

December 2019

## An Intersectional Analysis of the Role Race and Gender Play in Welfare Recipients' and Case Manager Experiences

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AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE RACE AND GENDER PLAY IN  
WELFARE RECIPIENTS' AND CASE MANAGER EXPERIENCES

by

Stephanie M. Baran

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Sociology

at

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

December 2019

## ABSTRACT

### AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE RACE AND GENDER PLAY IN WELFARE RECIPIENTS' AND CASE MANAGER EXPERIENCES

by

Stephanie M. Baran

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019  
Under the Supervision of Professor Aneesh Aneesh, PhD

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of food insecurity in Milwaukee and how people receiving benefit assistance understand themselves, others and how they thought others understand them. This frame was duplicated for social workers and poverty organizations in the Milwaukee area. Using a series of theoretical viewpoints, the study utilizes racial theories, as well as, symbolic violence and annihilation to discuss how various aspects of recipients, social workers and poverty organizations interact within the theoretical margins. Taking place over one and a half years and including 350 observation hours at a local food pantry, the study found that respondents feel a range of emotions from anxiety to pride when discussing their perseverance with benefit receipt. Consequently, research uncovered how local food organizations, with connections to the Milwaukee Chapter of the Black Panther Party, hide their more radical roots in order to protect food donations from white donors, in essence protecting white fragility. In the end, 44 people were interviewed, 26 benefit respondents, 15 social and case workers and 3 poverty organization representatives necessitated building rapport with all of the participants during this time.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Illustrations.....	iv
List of Maps.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Abbreviations.....	viii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Research Methodology.....	29
Chapter 3: Food Insecurity in an American City.....	41
Chapter 4: “Let’s Go Eat in the Office” Life in a Milwaukee Food Pantry.....	76
Chapter 5: The Shutdown 35 Days Inside the Pantry .....	107
Chapter 6: “I Feel Like a Rat in a Race”.....	119
Chapter 7: Hunger Task Force Your Free and Local Food Bank .....	140
Chapter 8: Conclusion.....	159
References.....	165
Appendix A: IRB Protocol Approval.....	177
Appendix B: IRB Protocol Change Approval.....	178
Appendix C: IRB Protocol Extension Approval.....	179
Curriculum Vitae.....	180

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Image A Detailing the Home Owner Loan Corporation (HOLC): Grades of Security.....45

Image B Documents detailing HOLC remarks about families.....47

Image C Documents detailing HOLC remarks about Jewish families.....49

Image D Looking south on N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street (N. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr.) and Auer....54

Image E Milwaukee Green Book.....55

Image F Milwaukee Green Book, Business page.....55

Image G Lerner’s Grocery Store, N. 5<sup>th</sup> Street (N. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr.).....58

Image H Destruction of Bronzeville for I-43.....60

Image I Color map of Segregation: Red for White populations, dark blue for Black  
populations, light blue for Asian populations, yellow for Latinx/Latino  
populations.....66

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1 Home Owners Loan Corporation Redlining Map.....46

Map 2 1940 Census Demographic Change.....54  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 3 1950 Census Demographic Change.....56  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 4 1960 Census Demographic Change.....59  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 5 1970 Census Demographic Change.....61  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 6 1980 Census Demographic Change.....62  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 7 1990 Census Demographic Change.....63  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 8 2000 Census Demographic Change.....63  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 9 2010 Census Demographic Change.....64  
Green dots are white populations, Yellow dots are Black populations

Map 10 Boundaries of Harambee.....68  
Yellow dots are corner stores, blue dots are pharmacies and green dots are specialty stores

Map 11 Northern boundaries of Harambee.....69

Yellow dots are corner stores, blue are pharmacies and red dots are large grocery stores.

Map 12	Northern side of Milwaukee and location of Harambee.....	70
	Red dots are large grocery stores.	
Map 13	GIS maps detailing distances to and from grocery stores.....	71
Map 14	GIS maps detailing distances to and from grocery stores.....	71
Map 15	GIS maps detailing distances to and from grocery stores.....	72

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	System Map.....	25
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HOLC = Home Owners Loan Corporation

HTF = Hunger Task Force

GPLC = Gathering Place Lutheran Church

SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

USDA = United States Department of Agriculture

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank and appreciate the support and guidance from my chair Dr. Aneesh Aneesh, as well as, the support from my committee, Dr. Cary Costello, Dr. Timothy O'Brien and Dr. Anne Bonds who were collectively named, "The Awesome Squad", because at the beginning of this adventure, Dissertation Committee seemed all too daunting.

There not enough ways I can say thank you.

In addition, without the assistance and contributions of those who participated in this research, none of this would be possible, nor would there be any words on these following pages. The work that is done at these pantries and in these organizations is nothing short of amazing and it is because of their hard work that people in Milwaukee find help and community.

And lastly but not least, the ongoing encouragement I received from my friends and family, who always gave me the continual boosts of energy, support and inspiration. While there are many people, and ya'll know who you are, special mention goes out to Dennis and Patricia Baran, Bridget Carsten, Kaylin Taylor, DaJuan Ferrell, and Daniel Bartholomay. Also noted, much of this dissertation was written with considerable support from Harley von Flufflepants and Mapes McGillacuddley.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“I feel like I’m robbing Peter to pay Paul,” is a statement my mother says often. By visual standards, my parents would not be considered people who might be experiencing issues of poverty adjacency. They have a nice house, live in a nice, mid-western town in Illinois and my father has a regular 9-5 job that he worked for my whole lived existence. In many cases, I was very fortunate and had what Lareau (2003) describes as a middle-class childhood. However, like many families and children, unbeknownst to me as a child, mine experienced financial struggle. I had a very stereotypical upbringing for a white, <seemingly> middle-class midwestern child. Like Lareau (2003) notes, middle class parents put their child in every activity under the sun – dance, softball, soccer, basketball, theatre. However, when we went shopping for clothes, my mom always taught me to start at the back of the store and then work forward because the sale items were always in the back. We also frequented discount, commonly referred to as thrift stores, such as, Goodwill, Savers, and St. Vincent DePaul. As a child and through my adult years, I continued this habit and it helps me, but I never really thought about the origination. As my parents aged and I decided to enter my post-secondary education, my parents fell on harder times. While yes, my father had a job and provided for the house, much of their life was spent ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul,’ or in some cases, having to choose between one bill or diabetic medicine, etc. This commonality is more broadly shared than we know, but the perceptions that we see hide that connectedness in experiences. At this point, some people might make the usual notions of wealth and poverty as an ‘us versus them’ nature. My parents are not considered visibly poor but the perception of attained middle class status hides what is behind the veil.

Representations of poverty tend to guide one’s attitude toward the poor. Often when we think about poverty, we have a specific image that appears in our minds. Maybe we have several

images that appear which configure someone in poverty. We also have ideas about how we think they got to that place. Yet, many of the images that appear in our minds are contrived, controlling images that do not necessarily convey what poverty actually means for people. One may have ideas about people in poverty, but it would be a difficult one to have without first-hand knowledge or experience. This dissertation examines how people navigate poverty and the benefit recipient system. Additionally, this study seeks to provide an understanding of symbolic annihilation and symbolic violence, and in view of specious representations—often along racial and gender lines—about recipients and the ways they spend their assistance.

“So, you think I drive a Cadillac?” was one welfare recipient’s response to misleading media stories about people receiving state assistance (Seccombe 2007). Tropes of welfare recipients as shiftless, undeserving and irresponsible people not just looking for a handout, but also portrayed as living high on the hog, are common partly due to their negative portrayal in the media. In view of specious representations—often along racial and gender lines—about recipients and the ways they spend their assistance, the proposed study examines 1) how welfare recipients of diverse racial identities perceive themselves and their welfare benefit status; 2) how they think others perceive them; 3) how they view other people in related situations; and 4) how case managers perceive recipients who are receiving benefits. Relatedly, how do structural and social inequalities manifest themselves in the daily lives of these individuals? How do individuals experience and deal with different social and structural barriers?

While substantial literature exists about the effects and efficacy of various welfare programs (Baldwin 2010a; Bullock 1999; Gilens 1999; Goldberg 2001; Halpern-Meekin et al. 2015; Hamilton 2002; Handler and Hasenfeld 1997; Lieberman 1998; Picchi 2019; Quadagno 1988, 1994; Rank 1994; Reich 2018; Seccombe 2007), experiences of welfare recipients as well

as their understandings of others remain understudied. Additionally, this study seeks to determine how welfare case managers understand the clients they serve via their experience and professional opinions. It is important to mention that the group benefiting the most from welfare recipientship are white people (Delaney and Scheller 2015; Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994). However, the controlling image of a welfare recipient are often Black women, white voters will often vote against social safety net assistance policies that would equally benefit them but are perceived to “give something extra” to marginalized populations (Bobo 1998, 1999; Bobo and Smith 1998). They may indirectly be affected by racism against non-whites by the way they perceive other welfare beneficiaries as worthy or unworthy (Bobo 1998, 1999; Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bobo and Smith 1998). While previous studies examined specific groups (attitudes of women, middle-class individuals, etc.), this study investigates how the intersections of race, class and gender manifest while receiving welfare.

Milwaukee, given its status as the most segregated city in the United States, is a suitable site for this study due to its high rates of inequality and the legacy of racial segregation between its white and black residents (Bonds 2013; Glauber and Crowe 2013; Halpern-Meekin et al. 2015; Heynen 2009; Loyd and Bonds 2018; Moynihan 1965; Sims and Rainge 2002; Squires and O’Connor 1996; Trotter 1985). Work by Matthew Desmond highlighted Milwaukee’s high rate of eviction and its effects on poor white and black residents (Desmond 2012a, 2012b, 2016; Desmond and Valdez 2013). Not only is experiencing an eviction a demoralizing experience, it also hampers an individual from finding future accommodation for themselves or their families. Therefore, housing and eviction are unquestionably connected to issues of poverty and inequality. Other works examined Milwaukee’s high percentage of poverty and racial segregation (Bonds 2013; Halpern-Meekin et al. 2015; Heynen 2009; Sims and Rainge 2002;

Squires and O'Connor 1996). The City of Milwaukee recently lost a residency requirement court case that mandated all city employees to live within the city limits. A state court ruled against this mandate and now case workers and other workers can live outside Milwaukee in places with a different socioeconomic and racial make-up, affecting how case workers understand, perceive, and encounter the people they serve. This study hopes to add to the rich and growing literature in this field. The overall purpose is to shed light on how Milwaukee residents conceptualize social and structural inequalities in their lives, how they deal with those daily struggles, and how they understand themselves and others in the process.

I interviewed 44 people as case managers, recipients and organizations about their experiences with poverty a participant observation that accounts for about 350 hours at a local community lunch and food pantry. These experiences and observations highlight the ways in which perceptions emerge in various ways.

In addition to all the above, I was able to examine how the effects of the longest U.S. government shutdown in history (December 22, 2018 until January 25, 2019) reached far beyond the 800,000 federal workers who were furloughed or went unpaid. Much of the media focus were on federal workers; however, many people in the welfare sector were affected by similar issues – lack of access to pay, rent, cash and food assistance. I include a chapter that weaves in the diverse experiences at the food pantry through my ethnographic observations as well as interviews with participants and case managers.

In connection with the shutdown, this work also examines how people in poverty navigate and negotiate systems of poverty – relying on friends, families and social networks. It also lends an examination of constant feelings of anxiety, food insecurity, precarity and a social safety net that is more confusing and fraught with misinformation than actual assistance.

Respondents and case managers alike express frustration and hopelessness when trying to work with federal systems like SNAP/Foodshare and cash assistance, because they feel people making the laws and requirements lack a basic understanding regarding the lived experience of poverty in America.

## Literature Review

There is an extant literature discussing how racialized and gendered constructions of benefit assistance influence how welfare recipients are perceived (Baldwin 2010; Gilens 1999; Kingfisher 1999; Lieberman 1998; Lubiano 1992; Quadagno 1994; Seccombe 2007). Racialized and gendered notions and popular representations in the media function to stigmatize welfare recipients (Gilens 1999; Handler and Hollingsworth 1969; Lewis 1961, 1969; Moynihan 1965; Quadagno 1994; Roberts 1997; Rogers-Dillon 1995; Seccombe 2007). This literature helps us understand how representations of benefit receipts can lead to faulty perceptions of welfare recipients, but leaves a gap in that it does not address the differing situations in which welfare recipients of all genders may find themselves nor present a complete picture of benefit assistance (Baldwin 2010; Bullock 1999; Gilens 1999; Rank 1994; Seccombe 2007). Often, welfare is thought of as one of the many social safety nets for people in need, however, there are a variety of issues that arise from the way that the institution has been structured from its inception.

### A. Social Construction

Since this is a study of perceptions, it would be expedient to revisit the sociological literature by Mead, Cooley and Goffman. Foundational theories about perception, the self and society, and the “looking glass self” all point to the ways in which people understand themselves, how they perceive others and how people think others perceive them (Cooley 1922, 1956; Goffman 1959; Mead 1934). For Cooley and Mead (1922, 1934, 1956) there is no self prior to

the social; structures of the self take shape through daily interactions with others; people constantly modify actions to present a self-image and self-presentation as a response to the social (Cooley 1922, 1956; Goffman 1959; Mead 1934). Mead examines the ways in which the “I” part of the self is a response to the “me,” which is a set of others’ attitudes organized within the self. In this case, the perceptions of those who receive benefit assistance are shaped by what people receiving assistance think about others receiving similar benefits and what people receiving benefits think other people think about them. Much of the perception of benefit recipients is overwhelmingly negative, given the number of negative media reports and numerous attempts to restrict how people use their benefits (Bullock 1999; Diamond 1966; Gilens 1999; Halpern-Meekin et al. 2015; Kingfisher 1999; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1988, 1994; Rank 1994; Seccombe 2007). Using these perceptions formulated through various interactions, including interacting with media, one forms a self-image and applies that to oneself and to others (Mead 1934).

Goffman (1959) further extends Mead and Cooley’s symbolic interactionism in his theory of the presentation of self; we organize our lives through encounters with others and manage impressions of ourselves in front of others. Welfare recipients need to convey the image of poverty, because if they do not, they risk being perceived as untruthful about needing benefits. Also, recipients need to behave the ‘right’ way to be considered part of the ‘deserving poor.’ Some examples of what is perceived as the ‘right way’ include having an older or no cell phone, older or no vehicle, and clothes that indicate poverty. Benefit recipients must fit a narrowly defined area wherein people will believe them as being ‘legitimately’ poor. People receiving benefits must fit into the appearances expected of them and fit into what society perceives as poor. People who do not fit into this narrowly defined space, by having certain clothes, shoes,



cars, cell phones and ability to buy certain food items, are deemed as undeserving and not the “right type “of poor. While Mead, Cooley and Goffman all discuss how the self and society interact, they did not go into detail about the ways gender, race and other socioeconomic factors specifically affect how one views oneself, others, and how others might see one through institutionalized racism, classism and sexism.

## B. Racism

Societal constructions organize the ways racism can take shape in society and construct internalized perceptions about others. Bonilla-Silva (2010) characterizes racism as “a set of ideas and beliefs”, which can lead people with constructed advantages to internalize racialized attitudes and attribute them to a whole group of individuals. The empowered group that holds prejudiced ideas may engage in racially discriminatory action. Institutions and socially-constructed norms work as a set of mutually reinforcing elements or a feedback loop, wherein institutions inform people and people inform the institution. Institutions and structures are not removed from human interaction but are structured by specific human interactions. Hamilton and Ture (2011) argue that we must distinguish between individual actions of racism and the more institutional form of racism, - the racialized outcomes that can result from the normal operations and functions of American institutions.

In Goldberg’s argument, racial states define racially-identified groups via a variety of bureaucratic and institutional forms and measures (Goldberg 2002). The racial state is not static, but a “political force” that employs economic, legal and cultural structures that recirculate racialized patterns about other groups in order to secure their production (Goldberg 2002). For example, Goldberg (2002) argues that racial states, like the United States, define, regulate, govern, economically manage and mediate racially-identified groups and structure, determining

who speaks for others and in what capacity. The racial state, according to Goldberg (2002), often protects and supports white people differently than Black and Brown people. White people, by structuring the racial state, have greater access to differing levels of power within these institutions, structures and systems (Bonilla-Silva 2010, 2001; Lipsitz 2006). Power is not measured as physical strength, but describes how policing, incarceration, housing, income, and education produce disparate effects and problematic positions for individuals of color more so than for white people (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Lipsitz 2006; Roberts 1993, 2011; Taylor 2016).

Researchers note that racism relies on the dominant group, or white people, who control the allocation of material resources (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Lipsitz 2011; Lipsky 1987; Roberts 1997). However, white racism only tells part of the story and erases the potentiality for prejudice and implicit bias to also be enacted by non-white people themselves (Aberson, Shoemaker, and Tomolillo 2004; Allport 1954; Lee 2012). Allport (1954) notes that notions of prejudice and discomfort could be mitigated through social integration of different groups. Lipsky (1987) notes that internalized prejudice also contributes to the perpetuation of racist institutional policy and structure. The reproduction of these internalized prejudices occurs through holding dominant perceptions of people within the same racial category, such as believing them to be more likely to abuse welfare, be on welfare, be poor money managers or have poor family structures. Therefore, the structure of assistance programs that are mediated and perceptions about race also work to recreate problematic perceptions about welfare beneficiaries.

### C. Welfare

Lieberman (1998) and Quadagno (1994) both examine the development of welfare policies, starting with the inception of the 1935 Social Security Act. This Act was the first effort from the federal government to protect citizens from poverty. Prior to this, there were no policies

addressing poverty and mobility forward for Americans. As a response to the Great Depression, the Federal government instituted New Deal policies to assist affected American workers. One of the policies emerging from the Social Security Act of 1935 was the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), later changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (Collins 2000, 2004; Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Roberts 1993), and then to PRWORA<sup>1</sup>, and its Wisconsin variant, “Wisconsin Works” or “W-2” in 1997 (Baldwin 2010a).

PRWORA, or the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, considered to be a recent major welfare reform, ended the 60 year AFDC program by creating TANF, or Temporary Assistance For Needy Families, which is a temporary program aimed at eliminating long-term assistance program usage (Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994, 1988). TANF introduced time limits on benefit assistance, work requirements for recipients and the ability for individual states to figure out how to administer the program (Gilens 1999)

Before Clinton “ending welfare as we know it”<sup>2</sup> in PWORA in 1996, it is important to take a step back to explore the welfare benefit development timeline. In order for Roosevelt to pass the original 1935 Social Security Act, he needed support from Southern Democrats. This resulted in the exclusion of certain occupations, such as farm workers or domestic labor, which were mostly held by Black, African American and brown workers<sup>3</sup> (Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1988, 1994). Scholars note that the policies allowed states to limit the number of Black welfare recipients and essentially viewed Black families as ‘undeserving’ or non-existent working in these excluded occupations (Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Roberts 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, PRWORA

<sup>2</sup> Former President Bill Clinton, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> To account of the potentiality of self-identification, this paper will use Black and African American interchangeably. Some may identify as Black for political reasons and others may identify as African American due to common descriptors, depending on how that person was socialized to identify themselves.

This institutionalized racial and gender inequality was guaranteed via deals between Southern and Northern congressmen in order to pass many of the New Deal policies (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Roberts 1997). Gilens (1999) notes that prior to 1965, the face of poverty and the poor was white, with African Americans and Black people representing the invisible poor, since they were written out of most of the legislation. The legislators negotiating AFDC considered widowed white women as the primary recipients and their sole job as to raise children. To highlight this, Gilens (1999) notes that beginning in the 1960s, the roles of women were beginning to change, wherein widowed mothers were seen differently than women who had children ‘out of wedlock’ and therefore encouraged changes to welfare policies based on this distinction. Davis (1983) and Roberts (1997) found that due to the racialized notions of work, people and legislators felt that Black women always worked, therefore, Black women should not qualify under AFDC guidelines. Beginning in the 1960s, Gilens (1999:117) notes that contrasting images began circulating using Black people to illustrate news stories regarding waste, inefficiency or abuse of welfare and images of white people in more ‘race-neutral’ discussions of anti-poverty measures which helped to ground recipient perception.

After Civil Rights legislation hypothetically made various forms of discrimination illegal and black individuals qualified for more benefit programs, the white majority came to believe that there were no obstacles to financial security for people of color except for a poor work ethic. This caused white people to view anti-poverty programs with racialized suspicion (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Lipsitz 2006; Quadagno 1994). Roberts (1997) finds that after 1951, benefit programs such as the Federal Housing Association loans (FHA), GI bills for returning veterans, and Social Security benefits once reserved for white women and men were now legally “open” to Black families (Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994; Roberts

1997). However, this did not mean that benefits were easily obtained. Once Black families were added as potential beneficiaries, work requirements, such as minimum hours to receive assistance, job training, restrictions on length of assistance, were added during the transition from welfare to ‘workfare’, based on a racialized public narrative about not assisting a lazy, undeserving, poor population of color (Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994). This is the opposite of the former eligibility requirements for widowed white women (which required them *not* to work) (Gilens 1999; Lieberman 1998; Roberts 1997).

Other research compared attitudes of welfare recipients and middle-class people. Bullock (1999) finds that the voices of the poor are often overlooked or silenced. Bullock’s study assessed both white working and middle-class American men and women’s attitudes on poverty and welfare programs (Bullock 1999). The findings concluded that most of the 236 (112 middle-class, 124 working-class, European Americans living in Rhode Island) interviewees held anti-Black feelings toward recipients of color. Furthermore, the study found that welfare recipients were more likely to reject restrictive welfare-reform policies and use structural identifications for the existence of poverty, but they were more likely to view fellow recipients as being dishonest regarding deserving of benefits (Bullock 1999). Some of these findings contradicted some of the hypotheses of the researchers based on class perceptions, as they expected middle-class participants in the study to hold harsher views, but were more likely to view recipients as dependent on benefit receipt (Bullock 1999). One limitation of this study was that it only looked at the attitudes of white men and women to the exclusion of other potential recipients.

In accordance with the widely quoted statement that the ruling ideas of an age are the ideas of its ruling class, those receiving government assistance do not fare well in public perception (Collins 2000, 2004; Marx and Engels 1842; Roberts 1993, 1997). By defining Black

women as “welfare queens” and overwhelmingly dependent on welfare, without considering historical constructions of poverty, this racialization makes the majority of welfare recipients, who are white, invisible (Collins 2000, 2004; Collins and Gimenez 1990; Edin and Shaefer 2015; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994; Roberts 1993, 1997; D. E. Roberts 2011). Therefore, a reversal of roles occurs now – Black families formerly written out of the welfare recipient debate become the focus, and Black mothers are configured as ‘welfare queens’ (Collins 2004; Lieberman 1998; Quadagno 1994). While Black people experience high rates of poverty, white people make up the majority of welfare benefit recipients; yet, they are less likely to be seen as recipients by the public. According to the 2013 U.S. Department of Agriculture data, which administers the SNAP program, “40.2 percent of recipients are White, 25.7 percent are Black, 10.3 percent are Latino/a/x, 2.1 percent are Asian and 1.2 percent are Native American” (Delaney and Scheller 2015). White Americans are symbolically removed from the image of welfare recipients – their positions are symbolically erased (Collins, Di Leonardo, and Williams 2008; Collins and Gimenez 1990; Edin and Shaefer 2015; Halpern-Meehin et al. 2015; Quadagno 1994).

The fact that Black families figure prominently as recipients in public perception, while white families do not, disrupts the ability to adequately assess the structures of poverty and benefit assistance. These false presumptions influence welfare case workers’ attitudes toward their clients. Roberts (2011) notes that social workers were more likely to describe Black and African American women as hostile and aggressive without giving any context for these notes in their client’s case files or making similar notes about white parents. Roberts (2011) also notes that social workers also assumed that African American or Black parents had substance abuse addictions without making the same assumptions about white parents in similar situations.

Roberts (2011) notes that welfare recipients of color receive more intense scrutiny by social workers. For example, Roberts (2011) found that in child protection cases, mostly urban areas with high concentrations of Black and African American populations have higher rates of child welfare agency intrusion, while white suburban families encounter less such intrusion. Therefore, including the perceptions held by case workers or people who make decisions determining benefit assistance for people applying for cash and food assistance is an important detail left out from previous studies. While Roberts (2011) noted a survey for child welfare case workers, studying Wisconsin social workers and how they determine fitness for benefits while living outside of the population that they serve may present different socialized ideas about race and class.

