

Segregation in Milwaukee Today

Goals

Students discover the effects of de facto segregation by examining maps that show race and income distribution. Using the Anti-Defamation League’s “Pyramid of Hate”, they identify prejudice in their own lives and imagine steps they can take to change it. Although this lesson is focused on Milwaukee, its sources work for any location in the United States.

Central Questions

How does life in Milwaukee today compare with life in segregated Mississippi in 1964? What is de facto segregation? What can we do about it?

Background Information

Fifty years ago, Mississippi was considered the most segregated place in the country. Today, Milwaukee is called the most segregated place in the country. But conditions in the two places are radically different.

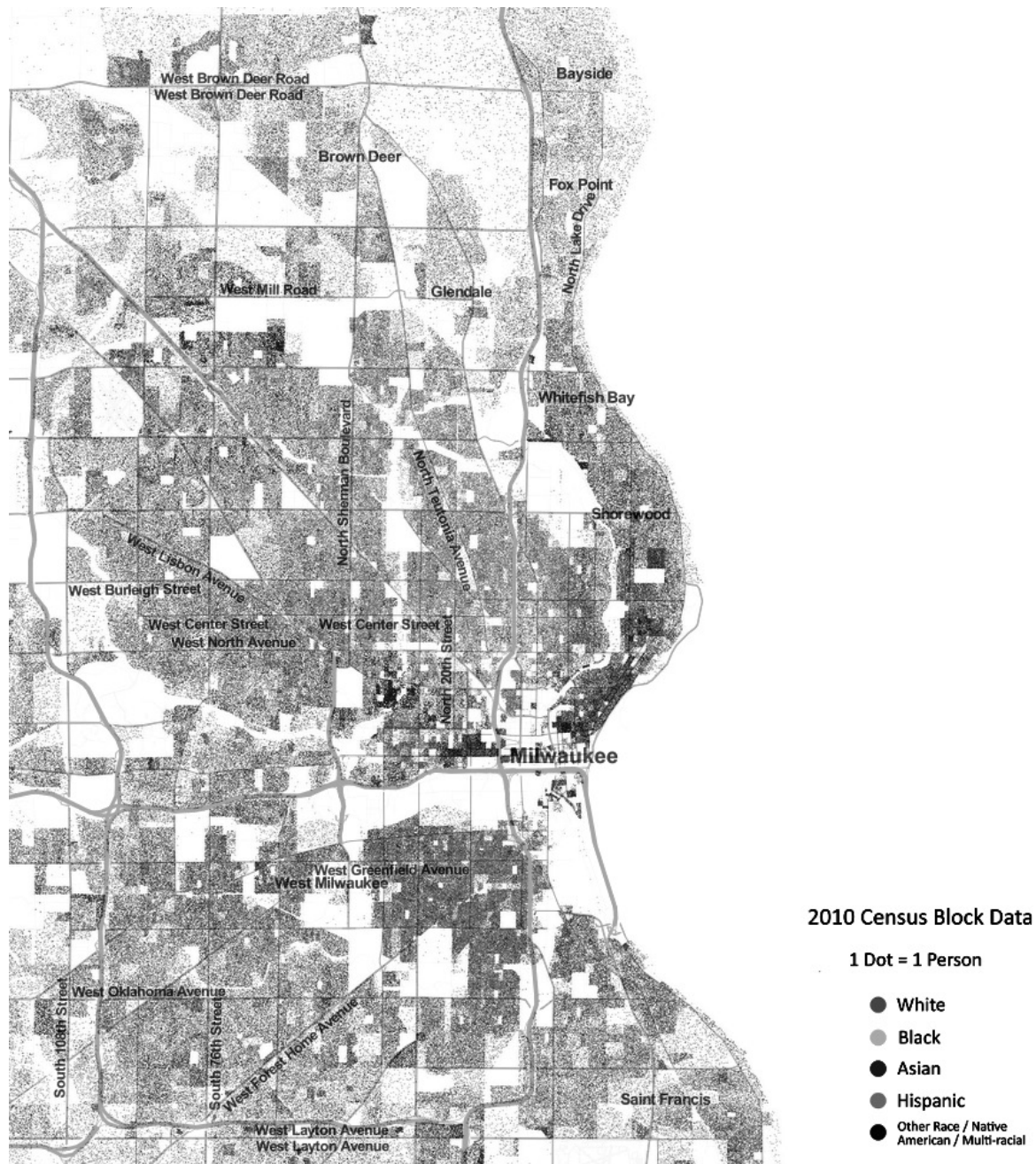
In Mississippi in 1964, government-sponsored (de jure) segregation was enforced through laws, economics, and public opinion. The races were separated, African-Americans had dramatically lower standards of living, and challenges to the status quo were met with violence.

