Healing "Sick" Cities: Analyzing Mid-Century Urban Renewal Literature

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Abstract

Mid-century city planners often made the ultimate decision to determine which areas were too "sick" to save, who was allowed access to the new spaces, and who was not. The bias against minorities and anyone who was not considered the perfect tenant is evident in the three types of documents analyzed in this paper: books on urban planning, city plans and reports, and federal government housing policies. Planners would often use the metaphor of the human body and disease when discussing the "cancerous" slum areas in the city whose only treatment was swift extraction. This very narrow focus of mid-century city planners made them unwilling to see the city as many connecting parts that relied on each other for success. This was especially true in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin as developers quickly removed families out of the East Side neighborhood between Lake Michigan and the downtown area in order to build new, modern office space and residential buildings. However, the East Side plan was only part of the problem concerning discrimination against minorities. Civil rights protests regarding issues like opening housing, fair employment, and neighborhood support played a large role in Milwaukee politics during the 1950s and 1960s but many demonstrations were met with violence from opposing white homeowners. When city planners established which neighborhoods were worth treating for urban decay and which would be ignored or removed, they did not consider the ramifications of their actions.

Introduction

The broader urban vision for the American city went through a period of great change after World War II through the 1960s. After the Great Depression, part of the massive shift in thinking that occurred in America included a bias to 'new' and dismissal of the old. All over the country, people wanted a fresh start. Living in old, cramped cities was no longer the desirable mode of living and people moved in droves to new housing developments in the suburbs. Then the residents needed to buy new furniture and new cars to fill all the new houses and garages. This is a considerable shift from the Great Depression idea of frugality and the old adage: "use it up, wear it out; make it do, or do without" that graced propaganda posters as the country tried to have enough for its citizens at home and abroad. Reuse of material goods was an integral part of American daily lives through the Great Depression. The modern consumer culture had started to take control during the 1920s as Americans were buying into new products intended to make daily tasks easier like the vacuum cleaner or processed foods. However, the start of the Great Depression required many Americans to return to thrifty reuse practices.[1] As the country pulled itself out of the Great Depression, the combination of sheer quantity of items that became available for sale and an expanding middle class allowed for greater consumption of these goods. However, in the early part of the century before the first consumer boom, the focus was still on quality goods that could be reused. In a Ladies Home Journal article from 1911, a son explains the relatively new government concept of environmental Conservation his mother. The examples he uses to explain how the government wishes to reorganize their

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[1] Susan Strasser, *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash,* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999): 161-202.

environmental efforts offers a pointed insight into the American ideology behind the worth of

goods:

> "when you open a parcel from the store do you throw away the paper and string? Not a bit of it. You smooth out the paper and roll up the strong, and lay both aside till you wish to wrap a package yourself… The bones the butcher sends home with the meat you drop into the soup-kettle, and the surplus fat into the soap can…So you have been practicing conservation all your life…If the Government had begun as long ago as you did the people of the country would have been educated to the idea by degrees, just as you educated us boys not to be stingy, but to despise waste."[2]

It would never have occurred to the author that in a few short decades, things like package

wrapping or useable parts of a hunk of meat would be tossed away. This new idea of a "throw -

away" society focused only on new things and buildings applied directly to mid-century city

planning. Urban designers faced decaying cities all over the country and many wanted to cut

out the bad portions, build new structures, and add support only to areas that they determined

to be valuable space. Many planners explained their views of the city using the metaphor of

the human body, describing the urban environment as a complicated organism that needed

"treatment" for its "ill" sections or suggesting swift removal of its "cancerous" areas like slums.

However, buildings cannot be tossed aside as easily as a scrap of wrapping paper. As much as

urban planners lamented the slums and blighted neighborhoods, limited funds and grassroots

neighborhood campaigns forced city planners to re-figure their designs to include more of the

established environment. Communities already living in areas targeted for demolition

demanded that they should be allowed a voice and began grassroots efforts in cities all over the

United States. Neighborhood groups, especially in minority communities, began to organize in

response to overreaching city planners and forced them to consider the individuals in the

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[2] *Ladies' Home Journal* 28 (November 1911), pp. 23, 95.

neighborhoods they were attempting to throw away. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a number of African American led community groups like the renowned Milwaukee Urban League were established to save and stimulate investment into their neighborhoods.

After the flight to the suburbs, mid-century urban renewal attempted to bring people back to the city through the massive urban renewal construction projects offering residential and commercial space, as well as amenity space like shopping complexes. Land developers always look for the optimum locations to maximize their investment so not so coincidentally, renewal efforts frequently occurred on the best land the city had to offer. One such urban renewal project published in 1959 focused on the East Side area of the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin along Lake Michigan. City planners wished to build new, modern lakefront residential and commercial properties to replace the older housing, businesses, and manufacturing properties on the land. A great divide in the field of urban planning developed during this time as most experts argued about investing in areas like slum neighborhoods they deemed severely blighted and too "ill" to save. Others like revolutionary Jane Jacobs insisted that to save American cities, planners needed to keep and enhance the established urban fabric to save intimate neighborhoods.[3] This bias against "sick" sections of the city is identifiable in the language of the city plans and reports, as well as the books written by experts in the field of city planning. This is especially true of the proposed redevelopment for the East Side of Milwaukee. While at first glance, the Plan may appear to "treat" the city's problems and promote investment in the downtown, further inquiry allows the reader to see what has been glossed

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[3] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1961): 178-221.

over to sell the development. The Plan was a textbook example of planners relocating people out of a desired construction location with less thought about the needs and circumstances of the people currently living in the area and facing removal.

