¹⁰ In other words, the availability of Chicago and North Western Railway property was a major enticement for the city at a time when most of the lakeshore was already claimed and there was the perceived need for further beautification. The success of lakeshore redevelopment efforts and the symbolism this held in the mind of Milwaukeeans was evidenced by the “Our Shabby Downtown” series:

A Milwaukeean setting out to show the city to an out of town visitor is apt to head at once for the Lake Michigan shore. Viewed from Juneau park, the sky line is moderately impressive. The new Memorial Center is modern enough to satisfy anyone. The tall apartment houses along N. Prospect av. and such solid structures as the Elks club at the east end of E. Wisconsin av. give an impression that here is a prosperous sort of place.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...IV: Here’s to Grandpa! He Built ‘Em to Last,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 25, 1959.

¹⁰⁹ Analysis Request No. 154 by Arthur Else, progress report, April 26, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Robert W. Wells and Lloyd D. Gladfelter, “Our Shabby Downtown...II: Milwaukee’s History Not All in Museum,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 22, 1959.

Considering the harsh criticisms Wells and Gladfelter had for the rest of Milwaukee, this description was a complement. The above *Journal* excerpt supports the conclusion that Milwaukee's lakeshore become a source of pride for the city by the end of the 1950's.

The Plan Commission's report, issued in 1961, appeared following Wells and Gladfelter's series of articles. The establishment of an aesthetically pleasing lakeshore was a major priority for developers, spanning many years and consuming a great deal of dialogue within City Club records. More specifically the 1961 report included two separate "schemes" for development that would have different pros and cons accompanying them; return on investment was emphasized, suggesting some fiscal conservatism on the behalf of the City Club and the broader city government of Milwaukee.¹¹² A member of the City Plan Commission emphasized that the resale potential should be made explicitly clear to those involved with financing lakeshore development, once again suggesting the importance of fiscal conservatism.¹¹³

Ultimately, the Board of Harbor Commissioners responded to the Special Committee on Lakefront Land Study and expressed an interest in the acquisition of the Chicago and North Western Railway Company's property.¹¹⁴ The Harbor Commissioners response stated, "...historical review of the degree of development which has already taken place in the public port area may be of assistance in analyzing the future usefulness of the railroad property in relation to the public port development."¹¹⁵ The review divided the land around Milwaukee's harbor into three sections: the South Harbor Tract, the Abott Tract, and the North Harbor

¹¹² Analysis Request No. 154 by Arthur Else, progress report, April 26, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹¹³ File No. 61-2899, "Resolution relating to a study and survey of the Lake Front area by the City Plan Commission," City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹¹⁴ City of Milwaukee Board of Harbor Commissioners to the Special Committee on Lakefront Land Study, letter, December 12, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Tract.¹¹⁶ The Board studied development patterns and deemed the Chicago and North Western Railway Company land a serious consideration for public acquisition and development.¹¹⁷ The Board stated,

During the last three years there have been active negotiations or serious discussions of a number of new business enterprises for possible development in the outer harbor area, including grain elevators; liquid cargo terminals; general warehousing; automobile warehousing and distribution; salt warehousing; cement packaging; export packing plants; bunkering facilities; trunk terminals; restaurants; and others. It may be anticipated that the next wave of business expansion will bring many of these to the active stage.¹¹⁸

This dialogue revealed a multi-faceted interest in the future of lakeshore development, not simply limited to a park, memorials, or beautification. There were discussions about setting aside land for industry and as previously noted, for constructing upper class housing with a lakeshore view as a selling point.¹¹⁹ Thereby, suggesting that there needed to be economic benefits for Milwaukee's economy in order for the city to invest taxpayer finances in the acquisition of available property for beautification.

