

# Chapter 6: Sherman Park, Milwaukee

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin, long one of the Nation's leading industrial centers and home to an ethnically diverse population, has experienced significant deindustrialization and hypersegregation in recent decades. Milwaukee also has been the location of significant struggles to create and maintain stable, diverse neighborhoods. Many of those struggles have focused on a neighborhood known as Sherman Park.

The first place in Milwaukee to be called *Sherman Park* is a Milwaukee County park that occupies four square blocks on the city's west side. In 1970 a group of seven families living near the park decided to establish a neighborhood organization, called the Sherman Park Community Association (SPCA), to address local concerns. The families decided that the boundaries of their city aldermanic district would also be SPCA's boundaries (Saltman, 1990). At that time, this neighborhood included nearly 39,000 people in an approximately 300-block area (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970).

SPCA's first publicly stated goal was to improve the quality of life in what had been the city's fifth ward (Mazurek and Johannsen, 1971). A key component of that quality was racial diversity and inclusivity. SPCA was about to provide a lasting new identity for its slice of Milwaukee. The fifth ward has been redistricted out of existence, but its previous boundaries now form the heart of the neighborhood commonly known as Sherman Park.

SPCA has expanded its official organizational boundaries to the east and north since it was formed in 1970. This change must be noted when tracking neighborhood developments over time, since the demographic nature of the added areas was and remains quite different from that of the original neighborhood.

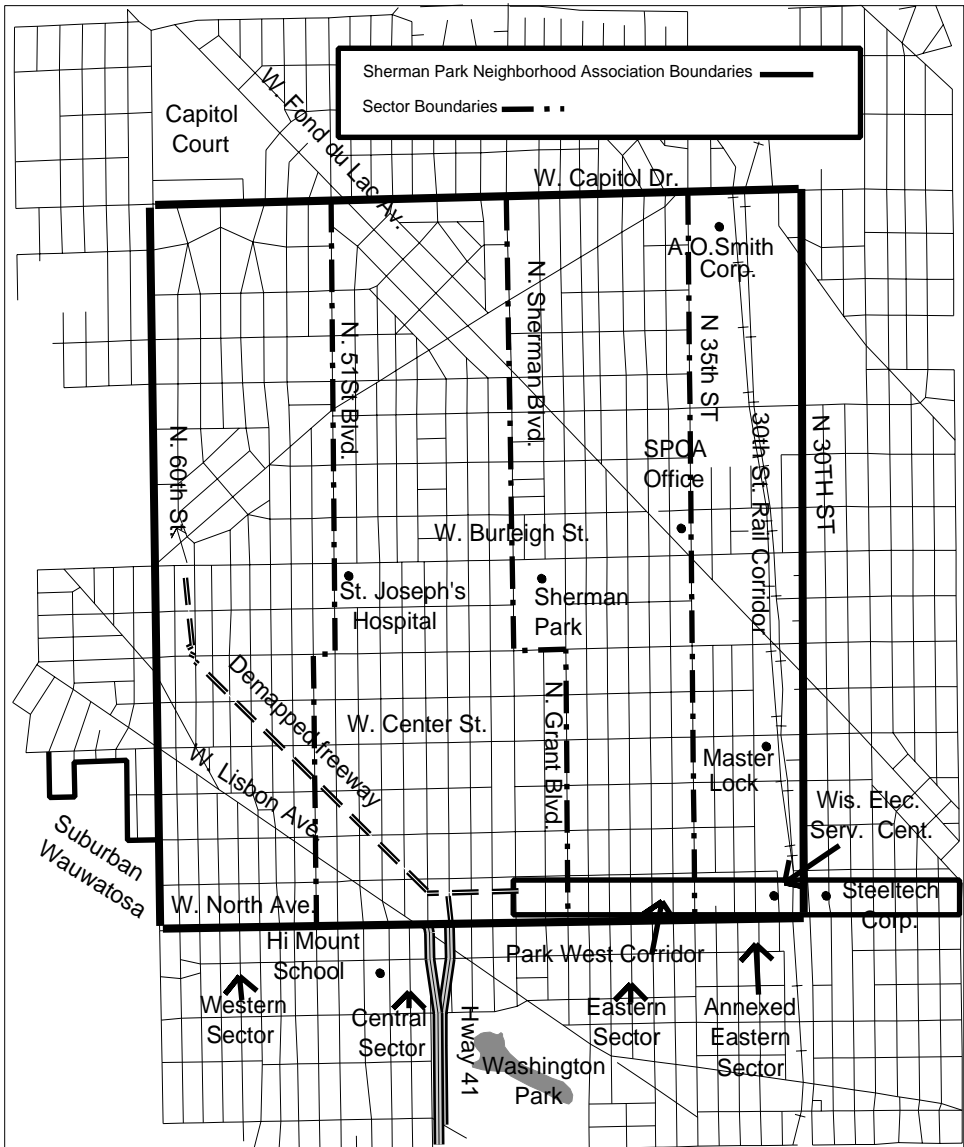
Sherman Park's westside Milwaukee identity as a community working to create and sustain racial, ethnic, and economic diversity was already well established when it annexed adjacent neighborhoods in the 1980s. This annexation increased the population of SPCA's service area by about one-third. It was done because SPCA saw value in extending its housing rehabilitation and neighborhood organizing resources to areas that lacked such assets (Geenan, 1996). The annexed area, which formed a new eastern boundary for the neighborhood, was much older, more industrial, and poorer than the rest of Sherman Park. It was also overwhelmingly African-American, and not at all diverse when included in SPCA's neighborhood. Since promotion of diversity had long been a central SPCA goal,

one of the association's challenges in the annexed area was to build strengths to attract that diversity.

Sherman Park can be best understood by examining four areas within the community: western, central, eastern, and annexed eastern sectors (see exhibits 1, 2, 3, and 4). In a neighborhood such as Sherman Park, which is the size of a small city, it is helpful to study the area subdivisions to avoid misleading conclusions.