The organization of city planning should be twofold: the expertise of the architect aligning with the wants and needs of the inhabitants. However, it was evident in mid-century city planning that the supposed wants and needs of the inhabitants could be adjusted, reframed, or ignored to meet the desires and biases of the expert. This was especially true in the city of Milwaukee as city planners made the ultimate decision to determine which areas were too "sick" to save, who was allowed access to the new spaces, and who was not.

Decentralization

Decentralization is the redistribution of a population and industry from urban centers to outlying areas.[4] City planning expert Eliel Saarinen was a major supporter of decentralization as a partial solution to "free the city from the contagious danger of slums" which he described as "cancer in the urban body."[5] Saarinen was already well known for his architectural design in his home country of Finland when he moved to the United States in 1923, where he influenced skyscraper and church design. Saarinen is most well-known for his presidency of Cranbrook Academy of Art near Detroit where he headed the graduate department of architecture and city planning.[6] He published one of his recognized books *The City, Its Growth, Its Decay, Its*

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[4] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate® Dictionary*, s.v. "Decentralization," accessed November 12, 2014, https://login.proxy.uwec.edu/login?qurl=http%3A%2F%2Fsearch.credoreference.com%2Fcontent%2Fentry%2Fmw collegiate%2Fdecentralization%2F0.

[5] Eliel Saarinen, *The City, Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future,* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1943): 147.

[6] *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Eliel Saarinen," accessed November 11, 2014, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/514860/Eliel-Saarinen.

Future in 1943 and his commentary on decentralization offers an insight into the urban planning literature that was taught during the upheaval of mid-century urban renewal projects. Saarinen attributed the "general need of urban liberation from the existing deteriorating compactness" as one of the main causes for decentralization along with the desire for "freer and airier living conditions." [7] He credited the advancements in understanding human health to a more health conscious population that "now prefers to be surrounded by gardens and the freshness of nature."[8] Saarinen used the human body as a metaphor for the urban environment throughout *The City* and through this metaphor, his distaste for slums and the people who live there is very clear. He describes the slums as a cancer or dead organ that the city planner must "amputate by a decisive surgery. And he must transfuse vitality only into those areas that are protected against contagion."[9] With this bold statement, Saarinen attempted to use his expertise and influence as a planner to establish a bias against slums by marking them as impossible to save.

Discrimination in Financing

While scientific discovery may have been contributing to a growing health consciousness, there were more significant factors that contributed to the mad dash to the suburbs. Cramped spaces and traffic congestion, as well as social problems like class and racial tensions, altered the concept of the city as a desirable place to live, which caused city dwellers to move to the more open and natural spaces outside the city limits. Developers observed and

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[7] Saarinen, 147.
[8] Saarinen, 148.
[9] Saarinen, 144.

responded to these problems and designed campaigns tailored to market to a public that was ready to move. As presented below, popular media depictions of the city often utilized fear tactics or generalizations about city life that greatly contrasted to the safe suburbs that the young, white couples in the cartoon are fleeing to.

Cartoon accompanying article titled "What Young People Think: Teens Want "Out" of Big City" Janesville Daily Gazette July 31, 1958.

Now all that was needed was a financial push to help people discover the white picket fence and green grass of the American dream. Federally backed mortgages and loans from the Federal Housing Administration and benefits for veterans like the GI Bill "put home ownership within the grasp of thousands of middle-class and working-class Americans, often for the first time."[10] Huge numbers of people were able to afford more than just the necessities of life and could leave the city to pursue homeownership. The great shift in people also changed the traditional designs of the neighborhood and public space. The "newly defined aesthetic of prefabrication" inspired by mass-produced suburbs like Levittown, New York combined with

[10] Patrick D Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009): 171.

the innovations in manufacturing and assembly lines that occurred during World War II led to cookie cutter neighborhoods.[11] Entire homes could be ordered out of catalogs and then the pieces shipped to the suburbs and constructed next to dozens of nearly identical houses. From 1908 to 1940, Sears sold about 100,000 mail-order houses ordered straight from the Sears Big Book; for "a few thousand dollars, buyers got floor plans, precut lumber, nails, paint, doors, light fixtures, everything they needed, all delivered to the nearest railroad station."[12] According to a California newspaper article republished from the United Press in the San Mateo Times in October of 1954, over a million new family homes (had) been added each year to the number of homes in the United States since 1949.[13]   The article then continued by addressing the positive impacts of the massive growth with the claim that "the housing surge was the biggest single factor in fending off the depression since the war." [14]

After World War II, the expansive, mass-produced suburbs outside of the city "rekindled a long-term American romance with the detached family home."[15] However, only certain people were able to get financing options that would enable them to move out of the city, and therefore the urban fabric of the city was forever changed. The middle class at this time was primarily composed of white Americans who were able to apply for and obtain the financial assistance offered by the government. Often African Americans could apply for the same mortgage as whites and were denied based on a discriminatory practice known as redlining. The construction and housing standards set by the Federal Housing Administration were one of

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[11] Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse : Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001): 33.

[12] "For Sears Houses, a Catalogue Like No Other" *The New York Times*, February 07, 1993.

