

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

THE CREATION OF MILWAUKEE'S SEGREGATION: A LOOK AT  
MILWAUKEE'S PAST FROM 1900-1930s

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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## **Abstract**

This paper will be exploring race relations and the beginning of segregation among the people in urban Milwaukee, Wisconsin starting in 1900 and ending before the United States involvement in World War II, and how the Milwaukee Urban League helped with the advancement of African Americans and other people of color in urban Milwaukee. This paper will examine what economic, social, and political actions in Milwaukee caused the city to become segregated, and explain why Milwaukee County remains one of the most segregated cities in our nation today. The reason this paper will be focusing on the 1900s through the 1930s is that this was a period of time when Milwaukee's population began expanding rapidly due to industrialization, providing many new job opportunities for people of all races. This research may help determine if today's Milwaukee became more or less segregated from the effects of social issues, politics, economics, and organizations like the Milwaukee Urban League.

Some of the important sources I will be using are Joe William Trotter Jr.'s book *Black Milwaukee*, where he has done extensive research on the African American population of Milwaukee and other northern cities with high African American populations. John Gurda's *The Making of Milwaukee* is another important source that helps explain Milwaukee's history and the different social and political movements that have emerged. Another essential source for this paper are the primary documents of the *Milwaukee Urban League* on microfilm from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's archives.

## Introduction

In the past couple of years of Milwaukee's history, fighting has broken out in the form of flash mobs of teenagers, requiring the use of police and more security at summer events. The first of these recent incidents happened on July 4, 2010, when a flash mob of dozens of teenagers ran into a BP gas station and looted the place. Shortly after, youth from the mob traveled to the Kilbourn Reservoir Park where they began attacking and robbing a group of 20 to 25 friends from Milwaukee's Riverwest neighborhood who had gathered at the park to watch a firework show.<sup>1</sup> Another similar incident during the opening night of Wisconsin's 2011 State Fair in Milwaukee also took place. Fighting would break out around 11 p.m. between the people of the fairgrounds and dozens to hundreds of youths.<sup>2</sup> The reason these events would get a lot of attention in media was not just because of the fighting, but the claims that these incidents were considered "race riots." According to the witnesses in both incidents, the attackers were African American while most of the victims were white. In what seems to be an incident that would have happened fifty plus years ago, the fighting that was called a "colorblind" crime by the Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn, but would be labeled as a race riot by media.

One of the most known race riots in Milwaukee's history happened July 30, 1967. The five hour riot would result in a 24 hour curfew, 1,740 arrests, almost 100 injuries, 3 deaths, and the 4,800 guardsmen from around the state of Wisconsin to be sent to

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<sup>1</sup> Meg Jones, "Flynn Calls Looting, Beatings in Riverwest Barbaric," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (July 6, 2011), <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/125027704.html>, (accessed 23 October, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Don Walker, Mike Johnson, and Breann Schossow, "State Fair Melees Produce 11 Injuries, 31 Arrests," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (5 August, 2011), <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/126828998.html>, (accessed 23 October, 2013).

Milwaukee.<sup>3</sup> Although this case labeled “Milwaukee’s Bloodiest Night<sup>4</sup>”, Milwaukee was able to act swiftly and regain order to prevent a high injury and death rate compared to cities like Detroit, Michigan with 43 deaths, and Newark, New Jersey with 26 deaths.<sup>5</sup> These incidents, both new and old highlight the racial tension between African Americans and whites in the city of Milwaukee that has been lingering in the city for over a century. But why is it still continuing? Throughout Milwaukee’s history, certain groups or communities would go through times of oppression, resulting in division or even violence. When new groups enter the city, they tend to start at the bottom with tough and unwanted jobs, low wages, rough housing conditions, and sometimes discrimination from other groups. Groups ranging from the Germans, Poles, Irish, Mexican, Chinese, and African Americans would face hard times when they first arrived in the working-class industrial city. But due to the low numbers of Chinese and Mexicans in Milwaukee I will not be focusing on their groups as much as the Germans, Poles, and African Americans who had greater numbers in Milwaukee. The fear of competition for jobs between these groups resulted with the city’s elites placing barriers in the way of communities, making it harder for them to climb up the social and political ladders in the city. In the case of the Germans, it would be War propaganda that would bring hatred from Europe to the city of Milwaukee, effecting a majority of the German population in the 1910s as Gurda examines. African American would see struggles in the expanding city Milwaukee because of the low wages they worked for, taking the jobs away from other working groups.

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<sup>3</sup> “City Acted Fast; Detroit, Newark Didn’t” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 1, 1967. p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> “City Acted Fast; Detroit, Newark Didn’t” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 1, 1967. p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 371.

When people think back on segregation and race relations in the United States, most are reminded of the events that took place typically in the South in the late 19<sup>th</sup> through mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, present day Milwaukee, Wisconsin is considered one of the most segregated cities in the United States. This comes off shocking since Wisconsin is nowhere near the South and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed almost half a century ago. Although Milwaukee has not become completely desegregated, I believe that the aid African Americans and other minorities at the time received from organizations or groups for jobs, along with the rise of socialism, helped Milwaukee become a less segregated city than what it could have been.

## **Historiography**

Similar to most cities in the north in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, industries would become the staple for Milwaukee economy. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> through early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Milwaukee would shift from commercial based economy to industrial capitalism. Jobs and industries like milling, slaughtering, tanning, and brewing had become the foundation for Milwaukee's economy. Eventually Milwaukee's iron and steel industries would surpass agricultural processing like most cities in the Great Lakes region.<sup>6</sup> In his book, *Black Milwaukee, The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*, Joe William Trotter Jr. argues that the movement away from agricultural, domestic, and personal service jobs and into more urban-industrial jobs creating "complex interactions of racial and class consciousness and behavior."<sup>7</sup> Trotter states that the need for African American workers for factory employment in Milwaukee was more demanding than in any other city in the

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<sup>6</sup> Joe William Trotter, Jr. *Black Milwaukee, The Making of an Industrial Proletariat* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, xii.

United States, and the proletarianization of Milwaukee African American population would result in the unification of the African American bourgeoisie and the African American working-class, who would “express their class interests in explicitly racial terms.”<sup>8</sup> The proletarianization of African Americans in Milwaukee however did not result in a loss of autonomy, which was the view Marxism shared for proletarianization. Trotter argues that the proletarianization actually helped the economic status of African Americans in Milwaukee.<sup>9</sup> This would be true for other ethnic groups throughout the city as well. Trotter goes on to state;

Industrial expansion created economic opportunities that increased the city’s population from 71,616 in 1870 to 373,857 in 1910, thereby raising Milwaukee’s rank among American cities from 19<sup>th</sup> in 1870 to 12<sup>th</sup> in 1910. Immigrants made up a high, though declining percentage of the population during most of the period: 1870 (47.1%) and 1910 (29.8%)<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned by Trotter, immigrants were a significant portion of Milwaukee’s population. When large numbers of immigrants came to the country in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many would move through the east coast and into the newer settlements in the United States, including Wisconsin.

Due to the industrial expansion and large German population, Milwaukee’s population would consist of a large working-class who would find their political voice in socialist leaders.<sup>11</sup> The book *The Making of Milwaukee* written by John Gurda goes into detail about the emergence of the socialist movements in Milwaukee that would last until the end of the Great Depression.<sup>12</sup> Gurda argues that the socialist would create initiatives

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<sup>8</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, xi-xii.

<sup>9</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 276-277.

<sup>10</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 4

<sup>11</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 210.