### Exhibit 1

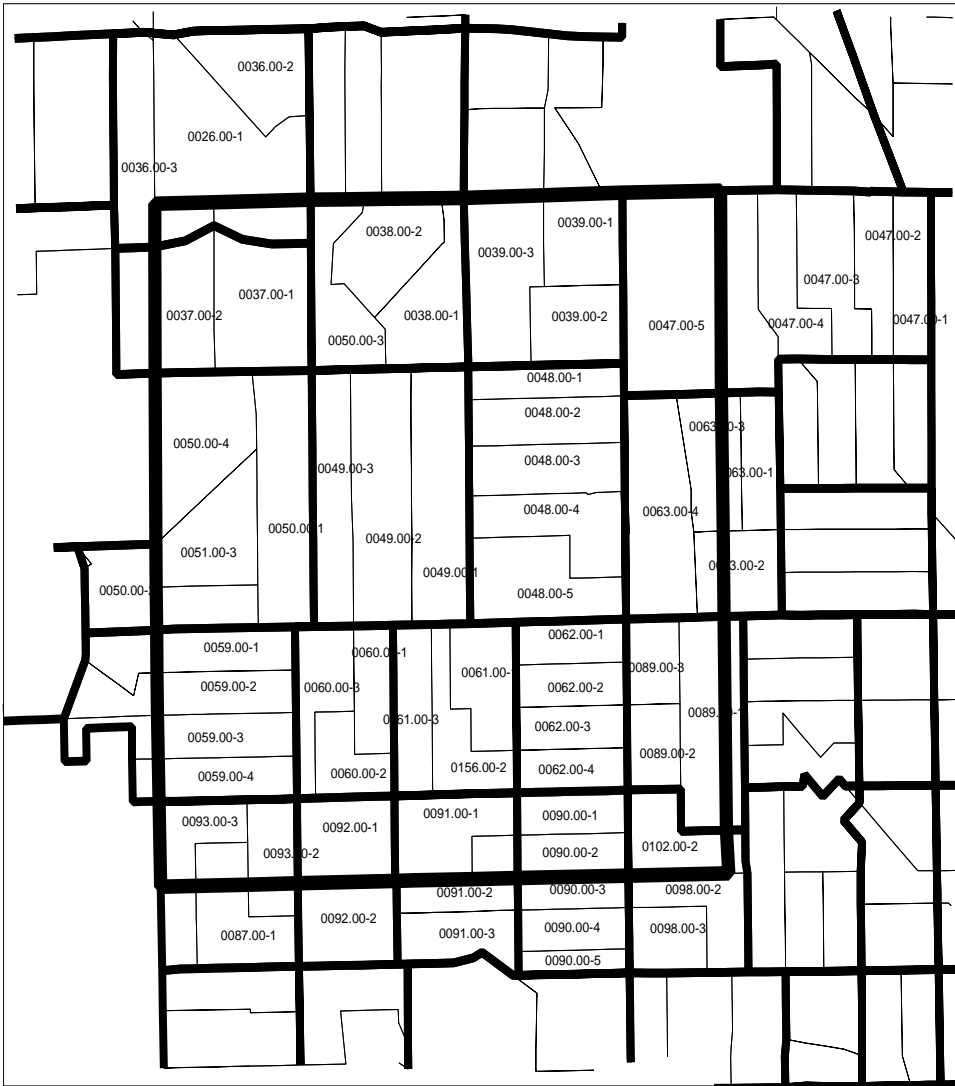
#### Sherman Park Neighborhood



Source: Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee

## Exhibit 2

### Sherman Park Census Tracts and Block Groups



Source: Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee

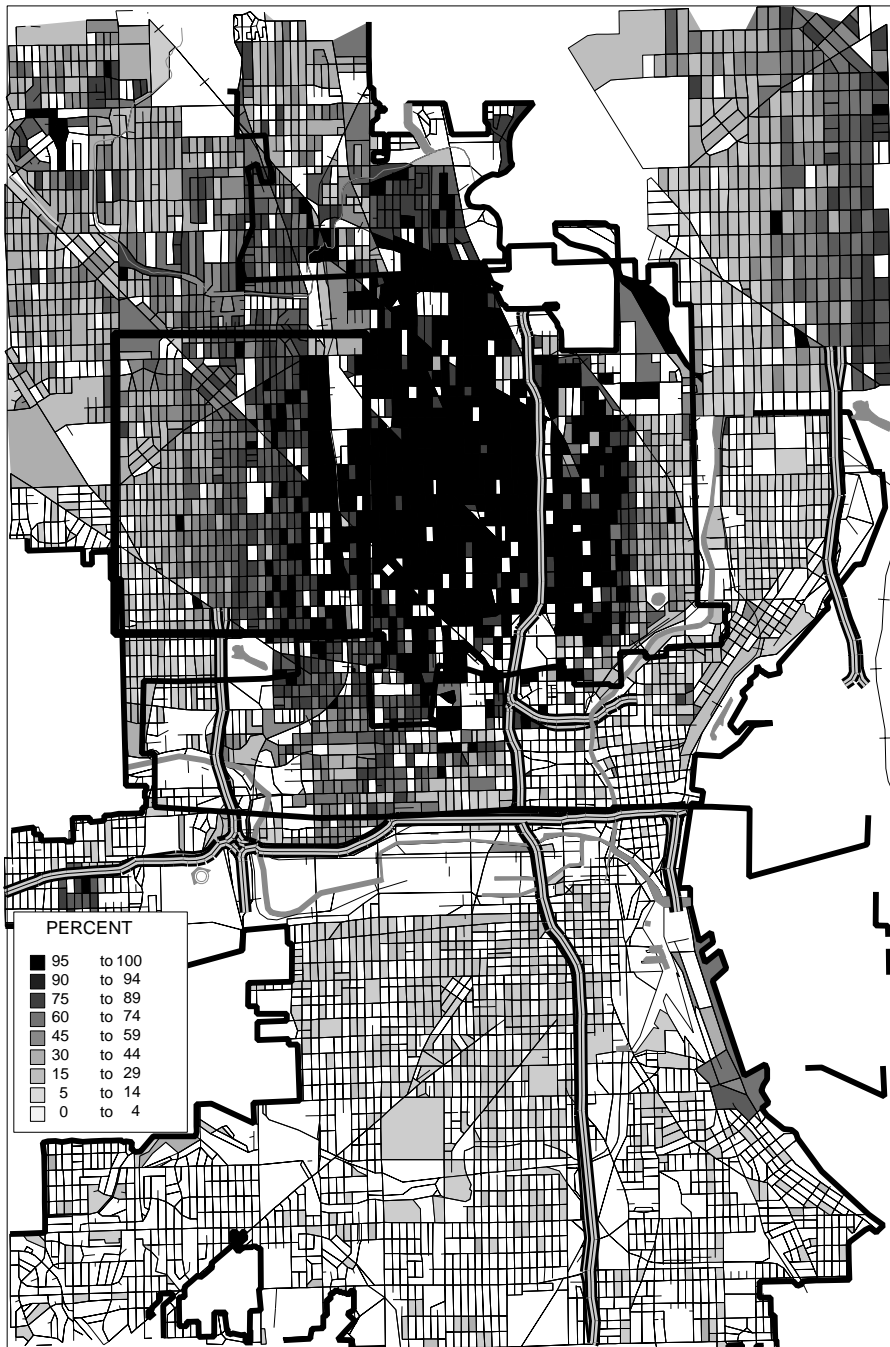
## Historical Development of Sherman Park

The city of Milwaukee has grown outward from the Milwaukee River harbor on Lake Michigan. At the start of the 20th century, much of what is now known as the Sherman Park area was yet to be developed.

### Exhibit 3

#### City of Milwaukee/Sherman Park, Racial Composition of Census Tracts, 1990

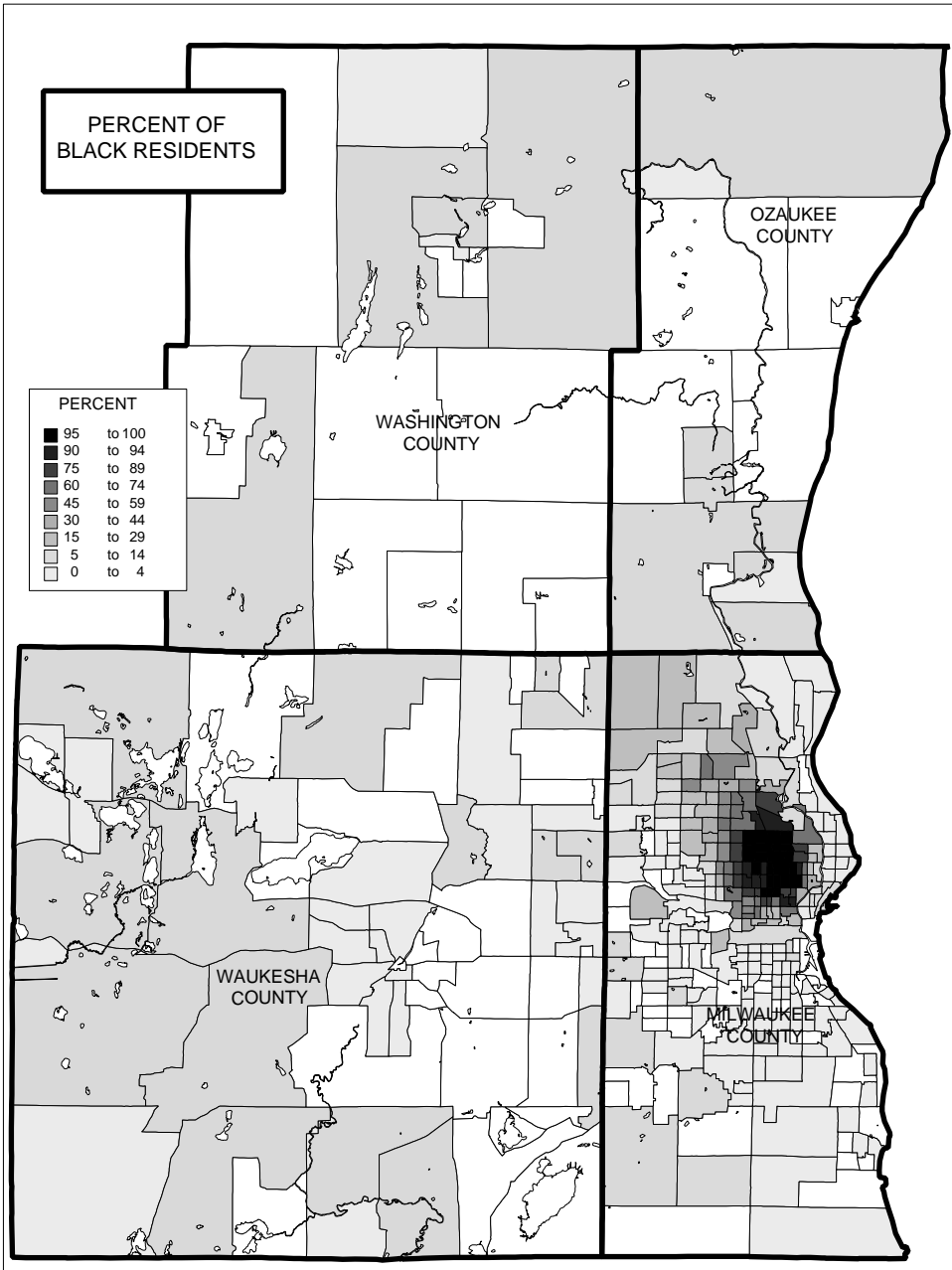
PERCENT OF BLACK RESIDENTS - 1990



Sources: U.S. Census, 1990; Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee Data Center

### Exhibit 4

#### 1990 Metropolitan Milwaukee, Racial Composition of Census Tracts



Source: Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee

## Industrial Development

Industrial growth came first, following railroad lines along what is now Sherman Park's eastern boundary. Over the past 30 years, this once-bustling manufacturing area has deteriorated as the rail links it provided declined in importance to industry. Like the city of Milwaukee as a whole, the area has also been adversely affected by the nationwide trend toward fewer and relatively lower paying manufacturing jobs. Between 1975 and 1990, Milwaukee lost more than 27,500 manufacturing jobs. Gains in service-sector jobs did not fully compensate for these losses (Squires, 1994). A.O. Smith Corporation and Master Lock are major manufacturers that still operate in the rail corridor. A.O. Smith's Sherman Park facilities have been purchased since this article was written. They carry on their work as Tower Automotive. Many others remain, but the corridor also has several vacant and deteriorating industrial sites. Obstacles stand in the way of reinvigorating this area, but cooperative efforts are now being made to accomplish this.