[13] Dayton Moore, "Suburbia is Undergoing Gigantic Face Lift", United Press Staff Writer republishing in the San Mateo Times, October 13th 1954, page 13.

[14] Moore, 13.

[15] Spigel, 3.

the major acts of discrimination against minorities. Exclusionary redlining and construction

practices made sure that "undesirables" and "urban clutter" would be kept out of the suburban

neighborhood by establishing certain areas as high risk.[16] This meant that even if a potential

homebuyer had good credit, the lender refused to give mortgages to buyers who wished to

purchase or fix up a property in a selected high-risk zone. Between 1935 and 1940, the Home

Owners' Loan Corporation created color-coded real estate investment maps of 239 United

States cities that ranged from blue (grade A) to red (grade D). [17] Those assigned the lowest

grade were usually primarily minority neighborhoods which meant that even if a family had

access to money from the GI bill, many minority groups, especially African Americans, were

unable to secure loans to buy or renovate property. This left many African Americans stuck in

blighted neighborhoods without the opportunity to fix up their property or move out of the

area.

　　With money in hand, white residents left the city and the demographics of the city

changed. Some minorities were able to move into what had previously been primarily white

neighborhoods. Racial tensions and biases caused even more white Americans to leave the

neighborhoods for other parts of the city, or to leave the city altogether, in the social migration

known as white flight. According to an article called "Metropolitan Segregation" published in

the *Scientific American* in 1957, the first African American families to move into vacancies in a

previously all white neighborhood were "usually similar to their white neighbors in income,

employment, education, and…manners."[18] However, no matter the "social qualifications of the

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[16] Spigel, 34.

[17] Vincent Parrillo ed., *Encyclopedia of Social Problems,* s.v. "redlining", (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008).

[18] Morton Grodzins, "Metropolitan Segregation", *Scientific American*, Vol 197 No 4, October 1957: 34.

new Negro neighbors" when the number of families increased, whites left the neighborhood. This concept the author, Morton Grodzins, called the "tipping point" and stated that real estate agents manipulated this point as they sought the higher revenues associated with "the piling up process" or "gross Negro overcrowding of dwellings and areas."[19] In the city of Milwaukee, a 1966 report found evidence of relators using the tipping point to "block bust" a neighborhood.[20] Relators would sell properties to middle class black families in a white neighborhood on the edge of a black neighborhood well above market value. Then the relators would begin to convince the white homeowners to sell their homes at a loss because they told them black families would bring down property values. Once the white families had moved out, the relators would sell the properties to black families, but again, at much higher prices than they were worth.[21] Relators who targeted properties on the fringe of segregated neighborhoods to make themselves more money only furthered racial tensions and promoted white flight while expanding the segregated boundaries of the black neighborhoods. The high cost of these properties often forced multiple families to live together and overcrowding contributed to the increased decay in these areas. Grodzins and other angry whites blamed the spreading of the slums to overcrowding because the "Negro population always increases faster than the living space available to it."[22] Residences become "grossly overcrowded" as multiple families moved into what had previously been a single-family space. This high density is attributed to the low incomes of African Americans, many of whom shared living spaces with

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[19] Grodzins, 35.
[20] Jones, 177.
[21] Jones, 177.
[22] Grodzins, 36.

other families to save money and share resources. They also were often paying much higher

rent than their white neighbors were, although Grodzins states that he is unable to offer any

statistical evidence to support or refute this claim.[23] Income level and the "sheer cost of

suburban housing" were offered as the reasons why many African Americans were excluded

from the suburbs. However, he does point out that African Americans did not really have much

choice in the matter, even if they had the means to move, as social antagonism and restrictive

regulations kept undesired families out. Restrictive zoning and building regulations were

established and enforced for undesirable minority developments, but easily waived for white

subdivisions. When the "barriers of this sort fail" Grodzins frankly states, "suburban whites

have been known to resort to violence against Negro property and persons."[24] The

neighborhoods surrounding the African American urban areas were just as, if not more, hostile

than the suburbs. The neighborhoods usually consisted of other low-income groups or new

residents who had just moved to the city. Tensions were high because of the poor white

occupant's fears of "invasion" into their community. City residents across the country were

afraid that African Americans would eventually come to be "twenty five to fifty per cent of the

total population in at least ten of the fourteen largest central cites."[25] The data included in this

article is from the 1940 and 1950 censuses, which was a time characterized by huge internal

migration movements. During and after World War II, many African Americans moved from the

South due to rampant unemployment or meager agricultural jobs to the Northern cities that

had more opportunities for jobs in manufacturing. At the turn of the century, "87% of the

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[23] Grodzins, 38.
[24] Grodzins, 34.
[25] Grodzins, 33.

nonwhite population was concentrated in the South" and most of this population resided on

farms. In the decade of the 1950s alone, nearly 1.5 million nonwhites left the South.[26]

Milwaukee was one of the cities that saw a major increase in its minority community during the

1950s. At the beginning of the decade, there was a population of 23,000 nonwhite, mostly

African American, citizens and by 1960 that number had increased to 66,000 people which is a

189% increase in population.[27] By looking at these two censuses alone, it appeared that the

African American population would continue to stream into cities and such speculations

furthered the near hysteria of current urban residents. The heightened reaction to this fear

could turn deadly and Grodzins briefly mentions hearing a recent story where a white teen beat

a "Negro to death with a hammer" because he "just wanted to get one of them…which one

didn't matter."[28] Discrimination practices described by Grodzins throughout the entire