<sup>12</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 305.

designed to “make Milwaukee a model city for the workingman and his family.”<sup>13</sup> Other books like Bayard Still’s *Milwaukee: The History of the City* and Patrick Jones’ *The Selma of the North* also brush upon Milwaukee’s socialism movement and how it affected the city’s racial tensions by supporting the white working-class and tried to leave out the African-American working class. Because of proletarianization and rise in socialism in Milwaukee, I believe that these issues would result in the beginning of segregation in Milwaukee. The segregation that the Milwaukee Urban League tried to end with interracial cooperation, and perhaps helped make Milwaukee become less segregated today than it otherwise could have been. The connection between the Milwaukee Urban League, proletarianization, and Milwaukee’s socialism together is not found in any of the books used, this paper will show how they are connected to Milwaukee’s current state of segregation.

## **Demographics & Division of Milwaukee’s People**

The late-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was a period of growth for Milwaukee. The 1850 United States Census indicates that there were 31,077 people in Milwaukee, with immigrants born out of the United States making up 60 percent of this total population.<sup>14</sup> By 1890, immigrants and their children made up 86.4 percent of Milwaukee’s population, making the city the “most foreign” city in the United States.<sup>15</sup> In 1900, the population would increase dramatically to an overwhelming 330,822 people, a 965 percent increase with an annual growth rate of 19.3 percent between the years of 1850 and 1900. The

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<sup>13</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 214.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, U.S. Census of Population, 1850, from University of Virginia Library: 2007, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>, (accessed 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*, Harvard University Press: 2009. 15.

number of foreign-born persons would also increase by 222 percent but at a slower annual growth rate of 4.5 percent, totaling 102,647 immigrants in 1900.<sup>16</sup> By 1910, working-class migrants from Eastern European countries like the Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania continued to come to the city, contributing more to the city's diverse population. The proportion of foreign residents would total 78.6 percent (roughly 340,484 foreign-born people), tying New York City as the most foreign city.<sup>17</sup> This data helps show how diverse Wisconsin's largest populated city truly was between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Of all the immigrants, Germans made up a large fraction due to the cheaper land costs while also being more financially established. Germans were also some of the most successful immigrants by helping the city discover its most popular beverage, beer.

Companies like Pabst, Schlitz, and Miller were all based in Milwaukee by Germans.<sup>18</sup>

John Gurda's book, *The Making of Milwaukee*, discusses that;

The Germans made Milwaukee safe for ethnicity. The simple fact that a non-English-speaking group was the city's largest made it easier, relatively speaking, for later arrivals to resist the melting pot. Pressures to assimilate were always present, but they may have been weaker in Milwaukee than in cities with larger Anglo-Saxon populations. The Yankees were outnumbered; it was acceptable to be something else.<sup>19</sup>

The next biggest immigrant group was the Irish making up 15 percent of the population in 1848. Unfortunately, the Irish were not as successful as the Germans were since the majority of them came to the city with very little. 55 percent of Milwaukee's Irish population were unskilled laborers by 1850 and tended to settle in the Third Ward.

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Census, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, U.S. Census of Population, 1900, from University of Virginia Library: 2007, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>, (accessed 2012)

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, U.S. Census of Population, 1910, from University of Virginia Library: 2007, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/county.php>, (accessed 2012) & Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 61-64.

<sup>19</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 65.

Eventually their offspring would rise socially and economically but the early Irish “showed the effects of grinding poverty and marginal social status,” Gurda states.<sup>20</sup>

American-born whites, concentrated in business and professional occupations, resided on the far West and Upper East Side. Higher-paid German factory operatives and skilled tradesmen also occupied the northwest portion of the city. While some lived in the North side near the tanneries, flour mills, and other unskilled labor pursuits, Poles tended to settle south of the Menomonee River. Newer smaller groups of immigrants, Italian and Jews along with others, concentrated around the heart of Milwaukee. The Jewish area would later become a prominent place for African-Americans who settled there in large numbers before World War I.<sup>21</sup> The breakdown of these groups and the wards they lived in will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

After the industrial boom, Milwaukee’s population continued to increase rapidly. The city’s population in 1920 increased to 457,147 and continued to rise to 578,249 by 1930. This rapid growth added to Milwaukee’s problem of overcrowding. Right behind New York, Milwaukee’s population density peaked at 18,213 persons per square mile. Contributing to the density was the developer’s craving for profit along with the choice of immigrants tight housing units packed with people and their families. As a result, suburbs around Milwaukee sprouted and absorbed some of the overcrowding from the urban parts of the city. Thousands of Poles would settle in the West Allis South of Oklahoma Avenue.<sup>22</sup>

Milwaukee was becoming more and more modern. The pattern of old groups moving to the outside parts of Milwaukee while new groups moved into the center of the

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<sup>20</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 66.

<sup>21</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 246-250.

city would continue, but after World War I it would not be European immigrants like it had been for the last couple decades. The number of immigrants coming to Milwaukee dropped from 22,508 between the years 1900-1910 to a low of 1,369 between the years 1910-1920.<sup>23</sup> Gurda elaborates that;

World War I had slowed transatlantic immigration to a trickle, and quota laws of the early 1920s kept the faucet tightly closed. For the country as a whole, the number of new European arrivals plummeted from 1,058,391 in 1914 to 148,366 in 1925. The unforeseen result was critical shortage of unskilled workers. Like their counterparts elsewhere in America, Milwaukee industrialists had long relied on Europeans.<sup>24</sup>

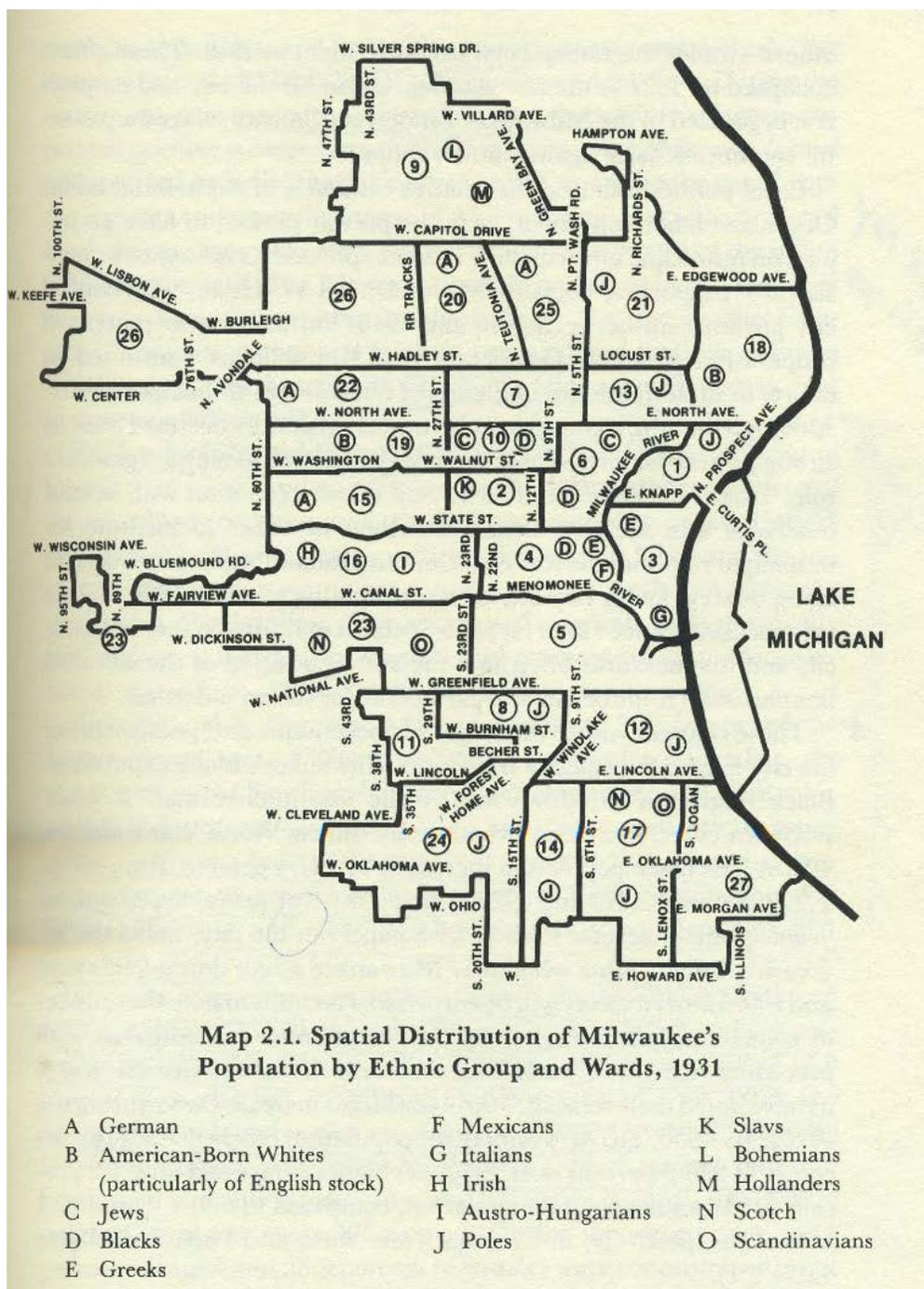
In 1931, the city of Milwaukee was divided by 27 wards. Germans were the main foreign group occupying the 15<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> wards, and some parts of the 18<sup>th</sup>. U.S. born Milwaukeeans would also share parts of the 18<sup>th</sup> ward but tended to congregate in the 19<sup>th</sup> ward. The Dutch tended to live in the southern 9<sup>th</sup> ward that was mainly occupied by Czechs who also occupied parts of the 10<sup>th</sup> ward, between North Ave. and Vine St. A large Jewish community settled in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> wards, that would later be the area African Americans were centralized. Poles settled in many areas throughout the city and monopolized the 1<sup>st</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> wards; and were distributed in portions of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> wards. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ward would be inhabited by a colony of Slovenes, Italians shared the 3<sup>rd</sup> ward with the Greeks who claimed the 4<sup>th</sup> ward, and made up a section of the 17<sup>th</sup> ward. The predominantly Irish 16<sup>th</sup> ward would also be shared by Austrians. Slovenes made up the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> ward; Scottish in also in the

