



The Wisconsin Historical Society Presents

CROSSING THE LINE



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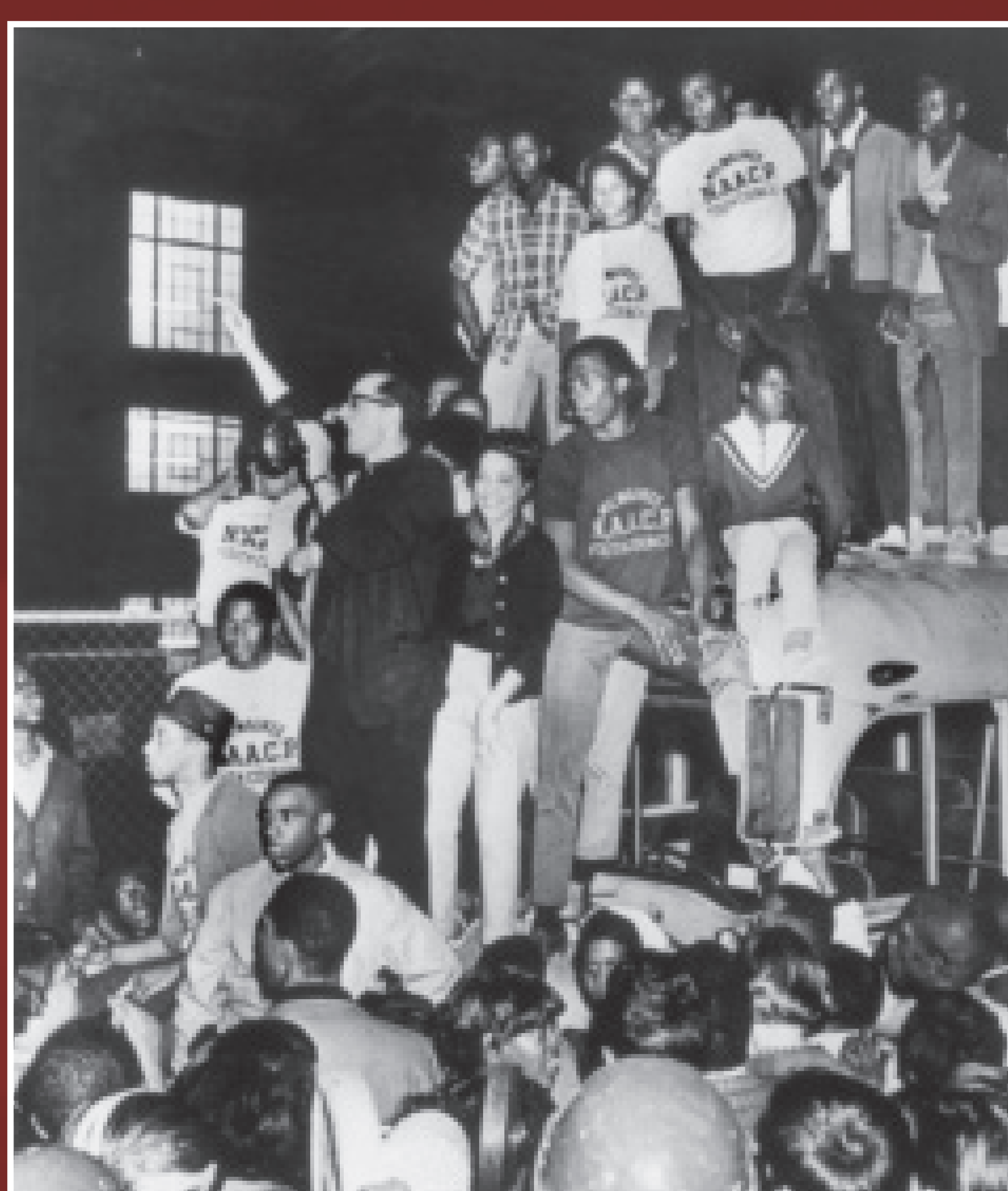
THE MILWAUKEE FAIR HOUSING MARCHES OF 1967–1968

An NAACP Youth Council member holds a fair housing sign in Milwaukee in September 1967.

African Americans in Milwaukee were fighting for their rights long before the 1960s. In 1866, black men sued for the right to vote. In 1889, black leaders first organized to demand an end to segregation.

RIGHT: Father James Groppi and Vel Phillips speak to a gathering of NAACP Youth Council members and other concerned citizens in Milwaukee.

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A group of concerned citizens, including Father James Groppi, leads a fair housing march in Milwaukee in August 1966.

During the 1940s, many African Americans moved to Milwaukee in search of jobs. Black people in Milwaukee had no choice but to live in a small, north-side section of the city known as the “Inner Core.” This segregation was enforced by many of Milwaukee’s white leaders and business owners.

How do citizens work for change when faced with injustice?



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This exhibit contains language and images that may be offensive to some viewers. The Wisconsin Historical Society does not condone the use of this language but includes it as an accurate reflection of society in the time shown.



LEFT: NAACP State President Lloyd Barbee walks out of a Milwaukee Public School Board meeting in January 1964 after the chairman refused to allow other education representatives of civil rights groups to participate in the meeting. **MIDDLE:** Father James Groppi joins hands and sings with a group of activists. **RIGHT:** Vel Phillips is carried on the shoulders of NAACP Youth Council members as Father James Groppi speaks.

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LLOYD BARBEE, FATHER JAMES GROPPY, AND VEL PHILLIPS

“The whole system should be ordered to desegregate, root and branch.”

Lloyd Barbee was a lawyer who fought to end segregation in Milwaukee’s schools. His lawsuit in 1965 against Milwaukee Public Schools took 14 years to complete, but in 1979, he won his battle with the state and federal government, forcing the district to desegregate.