The Milwaukee River saw similar development proposals during the postwar period that drew upon its potential as an aesthetic focal point within the cityscape. A joint meeting was called between the Committee on Municipal Planning and the Committee on Public Finance by Robert J. Strass, a member of the former, to discuss the development of Milwaukee's riverfront.¹²⁰ A letter calling for the joint meeting observed that "heavy river traffic has been eliminated by action of the U.S. Corps of Engineers," and goes on to ask: "Is this the time and

¹¹⁶ City of Milwaukee Board of Harbor Commissioners to the Special Committee on Lakefront Land Study, letter, December 12, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Analysis Request No. 154 by Arthur Else, progress report, April 26, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹²⁰ Robert J. Strass and Frank Lipsky, letter: "Subject: Riverfront Development," City Club of Milwaukee Records, Milwaukee Area Research Center.

the occasion to think in terms of the development of the riverfront in that area generally?”¹²¹

The obvious connotation meant that Strass saw heavy shipping traffic on the Milwaukee River as a hindrance, perhaps an eyesore, inhibiting desired development of the river area. The Milwaukee River was losing its importance as a shipping thoroughfare and with this adjustment; committee members like Strass began brainstorming other possibilities to keep the landscape relevant.¹²²

Future developments for the Milwaukee River included expanded accommodations for recreational boating as a possible industry and pastime, to attract tourism and revenue. Such a possibility led the Technical Committee of the Milwaukee River Study to call a meeting, which sought to study “the role of the pleasure boat and excursion boat operations, in appraising the future of the Milwaukee River and its adjoining land areas.”¹²³ The Committee invited representatives from the boating community, including Arthur Fransee, an operator of an excursion boat named the *Iroquis*; representatives from the Outboard Runabout Fleet of Milwaukee, Nino Costarella representing Nino’s Steak Round-Up, located along the riverfront; and Rev. Ensworth Reisner, a pastor from the First Methodist Church.¹²⁴ Arthur Fransee reported to the Committee that his boat tours around Milwaukee’s harbor were successful; however he relayed that many of his customers desired a better view of the city from the river.¹²⁵ Representatives from the Outboard Runabout Fleet of Milwaukee suggested Milwaukee would likely benefit from the construction of boating facilities along the Milwaukee River.¹²⁶ The

¹²¹ Robert J. Strass and Frank Lipsky, letter: “Subject: Riverfront Development,” City Club of Milwaukee Records, Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Technical Committee: Milwaukee River Study, Friday, February 7, 1964 at the Mayor’s Conference Room, City Hall, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

representatives argued that boat landings would open up access to restaurants and noted restaurants like Nino's Steak Round-Up benefitted from boating patronage after installing the proper accommodations.¹²⁷ Rev. Ensworth Reisner presented himself at the Commission meeting to express the interest of his church in obtaining land along the river to build a church and apartments.¹²⁸ The Technical Committee stated,

Rev. Reisner felt that the creation of a 'living area' on the river would be of value to the community. However, many river improvements must be made if this 'living area' is to be developed, he said. Rev. Reisner further stated that transit boats cannot now use Milwaukee affectively, because of a lack in boat landings, transportation facilities, and access to shops and restaurants. Mr. Perrin observed that emphasis must now be placed on the recreational and human interest development of the river, as evidenced by Rev. Reisner's remarks, not on the commercial aspects of the past.¹²⁹

Reisner's comments reflected the sentiments that Strass and others had foreseen. The Milwaukee River's relevance was changing, reflecting changes that faced the city as a whole. Demographically and economically, Milwaukee faced transformations between 1945 and 1970 that civic leaders had to act in response to lest the city fall behind.

¹²⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Technical Committee: Milwaukee River Study, Friday, February 7, 1964 at the Mayor's Conference Room, City Hall, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Other City Club of Milwaukee Activities

Aside from involvement in redevelopment, land procuring, and beautification along Milwaukee's lakeshore and riverfront, the City Club influenced supplementary programs throughout the city. The Mayor's creation of a Fountain Committee was one such program. A report to the Common Council regarding the orchestration of fountain construction within Milwaukee highlighted underlying priorities regarding beautification in the city. The planned construction of impressive fountains across the city sought to serve as "desired symbolism of an abundant water supply," according to the Committee.¹³⁰ The Fountain Committee concluded that "a trifling water display might suggest just the opposite; namely, that the City has a meager water supply or that it is economizing too greatly in its use."¹³¹ It was ultimately suggested that "five prominent, important, and strategically-placed fountains" be erected and that "thereafter for a period of time still to be determined, one additional important fountain be constructed each year until the number has been established which will achieve the ultimate and desired effect."¹³² In essence, such plans for beautification illustrated the preoccupation Milwaukee had assumed with finding its identity and competing developmentally with not only other cities, but even its own suburbs.