"Metropolitan Segregation" article clearly identified the bias held by housing officials and white

residents who saw minorities as the "other" and purposely set up regulations that would

exclude them from safe and affordable housing. Using language like "the Negros" or "it" to

refer to groups of people show the city planner's removed attitude from the neighborhoods

they were trying to "heal." The gap in understanding between planner and planned sometimes

generated justifications that sound almost unbelievable to the modern reader. Since the "social

satisfactions of slum or near-slum existence for a homogeneous population" was inadequately

studied when Grodzins wrote this article, he mused that "it may very well be true that many

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[26] United States Housing Home Finance Agency, *Our Nonwhite Population and Its Housing: The Changes between 1950 and 1960,* Washington: Housing and Home Finance Agency, Office of the Administrator, 1963: 2.
[27] United States Housing Home Finance Agency, 26.
[28] Grodzins, 38.

Negro urban dwellers would not easily exchange current big-city life for even reasonably priced suburban homes."[29] Living together as an African American community in a condensed location may have been a safer and more economical option than spreading out in a city, but no one who had actually experienced living in the slums would agree that it was the preferred living environment. The acceptance of violence and illegal, discriminatory housing regulations as commonplace occurrences provides the modern day reader with a perspective of the uphill battle many individuals and community organizations faced as they tried to secure housing.

Racial tension and housing discrimination segregated the African American community in Milwaukee as well. The black neighborhood slowly formed and moved north and west due to biased loan and mortgage policies and discriminatory real estate practices. This created an inner urban core leaving the southern part of the city to white middle class families and the great concentration of people led to overcrowding and dilapidation. [30] By the 1960s, open housing was a major agenda for civil rights activists in Milwaukee who faced great opposition from whites in the city. Non-violent protests and marches were often met with extreme violence from white onlookers who would throw rocks, bottles, and insults at the demonstrators. A march across the Sixteenth Street Viaduct into the South Side led by the NAACP Youth Council and their mentor, Catholic priest Father James Groppi, faced a barrage of violence in one of the white counter protest's acts of aggression. The group of marchers had police and unarmed NAACP Commando members flanking them for protection as they walked but they were met by almost "13,000 angry white spectators" lining the sidewalks and

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[29] Grodzins, 33.
[30] Jones, 173.

Kosciuszko Park where they intended to end their march.[31] To combat the riot that broke out as

the group of white counter-protesters surged forward, the police fired shots into the air and

tear gas canisters into the crowd as an attempt to get people to disperse. In the confusion, the

Youth Council marchers retreated to the North side over the viaduct and reconvened at their

headquarters called the Freedom House.[32] Although there was a police presence at the house,

a crowd formed outside and began to taunt the occupants. Verbal threats turned to violence,

and bottles and rocks once again rained down on police and protesters. During this scuffle, a

tear gas can tossed through a window into the Freedom House burst into flame which

decimated the structure.[33] Historian Thomas J. Sugrue discussed the similar violent reactions to

open housing protests in Detroit, Michigan in his book, *Origins of the Urban Crisis,* and offered a

broader discussion about the creation of the divided metropolis. Not only did physical

separation of blacks and whites perpetuate inequality in housing, Sugrue argued, but it also

"reinforced the ideology of race held by northern whites."[34] Supporting the physical boundaries

of the slum areas also reinforced the ideological construct of race and even as the changed over

time through tipping point techniques, the "racial wall" remained.[35]

City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin – East Side Plan

During the mid-century mass migration as housing in the city opened up, there were

major problems with the quality and quantity of housing available. To begin to alleviate housing

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[31] Jones, 2.
[32] Jones, 3.
[33] Jones, 4.
[34] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit,* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996):228-229.
[35] Sugrue, 229.

shortages and blighted areas in the nation's cities, The Housing Act of 1949 was passed and included multiple actions concerning urban renewal. The first title provided federal funding for slum clearance in cities slotted for urban renewal projects. The second title increased power in the Federal Housing Administration which primarily dealt with mortgage insurance at this time. The third provided federal funds to build thousands of public housing units. [36] However, through the 1960s and 1970s, it was obvious that the government was coming up short on its plan to alleviate housing shortages in cramped American cities. Actually, in some cities like Milwaukee the urban renewal plans tore down more housing units than were rebuilt. Between the years of 1966 and 1971 alone, the city of Milwaukee saw a net loss of 3371 housing units. [37]

A report created by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee in July 1959 includes a summary of the general neighborhood renewal plan with details about the proposed land use and characteristics of the blight that focused the attention of city planners on that area. The targeted area of 795 acres was along Lake Michigan, bordered by the Milwaukee River, and ended by the rail yard parallel to E. Detroit Street.[38]

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[36] *The Encyclopedia of Housing*, s.v. "Housing Act of 1949," (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2012), 333.

[37] N.W. Niemuth, "Urban Renewal and the Development of Milwaukee's African American Community: 1960-1980," Master's thesis, UW-Milwaukee Digital Commons, May 2014, p. 8. Originally cited from: Elam E. McElroy, Social Indicators for the Milwaukee Model Cities area: 1967 to Present (Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, 1972), 100.

[38] Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee. *East Side Area: General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Authority, 1959.

