WHAT THEY TAUGHT US
HOW GRASSROOTS DEBATE AND DIPLOMACY SHAPED THE MILWAUKEE OPEN HOUSING MOVEMENT

Krin Blegen
Junior Division
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As the racial divide in America grows, the importance of youth leadership is never more important. Recent years of heightened racial violence triggered questions within me, and the discussions of removing certain historical context from curriculum made it even more prevalent for me to learn of important Civil Rights history in Milwaukee. Soon after forming these questions, I attended a forum led by Dr. Robert Smith and Mr. Adam Carr, two historians of the Open Housing movement in Milwaukee. The diplomatic choice of nonviolence, and the debate instigated by marchers caught my eye, little did I know that the debate and diplomacy went far deeper.

My research began with reading ‘Selma of the North’ by Patrick Jones and discovering the preachings of Father James Groppi. After gaining context and an analysis of the debate and diplomacy in the marches, I discovered the writings of Margeret Rozga, Father Groppi’s widow, and the digital archives of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. These digital archives provided many primary sources, and eventually I traveled to UWM to look through more sources. To gain an authentic understanding of these marches, I reached out to Ms. Pamela Jo Sargent, a former member of the NAACP Youth Council. This interview provided me with a firsthand account of the marches, as well as a deeper understanding of debate and diplomacy in the marches seen through a young person’s mind. Reflecting on my research, I ended with more questions than when I started.

I chose to create a documentary because of the emotional message that can be sent when images, audio, and music align. After gaining context and background knowledge, I drafted a script, rewriting multiple times after acquiring new perspectives on the debate and diplomacy within these marches. After writing my script, I composed original music to underscore my narration and create a clear tone in my documentary. Then, I began editing, stopping when I ran out of time.

My historical argument, which changed many times after gaining perspectives and ideas, is that the result of racism can be found in the housing policies across the U.S. and led to the 200 day marches in Milwaukee. This debate and grassroots diplomacy by Milwaukee’s youth in the 1960s, impacted the city, state, and country. The NAACP Youth Council led the diplomatic planning and fierce debate. Their diplomatic steps included taking the issue to the streets, which can still be seen in America today.

Throughout history, people have marched to bring awareness to injustices in our country. From Selma to Montgomery, St. Boniface Church to Kosciuszko Park, Americans have diplomatically planned and debated powerfully to bring together millions of people fighting for one cause. The 200 day marches in Milwaukee sheds light on one step of the diplomatic process that creates change in America. My research showed me the arc of the moral universe’s beginning, now it is time to create an arc that bends towards justice.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


This image portrays a woman fighting a police officer during one of these marches. I used this image to describe the outlawing of these marches even though they were nonviolent and not disruptive. It also answered questions on self-defense and the relationship between the marchers and Police Officers.


This Oral History interview deepened my understanding of what life was like during the 1960s. This helped me capture the story of the marches in the fullest light. It was also a detailed interview that helped me comprehend the details that are seldom retold.


This song was one of the most powerful pieces of audio that I used in my documentary. It shows the power of unity, as well as the amazing message it is sending through the lyrics. I used this to show hope for the future in my documentary.


This video helped me understand the protests that young people are leading today, just like in 1967-68. I used this video to display the leadership displayed in schools and beyond by youth in the present day. It shows the passion and determination of youth.
Civil Rights Act of 1866. 1866.

This piece of legislation helped me understand how loopholes in democracy can lead to repeated history. I used it to enhance my script in my documentary. It also is a primary source, therefore more credible than the secondary source written about this document.

Civil Rights Act of 1968. 1968,

The Civil Rights Act of 1968 helped me understand the context of what was going on during the 200-day marches. It also gave me a reference point to understand what the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and 1964 did for the country, and how these three Civil Rights Acts compared to one another. Although this didn’t make it into the final product, it was critical to my research.


This video portrays the glamorized version of white suburbs in the 1950s. It helped me understand the propaganda and other false information spread throughout society during this time. I used it in my documentary to expand the visual aspect of my context and evidence in my project. Overall it was a very helpful source, as it served as a portal into the lives of white suburbians in the 1950s.


This article shows the perspective of a Milwaukee priest, Father Witton. His perspective and that of the majority of the white community in Milwaukee helped me understand the opposing perspective of the Youth Council. I used this to display the struggle of the Youth Council.