In research focused on amplifying voices and experiences with welfare benefits, Baldwin (2010) examines how Black women specifically navigate the changes in the Wisconsin W-2 program and how the transition from welfare to workfare specifically affected them. The same study also questions whether or not the voices of Black women are heard or whether there was any concern for them among policy-makers (Baldwin 2010b). Baldwin's dissertation (2010b) examines the success of the W-2 Wisconsin Works program through the voices of Black women themselves. While Baldwin (2010b) examines the W-2 program success and examined the effects through the voices of Black women, this work broadens the approach to how intersectional perceptions of women and men of all identities perceive themselves and others regarding the use of benefit assistance.

Next, I will show that theoretical approaches which use frames of culture of poverty, spatial mismatch and symbolic annihilation to detail the perceptions and representations of welfare recipients involve problematic assumptions. These approaches provide one way to

understand how people in poverty are configured and presented, but they nevertheless leave a gap by failing to fully address welfare recipients' actual experiences--which conflict with popular victim-blaming presumptions.

#### Spatiality of Poverty, Race and Class

#### D. Culture of Poverty and Spatial Mismatch

Other research relates welfare assistance to cultural attributes. This review would be remiss if it did not mention how the concept of a culture of poverty once encapsulated sociological understandings of welfare assistance (Katz 2013; Lewis 1961, 1969; Mink 1993, 1998, 1999). Lewis (1961) created the term, “culture of poverty”, to refer to an “underclass” of Black families that make poor decisions, based on problematic beliefs about people of color. This supposed unhealthy culture was said to cause Black families to lack the social mobility to emerge from poverty and was transferred to the next generation. Building off Lewis' work, Moynihan, a sociologist-turned-senator, argued (1965) that the failings of the Black community were not due to the lack of available jobs for African American and Black families, but the increase of Black single mothers, whom he pathologized as the reason for the downturn of the Black community (Moynihan 1965). Since at the time, most white people considered racism to be “over,” given the signing of the Civil Rights Act, anything experienced by the Black and African American community was seen as a personal failing, not a systemic, structural or institutional one. Since legislators believed that Black families were undeserving of assistance, the lives of Black families began to experience more intense regulation upon benefit receipt. Moynihan and Lewis failed to recognize that many white families benefited greatly from federal welfare programs – such as Federal Housing grants and the GI bill – and more white families were thus able to lift themselves out of poverty and increase their wealth and assets (Bonilla-



Silva 2010; Collins et al. 2008; Edin and Shaefer 2015; Halpern-MeeKin et al. 2015; Lipsitz 2006a; Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Roberts 1997). Over time, the media constructions of welfare as one of Blackness versus whiteness created an environment of “us versus them” pathology. In turn, belief in a culture-of-poverty theory allowed for those with a privileged racial status to enact problematic welfare legislation that perpetuated faulty popular representations.

Other researchers critiqued the theory of a culture of poverty or offered a blended explanation. For example, Wilson (1978, 1987, 1996) believed that the reason for intergenerational poverty was not necessarily a cultural issue, but more prominently, the issue of deindustrialization – the reduction in manufacturing/factory jobs, increase in service positions, and the lack of well-paying jobs in areas where there are high populations of Black workers. Spatial mismatch hypothesis emphasizes a mismatch between low-income households and suitable job opportunities, which has mostly affected Black and African American populations (Hellerstein, Neumark, and McInerney 2008; Kain 1968; Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996). Some other scholars argue that the issue is not so much a spatial mismatch, but more a racial mismatch – employers choosing not to locate where Black people live, which dictates where Black people are hired (Hellerstein et al. 2008).

However, the culture of poverty analysis is regaining prominence as a theory. Wilson (2009) connected the structural theory of spatial mismatch with cultural factors. For example, Wilson (2009) contends that Black women headed households and low rates of marriage are some of the reasons for the downfall of the Black community. This analysis does not clearly examine the impact of racism or policies/legislation that disparately affect people of color, or wrestle with the mass incarceration or the high populations of Black and brown men behind bars. Other researchers argue that culture-of-poverty theory hinders the debate in discussing poverty –

because it fails to grapple with any systemic or structural barriers that actually make getting ahead or out of poverty more difficult (Gilens 1999; Gorski 2008; Leacock 1971; Lieberman 1998; Massey and Denton 1993; Quadagno 1994).

#### E. Sites of Encounter

Milwaukee, in relation to its population size, is named the nation's most segregated city (Loyd and Bonds 2018; Rosenblatt and Cossyleon 2018). While the history of segregation goes back to the Great Migration (1910 – 1970), particularly the post-WWII second wave when many African Americans from the southern United States migrated to Milwaukee, its continuance can also be partly explained through the decades of “urban renewal” displacing families and creating new neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (Massey and Denton 1993; Niemuth 2014). Much of Milwaukee was shaped by the construction of new highways such as I-43, which bifurcated parts of the Southside and Milwaukee's Black neighborhoods. Businesses closed and forced people to migrate North (Niemuth 2014). Since spatiality is not naturally occurring but a phenomenon socially constructed through migrations, restrictive covenants, government and industry policies, and societal attitudes in different cities, a sociological examination of sites of encounters is important (Elwood, Lawson, and Sheppard 2016).

Similarly, how cities come to terms with the reality of segregation related to racist and classist policies can be examined by analyzing the geographical location and spatiality of grocery stores. Therefore, connected to the segregation related to racist and classist policies, the geographical location and spatiality of where stores are located is also related to how people perceive themselves and others. Since Milwaukee is the most segregated American city, notions of spatiality and who is occupying that space may be particularly interesting. Nutritional redlining, where grocery stores are spatially located near interstitial areas (where white and

Black neighborhoods blur) and access to healthy, nutritious food is placed at a distance (Blauner 1969; Cho and Clark 2019; Eisenhauer 2001; Kwate et al. 2013; McBride 2007; Schram 2014). Food insecurity is an issue that affects people in many cities. Previous work by scholars note that Milwaukee's food insecurity has a longstanding history (Bonds 2013; Heynen 2005; Heynen, Kurtz, and Trauger 2012; Jones 2013; Loyd and Bonds 2018).

Researchers note these definitions arise from how people are continually changing and are connecting to different power structures which can and should be disrupted through learning and engaging with others (Elwood et al. 2016). Elwood et. al. (2016:746) note that geographical conceptions of geography are constituted in three distinct ways: socio-spatial, epistemological and politics of possibility. Other researchers explore this engagement through sites of encounter or contact (Allport 1954). Similarly, geographers use Allport's contact hypothesis to how researchers can be more mindful of the shared space between strangers collecting data from participants (Valentine 2008; Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen 2008; Wilson 2016). Therefore, for researchers who may live in different areas than the people that are their participants, consistently remaining mindful of the role inequalities play in restructuring how race and gender often interact is vital.

### Perceptions

#### F. Symbolic Annihilation

While some researchers examine the visibility of welfare recipients, and others discuss the effects of symbolic annihilation and poverty, the thesis of symbolic annihilation is not put into use in discussing the regulation of others through these policies, even though the lens of symbolic annihilation might potentially add to their analysis (Collins 2000; Mills 2003; Roberts 1997, 2002; D. E. Roberts 2011). For example, if the media primarily presents Black women as

poor and as single mothers who are struggling, then that controlling image is associated with a Black woman, and is integral to how symbolic annihilation occurs but it is not described as such (Collins 1993, 2000, 2004, 2006).

Symbolic annihilation is defined as the media presence<sup>4</sup> or absence based on gender, race, socio-economic status of a particular group (Ducille 1994; Gerbner 1977, 1978; Kane 1994; Klein and Shiffman 2009; Knight and Giuliano 2001; Lind and Salo 2002; Merskin 1998; Milkie 1999; Tuchman 1978, 1979). As ‘welfare queens,’ Black women are presented as a monolithic group without much consideration of the total population of Black women, making black women who do not fit the stereotype invisible in the discourse. To understand symbolic annihilation, one can observe how stereotypes present all Black women as loud, dominating and demanding. Another way to examine symbolic annihilation is through absence, and often men are absent or excluded as recipients, perhaps due to the gendered construction of W-2 programs. Most of the research about the lives of benefit recipients is centered around women (Lareau 2011; Roberts 1997, 2002; D. E. Roberts 2011; Seccombe 2007).

Much of the literature surrounding symbolic annihilation has revolved around issues of media representation (Gerbner 1977, 1978; Klein and Shiffman 2009; Tuchman 1978, 1979). Black women can play many roles in society – but they are symbolically annihilated in the media when they are only presented as characters in one-dimensional ways (Pixley 2015), which result in misrepresentations of benefit recipients. Often symbolic annihilation research revolves around the self-perception of mostly Black and some White women in regards to media representations (Ducille 1994; Emerson 2002; Kaszynski 2016; Milkie 1999).

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<sup>4</sup> It can also be defined as the absence – such as white welfare recipients being the largest group of welfare beneficiaries. Or, only seeing Black people as athletes and not chemists or scientists, etc.

Another way to look at symbolic annihilation is not that women are absent, but more that women are pigeon-holed into types of roles, thus annihilating their full range of experiences in real life. For example, Tuchman (1978, 1979) noted that women actors in medical shows are often seen as secondary characters to the men who play doctors, even if those women are doctors themselves on the show – being portrayed as assistants in a surgery scene or shown doing paperwork instead of providing care. More recent work examines current roles of successful Black women, like Olivia Pope featured in the show *Scandal*, in a ways that appear to be progressive but are clever disguises of racialized and gendered tropes that Black women and other women of color often find themselves configured in the media and result in perception formulation (Chaney and Robertson 2016; Emerson n.d.; Pixley 2015; Warner 2015).

Using the frame of symbolic annihilation– in either television, movies or in print – is appropriate when there is something not seen that affects how people are perceived and impacts the perceptions of others. Kaszynski (2016:63) examines “racial essentialism” which creates a strict description of what ‘Blackness’ or ‘womanness’, etc., are and the role that photography can play in creating or erasing, making something visible or invisible, by examining the photography of two blind photographers. Kaszynski (2016) argues that even though the photographers she examines are blind and “despite our tendency to treat vision as a series of neutral interactions with the world, social conditions and practices can produce the very ability to see human difference” through a variety of interactions, vocal intonations, and other socially constructed information (Kaszynski 2016). Even people who have the ability to see often claim colorblindness towards race, i.e. “I don’t see color,” meaning individuals who do not have visual impairment often hide racist ideology behind the language of physical incapacity (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Kaszynski 2016). Colorblind ideology is used to claim that if one does not mention race,

then it is not seen, and cannot have an effect and could be an additional avenue for symbolic annihilation (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2010; Kaszynski 2016). Kaszynski (2016:64) further argues that race is much more than just a matter of visible difference in appearance but should be taken in a “larger context of visualization (which includes the meaning of and relationships between things)” (Kaszynski 2016). One-dimensional visual representations of benefit recipients in popular discourse limit the ways others experience and perceive assistance.

Symbolic annihilation research examines issues of welfare policies, and how their punitive sanctions specifically affect various women (Diamond 1966; Kingfisher 1999). Kingfisher (1999) compares the United States and New Zealand and how both nations demonize a collective “other” in relation to welfare “reform.” Here, Kingfisher concludes that in both nations, indigenous and Black women, as groups, are seen in the media as savage and uncivilized, thus supposedly requiring more punitive measures because these women need reformation. These notions map onto how Black women are prominently featured as “welfare queens” or how Black men are depicted as bad fathers, etc.--images of old tropes reformulated with Reagan-era welfare “reform” and maintained through repetitive use of racialized and gendered media tropes for a new audience. The presence of these perceptions allowed for the continued transformation of welfare rhetoric in US anti-poverty policies, as these became racialized and further stigmatized in the “post-civil rights” era.

Similar to the ways that symbolic annihilation affects women of color, men are often left out of the benefit recipient narrative. While men receive welfare, Kost (1997) notes that many men interviewed felt varying levels of shame and stigma associated with benefit assistance. Kost (1997:15) noted that many men would use benefit application as a last resort, or if they did receive benefits, they would never use them, or have friends who were women purchase items

for them. Much of the welfare/benefit assistance discourse revolves around women and children, but fewer studies examine how men experience issues with welfare structures as well. Another reason why men may be reluctant to receive benefit assistance could be connected to notions of patriarchy, masculinities and the perceptions of men as breadwinners (Collins 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Popay, Hearn, and Edwards 1998). Some researchers may argue that the reason there is less data on men as recipients is because they account for fewer of those recipients. Examining men of varied demographic sectors as recipients may highlight how patriarchy annihilates the ability for men to feel comfortable in reaching out for assistance. If patriarchal structures establish men receiving benefits as 'less masculine' then assessments of hegemonic masculinity and masculinities in general might be overlooked or erased (Connell and Connell 2005).

Other researchers examined symbolic annihilation in relation to cities and gentrification (Mitchell 1997; Wilson and Grammenos 2005). Mitchell (1997) focuses on the symbolic annihilation of the homeless through anti-homelessness laws in various US cities. Additionally, the welfare state governs where people can exist. For example, welfare structures the residential lives of people, such as where they can shop for goods, what they can buy and what they can do with their funds. More directly, due to welfare reform in 1996, welfare structures are more able to intrude on the lives of the poor, making them more vulnerable due to meeting the requirements to receive benefits. Echoing that, Lipsitz (2011) notes that "poverty by itself is an impediment to securing adequate shelter; race and gender discrimination adds new obstacles for women of color...Impoverished women of color have fewer housing options than white women or men of all colors and rarely thus subject to severe housing insecurity" (Crenshaw 1991:1446;

Lipsitz 2011). These laws work in a way to demonize those that are deemed less worthy of interacting in normative society.

Marginalized groups experience annihilation of their personhood on a frequent, if not daily basis. The repetition of racialized stereotypes in media become seen as facts of life – because the issues that are portrayed in the media affect people’s assumptions and policymakers’ beliefs – thus becoming internalized perceptions of others. For example, news outlets that often show images of Black women as welfare recipients and Black men as criminals are transferred to real-life dialogue wherein Black and African Americans are only seen in this one-dimensional way and other populations are configured in a completely different light (Dowler 2003; Emerson 2002; Quillian and Pager 2001).

This same one-dimensionality in media is mirrored in the ways that poverty organizations feature or hide connections to people of color. In Milwaukee, Hunger Task Force (HTF), a Free and Local food bank owes its existence to a group of Black Panthers meeting with a local pastor of Cross Lutheran Church. This rich history is symbolically annihilated from their media campaigns so as to protect the influx of donations from white people in Milwaukee’s suburbs. The vague origins of HTF are purposely curated so as to protect white fragility due to white perceptions of the Black Panther Party.

#### G. Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of symbolic violence involves placing one set of cultural habits over another, for example, valuing white cultural attributes over the cultural habits of Black or other marginalized groups. Bourdieu (1991) argues that society creates a legitimate language and then subjugates all other languages as “lesser than” or as unimportant. With the establishment of a “legitimate” language comes access to power, as well as determining whom



that language signifies. For example, the development and application of the phrase, “welfare queen” is specifically targeted at Black women, having been created by the white racial order.

#### H. Intersectionality

Another theory, intersectionality, a Black feminist epistemology founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is based on the understanding that there are no single-issue lives and that race, class, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, etc., are all experienced interactively and simultaneously. Statuses are not experienced in isolation; therefore, multiple identities and statuses must always be simultaneously addressed (Collins and Bilge 2016; Crenshaw 1991; Hooks 2000). For example, in considering welfare recipient status as a poor person, receiving government benefits is always experienced simultaneously with race.

A large proportion of recipients are poor, white Americans. While they are able to benefit from many of the privileges that are attached to whiteness, they also are marginalized in the sense that they are poor (Harris 1993; Harrison 1995). White welfare recipients are simultaneously annihilated in the sense they are absent from view; their situations are not taken seriously, they’ve often been seen as inferior to other white people, and they often participate in their own annihilation due to attachments to how they understand deservingness. For example, Bobo (1998) notes that even if white folks benefit from policies aimed at lifting up others, white voters will sabotage themselves, vote outside of their class interests and harm themselves if they believe that others will receive more benefits. They can un/consciously participate in perpetuating racism depending on how they understand political ideology (Bobo 1983, 1998, 1999; Bobo et al. 1997; Bobo and Smith 1998).

#### I. Web of Systems

As I was describing my research, it became evident that there are many governmental and nongovernmental bodies involved in benefits provision and if not properly described, one might get lost. Therefore, the ‘systems map’ attempts to simplify the links between all of these actors and how they work together. At the top, there is the figure of the president and of Congress where significant back-and-forth legislation occurs –in this case, spending bills, (or the lack of a spending bill, which initiate shutdowns, like the one in December, 2019). Funding is distributed to departments under the president that in turn goes to state governments and local agencies. The United States Department of Agriculture works with local farmers and buys what is unable to be sold (in this case, due to tariffs imposed), then distributes that food to organizations like Hunger Task Force at a discounted price. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is run through the USDA and rent and housing assistance is distributed to Housing and Urban Development, but aid is disbursed through individual state and local agencies (i.e., Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services). Eventually, the recipient finally receives the benefits from these agencies.

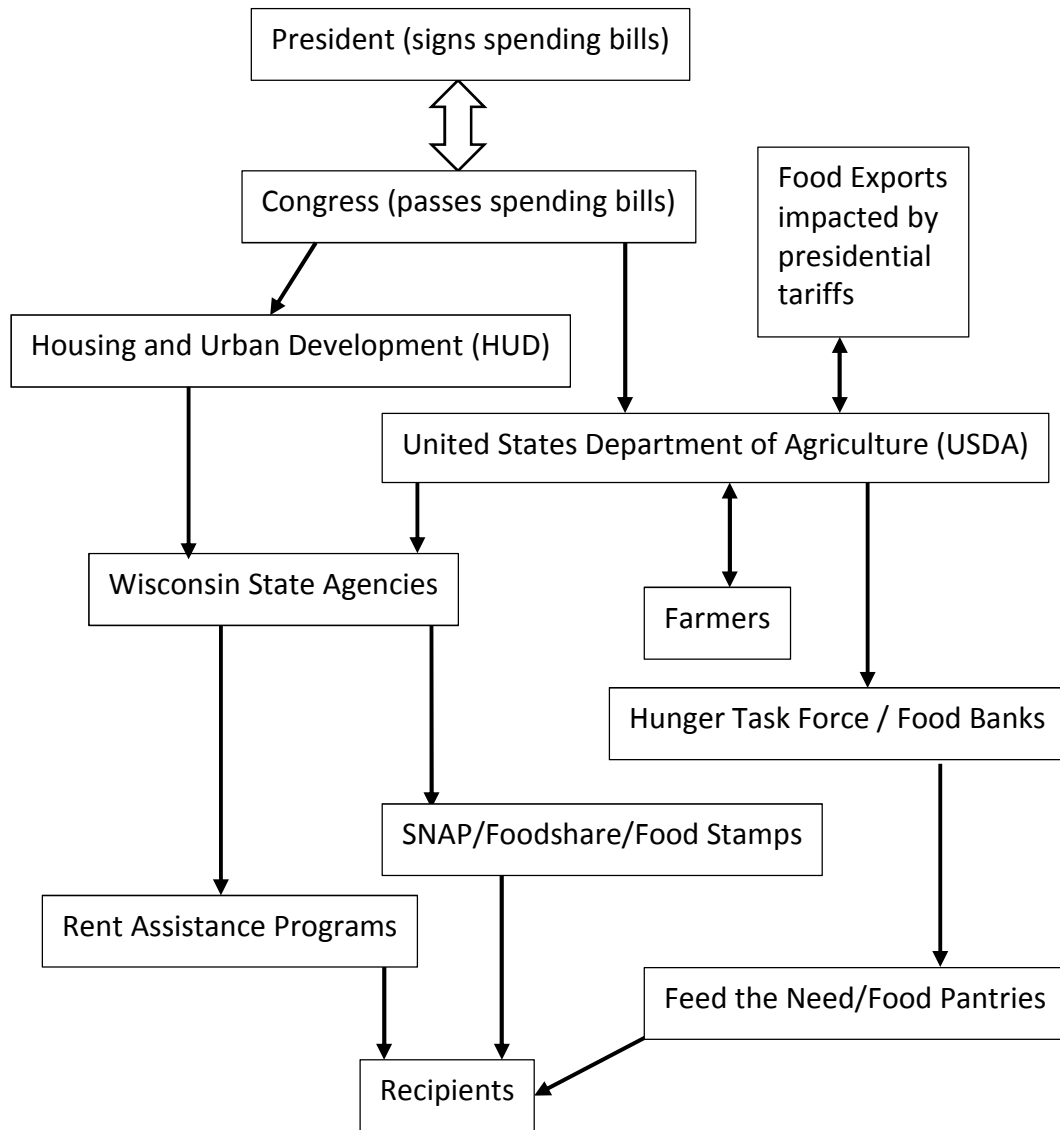


Figure 1: Map of Systems

## Chapter Organization

Chapter 2 details the research methodology used in the remaining chapters of the dissertation. This chapter details the process by which data was collected for the geographic analysis and ethnographic study.

Chapter 3 describes the social geography of Milwaukee – how it became the most segregated city in the entire United States. Exploring segregation as a deliberate and constructed social fact allows the reader to look at how neighborhoods were formed over time – not as natural occurrences – due to actions by institutions. Not only does this geographical component display visual segregation maps, it also points to nutritional redlining. With the high concentration of Black and brown Milwaukeeans that lack access to healthy food options, these maps illustrate the context in which the recipients experience and navigate precarity in terms of food insecurity.

Chapter 4 focuses on the recipients at a pantry that I refer to as Feed the Need to protect their identity. Here, we meet the main cast of characters that create the ability for the pantry to function. It describes the interactions between members, the purpose and layout of the pantry and how people use it to survive. The Hunger Task Force is a free and local food bank that provides food to pantries in the Milwaukee area.

Chapter 5 is a snapshot of one of the more recent government shutdowns that affected approximately 800,000 federal workers and 30-40 million benefit recipients and their children. Media outlets solely reported on the 800,000 workers, who are important, but the total impact was invisible. Many benefit recipients often are blamed for things that go wrong or are completely erased and forgotten. This chapter also introduces a third actor in the study – the social worker.

Chapter 6 connects recipients and social workers in more detail than chapter 4. The purpose is to show how lives of recipients and social workers are interconnected. This chapter more explicitly features how recipients see themselves, others and how they think others see them. These same questions are posed to the social workers because the workers can be seen in sometimes negative ways and configured as ‘ineligibility agents,’ as one former social worker described the personality of state workers.

And finally, chapter 7 finishes the analysis with the Hunger Task Force, an organization mentioned in previous chapters, wherein proper attention is given to how it tries to advocate and end hunger in the greater Milwaukee area through various programs. Putting symbolic annihilation into practice, the organization has foundations in breakfast programs founded by the Black Panther Party (BPP) in Milwaukee. This organization is another piece of the web of how recipients access food during times of precarity. HTF also engages in symbolic annihilation and violence through how it implements its various service programs.

The following chapters seek to combine these theories – presentation of self, intersectionality, symbolic annihilation and symbolic violence – and apply them in tandem. This theory combination may capture the ways in which recipients are conceptualized or erased in media, dialogue and in their everyday lived experience. This combination provides a new way to conceptualize how people understand their lived experience. That is, while white people may be on welfare and in poverty, their experience may differ from Black people in comparable situations due to racialized understandings of welfare. This research fills a gap by examining the differing experiences of people who are welfare recipients. More broadly, this study examines how racial and gender privilege in the US-- specifically, in Milwaukee-- manifests through

specific narratives about race and gender that have real material consequences for welfare recipients' lived experiences.

## Chapter 2: Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology used for this study regarding how welfare benefit participants, case managers and poverty organizations see themselves, others and how they believe others see them. In this research project, I used a qualitative method to analyze the different experiences encountered during the research process. A reflexive approach to in-depth interviewing and participant observation are discussed at length in this chapter. The research plan, including methodology, participants, procedures, analysis method and ethical concerns are the primary components of this chapter.

### Research Questions

At its base, the research that follows is a study of perceptions: how welfare recipients of diverse racial identities perceive themselves and their welfare benefit status; how they think others perceive them; how they view other people in related situations; lastly how case managers perceive benefit recipients receiving assistance. Relatedly, how do structural and social inequalities manifest themselves in the daily lives of these individuals and how do they navigate these barriers?