The 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corporation is the local entity leading these reinvigoration efforts. This group, a spinoff of SPCA, works with more than 100 member businesses and local, State, and Federal governments. The corporation's main focus is job creation. It has helped create business incubators in new and unused buildings, and provides technical assistance to help neighborhood companies devise business plans and obtain financing. The corporation has also obtained commitments for millions of dollars from local and State governments to clean up brownfields, contaminated urban sites that have been rendered unusable because of past pollution.

## Residential Development

Most of the neighborhood's residential development took place from the 1920s to the 1940s. Development generally went from the eastern to the western sectors of the neighborhood. Homes were built on city lots with small yards. In the far eastern neighborhood, mostly small, frame, single-family homes were interspersed with duplexes near the industrial corridor. The neighborhood to the west included housing for the well-to-do on such stately streets as Grant and 51st boulevards. These streets featured architectural showplaces in a wide variety of styles. Single-family "Milwaukee bungalows," generally more substantial and often constructed of brick and stone, were built in these sectors. Duplexes and some small apartment buildings were also built in the original Sherman Park neighborhood.

One striking neighborhood feature is the economic diversity that developed when housing for people with low incomes was constructed in close proximity to housing for people with moderate to high incomes. Children living in duplexes designed for working-class people needed only to cross an alley or go down the street to play with children of professional families living in showplace homes. Census data show that Sherman Park began as a neighborhood that attracted a diverse group of European Americans. (Restrictive covenants, since ruled invalid, barred sales of many neighborhood homes to African-Americans.)

## Commercial Development

Commercial development in Sherman Park took place on neighborhood shopping strips along major city streets. These business strips suffered when forced to compete with malls and superstores found outside the neighborhood and designed for easy automobile access. Still found along Sherman Park's original business strips are small grocery stores, restaurants, video stores, pharmacies, financial institutions, bars, laundries, and an array of other specialty shops. Many small businesses thrive on these strips. Yet vacant and even abandoned commercial properties are evident in the far eastern sector of the expanded Sherman Park neighborhood. Local businesses have joined with each other, the city, and SPCA to address their desire to have vibrant commercial strips continue to serve the neighborhood.

Old-style commercial strips have been challenged by the changing retail scene nationwide. Yet there seems to be a continuing niche for such local business strips, primarily because investment in the neighborhood shopping infrastructure continues. Banking consolidation has changed the names of some local Sherman Park financial institutions, but the affected branches continue to serve the community. As family-operated pharmacies have closed, chain stores have moved in to replace them. Organized and broad-based support for investment in neighborhood retail operations may stem from the institutional disinvestment that has greatly damaged other Milwaukee neighborhoods.

Another major retail force affecting the Sherman Park neighborhood is the Capitol Court Shopping Center. This mall, located across the street from Sherman Park's northern border, was the metropolitan area's most prosperous shopping center as recently as the 1960s. In 1996 the mall's only remaining anchor store, a Target department store, closed. Serious questions abound about the future of this neighborhood resource. The Target store is the last major retailer to leave the area. A recent story in the *Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel* newspaper focused on the complete absence of major department stores and superstores in a huge area stretching across the center of the city (Norman, 1995). Sherman Park residents who live near Milwaukee's western border still have fairly easy access to such stores. To get to them now, however, they must visit downtown Milwaukee or its western suburbs.

## Hypersegregation of African-Americans

Juliet Saltman provides a short history of African-American population growth and movement in Milwaukee in her book, *A Fragile Movement: The Struggle for Neighborhood Stabilization* (Saltman, 1990). She notes that less than 2 percent of Milwaukee's population was African-American in 1940. The city's 8,821 Blacks lived in an area four blocks long and three blocks wide just northwest of Milwaukee's downtown.

Saltman cites a *Milwaukee Journal* article dated September 16, 1924, to help explain how this racial isolation developed. The article notes that the Milwaukee Real Estate Board was concerned that something be done about the rapidly growing Negro population. These 1920s social engineers were amazingly successful. They discussed restricting the Negro population to an area on Milwaukee's west side if means could be found to make it practical. In only 16 years their work was complete. Racial exclusion and steering of Black renters and homebuyers to the west side resulted in an amazingly thorough isolation of the Black community for the next 30 years.

Census data from 1950 and 1960 chronicle the rapid growth of Milwaukee's African-American population. Saltman notes that by 1967 Milwaukee's Black population had reached 12 percent of the city's total. As late as 1967, only 320 Black families—out of a population of nearly 90,000 individuals—lived outside Milwaukee's Black ghetto. Saltman adds that most of those 320 families lived in blocks that bordered the ghetto and included a part of what is now known as the Sherman Park neighborhood.

Milwaukee was and remains one of the most racially segregated cities in the Nation. It was given a *hypersegregated* designation based on a number of measures devised to provide comparative data on residential racial dissimilarity for cities around the country (Massey and Denton, 1993). Urban geographer Leonard Pettyjohn chronicled a block-by-block pattern of Black migration to the west and north in Milwaukee during the 1960s (Pettyjohn, 1967). Armed with a statistical model and the computing facilities available at the time, Pettyjohn projected continued "ghetto intensification, initial infiltration of White blocks, and concomitant extension of the ghetto." His model relied on a continuation of the housing practices of the previous 43 years.

In the 29 years after Pettyjohn's predictions, we have seen an expansion of majority Black blocks in areas contiguous to the 1967 ghetto. We also have witnessed a new phenomenon in Milwaukee: The city's Black population has more than doubled, but the pattern of complete isolation of African-Americans shows signs of changing. Although Milwaukee remains one of the most segregated cities in the Nation, many Black homeowners and renters now live in integrated census tracts far outside the overwhelmingly African-American inner city. The movement of Blacks into integrated tracts is a hopeful sign. At the same time, however, the pattern of segregation dominates.

In 1970 only 202 of the 38,887 residents of the original Sherman Park neighborhood were African-Americans. This represented only about 0.5 percent of Sherman Park residents. Since 1970, census tracts to the east and north have been added to the area now called Sherman Park. In the 1980s these tracts, which were adjacent to Sherman Park, were added to SPCA's coverage area when the city of Milwaukee found that no community organization served them. In a citywide effort to have all communities served by at least one community organization, the city approached SPCA to see if it would be willing to annex the tracts to its service area. SPCA agreed. The additional census tracts to the east of Sherman Park's original boundaries include older, poorer, and more industrial neighborhoods with more Black residents. Those census tracts that extend the neighborhood's northern boundaries are demographically similar to the tracts just south of them. When census data for the expanded neighborhood is considered, 1,906 of the 55,514 people in the area in 1970 were African-Americans. This accounting change yields a greater-than-ninefold increase in Sherman Park's Black population.

These statistics show how misleading racial composition figures can be for an area bordering a neighborhood that is undergoing racial change. In 1970 the Sherman Park neighborhood was either 0.5 percent Black or more than 3.4 percent Black, depending on which eastern boundary was used when compiling the figures. To get a more accurate picture of the racial change taking place in sections of the neighborhood, it is helpful to look at north-to-south strips of census tracts with similar demographics.

Obviously, the eastern tracts that were added to SPCA had already undergone significant racial change between 1967 and 1970. In 1967, as Saltman pointed out, Black families were just beginning to move into the tracts to the east of SPCA's original boundaries. By 1970 these tracts were nearly 25 percent African-American and were well on their way to becoming part of the overwhelmingly Black Milwaukee inner city.

This eastern sector of Sherman Park has gone from overwhelmingly White to overwhelmingly Black in the space of 25 years. Exhibit 5 tracks the total population and racial composition of this annexed eastern sector of Sherman Park from 1970–90. (In 1970 Hispanic residents were counted in White and Black totals. In 1980 and 1990, Hispanic residents were counted in other racial groups.)