LAND USE PLAN
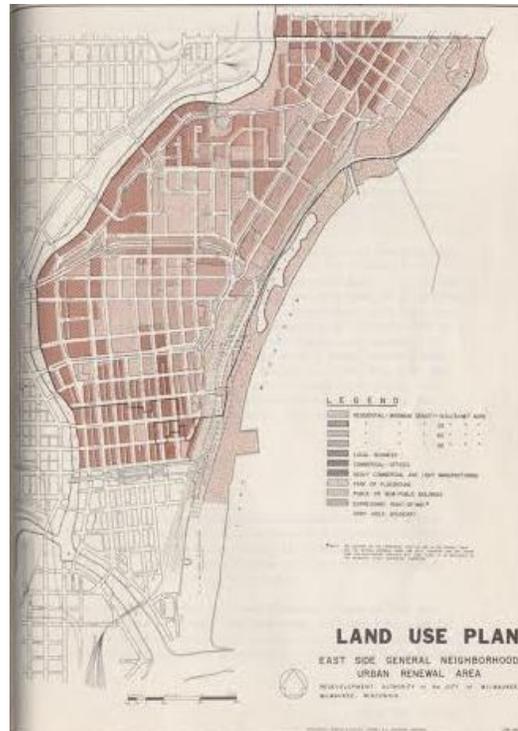
The Plan included residential and commercial space, road development, as well as proposed community facilities like city parks. The project was supposed to be completed in stages over a ten-year time span. This plan focused on broad neighborhood renewal to eliminate "blight" from Milwaukee's East Side area. The east side area originally included industrial space along the edge of the lake and residential and commercial moving west from the shore. The area was also situated above the Third Ward historic district that holds a great number of Milwaukee's historic structures. Milwaukee has an amazing manufacturing history but the city was not exempt from the complications that arise with such an industry. The city has had a problem with a limited housing stock since the first streams of immigrants came to work in the growing industrial businesses. Since the East Side area is directly connected to the lake harbor where a good number of the shipping and industrial companies were located, the area had a very diverse built environment of different classes of homes, businesses, and

industrial space. According to the Neighborhood Renewal Plan the characteristics of blight in the proposed construction area were:

> "marginal commercial operations, conversions of single-and-two-family residences to small multiple family apartments and "flop-houses" for a transient and semi-transient population, incompatible mixed land uses, mixed use of structures, and overcrowding."[39]

The U.S. Census of Population and Housing in 1960 identifies that the average population of nonwhite households was 4.07 in the City of Milwaukee.[40] Concerning the already built environment, the plan states that "it is not… necessary that all structures in the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan Area be cleared. Sizeable portions of the…plan area are suitable for large-scale rehabilitation."[41] However, it is quick to note that clearance is included in the plan and says it will "propose clearance only in areas where buildings are beyond salvage" but then adds "or where it is in the city's best interest to have the land put to new and different uses."[42]

The language in the plan is purposely vague to allow the city ample control over what they feel is 'best' for the city. With the majority of the blame for the urban decay placed on the residents, and more specifically the type of residents that lived there, the city could justify their actions to others that felt similar bias. The city planners deliberately did not mention the

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[39] Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee. *East Side Area : General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Authority, 1959: 7.

[40] Prepared by U.S. Department of Commerce, "U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960 Census Tracts - Milwaukee Wisconsin": 111.

[41] Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee. *East Side Area : General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Authority, 1959: 2.

[42] Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee. *East Side Area : General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Authority, 1959: 1.

economic and social problems both the residents and the city faced in the previous decades

that greatly contributed to the deterioration. While later in the plan the city recognized that

"poor street layout and…inadequate off-street parking" likely contributed as a blighting

influence, pointing this out only gave them even more validation to clear areas for new roads.

A report titled "Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Urban Renewal

Techniques" published in 1964 by the Department of City Development in Milwaukee during

the height of the proposed urban renewal plans outlines some of the techniques mentioned in

the East Side Plan. The report attempted to establish a clear "understanding of what renewal is

and what it can accomplish" by outlining conservation and redevelopment objectives as well as

the organization for federally assisted renewal.[43] One of the features of this report is the

number of advisory services the city planned to provide to encourage homeowners to

rehabilitate their properties. Besides offering architectural and financial advice, the city

described their plan to offer assistance with relocation. The city understood that through the

renewal process the "tenant may need to find another place to live if the owner increases rent

to compensate for improvement expenses."[44] This detail highlights another way that city

planners and landlords were able to gentrify a neighborhood in order to move out low-income

tenants. Under the excuse of urban renewal, landlords who had the means to fix up their

properties with newly acquired loans could raise the rents on their properties after they made

necessary repairs. If a landlord owned multiple properties in an area, they could possibly

reorganize an entire neighborhood. In this report, the city encourages private redevelopment

[43] Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques,* Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1964: 2.
[44] Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program, 15.

and recognizes that there are "many factors (that) affect private redevelopment, some of which are beyond municipal control and some of which (that) are not."[45] Treatment of social problems was on the list of factors that can be "can be controlled or at least affected by municipal policies."[46] However, their discussion of the treatment of social problems was limited and did not outline how the city will actually attempt to "treat...underlying social and economic ills."[47] Some of the problems the city credits with indirectly fostering residential blight are "tenant unfamiliarity with minimal standards of health, sanitation, and safety,...vandalism; and broken families."[48] According to the city, these problems were linked to the property abuses responsible for the visible causes of residential blight produced by "poor housekeeping and maintenance."[49] All of these problems can be linked to dissatisfaction of tenants with their environment, and then perpetuated because of the lack of the city's attention to these areas.