### Qualitative Research

In order to analyze perceptions, the study uses a qualitative methodology that allows me to capture people's self-perceptions and perceptions of others while also recording welfare processes through micro-interactions. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed for the collection of rich data. While modest sample size means qualitative data may not be generalizable beyond the case at hand, it does allow for insight into a particular population, particularly as I employed a semi-structured interview process, which includes some direction but allows for the participant to add information to the conversation. While I had a set list of questions, I also wanted

interviews to function more like conversations. This method uses questions to contextualize experiences and obtain rich descriptions of events. The interviews obtained data about how recipients live their daily lives, i.e., how recipients spend the money received, what is important in their lives, and encountered struggles. The questions asked about their daily life, how they cope and make decisions with issues they may encounter, the type of assistance they receive, support networks and views on other recipients and general demographics. To capture different voice inflections or verbal cues, a recorder was utilized. The participant was given the option if they wanted to be recorded or not, however, no one declined the recording. By helping make the interviewee feel comfortable and build a connection which often took several interviews, it helped uncover how the structures of inequality manifest through the experience of interacting with the welfare system and its impact on a group of individuals in a city. Also, some participants did not feel comfortable coming to campus or speaking in a public place, nor were able to access campus. Therefore, the interview location was their choice. I interviewed 26 recipients, 15 social and state workers and 3 employees at Hunger Task Force and 2 community members about their experiences and perceptions of poverty in addition to working at the pantry.

### Participant Observation

I worked at a food pantry and soup kitchen for a year and a half, providing food insecure people access to food and community. In order to engage in the research process to obtain the data found, I developed rapport to eventually become entrusted by the community that I was studying and became friends with my respondents which led to the type of data that I was able to collect. This study is connected to my work about understanding racism and white supremacy. To accomplish a study on welfare recipients, I examined the ways in which poor people and



people of color manage in the city of Milwaukee under such conditions, how those conditions affect them and how they feel about people with shared life circumstances (Collins 2003; Collins and Bilge 2016; Gilens 1999; Quadagno 1994). Therefore, my purpose as a sociologist and emerging scholar is to ensure that I am not continuing practices of oppression or trying to “fix” marginalized people, but help fix conditions that marginalize people. Also, I recognize that as a poor white, cisgender woman, who is ineligible for assistance due to my student status but experiencing some of the structures of poverty, I may be able to find common experiences with the respondents of the study. I experience oppression and sexism differently than women of color or transgender women experience those same forces. I disclosed that I was in the process of receiving my PhD at an urban university, while being poor but having the privilege to live in a middle to upper middle-class suburb of Milwaukee, though in walking distance from a neighborhood that has a fraction of the resources as Shorewood. Prior to the conception of this project, I began attending a church located in the Harambee neighborhood as was recommended to me because of its strong foundation in social justice. My reasoning was that establishing these connections early on would assist in identifying study participants and earning their trust.

Sociology has a fraught but important history with communities of color and a history of not appropriately amplifying those voices. Being a sociologist requires that my practice be intentional and inclusive; always remembering the voice I am seeking to amplify. It also requires me to acknowledge when I may be wrong and be comfortable addressing my privilege. To use my privilege appropriately, my academic work focuses on identifying color-blind racism within left-wing political parties, racism and its effects on mental health, intersectional feminism more broadly, and the ways in which white feminism often hides or erases work and thought from feminists of color more directly.

## Participants

While not singular to Milwaukee, institutional, structural and systemic racism and inequality established the city as one of the nation's most segregated metropolitan areas despite its population size. I solicited subjects by placing advertisements in local coffee shops, grocery stores, community centers, and local churches located throughout the city of Milwaukee, accounting for the segregated nature of the city. I met with local poverty advocacy groups that work with those in poverty, such as Hunger Task Force (HTF), an organization that advocates for individuals experiencing food insecurity. Interviewing organizations, HTF, assisted in understanding how dominant discourses shape the point of views and institutional culture for those who work with people receiving benefit assistance. These advertisements included basic study information, like the purpose of the study and how to become a participant. While perhaps problematic in some settings, convenience sampling also helped me find participants – both recipients and case managers. Sometimes, convenience sampling can be problematic because the researcher has access to specific networks or relationships and there is the possibility for issues of power and coercion. However, convenience sampling and snowball sampling proved necessary to obtain sufficient interviewees. This was completed through personal connections, advertisements on social media, and through word of mouth through colleagues and locally-connected friends, but not through cold-calling people to participate in the research.

What I originally perceived as more difficult was the recruitment of welfare case managers that often decide whether others are eligible for welfare. Interviewing case managers in Milwaukee is a delicate dance. Asking case managers directly about their thoughts about race, racism and gender led to a calculated answer, or as one supervisor retorted, “I know how to

creatively answer *those* questions,” in order to avoid potentially exhibiting racist or sexist thoughts.

In order to deal with this particular tension, it was beneficial to approach welfare case managers as experts in their respective fields because approaching them in this way relieved some of the tension. Helping frame the interview as an inquiry about their professional opinion elicited coded language regarding Milwaukee, their feelings about how recipients use assistance, views on poverty, work ethic, etc., more often than I expected.

For recipients to feel at ease, case managers were not connected to the recipients. This disconnect was important for recipients to feel comfortable about being honest regarding their experience, and to avoid the risk that the case manager could resent or retaliate against the recipient. To ensure this, the interview pools were completely separate from each other. In the interviews, questions were not asked about *specific* recipients, but rather their broader ideas and the way that they conceptualize a welfare beneficiary. For example, how do case workers find themselves in this work? What motivates them to help others? The case managers were sourced through interpersonal connections by speaking to locally connected people who work as social workers or are connected to organizations or advocacy groups that handle benefit assistance cases in Milwaukee.

### Feed the Need

I first started coming to the pantry right before people started to eat, and I distributed my materials about the study. I met with the worker at the Church, who put me in touch with the day pastor, who I met with shortly thereafter. Essentially, she acted as the gate keeper for the pantry, and gave me permission to speak with people at the pantry. I went every Wednesday at 11:00am, placed my materials on the tables and gave a short synopsis of my purpose. At first, my

goals were simply to have the patrons see me as a returning face. Often during my short introductions, people would interrupt with questions, mostly revolving around whether I could help them with services, whether I was a social worker, whether I was working for the state, and whether or not I would report them if they told me any incriminating information. All of these questions were responded with a no (however, it is a subtle caveat that technically I do work for the state, since my university is a public institution, but I do not report to any social service organization for this work, so I felt comfortable informing them that no, I would not). At this time, I was unable to provide any incentive for their interviews, which obviously impeded patron involvement. For approximately a month, beginning in May of 2018, I would simply go in, leave my information, make my speech and then leave, and return each Wednesday. Since many of the patrons are Black/African American/People of color more generally, I wanted to be cautious about taking up space in this particular manner.

My whiteness in this space was always front and center in my mind. Previously, students from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee data farmed this neighborhood in a way that felt condescending and I wanted to try my best to stay away from doing just that. I also did not want to come into the Feed the Need community and assume they needed my help. Just as much as my whiteness was on my mind, there was a general distrust (based on the history of students from the university) towards me. This distrust was based on a combination of several factors: the fact that I was a UWM student doing research in the area and the assumption of wealth due to my whiteness. In my initial recruitment, many of the pantry patrons asked me, rightfully so, ‘what are you going to give me?’. While some may interpret this as greed, it is important to understand the significance of this statement. People in poverty, especially in Milwaukee, are prodded for information about their lives, but often they receive no benefits or compensation after telling

people about their lives. It was important to me to be a constant presence at Feed the Need. Therefore, building rapport, even though it is often a necessarily slow process, was incredibly important to me. However, after my initial limited involvement, over time my duties at the pantry expanded.

### Encoding the Data

The codes that developed from my qualitative portion emerged from the interviews and data collected from the participant observation. I made sure that the respondents had access to my informed consent form, and they were able to exit the interview, however, there was no time during the course of data collection that it happened. To protect confidentiality, I created new “characters and scenes” that were a representation and collection of many interviewee experiences but do not represent one specific person, in the event a person or scenario was *too identifiable* (Hopkins 1993; Kaiser 2009). Exceptions to the rule included some well-known geography and intersections that were important to set and locate a particular change over time.

Many researchers recommend the assigning of a pseudonym as a collaborative process between the participant and researcher, so that participants feel a sense of connection to their contribution to the work, in order to create rapport with the research process and promote a better and deeper conversation and data (Allen and Wiles 2016). For example, Allen and Wiles (2016) suggest asking to check the spelling of their name, asking if they want to select a “pretend name”, for the purposes of research. Previous research shows that participants choosing their own pseudonyms as a meaningful process – sometimes reflecting on a close family member, friend, word or meaningful attachment (Allen and Wiles 2016:155). If the participant could think of a “pretend name”, an effort was made to choose a pseudonym that reflected the self-identified culture and ethnic background for the participant unless specifically requested that I

use their real name. While the participants in the study advocated that they wanted their real names, for their personal protection all names were changed to fully follow a feminist ethnographic ethic. The participants were given the opportunity to come up with their own name because allowing the participants to first choose their pseudonym acknowledges the power of the researcher and brings the participant into the research.

For a proper analysis, figuring out this research puzzle and connecting it to newly collected information is crucial. This intimate, working knowledge of my interviewees lives and situations was present in my mind when I was writing and reviewing the interviews (Marshall and Rossman 2011). This intimate knowledge informed my ability to generate more informative case studies and create an interesting and informative web of lives and experiences to tell the story of recipients in Milwaukee. Preliminary codes were identified by the content analysis project, but interviews illuminated others - such as stress, juggling bills, families, the police and incarceration, stigma, racism and others through the interpretation of the data uncovered through the interview process.

Each day after the pantry, I reviewed my notes and recorded my own feelings. I gave the participants my consent form and I gave each participant time to read it. Overtime, the regular pantry patrons would ask about how the writing was going and if they could help or get another interview if I needed more information. I never wanted the patrons to feel like they were being watched, so while at the pantry, I would quickly enter the instance/encounter into the note feature on my phone (many people would text, so it was not out of the ordinary). After my day at the pantry ended and people were driven home, I would voice record the events of the day. Upon reviewing the conversations that took place over the course of my observation, I found that they could be corroborated by past research on how people in poverty discuss themselves and others.

However, how individuals talk about themselves is not the same manner as that of people outside of poverty. The individuals described in the following pages were aware and consented to my writing about them at the same time.

Qualitative data are not just about noting what interviewees or participants say but understanding what they mean. To avoid transcribing errors of respondent interview responses, I made available my notes and asked for clarification. Doing this, I found created rapport and confidence, but I did not require the respondents to spend any additional emotional labor for this research. While this research is about poverty, it was also about telling my participants’ story and amplifying their lived experience.

*Qualitative*

Over time, as I listened to my interviewees, I began to notice thematic patterns in how they were talking about themselves, others and how they thought others perceived them. In order to analyze the qualitative data, I organized my recordings with code names. While listening to the recordings, I would note any stops, pauses or re-iterations. I also documented laughter-nervous tendencies included. The following themes emerged from each interview I was fortunate to encounter and each of these themes are highlighted in the chapters that follow.

Theme	Instance that met this theme
Anxiety	Shopping, card balance, rush, waiting at the office/on phone/mail, inability to assist, health, self-care
Stress	Card balance, budgeting, knowing exact amounts, not being able to buy needed items, high case load, personal development, time management
Self-perception	Guilt, demoralization, sadness, happiness, family

Perception of others	Getting by, positionality, greediness of others
Dignity	Being able to shop, EBT card versus stamp book, being seen, wanting to be heard.
Perceptions of them by others	As a ‘taker’, not trying, lazy, distant, unhelpful, working <i>for</i> the system
Joy /emotion	Having extra to buy something special, guilty pleasure, assisting a client, sharing, being open, expressing notions of sadness.
Stigma	Rudeness, disbelief, not hospitable, internalized
Precarity	Food access, food deserts, high priced food, veggies/fruit often rare, space (built environment)
Racism/implicit bias	Coworkers, whiteness conferences, coded language, workplace practices, geographical connotations, ‘those people’, recipient check use patterns
Whiteness	‘Getting it’, nicknames given, acknowledgement
White savior complex	Helping people who can’t help themselves, we’ll do it for them

These themes helped organize the data in a meaningful way and potentially analyze the theme, its expression and what it meant to the data. Each of my respondents: recipient, social worker and poverty organizations, all found themselves interconnected via these mutual experiences.

### Geographical Methodology

Understanding the geographical nature of Milwaukee’s nutritional redlining was similarly integral to data collection. Using Social Explorer, a website interface that uses census level data



to analyze population demographic change over time. The census tracts do extend farther than the neighborhood boundaries, but the neighborhoods of Harambee and Riverwest are denoted by pink and blue boundaries. In addition to the census tracts, archival research informs how the neighborhood that became known as Harambee at one point had grocery stores throughout the neighborhood. Just like the white flight that created a vacuum, so did the movement of grocery stores. While not all the corner stores are noted in the maps, the focal neighborhood is Harambee and is compared to the large land area that surrounds it. The city boundaries that surround Harambee show how far full-stock grocery stores are from Harambee. Similarly important, the maps detailing the location of grocery stores are not an exclusive city list but show that in a small area like the upper and lower east side, there are more grocery stores than in the neighborhood of Harambee.

### Limitations

By virtue of being a qualitatively focused study, it lacks the ability for me to truly generalize these experiences for a whole population. What is important about this research is that while my participant pool was small, I found that many of the respondents would detail similar experiences about how they navigated poverty. Another limitation is quite simply, the interpretation. It would be foolish to think every white, ciswoman researcher will have the same analysis as what follows in these pages – because the idea and understanding of whiteness and racial knowledge is not shared in the same way by every person.

Much of the interactions throughout the project were built over time and a level of trust was necessary before I was ever able to interview people at the pantry. Building rapport takes time, effort, consistency, patience and understanding – and many of those things are learned over the course of data collection. For example, a white researcher *may be knowledgeable* in their

field, but upon entering the doors of the location that will be observed, the researcher is no longer the “expert”. Knowing how whiteness functions and manifests is important because one’s whiteness necessarily needs to be acknowledged and understood. Until that moment happens, communities of color are understandably wary and mistrustful of white people and in this instance, white researchers that data collect in marginalized communities. That acknowledgement and historical awareness of how whiteness takes up space, informs my analytical framework which might differ from another white scholar.

It is perhaps important to note that approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as well as completion of CITI training for interviewing human subjects. Once the approval was given, I started dispersing my interview flyers around the city. The following chapters detail the results of these themes listed above.

### Chapter 3: Food Insecurity in an American City

Like an unspoken marker, Holton Avenue runs through the heart of Milwaukee's northside and separates two different worlds, one black and the other white. While hiding in plain sight, it helps visualize Milwaukee's unwanted honor as the most segregated city of America (Frey 2018). The modern Milwaukee cannot be understood without the understanding that its history is characterized by segregation, poverty, food and economic insecurity, including the lack of access to stores selling nutritious foods. Locally known as the 'Selma of the North', Milwaukee's racial history makes it an interesting case because of its position in the northern part of the nation, and its perception to be out of the range of common racial geographies (Golightly 1963; Jones 2009). Much of the racism discourse during the decades of the 1940s through the 1970s focuses on the Southeastern United States with their explicit 'Jim Crow' Laws and de jure segregation – or segregation by law. However, just because the northern states were not governed by these laws does not make them innocent. Northern states used what some scholars might argue as a more insidious form of segregation – which is de facto segregation – or segregation commonly led by emotions, attitudes and feelings -which is significantly harder to demonstrably 'prove' (Bell 2004; Crenshaw 1995; Wilson 2016). It's hard to 'prove' that infrastructure created barriers in particularly non-white communities, because there are ways to use coded discourse and talk *around* that (Bell 1976, 1980, 2004).

This presence and absence might geographically represent the notion of real and symbolic annihilation. Real annihilation is configured via the destruction of buildings, homes and businesses. Symbolic annihilation manifests in Milwaukee's northside by being both present and absent in people's minds – in terms of how people might focus and erase its business and residential areas. Milwaukee's racial history gained attention with the marches across the 16<sup>th</sup>

street bridge, led by the Milwaukee chapter of the NAACP, Freedom House and Fr. James Groppi during the late 1960s, which are well-documented by Jones' *March on Milwaukee Civil Rights History Project*, and maintained by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives Library (Jones 2009, 2013).

This chapter highlights two neighborhoods as examples of Milwaukee's racial history and its change over half a century. Using information from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives, Milwaukee Black Historical Society, United States Social Explorer, and Census data, this chapter attempts to show demonstrable racial change over time with geographical food deserts and food insecurity which create and maintain spatial mismatch and difference. Understanding the creation and maintenance of nutritional redlining is just as important as understanding barriers to housing and educational equality in a northern city (Cho and Clark 2019; Eisenhauer 2001; Heynen et al. 2012; McBride 2007). Let us explore manifestations of how geography, poverty, inequality in terms of proximity to food insecurity play a role in the city of Milwaukee's past and present.

### Results of Urban Inequality

Structural geographic inequities have at times disparately impacted Black and brown residents in the most horrific way. While a similar impact hit Milwaukee, Klinenberg (2002) wrote about a heatwave that occurred in Chicago, Illinois in 1995 that disproportionately killed over 700 Black and brown people living on the south and west sides of the city. During this event, local officials tried to downplay the aftermath – many of the bodies were stored in refrigerator trucks and families were unable to have access to their loved ones (Klinenberg 2015). More importantly, this event showed an example of government breakdown – whereby crumbling or unattended infrastructure left residents and humans in dire situations. In addition to

the issue of infrastructure, it also shows failure on multiple fronts because many of the deaths were seniors, but connectedly, many of the deaths were due to the abandonment of poor neighborhoods. There was a lack of access to cooling centers and personal air conditioners, nor were electrical/power lines maintained to combat the intense heat for residents in specific neighborhoods of the city (Klinenberg 2015). This neighborhood abandonment (lack of infrastructure, reduction of welfare aids, etc.) by cities is in large part what helps facilitate geographical sites of embodied inequality. As a result, hundreds of people died due to these intersecting institutional failures (Klinenberg 2015).

As we will find in the remaining pages of this chapter, Milwaukee's spatial mapping and food insecurity emerged over time. While Milwaukeeans are not dying as a result of "starvation"<sup>5</sup> they are blocked from accessing fresh foods, vegetables, fruits, etc., that are important to ensure cardiovascular health and overall bodily health. Ruth Wilson Gilmore wrote "racism is the unequal distribution of death," when she discussed the prison industrial complex. In the context of food and nutrition, in Milwaukee, the spatial deficits in food access create the inability to access adequate care and help reduce life expectancy for Black and brown residents on Milwaukee's North Side (Sundaram-Stukel and Pearson 2016).

While the work that follows is not explicitly about death, it does show how institutional abandonment has detrimental effects on people, bodies and food security. Roberts (1997) noted that health inequalities for Black, Brown and African American people are often seen via negative outcomes in overall health. These outcomes include maternal mortality, preterm birth rates and weights, and cardiovascular health. These are often compounded by Black and brown peoples' lack of access to doctors in their area, or doctors who believe the reported symptoms

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<sup>5</sup> How we often think about hunger is emaciation, which is extreme and does not take into account the ways that food insecurity means not meeting dietary needs.

that their clients are experiencing (Hoffman et al. 2016). However, researchers note that this is less about the individual's health decisions and more about the environment and factors that racism and inequality that impact a person over their lifespan (Hoffman et al. 2016; Pulido 2000; D. Roberts 2011; Roberts 1997).

Americans are unusual in the way poverty is manifested and maintained and how poverty discourse is internalized and discussed. Poverty is as much related to the economy as it is geographically created and maintained. Poverty and segregation are not just economic constructions but are also embodied, meaning that access to healthcare, clean air, and education, matter and can be visually mapped onto and into the built environment. Hence, we may explore and explain things like nutrition and food deserts on maps. However, to take it one step further, these maps do not simply display inequalities, they also visualize proximity to death.

#### Milwaukee: The Gathering Place and the Good Land

While discussing contemporary Milwaukee, it makes sense to honor its indigenous heritage, which accounts for its name, thanks to its original inhabitants, the Potawatomi, Ojibwe and Algonquian tribes (Prigge 2018). Different indigenous tribes attribute the etymology of Milwaukee as the "Good Land" or the "Gathering Place" and as someone who is not affiliated with these tribes, it seems important to detail the variety of names for Milwaukee (Prigge 2018). Geographically, Milwaukee is cut in half, East to West, by the Milwaukee River and North and South by the Menominee River Valley.

Redlining maps, as shown by Map 1, drawn for the city of Milwaukee show how social constructions of race and class are created. Redlining, or the process of deciding where and where not to give out home mortgage loans were prevalent during the 1930s. Created as part of Roosevelt's New Deal legislation in 1933, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) was the

leader in and condoned legally discriminatory mortgage lending via the manner it graded neighborhoods in cities at the time. Studies show that these grading patterns hold through to today – with many areas that were described as ‘hazardous’ as now being Black and Brown areas and areas that were declining as low-to-moderate income neighborhoods (Mitchell and Franco 2018; Rothstein 2017)). The following maps explicitly detail these by designating each with a grade and color rating, exemplified by Image A: Green was A which meant “Best” , Blue areas with B meant “Still Desirable”, Yellow areas with C meant “Definitely Declining” and were flagged as caution and finally Red and its associated D indicated “Hazardous” ( Mitchell and Franco 2018; Rothstein 2017).

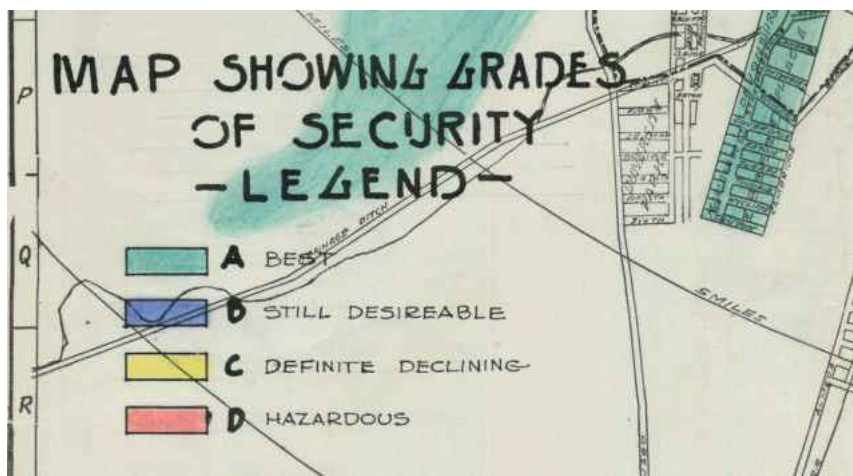
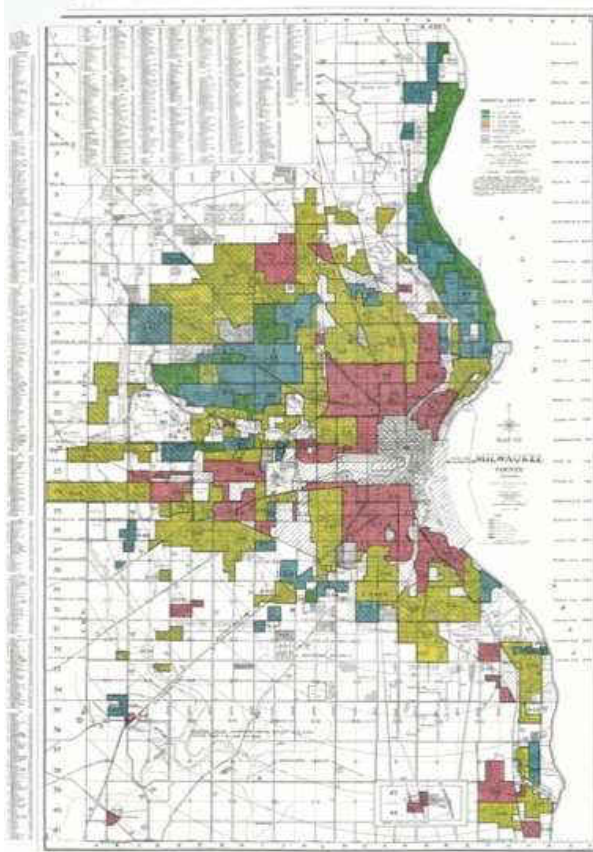


Image A

Map 1 and Image B detail the redlining map, and ‘gold coast’ refers to an area of substantial wealth along a coastal area, often with homes that are described as ‘mansions’. This area, which includes today’s Lower and Upper East Sides, at the time were labeled C and D, which indicate ‘definitely declining’ and ‘hazardous’ because at the time, “lower class” homes and apartments were being made available to “lower class” individuals. However, it is interesting to note that these labels are created by class designations and depended on the class status of the incoming group and housing availability, which the HOLC configured as the Lower East Sides

declining class status. For example, some areas are favorable towards Polish or Italian or German people if they were seen as professional or higher-class workers, versus unfavorable when the same groups were considered working class or low wage workers. Therefore, whiteness was drawn in these maps along class lines versus racial lines. These lines change and factor both race and class if Black people and families were moving into the area.