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<sup>23</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 42

<sup>24</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 257.

17<sup>th</sup> ward, shared with Scandinavians who also resided 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>25</sup> This map taken from Trotter's *Black Milwaukee* helps show the division of these wards.



(Map of Milwaukee County's Wards from Trotter's *Black Milwaukee*, 43)

<sup>25</sup> Bayard Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City*, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948), 454-455.

Before and after the growing number of African Americans in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> wards, most foreign-born peoples continued to reside in the wards their generations lived in for the last couple of decades until 1940. By 1940, the percentage of foreign-born white persons had dropped to less than 15 percent in the urban community; but more than 20 percent of Milwaukee's residents still spoke German,<sup>26</sup> showing how much influence Germans had on Milwaukee's population.

With a wide range of different nationalities in Milwaukee, it was important for these groups to work together to better the city. After Hitler's attack on Poland, Poles and Polish-Americans were able to integrate into the city much easier. The appearance of Polish banking institutions, industrial enterprises, dozens of Polish-American dentists, attorneys, physicians, and architects suggested a developing common stratification that helped Milwaukee Poles develop a sense of nationality, similar to the German American experience.<sup>27</sup> An important force that promoted the wholesome assimilation of Milwaukee's foreign-born population was the International Institute, organized in 1923 as a branch of the Young Women's Christian Association.<sup>28</sup> The plan for the institute was to develop leadership among foreign-born people and promote appreciation of them by familiarizing other Americans with the contributions of their culture. Classes for immigrants, folk festivals, activities of Milwaukee's adult educational programs, and the Harvest Festival of Many Lands, sponsored by the International Institute, helped bring the city's diverse nationalities together.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City*, 453.

<sup>27</sup> Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City*, 468-469.

<sup>28</sup> "About Us," *International Institute of Wisconsin*, Milwaukee, <http://www.iwisconsin.org/about-us.html>, (accessed 15 October, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City*, 471.

With the growth of Milwaukee's African American community came the increasing racial concentration of urban African American development. Whether by choice, economic necessity, restrictive housing, discriminatory loan and real estate practices, or racism, the "black district" also known as "Little Africa" and "Bronzeville;" or in Patrick Jones' book, *The Selma of the North*, "the inner core," emerged in the southern 6<sup>th</sup> ward. This area would be known for its gambling dens, brothels, and liquor stores. By 1940, this core developed into a 75-block district that would house 90 percent of Milwaukee's African American population. According to Jones;

"White Milwaukeeans outside of the inner core staunchly resisted the encroachment of black people into their neighborhoods, and real estate agents, banks, and local, state, and federal authorities also worked to maintain the racial status quo in housing."<sup>30</sup>

These were the early signs of Milwaukee's housing segregation among African Americans that is still prevalent today. The history of this segregation can go back a couple decades starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Compared to the South, Milwaukee along with other northern cities would become a safer place for African Americans to live and have better job opportunities. After reconstruction in the South ended in 1877, Jim Crow Laws were gradually established by Southern States, legally and purposely segregating the South, leaving many African Americans unemployed and searching for jobs. African Americans from the South migrated to the north in search of better opportunities both socially and economically. This migration known as The Great Migration would last until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and offered millions of African Americans new opportunities and hopes for a safer position in the United States.

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<sup>30</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 19.

The most popular city that many African Americans flocked to in the Midwest was Chicago, Illinois. However, these large numbers of incoming African Americans in Chicago would cause troubles with the current residents in the city leading to somewhat tense pressure between African Americans and whites. Being less than 100 miles away,<sup>31</sup> Milwaukee was a relatively short trip north by train or boat and could offer better opportunities for newly arrived African Americans. However, Trotter explains;

Milwaukee employers, like other northern industrialists, articulated the myth that blacks were inherently “inadaptable” to the intellectual and physical requirements of the machine. Thus, employers considered blacks particularly suited only for arduous common laborer jobs as well as for menial domestic and personal service tasks.<sup>32</sup>

The decrease in unskilled workers from Europe resulted with the placement of African Americans and Latinos into the labor system. Milwaukee’s African American population at the time also began to grow rapidly. In 1910 the African American population of 980 people would more than double to 2,229 people in 1920. The population later tripled its size to 7,501 people by 1930.<sup>33</sup> Although the numbers of African Americans increased in the city, the size of the African American population remained rather small compared with the rest Milwaukee. Milwaukee’s African American community ranked among the smallest for northern cities. African Americans only made up 0.2 percent of the city’s population between 1870 through 1910. While the African American population in most other northern cities would have no more than 5 percent, Milwaukee’s was surprisingly low. As Milwaukee’s population increased by 92

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<sup>31</sup> “Milwaukee, Wisconsin,” (Google Maps, Google:2013), <https://maps.google.com/maps?ie=UTF-8&gl=us&daddr=Milwaukee,+WI&saddr=Chicago,+IL&panel=1&f=d&fb=1&geocode=Ke3L9NA8LA61MQDAwAmpuCV%3BKedHi1fXAgWIMYR7QbUiGV9E&ei=WQaxUs-TFYs0yAHiyYDoAQ&ved=0CCoQ-A8wAA>, (accessed 3 December, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 257.

percent between the years 1870-1910, the African American population only increased by 13.7 percent.<sup>34</sup>

The African American population in Milwaukee was small enough that there was little obvious racism at first. But according to Gurda;

African Americans were invariably the first to be fired in economic downturns, and many experienced discrimination in theaters, restaurants, and the housing market. Like newcomers of every background and every generation, blacks lived together by choice, but the choice of neighborhoods was not entirely theirs.<sup>35</sup>

An article from the *Sentinel* speaks to the unfair conditions African American experienced in Milwaukee with the mentioning of 35 mailboxes in the hallway of a three storied building that was “terribly rundown.” Many African American were forced to live in alley houses due to landlords requesting ridiculously high monthly rents. The example from this article says that some landlords would charge as high as 100 dollars for one month’s rent.<sup>36</sup> These poor housing conditions also effected the health among African Americans. With 22.29 percent of Milwaukee’s African American population dying from tuberculosis alone while the only 4.58 percent of the white population died from tuberculosis during the same period.<sup>37</sup> That year in 1927, Milwaukee would have the largest death rate from tuberculosis when compared to other large cities like Cleveland

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<sup>34</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 258.