Historically speaking, Milwaukee struggled during the 1950's to acquire land for city expansion, often fiercely resisted by its suburbs.¹³³ City expansion often sought to circumvent the negative effects of cluttered city living, or so Socialists like Zeidler believed; moreover the

¹³⁰ Fountain Committee, "Definitive Report to the Common Council Relating to a Fountain Program for the City of Milwaukee," City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 150-159.

annexation of surrounding properties around Milwaukee's periphery would have strengthened the tax base.¹³⁴

Possible concerns over the city's financial stability were echoed during the 1960's. For instance, County Executive John L. Doyne addressed the strain rapid population growth placed on Milwaukee, during his 1965 "State of the County" address.¹³⁵ He stated,

Population increases and the demands to render service to that population quite obviously must be reflected in our court and judiciary system; our public works, highways and sanitation system; our health institutions; our public welfare programs; and our parks, recreational and cultural programs. All of these services cost money, and the money must come either from the people, based on a program of taxes, or from services by government that are revenue-producing.¹³⁶

This sentiment might explain the city's frugality, as previously noted, when discussing the purchase of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway property.¹³⁷ Civic leaders faced real financial obstacles when planning redevelopment; proponents of beautification had expectations of the city as did taxpayers who cared less for the aesthetic beauty of the city.

In summation, an analysis of this topic could end with the insights of a civic historian to provide some needed perspective. Architectural historian Lewis Mumford theorized on the future development of cities and stated,

But apart from the fact that history is full of reverses in existing trends- above all in such tricky matters as urban increases in population- such plans for the future leave out of account all those elements that exist in the present only as imagination, desire, dream, and project: the latent social forces which materialize in each generation in unexpected

¹³⁴ John M. McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth 1910-1960* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 41-80.

¹³⁵ John L. Doyne to The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, report: "Annual Message of the County Executive," City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ File No. 61-2899, "Resolution relating to a study and survey of the Lake Front area by the City Plan Commission," City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

forms. The incalculable element in every scheme for urban and regional planning is not what men have and are accustomed to: but what they want, and are ready, when the want has been organized and dramatized, to reach for. Without taking advantage of the directive force of the imagination, releasing elements not given, or not dominant, in a present situation, planning must remain a belated mopping up after the forces of life have spilled over...¹³⁸

Contrary to this more fatalistic characterization, Milwaukee appeared to have been relatively proactive during the timeframe, 1945 to 1970. As noted, the city faced challenges, as did most cities across the nation during the postwar period. However, Milwaukee made serious efforts to economize while still balancing its history of fiscal conservatism with perceptions of reality that demanded modernization. Ultimately the city took on debt to satisfy these demands.

¹³⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 389.

Conclusion

In summation, *Milwaukee Journal* coverage was consistent in its demand that Milwaukee improve the downtown. While the City Club of Milwaukee remained more fiscally conservative during civic planning. The City Club involved itself with politics favoring the annexation of properties surrounding Milwaukee; it cannot be understated, the importance this would have had in expanding Milwaukee's tax base. Further frugal financial priorities revealed themselves in the City Club's beautification initiatives. There is the real impression that beautification efforts had to reward the city and taxpayer with monetary benefits; financial concerns were pivotal in the developmental stages of the lakefront and river redevelopment projects. This raises questions of whether beautification and redevelopment reflected a concern for societal well being or simply attracting capital into Milwaukee. This research has concluded both are correct. The conferences and committee records from the City Club express an honest concern with making urban living in Milwaukee more pleasing. However, redevelopment could not have separated itself from the realities of politics, especially considering Milwaukee's own record of non-debt politics.