The Southside has been distinctly ethnic, shifting from a predominantly Polish and Eastern European heritage, the HOLC documents claiming that “Mexicans are encroaching in the northeast,” in the 1940s (Nelson, et. al. *Mapping Inequality*). In this way, Mexican and Latinx migrants are seen as an invading entity to the established Polish residents currently living there. However, today much of the old Polish history, Catholic churches and other parks remain.



Map 1 [Milwaukee designations of red, green, blue, yellow]



However, perhaps more explicit is how the city and its residents cultivated the movement and enclosing of Black residents over time in Milwaukee. In an interview with Reverend Ellwanger, a prominent pastor in the Milwaukee area, it was noted that in his time as pastor at Cross Lutheran Church, which is located just a bit southwest from Gathering People's Lutheran Church, that in the early 1960s, the church and area was whiter. In the 1940s, evaluating the HOLC's redlining maps, the areas that are emphasized in the census maps is also the area identified as not just Black, or as written at the time, 'negro', they were also described as Jewish, infiltration.

FORM # 10-1-37  
**AREA DESCRIPTION - SECURITY MAP OF MILWAUKEE AREA**

1. AREA CHARACTERISTICS:

a. Description of Terrain. Level with a pitch north.

b. Favorable Influences. All utilities — schools — transportation

c. Detrimental Influences. Negro and slum areas — condemnation proceedings going on.

d. Percentage of land improved 90 %; e. Trend of desirability next 10-15 yrs. Down

2. INHABITANTS: Laborers and

a. Occupations Upper-downwells ; b. Estimated annual family income \$ -

c. Foreign-born families 2 % ; Immigrant desc. pre-dominating; d. Negroes 100 %

e. Infiltration of Russian Jews ; f. Polish families many

g. Population is increasing Yes ; decreasing - ; static -

3. BUILDINGS:

	PREDOMINATING 40 %	OTHER TYPE 30 %	OTHER TYPE 10 %
a. Type	Singles, 4 to 6 up	1 - 2 units	Apts. - 6-15 units
b. Construction	Frame	Frame	Brick
c. Average Age	31-75 Years	30-75 Years	30 Years
d. Repair	Poor	Bad	Fair
e. Occupancy	77 %	77 %	77 %
f. Home ownership	10 %	10 %	5 %
g. Constructed past yr.	None	None	None
h. 1930 Price range	\$1000-4500	\$4000-8000	\$15,000-25,000
i. 1950 Price range	\$1800-4800	\$3200-6100	\$8000-20,000

4. AVAILABILITY OF MORTGAGE FUNDS: a. Home purchase, None ; (1) Home building, None

5. CLARIFYING REMARKS: This is the Negro and slum area of Milwaukee. It is old and very degraded. Besides the colored people, a large number of lower type Jews are moving into the section. This section housed Milwaukee's wealthiest families seventy years ago.

6. NAME AND LOCATION MILWAUKEE, WIS. SECURITY GRADE D AREA NO. 2

6. NAME AND LOCATION MILWAUKEE, WIS. SECURITY GRADE D AREA NO. 2

Image B

Image B exemplifies how the HOLC went a step further and not only included anti-black sentiments in their analyses of neighborhoods, but also anti-Semitic sentiments. The HOLC did not just stop at anti-Black and anti-Semitic assumptions, they also included classist remarks about the individuals moving into the area. This is highlighted by their phrase “lower type Jews”, which should give anyone pause, because at the time these documents were being collected and written in 1937, Jewish individuals and families were experiencing high-levels of racist violence in Germany and abroad. Loewen (2018) describes a series of restrictive covenants that were bolstered by anti-Black racism and anti-Semitism coupled with classism that paved the way for Jewish people to be included in restrictive covenants as well. Restrictive covenants essentially prohibited non-whites from purchasing homes from white home sellers (Rothstein 2017).

The HOLC was inconsistent in their anti-Semitism, because unlike Black and brown families, the HOLC could see through their ‘Jewishness’ for some Jewish families if their class status was high enough. That does not make this better, nor should it be seen as a more ‘suitable’ type of anti-Semitism, but it also showed that in some cases, closeness to the appearance of whiteness and having access to wealth was still considered better than being Black or brown and moving into or already existing in a neighborhood. This is exemplified in an HOLC document, Image C, which profiled an area on the North side of Milwaukee, on Center Street near Sherman and Washington Park (presently part of the Black north side) but not yet experiencing the movement of Black families northward. While in some cases, Jewish families were not seen as white, apparently this was mediated by “a steady influx of Jews of a substantial class” coming in from the red and yellow areas. Loewen (2018:155) notes that Black and African American movements in cities, often followed Jewish families due to suspicions that these covenants would

be used against Jewish families and essentially had to permit Black and African Americans to purchase their homes due to worries these restrictive covenants could be used against them.

FORM # 10-1-27

AREA DESCRIPTION - SECURITY MAP OF MILWAUKEE AREA

1. AREA CHARACTERISTICS:

a. Description of Terrain. Level.

b. Favorable Influences. All utilities — schools — transportation.

c. Detrimental Influences. Two cemeteries at northwest.

d. Percentage of land improved 28 %; e. Trend of desirability next 10-15 yrs. Static - Down

2. INHABITANTS: Business, clerical,

a. Occupation professional ; b. Estimated annual family income \$ 1000-8000  
skilled labor

c. Foreign-born families 10 %; Irish, German predominating; d. Negro 0 % ; e. \$

e. Infiltration of Jews ; f. Belief families Few

g. Population is increasing Static ; decreasing — ; static —

3. BUILDINGS:

	EXHIBITING	60 %	OTHER TYPE	40 %	OTHER TYPE	— %
a. Type	<u>Singles</u>		<u>Duplexes</u>			
b. Construction	<u>Frame, brick</u>		<u>Frame 50%</u> <u>Brick 50%</u>			
c. Average Age	<u>1-40 Years</u>		<u>1-25 Years</u>			
d. Repair	<u>Good</u>		<u>Good</u>			
e. Occupancy	<u>99 %</u>		<u>95 %</u>			
f. Home ownership	<u>75 %</u>		<u>60 %</u>			
g. Constructed past yr.	<u>5</u>		<u>None</u>			
h. 1929 Price range	<u>\$ 2,000-20,000</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>\$ 2,000-10,000</u>	<u>80%</u>		<u>100%</u>
i. 1936 Price range	<u>\$ 2,500-12,000</u>	<u>60%</u>	<u>\$ 8000-14,000</u>	<u>75%</u>		<u>5%</u>
j. 37-38 Price range	<u>\$ 2,500-14,000</u>	<u>60%</u>	<u>\$ 8000-14,000</u>	<u>78%</u>		<u>5%</u>
k. Sales demand	<u>\$ Under 2,000</u>		<u>\$ Under 2,000</u>			
l. Activity	<u>Fair</u>		<u>Fair</u>			
m. 1929 Rent range	<u>\$ 45 - 100</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>\$ 55 - 125</u>	<u>100%</u>		<u>100%</u>
n. 1936 Rent range	<u>\$ 45 - 70</u>	<u>70%</u>	<u>\$ 30 - 55</u>	<u>55%</u>		<u>5%</u>
o. 37-38 Rent range	<u>\$ 50 - 75</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>\$ 40 - 70</u>	<u>58%</u>		<u>5%</u>
p. Rental demand	<u>\$ 50</u>		<u>\$ 35</u>			
q. Activity	<u>Good</u>		<u>Good</u>			

4. AVAILABILITY OF MORTGAGE FUNDS: a. Home purchase Ample ; b. Home building Ample

5. CLARIFYING REMARKS: This is a spotty area, but is a substantial neighborhood. There is a steady influx of Jews of a substantial class coming in from the yellow and red areas to the east, more especially along Center Street, Sherman Park to the northeast and Washington Park is to the southeast. The area is intersected with business streets and enjoys their adequate and quick transportation to downtown. The eastern portion and center of area are older sections.

6. NAME AND LOCATION MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN SECURITY GRADE B AREA NO. 9

Image C, HOLC document, which details the clarifying remarks.

## Harambee & Riverwest: Divergent Neighborhoods

I will now focus on a neighborhood located on the Northside of deeply segregated Milwaukee. Harambee is home to a predominantly Black population that borders a mostly predominantly white neighborhood, Riverwest. The name Harambee was adapted in the 1970s and signifies a Swahili word for ‘pulling together’ – which is a theme that runs throughout the neighborhood. Over the years, community initiative projects and programs tried to revive the area since the rapid change in the 1960s to be shown in the following maps. The spirit of community building is a thread that holds the fabric of Harambee together, and much of that is done through the work at Gathering People’s Lutheran Church.

References to “west of the river” act as a geographical descriptor that helps construct particular perceptions of racial communities in the city of Milwaukee. Some researchers refer to Riverwest as ‘diverse,’ and it is if you look at population percentages as a whole. However, if you break up the neighborhood into its various census tracts, the viewer might notice the areas where neither white nor Black residents are moving into either tract.

Harambee neighborhood sits in contrast with Riverwest, with the defining line between the two neighborhoods being Holton Avenue. This definitive line of Holton Avenue highlights the stark nature of Milwaukee’s segregation. While the study respondents live in various Milwaukee neighborhoods, many cited Harambee as where they spend or have spent a significant amount their time. Many respondents noted that they had history in the neighborhood, by either having family there or living their themselves at one point. Harambee is a representative neighborhood in terms of shops and residents that make up the rest of the northside. One might ask, how does this happen?

## White Flight and Visualized Segregation

Milwaukee, like Chicago, likes to call itself a city of neighborhoods, which is really just putting a pleasant face on racial segregation. Often these neighborhoods are historically created via redlining, white flight or restrictive covenants that governed residential areas over time. White flight, or the movement of white people out to the suburbs, led to high rates of deindustrialization and also the creation of disenfranchised and abandoned areas in metro areas (Wilson 1977).

Therefore, many of the neighborhoods that cities like Milwaukee pride themselves on are built on systemic, structural and institutional discrimination and racism. However, much of this history remains unknown or unrecognized, particularly by white individuals. The theories of the Chicago School of Sociology place segregation, racism and classism as natural outcomes of human existence due to people wanting to live near people who share interests, values and perceived phenotypes.

Scholars often discuss white flight as a concept, but it becomes even more apparent when you visualize population change over time. I have visualized this change in maps built via Social Explorer using census data. Social Explorer is a web-based site that allows the user to create and analyze census data and other demographics using maps that date back to 1790. These maps also identify census tracts and how they changed more frequently for one neighborhood than the other. For example, prior to 1940, the census was just county wide, but in the 1940 census tracts were designated nationally. Because of the changes and increases in population sizes, census tracts were developed from other delineations of space and geographic mapping (census.gov). Census tracts are supposed to be relatively permanent; however, if there are population changes various tracts can be merged, split or new ones can be created. If necessary, these arbitrary

census tracts can be split into smaller tracts if they have more than 8,000 people and merged with a nearby tract if they have less than 1,200 people.

### *Maps*

The below maps attempt to display why Harambee and Riverwest are so different and how these two neighborhoods have changed over time (or not). Originally, the Harambee neighborhood was settled by German immigrants in the 1800s, but like many neighborhoods on the Northside of Milwaukee, and other cities in the northern Midwest, it experienced similar events in white flight, with white residents moving out and Black and African Americans moving in due effects of de facto segregation. Map 2 displays Harambee outlined by the pink rectangle, its corresponding census tracts in red and Riverwest outlined by the Blue census tracts. The yellow dots indicate Black populations and the green indicate white populations. On the below maps, Holton Avenue is indicated by the vertical pink line that borders blue census tracts that outline areas in Riverwest.

The following maps are an attempt to visualize this discrepancy and to highlight the incredible segregation occurring within this city, compounded by the entrenchment of internal colonialism. Often, the concept of colonialism is where an outside force takes control over another area; for example, when the British empire-controlled India (as one example) or when the United States colonized Hawaii, Puerto Rico or Guam. Blauner (1969) notes that internal colonialism emerges when an area, like a neighborhood within a city, experiences those same issues, and is defined by clear and distinct boundaries and the lack of services that many other areas take for granted. Much of the discussion of Milwaukee is consistently about segregation, but Blauner (1969) adds to the complexity by noting that internal colonialism is related to

keeping populations corralled in distinct areas. Therefore, the maps detail not only segregation but also internal colonialism of non-white populations as well.

Indicated in Map 2, now known as Harambee, we find a significant white population indicated by the high concentration of green dots from the census in 1940. While some of the census tracts transcend the border of Harambee, the white population was just over 50,000 white residents and just under 1,000 Black residents. This contrasts with over 20,000 white residents and zero Black residents in Riverwest at this time.

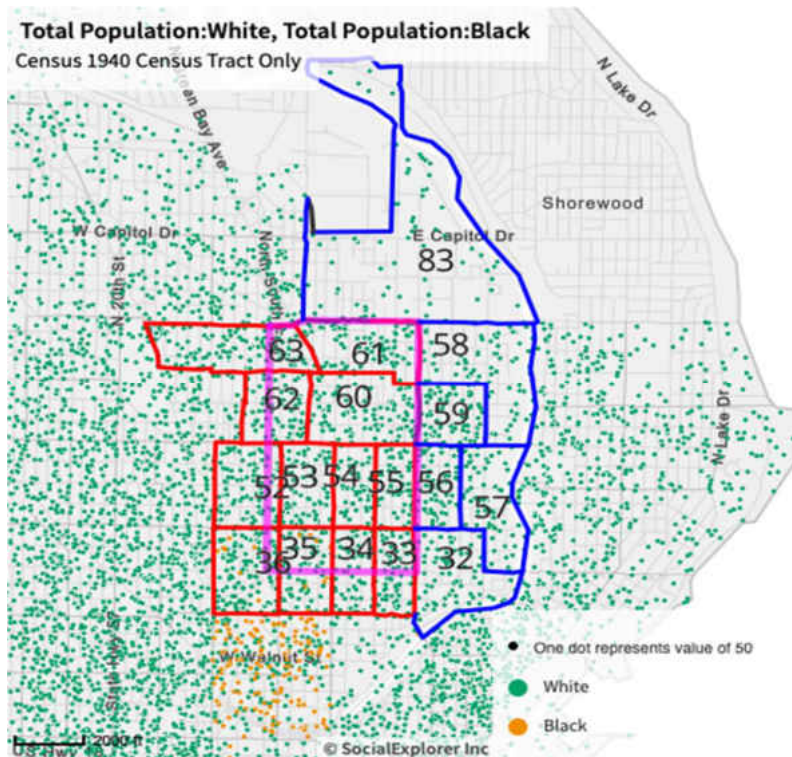
Archival research at the Milwaukee Public Library revealed that the area of North Third Street and Auer (which was renamed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the 1980s), within the boundaries of the Harambee neighborhood, had a bustling commercial center. Image D shows a photo from 1948, which pictures a Walgreens, Kohl's produce store (which later became the Kohl's department store) and a well-connected street-car system. Not to mention that there was a Rapid Transit connection nearby that transported residents to nearby towns such as Cedarburg, Sheboygan and Port Washington (all predominately white). These modes of transportation within and outside the city no longer exist, which begs the question regarding the removal of these systems. Especially because much of this change occurred after the demographic change from predominantly white to an influx of overwhelmingly Black and African American residents to the area.





Image D

In order to visualize Image D above and place it in context of Map 1, the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Auer is essentially the upper left corner of census tract 60. At this time throughout the 1940s, this area of the map has a significant white population. However, consistent with HOLC documents detailing Black ‘encroachment’, Map 1 does show Black populations increasing in the bottom, almost middle of the map.



Map 2



The maps detail a change from 1940 through to 1950 wherein there is an increasing Black population in the areas below census tracts 35 and 35 on Map 2 above. Depicted below in Image E and F, the Milwaukee Green Book<sup>6</sup> was a book that detailed businesses that were friendly or open to Black and African American people, and the information within its spine would limit the potential for danger for African American and Black travelers in the area. There were Green Books for most states and also a national green book, for motorists that wanted to safely explore the United States.<sup>7</sup> The businesses included in the book were located with addresses mostly in the areas of census tracts 35 and 36. The book details many places in Milwaukee, and indicates that the new city had a developing and thriving Black Wall Street, with quality grocery stores, lawyers, beauty shops, etc., within its borders. (This of course does not indicate that Milwaukee welcomed Black and African residents – businesses simply served an emerging clientele.)

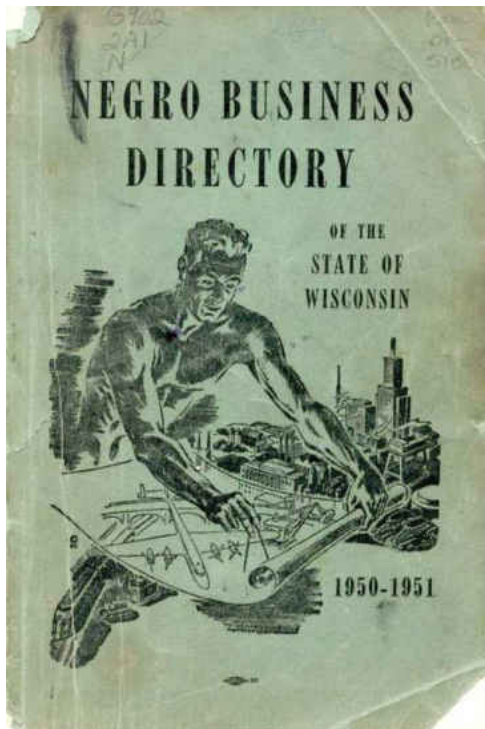


Image E

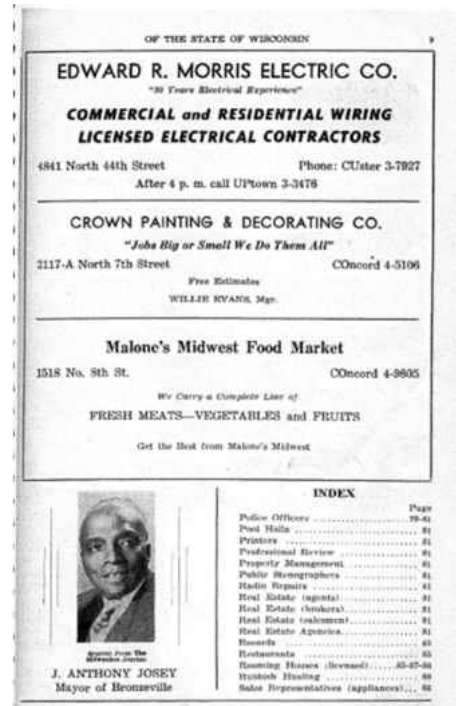
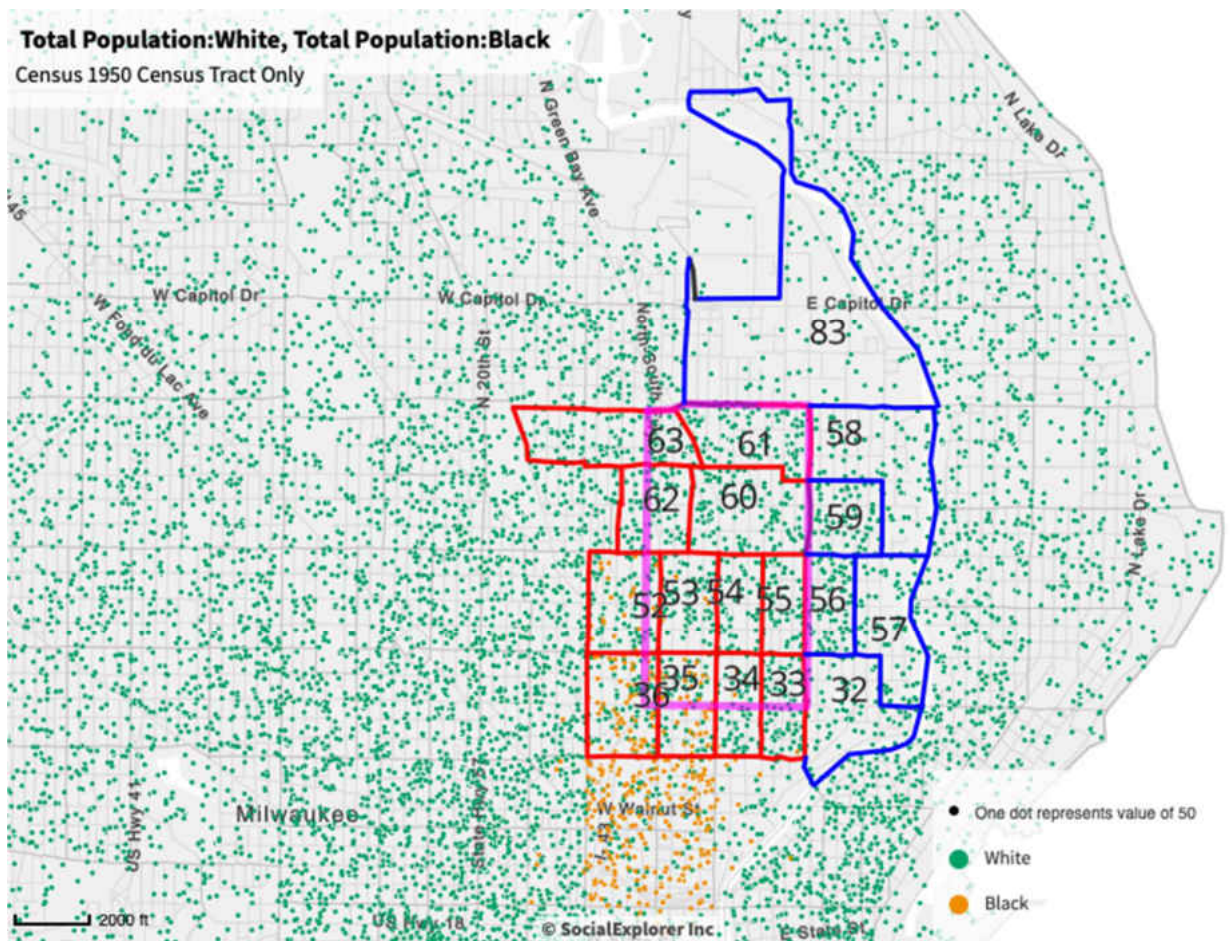


Image F

<sup>6</sup> Green Books were popular and accessible between the years of 1936 and 1967.

<sup>7</sup> This was not depicted accurately in the most recent film, "The Green Book".

Moving forward to 1950, Map 3 displays an increasing Black population moving northward with the same demarcations as Map 2 with the new residents staying a distance from the Holton Avenue Harambee/Riverwest border. The census data visualized from 1950 captures the beginning white flight from Harambee, with just over 45,000 white residents and 7,000 Black residents. Riverwest at this time is just over 21,000 white people and a burgeoning population of 5 Black people. These maps not only visualize segregation and enduring issues of internal colonialism, they also detail the HOLC's redlining discrimination. The area detailed in 35 and 36 and northward are where the HOLC designated neighborhoods as declining (Mitchell and Franco 2018).



Map 3

Map 4 is drawn using census data from 1960, details a growing Black population in Harambee but a relatively stable white population in the Riverwest area to the east. In 1960, the Harambee Black population edges out the white population at over 26,000 people to 21,600 white residents. While there are large numbers of white residents, they are quite visibly corralled into the 55, 60 and 61 census tracts. Through this 10-year period, from 1950 to 1960, we see a developing boundary area that illustrates Blauner's concept of internal colonialism.

During the 1960s in Milwaukee were a relatively tumultuous time – like many cities across the United States and in the North and North East, there were marches and demands for racial equality (Jones 2009, 2013). Local activists like Representative Vel Phillips, Lloyd Barbee and Fr. Groppi advocated at the local and state level for fair housing, access to equal education and job opportunities. Just shy of 20 years after Image D was taken in 1948, Milwaukee was one of the cities experiencing race riots the summer of 1967 along the same streets pictured.