<sup>36</sup> “Rev. Dunkley Reveals Terrible Existing Conditions; Suggests Remedies,” *The Sentinel*, November 25, 1928, found in *Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979*, Milwaukee Micro 20, (Housed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries’ Archives Department/ owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society), Reel 3.

<sup>37</sup> “Negro Health Week,” *The Sentinel*, April 2, 1927, found in *Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979*, Milwaukee Micro 20, (Housed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries’ Archives Department/ owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society), Reel 3.

(407 deaths), Kansas City (369 deaths), Philadelphia (327 deaths), and Minneapolis (200 deaths).<sup>38</sup>

African Americans would share the same neighborhoods as Jews, Germans, Slovaks, and other European immigrants. Eventually, institutions like the Milwaukee Urban League, the Negro Business League, and a branch of the NAACP would develop in these diverse neighborhoods.<sup>39</sup> The impact of this population boom and overcrowding in Milwaukee's inner core intensified racial tensions and would assist with the deterioration of housing, health, and urban education.<sup>40</sup> Another concern brought up in the month of November was the construction of a junk yard adjoining the Willarege Hotel, located in one of the most densely populated districts of African Americans in the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward. The MUL found fifteen junk yards in the 6<sup>th</sup> ward alone, which they believe is responsible for the high death rate in the district; "as old rags, mattresses and other refuse are deposited in the yards."<sup>41</sup>

With the advancement of African Americans, Milwaukee was now becoming the city we almost know today. Another group that began making its way to Milwaukee in the 1920 would be the Hispanics, mostly Mexicans. Taking jobs in tanneries, steel plants, and foundries, the Mexican population would stay relatively small, with only 1,479 being tallied in the 1930 federal census. According to the book, *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, by Margo Anderson and Victor Greene;

The Spanish-speaking community in the Near South Side grew slowly until the 1930s. Mexican immigrants and other Latino migrants from the south Texas

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<sup>38</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Milwaukee Urban League: Seventh Annual Report," *Milwaukee Urban League*, Milwaukee Micro 20, (Housed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries' Archives Department/ owned by the Wisconsin Historical Society), Reel 1.

<sup>39</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 258.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 23-24.

<sup>41</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Foreword on Report of Activities of the Milwaukee Urban League November, 1926," Reel 1. Slide 197.

settled formerly Polish-dominated neighborhoods. Some of these newcomers also left quickly, as high unemployment during the Depression forced half of the Mexicans to return either to Texas or Mexico.<sup>42</sup>

The Chinese between the periods of 1900 through 1930 would be another one of the smallest minority groups if not the smallest. The first documented Chinese resident in Milwaukee would not appear until 1874 (although others may not have been accounted for due to anti-Chinese events both in the city and the nation as a whole). The number of Chinese residents would gradually increase to an estimated 12 by 1881 then increased in a rather large spike to 90 Chinese residents 6 years later in 1887.<sup>43</sup>

However, an incident involving two Chinese men and several white teenage girls would reduce the Chinese population in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the book, *Chinese Milwaukee*, David Holmes and Wendbin Yuan account that “public anger spurred on by sensationalized newspaper accounts, four days of protests exploded in a 12-hour riot targeting Chinese Laundries on March 11, 1889.”<sup>44</sup> The jobs that most Chinese Milwaukeeans would create and work would be in the laundry and restaurant businesses. Before the 1889 riot, there would be 30 Chinese laundries in 1887 with the majority of them located, with other Chinese businesses, several blocks west from the Milwaukee River and north from Grand Avenue.<sup>45</sup> Holmes and Yuan go on to claim that;

The riot had a lasting effect on the Chinese community, as measured by the number of Chinese laundries listed in Milwaukee City Directory. Whereas a total of 30 laundries were listed in 1887, the number during the 1890s ranged from 10 to 12. As 90 percent or more of the Chinese residents in the city were employed in the laundry trade during this period, the decrease in the number of laundries likely

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<sup>42</sup> Margo Anderson and Victor Greene, *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 164.

<sup>43</sup> David B. Holmes and Wenbin Yuan, *Chinese Milwaukee* (Arcadia Publishing: Charleston, 2008), 9-10.

<sup>44</sup> Homes and Yuan, *Chinese Milwaukee*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Homes and Yuan, *Chinese Milwaukee*, 15.

reflects a proportionate decrease in the population of the Milwaukee Chinese community.<sup>46</sup>

The riot incident along with other anti-Chinese acts would decrease the Chinese population back to a small number. By 1900, the Chinese population was a low number of 23 people and slowly increased the next 30 years. In 1910 the population increased to 51 people and only added 14 more residents in 1920 totaling 65 people. The peak of the Chinese population in Milwaukee during this time period only totaled 176 people by the year 1930. Similar to the trend, as the Chinese population increased so did the amount of Chinese laundries. The number started at 12 laundries in 1900 and increased to 58 by 1930. The reason for the very low Chinese population was not just in Milwaukee alone, but in the entire country. The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1902 along with the Immigration Act in 1924 would keep the Chinese population to a low number.<sup>47</sup> These low numbers in both the Chinese and Mexican communities demonstrate that issues between races occurred no matter how small the population of a certain group. The larger groups got, the tighter the tension between the groups became. An increasing population challenged the availability of jobs in the job market in Milwaukee. This in allowed the doors to open for socialism to enter the city, that everyone hoped could make jobs available for everyone in the city.

### **Milwaukee's Socialist Movement**

With a large working population in the city of Milwaukee, socialism was able to enter the city as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the large German population. Between the years 1870-1910, the working-class became more politically involved due to the

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<sup>46</sup> Homes and Yuan, *Chinese Milwaukee*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Homes and Yuan, *Chinese Milwaukee*, 31.

problems created by the expanding industrial city and its growing population. In 1888, the old Democrat and Republican parties joined forces in order to prevent the election of a Union Labor candidate. The concentration of people in this urban environment along with the development of large public service corporations contributed to the political issues at the time. Leagues like the Municipal League and Voters' League along with other political parties proposed civil service reform and community ownership to purge the corrupt and profiteering government that had developed. By 1910, Social Democrats gained enough strength from workers and progressives to control the common council, win the mayoralty, and make Milwaukee the first large city in the United States to be controlled by Socialism.<sup>48</sup> In turn, these socioeconomic and political changes helped transform Milwaukee's African American population Trotter argues.<sup>49</sup>

Segregated social work expanded by the late 1920s when African Americans intensified their pressure on municipal agencies to hire African American workers to serve the increasingly segregated African American population. Other public departments like the police, school board, and outdoor relief hired African American workers to help other African Americans in the community. Before, African Americans seemed to be excluded from certain works, but now they had become more segregated. Milwaukee's African American population accepted this change for it opened jobs, allowing them to become more involved in city works.<sup>50</sup>

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with help from the large German community, a large portion of Milwaukee became supporters of liberal causes. The German's tame radical impulses along with exposure to America life, allowed a left-leaning idealism in

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<sup>48</sup> Still, *Milwaukee: The History of a City*, 279.