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Lloyd Barbee participates in a memorial gathering for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.

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Father James Groppi and NAACP Youth Council members march east up Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee in 1968.

“You must be revolutionaries.”

Father James Groppi was a priest at St. Boniface Church in Milwaukee’s Inner Core. He had marched in the South with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and believed that Milwaukee needed to change, too. He advised the NAACP Youth Council and led many fair housing marches.

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Vel Phillips marches with the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council in November 1967.

“Live where you want to live.”

Vel Phillips was the first black woman to graduate from UW-Madison’s law school, and in 1956 she became the first woman to win a seat on Milwaukee’s City Council. In 1962, she introduced her fair housing bill in an effort to stop housing discrimination against people of color.

How can individuals make a difference?



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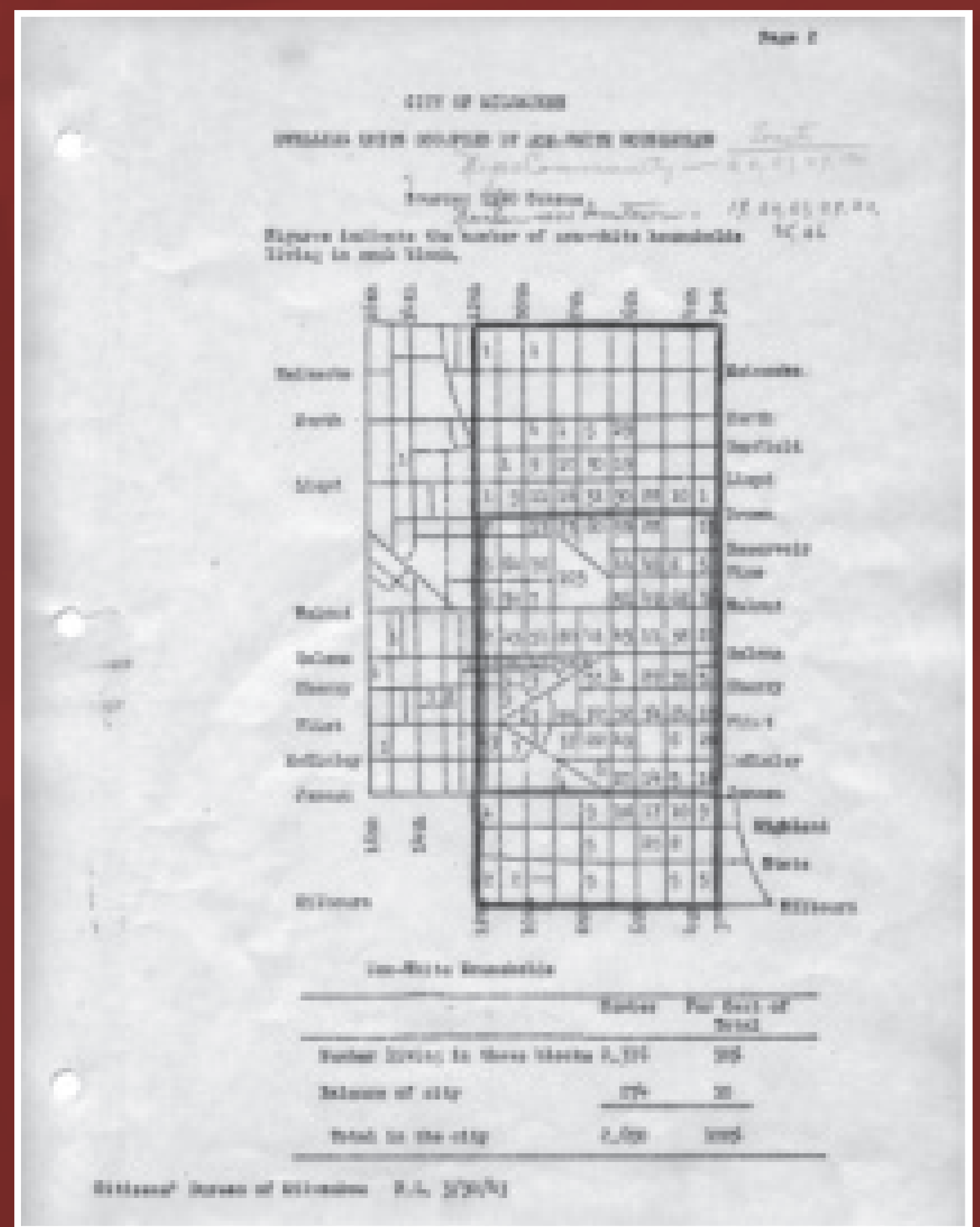
Members of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) picket Milwaukee's Board of Realtors for fairness and equality in housing in January 1964.

HOUSING SEGREGATION

Until the 1960s, almost all black residents of Milwaukee lived in one neighborhood north of downtown known as the Inner Core. The Inner Core was run-down and falling apart, with few jobs and not enough housing. The people who lived in the Inner Core felt ignored by Milwaukee's leaders.

RIGHT: A 1946 map created by the Citizen's Governmental Research Bureau shows Milwaukee's black neighborhood.

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Written covenants as well as unspoken agreements prevented people of color from buying or renting homes outside of the Core. White landlords and realtors made sure these agreements were followed.

In 1962, Madam Alderman Vel Phillips introduced her fair housing bill to the council, where it was defeated 18–1. Phillips would try to pass her law four times over the next six years, but the other council members, all white men, voted against the bill every time.

MIDDLE LEFT: In 1962, Vel Phillips introduced this fair housing ordinance to the Milwaukee Common Council. It was rejected four times over the next six years.