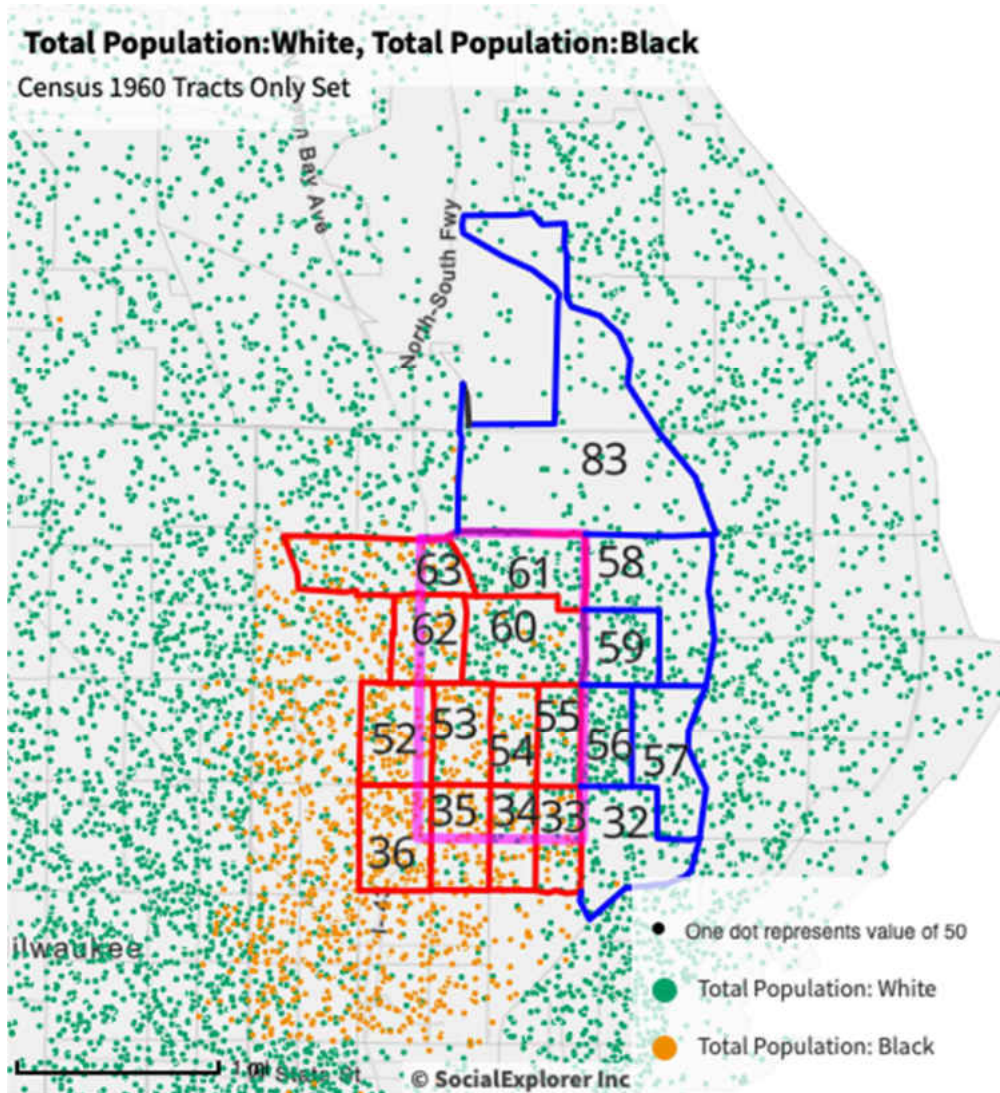
During the decades between 1940 and 1970, Milwaukee, like other northern cities, was experiencing the Great Migration, or the largest demographic shift of Black or African Americans moving from the South up through to the North (Geib 1998; Jones 2007; Sernett 1997; Trotter Jr 2002). Like many other northern cities, Milwaukee was the destination point for many people who formerly lived in the south and sought better jobs and “safer” communities (Jones 2007; Trotter Jr 2002). Many respondents in the study recalled memories of either moving up with their parents or moving themselves, depending on how old they were at the time. The respondents who identified as Black or African American, moved from Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Missouri. These moves are consistent with United States history and particularly Black and African Americans moving north.

Adding to the effects of the riots, instead of seeking to remedy community relations, shops decided to pull business out from the area and move elsewhere – essentially practicing business white flight. One example of this might be the store, Lerner Foods, which was located on what is now MLK and 5<sup>th</sup> and in Map 5 below, located almost on the bottom of the red line between census tracts 63 and 61. Lerner Foods, shown in Image G, shows signs that detail ‘Fresh and Smoked Meats’ and “Fresh Greens Daily”, and the car models indicate that this photo was taken during the 1960s. The building that once was Lerner’s still exists in the area, but no longer houses a grocery store for local residents. Similar grocery stores existed on the north side – with a Kohl’s Grocery Store on 64<sup>th</sup> and Silver Spring, which is not located in Harambee but the area just west of census tract 83 on Figure 6, but was closed sometime later and was replaced with a vacant lot.



Image G





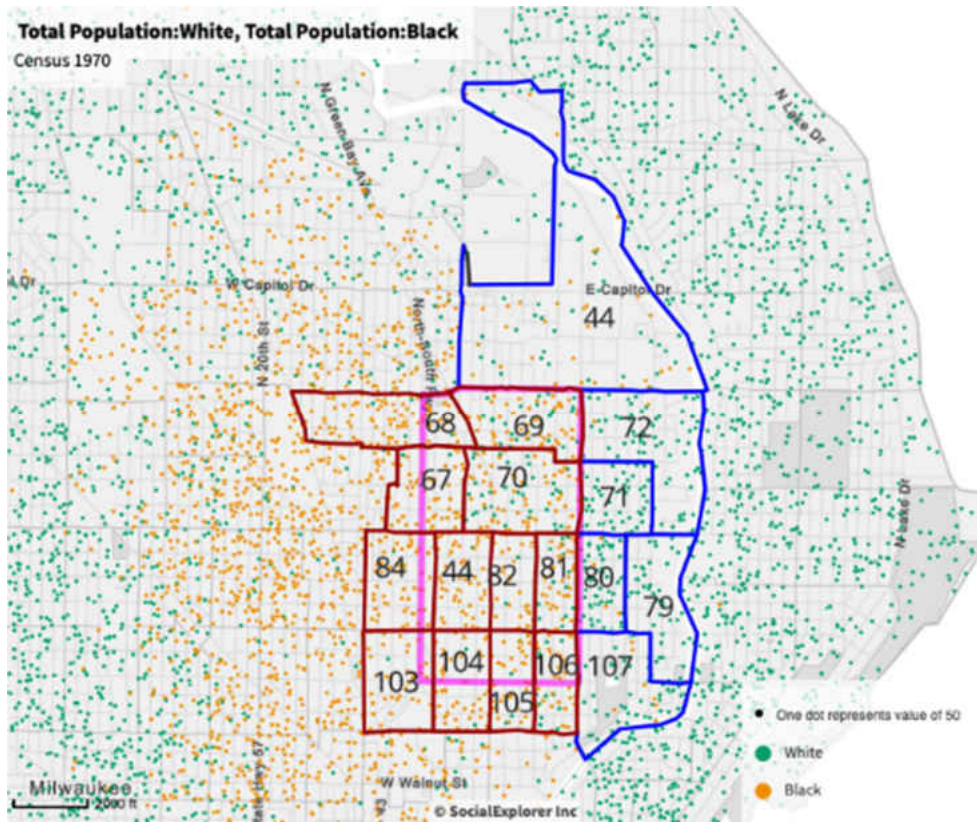
Map 4

The decade between 1960 and 1970 essentially created how the Northside looks at present – albeit smaller. Instead of being a relatively equal number of residents between white and Black people, whites in Map 5 account for solely 6,000 people and Black residents in this area account for almost 32,000 people. This decade clearly displays the phenomenon that was occurring all over northern cities, where the population numbers flip almost completely and what is clearly seen in Harambee and the surrounding Northside is demonstrable white flight and confinement of Milwaukee’s Black population.



Image H

There were two other noticeable changes in the area. One was the creation of new census tracts – due to the drastic population shifts, new tracts were added to account for this change. And the other was the creation of I-43, which essentially decimated Milwaukee’s Bronzeville, often noted for its population of Black residents, removed thousands of homes, at the time in the 1960s would have been mostly Black and African American residents with reduced power to try to stop a large interstate from bifurcating their neighborhood (Niemuth 2014). On Figure 7, I-43 is located along the pink vertical line that cuts through census tracts 103, 84, 67, 68. Not only is white flight part of the problem, but given the construction of Interstate-43, the Bronzeville neighborhood, detailed in the Milwaukee Green Book was systematically destroyed, paving the way for Black and African American families to shift northward, which can be seen in Image H and in the following figures (Niemuth 2014).



Map 5

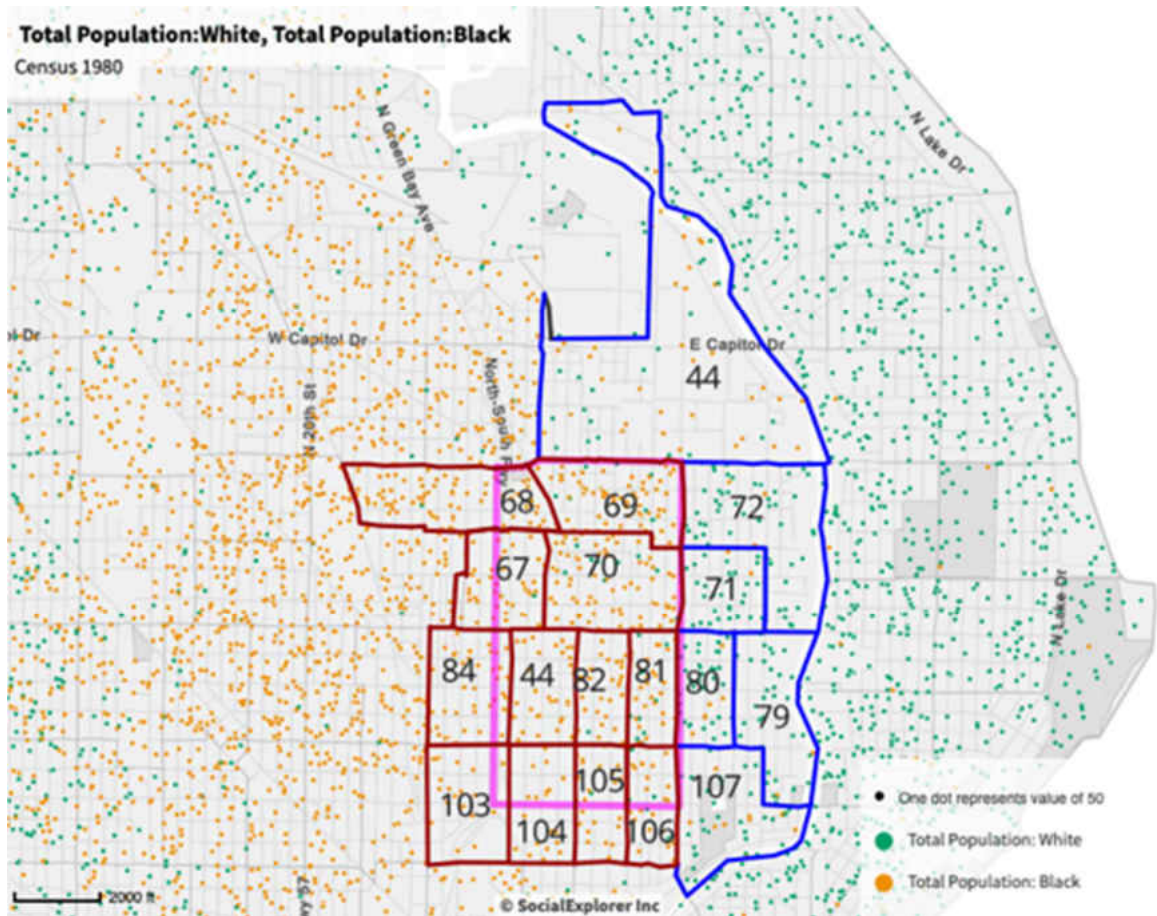
Maps 6-9 visualize for the entrenchment of segregation in Milwaukee, which become more intense through the 1980s through the 2010s. The maps show the growth of the north side expansion of the Black population in Milwaukee bordered by an opposite representation of white residents in the suburbs to the east and northeast.

Unspoken but clearly defined is the demarcation between Harambee and Riverwest along Holton Avenue indicated by the vertical pink line that borders the blue outlined census tracts. What can clearly be seen over the last 40 years is the entrenchment of internal colonialism and the extent of the problem with segregation in a northern city in the United States. During this time, the population changes from almost 100% white in 1940 to almost 100% non-white.

Simultaneously, the effects of white flight and deindustrialization become evident and left large parts of northern cities with predominately Black neighborhoods that were once filled

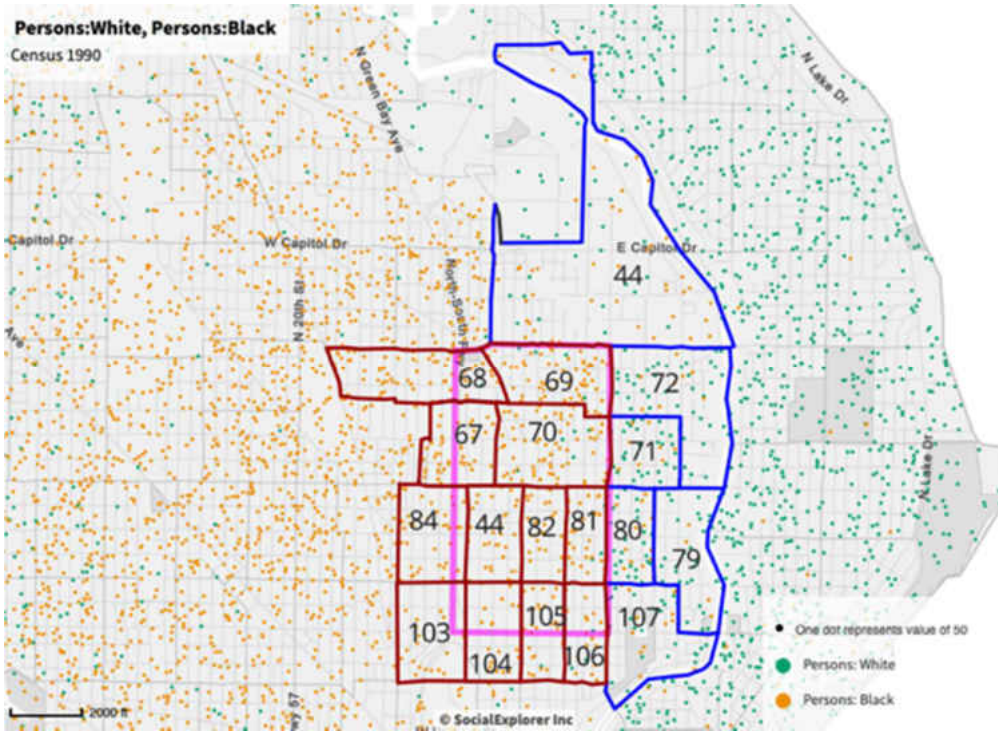


with opportunity now areas that experienced high levels of de-industrialization (Wilson 1977). Located on the northern part of Harambee, there was an AMC manufacturing plant (located just north of census tract 69) that offered stable wages and avenues for employees to have the potential to accrue wealth. In 1985, the plant closed, and thousands of jobs were lost. In its place, a Walmart was built, which pales in comparison to the wages and stable work prospects that the manufacturing sector once provided.

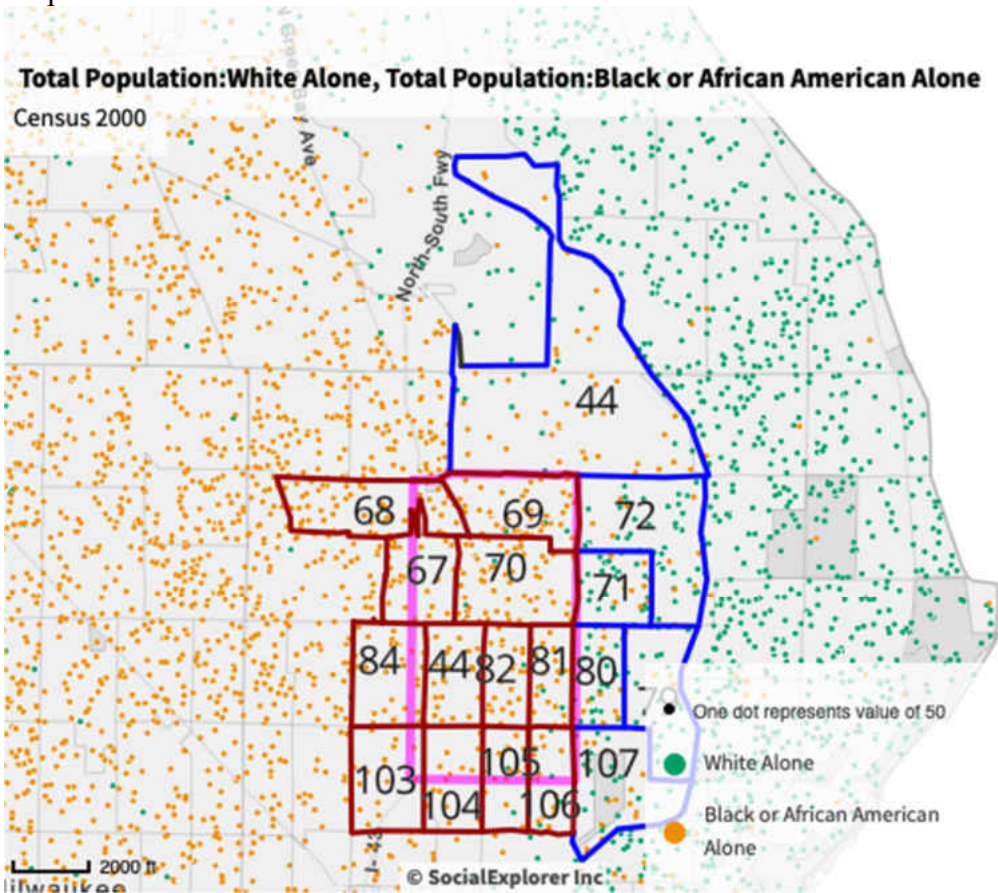


Map 6

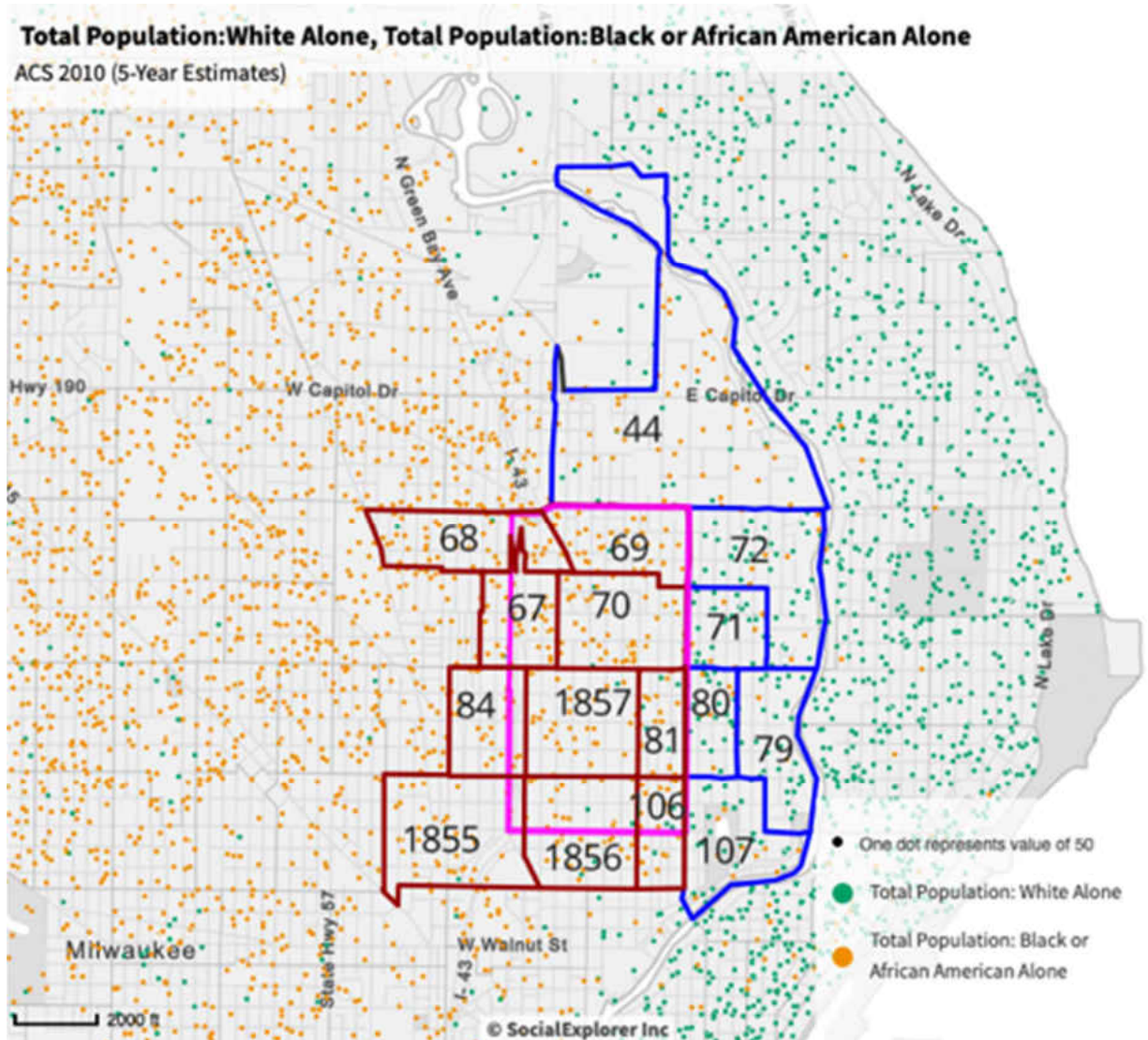




Map 7



Map 8



Map 9

### Milwaukee: An American City

Knowing that Milwaukee is one of the most segregated American cities is one thing, but seeing the change occur over time is another. The 2010 census details the population of Harambee as 80% Black/African American and 3% white. Given the moniker of being Milwaukee's most diverse neighborhood, Riverwest's white population represents 60% of the those who live in the neighborhood while 25% of inhabitants identify as Black or African American. Not only is there a racial disparity between the neighborhoods, the median home price

in 2014 for Riverwest was approximately \$150,000 and for Harambee, \$63,000 - a difference of almost \$100,000, just by crossing one street. Therefore, the ability to accrue wealth through homeownership in Harambee, is completely different just a few blocks away. Harris (1993) notes how whiteness equates to disparate wealth attainment since homes owned by whites often lead to wealth attainment. The median home prices in these two neighborhoods show how strong the connections between race and wealth are to neighborhood demographics.

Even though the HOLC's active discrimination is long over, the remnants of negative home mortgage lending are still in effect. If Riverwest is examined as one whole neighborhood in terms of the percentage of inhabitants who are white and Black like above, it appears to numerically be diverse and more importantly integrated. However, if one takes a more critical look at the above Riverwest population maps, it becomes clear that the more northern and southern census tracts help sandwich the significantly whiter population. This area, in part, has not experienced dramatic shifts like other areas immediately to its west. While Riverwest isn't as white as it used to be, it certainly has not increased its Black population. Visibly missing from these maps are Latinx populations.

For representation, in Image I, each dot equates to 25 people and the colors are as follows: red indicates White populations, dark blue for Black populations, light blue for Asian populations and yellow for Latinx populations. Image 1 was constructed by Fischer in 2011 and details the racial distribution in Milwaukee via the 2010 U.S. Census. To highlight the segregated nature of the city, Latinx and Latino populations are located in the southern area of the city. That is not to say that Latinos do not live in the areas profiled above but they are similarly segregated to the south.