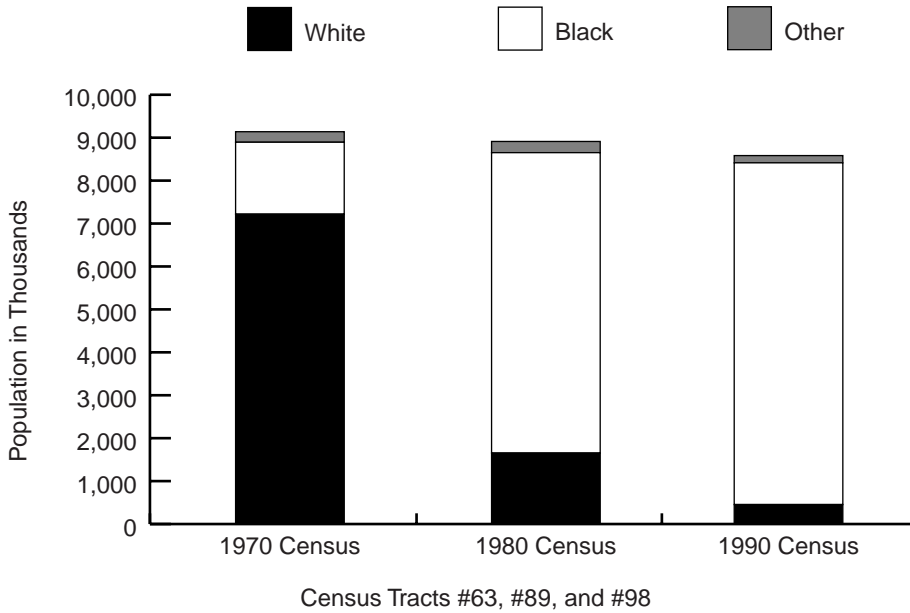
A recent survey of Sherman Park residents showed that most of them are not even aware that official SPCA boundaries include annexed eastern census tracts (Sherman Park Neighborhood Planning Committee, 1995). Racial change, disinvestment, and decay were already well underway when this neighborhood was included in the Sherman Park neighborhood. Since what happens in the eastern census tracts influences what will happen in adjacent tracts, neighborhood quality-of-life issues remain important to the larger community. Demographic trends indicate that the percentage of African-American residents in the city of Milwaukee will continue to grow. Although there is little prospect for reintegration of this neighborhood in the near future, there is



great incentive to invest in improvements to housing, commercial property, and the neighborhood's industrial corridor and to continue to use SPCA resources for neighborhood improvement.

## Exhibit 5

### Population: Annexed Eastern Sector of SPCA



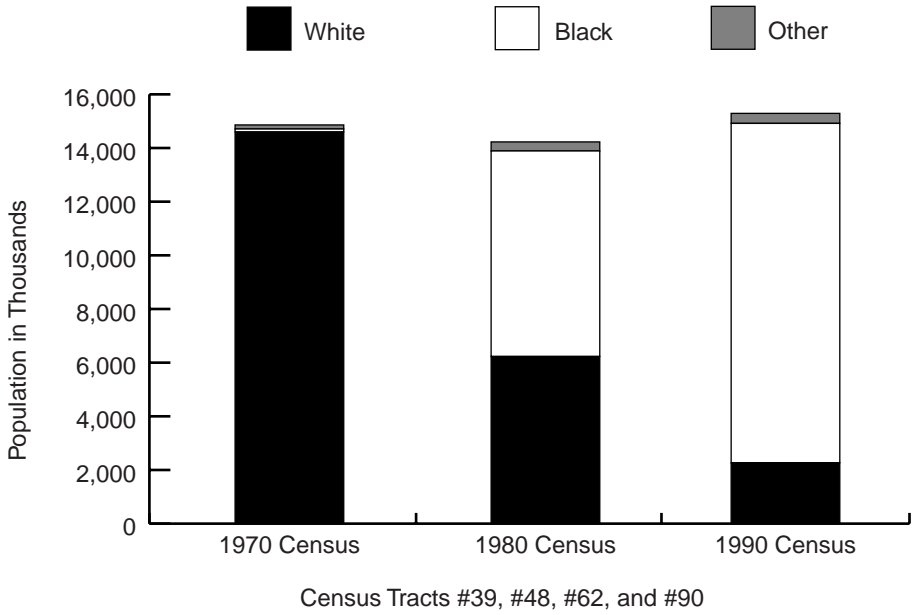
It is discouraging to see neighborhoods resegregate. However, it is somewhat encouraging to see that the rate of such change seems to have greatly decreased over the past 25 years. Exhibits 6, 7, and 8 show population data for Sherman Park's original eastern, central, and western sectors. Each has undergone significant racial change since 1970; however, the graphs show a slower pace of change in each sector from east to west.

It seems to have taken the annexed eastern sector only about 6 years to progress from having a negligible Black population to having one that is nearly 50 percent African-American. This transition took a decade in the original SPCA eastern sector and about 20 years in the central sector. The western sector of Sherman Park had a small number of Black residents in 1980 and 1990. These progressively slower neighborhood transitions took place while Milwaukee's Black population was growing quickly.

Exhibit 9 shows racial composition for the city of Milwaukee, the current SPCA neighborhood, and the original SPCA neighborhood for the years 1970, 1980, and 1990. The exhibit tracks Sherman Park's transition from an overwhelmingly White neighborhood to one that has a higher percentage of Black residents than the city as a whole.

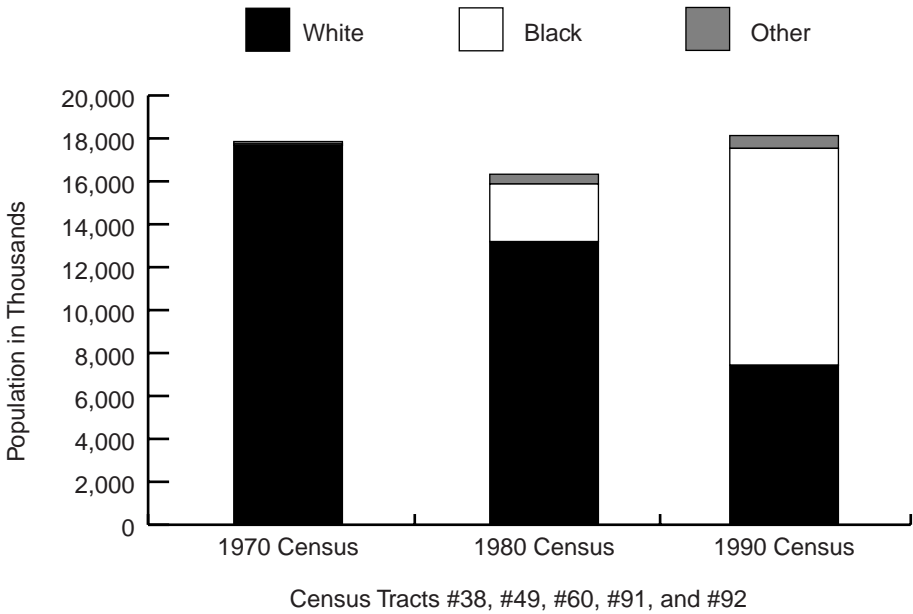
### Exhibit 6

Population: Traditional Eastern Sector of SPCA



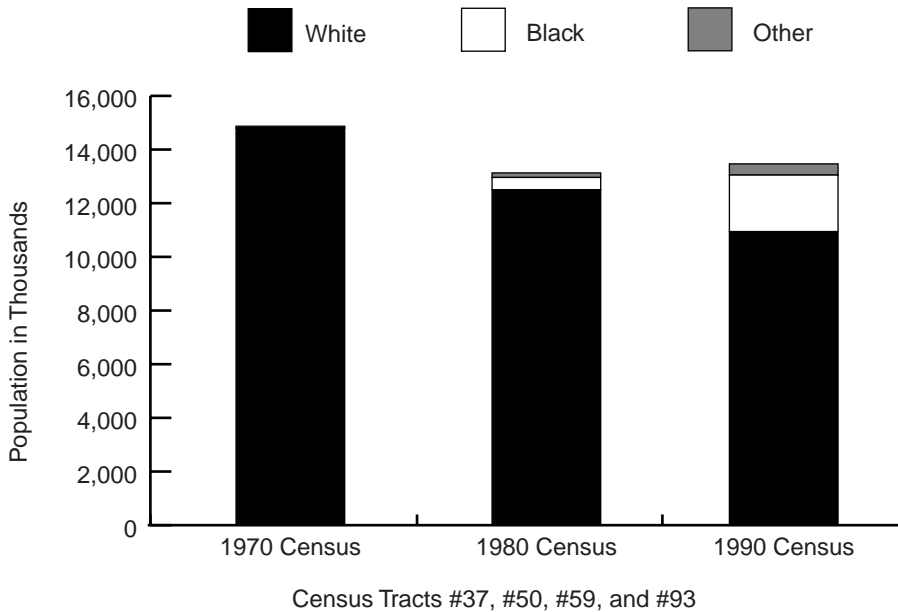
### Exhibit 7

Population: Central Sector of SPCA



## Exhibit 8

### Population: Western Sector of SPCA



The total neighborhood population has changed very little in the past 20 years. The original SPCA neighborhood population has stayed at around 38,000, and the current SPCA neighborhood has maintained about 55,000 residents. During this same period, the city's population decreased from about 717,000 to approximately 628,000, with most of the decline taking place in the 1970s.