BOTTOM LEFT: Vel Phillips speaks in the Milwaukee Common Council chamber as her fellow aldermen look on.



What is systemic racism?

Brown v. Board of Education makes school segregation illegal

1954

Vel Phillips introduces fair housing ordinance

1962

Milwaukee United School Integration Committee is created

1964



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MUSIC demonstrators, including Lloyd Barbee, protest school segregation in front of a school bus.

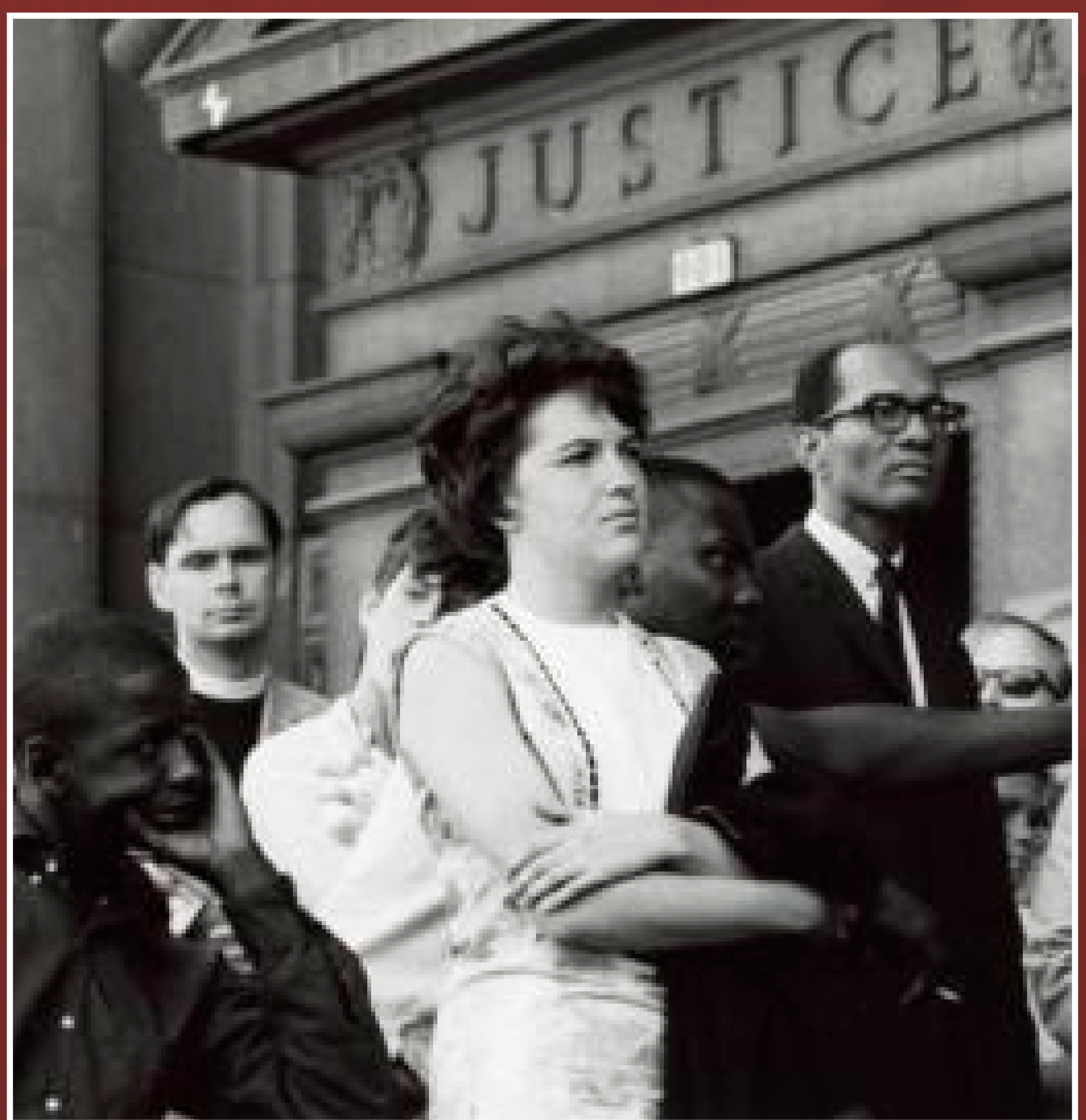
MILWAUKEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SCHOOL SEGREGATION

In 1954, the US Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision made segregation in schools illegal. Milwaukee school officials ignored the Supreme Court ruling for the next 25 years.

Schools that black children went to were not equal to the schools white children attended. There were fewer supplies and more out-of-date textbooks. The buildings weren't maintained. Even when some schools were integrated, shared spaces like lunchrooms and bathrooms were not.

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Lloyd Barbee and others gather in front of the Milwaukee County Courthouse for a rally addressing education, housing, and police brutality in 1966.



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

A MUSIC flier recruits residents for a march protesting segregated schools on August 28, 1965.

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In 1964, Civil Rights leaders created the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee, or MUSIC. They organized a boycott of “black only” schools to bring attention to the problems of segregation. Over half of the black students of Milwaukee stayed home or went to “Freedom Schools” organized to teach students about African history, culture, and the arts.

LEFT: A woman and her child carry CORE picket signs protesting school segregation in Milwaukee in 1964.

Why are separate schools unequal?