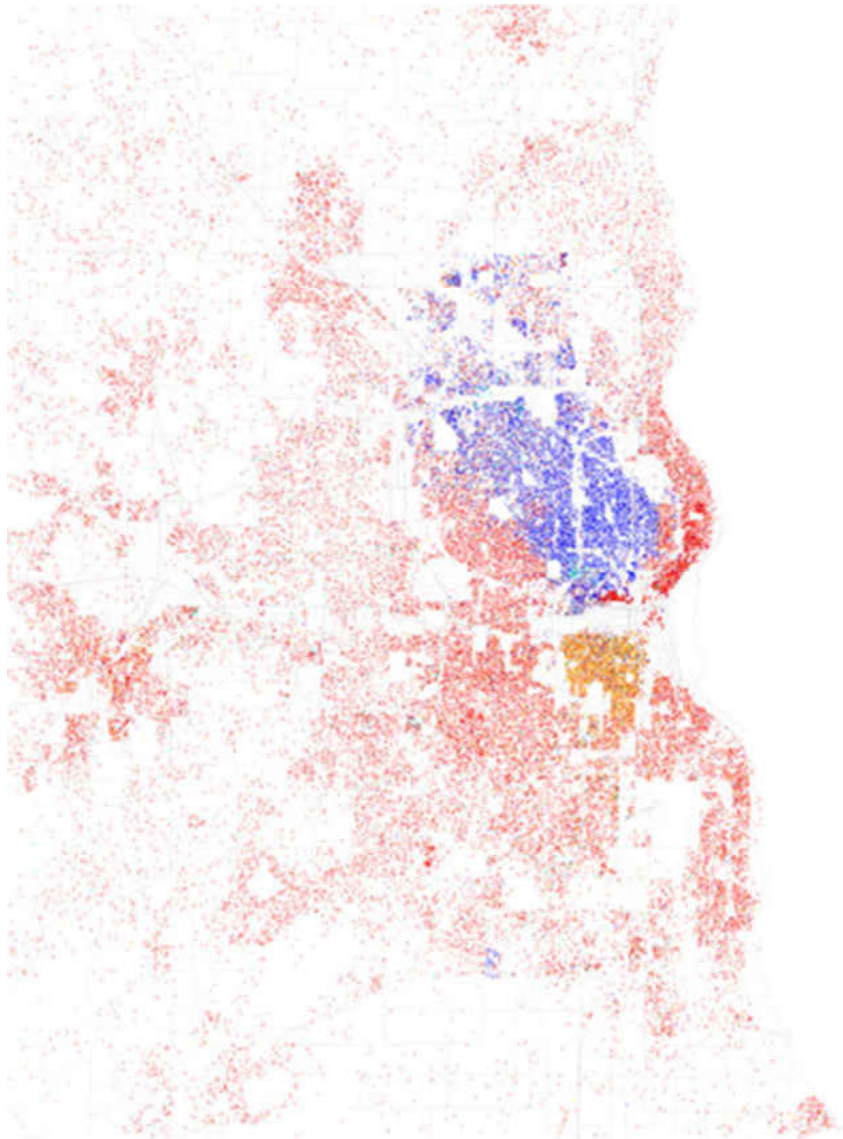


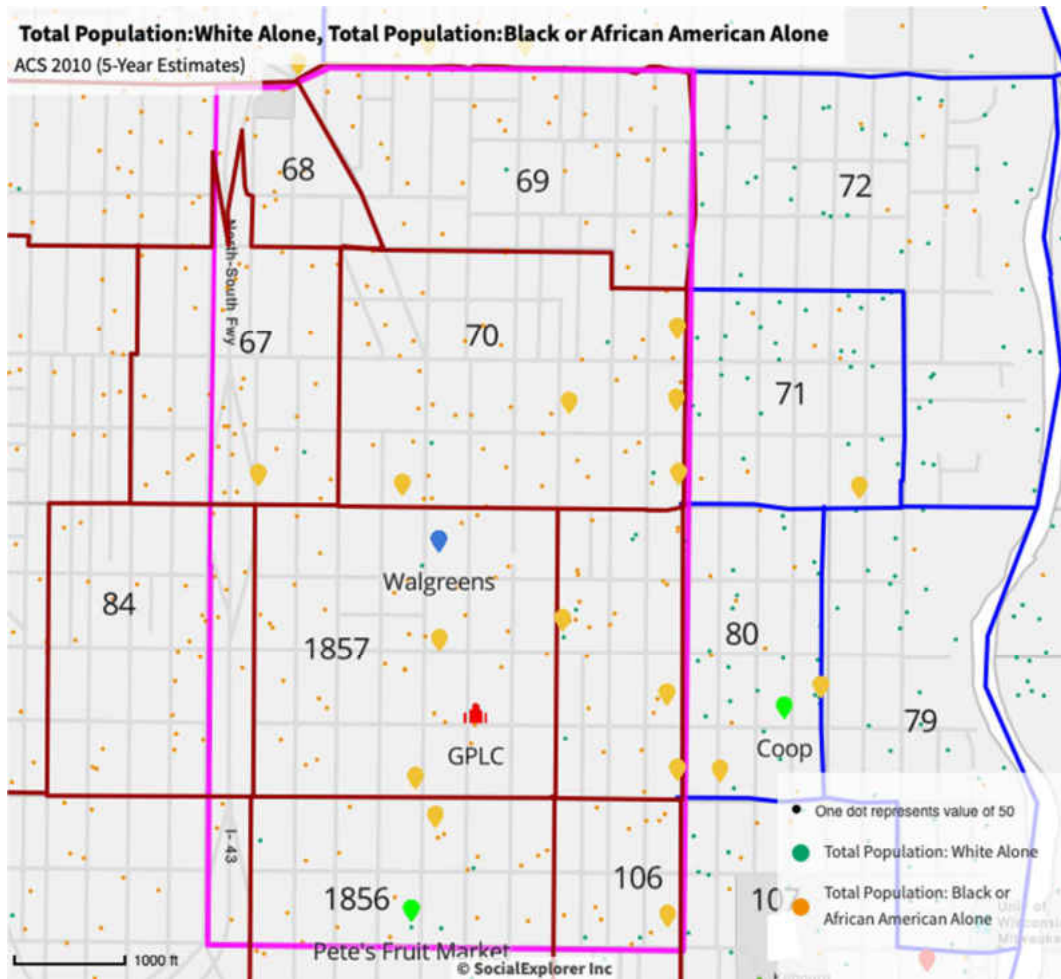
Image I

What does all the above mean?

The above maps clearly document Milwaukee’s racial segregation built up over time via federal regulations and white flight, leading to the lack of access to grocery stores selling nutritious foods (Heynen et al. 2012; Kurtz 2013; Morland et al. 2002; Shannon 2016; Slocum and Saldanha 2016). While there are many claims recently that food deserts do not exist and poor people just choose junk, the below maps work as an attempt to dispel that myth (Mike Schneider 2015). Milwaukee is one example of a city that has food access inequalities – what some

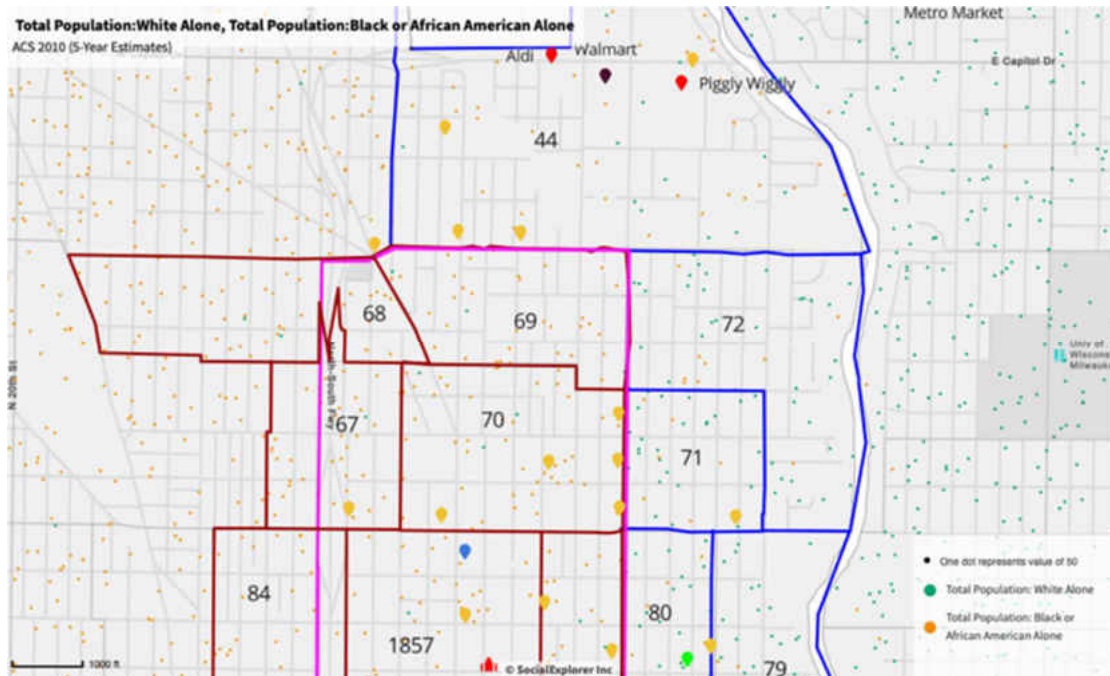
scholars describe as food deserts wherein there is a lack of healthy and fresh food options. Kurtz (2013:248) argues that “food deserts might better be called nutrition deserts, because the term encapsulates a lack of access to nutritious food, and often an over-exposure to unhealthy foods that are high in fat and calories and low in nutritional value.” These are in contrast to a ‘food oasis’ where grocery stores are widely available (Schneider 2015). Food is available in areas that lack a grocery store, but often the options lack fresh fruits and vegetables and if they do stock these items, they are sold at a higher markup than a regular grocery store. One example is Blast Foods on North Avenue, where there was a wide selection of sweets, candy, dairy and processed foods, but no access to fresh vegetables or meat.

Grocery stores selling fresh foods are mostly absent from Harambee. Those that do exist are near or on the periphery of white neighborhoods. Map 10 is a close up of the Harambee neighborhood outlined in pink. Another Blast Foods, located on the North side – similarly Black-owned offered the local community fruits, vegetables and meats, but was forced to closed in 2008. While they own several stores, losing just one in a neighborhood has a significant impact. The red icon denotes Gathering People’s Church, and yellow markers are corner/small stores that sell various items. The green icons are the Riverwest Co-op, a very small store that sells oats, vegan and vegetarian items and has an attached kitchen. The other green marker is Pete’s Fruit Market on North Avenue, which is essentially the border of Harambee. The red marker slightly hidden by the legend is a full stock grocery store, Pick n’ Save.



Map 10

Map 11 details the same area, just a little further north. Map 11 details the location of an Aldi's, Walmart and Piggly Wiggly, another full-stock grocery chain in the area (these are marked by red and deep purple). These three are what people might consider a 'food oasis' because the stores are in close proximity to each other (Slocum and Saldanha 2016; Walker et al. 2010). These low-cost food stores are in areas adjacent to areas with high rates of white residents. What should be noticeable is the lack of red markers, which indicate grocery stores, in Harambee.

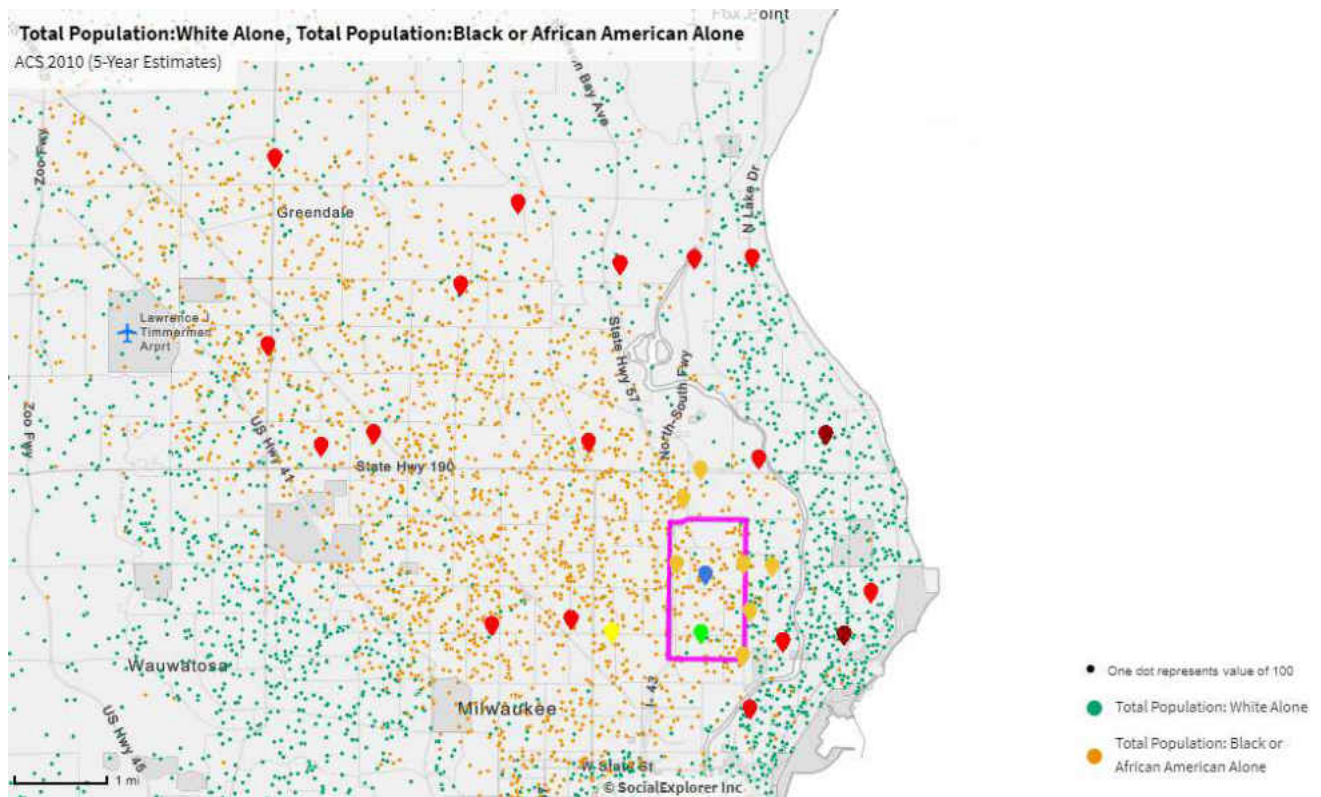


Map 11

## Nutrition Deserts

Map 12 details more explicitly the nutrition desert that exists in Milwaukee county. While there is a great deal of academic discussion of historical redlining in housing markets, this map details nutritional redlining, which is the lack of grocery stores in marginalized areas (Heynen et al. 2012; Kurtz 2013; Slocum and Saldanha 2016). Juxtaposed next to the map of the northside and the great distance that exists between residents and stores, the following map details access to three grocery stores, in relatively close proximity. On the lower east side, there is a Pick n' Save, Metro Market (an upscale supermarket), and another upscale supermarket Fresh Thyme; further north and north east are another Pick n' Save and Whole Foods. Not pictured is the Metro market, which is located north in Shorewood, the southernmost of the suburbs to the northeast of Milwaukee. Given the spatial area (which is almost identical to Harambee), on the east side, one cannot walk without running into a grocery store, chock full of fresh vegetables, fruits and meat.

Map 12 details the entire northside, complete with grocery stores that by and large outline Milwaukee's Black neighborhoods. For context, Harambee is kept on the map, outlined in pink, in order to center the eye on the large expanse that is Milwaukee's north side. While there are three grocery stores within the confines of the northside, they are also in neighborhoods where there is an interstitial or residential buffer zone. This means there is a shift from a predominately Black neighborhood to a white neighborhood and there is some blurring occurring as they transfer based on directionality.

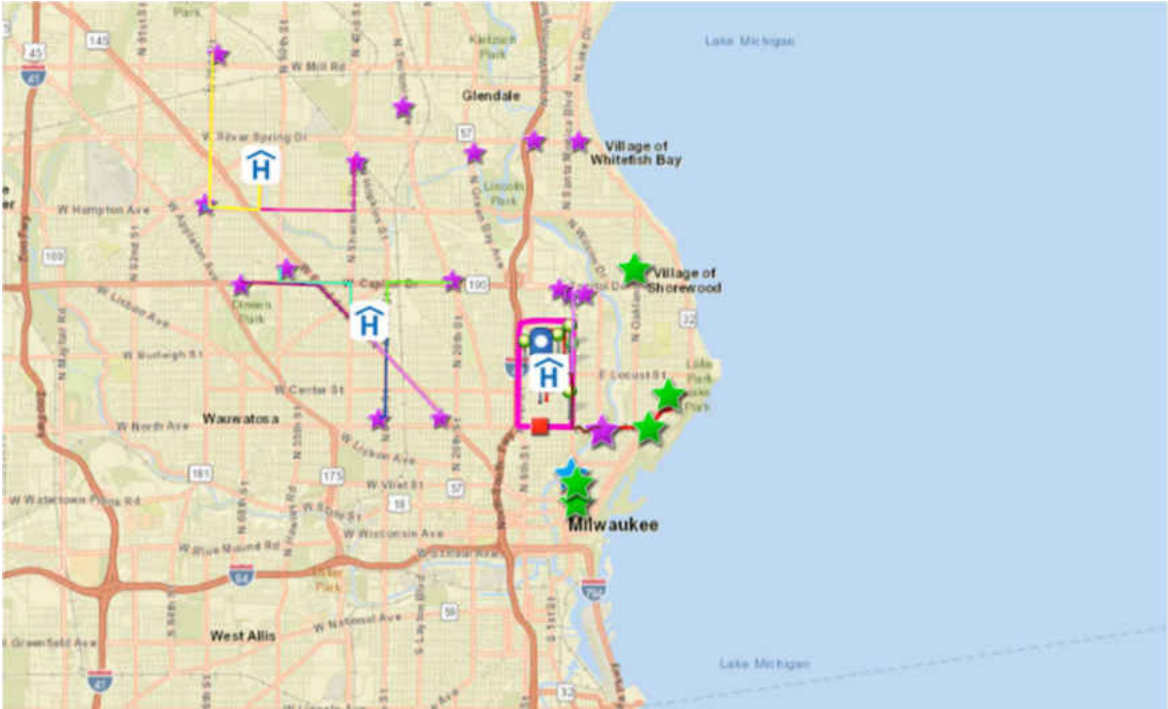


Map 12

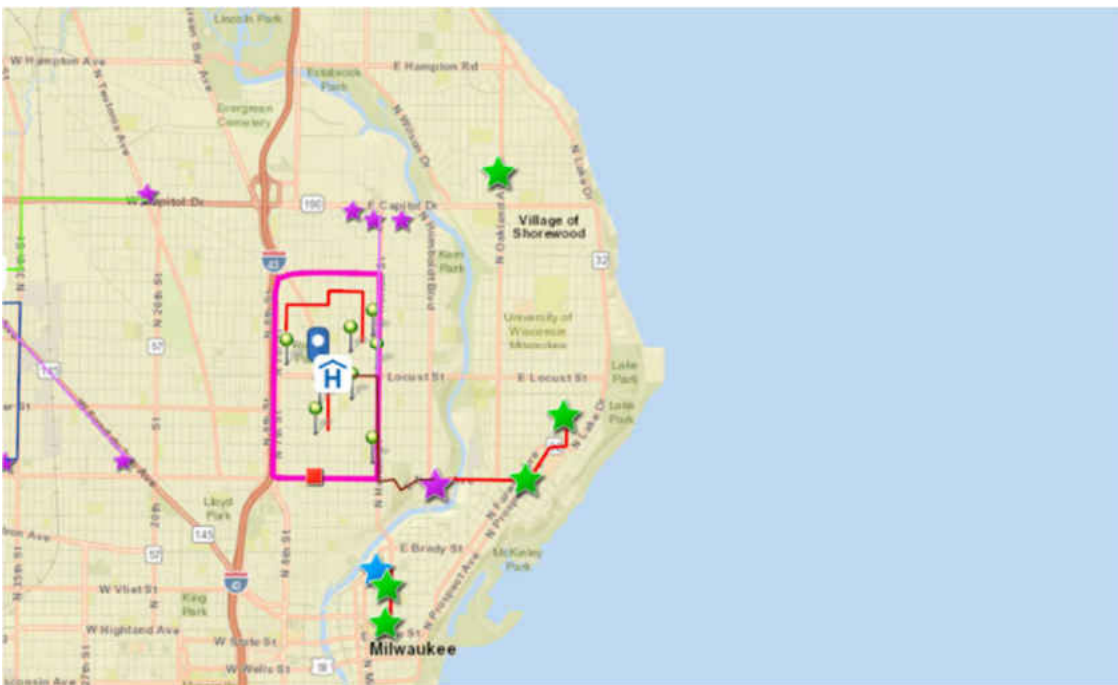
The key point illustrated by the above and below maps is the relative availability of the red markers which indicate grocery stores in the green dotted areas and the significant lack of grocery stores (red markers) in the yellow dotted areas. The above map includes population data from the 2010 census detailing neighborhood demographics and grocery stores. The below map, Figures 13, 14 and 15 detail the same map information but includes distance measures, in order



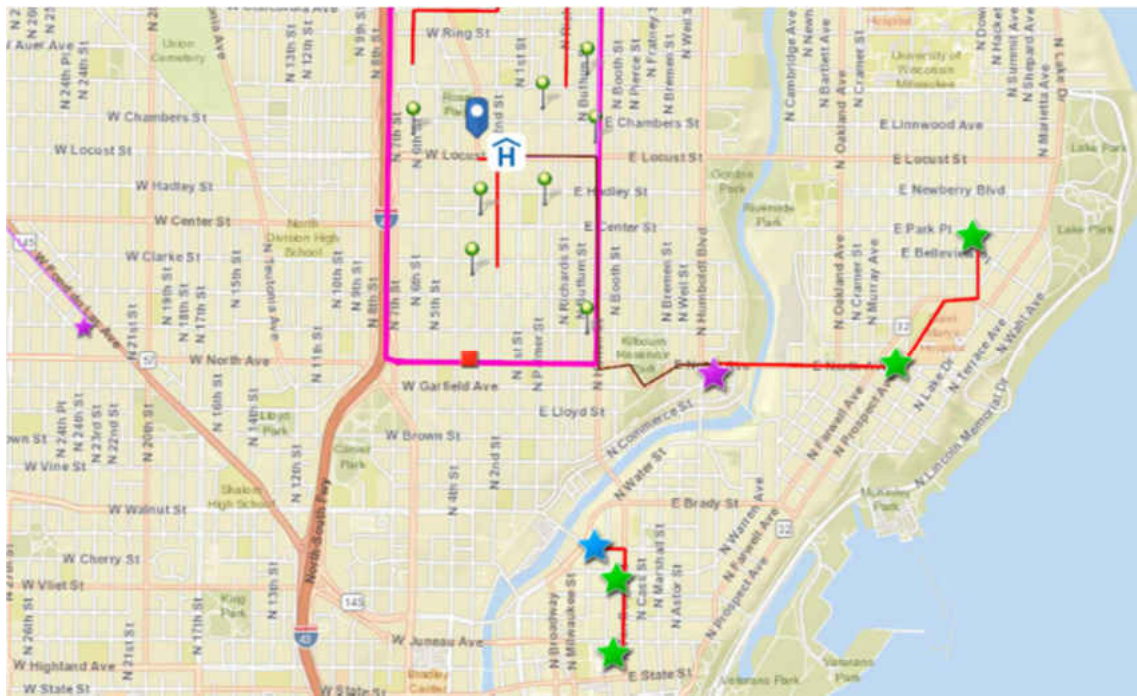
to detail the distance between where someone might live in proximity to a full stock grocery store.



Map 13



Map 14



Map 15

Maps 13, 14 and 15 detail spatial difference between the considerably whiter east side and the predominately Black North side in Milwaukee. Figure 16 is the same map as Figure 15 but modeled to show distance. The three stars on the bottom account for .47 of a mile, so less than half of a mile. Said another way, in under half a mile, you can enter into three very nice, clean, grocery stores with fresh produce and meat. Just about half a mile north, residents can access three grocery stores that also have fresh produce and meat within 1.3 miles. This same spatial makeup does not appear in the same manner anywhere else on the north side. For example, Map 14 includes markers for homes on the northside, to demonstrate the minimum distance it would take for someone to get to a store. The shortest distance is 1.6 miles and the longest in these examples is 3.5 miles. The 1.6 mile example is the one within Harambee (the pink box) to the first purple star. These points were chosen at random as an example of what a nutrition desert might look like for residents on the north side.