The Fair Housing Act was the piece of legislation that this movement was working towards. However, the legacy of this act was not as beneficial as expected because of the loopholes that are intertwined. The Fair Housing Act was critical to my research because it was the outcome of the movement itself.


This digital collection of hate mail that Father Groppi had received during the Equal Housing Marches goes to show how unappreciated these marches were despite the big impact they had on the country. They helped me understand and deeply comprehend the
opposing side and other perspectives. They also gave me an idea of the reasoning behind the other perspective.


This article helped me understand the opposing perspectives within the open housing fight in Milwaukee. I used it in my research to get an in-depth understanding of the open housing fight.

Journal Sentinel. “A Smiling Young Marcher Wears an NAACP Sweatshirt as He and Others Carried the Campaign for Open Housing to the South Side,” *Journal Sentinel,* 1966.

This image of a young boy marching in the Open Housing March, helped me deepen my understanding of youth participation within the movement. I used this image to portray the hopeful mood and joyful faces the youth had when marching for their rights.


This video about living the “American Dream” in the 1950s, helped me understand the propaganda implemented in society during these times. I used it to help the audience of my documentary visualize what the “American Dream” was perceived to be, and why it was so prejudiced.


These archives (a part of the Library of Congress) helped my research exponentially, in addition to assisting my note-taking and researching abilities. These sources helped me understand the historical context of civil rights in Milwaukee. I used these resources in my research to refine my historical argument.


This famous image of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination helped me understand the shocking truth of his death and how it moved the Civil Rights Movement forward, despite the tragedy that it is. I used this image to display this horrible time in history.

This video was very helpful to my firsthand account knowledge because of the context I needed in my background information section. It was also helpful to the information I added about Vel Phillips and the common council.


This oral history interview with Margaret Rozga helped me enhance my research by providing a firsthand account of the 200-day marches. Margaret Rozga marched with the Youth Council, in addition to being Father Groppi’s wife after he left the priesthood. This deepened my understanding of the 200-day marches because the emotion intertwined in this interview is more meaningful than the secondary sources that summarize the marches.


This advertisement in the Milwaukee Journal helped me understand the opposing view; “forced housing”. I used this source in my documentary for a visual to go with my script as I describe the propaganda spread throughout society. It helped me understand the perspective of the white majority in Milwaukee. I used it to display this perspective.

--- Forcible Housing Legislation. 3 Apr. 1963.

This piece of “legislation” was an ad in the Milwaukee Journal showing the perspective of white homeowners during this time, as well as the information put out by realtors. It helped me gain a deeper understanding of the other perspective of the fair housing fight, and the complicated factors of this struggle.


The photo of Father Groppi and the NAACP Youth Council leading a civil rights march helped me portray this very thing. I used this image in my documentary to describe and help my audience comprehend the mood and determination of each and every one of these marches.

This image helped me understand the level of counter-protesting that was happening at the same time as these marches. I used this image to show the level of violence that the counter-protesters used against children and nonviolent protesters. It helped me deeply understand the state at which the Police Department was at if having to aim their guns.


This image of counter protesters in Milwaukee helped me understand the critical condition that Milwaukee was in when the Open Housing Marches and the disapproval that they faced as they were marching. I used this image to enhance my visual understanding of the powerful counter-protesting that was happening.


This image displays the joyful approach to these marches. Instead of being a dreaded task, these marches were meant to be a good experience, even though the tough moments of opposition may have been serious. It also displays the youth that was involved in the marches.


This image portrays all of the young people that were involved in these marches. I used this image to show the movement as a whole and how it was led by kids. This is a critical piece in my documentary and couldn’t have been shown without this image.


This image showing a line of marchers going against a line of police officers helped me comprehend the determination of the youth during this movement. I used this image to display the fierce knowledge of right and wrong portrayed in these images.


This image of the memorial protest after MLK Jr.’s death helped me understand the profound impact that he had on the country and Milwaukee specifically. I used this image
to display this impact in my documentary. It showed Milwaukee from a birds-eye view, making it possible to see the whole march.


This UWM newspaper article showed me how widespread the support for the Open Housing Marches was, even though the opposition was outspoken. It explained that even in the colleges, there was support for the Youth Council, even though the other side debated louder in opposition.

Phillips, Vel. Presentation by Vel Phillips to Students in History 191 (Technology for Historians).

This speech by Vel Phillips helped me understand her point of view in her own words. It is hard to find personal accounts, and this was one of the most critical personal accounts that I found in my research. It explained her story, and how she got to the point of joining the Open Housing Marches. It also helped me understand the little details that are left out in most secondary sources.