Freedom Schools are established

Lloyd Barbee is elected to State Assembly

Milwaukee marches for Selma

1964

1965

Civil Rights Act passes

Barbee files federal lawsuit against MPS



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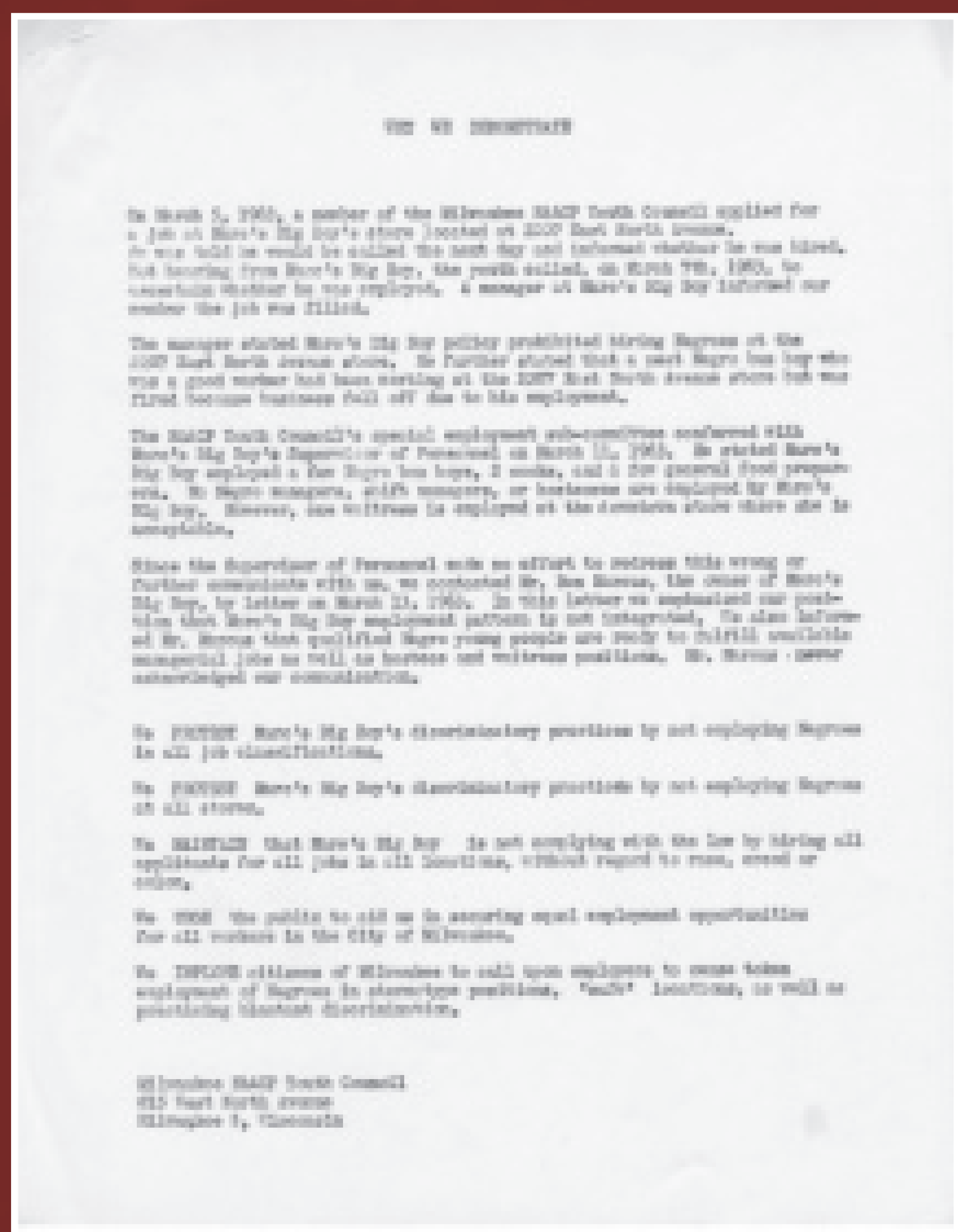


NAACP Youth Council members, including several Commandos and Father James Groppi, meet in Milwaukee.

NAACP YOUTH COUNCIL

Milwaukee's NAACP Youth Council started in 1947. By the 1960s, the young men and women on the council were helping organize demonstrations against segregation in Milwaukee.

RIGHT: Three NAACP Youth Council Commandos kneel over presidential campaign materials for George Wallace. The Youth Council protested Wallace's candidacy in 1968.



The Youth Council protested job discrimination at Marc's Big Boy restaurants. They demanded that the Eagles Club let people of color join by protesting outside the homes of members. Of course they marched for fair housing.

LEFT: A 1963 NAACP Youth Council flier describes the motivation for the Council's demonstrations against Marc's Big Boy.



In response to violent counter-protests, the NAACP Youth Council formed the Youth Council Commandos for protection. After the 1960s, the Commandos continued to help people of color in many ways.

LEFT: NAACP Youth Council members protest outside the Milwaukee Eagles Club, whose membership only allowed white members in 1966.

How can young people get involved in social justice?

Youth Council Commandos are formed

1966

1967

First 16th Street Bridge march

Freedom House is burned



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A large group marches across the 16th Street Bridge. Father James Groppi can be seen at the front of the group.