Something quite different happens in Milwaukee today. Our laws legally prohibit racial segregation in housing, jobs, and schools. Yet most residents of the Milwaukee area live in very segregated communities, and Black neighborhoods have much higher poverty rates than white ones. This is called de facto segregation, meaning that it’s still a fact, even though laws do not cause it. De facto segregation is created and maintained by ideas about other races inside people’s minds, rather than by forces such as laws, police, or terrorist groups.

Documents Used in This Lesson:

1. Demographics Research Group, Racial Dot Map for Milwaukee area, 2013 (click to zoom in).
<http://wihist.org/1HW1AZK>
2. *New York Times* “Mapping Poverty in America,” map of Milwaukee neighborhoods by poverty rate, 2014. (click to zoom in)
<http://wihist.org/1rSAi1O>
3. Anti-Defamation League’s “Pyramid of Hate.”
<http://wihist.org/1wlv2Vt>

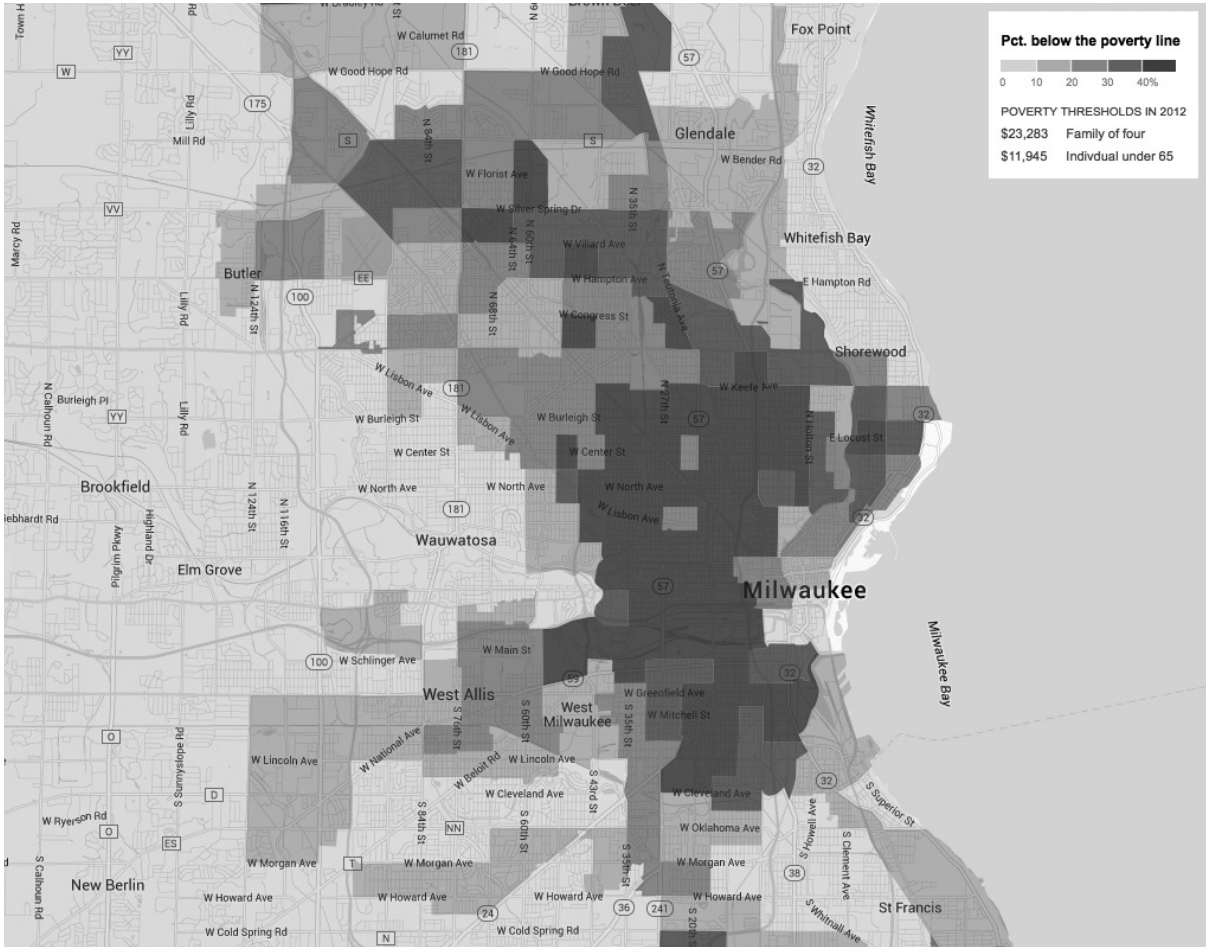
Document 1: Demographics Research Group, Racial Dot Map for Milwaukee area, 2013.
<http://wihist.org/IHW1AZK>