This photo gallery was critical to my understanding of the 200-day marches because of the sensory details it provides. In addition to the articles and interviews I used for my research on this topic, photos are even more important, as they complete the understanding of this topic. They do this by showing the emotion, tension, and joy of specific moments that neither an article nor interview can provide.

Rockwell, Norman. Soldier’s Homecoming, 24 Sept. 1924.

This image helped me understand the stereotypes during the historical period I am researching. It displayed the inequality that was seen all throughout society. I used it to display these very things.


This news article helped me learn both perspectives on this topic. The article was leaning more towards the perspective of the opposition to marches. It helped me understand the point of view of the Catholic church and the opposition that Father Groppi faced from his own community.

This obituary of Father Groppi explained the significance of the work Father Groppi did in his lifetime. It also helped me understand the legacy of the Equal Housing Marches and Father Groppi. It helped me construct my legacy portion of the documentary, which is critical to the project.


This is a primary source because it was written during the time of the marches. It helped me better understand the attitude of people during that time period. It also gave more depth to my comprehension of the topic, as it is a primary source.


This image of Ruby Bridges helped me enhance the viewer’s experience and comprehension of what my script is saying. It also helped me fully comprehend how unsafe it must have been in order to need that much protection. This helped me write my script, as I didn’t know some of the small details without this image.


This video of a fair housing march helped me understand the widespread support of this issue, as well as the voices against it. I used it to enhance my documentary’s impact on the viewer because of the window it provides into history. This helped me understand the debate and diplomacy that was shown through these marches.


This speech is one of the many pieces of firsthand accounts that have been very critical to my research. This helped me understand both the struggles of open housing and the point of view of Father Groppi. Both of these are critical pieces to my final product, and this information could not be found completely without this video.
This is a press conference with Father Groppi after the strenuous first march of the 200 marches those two years. I used this to show the significance of the YC’s drive and courage. The press conference helped me understand the point of view of Father Groppi, better than any of the articles did.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee - March on Milwaukee Digital Collections.

This image of Vel Phillips speaking at the Common Council is a source along with the videos I found of her, that expand my knowledge of the mood and determination of Vel Phillips. I used this image to deepen my comprehension of Vel Phillips’ work.


This video showed the freedom house, the meeting place for the NAACP Youth Council, going up in flames. Through this video, I learned how the Fire and Police Department did not do anything to stop it. I used this video to display the fear that was coursing through this whole movement.


This video, also from the digital collections in the UWM Archives Department, helped me understand the impact Vel Phillips had on Milwaukee and the country. I used this source to deepen my understanding of Vel Phillips, as well as a visual aid for my documentary.


This image showing a Youth Council and Commando meeting in 1967-68, shows the leadership within the movement, and the diplomacy of the meetings. I used this image to portray the diplomatic choice of letting kids lead the movement.

This image shows three Commandos gathered around materials about George Wallace. Although a staged photograph, it represents the teamwork that the NAACP Youth Council used. I used this image to deepen my understanding of the mood that was portrayed throughout the movement.


This video of Vel Phillips addressing the Common Council was very helpful to my topic because it assisted me research Vel Phillips and her experience in the Common Council. It was also a great visual in my documentary. I used this source to learn the exact things she said to the Common Council, instead of the summaries that many secondary sources provide.

Secondary Sources


This article gave me a better idea of Vel Phillips’ legacy and important accomplishments in her life. This, like many of my secondary sources, is a summary of her life and legacy but is the foundational source to my research on Vel Phillips.


This New Yorker article helped me understand the significance of the diplomatic steps taken to pass the fair housing act and the legacy of this promise. I used this article to create another perspective in my documentary.

This article is a summary of the 1866 civil rights act, one of the critical pieces of my project. It helped me understand the context of this act, as well as the meaning of the act in general. I used this article as a piece of my research to back up my claims that are about the 1866 civil rights act.


This article described the legacy of inequalities within the housing industry and the building of highways. The history of discrimination in highway buildings is unknown to most but so important in the context to open housing. It deepened my understanding of the context of open housing and the widespread damages unequal housing provides.


This article was one of the most helpful pieces of my research, because of all the quotes and resources within the article. This was the article where I learned about hyper segregation, and this article was a foundation point for my script. In addition, the quote by the Princeton sociology professor was very important to my research as it provided evidence to my claims.