Median incomes in Sherman Park and the city of Milwaukee have been similar over the past 20 years (see exhibit 10). Sherman Park had slightly higher median incomes than the city in 1980 and slightly lower median incomes than the city in 1990. Neighborhood census tracts with high concentrations (more than 50 percent) of people in the lowest income categories (under \$15,000 in 1990) were clustered in the annexed eastern sector of Sherman Park and around land cleared for a freeway in its southeast corner. Median incomes rise to levels well above city medians in western Sherman Park tracts.

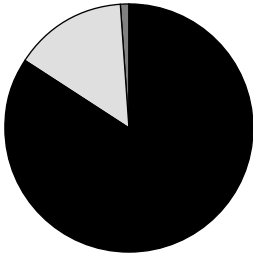
Owner-occupancy rates remain higher in Sherman Park than in the entire city (see exhibit 11). These rates declined for both the neighborhood and the city in the 1980s, as did Sherman Park's lead in owner-occupancy rates. Much lower owner-occupancy rates were found in tracts bordering land cleared for expressways. Owner-occupancy rates in census tracts 62, 89, 90, and 91 in the neighborhood's southeast corner average less than 26 percent.

The major changes in racial composition of the Sherman Park neighborhood have not been accompanied by major changes in relative neighborhood income or homeownership levels. These indicators of well being seem to bode well for the neighborhood's continued vitality.

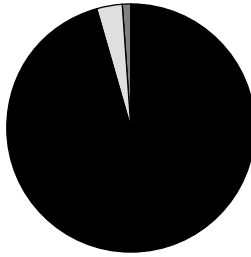
### Exhibit 9

#### City/Neighborhood Racial Composition

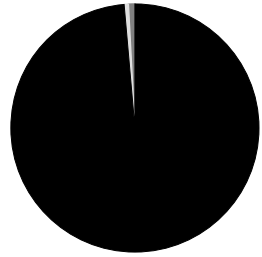
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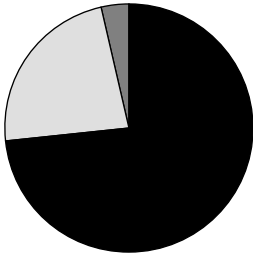
City/1970



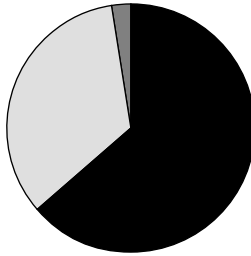
Current boundaries of SPCA/1970



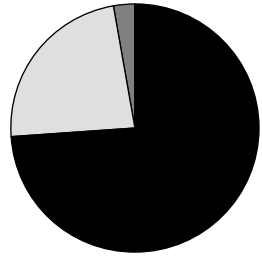
Original SPCA/1970



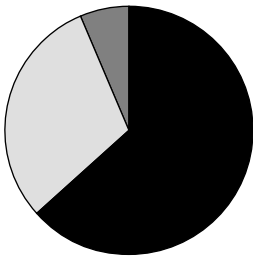
City/1980



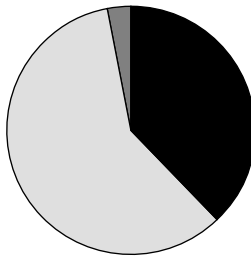
Current boundaries of SPCA/1980



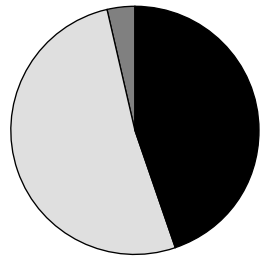
Original SPCA/1980



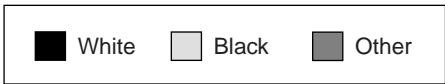
City/1990



Current boundaries of SPCA/1990

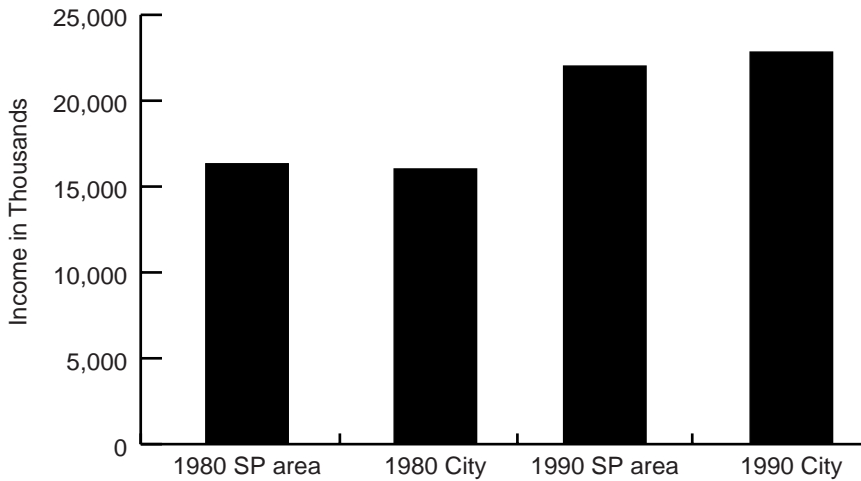


Original SPCA/1990



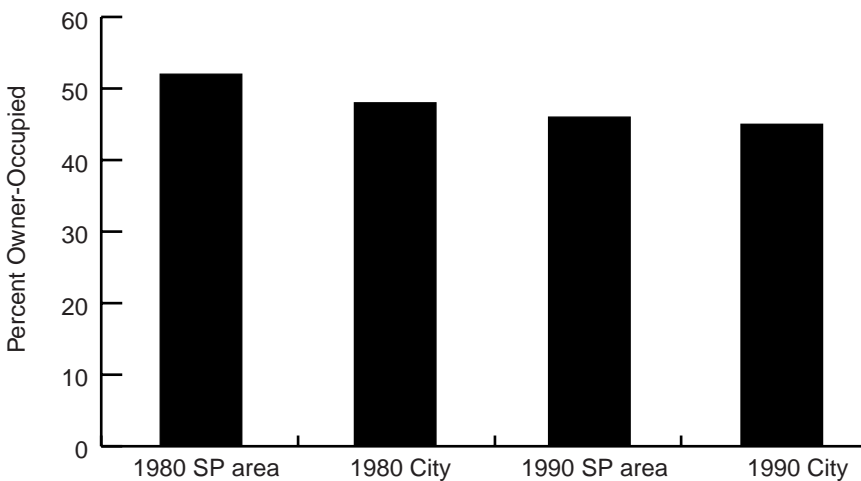
## Exhibit 10

### Sherman Park/Milwaukee Median Incomes



## Exhibit 11

### Sherman Park/Milwaukee Owner-Occupancy Rates



Statistical changes in the Sherman Park neighborhood over the past 25 years should be viewed in the context of nationwide trends during the same period. Four national conditions have had an impact on the Sherman Park neighborhood: the loss of manufacturing jobs, the availability of the interstate highway and urban expressway systems, the effect of environmental laws, and the continued limitations on residential choices for African-Americans. The U.S. manufacturing economy has declined as foreign competitors have

taken jobs and industries away. Modern roadways also have detracted from the advantage Sherman Park derived from its railroad links. Many established businesses have moved and many new industries have located outside central cities. Sherman Park redevelopment efforts also have been hampered because of the need to clean up polluted industrial sites before they can be put back into use. Neighborhood commercial strips were affected greatly by a nationwide trend to construct malls, superstores, and other automobile-friendly shopping that is difficult to develop in mature, urban neighborhoods. Urban populations nationwide have been dispersed as modern expressways have made longer commutes possible. Finally, Sherman Park's promise of neighborhood racial inclusiveness in a metropolitan area, which still presents many barriers to residential choice for its minority residents, has made the neighborhood very successful at attracting African-American residents. Today the neighborhood faces the prospect of gradually losing some of its prized diversity if it does not continue to attract residents of all races.

## Neighborhood Efforts To Promote and Maintain Diversity and Quality

Before 1970 the Sherman Park neighborhood had no distinct identity. It did, however, face a number of important challenges. Land acquisition and clearance for two freeways that would cut through the heart of the neighborhood were well underway. Milwaukee's Black ghetto, which had experienced the loss of many community institutions and a dearth of new investment, was expanding in a quick and steady block-by-block march toward the neighborhood. The real estate practices that created and provided for the ghetto's growth were still flourishing. Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) were following policies of racial separation that afforded African-American children inferior educational opportunities in some of the city's oldest and most crowded schools. MPS even adjusted school district lines within the Sherman Park neighborhood, which served to maintain school segregation (*Milwaukee Journal*, 1973).