A detailed look into the location of this proposed redevelopment plan is crucial to understanding the Plan's undertones. This area of the lakefront and the Milwaukee River were originally used for the city's commercial and industrial ventures. Until the 1840s, Milwaukee was actually two detached and competing cities with separate industrial areas, Juneautown on the east side of the river and Kilbourntown on the west. In 1840 when the Wisconsin Legislature required the cities to build a drawbridge between them to replace the previously used ferry system, it greatly increased conflict. In 1845 in an act of aggression, the mayor of

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[45] Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques,* Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1964: 22.
[46] Milwaukee Department of City Development, 22.
[47] *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques*: 25.
[48] *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques*: 25.
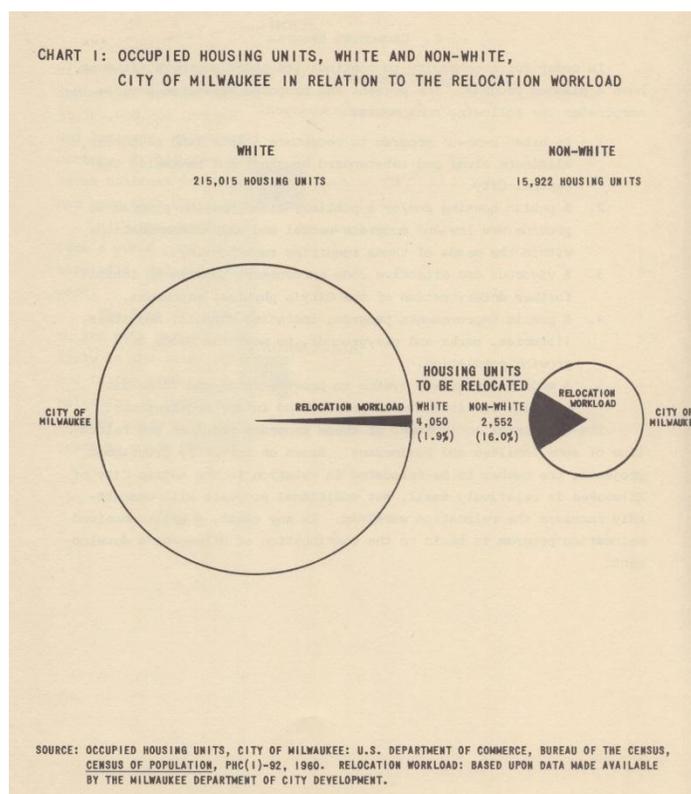[49] *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques*: 25.

Killbourntown "decided to drop the west end of the bridge into the river." A few weeks later, an east side group destroyed two smaller bridges while trying to cut off the west side. The destruction prompted a skirmish between mobs on both sides. After the fight had settled down, the cities agreed that they would need to work together and live as one community so they formed the City of Milwaukee in 1846. [50]

The combination of the multiple waterways in the city and the development of settled industry on both sides of the river as well as the lakeshore made this some of the most desirable commercial property in the Milwaukee area. However, the land was tied down to primarily industrial use. This land usage did not lend itself to being a very enjoyable housing area so the downtown businesses and upper class residential areas spread west of the river. The land along the lake was a network of railways with easy access to the ports that connected through the Menomonee Valley which is located south of the proposed redevelopment plan area. However, after World War II, a nationwide shift from railway and water transport to interstate transportation left parts of the large industrial transport and holding areas underutilized. With potential funding coming in from the Federal Housing Administration, city planners saw the perfect opportunity to redevelop the waterfront near Milwaukee's downtown. The city planners could develop the area to be a profitable waterfront residential and business district connected to the heart of the city and the major port. In the marketability section of their plan, the city planners discuss this locational advantage especially with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1958 which would eventually turn Milwaukee into a

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[50] Milwaukee County Historical Society, "Milwaukee Timeline," Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2011, accessed October 11, 2014, http://www.milwaukeehistory.net/education/milwaukee-timeline/

"world port."[51] They predict that the "prestige location" adjacent to the port and downtown would be in high demand for "office and business facilities serving these wholesaling and freight handling interests."[52]

However, the city first needed to remove the current occupants of the proposed redevelopment land. Based on the research presented in the Plan, the city estimated that there would be 11,850 families displaced over the ten-year construction period. However, the number of non-white families forced to relocate was eight times as many as white families in the relocation area.[53]

CHART 1: OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS, WHITE AND NON-WHITE, CITY OF MILWAUKEE IN RELATION TO THE RELOCATION WORKLOAD

SOURCE: OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS, CITY OF MILWAUKEE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, CENSUS OF POPULATION, PHC(1)-92, 1960. RELOCATION WORKLOAD: BASED UPON DATA MADE AVAILABLE BY THE MILWAUKEE DEPARTMENT OF CITY DEVELOPMENT.

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[51] Relocation Management Associates, Inc., and Relocation Management Associates, New York. *City of Milwaukee Community Renewal Program : A Relocation Analysis / Prepared by RMA, Relocation and Management Associates, Inc.* New York: RMA, 1964: 16.

[52] Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee. *East Side Area : General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Authority, 1959: 30.

[53] *City of Milwaukee Community Renewal Program : A Relocation Analysis*: 40.