Inside the pink box that indicates the boundaries of Harambee, the relative distances are shown that there is “space” for three grocery stores or places that sell nutritious foods to be placed in close proximity within the neighborhood. While I have quantified the access to healthy foods in miles – there are more things to take into account than just distance (Heynen 2005; Heynen et al. 2012). There must be a discussion about the affordability of foods and income of shoppers and if those shoppers have access to vehicles or transportation. If shoppers do not have personal access, via a car, lack of access to rapid public transit negatively impacts visits to grocery stores. But fundamentally – if there are no nearby grocery stores selling fresh fruits, vegetables and meat in a neighborhood, that makes it hard for people living there to access them. And probably most importantly, what gets sold at grocery stores matters too. If grocery stores do not have ingredients that are necessary for the dishes that people in nearby communities like to make, it increases the work, effort and expenditures just to get those products. Inability to access grocery stores therefore makes access to food pantries more necessary and important.

Lack of fresh markets, but not community

I was interviewed by Wisconsin Public Radio about recent elections in the state, in which many LGBTQ candidates won seats, there was a commercial segment in an upcoming news broadcast about Milwaukee’s food insecurity problem. One way that local food markets have tried to “solve” this problem is via “mobile markets”. These ‘mobile markets’ are trucks filled with fresh vegetables and fruit and they come during a specified day and time to different neighborhoods and local residents can purchase food from them. A local Milwaukeean was interviewed and said, “put the mobile market next to the corner store and see who wins.” But why do poor communities need to choose between something for access? Predominately white communities are able to access to both local stores and larger grocery chains without having to

go through the pains of choice. Also, more deeply, why not figure out ways to build brick and mortar stores, that are available on a daily basis versus having these mobile markets that have schedules available in an online format that not everyone might have access to on a regular basis. Fresh food should be as readily accessible in Black neighborhoods as in predominately white areas or white adjacent areas. Simultaneously, within the confines of Harambee, these maps detail the existence of corner stores and convenience stores. For many, these stores are no pun intended, ‘cornerstones’ of communities, where people congregate on a daily, weekly or other familiar basis. These convenience and corner stores fill the void with the absence of larger grocery stores. The maps also detail the long-standing segregation and structures of discrimination that were built via institutional, systemic and structural racism.

## Conclusion

Evidenced from this chapter, the areas that surround and are within the neighborhood boundaries of Harambee once had several grocery stores, as well as, transportation that allowed residents to get their groceries. Overtime, the change of demographics subsequently changed the access to foods with nutritional value. Therefore, the relationship of race to access to goods and services is present, but often hidden via other methods, such as, interstate construction which became I-43. It also highlights connections of spatial mismatch and racialized spaces – with reference to the change in fresh foods and grocery stores, over a 40 year+ period. While combing through data, one archived photo of a razed grocery store noted that it was replaced with a Kentucky Fried Chicken (Kwate 2008). In Shorewood, a predominately white, middle to upper-middle class suburb east of the river and neighborhoods referenced above, at one point there were two grocery stores in close proximity (about one city block). If a person wanted fast food,

you needed to cross the river, by turning around and go back west. Essentially, you needed to leave the neighborhood to access unhealthy options.

This chapter is not advocating for the closure of corner stores or smaller markets but highlight the fact that many places lacking in fresh foods are in predominately Black and brown neighborhoods. Corner stores not only play a role within communities, but they also leave space for food banks and pantries that become indispensable to fill these gaps left by the absence of grocery stores. The following chapters detail the experiences of members of the community that live in or near Harambee and how they manage their lives while living in poverty.

## Chapter 4: “Let’s go eat in the office”: Life at a Milwaukee Food Pantry

The previous chapter focused on the geographical component of Milwaukee; this chapter includes the day-to-day interaction experienced during the participant observation that I completed for this project. Situating a pantry within Harambee allows the reader to not just read about the neighborhood and its development over time, but to experience the realities of people that live and work nearby in a real way. This chapter is an attempt to discuss what often gets hidden in discussions of poverty – that people are really just trying to get by and provide for themselves and their families. This chapter not only explains an average day at the pantry but reveals relevant themes, such as work ethic, conceptions good/bad whites, what ‘real’ Blackness is, implicit bias, dignity and self-preservation that emerged over time as well.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative ethnography takes time and dedication because as an outsider, both as a white woman and someone from Chicago, I needed to build rapport and comfort with my presence there. In May of 2018, after Pastor Patricia asked the patrons for their approval for me to come to the pantry, she recommended I keep coming back each week so the patrons would see me as a familiar face. Over time, I was able to start interviews; each interview took between 30 to 45 minutes in the office area of the church. Each time I attended, I left contact sheets with the purpose of the study and how they could reach me. In the fall of 2018, I was able to start giving gift cards to local grocery stores as an appreciation of their time. Each Wednesday morning and afternoon was spent at the pantry for a year and half. In addition, I spent time at their respective houses or helping with other tasks and errands. I wanted to involve participants in the process and asked them to clarify any details to avoid confusion or errors in my interpretations. Participants found through working at the pantry or referred by friends and those participants

also received clarifying questions to ensure correct interpretation, if there were any unclear statements.

### Pantry Background

The Feed the Need pantry is a place where local community members can come each Wednesday, enjoy a meal in the company of others, and shop in the pantry to add to their monthly food allotment. Feed the Need derives its name from the verse where the hungry are fed and the thirsty are satisfied. Noting this is important because even though this is how the pantry represents itself, it does not mean that the people who operate and work at the pantry are outside the normative discourse of how we talk about people in poverty.

One of my first interview participants was Ava, the administrative assistant for the Church. Ava encouraged me to present my dissertation idea to Pastor Patricia, who at the time worked as the day pastor, a pastor who coordinates the day to day activities of the community lunch. When I was being introduced to her, Pastor Patricia was in the process of ending her time at Feed the Need, the community lunch that is served every Wednesday, and was preparing to train the new pantry director, Pastor Donte. Pastor Patricia was a sweet, middle-aged white woman who understood some of the barriers and issues experienced by the pantry patrons. She understandably was cautious in allowing me to speak at the pantry, but eventually felt like perhaps this might help some of the recipients. She was married and was the foster mother of a few children and discussed with me the troubles of child welfare services, which it was clear in her mind, were disorganized and unhelpful and were oblivious to the needs and desires of the children that were in her care.

There are several pastors that spend their time at Gathering People's Lutheran Church. The day pastor is different from the main pastor who gives the Sunday services and

provides general oversight of the Church. For example, the day pastor oversees the weekly community gatherings, while the main pastor oversees preaching to the church on Sundays. Typically, at the weekly gatherings, the patrons first gather for a community lunch (where they sign up for the pantry), then they attend a Bible study, and then the patrons can use the pantry. While pantry patrons are not required to sit through Bible study, if they leave and miss their name being called, they are unable to participate in the shopping. The door to the pantry has a buzzer that alerts people that someone is coming in and out. After the community lunch, the patrons distribute well-used Bibles which are kept on the shelf nearby to the other patrons. The Bible study usually centers on some level of community, sharing, removing negative thoughts or ill will towards others, or overcoming the issues experienced in poverty.

Pastor Patricia and the incoming Pastor Donte are in charge of the orders from Hunger Task Force (HTF), an organization discussed in the introduction, that functions to help supply people and organizations with food. Every month, from the wish list created by the pantry, she would go on to the HTF website and order the items. Often, the wish list items are not available, so substitutions are made, and even then, you might not get what exactly what you order. In some sense, the pictures and items acted as stand-ins for similar items. For example, one time, she ordered soft drinks for the pantry and the selection on the website was 12 ounce bottles, which hypothetically could be given away on the pantry table (which will be explained momentarily), but what actually came were larger bottles of soda, which were not enough for the individual patrons but enough for the community lunch.

While there was a general collegial relationship between volunteers and Pastor Patricia, this same could not be said of Pastor Donte. Pastor Donte is a six-foot-tall, Black man from the Milwaukee area, who often wore collared shirts and jeans with patterned dress



shoes, he always looked put together, with a groomed beard and mustache. Aside from his attire, he also had a different perspective on his Bible study presentation. While often being unable to capture the attention of the patrons, he would sometimes pull out a portable microphone to amplify his sermons over the rolling and impatient noise of the pantry patrons. There are some volunteers that have health issues, lift restrictions, etc., and he often admonished some of the other volunteers of not helping, regardless if they may have duties in the kitchen or actual pantry. In one instance, the food delivery for the pantry was late and Pastor Donte felt as though the volunteers were not “working hard enough” even though the work at the pantry for most is unpaid. Many of the volunteers would lodge empty threats about leaving the volunteer space when he would engage in these statements. Sometimes, volunteers would get pulled in multiple directions and then finally be able to finish tasks shortly after lunch. That said, when Donte would get ‘hyped up’ many of the volunteers never talked back but would roll their eyes, saying things like, ‘he’s doin’ it again’, etc.

While the change of pastors was fairly routine, many of the pantry volunteers were less welcoming to Pastor Donte. Upon his arrival, he required all pantry volunteers (except for myself) to sign a pantry volunteer agreement: which stipulated how volunteers were to use the pantry and if they failed to abide by these policies, they would be removed from their duties. I found it curious that I was never provided this sheet, nor had to view it or sign it. When I asked for a copy, I never received it. That said, many of the volunteers refused to sign it because they felt it was restrictive and too punitive for volunteer work. More deeply, many of the recipients thought about the pantry not as volunteer time or work, but a moment to commune and eat with others and spread good news.

The Pantry Layout

To give context about the pantry layout, the pantry is located in the basement of the church and looks very much like a school room. Circular folding tables and stackable chairs are placed in the middle of the room and two rectangular tables line the south wall, along with a large shelving unit that holds the bread items. Perpendicular to those tables and shelves are the food line tables that consist of 1 long rectangular table and one round table that usually holds the desserts. There is also a small stage where the delivery boxes are broken down and taken to recycling. There are 2 parts to the pantry: the actual pantry, which is approximately 20' X 10,' and which includes two walls of cabinets, a desk and a freezer where the pantry meat is stored and distributed, and a large open space with several round tables where diners would sit, 2 long rectangular tables where the food is served. Along the wall were the table items and bread shelves.

Connected to the pantry is the storage room and a comparatively larger kitchen, which has a typical industrial kitchen look and feel. There are two stainless steel refrigerators, two sinks with one being directly connected to the dishwasher and four ovens and a large eight-burner stovetop. To the right and left of the refrigerator, there are large shelving units and an island with metal countertops in the middle.

Families and patrons can only use the pantry once a month. The pantry itself is stocked in two ways: via Hunger Task Force and donations. The volunteers of the pantry usually consist of approximately 6 people, including myself during the time of data collection. The main volunteers besides myself were Harold, Wynette, and Toya. Idgie, and Leticia were main volunteers until there was a change led by Pastor Donte. However, sometimes there are volunteers that come and go each week so the number of people at the pantry varies each week. The people who actually purchase the items to stock the pantry are an older white couple and another white woman who

comes in every so often with various items. The older couple comes with approximately 15-16 boxes of items from Aldi, an affordable food market.

The pantry itself has basic foods: tomato sauce/paste, mushrooms, rice, mashed potatoes, pasta and pasta sauce, Mac n' cheese, cereal, pancakes/syrup ,and sometimes there are granola bars. There's always luncheon meat (generic spam), tuna, canned ravioli, chili and soup. Then there is the beans and vegetable cabinet, peanut butter/jelly and Jiffy muffin mix. The last area contains the meat, sweets and personal hygiene products. An older white couple, Tom and Mary, bring in all the items for the pantry. These items are often delivered right before the community lunch opens; therefore, there is often a little rush and a sense of organized chaos to put everything away and get everything out, however, somehow everything is done in time. Sometimes the deliveries included more than just food– like school supplies for the back-to-school rush and winter coats and boots in preparation for winter. These items are given out in a lottery system, with note cards given to patrons indicating they are to receive a coat.

Some patrons discovered that if you help unload the car you might enter the good graces of the volunteers – like Idgie. For example, for a family of three there are a certain number of items listed above allotted per family. While in the pantry, the shopping assistant is the only one that is 'allowed' to touch the items, the shopper can only say or point to the item. Whatever items the shoppers grab first is what they must take. There are no exchanges or switches. Shoppers must make very quick snap decisions in a very short time period. The usual time it takes shoppers from entrance to exit is approximately 5-7 minutes.

Shoppers are also never sure about what is available in the pantry. Meat can vary from hot ham, chicken feet, ground beef, various sausages and more. The pantry functions as an

assembly line of sorts wherein two to three shopping assistants are helping each shopper. As one shopper exits, another enters the room.

### Pantry Rules, Regulations and Perceptions of the Pantry Patrons

When I first started volunteering at the pantry, Leticia, Idgie's daughter was in charge of signing people up coming in, checking if the patrons already visited the pantry that month and organizing the received materials that day but because this was not always enforced, the patrons would not remember to bring their documents every time. Leticia was a Black woman of average height, who had a gruff but sweet exterior. She is a strong woman, which is usually seen as angry by white people, she often said she used volunteering at the pantry as a way to build empathy because she said she struggled with patience. Just like there are particular rules and regulations for public assistance, the pantry operates in a similar punitive manner. It operates in a very particular and deliberate manner – with a system and structure, which mimics the state operation. Each person that comes in to sign up for the pantry sees Leticia, she checks their identification (ID and piece of mail that corroborates the ID address) and their information is recorded on the sheet. While the community lunch is being served, she checks the list to previous Wednesdays in the month to make sure no person goes twice in one month. If someone as she says, “forgets” and signs up twice, they are only able to pull from the table, but for those who are able to use the pantry, they can take from the table and pantry.

The table setup and pantry meat section actually create a bit of competition and are usually vigilantly policed. People often come in and scope out the food available on the table. However, the table selections function as follows. No one is allowed to take from the table until after bible study and only when announced. The patrons line up and during the first pass through, the patrons can only take one item from each table but can take unlimited amounts of bread

items. The second pass through allows for the patrons to take as many items as they would like. The table items usually include basic staples, a combination of fresh items and almost-expired items. Sometimes the pantry will place items they cannot use on the tables as well. However, sometimes there is a bit more action surrounding the table, as Leticia would phrase it, “people tryna be slick” and grab the ‘good items’ before the table opens. During my stay, I’ve only seen a few limited arguments over the tables and people standing too close to it, which usually results in someone yelling, ‘step away from the table’, in some fashion.

While the point of Feed the Need is to feed the hungry, I also found that there was some variation in how the volunteers spoke about the pantry patrons. Most of the people who attend the pantry are of the same class status – poor and working class. When thinking about needs, having access to food and being fed, an outsider might look at how the pantry patrons operate as, ‘I’m going to get mine,’ and in some sense, that is true, but not for the common reason most people perceive. It is the sense of control that people get to pick what they want and also have access to “good” food. People clamor to be first on the list so they can have access to what they perceive is the better food, meat, etc. Pastor Donte pulls out the meat to be distributed from the refrigerator and it all depends what he picks first. For example, one day at the pantry, we were quite low on items because after a holiday we receive less food, a man stated, “no worries, I came late” but he still fared well because he was able to take a large package of chicken drumsticks. That said, if the patrons do not express an appropriate level of gratitude, the patron is rebuked as ‘pushy’, ‘ungrateful’, or that they ‘take, take, take’. This is not unlike the perceptions held by members of society writ large. However, the volunteers themselves often take more than necessary at the pantry but often describe this as, ‘I’m a volunteer’, so they rationalize this food as payment for their time at the pantry. While the pantry patrons and

volunteers often say that others are ‘taking’, race is not what the volunteers comment on because the collective is by and large identifying in the same way, but what they do comment on is their demeanor. Thinking about this more deeply, this might at some level *be* coded language that runs rampant in white racist/classist discourse, in terms of how poor Black and people of color ‘take’ from the system. If we look at the way race is not explicitly mentioned, but some coded wording takes its place, there might be implicit bias that runs through the discourse of the pantry in terms of social norms, class status, and race.

Idgie, helped grow the Feed the Need community lunch and was the cook for the past 26 years. Idgie was the lifeline of the Feed the Need pantry. After moving with her family from the south, she found GPLC church. Originally, she attended other churches in the Milwaukee area, but fell in love with the church that became GPLC. She has the kindest heart and simply desires to make food for people. She started the community lunch with her friend Caroline, she has been able to maintain the kitchen on donations and the food from Hunger Task Force. I encountered Idgie first when I started coming in to do my short demonstrations.

During my time volunteering, I likened her to the hype woman before a show. She would often emerge from the kitchen, and with her positive, boisterous voice would ask the patrons how they were feeling that day. She always talked about being neighborly, bringing food, checking up on friends, family and neighbors. She also would ask if anyone would like to bless the food or if there were any prayers to lift up. Shortly after, Idgie asked me if I wanted to eat, before that I had never stayed particularly long because I felt that at this moment, I didn’t want to necessarily intrude, but I did want people getting used to my face and presence.

One day, she asked if I would stay and help serve the food. Understanding about how white people can often occupy space, I wanted to be aware of the space that I was taking up. I

wanted to make sure that I was invited into the pantry/community lunch versus just assuming that I could be helpful. Idgie showed me where the supplies were and I grabbed an apron, set of gloves and hairnet. While I wish I could say I was a stellar volunteer my first day, that would be a gross mischaracterization. My first day helping out at the pantry, I was pretty terrible; I worked on the line with Harold, Wynette and Toya and I didn't necessarily know how much food to give people nor was I particularly fast. However, like anything else, volunteering necessitated a learning curve. I kept returning each Wednesday and over time was given more and more responsibility. Gradually, I got better at the line and was tasked with other directions. My duties at the pantry increased significantly, mainly because it is very hard to turn down the way Idgie asks questions – i.e., “Can I count on you to help out at the Thanksgiving Dinner on Sunday?” It is very hard to tell someone that no, they cannot count on you. My sense of duty toward the pantry was always on my mind. Because gaining access to this community was so important to my work, I worried that if I had another engagement or travel plans, that I would not be seen as being helpful. Understanding the perceptions of how previous students doing work in the area carried out their work and how they left without giving proper credit, was something I wanted to avoid given my identity as a white woman researcher in a predominately Black space.

### Change of Staff

Much of the disagreement with Pastor Donte and the volunteer staff occurred with the more veteran members and most often with Idgie, the founder, lifeline, and spirit of Feed the Need. However, there was some change up in the pantry in regard to staff and volunteers. Earlier in the summer, I had interviewed the caretaker of the community garden, Karen, about the work that she does there and how the garden helps the community. She discussed that sometimes people might ‘steal’ from the garden, but that is ok, because it just might mean that

they need the food but are not particularly sure who to ask for assistance. At this point, there was not much anger or frustration about this fact, only to say that the purpose of this garden is for people in need.

### Idgie

However, this same compassion was not extended to Idgie and her family. Idgie was never one to explicitly talk about race, however one day she pulled me aside and asked about some suspicious interactions she had noticed with the white women that worked at the Church. She said that while she had been working at the pantry for about 27 years as the cook, she still lacked access to keys to the church and kitchen refrigerator. She asked me if that sounded shady, and then noted that she felt like she was not given these items because she was a Black woman and people did not trust her. She counted all the white women who had access to keys and noted that Pastor Donte, who is a lighter-skinned Black man, had access to the keys as well. I could tell during this conversation that she was rather hurt. She expressed that Feed the Need was her life, she enjoyed cooking for the people that came to eat, and she always remarked about the reputation that she had to uphold in the community. People who attended the pantry and meal, by and large respected her. However, one day at pantry, she was asked to come upstairs, and she was fired for allegedly stealing from the pantry. I found that there was a bit of dissonance with this particular response. In a prior interview, the manager of the community garden discussed 'stealing' quite differently. Denise noted that if someone was going to take from the community garden, it must mean that they need it, therefore, it does not seem right to call it stealing.

### Leticia

Leticia, who was formerly in charge of the pantry, would let people who worked at the pantry shop before everyone else could come in. This often resulted in Harold and Wynette



receiving more than the typical food allotment. Leticia expressed frustration with Harold and Wynette because of how they did many of the same activities that Idgie was accused of doing. After the split between the volunteers, Leticia was angry at the whole situation and asked me to be her eyes and ears at the pantry. As an observer, it is a bit of a weird position to be in, seeing as though I'm supposed to be objective and just record data. In order to maintain my qualitative and researcher integrity, I chose not to report because everyone was conspicuously quiet about it around me, probably given my close relationship that developed over time with Idgie and Leticia. A few months later, Jenny commented to Harold, when he clearly had an overallotment of items in a box, that maybe Pastor Donte was watching him too.

An outside viewer might view this as 'take, take, take,' however, many of the volunteers dedicated their time to the pantry and felt that with the extra work they do, they were able to extend their allotted benefit amount for each month. Also, there were moments when new items would come to the pantry that may be a one-time donation, so they approached it as a moment of opportunity. For example, an online comedian wore a suit that had one-dollar bills pinned to it, with a sign that said, take what you need. He videoed the social experiment and it showed people with access to money, seemingly well-dressed, walking down the same NYC street and taking the money off the man. When the person took the money, he would ask what they were using it for, it was for wants – nail appointments, extra cash, etc., and not needs, food, shelter etc. He approached a homeless man, who only took a small amount off the man's suit, and said he was going to use it for lunch. Therefore, we often fault the poor or people in poverty with being the sole 'takers' but the spectrum exists here as well. Rich people 'take' as much if not more, but because their perception is different, their loopholes are seen as positive. Thus, illustrating that

the proximity to power allows some behaviors to be hidden, while homeless and poor people are left holding the blame for trying to scrape by each month.

### The Main Volunteers

Volunteers at the pantry often ebbed and flowed, but the following individuals remained consistent in their return to the pantry each Wednesday. They all expressed that the pantry offered them something that they were missing in some place in their lives and the community and fellowship felt here in that space was important to them. While sometimes they would reference the pantry as ‘work’ they never saw it as a job that they would necessarily ever ask to be paid for because they all saw it in connection to service in the eyes of the church.

### Jenny

While the relationship between Idgie and Pastor Donte began to sour, Jenny, a young Black woman in her early 40s with three teenagers started volunteering at the pantry. She had long hair, lashes and a small stud nose ring; she had a few tattoos on her arms and worked in healthcare at a hospice clinic with patients diagnosed with failing mental health issues and Alzheimer’s in a fairly far suburb of Pewaukee – at least 30 minutes away in good Wisconsin traffic. She often struggled with the long commute between her home on 39th and Burleigh, one of the rougher Northside neighborhoods. That trip would be fairly easy if one had access to a vehicle, but the city of Milwaukee has small city transportation and cars are especially needed once you leave the metro area of Milwaukee.

Jenny once detailed to me the weekly expenses just to transport herself to work, which in a given week could be between \$80-360. Instead of alleviating this headache, Governor Walker turned down high-speed rail transportation funding from the Obama administration and instead spent it on controversial road projects (Harding 2004; Mulvany 2014). Wisconsin, unlike its

southern neighbor, Illinois, does not have a regional train line like the Metra to carry people from metro Milwaukee to the outer suburban areas, and vice versa. Because her gross income puts her over the maximum needed to qualify for benefits, she consistently uses Feed the Need to meet her food and nutrition needs because of her inability to find an affordable car or available public transportation. The notion of precarity emerges again because while Jenny does have a job and is gaining income, she is unable to meet her daily needs for her and her child.

After Idgie was fired from the pantry, her schedule afforded Jenny to become the new cook and pantry manager. While Jenny was a great person and cook, her meals were not always as thought out as Idgie. One might argue you could taste the love in a meal cooked by Idgie. This doesn't cast any indifference to Jenny, as she was a wonderful cook, but the meals were not as thought out as before. Perhaps the difference in the cooking could be explained by age. Idgie was much older than Jenny and retired, so time constraints were not the same as they were for Jenny. Jenny worked a few jobs in food service, which might explain the desire to get the food out quickly to the pantry patrons. Jenny, someone who was poverty adjacent herself would sometimes fall into this trap of blaming people – and often they were the Black patrons at the pantry. Lending to some implicit bias or internalized racist discourse, wherein she harbored some white mainstream ideals about how specifically Black people use and apply for benefits – most often that they misuse them or are lazy. She would almost always comment on how the pantry might be below or at capacity that day, depending on the days when benefit checks were cut.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Jenny and I routinely chatted about how she found the SNAP application ridiculous and purposefully difficult.