Future research could reanalyze many facets of development and beautification in the city of Milwaukee. There remain many documents unanalyzed by this research, which could be utilized to create additional detail and perspective. Additionally further research could analyze the freeway construction in Milwaukee, how this development was discussed and how a freeway system met demands for modernization. Next, race, ethnicity, and religion could be discussed in Milwaukee politics of civic redevelopment. Socialism's influence and the influence of socioeconomic class dynamics could furthermore be reflected upon. In depth analysis of the suburbs would provide an excellent contrast with the material presented within this report, which

focused itself primarily with dialogue, especially the discourses regarding the downtown and the river/lakefront developments. However redevelopment efforts harbor deeper implications that have not been touched upon by this research. Although other authors noted within the Historiography section have addressed various dimensions of these topics, there is a great deal more to uncover.

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Primary

“Action Urged on Housing Improvement: President of New Non-Partisan Council Asks New Jersey Groups to Support Program,” press release: “News from Action: American Council To Improve Our Neighborhoods, Inc.,” National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

This press release was used to learn more about ACTION as an organization. Its information added to the analysis by positioning the redevelopment in Milwaukee within a more nationwide perspective.

Analysis Request No. 154 by Arthur Else, progress report, April 26, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

This primary source document described some of the City Club’s findings regarding the lakefront development. It was used to explain their planning for redevelopment and establish the importance fiscal conservatism held in the organization.

Bruce, William George, “Shall Milwaukee Issue Bonds to Finance Its Improvements?: ‘Yes,’ Says Bruce, Because Present Policy Can’t Give Us the Policy We Need,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1947.

The article was used to explain the arguments advocated by the Improve Milwaukee NOW Committee, during the 1947 referendum debate. The source was particularly useful because it was authored by a representative of the committee itself.

City of Milwaukee Board of Harbor Commissioners to the Special Committee on Lakefront Land Study, letter, December 12, 1961, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

This primary source document gave additional detail to the analysis of City Club involvement in lakefront development. It outlined possible uses for the lakefront property that revealed a concern for economic return on investment. It was used to strengthen the analysis of the organization’s planning operation.

Doyme, John L, speech: “Welcome and Opening Address by County Executive John L. Doyme,” speech presented at the County Executive Conference on Beautification, April 26, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

This was a speech outline that introduced the presenters for the County Executive Conference on Beautification. The document helped establish the purpose of the conference.

Excerpt from Cotton Northup's talk before the Construction and Civic Development luncheon of the 42nd annual meeting of the US Chamber of Commerce held at Washington's Mayflower Hotel, "Office Memorandum To: Mr. Heisfell, From: Breckenfeld," National Urban Coalition Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

This excerpt from a speech, appearing in an ACTION memo, was used to highlight possible motivational concerns behind redevelopment. The concluding thoughts of this paper strongly address questions of whether beautification and redevelopment were initiated out of concern for standards of living, attracting capital (return on investment), or both. Although this question cannot be answered without a question of a doubt (especially because it might vary depending on the source) it remains a crucial consideration.

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This speech was used to give perspective on the research; it represented a call for redevelopment, however in another city, aside from Milwaukee.

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All of the speeches given at the County Executive Conference on Beautification were used to establish additional detail regarding the importance of city beautification in civic discourse.

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Kole, Jack W, "Her Plight Tells Need of Housing," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 24, 1959.

The article provided an excellent addition to this research's examination of *Milwaukee Journal* coverage. It was especially important because it differed in tone from other articles and added depth to the examination, by highlighting entirely new concerns.

Mason, Jerry, "Fighting the Postwar Blues," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1947.

This article was used to examine *Milwaukee Journal* arguments regarding city redevelopment, following World War II. The article was a major stepping stone in the research, it supported the research's thesis that the *Journal* advocated for large scale development of the cityscape.

Mayor's Beautification Committee, annual report, September 14, 1966, City Club of Milwaukee, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

This report was used to supplement the discussion on beautification efforts in the city, especially during the later years of the period under study.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Technical Committee: Milwaukee River Study, Friday, February 7, 1964 at the Mayor's Conference Room, City Hall, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives/Milwaukee Area Research Center.

Similar to the utilization of lakefront material, this primary source document, gave detail to another civic beautification project: the riverfront beautification and redevelopment.

Petshek, Evelyn, "Memorandum To: Members of the City Plan Commission," Records of the Henry W. Maier administration, 1960-1988, Milwaukee Area Research Center.

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Trotter, Joe William, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

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