To house the relocated families, the city estimated that a minimum of 210,000 public and private dwelling units would be available as a relocation resource.[54] However, of the 210,000 units, only 3,120 were federally aided low-rent public housing and only 1,880 were actually already built at the time. The majority (132,000) of the available dwelling units were private rental housing. While the city said that there are ample housing opportunities available to displaced families, they do not mention if there are enough adequate housing openings to match the income levels of the families. A later report created for the City of Milwaukee Renewal program by a New York Relocation and Management Company in 1964 discussed the housing imbalance that occurred within the city. In the relocation workload that was scheduled between 1963 and 1972, the greatest imbalance of housing was in the "supply of non-white, owner occupied housing units valued at less than $15,000 and for rental units under $40 a month."[55] Lack of housing options pushed relocated African American families to one section of the city, which was often another low income, older housing neighborhood that had not yet been a focus for renewal developments. So many mid-century urban renewal plans targeted minority neighborhoods for demolition and relocation of its residents that people angrily began calling them 'negro removal' plans. In the case of the city of Milwaukee, the already deteriorating north side became the black ghetto during mid-century urban renewal.

[54] Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee. *East Side Area : General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Milwaukee, Wisconsin / Prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee.* Milwaukee, Wis.: Authority, 1959: 38.
[55] *City of Milwaukee Community Renewal Program : A Relocation Analysis*: 32.

Activism in Response to Urban Renewal

Milwaukee is unique city concerning urban issues because "it did not have a large, long established black community with a significant middle class that was able to express...political power or economic influence" in the 1940s and 1950s when the urban renewal movement began.[56] The total African American population was also quite small but grew very quickly in the 1960s and 1970s with people migrating from Chicago and cities in the south. The growing population along with the timing of the peak of the civil rights movement led to community organization in African American neighborhoods. African American community groups across the country believed that city planners intended to disrupt their neighborhoods for development and then offer no real plan to fix them. Families from entire neighborhoods were being relocated to other, often undesirable, parts of the city to make way for the developments and they felt they were not welcome in the built environment after it was completed. Besides skewed building regulations, rent prices for the new areas were intentionally high, successfully keeping the lower income citizens and small businesses from being able to move back into their old neighborhoods once construction projects were complete. The massive clearances of neighborhoods prompted people to act and demand to be included in the urban renewal discussion. Urban renewal programs led to the organization of African American neighborhood groups that worked together to combat the multitude of civil rights issues. The neighborhood associations promoted preservation as a form of community redevelopment and attempted to

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[56] N. W. Niemuth, "Urban Renewal and the Development of Milwaukee's African American Community: 1960-1980," Master's thesis, UW-Milwaukee Digital Commons, May 2014: 3.

obtain federal funding to help with urban decay problems.[57] One of the most prominent

organizations in Milwaukee was the Milwaukee Urban League. Already established by the

1920s, the Milwaukee Urban League organized to provide a number of services to new families

moving to the area and to act as a liaison between individuals and government. During the

1950s and 1960s, the League worked to organize the African American community to act on

issues like neighborhood beautification and availability of affordable housing. Besides

promoting community awareness and education of city issues like these, the League

encouraged "members to make proper use of their right to vote and their right to participate

[politically] in local government operations"[58]

The 1950s and 1960s are characterized by massive activism across the country for a

variety of reasons. One of the most famous displays of activism concerning urban planning was

by Jacobs who organized a grassroots effort to save her neighborhood, Greenwich Village in

Lower Manhattan, from urban planner Robert Moses who wished to build an expressway

directly through the Village. Ultimately, the passion Jacobs exhibited for her neighborhood

stopped the expressway project and inspired people across the country to become activists for

their own neighborhoods. Even though Jacobs was a journalist with no formal education in

urban planning, she was able to look at the city as a total functioning organism where all the

parts needed to be included in renewal 'treatment' plans. Her famous work published in 1961,

The Death and Life of Great American Cities, was a very popular work due it is accessibility to

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[57] N. W. Niemuth, "Urban Renewal and the Development of Milwaukee's African American Community: 1960-1980," Master's thesis, UW-Milwaukee Digital Commons, May 2014, p. 3-15.

[58] Michael Ross Grover, *"All Things to Black Folks" : A History of the Milwaukee Urban League, 1919 to 1980"*, Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, August 1994: 94

city planners and the public alike, and for her solid understanding of the problems with urban

planning in the 1950s. While most planners were targeting and wiping out slum areas as the

method to heal the city, Jacobs argues that this cycle was actually perpetuating slums and

cutting off support to areas that need reinforcement rather than eradication:

> "Our present urban renewal laws are an attempt to break this particular linkage in the vicious circles by forthrightly wiping away slums and their populations, and replacing them with projects intended to produce higher tax yields, or to lure back easier populations with less expensive public requirements. The method fails, At best, it merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and disruption. At worst, it destroys neighborhoods where constructive and improving communities exist and where the situation calls for encouragement rather than destruction."[59]

Jacobs goes on to say, "slum shifting fails because it tried to overcome causes of trouble by

diddling with symptoms" and that these symptoms are usually "vestiges of former troubles

rather than significant indications of current or future ills."[60] Mid Century city planners focused

only on the 'sick' section of the city that were visible, without trying to understand the real

underlying strife of slum dwellers.