CROSSING THE 16TH STREET BRIDGE

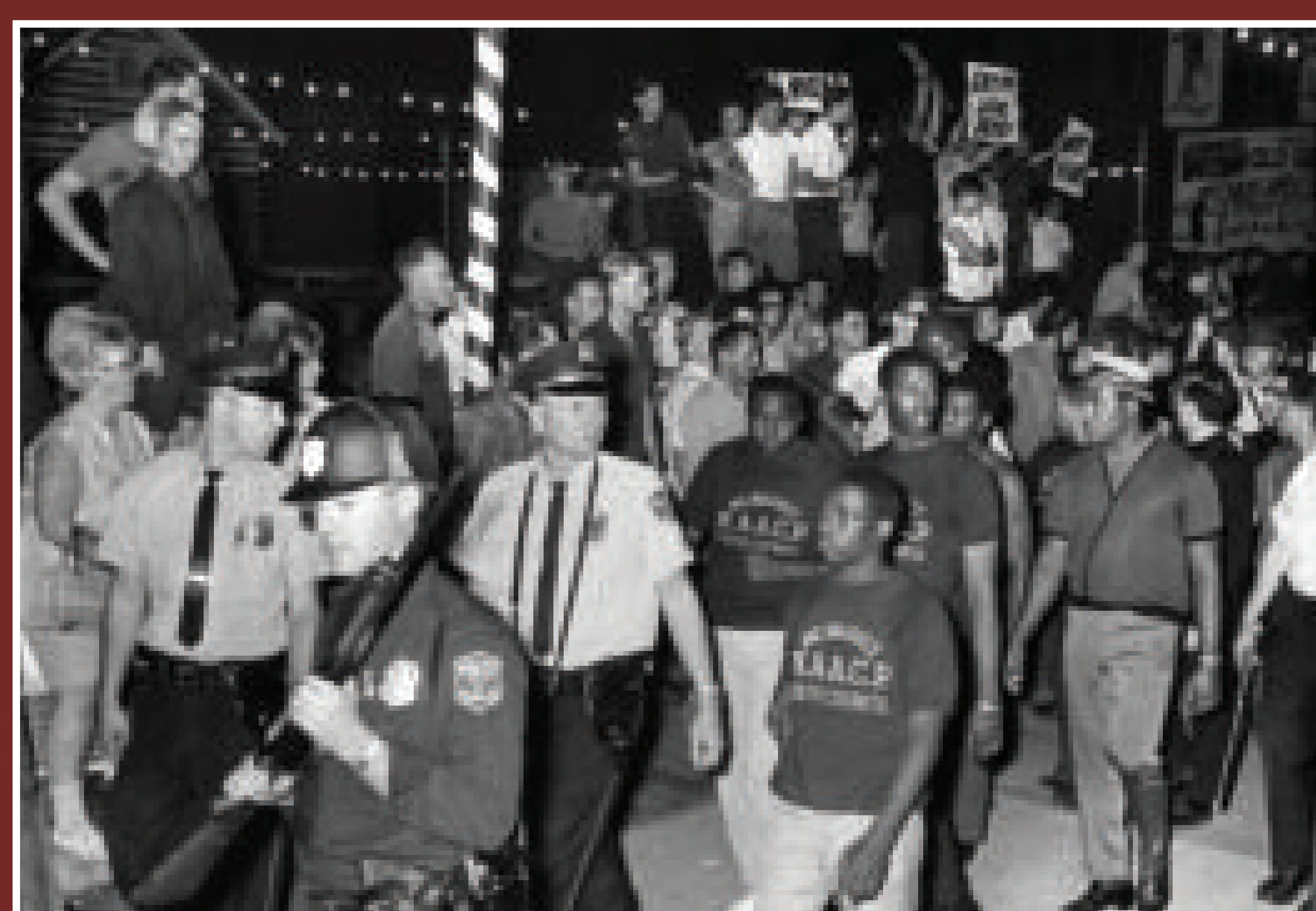
By the 1960s, Milwaukee's neighborhoods had been segregated for many years. The Menomonee River factory district, just south of today's I-94, separated the black neighborhood on the north side and the white neighborhood on the south side. The 16th Street Bridge connected these communities.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



Milwaukee residents joked that the 16th Street Bridge was the longest in the world, connecting Africa to Poland. It separated the black and white neighborhoods of Milwaukee.

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL, AUG. 28, 1967. © 2015 JOURNAL SENTINEL INC.



ABOVE: White protestors on Milwaukee's south side taunt NAACP Youth Council demonstrators.

BOTTOM RIGHT: An NAACP Youth Council member holds a sign made by a group from St. Veronica's Parish in Milwaukee's south side on August 28, 1967.

On August 28, 1967, over 200 members of the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council led by Father James Groppi crossed the 16th Street Bridge as a protest against segregation and unfair housing practices.

The following evening the marchers were attacked by 13,000 angry white residents. Some were hurling bottles and swinging clubs. The police were overwhelmed as the mob pressed in.

What motivates people to demonstrate and how does that affect others?

WE SOUTH SIDERS
WELCOME NEGROES

1968

Dr. King is
assassinated

Fair Housing
Act passes

200th
March

Common Council passes
Phillips housing ordinance

1979

US Supreme Court
rules in favor of Barbee

MILWAUKEE
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The Milwaukee police approach NAACP Youth Council members in an attempt to break up a demonstration.