<sup>49</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 120.

the city's Turner halls, freethinker societies, and intellectual circles. The Socialists movement in Milwaukee would also get a boost from the large concentration of industrial workers.<sup>51</sup> When the Republicans and Democrats joined forces to try and dismantle the Socialist influence in Milwaukee, African American would stand for the Socialist, who represented the working-class. African Americans along with other ethnic groups hoped to influence the public patronage system to their benefit by turning to ward-level positions where they could have a chance to become political figures and help make a change.<sup>52</sup>

### **Race Relations and the Milwaukee Urban League**

In the wake of World War I, Milwaukee's German and German-American population would be challenged by the community. With the large population of German heritage in the city, Milwaukee became a center of support for Kaiser Wilhelm and his ideas of expanding the German Empire. Events like the immense "Charity War Bazar" would attract 175,000 people to support German and Austrian widows and orphans of soldiers and other war sufferers. According to the *Milwaukee Journal*, the bazar was "without a doubt the biggest thing ever attempted in Milwaukee."<sup>53</sup> Troubles would arise after 128 Americans loss their lives in the 1915 sinking of Lusitania, which was accused by Germany for carrying contraband to support the British in World War I, creating America's stance against the Central Powers.<sup>54</sup> With the declaration of the United States' involvement in World War I and no longer remaining neutral, the German and German-American supporters would be accused of supporting the enemy with its "Anti-

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<sup>51</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 202.

<sup>52</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee* 120-121.

<sup>53</sup> "Crowds at the Bazaar Overflow the Streets," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 5, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 222.

American” campaigns by injecting “racial hatred” into politics.<sup>55</sup> The shift to Anti-Germania in Milwaukee could be seen in the articles of the *Milwaukee Journal*, where the sentinel, at first, praised the German community’s efforts to support war-sufferers but now accused the German community of having “daily preaching of hatred for this government.” In public schools, the teaching of German was seen as a support for Germany’s actions in the war. The *Milwaukee Journal* predicted that the end of Germania in American society was coming to an end and in 1919 *The Sentinel* would win a Pulitzer Prize for its efforts to save the community from the “German terror.”<sup>56</sup>

The combined efforts made by Unites States patriots, the press, and the American public opinion would result with Germans beginning to break away from their heritage. The German-English Academy would be renamed Milwaukee University School, the German social club known as the Deutscher Club would become the Wisconsin Club, and sauerkraut would be renamed “liberty cabbage” for the consumption of sauerkraut would drop 75 percent during the first year at war with Germany.<sup>57</sup> Another impact anti-Germania had on Milwaukee’s community could be seen in the schools. According to Gurda, the number of local school children enrolled in German classes would fall from 30,000 children in 1916 to a mere 400 children in 1918. The use of the German language would disappear from the press, speeches, and the streets, for citizens who were caught speaking German would be singled out for insult, showing the beginning signs of segregation among Milwaukee’s German population. Teachers and public employees involved in the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, that was created to support the United States

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<sup>55</sup> “Disloyalty Flaunted Daily in the Face of Milwaukee,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 14, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 224-225.

<sup>57</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 225.

in World War I from 1917 to 1918<sup>58</sup>, where forced to sign loyalty oaths if they were not considered “100 percent American”, families who refused to buy their “fair share” of Liberty Bonds from the legion had their houses splashed with yellow paint.<sup>59</sup> Gurda argues that these events to the German community led to the forced assimilation of the German people in Milwaukee. Because of large European American population in Milwaukee, it was much easier for Germans to assimilate in the Milwaukee community. Opposite can be said about the African, Latino, and Asian Americans, most likely because of the color of their skin and different cultural backgrounds. “Milwaukee’s distinctly German society had been blending into the mainstream for decades, but World War I forced a brutal acceleration of the process,” Gurda proclaims.

Although World War I was tough on Milwaukee’s German community, eastern and southern European immigrants remained welcomed in the city. Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes who had their homelands under foreign rule for centuries would be liberated by the war. The reaction of the Liberation was seen in Milwaukee when in June of 1918, 20,000 Slavs paraded through the streets to show their support of the American intervention in World War I and pledged their allegiance to the United States. President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points brought independence to Poland and created the new nations of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which brought pride in Milwaukee’s Slavic communities. Poles now had a chance for success in a city that was predominantly German.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, “*Wisconsin Loyalty Legion: State Secretary’s Report, Mass Meeting Minutes, Annual Meeting Minutes, President’s Address*,” Milwaukee: Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, 1918. (Wisconsin Historical Society: Madison) <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/tp/id/69740> (accessed 26 October, 2013)

<sup>59</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 225-226

<sup>60</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 226.

In *Black Milwaukee*, Trotter argues that the racial tensions were not just being caused by the struggle for jobs, housing, business, and career opportunities between different ethnicities. Tension could be seen in the competitive interplay between African Americans and whites in a broad spectrum in the public and private services and institutions in Milwaukee, and within the city's politics as well. As they joined together to combat racial discrimination in other areas of their lives, African American workers and the bourgeois elite joined forces to resist racial discrimination in the broader institutional and political life of the city. The different class interests of the African American businesses and professional elite on one hand and those of African American industrial workers on the other hindered the push for racial unity.<sup>61</sup> This information from Trotter shows that it was not only whites segregating Milwaukee but African American as well.

Many factors can contribute to segregation in a city. Segregation in a city like Milwaukee can be a conflicting or cooperating struggle. Groups like the African Americans, Irish, and Mexicans may not agree with the unwritten rules of segregation in the city, but cooperated with these unwritten rules by living and working through the division of race in order to not only stay safe but to also keep their jobs. This was seen by Trotter's;

Compared to Southern conditions, Afro-Americans improved their economic position in Milwaukee. Most of them entered industrial jobs where wages ranged from 30.5 cents to 64 cents an hour and from \$3.67 to \$4.79 per day. This contrasted sharply with conditions in the South where, even in urban industrial centers such as Birmingham, unskilled workers earned a maximum of \$2.50 for a nine hour day. Southern farm hands made even less, usually 75 cents to \$1.00 per day.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 15, 115.

<sup>62</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 47.

Even though people had to deal with segregation in Milwaukee, they continued to cooperate with it because of the “safety” and better pay, allowing segregation to become deeper entrenched in the city. There was always someone willing to work entry-level jobs in the rising industrial job market in Milwaukee. These jobs, that were usually dirty, demanding, dangerous, and poorly compensated, opened an alternative option to hopeless poverty in other states or other countries for both African Americans and immigrants.<sup>63</sup>

The struggles between African Americans and whites for jobs, business, and professional opportunities extended to the cities scarce housing supply. As African Americans lost out for better jobs, they were forced to move deeper into decaying sections of the urban housing market, which tended to be in east-central Milwaukee in the 6<sup>th</sup> ward. The growing African American population concentrated in this area formed the basis of African American business and professional expansion during the 1920s,<sup>64</sup> but also led to the poor housing conditions.

For African Americans, it would not be until the World War I when a division in class in northern African American communities began to be more noticeable. Since this African American population was not large at all compared to other northern cities like Chicago and Detroit, a middle-class would become almost nonexistent until 1915. Bourgeois elites with ties to an expanding clientele gradually supplanted a small, educated, business and professional elite tied to white patronage. At the bottom was the broad-based working class of common laborers and domestic and service workers. The low wages received by the working class left little room for the development of an

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<sup>63</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 175.

<sup>64</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 43, 81.