Backlash to the Suburbs

In a book published the same year as Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American

Cities*, sociology professor Anselm L. Strauss attempted to "write a book about what Americans

think and have thought about their cities."[61] What Strauss discussed in his book was extremely

different from works of urban planning even only a decade before. The issues that he raised

about how Americans feel and think about cities stems directly from the mental shift that

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[59] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1961), 270-271.
[60] Jacobs, 271.
[61] Anselm L Strauss, *Images of the American City* (New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), viii.

occurred as people realized the suburbs were not what they had seemed. Already in 1961,

Strauss is able to talk about the depth of the dissatisfaction that suburbanites who had long

resided in the suburbs had with their environment. Initially many hoped that the suburbs would

replicate the idyllic, "emotionally satisfying bonds of community and neighborhood."[62] Instead,

many discovered "false friendliness, mock neighborliness" and nothing like the ideal small town

they had expected.[63] Another criticism was the very domestic focus and "too little concerned

with intellectual or cultural pursuits."[64] In his research, Strauss noticed that growing "literature

of the suburban novel portrays the city as a creative foil" to the domestic and unstimulating life

for many in the suburbs. The city once again began to be seen as a haven for culture and

sophistication which the dull, spread out suburbs could not supply.

The point of urban renewal projects was to draw those dissatisfied suburbanites back to

the city. Many city planners believed that a revived urban core would have the allure to pull

people back into urban life. However, there was great discussion on "who shall – or should –

live in the central city."[65] The perfect tenant according to famous urban planner William

Zeckendorf was "aged 45 and upward. He has raised his children; he has reached the peak of

his earning power; his house is now superfluous in size, he is tired of commuting."[66]

Nevertheless, by providing numerous spaces and attractions for only this specific type of

tenant, the city planners would yet again organize the city based around the most affluent of

citizens and create an even more segregated city.

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[62] Strauss, 249
[63] Strauss, 249.
[64] Strauss, 250.
[65] Strauss, 248
[66] Strauss, 248.

Conclusion

The broader urban vision for the mid-century American city was redesigned by the biases of urban planners. The disease metaphor in mid-century urban plans and expert text identifies the bias of city planners against certain areas of the cities they were supposed to "heal." Planners had the power to make the ultimate decision on determining which areas were "too sick" to save and created treatment plans meant to infuse new life into an area. However, once the current occupants were removed from the area, they were usually unable to come back due to rent increases or the fear of social antagonism. In Milwaukee, the land use of the area was reorganized to include more higher tax yield structures and commercial area near the lake, which is what kept original occupants from returning.

During the mid-twentieth century, cities across the United States were in decline or already in advance decay. As families moved out of the cities, they took with them the resources and stimulus that kept large urban centers alive. Over time, the vibrancy of the downtown shifted to the far-reaching edges as part of decentralization, a strategy that initially had the approval of many urban planners like Eliel Saarinen. The overwhelming majority of the population in route to the suburbs was white and middle to upper class and their demands of a gleaming manicured "new" and "healthy" environment outside of the "sick" cities ultimately reshaped the physical spaces of the United States. Those who were able to afford all the modern conveniences of life did so in such massive numbers that there became an even greater discrepancy between the affluent and those who barely had enough. Suburbanites tried to throw away or ignore the undesirable parts of life for as long as they could but eventually that was no longer an option.

This very narrow focus also plagued mid-century city planners who were often unwilling to see the city as many connecting parts that relied on each other for success. Many planners used the metaphor of the human body to talk about the city as an "organism" that has many linking parts, but often they attempted to treat the symptoms without seeking out the underlying cause. By identifying certain sections as "cancers", whose continued presence would only hurt the city, planners already began at a deficit of thinking. Marking neighborhoods as unable to be saved, especially those of low-income or minority residents, identifies an immediate bias against these areas. Viewing the area as a threat to the whole organism dehumanized the area and made throwing the neighborhoods and their occupants away much easier. The language in the city plans and expert texts of the time show how planners used health and human body metaphors when talking about the urban environment, but then often ignored the actual humans who lived in the buildings. Decisions regarding which areas were worth saving were made by experts analyzing the city from the macro level and created problems throughout the whole renewal process as they tried to shift the slums from one area to another. This was especially evident in the city of Milwaukee as planners pushed thousands of families out of the area they wanted to develop without ensuring that the population had somewhere to go. The realization of many who were forced to relocate is that the planners were not "treating" the "sick" sections of the city for the benefit of the current inhabitants, but instead reorganizing the area for those they deemed worthy of occupying the new space. Once the occupants were removed from the area, it was often not likely for them to be able to move back to their neighborhood after construction was complete.

The response of community activism countered the negativity of urban planners and reminded the public about the human element of neighborhoods. Radical thinkers like Jane Jacobs attempted to change the throw away mode of thinking by convincing people to see blighted areas like slums as a treatable illness rather than a cancerous one. She encouraged experts to think of the symptoms and their causes that had come together to create the blighted environment rather than blame the residents. Instead of seeing the space as undeserving of supportive attention, Jacobs encouraged planners to think of what resources they could use to reinvigorate life into the neighborhood.

City planners created urban renewal campaigns to try to deal with the old and decaying parts of the city. Their narrow focus of scope is evident in the language they used in their city plans which community activists hoped to change. By equating the blighted areas of the urban environment with cancer in the human body, they dehumanized the area which allowed for the removal of undesired tenants and the development of the areas for those they deemed worthy of the new space.

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