200 NIGHTS OF MARCHING

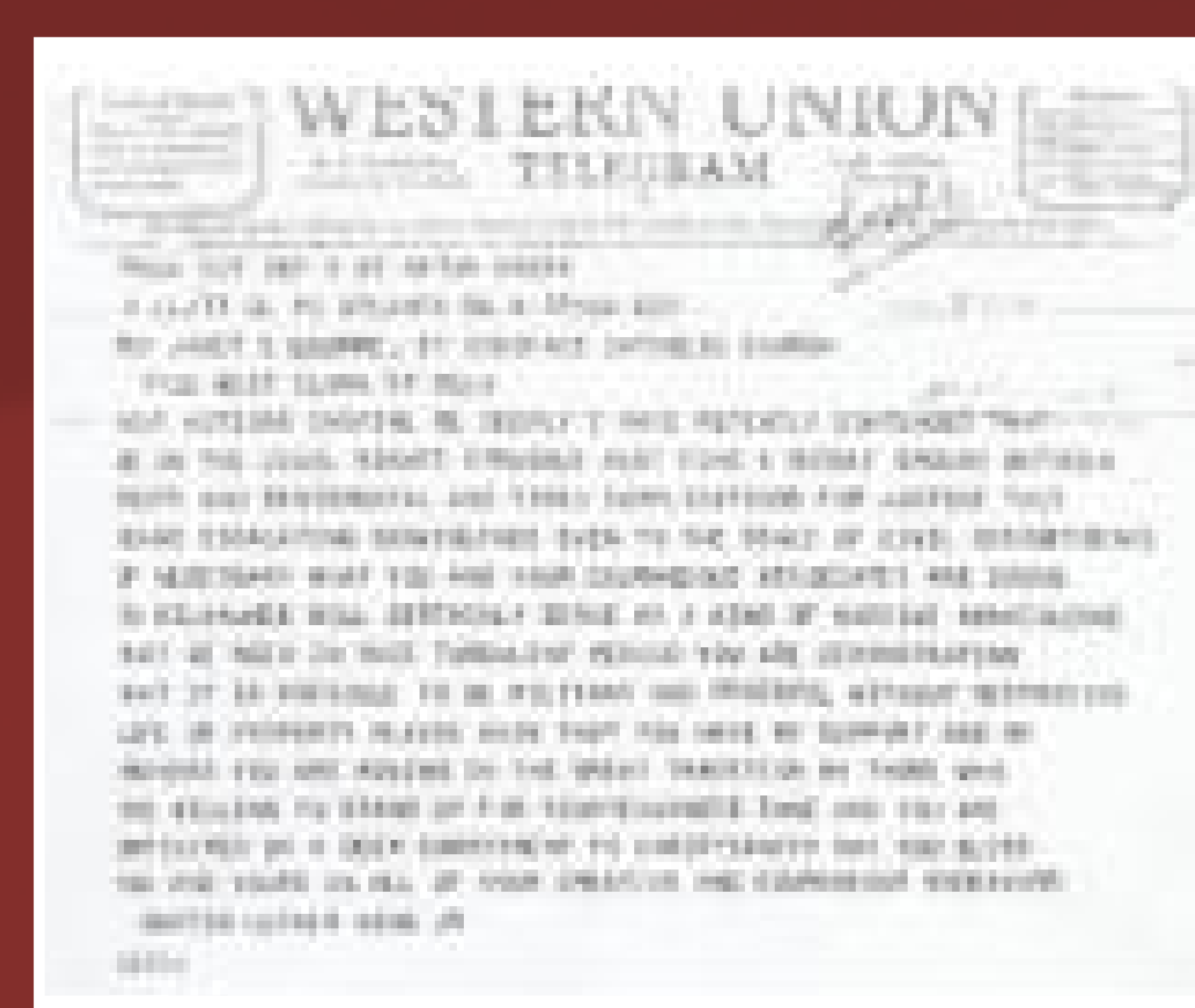
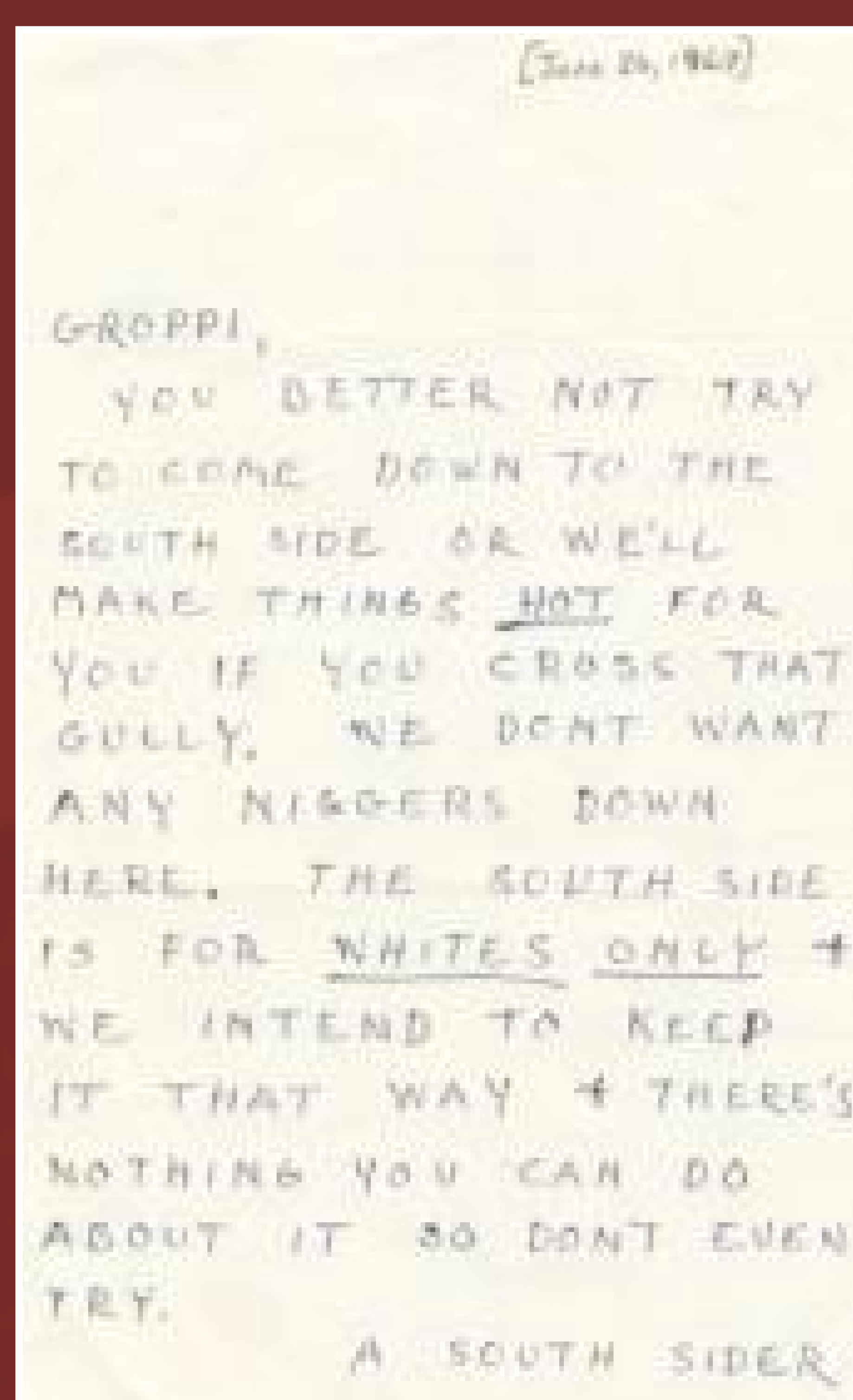