African American professional and business leaders, broadening Milwaukee's segregation.<sup>65</sup>

The old elite were able to stay connected to the economic, political, and social life of Milwaukee's African American community until World War I, when social class distinction became more obvious. African Americans responded to the socioeconomic, political, and racial restrictions by intensifying their efforts to build a separate African American institutional life. The self-help, race pride, and solidarity ideology inspired by Booker T. Washington became a model to help African Americans rise out of the division. When a large number of African American middle-class citizens arrived between 1915, and later in 1932, the dream of a Black Metropolis led to a decline in earlier businesses and professionals who based their services primarily on white consumers. This newly arriving middle-class looked to merge its philosophy of economic self-help and racial unity with the ideological viewpoint of the old elite. Trotter backs this philosophy stating that "the forceful thrust for the full integration of African Americans into the socioeconomic and political life of the city would increasingly gain support. The old elite would also help incorporate the self-help ideology because of the economic opportunities they recognized would come, along with the expanding black population".<sup>66</sup>

Racial hostility following World War I blocked African Americans access to theaters, restaurants, health services, recreational facilities and other services and provisions. Racially biased and stereotypical reports of African Americans in local newspapers supported the unequal treatment of African Americans in other areas of urban life. Initially, the *Milwaukee Journal* from 1919 through 1920 supported local African

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<sup>65</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 28.

<sup>66</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 80.

Americans, but tended to graphically depict African American crime and “underplayed Afro-American achievement.”<sup>67</sup>

The Milwaukee Urban League was proposed by Wisconsin’s Secretary of State Marlin Hull on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1919 with the purpose of promoting, encouraging, assisting, and engaging any and all kinds of work for improving the industrial, economic, and social conditions among African Americans in Milwaukee and the surrounding areas of the city.<sup>68</sup> Under Chapter 181 of the Wisconsin Statutes and acts of amendatory, the business and purpose of the Milwaukee Urban League was created to conduct and educational and social service program to bring a cooperative working relationship among existing agencies and organizations between African Americans and whites as well as develop other agencies and organizations to assist the African American community. Membership for the MUL was chosen from the community on the basis of ability and the interest of each member in the purpose of the organization.<sup>69</sup>

The MUL’s first president Ambrose Nutt helped bring up the issues of health, recreation, housing, labor conditions, and community programs in African American communities.<sup>70</sup>

To improve the welfare work among African American, the MUL began working with the Negro Churches of Milwaukee and members of the Negro Ministers Union, along with The Federation of Colored Women’s Club of Milwaukee, and the Fraternal Organizations in 1924.<sup>71</sup> With a complaint from several parents, the MUL investigated a case of segregation in a Milwaukee school with a large African American enrollment.

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<sup>67</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 116.

<sup>68</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “By-Laws,” Reel 1. Slide 10.

<sup>69</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “By-Laws,” Reel 1. Slide 10.

<sup>70</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “Meeting Minutes November 18, 1919,” Reel 1. Slide 64.

<sup>71</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “Meeting Minutes February 25, 1924,” Reel 1. Slide 128.

The findings of the MUL found that a majority of the African American students tended to be grouped in one section of the classroom. Members of the MUL held a conference with the principal of the school and warned him about the danger of the practice, resulting in a change of arrangement.<sup>72</sup>

The Milwaukee Urban League in the 1920s also saw the importance of recreation and recreation facilities for African Americans. The MUL reported that the African American population had increased by 150 percent between the years 1917 and 1927, with a majority of them coming from areas in the South “where there have been no evidence of organized recreation as such.”<sup>73</sup> At first, there was not much of a demand for recreation among men and women in Milwaukee for their first priority was “bettering their economic status.” But with the family movement and birth rate increase, the desire for extensive recreation came to play. In a study, the MUL showed an increase in school attendance, with 389 African American students attending in 1923, and 615 African American students attending by 1926. The MUL came up with the conclusion that “more of the colored children enjoy the recreational activities which were offered in the school social centers,” which in turn boosted school attendance.<sup>74</sup>

Between World War I and the Depression, the competitive contact between African Americans and whites in the housing and job markets resulted in built tensions between the two and affected the relations in almost every part of the city’s social, political, and economic life. Luckily, this tension would not be as violent as it would be in other large cities at the time. Similar to the struggle for jobs and housing, African

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<sup>72</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “Monthly Report of the Milwaukee Urban League October, 1926,” Reel 1. Slide 185.

<sup>73</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “Recreation for the Colored People,” Reel 1. Slide 231.

<sup>74</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, “Recreation for the Colored People,” Reel 1. Slide 231.

Americans would rely on protests to combat racial discrimination for their demonstrations. The processes that allowed African Americans to expand their institutional, economic, and political potential also promoted greater social class separation.<sup>75</sup> According to Trotter;

The persistence of racial discrimination of socioeconomic and political life of the city frustrated the efforts of middle- and working-class blacks to create class unity across racial lines. Thus, a continuous interracial unity developed between the black bourgeoisie and the Afro-American industrial proletariat, and both groups expressed their class interests in explicitly racial terms.<sup>76</sup>

In the course of fifty years, Milwaukee had become more diverse than it had ever been. Although tensions between some groups had been building, it would not be until post-World War I when the city would have an outbreak in nativism. Schools and industries began offering English lessons for newly arrived immigrants. Americanization programs attempted to unify the city. The Ku Klux Klan revival in 1921 led to 4,400 members joining the group. The main targets of the KKK included immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and African Americans. Even though this northern Klan group was usually non-violent, many of the citizens who wanted a unified city were furious with the group, causing the KKK in Milwaukee to die down.<sup>77</sup> In 1927, one of The MUL's programs that promoted the sympathetic understanding and good will between races was "Race Relations Week." During this week, the public library placed thirty "best books on the Negro question" on special display along with posters containing statistics on African American population, school attendance, and number of professions and businesses ran

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<sup>75</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 138.

<sup>76</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, xi-xi.

<sup>77</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 236

by African Americans in Milwaukee.<sup>78</sup> The MUL would also address members of the Civic Class of West Division High School and the Business and Professional Women's Club on race relations.

While Milwaukeeans were against organizations like the KKK, the city continued to be divided in some areas of life, especially between African Americans and whites. As the immigrant population declined, as mentioned earlier, European immigrants and their children became Americanized, making it much easier for them to unite much faster than other minority groups. Businesses ran by African Americans found it hard to stay in business due to inexperience in business, foreign-born competitors, hostility, and lack in capital. The struggle for jobs between African Americans and whites contributed to the limited housing supply. African Americans were forced to live in rough housing situations due to the low income the majority of them faced. Here is when you can see the beginning of Milwaukee's segregation that may still be in effect today. Even if an African American worker had a business to succeed, it most likely did not. "A growing pattern of white racism in the socioeconomic and political life of the city often kept even those who had the material means from moving out", Trotter explains.<sup>79</sup> This in turn helped the segregation gap get even wider.

When it came to jobs, African Americans often occupied the jobs in harsh conditions. African American tannery employees often worked in full rubber due to the eroding lime they worked with that was used to remove hairs from hides, while whites often controlled the cleaner and more skilled tanning jobs of stretching and buffering hides. In Packinghouses, African Americans generally were employed as stable cleaners

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<sup>78</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Monthly Report of the Milwaukee Urban League February 1927," Reel 1. Slide 221.

<sup>79</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 21.

or slaughterers while whites worked in the actual butcher category with the skilled job requiring the use of the knife. African Americans shared the most disagreeable jobs with large numbers of foreign-born white workers like the Poles and Hungarians.<sup>80</sup> Working conditions, the amount of effort, and wages for unskilled laborers contrasted sharply with the jobs that skilled workers had, that were generally maintained by white Americans. Skilled African American workers coming from the South had to take up jobs as unskilled workers in industrial jobs in order to have an economic position in Milwaukee.