This article is one of the critical pieces to understanding the summary and overview of the Open Housing Marches. It explained the overview and important details of 1967-68 and gave me a good starting point for my research.


The Center for American Progress published this article to inform people about the legacy of unaffordable housing. It helped me understand the nationwide problem of
unaffordable housing and how it extended beyond Milwaukee. I used this article to expand my knowledge on the legacy of unequal housing.


This organization was the same organization that paid for advertisements in an attempt to stop open housing. I used this article to see the evolution of this organization, in addition to looking at the summary of the 200-day march included.


This article helped me understand the government’s involvement and perspective when it came to the Fair Housing Law. It also explained the politics within the government during this movement, whereas other secondary sources only show the civilian’s perspectives.


This article provided me with key spots in the marches. It also mentioned a summary of the Open Housing marches, as well as the NAACP headquarters. I used this article to gain the specific addresses and important places of the Open Housing marches.


This book was one of the foundational sources of my research. It was one of the first resources that I used to understand the details of the 200-day Marches, as well as the Youth Council itself. It helped me understand every aspect of civil rights history in Milwaukee.


This article explained the legacy of the fair housing marches and discrimination in Milwaukee. It also helped me understand the detail of how housing discrimination still exists in Milwaukee. In addition, it showed another perspective on the fair housing
marches, instead of being written during the time of the marches, it was written now about the legacy.


This article published by the Library of Congress describes the nationwide civil rights struggle, and details a few key moments. This provides context for my background information, as well as gives me details along the timeline for reference points.


This article, among the other articles from the March on Milwaukee digital collection, has been an asset to my research and foundation for my research. These articles provide summaries, both detailed and overviews, helping me understand the 200 day marches in every perspective.


This article was one of the many pieces I used to gather a complete perspective on the legacy of the fair housing movement. This article provided me with a deeper understanding of the trends in residential segregation as well.


Wisconsin Public Radio published this secondary article as a way to show the legacy of the 200 day marches. This helped me understand the legacy of not only the marches but the disparities that the marches were trying to limit. Although I could not include this information in my documentary, it displayed that the work is not done. It is important to see both sides of this, as the problem was not completely solved by the marches. It was very helpful to my research because it explained a side of the story that I had not considered.


This magazine article helped me understand details that were not covered in other secondary sources. This article was published by the Wisconsin Historical Society and
cites many sources within the article. It also explained the other organizations that were working with the NAACP, and this helped me comprehend the topic more fully.


This article is a secondary source because it is not a firsthand account of the 200-day marches in Milwaukee. It helped me understand the 200-day marches because in addition to being a detailed summary of the marches, the links they reference helped me a tremendous amount to further my research. It also explained the struggles that arose during the marches, which helped me back up my claim about the debate in the marches.


This article, published by the NAACP organization itself, gave me credible information about the mission of the YC, and how it has changed since 1967. This helped me form my legacy, as well as enhanced my understanding of their mission when going on the Open Housing Marches.


This report about the segregation of Milwaukee includes both personal stories and statistics. It was very helpful to find other credible sources, as well as learn of personal stories about segregation. I used this article as a way to find other sources, and to find statistics that back up my claims.


This article contains a quote from a famous poet that helped me turn a corner in my research. It described the behaviors of white citizens during this time and was very accurate in the narrative that was created during this time. It helped me understand the white perspective during this time.

This article helps me understand the daily occurrences of the 200-day fair housing marches. It explained in detail the occurrences of days in the march by interviewing primary sources and historians. It is a secondary source because it is not a firsthand account of the fair housing marches, although it has firsthand accounts within it.


This article about the construction of freeways in general, helped me understand the overview of the freeway construction, whereas other articles that I used for my research were about a specific highway. Although this specific information didn’t make it into my final product, it was an asset of my research that helped me broaden my comprehension.


This secondary source helped me enhance my research by deepening my understanding of the inequalities connected to open housing. Even though the struggle of open housing was mainly to limit the discrimination in buying and selling a house, this article explained that many different inequalities stemmed from this one flaw in the system.


This secondary source, published in June 2020, is a good starting point for further research on my topic. This is because it gives me a foundation and summarizes the history behind the fair housing marches, whereas other summaries of the fair housing marches summarize the actual marches. I read this article to get a deeper understanding of the background information needed to complete my project.