The neighborhood also had some significant strengths. It was an area of attractive, well-built homes on tree-lined streets that offered easy access to a wealth of city resources: jobs, shopping, cultural attractions and events, public transportation, and more. Christians and Jews lived in harmony, sharing in Milwaukee's prosperous manufacturing economy. The neighborhood had an abundance of middle-class housing, but also offered a mix of housing opportunities for those of modest means and some impressive choices for the well-to-do.

In 1970 a group of seven families formed SPCA, a powerful and cohesive association that has had an effect on decisions and events affecting the neighborhood. SPCA started recruiting members and volunteers, and began printing and distributing a newsletter. In the December 1971 issue of *Sherman Park News*, SPCA officers proclaimed that the association was "founded not in response to an outside threat, but to improve the quality of life in the Fifth Ward on Milwaukee's Northwest side." In its early years, the association was funded and operated entirely by volunteers, but it quickly had a profound effect. In the following sections, some of the reasons for Sherman Park's success at maintaining its diversity are discussed.

## Creation of a Positive Neighborhood Identity

One of SPCA's most vital immediate successes was providing its neighborhood with the *Sherman Park—A Nice Place to Live* identity.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-five years of self-promotion and news clippings have given the Sherman Park neighborhood an identity that is, in some

ways, better established than some Milwaukee County municipalities. Sherman Park has long promoted itself as a pleasant, urbane, and inclusive neighborhood with affordable and high-quality housing. It is known as a neighborhood with clout that has attracted considerable private and public support for its efforts, and one that has had and continues to have noteworthy successes. This reputation attracted many current residents to the neighborhood. Given the power of such perceptions to affect buying and investment decisions, the establishment of a positive neighborhood identity should not be underestimated.

In Milwaukee, as in many other cities, the term *inner city* has long been a euphemism for “overwhelmingly African-American neighborhood.” Saying that one lives in the inner city suggests to many Milwaukee area residents that one lives in a blighted, overcrowded, crime-ridden neighborhood. Over the years, maps appearing in newspapers have shown progressively larger areas of Milwaukee as inner city. The inner city’s growth on such maps corresponds with the growth of Milwaukee’s majority African-American neighborhoods. Many residents of these areas identify themselves as inner-city residents. The city of Milwaukee struggles to encourage reinvention of its inner-city neighborhoods.

Until recently, maps generally drew the inner city’s border at the traditional Sherman Park neighborhood’s eastern edge. Now, inner-city borders are commonly drawn between Sherman Park’s central and traditional eastern sectors. Yet the residents in this area still commonly identify themselves as Sherman Park, not inner-city, residents. Though the racial composition of Sherman Park’s traditional eastern sector has changed, it retains the *Sherman Park—A Nice Place to Live* identity.

## Provision of an Institutional Force for Community Action

By 1976 SPCA had produced a statement of purpose that said, “Members of the SPCA believe that our future lies in encouraging people of all races, religions, and national origins to come together to meet our common goals of good quality education, beautiful homes and streets, and preserving the most attractive, convenient, and interesting place to live in Milwaukee.” Given Milwaukee’s history of social engineering to produce racial isolation, this statement provided a bold new vision for the neighborhood. It served to rally those who agreed with it.

Although it took several years to write the statement of purpose, SPCA’s first board of directors had already set to work on its goals. The board established expressway, education, and housing committees to address three of the neighborhood’s seemingly intractable challenges. Each of these committees became a focal point for successful community action where none had existed before.

**Expressway committee.** The expressway committee marshaled community forces against what had been seen as the inevitable construction of two freeways through the neighborhood. Seven years of sustained action ended in a Department of Transportation decision that the expressways would have “significant adverse environmental impacts” on Sherman Park. Both were demapped in a great victory for neighborhood organization and perseverance.

SPCA’s expressway committee became the Community Regeneration Task Force. Soon a Park West Redevelopment Task Force was formed by the city to plan redevelopment of land already cleared for freeway construction in the southeast corner of the Sherman Park neighborhood. This area had suffered greatly. Several blocks had been cleared of housing. A once-bustling commercial strip along Sherman Park’s southern border lost businesses and customers. Homes in the proposed expressway’s path had been neglected by owners

who had endured years of government indecision about the ultimate outcome of the freeway controversy. Owner-occupancy rates plummeted in the area. Sherman Park residents wanted to see construction of homes that would blend with and add value to the existing neighborhood. City planners and developers did not feel the neighborhood would support the ambitious project envisioned by SPCA's task force members. (Milwaukee was not far removed from an era when the words *urban renewal* meant sending in bulldozers.)

Eventually, a plan to build a mix of apartments and condominiums in the corridor was approved. However, Community Regeneration Task Force members were disappointed with the large number of low-income units included in the plan. They also wanted more resources allocated to help the depressed neighborhood around the cleared land. Still, there were high hopes for the future, in spite of skepticism over the fact that the winning plans were submitted by one of the mayor's campaign contributors. The city was, after all, making both land and improvement loans available at bargain rates to spur the development.

Sadly, construction proceeded slowly. Almost immediately there were complaints about the quality of even the best of the housing being built (Collins, 1987). The project was abandoned long before it was completed. Today much of the land remains vacant with little prospect for development. Instead of providing strength, the situation may actually have hurt the neighborhood, which is today the most economically depressed part of Sherman Park.

When development of this freeway land began, small, aluminum-clad homes were built down the block from substantial brick homes on prestigious Grant Boulevard. No one could claim that the area was not supporting expensive homes. The homes on Grant were among the most expensive found in Milwaukee at the time. This failure of faith and support in the neighborhood is in stark contrast to subsequent development of demapped freeway land on Milwaukee's east side, where the substantial brick units being built are spurring investment in the surrounding blocks.

The experience of the expressway committee illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of local community action. Sherman Park had the resources and the will to battle and, finally, halt expressway construction, but it was not in a position to develop and carry out ambitious redevelopment plans. Left in the hands of city bureaucrats and contractors with little faith or interest in the neighborhood, the redevelopment project failed.

**Education committee.** SPCA's education committee became an active participant in efforts to desegregate MPS. When court-ordered desegregation came to Milwaukee, city families were able to choose from among school sites anywhere in the city. SPCA education committee members were instrumental in developing plans for citywide specialty schools that would attract students of all races. A number of these specialty schools now thrive in the neighborhood. Citywide school choice eliminated fears that Sherman Park's children would be denied educational resources if African-Americans moved into the neighborhood. Ironically, now that Sherman Park families use schools all around the county and Sherman Park schools include students from all around Milwaukee, SPCA has become less involved in school issues. Schools have become more than neighborhood institutions.

One MPS school, Hi Mount, has worked with parents and the school board to make integration work for the neighborhood. The school, with a service area on Sherman Park's southern border, offers a popular computer specialty program only to neighborhood children. The expense of busing is eliminated and parents who don't want to bus their young children have an incentive to move into this integrated area to get the quality neighborhood education they seek.



**Housing committee: Housing rehabilitation and improvement.** SPCA's housing committee had two important goals: to eliminate illegally discriminatory and destructive housing practices and to maintain and improve the quality of the neighborhood's housing stock. What follows is a brief description of SPCA's rehabilitation and improvement efforts. Direct action to foster and maintain integration will be discussed later.

By the end of the 1970s, SPCA's commitment of program resources for direct action to promote neighborhood integration was ending. The association's housing committee became increasingly involved in efforts to promote housing maintenance and improvement. It contracted for Milwaukee Community Development Block Grant funds to run the Sherman Park Plan, which has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help low-income Sherman Park homeowners make home repairs. Through the plan, union building tradespeople supervise young people who may have an interest in pursuing careers in the trades. Labor is provided free, and homeowners need contribute only money for materials to make code-related home repairs. Homeowners who do not meet income guidelines for this program are referred to other home repair or improvement resources such as city programs that provide low-interest home-repair loans. Few of these programs are designed for absentee owners. Sherman Park has a policy of seeking strict enforcement of building codes in absentee-owned homes.

To identify homes in need of work, Sherman Park sponsors a yearly windshield survey of neighborhood blocks. Although arrangements have varied from year to year, volunteers usually attend a brief training by city building inspectors, receive code-violation checklists, and are sent to assigned blocks to note addresses with violations. Ownership of homes with violations is then checked and letters suggesting repairs and listing rehabilitation resources are sent to the owners. Absentee-owned homes with violations are reported to the building inspector's office. SPCA has had some success in discouraging absentees who own many units from renting rundown properties within its boundaries.

Sherman Park also experimented with a program through which SPCA secured lines of credit with local lenders to purchase, rehabilitate, and sell neighborhood homes. Although individual homeowners can often provide the sweat equity necessary to make such undertakings financially viable, the association struggled to break even when making quality improvements to the buildings it purchased. Efforts to work with city and Federal officials to deal with the neighborhood's boarded-up homes have met with mixed success.