Milwaukee policemen stand in front of the burning headquarters of the NAACP Youth Council, the Freedom House, in 1967.

When the marchers returned to the NAACP Freedom House the evening of August 29, 1967, it was in flames. The police claimed they heard gunshots and fired tear gas into the building, which caught fire. No gun was found, and many people believe the police intentionally caused the fire. Still, the marches continued.

On August 30, Mayor Henry Maier forbade nighttime marches. National news media began to cover the demonstrations, and support flooded in from across the US. The Youth Council would continue the protest marches for 200 nights.

MIDDLE: WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES
RIGHT: WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY MAGAZINE OF HISTORY



ABOVE: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sent Father James Groppi a supportive telegram on September 4, 1967.

LEFT: Father James Groppi and other NAACP Youth Council supporters received hate mail from angry white residents.



On April 8, 1968, the marchers gathered one last time to memorialize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., killed by an assassin four days earlier. On April 11, the US government finally passed a national Fair Housing Act prohibiting discrimination based on race. People could now live where they wanted to live. On April 30, Milwaukee passed Vel Phillips's fair housing bill as well.

How and why do people resist change?



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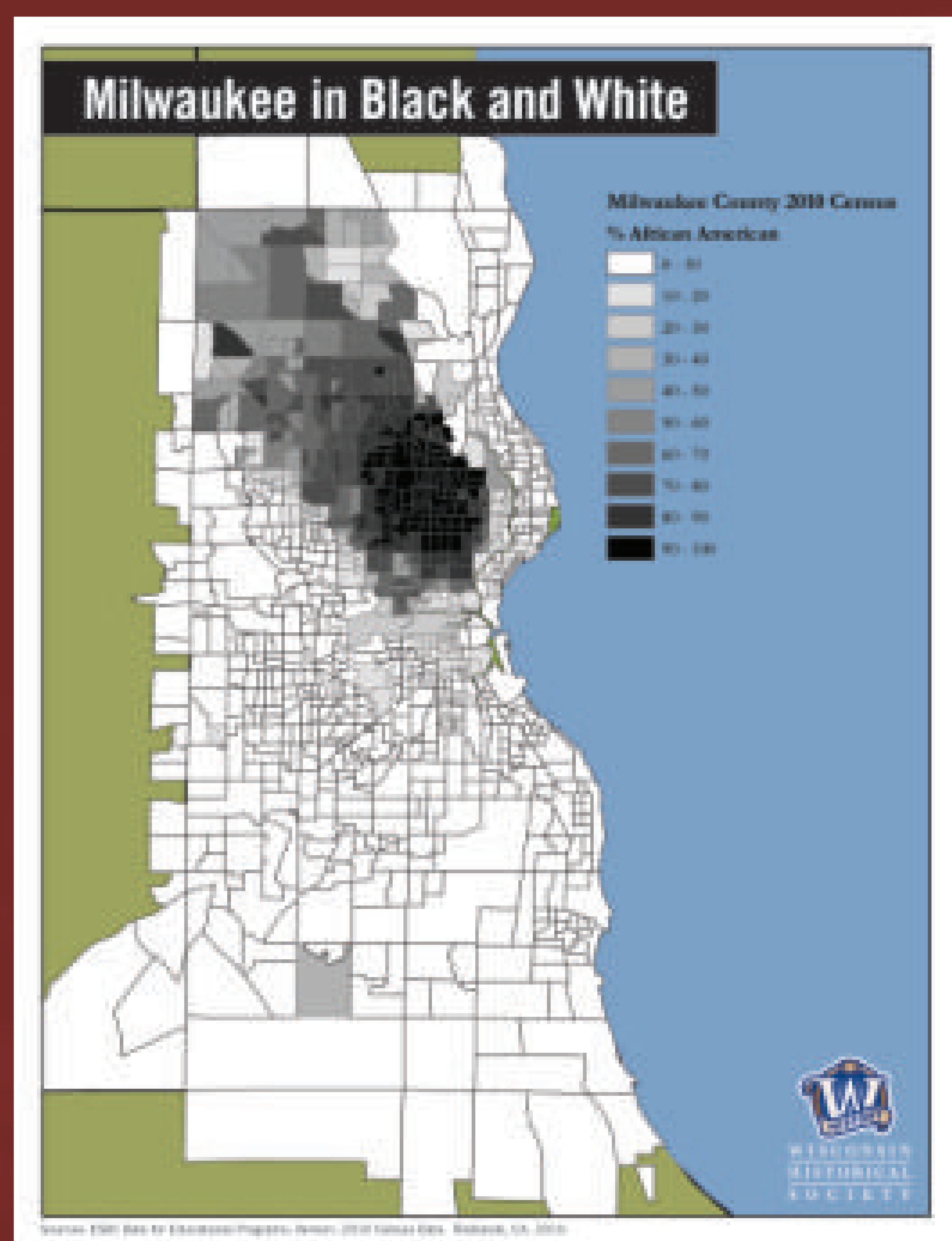
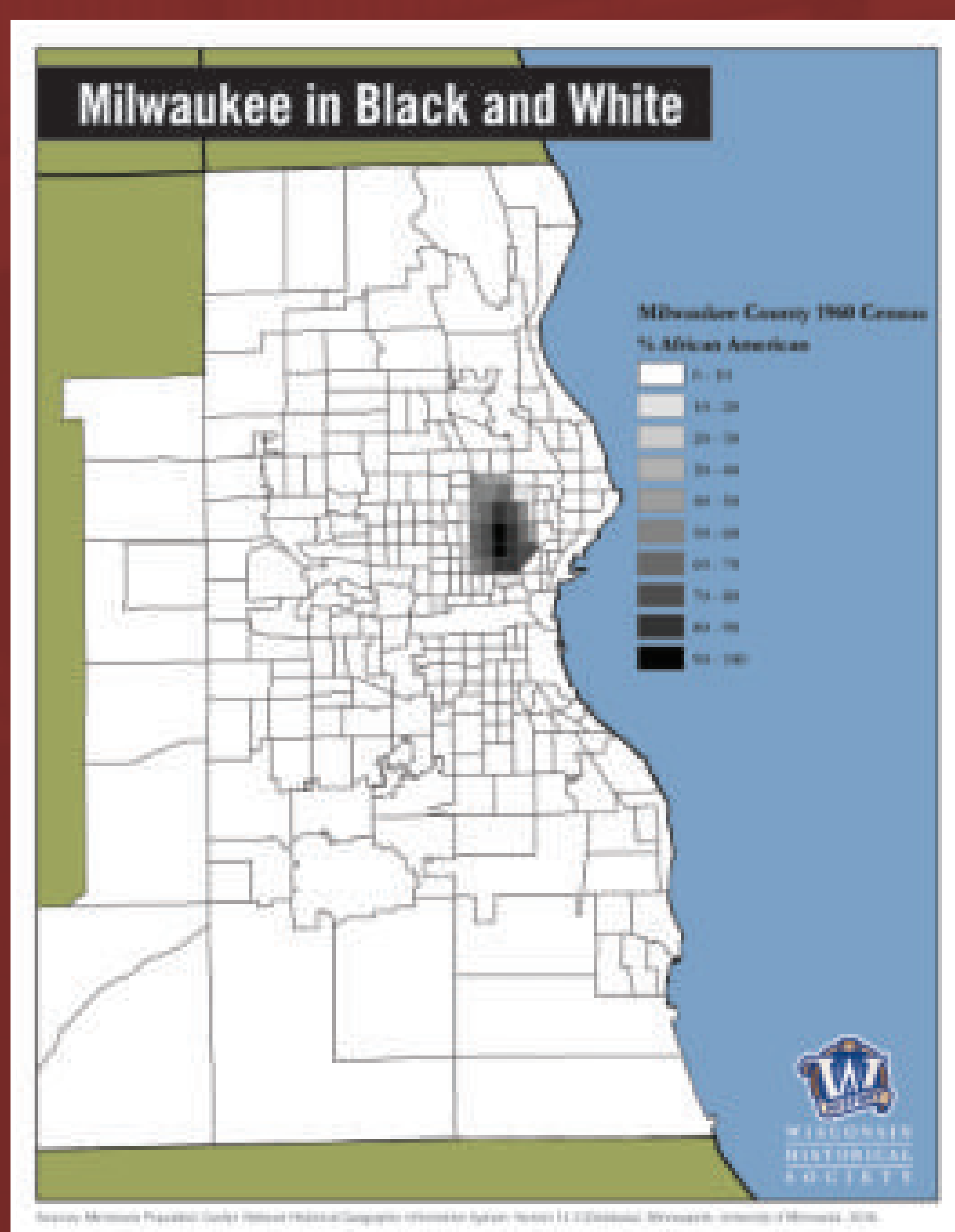
A man leads Milwaukee demonstrators holding signs reading, “Black Lives Matter. Immigrant Justice. Fight for \$15.”

SEGREGATION TODAY

The racial divisions caused by segregation run deep. They still divide most of Milwaukee’s neighborhoods and schools today in ways people from the 1960s would easily recognize.

Fifty-five years ago, segregation was legal and the state of Mississippi was the most segregated place in the US. Today, even though segregation is illegal, Milwaukee is cited as the most segregated city in the nation.

RIGHT: Census data clearly shows the area of Milwaukee in which most African Americans were forced to live until 1968.



Although these maps are separated by 50 years and the Fair Housing Act, a clear racial divide still exists in Milwaukee.

De facto segregation, ingrained ideas about culture and race, influences decisions made every day about where people live and work and who they socialize with. Ideas are much harder to change than laws.

The hard work of people like Vel Phillips, Lloyd Barbee, Father James Groppi, and the NAACP Youth Council members helped make segregation illegal, but there is still much more to be done.

What can you do to help end segregation?

Learn more

wisconsinhistory.org/marchonmilwaukeeexhibit

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS ON THIS EXHIBIT