Note: the online version of the map is color-coded.

Document 2: *New York Times* “Mapping Poverty in America,” map of Milwaukee neighborhoods by poverty rate, 2014.

<http://wihist.org/1rSAi1O>



Questions

Documents 1 and 2: maps showing segregation in Milwaukee today.

With a partner or in a small group, brainstorm answers to these questions:

1. Examine Document 1, the racial groups map. Where is downtown? Where is your school? Where do most Black people live? Where do most Hispanic people live? Where do most white people live? Are the races segregated in Milwaukee?
2. If the Civil Rights Act made segregation illegal 50 years ago, how can this be? List three things that encourage segregated neighborhoods.
3. Examine Document 2, the poverty rates map. Which neighborhoods have the most poverty? Which ones have the least? How does income correspond to housing segregation in the Milwaukee area?
4. Until 1950, nearly all Milwaukee's factories and jobs were located close to downtown, along railroad corridors and next to today's I-94 highway. After the 1960s, many employers closed those century-old factories and relocated them to the suburbs. What color are suburbs on the poverty rates map? Why don't inner-city residents commute out to jobs in places like Brookfield, Oak Creek, or Brown Deer?

Pyramid of Hate



Document 3: Anti-Defamation League’s “Pyramid of Hate.”

Read the following story:

In one school, a group of four boys began whispering and laughing about another boy in their school who they thought was gay. They began making comments when they walked by him in the hall.

Soon they started insulting him with anti-gay slurs. By the end of the month, they had taken their harassment to another level, tripping him when he walked by and pushing him into a locker while they yelled slurs.

Sometime during the next month, they increased the seriousness of their conduct — they surrounded him and two boys held his arms while the others hit and kicked him. Eventually, one of the boys threatened to bring his father’s gun into school the next day to kill the boy. At this point, another student overheard the threat and the police were notified.

Answer these questions on your own:

1. Could something like this happen at your school? What could have been done to stop the situation from escalating? Who should have stopped it? When?
2. Look at the “Pyramid of Hate” with a partner. Where does each act in the story of the gay student belong on the pyramid?
3. Have you ever encountered or witnessed acts of prejudice? What were they? Where do they belong on the pyramid?
4. How does the “Pyramid of Hate” connect to the segregation and poverty that the maps of Milwaukee show?
5. Write on a 3 x 5 card one way that you might change your own behavior when you witness prejudice. (The teacher will collect the cards and post them somewhere in the classroom as reminders for the next few days. Some classrooms have done this by having students assemble the cards into a “promise tree” or a mobile. Invite students to examine the ideas that the class wrote.)