Taken together, these rehabilitation efforts have paid dividends. The money invested in problem properties seems to have encouraged a significant number of owner-occupants in the neighborhood to maintain and improve their homes. Some windshield surveys reveal fewer code-related problems today than were evident in the same block in the 1970s.

## Promotion of Fair Housing and Integration: Neighborhood and Metropolitan Approaches

Although Sherman Park has been a leader in advocating for fair housing and promoting the benefits of integration, the need for more than a neighborhood approach to these issues is apparent. Both are discussed below.

**Bashing blockbusters.** SPCA began its efforts in the fair housing area by directly addressing the blockbusting practices of local real estate agents. Agents working on the fringes of Milwaukee's Black community would use literature drops, phone and door solicitations, and for-sale signs to induce panic home sales. When Ryan Sattler, then SPCA president, visited a meeting of the Milwaukee Board of Realtors® to present

anecdotal evidence of both blockbusting and racial steering (the practice of guiding homeseekers only to neighborhoods where people of their race might be expected to reside), he was thrown out of the meeting in mid-presentation.

Sherman Park Alderman Robert Weber added to SPCA's documentation of illegal and unethical real estate practices during the 1970s by using city resources to show how blockbusters were promoting panic home sales by White residents. Not satisfied with merely receiving commissions on these homes, blockbusters were buying the homes themselves and convincing sellers to let their properties go for prices that were well below market value. Over time, these distress sales effectively lowered assessments on comparable neighborhood properties. After prompting these panic sales, unscrupulous speculators would resell the homes at large profits within a short period of time, often making little more than cosmetic improvements. Sherman Park's efforts prompted the city to regulate the profligate use of for-sale signs as a means of prompting fears of White flight from neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> Neighborhood education efforts also helped innocent homeowners avoid blockbusting profiteers.

**Testing for illegally discriminatory housing practices.** Meanwhile, some integrated neighborhoods in other parts of the United States had successfully combated illegal practices by documenting them in housing audits designed to see how testers who shared the same homeseeker characteristics as other homeseekers (except race) would be treated when looking for housing in the neighborhood. Such testing was outlawed by Wisconsin State statute. When Federal court decisions overturned Wisconsin's law, Sherman Park worked with National Neighbors, a group of similar organizations from around the country, to conduct its own real estate testing in spring 1976. They found that racial steering of prospective homebuyers was the norm, not the exception, in the neighborhood. These test results led SPCA to file discrimination lawsuits against four of the largest real estate firms in metropolitan Milwaukee. Sherman Park eventually settled the lawsuits for monetary damages and consent decrees that ordered a halt to further illegal activity and stipulated reporting requirements that would help SPCA monitor neighborhood real estate activities by the companies in question. Because testing and subsequent enforcement of fair housing practices helps guard against resegregation, Sherman Park's involvement in testing contributes to the maintenance of diversity.<sup>3</sup>

**Neighborhood affirmative marketing strategy.** SPCA put direct action behind its goal of promoting neighborhood inclusiveness. In the 1970s racial steering meant that Whites were directed to homes in Sherman Park's central and western sectors and Blacks were shown homes in its eastern sectors. Between 1977 and 1980, SPCA operated its Neighborhood Affirmative Marketing Program (NAMP). Funded by the Ford Foundation, the State of Wisconsin, and a local bank, NAMP sought to eliminate discriminatory housing practices, desegregate mostly White segregated areas, maintain integration in integrated areas, and encourage home-maintenance efforts.

To address the issue of the dual housing market, NAMP provided information about all homes for sale or rent in Sherman Park to all homeseekers. It worked with the Milwaukee Metro Fair Housing Council (MMFHC) to provide information on fair housing laws and to act as a resource if housing discrimination was encountered. It also promoted the virtues of living in the Sherman Park area and provided referrals to cooperating brokers, attorneys, and city housing repair programs available to neighborhood residents. Homeseekers making pronteegrative moves were offered minor deal sweeteners such as low-cost appraisals, funds for attorneys' closing fees, and a neighborhood escort service.

Hundreds of families were counseled during the life of this program, but not more than a few dozen actually moved into the neighborhood each year, and only one-half of those made prouintegrative moves. The program's small scale and lack of continuing funding minimized its ability to have much effect on the neighborhood, but it did show a sincere commitment to inclusiveness.

## Metropolitan Housing Trends Affecting Sherman Park

NAMP demonstrated the limitations of neighborhood action to address the dual housing market. Housing choices available to the rapidly growing Black population already were limited by economics. Limiting those housing choices through discrimination meant that the few areas where Blacks might move could quickly become largely Black neighborhoods.

Although NAMP encouraged Black residents to move to Sherman Park, other metropolitan area communities were pursuing policies whose effect was racial exclusion. Examples of these policies include:

- Zoning regulations (for example, a minimum lot size) designed to keep even middle-class families out of exclusive suburbs and effectively exclude minority homebuyers as well.
- Fierce resistance to low-income housing in suburban Wauwatosa, which borders Sherman Park on the west.
- The practice of giving current suburban residents priority for receiving Milwaukee County's suburban Section 8 low-income housing certificates. Since the minority population of suburban Milwaukee was virtually nonexistent, this rule meant that minority group members were excluded from this program.

Although not entirely successful at eliminating discriminatory housing practices, Sherman Park's activism coincided with some remarkable changes in housing opportunity in Milwaukee:

- Local fair housing law enforcement and education were almost nonexistent before SPCA's efforts and the establishment of MMFHC.
- The racial steering lawsuits seemed to open up a great deal more housing opportunities for African-Americans.
- Awareness of real estate testing to enforce fair housing laws coincided with a marked slowdown in the block-by-block pattern of ghetto expansion in Milwaukee.

Although minority residents now predominate in Sherman Park's eastern sectors, the data presented above chronicle a declining rate of racial change in the neighborhood during a period of rapid growth in Milwaukee's Black population. Thus Sherman Park's involvement in metropolitan initiatives ultimately had a local payoff.

## SPCA Efforts To Promote Quality of Neighborhood Life

Over the past 25 years, SPCA has engaged in a wide range of activities designed to improve life in Sherman Park. What began as a largely volunteer-run organization has become a well-funded neighborhood institution. Both funding availability and evolving neighborhood interests have led to changes in the organization's programmatic focus over the years. However, in all of its activities, Sherman Park has tried to promote the idea that it is a great place where anyone is welcome to live. In order to break the connection

between neighborhood decline and racial change, the association addressed fears that neighborhood schools and housing would decline, and crime would flourish, as economic development floundered.

In 1996 Leticia Smith, current SPCA president, wrote members to describe the Association's most recent accomplishments and projects, including the development of a long-range plan for the neighborhood. She described the SPCA Neighbors Watch program, which provided neighborhood crime-watch patrols in cooperation with local police as well as graffiti cleanup and block-club organizing. Smith noted that the neighborhood housing survey had produced positive results. Finally, she described economic development progress: SPCA obtained funds to design the "Fond du Lac Business Commons" and participated in plan development for the area around St. Joseph's Hospital. Both of these plans will invest in infrastructure improvements along these commercial strips (Smith, 1996).

Since it was established, SPCA has sponsored or supported an impressive array of community activities, including youth soccer leagues, elderly outreach, neighborhood symphony concerts, fundraising auctions, political forums, absentee-landlord roasts, block-level welcomes, and neighborhood open houses. The association has been a mover and a facilitator. Although it is not possible to describe these programs in this article, it should be noted that SPCA has brought its philosophy of inclusiveness and quality to all of them. The benefit of such activities to a community should not be underestimated.

Each year SPCA also sponsors Shermanfest, an event that began as a simple picnic among neighbors in the park but has become a major attraction and fundraiser that celebrates neighborhood strength and diversity. In 1995 a Realtor-sponsored neighborhood open house was held in conjunction with the festival. The *Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel* noted, "Most festivals invite you into the neighborhood. During Shermanfest, the people of Sherman Park go one step further. They welcome you into their houses." (Higgins, 1995.)

### Other Efforts To Improve the Quality of Life in the Sherman Park Neighborhood

In 1993 the program that began as SPCA's Sherman Park Plan incorporated as a separate entity to revitalize the neighborhood. Now called the Sherman Park Redevelopment Corporation, this group still receives Community Development Block Grant funds to carry out its work. In addition to the economic development programs described above, the Uptown Redevelopment Corporation and the West North Avenue Business Association are developing business plans for the commercial strip on Sherman Park's southwestern border. The plans include making use of a closed movie theater and investing in improvements to street and building facades.

The 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corporation has been formed to retain and create business in this manufacturing strip and to promote neighborhood safety and cleanliness. This group's board of directors includes representatives of area businesses, including Master Lock, A. O. Smith, and Findley Adhesives. The corporation recently succeeded in attracting a recycling firm to the neighborhood.

Milwaukee County and the Boys and Girls Club of Milwaukee cooperated to establish a club in a new park pavilion inside the county recreation area called Sherman Park. Major park improvements accompanied the pavilion's construction.