Ambrose Nutt along with other directors in the MUL were able to examine the demographics and statistics of industries and reported that the demand for African American labor was increasing in 1919 Milwaukee. An example of this can be seen in Mr. Nutt's statement on the Plankinton Packers' Company who employed 125 "colored men", making up 8 percent of their working force. The Plankinton Packers' Company were desirous to raise that percentage to 10 percent. Another company known as Pfister & Vogel was a tannery who employed 175 African Americans and had "very favorable results from the Negro workmen." A consensus of opinion of the various plants and industries visited by members of the MUL were satisfied with "Negro Labor" in most instances and saw an increasing demand for African American labor in 1919.<sup>81</sup> Mr. Nutt would investigate the conditions of the African American community and was able to have the MUL warn African Americans about investing their money in fraudulent real estate agencies.<sup>82</sup>

In the early 1920s, economic difficulties confronting African Americans were seen with the increasing shift towards anti-African American migration to Milwaukee.

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<sup>80</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Meeting Minutes November 18, 1926," Reel 1, Slide 64.

<sup>82</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Meeting Minutes November 18, 1926," Reel 1, Slide 64.

White workers protested the Milwaukee Railroad because of wage cuts in 1922 and started a trend. White unions feared the use of African Americans as temporary workers in industries whose workers were gone or on strike. These workers were known as strikebreakers and were in regular use during World War I during the labor shortage in the city. Eugene Cooney, president of the Local System Federation of Northwestern Railroads, requested that the mayor of Milwaukee to stop the use of African American strikebreakers, who agreed to have no more African American strikebreakers sent to the city and permitted racial discord. The Local System Federation along with white workers succeeded with the efforts to block the widespread use of African Americans as strikebreakers.<sup>83</sup>

African Americans in Milwaukee were hoping to avoid the plight of African American workers in St. Louis, Chicago, and other northern cities where violence against African American workers would shift to violence against all African Americans in general. Groups like the Milwaukee Urban League, NAACP, and the City Federation of Colored Women's Club even opposed railroad companies importing African American laborers to replace strikers and would ask for the cooperation of Milwaukee's citizens and officials. Milwaukee's African American newspaper the *Blade* would also oppose the use of African American strikebreakers as well as the large migration of African Americans to the city, stating;

“Observation is that, generally speaking, it is not well for members of colored race to adopt migratory tactics. Any considerable movement from one place to another is the invitation for an outbreak of resentment usually merging into violence.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 57

<sup>84</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 57.

The fear of violence breaking out among and effecting all African Americans was trying to be avoided. Although it sounded bad that groups like the NAACP and MUL did not want more African American strikebreakers to come to the city, they may have helped save the city from having more racial violence and potentially stopped race riots.

According to Trotter, several barriers obstructed African American's access to better industrial jobs; racist attitudes and practices of labor unions and employers and the up-and-downs in the urban economy would contribute to the weak foundation for emerging African American industrial workers. Some industrialist praised African Americans for delivering satisfying work during the wartime emergency, while other employers had stereotypical attitudes towards African American workers. White workers shared this racist attitude towards African Americans in order to create barriers to keep the opportunities of African American industrialists minimal. Milwaukee labor leaders wanted to keep the city of Milwaukee white and free of African American low-wage labor. These low levels of tension between African American and white workers would persist through the early 1930. This overt racism was noticed by Mayor Daniel W. Hoan argued the separation between African Americans and whites in order to benefit the city in his eyes;

“I do want to urge among Negroes.... I don't like segregation in theory but colored locals are better than no locals among colored people and may be a step on the road to united locals.”<sup>85</sup>

However, a report done by the MUL shows different. In November of 1926, the MUL presented several problems they termed as “extreme” that were affecting the African American community. The first extreme was that of unemployment which not only effected African Americans but “other racial groups” as well. African Americans

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<sup>85</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 55.

would feel the pressure of unemployment since the majority of them were unskilled laborers and were in a class of workers effected first. An interview with 165 African Americans applying for employment found out that 102 persons had been in Milwaukee for less than a year; 52 had been in Milwaukee between 1 to 5 years; and 8 had been in Milwaukee for more than 5 years. This study helps show that the African American population in the city of Milwaukee was still increasing with the majority of the people coming from the Southern states Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. With most of these new comers bringing families and feeling the effects of unemployment, the study done by the MUL presented the problem of poverty among African Americans.<sup>86</sup>

In 1929, the MUL noticed that employment of African Americans in Northern industries began to suffer. According to The MUL, "Negroes no longer had an occupation which he could call claim as his own".<sup>87</sup> African Americans dominated the fields of labor in African American hotels, Pullman, train and barbershop porters, ditch diggers, and heavy construction workers and were known as "Negro Jobs." But in the recent years at the time, whites began taking these jobs, pushing out the African Americans.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, African American began getting jobs in industries that were unknown to them before. According to William A. Berridge of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, unemployment had increased from one million in 1923 to 4 million in 1928 due to new machinery and over-production. According to Berridge's report, "Negroes should have 400,000 more idlers than were employed in 1923," based

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<sup>86</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Foreword on Report of Activities of the Milwaukee Urban League November, 1926," Reel 1, Slide 197.

<sup>87</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Monthly Report of the Milwaukee Urban League April 1929," Reel 1, Slide 312.

<sup>88</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Monthly Report of the Milwaukee Urban League April 1929," Reel 1, Slide 312.

on race proportions. The MUL believed that educational programs for both employ and employer should be developed in order to decrease this unemployment rate.<sup>89</sup> A positive to come out of the Depression was that it surprisingly improved housing conditions. According to an article in the *Milwaukee Journal*, more houses became available during the depression allowing some African Americans the chance to move out of the 6<sup>th</sup> ward and into houses north of the ward that had better living conditions.<sup>90</sup>

### **Effects From the Depression**

When the stock market crashed on October 24, 1929, Milwaukee's economy seemed to not be affected. Compared to other cities after the crash, Milwaukee seemed to be a sign that the depression would not affect everyone. With the debt amortization fund established in 1923, the city was able to expend hundreds of thousands of dollars for unemployment relief as well as predicted to have 4 million dollars in the bank at the end of the 1931. It would not be until a year later that the effects of the depression would gradually begin to influence the city's economy. Wage earners in Milwaukee County would drop by 44 percent going from 117,658 in 1929 to 66,010 in 1933. Those who were able to keep their jobs still faced low wages and cut paychecks. Manufacturing would drop to 61.4 percent and the city's number would be 10 percentage points worse than the entire nations. By 1933, more than 53 percent of the Milwaukee's property taxes went unpaid.<sup>91</sup>

The African American community would be hit hard by the Depression. According to Jones, half of the city's African American workers became unemployed,

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<sup>89</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Monthly Report of the Milwaukee Urban League April 1929," Reel 1, Slide 312.

<sup>90</sup> Milwaukee Urban League Records 1919-1979, "Better Homes," Reel 3.