This book gave me important information on the history of housing segregation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and at a national level. It was important for my research because of the perspectives that it shows and the historical context that it provides. I used this book as a foundational aspect of my secondary research.

This article, written by Margaret Rozga, the widow of Father Groppi, is a detailed summary of the 200-day marches. Like others, this article was a standing stone for claims I make throughout my documentary. It was written by a person with first-hand knowledge of this movement, and therefore, has personal details as well.


This is the obituary of Vel Phillips from the New York Times. It helped me understand what the world thought of Vel Phillips and her work in the Open Housing movement. It also gave me context to other aspects of her life and the significance of her role in this movement.


This article helped me understand the legacy of fair housing and the struggles that still challenge Americans today. It also displayed that the work is not done, and we are still working towards a more perfect union. It explained the push for fair housing, now after more than 50 years after the fair housing marches. It helped me see how diplomatic the march and legacy of this movement is.


This article series was very helpful to my research because it included summaries, firsthand accounts, and detailed explanations. These articles helped me understand every aspect of the 200-day marches, as well as the context of the marches in history. It also explained what life was like in the 1960s, which was helpful to crafting my descriptive details.


This article helped me understand the historical context of Milwaukee before, during, and after the 200-day marches. This article was one of the articles I used to start researching. It showed multiple perspectives, as well as the connection to debate and diplomacy.

This article was published with the intention of informing people on the connection between Milwaukee and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It helped me understand that the change that was happening in Milwaukee impacted the whole nation. It also explained ideas that were unknown to me, like the connection between Dr. King and Milwaukee in general.


This article is a secondary source because it is not a firsthand account and was not written by a primary source. It helped me understand the context of the civil rights era in Milwaukee, to help me fully comprehend the impact of the 200-day march in Milwaukee. It also included many good photos that capture the core of the movement.


This scholarly article was written in 1995 about the politics of the urban north. It helped me understand how the government on the local level was connected to the movement, as well as the federal level. It also explained Mayor Maier’s stance on fair housing.


This article provided specific details, such as the specific starting and stopping dates, and the citations led me to more credible sources. I used this article as a way to learn about details I hadn’t known, as well as to use the citations that they cite at the bottom of the article. This article also had good information about the fight still happening today having to do with housing discrimination, and the activists working towards a more perfect union.


This article provided me with a timeline for the Open Housing movement. It also was a very detailed explanation for the movement. The article also explained residential segregation which is a critical aspect to the course of this movement as a whole.

This article was another critical piece in the legacy portion of my documentary. Because there are so many different pieces and connections from now to the 1960’s civil rights movement, the legacy portion of this project is very important.


This digital collection at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee helped me tremendously in my research. Where the majority of my sources provided me with an overview of my subject, these sources were the details that I needed to create a complete and honest depiction of this movement.


In addition to helping me understand the legacy of the Fair Housing Act, this article revealed things about current events that I was not aware of. I used this knowledge gained from reading this article to deepen my analysis of the legacy of the Fair Housing Movement.


This traveling exhibit was a good summary of the 200-day marches, as well as an addition to the information I already had about the movement. This exhibit also included context to the times, and inspiring pictures from the fair housing movement as well.


This website provided me with a short summary of the march on Milwaukee, but the majority are links to other resources. I used this article because of the essay collections, further reading, and other resources linked on this website.

WUWM - Milwaukee's NPR. “NAACP Commando Prentice McKinney Looks Back at Milwaukee’s Open Housing Marches, 50 Years Later.” *WUWM 89.7 FM - Milwaukee’s*
This article published by WUWM, helped me understand what it was like for the marchers and activists by interviewing a YC Commando. It explained the personal details and included more emotion than other sources. I used this source as a way to look back on how it felt to be in those marches.

WUWM-Milwaukee's NPR. “The 1960s: A Decade of Turmoil and Change in Milwaukee.”
_WUWM 89.7 FM - Milwaukee’s NPR_, 14 Aug. 2016,

This article describes the fair housing marches, but also described what else was going on during the time of the marches. It helped me fully comprehend the marches, as you cannot understand something without context. It also explained in detail the discrimination African Americans were facing in the 1960s.

Zonta, Michela. “Racial Disparities in Home Appreciation.” _Center for American Progress_,
Center for American Progress, July 2019,

This article, also a report from the Center for American Progress, helped me understand the effects of residential segregation. It expanded on what I already knew about segregation and went into detail about unequal housing in American history. I used this report to understand the details of this movement.