## Factors Affecting Prospects for Continued Diversity in the Sherman Park Neighborhood: Impediments to Fair Housing in Metropolitan Milwaukee

Even with all tools available to him in the geography department of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, urban geographer Leonard Pettyjohn could not accurately predict what was to come for the Sherman Park neighborhood. Pettyjohn produced an impressive statistical model that predicted more of the same rapid resegregation and decay that had already occurred (Pettyjohn, 1967). However, that just has not happened in the Sherman Park neighborhood.

Maybe no one could have predicted Sherman Park's remarkable achievements over the past 25 years. Thirty years ago this slice of Milwaukee had no identity and seemed fated to be sliced north, south, east and west by freeways. Doomsayers were predicting blighted slum status for the area. Yet today Sherman Park retains its status as an inclusive, quality neighborhood.

Four observations can be made about Sherman Park's success. First, it has marshaled some impressive resources in the name of neighborhood improvement and integration maintenance. Second, the neighborhood has had important and far-reaching successes. Third, its own efforts have been a necessary component of neighborhood success. Finally, Sherman Park's ultimate success will be greatly influenced by factors beyond the neighborhood's direct control—most notably, discrimination in home insurance and mortgage lending and government policies that reinforce segregation. (These include a concentration of low-income housing in city neighborhoods and failure to use Section 8 vouchers to encourage African-Americans to move to the suburbs.)

### Planning for the Future

Obviously, many factors contribute to the creation and maintenance of diversity in a community. Sherman Park's location in the heart of a hypersegregated metropolitan area will continue to make diversity difficult to maintain. Some suggestions for future efforts are listed here:

- Continue broadly based neighborhood planning and action on a variety of quality-of-life issues.
- Seek additional resources to rebuild neighborhood strength in the area in and around the Park West Freeway corridor.
- Strengthen SPCA's neighborhood membership recruitment, communication, and leadership-development activities.
- Promote inclusive, high-quality neighborhood life to destroy the stereotypical image that assumes disinvestment and decay are inevitable in racially changing neighborhoods.
- Support full funding for a complete package of fair housing services throughout Wisconsin. This package should include enforcement, homeseeker services, and education and outreach.
- Make Wisconsin's fair housing laws substantially equivalent to Federal laws.
- Monitor neighborhood practices of insurers and lenders and work with these industries to ensure that their services and products are readily available at reasonable cost to neighborhood residents.

## Conclusions

A review of the factors affecting prospects for diversity in the Sherman Park neighborhood reveals some serious problems. In spite of many positive developments in the past 25 years, many challenges remain. The December 1995 issue of *Wisconsin Magazine*, a supplement to the *Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel*, featured a cover story about the Sherman Park neighborhood (Stingl, 1995). Many of those interviewed for the article saw the near inevitability of continuing racial transition, if not economic decline, in the neighborhood. Although Sherman Park's institutions and amenities were viewed as strong, they were not seen as strong enough to stem the resegregation tide. Indeed, Sherman Park has changed from being an exclusively White neighborhood into a neighborhood where Black residents predominate.

Yet one of our unexpected research findings was the steady and continuing decline in Sherman Park's rate of racial change. Each sector of the neighborhood has taken a longer time to experience racial change. It may well be that Sherman Park's quality and affordability will continue to attract people of all races. This neighborhood has shown that its strength should not be underestimated. It has already accomplished some amazing feats despite limited resources and outright opposition to its goals. Its willingness and ability to organize, analyze, and tackle the challenges it faces may ultimately turn the odds in its favor. Finally, although factors outside the control of the neighborhood may determine the outcome of efforts to maintain and extend diversity, neighbors continue to express high degrees of satisfaction with neighborhood life. As they say, Sherman Park is a nice place to live.

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## Notes

1. This phrase accompanies the association's logo, which features homes on a tree-lined street.
2. Eventually, members of the Milwaukee Board of Realtors® agreed not to post more than three for-sale signs in a single block within SPCA boundaries.
3. In 1977 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) contracted with SPCA to run a scientifically designed testing program for the entire Milwaukee metropolitan area. The Housing Market Practices Survey (HMPS) (HUD, 1979) tested both the rental and sales markets. It uncovered widespread housing discrimination throughout the metropolitan area. Testers involved in HMPS audits joined with a

number of Sherman Park residents to form the Milwaukee Metro Fair Housing Council. This organization was established to address the issue of illegal housing discrimination throughout the four-county Milwaukee area. It still operates today.

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## Appendix A

### Exhibit A-1

#### 1970 Milwaukee/Sherman Park Population Data

	Census Tracts	White	Black	Other*	Total	
1970 city of Milwaukee population		605,372	105,088	6,639	717,099	
	63	2,151	1,291	51	3,493	
	89	2,539	209	51	2,799	
	98	2,529	175	143	2,847	
1970 Sherman Park annexed eastern sector		7,219	1,675	245	9,139	
	39	2,976	19	20	3,015	
	48	4,241	63	31	4,335	
	62	3,602	28	40	3,670	
Neighborhood racial composition	90	3,780	0	60	3,840	
	1970 Sherman Park original eastern sector		14,599	110	151	14,860
		38	2,280	4	10	2,294
		49	4,930	19	8	4,957
61		2,661	18	3	2,682	
Neighborhood racial composition	91	2,857	20	51	2,928	
	60	2,774	0	16	2,790	
	92	2,177	7	19	2,203	
	1970 Sherman Park central sector		17,679	68	107	17,854
37		2,508	6	15	2,529	
50		5,229	0	26	5,255	
59		3,970	1	7	3,978	
Neighborhood racial composition	93	3,093	2	13	3,108	
	1970 Sherman Park western sector		14,800	9	61	14,870
Neighborhood racial composition						
1970 Sherman Park neighborhood totals		54,297	1,862	564	56,723	
		39,314	158	319	39,791	
Expanded SPCA neighborhood						
1970 "traditional SPCA neighborhood"						

\*Hispanic residents were counted as White or Black in 1970 census.



**Exhibit A-2****1980 Milwaukee/Sherman Park Population Data**

	<b>Census Tracts</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Other*</b>	<b>Total</b>
1980 city of Milwaukee population		466,618	146,940	22,652	636,210
	63	366	3,350	48	3,764
	89	467	2,014	78	2,559
	98	821	1,633	135	2,589
1980 Sherman Park annexed eastern sector	39	1,654	6,997	261	8,912
		1,280	1,606	39	2,925
Neighborhood racial composition	48	1,851	2,412	159	4,422
	62	1,459	2,117	139	3,715
	90	1,641	1,524		3,165
1980 Sherman Park original eastern sector	38	6,231	7,659	337	14,227
		1,699	498	34	2,231
Neighborhood racial composition	49	3,739	851	61	4,651
	61	1,815	588	83	2,486
	91	1,926	555	118	2,599
	60	2,219	147	99	2,465
	92	1,795	43	61	1,899
1980 Sherman Park central sector	37	13,193	2,682	456	16,331
		2,060	207	36	2,303
Neighborhood racial composition	50	4,509	162	49	4,720
	59	3,362	76	54	3,492
	93	2,567	17	31	2,615
1980 Sherman Park western sector		12,498	462	170	13,130
Neighborhood racial composition					
1980 Sherman Park neighborhood totals		33,576	17,800	1,224	52,600
Expanded SPCA neighborhood		26,883	8,492	963	36,338
1980 "traditional SPCA neighborhood"					

\*Beginning in 1980, Hispanic residents are counted in "Other" columns, not in Black or White totals.

### Exhibit A-3

#### 1990 Milwaukee/Sherman Park Population Data

	<b>Census Tracts</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
1990 city of Milwaukee population		398,033	191,255	38,800	628,088
	63	126	3,520	29	3,675
	89	182	2,230	59	2,471
	98	146	2,210	81	2,437
1990 Sherman Park annexed eastern sector	39	454	7,960	169	8,583
		511	2,386	45	2,942
Neighborhood racial composition	48	699	3,854	142	4,695
	62	634	3,105	78	3,817
	90	425	3,304	108	3,837
1990 Sherman Park original eastern sector	38	2,269	12,649	373	15,291
		956	1,386	50	2,392
Neighborhood racial composition	49	2,258	2,722	110	5,090
	61	815	1,794	100	2,709
	91	808	2,182	116	3,106
	60	1,376	1,254	100	2,730
	92	1,220	765	121	2,106
1990 Sherman Park central sector	37	7,433	10,103	597	18,133
		1,572	739	51	2,362
Neighborhood racial composition	50	3,886	808	108	4,802
	59	3,038	363	151	3,552
	93	2,446	197	107	2,750
1990 Sherman Park western sector		10,942	2,107	417	13,466
Neighborhood racial composition					
1990 Sherman Park neighborhood totals		21,098	32,819	1,556	55,473
Expanded SPCA neighborhood		17,605	20,348	1,387	39,340
1990 "traditional SPCA neighborhood"					