<sup>91</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 276-279.

which was three times the rate of white workers. This became even more outrageous when compared to the number of African American workers in Chicago and New York where a fourth of the African American working population was left unemployed. Large employers in Milwaukee continued to discriminate against African American workers during this time. An example that Jones points out is the Schlitz and Pabst breweries who refused to hire African American workers in 1933, during the peak of the Depression. The African American community was politically weak which allowed white union violence against African American workers. Help was offered through the Milwaukee Urban League, who would negotiate with white employers in order to support a change with the African American community. Other groups like the Milwaukee National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, headed by James Dorsey, refused to organize meetings or raise money during the Depression because he believed that Milwaukee's local community could not support the MUL or the MNAACP.<sup>92</sup>

The effects of the Depression would affect everyone in the city of Milwaukee. African Americans would be the highest unemployed group in the city with a 9.6 percent unemployment rate. Compared to the white unemployment rate of 2.6 percent, African Americans in Milwaukee would have a higher unemployment rate than Chicago (6.6 percent), New York (5 percent), and Cleveland (8.1). African Americans in Detroit would be a little more unfortunate with an unemployment rate just 0.5 percent higher than Milwaukee's totaling 10.1 percent. The effects of the unemployment allowed African American groups to come up with new strategies to help the advancement of African Americans in the city.<sup>93</sup>

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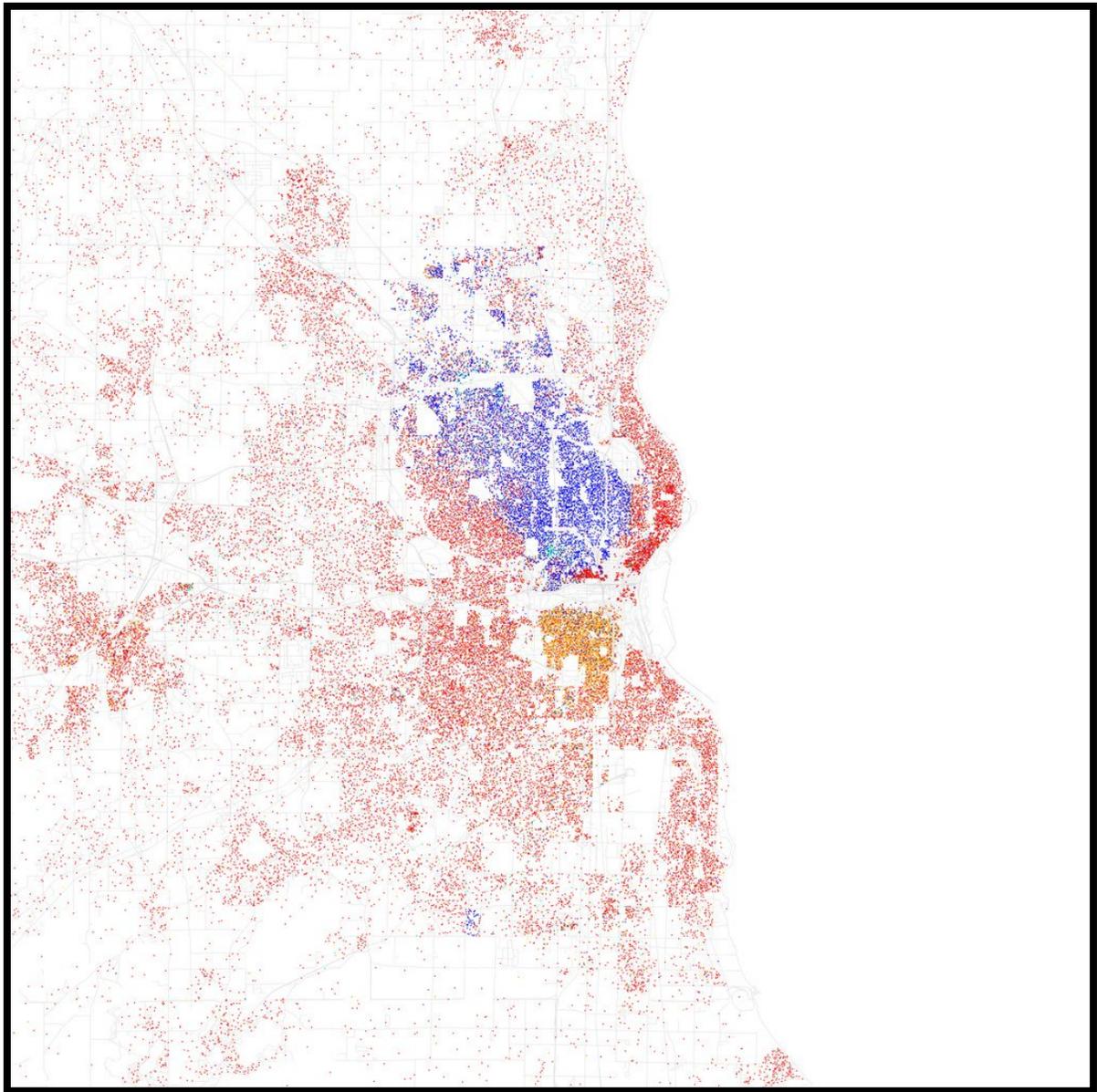
<sup>92</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 23-24.

<sup>93</sup> Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 61.

## **Conclusion and Current State of Milwaukee**

Through my research, I have found it very difficult to determine the effects the MUL along with proletarianization, and socialism had on the segregation in Milwaukee today. Because of the Depression and onset of World War II, the series of struggles made it hard for Milwaukee's population to find a comfortable position to allow equal access for everyone. The main reason for these struggles was because of the need for jobs among the people in Milwaukee. Because of the proletarianization of minorities, especially among African Americans, opportunity was made available in the form of jobs. Proletarianization in Karl Marx's eyes hurts the independence of people but it was opposite in Milwaukee. Though it sounds like proletarianization was a positive effect on worker and opened job opportunities, it resulted in the division among ethnic groups because jobs were taken away from one group of people and given to another for lower pay because industries and businesses knew they could pay workers less, especially if these low-paid worker continued to come to the growing industrial city. Socialism played an important role because it wanted to help the working-class. But the working-class for a majority of the Milwaukee's population who had been working there for years or even generations wanted to get their jobs back from the newly arriving groups of people, which in Milwaukee's case at the time was mostly African Americans. Resulting in the creation of segregation among whites and African Americans in the housing and job markets that can still be seen today. This led to the creation of the Milwaukee Urban League which helped some proletariats get jobs. Although the depression would help improve the conditions of housing among African Americans, it still led to more struggles for job opportunities for everyone, creating more tension between ethnic

groups. Organizations like the Young Women's Christian Association, Milwaukee Urban League, and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as well as other organized events promoted the assimilation of Milwaukee's population but failed to do so completely. Today Milwaukee is one of the most segregated cities in the United States.



(Map of Milwaukee County and its segregation from *Business Insider*. Red represents White people, Blue represents African American people, Orange represents Latino American people, and Green represents Asian American people)

This image from *Business Insider* helps show the division of race in Milwaukee and depicts the similar trend of movement out of the inner core.<sup>94</sup> The red dots represent white people, the blue represents the black people, the orange represents the Latino people, and the green represents the Asian people. With the image, you can see that a majority of the African American population is still located in the northern central section of Milwaukee County, with the Latino population now located more centrally in the county. Whites are primarily located in the suburbs around the city, helping to show the division that arose from better job and housing opportunities allowing them to leave the heart of the city. The low number of green dots show that the Asian population has remained relatively low in the county but is slowly increasing. Wisconsin's white population makes up 86.2 percent of the state's total population. Milwaukee breaks away from this trend with a white population making up 44.8 percent of the city, with the African American population close behind making up 40 percent the city's population.<sup>95</sup> This is interesting because the total percentage of African American in the state of Wisconsin is a mere 6.3 percent.<sup>96</sup> Although there is equality among Milwaukeeans, this segregation whose roots can be traced back to the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries shows that Milwaukee has not reached total equality among its population, and hopefully organizations similar to the Milwaukee Urban League can help break this trend that has lasted over a century.

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<sup>94</sup> Rebecca Baird-Remba and Gus Lubin, "21 Maps of Highly Segregated Cities in America," *Business Insider*: April 25, 2013: <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-segregated-cities-census-maps-2013-4#milwaukee-wis--blacks-live-in-the-north-central-area-hispanics-stay-in-the-southern-inner-city-near-humboldt-park-and-white-people-live-on-the-edges-and-in-the-suburbs-20>, (Accessed November 23, 2013)

<sup>95</sup> U.S. Census, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, U.S. Census of Population, 2010, (U.S. Census Bureau: 2012), <http://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=55>, (accessed 2011).

<sup>96</sup> U.S. Census, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, U.S. Census of Population, 2010.

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