### Harold

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<sup>8</sup> In Wisconsin, checks are cut on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, depending on the last two numbers of the social security number.

The other volunteers were also church members as well as pantry patrons. Harold, a Black man in his late fifties, does much of the heavy lifting at the pantry, taking out the heavy pans from the oven and maintenance tasks around the church. Harold and Wynette both live in the same low-income housing units and are friends who also help out around the church. He is one of the more direct or matter-of-fact volunteers, and often engages in some mild bantering with the patrons. He also enjoys getting through the line quickly and efficiently. Often, his job is managing the meats or hot foods and he usually takes on the organizing or facilitating the lunch line. While Harold would talk to me, he took some time to really feel comfortable in telling me personal information about himself. It was not until at least 6 months into my volunteer gig, that he started telling people in the line about my study, usually with the lead-in that I was giving out \$10 gift cards to the local grocery store. It was finally at that moment that I had built up enough rapport with the staff, volunteers and patrons that I no longer had to leave my information on each of the tables.

### Wynette

Wynette, a Black woman in her late forties, was the last woman to really come around and warm up me, similar to Harold, which was understandable. Since many students from surrounding universities used Harambee and similar areas as their field studies; there is a history of just going in, taking information and quickly exiting. Often, many of the pantry volunteers, like Wynette and Harold would ask me when I was leaving, and I would tell them, whenever I was hired by another school. Only after my continued appearances at the pantry, and willingness to help out with different activities, did Wynette express any interest in talking with me. Trust was built with Wynette over time, as she was a strong Black woman, who was quite

guarded with how she extended welcomes. I was working at the pantry for almost three months before Wynette invited me over to her home for a cookout.

Like many of the other patrons that I interviewed, her family also migrated from the South, but all of her 8 children live in the Midwest area. Most of them have working class, blue collar jobs. As a divorced woman, she expressed little interest to marry again, but was open to dating. She had escaped several abusive relationships, which led to her marriage aversion. She, like many of the other patrons and volunteers, found Gathering People's Lutheran Church because of its welcoming atmosphere and attachment to the community. One day, as I was taking Wynette to see Toya, another volunteer who recently had knee surgery, she confided in me that one of her children was in jail, but she had not seen him in some years. After being interviewed by police, all his friends who actually committed the low-level crime all took plea deals, but stuck DJ with the crime and he was incarcerated for 18 months. However, while I was volunteering, he was in the process of being released and I was invited to his homecoming party, which I thought was fairly special. Many of the items for the party were from the pantry, snuck out under the nose of Pastor Donte.

Previously, Wynette invited me to her son's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday party that was held in the common room of their apartment building. Here there were ribs, chicken, Natural Ice beer, and a large cake that was donated to the pantry, but we were not going to be able to use in time. I supplied the balloons, table decorations and the tablecloths, in preparation for the party. This was a moment I recall humorously, because I had never met D'Andro, but he was supposed to be on his way to his mother's house. Wynette was unsure of when he would arrive. In thinking about understandings of time – I was thinking very much in 'white time' wherein if something starts at 3, you get there at 3, maybe 3:15, so it is not just you alone waiting for other people. While I

arrived at 12, D'Andro did not arrive until 5, and we did not start eating until 6, which totally upends considerations about time spent with family. It made me think about all the events I spent during holidays with extended members of my family. There were no presents visible, but this party was not lacking on love nor laughter. People from the building came down, played on the piano that was almost slightly out of tune in the common room, friends were telling jokes and the feelings of family reunions were being shared.

### The Regulars

The pantry and community lunch serve several regulars that come in weekly. Alfie, an older Black man in his early 50s, is the resident grump who often causes the volunteers additional headaches, and many describe him as having an 'attitude.' He is a usual source of patron discontent because of his particular attitude and his frequent tries to cut the line to get on the pantry list first. Typically, the patrons that sign up first have the best selection of items in the pantry. Therefore, some patrons are very particular about pantry order call and are vigilant about who is in line, where and when they signed up and if the order becomes jumbled. However, no one is particularly angry, nor does anyone actually harbor any real feelings of anger or ill will, but they do express notions of annoyance or feelings of unfairness.

Jane, Idgie's sister often comes and helps with the bags that are used in the pantry by double bagging them. Like many of the volunteers, she also was slow to be interviewed by me, but overtime started asking me questions about what I was doing, what I was doing it for and how was I going to write about them. Annette is an older Black woman in her late 50s, who often is early to the pantry. Before the pantry is open, it becomes clear that some regulars who are 'nice' get extra food or first pick before people come in for lunch. I would sit at various tables

and one day when I asked to sit at one, the gentleman that was there started asking me about what I was doing, where I went to school, where I was from, basic small talk.

Martel was a tall, well-statured Black man, who talked about getting a job. He was on his way after the pantry to go talk with a social worker who specialized in job placements. He said he just needed to do a drug test, which would be no problem, but he expressed significant worry because the house he was staying in, had residents that frequently smoked marijuana. He told me, “I don’t smoke, but they do.” He then continued, “do you think just breathing in the house will come up?” I told him no, it doesn’t really work that way. This particular interaction really demonstrated something I felt was kind of special. Number one, he was being made to get a drug test, and number two I was this white woman college student whom he had never met being asked how weed works. He also went on to say that he was trying to get out of his living situation, so getting this job was extremely important. There have been a lot of housing developments in the city of Milwaukee, the typical city “affordable housing” that gets peddled to people, usually with restrictions in small writing, and at the time, many of these were being built in order to ‘revitalize’ a strip of Water Street, which is a main thoroughfare to get to the East Side of Milwaukee. These buildings are the usual modern loft styles with bourgeois writing on the side, no more than 5 to 6 stories tall. He said to me, “it would be nice to live in one of those nice apartments, even for just one month.” It was this notion or feeling that those apartments were still somehow out of his reach, he also knew or maybe thought that those apartments were not meant for him. In his own city, he could still feel the weight of division, even invisible ones – like home attainment. He hadn’t been to the pantry for a few months, but one day, he was in the lunch line. He was finally able to move out of his living situation, but still not living in an apartment on Water Street.

## Gender Binary at the Pantry

While poverty is often feminized, part of the goal of this project was to show how gender, femininity and masculinity play a role in how people are often seen as caregivers, breadwinners or not. While Martel soon found a job and stopped coming to the pantry, he was not the only person who identified as a man and used the pantry. Sometimes, when I would help out in the shopping area of the pantry, I would have short discussions with each of the people that entered through the door. Since the pantry room had gendered jobs, women usually did the signing of people in, checking their address and acting as shopping assistants. Meanwhile, Harold and David would complete heavy lifting tasks, like mopping the floor or taking out the trash.

Rodney, who towered over many of the patrons in the pantry at over 6 feet tall, was an older Latino man, with a sweet voice who I saw at least once a month at the pantry. He was one of the few men who applied for food assistance and was adamant about how he could provide for his family. Researchers previously noted that often men would give their benefit cards to a woman they knew to spend their benefits for them or feel emasculated. Rodney expressed that for him, “it wasn’t even about that” and that “[he’s] going to do whatever it takes to feed my family.” For Rodney, it did not matter how he was able to provide.

When they would enter the pantry or lunch area, I would always ask them how they were and follow it with ‘sir’. One distinct encounter involved a frequent pantry patron who had too many plates from the line and had no extra hands for his drink cup. I told him, ‘don’t worry, I got you, sir,’ and helped him with his drink to his seat. After I called him sir, his face softened and he gave me a sweet smile, “That’s real nice of you” and when I got to his table, he continued to extend various phrases of gratitude. And while it is just common courtesy to be helpful, it probably also matters to be addressed in a way that might indicate dignity, given the response



from them to me each time I either addressed them as Mr., Ms., or Sir. It seemed important for me to address them in this way, given that I was usually the youngest person in the pantry and as a white woman.

Gender and heterosexual relationships, meaning traditional binaries inside and outside the pantry, were vigilantly enforced. Once in the while, there would be personal hygiene products available for the patrons. Often, they were not full-size but travel sized and did not last very long. Previously, these products were available to anyone who needed them, unless they were products considered gendered, like ‘feminine hygiene products’. However, after his arrival, Pastor Donte thought it would be better to split up the items between men and women. While the church writ large is welcoming to people, the idea of gender or sexuality outside the binary is not seen as something tenable and common social constructions of these two categories are reinforced through these binaries in different ways, i.e., women and children eat first, men second, men get more food per plate.

In terms of gender binaries, the people who attended the pantry were cisgender, heterosexual presenting individuals. During one encounter, Alfie, the resident grump mentioned above, discussed with me that anything not heterosexual was a sin against the church and God. Knowing this, I always viewed the pantry as a place that was strictly gendered and explicitly heterosexual. Even trying to reason with Alfie, based on my commitment to marginalized communities, was not enough to convince him of his own biases against others. Alfie also had some of the most implicit bias against other Black people and their ‘overuse’ and ‘greedy’ attitude toward food stamps. Alfie, however, was his own hypocrite. On many occasions, he would be caught trying to jump the line in order to get food or the pantry first and chided the volunteer that exposed his movements.

While a majority of these moments happened inside the pantry, only once was an LGBT matter discussed outside the pantry. Once while attending a party at Mikayla's, her daughter, Aubrey and her brother Ben were discussing someone who was thought to be gay – in a variety of unkind names but refrained from using slurs. Aubrey turned to me and asked, “what do you think Steph?” Placed in a situation where saying something might lose me my participants but knowing that I was uncomfortable with the dialogue, but knowing that the people I was around attended church quite frequently, I went with the classic, “Everyone is made in the image of God and I think that's beautiful.” It seems pertinent here to discuss cross-marginalization in terms of longstanding historical oppression of Black people and the connected histories of LGBTQ oppression and how those often intersect. Recently, the General Social Survey (GSS) found that Black women are more likely than previous to identify as bisexual (Oppenheim 2019).

#### Whiteness at the Table

Harold had a birthday party and invited me to it. I arrived and Harold introduced me to everyone as ‘his n\*\*\*a’ and like whiplash I turned my head and asked, ‘are you drunk?’ because I have never heard him call me this before and also I understand what this word means in this context, as a term of endearment<sup>2</sup>. I've heard Harold and Wynette use the word before in a variety of ways, to describe different people, good or bad. I struggled on different ways to write about this interaction because as a white woman, I did not want readers to read this and assume that I thought I was special or that I thought I had a free pass in terms of this word. I spoke to various colleagues on how to describe this moment during my data collection. Understanding historical significance is key because power relations in the use of this word are inextricably connected. No matter what, I would never use this word to describe myself to Harold, because I understand historically what this word means coming from a white person's mouth. That said,

I'm in no way going to police a Black man on language, but I did ask him why he used this word to describe me to his friends and party attendees. He told me that he wanted to express that I was 'his n\*\*\*a, no bigga' and that I was his best friend, just like Jenny and Wynette were his best friends. This moment illuminates the rapport built overtime and describes the trust that Harold felt towards me and the formation of our longstanding friendship.

At this same party, there was a friend of Harold's whom I sat next to and he started talking to me about my work at the pantry and that I was a teacher at UWM. He confessed to me that he did not really trust white people, but when I came into the space, he noted that I 'came with love and understanding' and that did not tense up upon being surrounded by Black people. I told him something I've similarly told my class which is that [white people] have never done anything to earn people's trust, which either white people do not believe or would never say out loud. From this moment, Greg went on to tell me about his history with the army and the roommate he had in the 70s who had lynching photos hanging in his locker and [he surmised that] he probably supported the KKK. He went on to tell me that those images provoked such rage that he got into a fight with him, which after beating him up, Greg got a 7-day suspension and the overt racist did not and his superior stated that Greg should just ignore the racist locker. After explaining the encounter, the man whom he fought decided to better educate himself and afterwards informed me that he considered this man to be one of his better friends. The notion of self-education was important to Greg, in terms of how white people should educate themselves on specifically Black-white relations and ongoing oppression.

The idea of a 'good' white versus a 'bad' white came up in the course of my time with Wynette, Harold, Jenny, Mikayla and her children. For example, when Brianna's son tripped over a chain and I had to take her to the hospital, on our drive over, she asked me what I did and

studied and I told her and she responded with, ‘it’s hard to trust white folks, but I was a good one because I ‘got it’’. I asked her what that meant, and she surmised that I, ‘didn’t take myself seriously, knew I didn’t have all the answers and that I understood issues of inequality, racism, police brutality and poverty’.

Earlier in the spring, Harold asked if I could take him to pick up his back brace in West Allis. We had to stop to their home to drop off the food and other items from the pantry. A few of the friends that I met at various parties were out front, taking in some sun and drinking a few beers. They shouted to Harold in the car, “hey, where you goin’?” Harold, replied, “I’m going where the white people are (West Allis).” They yelled back, “aren’t you with one?”, implying me because I was the driver. Harold retorted, ‘nah, she’s a good one.’ I asked for some clarification about what he meant by that, while also holding in my emotions. In each of these cases, they said you ‘got it’, etc. It struck me each time they said this because I do not know what Blackness is like, I lack that first-hand experience. My “getting it” solely comes from community immersion, my studies, the literature and friends I surround myself with who are also practicing anti-racism in their lives. I ‘get it’ from an abstract theoretical experience, not a lived experience.

As I volunteered and became a fixture inside and outside the pantry, my whiteness and being a woman was always visible. Often, because I am the only white person in the pantry or space, there have been times where my whiteness comes up in interesting ways. For example, early in my volunteering, when I first started taking on more duties at the pantry, I began doing the dishwashing and Harold was going to teach me how to use the dishwasher, because it was one of those large industrial machines. I said, I worked in a restaurant, so I knew how the levers and trays worked. He responded with some surprise because he said I was white,

so why did I need to work? This, therefore, brings up some interesting notes about perceptions; it's not that 'unbelievable' that I might have access to money, due to long standing wealth disparities that exist in the United States between white and Black families. However, when my whiteness equals wealth it shows how powerful these messages are for day to day existences. Sometimes when Harold would ask me to borrow cash and I would not have any available, he responded with shock that I too, lived paycheck to paycheck. This highlights something important about how we see poverty and its connection to whiteness, and it is that we *don't* see it.

When poor people of color are the focus, often we forget how economies impact people across the spectrum. If white people experiencing hardship never see anyone that is in their same position, we then edge closer to being able to maintain racialized perceptions about poor people of color, while maintaining harmful dialogues about ourselves. Therefore, the absence of white people in poverty cements this idea that poverty is not something that is experienced by white people, and that if it does, it is their own fault and not how systems and structures are maintained. The difference is white people and families have systems and structures that function in ways to help them hide these issues due to potential access to privileges, "benefits" of racism etc. White people do not experience the same level of scrutiny in applications for personal or housing loans, with the police or when out in public anywhere, in anyway similar to how Black and brown people experience it when they are living their lives. That is, poor white people get class privilege despite poverty.

#### Race and Gender in the Kitchen

In connection to my whiteness, I also identify as a woman and the perceptions of what I *can do* are based off of this idea of my strength. For example, patriarchy in terms of lifting

things or what is considered “women’s/men’s work” is clear. I might be clear to do work in the kitchen, but Harold has never asked me to take out the garbage, even when I asked. Later in my time at the pantry, when I had a couple more days of experience, I began to have a system in place for expediting and streamlining this part of the pantry. At first, Harold would work with me in the kitchen, cleaning dishes, pans, and scrubbing what often is stuck on food from the oven.

However, if Harold was busy, I worked alone in the kitchen. Other times, David was an infrequent pantry patron that comes in every month to shop the pantry and he will be in the kitchen helping with the mopping, etc. David was a tall Black man in his early 40s, with a short, flat hairstyle and he always sang songs to me, with his favorite being from Twenty One Pilots. David was originally from Milwaukee but like many people I interviewed, his parents and grandparents also experienced the Great Migration, or when Black families left the south for the industrial and manufacturing jobs in the north. David would often reminisce about Milwaukee, when it was thriving, and had good jobs. In the 1980s, like what Wilson (1977) describes, David noted the rapid deindustrialization. He had a great job, but eventually lost it to the company closing and has trouble finding steady and solid work that gave him the same pay rate as before. David also talked about the prospect of finding a job and how difficult that was for him, namely because he lacked a vehicle and Milwaukee County Public Transportation was not always reliable, which also links up with the areas that lack access and transportation to large grocery stores.

Outside the pantry

While much of the above is about life inside the pantry, much of the work occurs outside the pantry as well. Harold and Wynette were already introduced, but they are the two people with whom I have been able to share life stories and build a friendship. At first, boundary

maintenance seemed like it was important because I was a researcher and they my subjects, however, I began to realize during my time, that it is more than that. Over the time I volunteered, I started to get invited to more and more after-volunteer activities. Jenny wanted to relax a little, so we finished cooking on the grill and we all went up to Harold's apartment.

There, Wynette taught me how to play dominoes, which I had never played as a game before, only to set them up and watch them fall in a particular pattern. At the same time, I was learning how to play dominoes, Jenny started to roll a blunt with the papers of a Swisher Sweet cigar. During many of my hangouts, the sharing of blunts was a regular occurrence.

Like many of the other nights I was over at their house, they shared a blunt rolled from Swisher Sweet papers. I mentioned several times above where I was around this substance, but I have never really experienced this communal manner of sharing. There is a method to unrolling the papers and ensuring that they can be rerolled again. One takes out the original tobacco, unfurls the papers, and then replaces the buds and then between a soft but firm roll to make sure everything is sealed and then it is finished off with a lick, not unlike someone might make a hand rolled cigarette. The process, however, is not complete. The whole blunt itself is sealed with a lighter along the seam too, and one end is burned before it gets passed to the first person. I found in any moment, the passing of the blunt to be a communal experience and one where I was an insider in the group. Also, weed is an expensive luxury so the fact that they were willing to share it with me was something that I did not take lightly.

Mikayla and her family began volunteering at the pantry around March and I gave them rides home each Wednesday after the pantry closed for the day. Mikayla often came with her 2 daughters, Brianna and Kylie. Mikayla is a sweet Black woman that worked for years but took some time off when her daughters became pregnant. Mikayla invited me to her Memorial day

cookout at Keefe Park, (which is located in the section of Riverwest that as a more saturated Black population) and not knowing what to bring, I came with raspberries and blackberries. As I drove and parked, it became clear that I was one of the only white people at this park. As soon as I got out of my car and walked toward the table, in movie-like fashion, it almost seemed like a record came to a halt with a scratch and everyone looked in my direction. Never in my life, have I felt this before, and I think it is important to note that this made me uncomfortable, so I can imagine how uncomfortable non-white or Black people feel when they enter a predominately white space.

While at the park, after getting over the initial new feeling of discomfort, I was settling in, with my wine cooler and good company. Shavonna, a friend of Brianna and Kylie came by and was interested in putting together a blunt. She had parked right on a street whereby police might think a smoke-filled car was suspicious, but Mikayla said that she wanted to get the full effect and I said, “oh she wants to hotbox it.” Shavonna laughed and formally invited me by saying, “you’re invited to the cookout.” (For those who may be unaware, hotboxing is where you smoke a blunt and keep the windows closed and fill the car with the marijuana smoke which often creates a longer lasting and more intense effect of the substance.) More importantly, being ‘Invited to the cookout’ is also an important moment because it indicates potential acceptance into the group. One can also be uninvited to the cookout, if someone does something negative or not in connection to the group. Many of these cookout memes involve with white people calling the police on Black people just being with their friends or families outside, living their lives.

During the cookout, Brianna’s one-year-old son was walking between the picnic tables which were linked together with a thick metal chain. Still being unstable, he tripped on the chain



and hit his lip on the table. He visibly hurt himself, but because he was around 1, he still is not able to directly communicate what hurts, if he feels ok, etc. So, while Brianna said she thought he was ok, family members were worrying her, asking her if he was ok, if he was concussed, and so she asked if I would take her and her son to the emergency room at St. Mary's, which is on the east side of the city. After waiting a few minutes, they were seen and they reemerged a little later, with an apple sauce packet and smiles, with just a small bruise on his left nostril.

Highlighting the negative instances Black respondents often have with authority figures which can lead to increased distrust, during our ride back to her home, she confided in me some of the experiences she had when she attended school. She said she was a good student, and was on the road to success, but one day there was a problem at the school and the resource officers were called. She was in the process of walking to class when a resource officer came up behind her and slammed her face first into a block of lockers. This officer was so aggressive that she needed medical attention after the encounter. She specified that she never even had a chance to talk to the officer, but experienced this unnecessary use of force, when she was clearly walking to class. She ended up missing class, still graduating but her grades suffered because of this interaction.

After returning from the emergency room, they invited me up into their home where Mikayla and her family were eating and drinking wine coolers. The children were getting under foot and in the way, which necessitated much yelling, and eventually the children started to listen. Eddie, the little boy that tripped was trying to get some ice from the cooler, but Brianna kept telling him to go away. Eventually, they asked me if I knew how to play spades and I did not, so they helped me as much as they could. Mikayla's cousin and his wife were at the party too and there is a spades etiquette that I was not formerly aware of, since I had never had friends

that either played the game or played around me. The game works where you have two partners that play two other opponents and you need to organize your cards so that you can quickly pull and drop your cards. The younger generation of players used speed as their bargaining chip. The faster you could deal, the faster you could make your books (number of bets you and your partner have to complete a round), and the more game you could talk were all things that they would use to their advantage. The older generation used noise as their playing style. The more exciting the potential play the more ostentatious the card flip and slap on the table, with a sound that resonated loudly. The elder players similarly talked some game, but more frequently used the loud slapping of the cards on the table. The other time I went over to hang out, they were playing for money, gambling between family members. I did not play this round of games, namely because I did not have money and was very certain many losses would be in my future. They played with a minimal amount, about twenty dollars for each player. This time all the players were younger and just Mikayla was the veteran player, but she still held true to her delightfully expressive playing style.

While this was another average night, the conversations that were had around the table piqued my interest. Kylie was nine months pregnant at the time and very much looking forward to the birth. She was excited that it was coming to a close. While no one mentioned the father, but based on the conversation between her brother Ben and the rest of the family alluded to the fact that the father was a lighter-skinned Black man. Everyone in the room at the time had skin tones of a deep brown, including the children. Ben was nervous that the child would be so light that their skin would exclude them from being able to claim 'Blackness'. Because of where I was in the kitchen, I was unable to have him clarify more, but the tone of his voice was sad that this not yet born child's skin tone would be too light. I cannot venture to say what Ben felt about this,

but culturally understanding the benefits and privileges extended to lighter skinned Black people is not lost when thinking about issues of colorism and beauty queues and general social experiences that are often driven by white supremacy and whiteness. Colorism and beauty queues promote idea that lighter skinned individuals fair better and are more attractive than their darker complected counterparts (Crenshaw 1991; Ducille 1994; Hunter 2016).

This wasn't, however, the first time I was the only white woman in a room of Black people. While in public Black and white people often interact, there are many moments where I found myself surrounded by a majority of both of these groups, either completely Black or white, which can be common in Milwaukee. Harold and Wynette often invited me over for cookouts they had at their apartment building. They lived in a five-story building where mostly benefit recipients and retired people resided. It was nice brown brick building, with a common room on the second floor. It looked out on to a branch of the Milwaukee River. Wynette gave me a tour of the building one day, she lived on the top floor, or what she referred to as the penthouse. Harold lives on the floor below her with views of the river. They both have good furniture, trinkets they picked up over time and pictures of their family and loved ones that dot their rooms.

## Conclusion

Working at the pantry allowed the collection of data that one would not be able to get otherwise. Finding out ways where researchers can simultaneously be insiders and outsiders and build rapport over time was important in this project. Ensuring that when doing research, your participants (not subjects) trust you is nothing short of necessary. During the entirety of the observation, I was able to detail and explore the how the volunteers and the patrons saw themselves, others and what they thought their reflections were from others. These experiences helped me understand and detail that poverty is not a one single issue or person experience, but

that we might share these issues more broadly. From participants simply wanting to feed themselves and their families to harboring implicit bias about recipients, this chapter explored life at a Milwaukee food pantry and how it helps people who might not have any other options. It also highlights how people navigate their experiences of poverty and demonstrates the general function of a food pantry. During the observation, the Trump Administration created the longest shutdown in American history. The following chapter details that experience.

## Chapter 5: The Shutdown: 35 Days Inside the Pantry

The preceding chapters examine the geographical disparities of Milwaukee and how people experiencing poverty manage their daily lives to survive. In 2007, a Loyola Chicago professor once told our class, ‘All Politics is Local’ meaning that political action, no matter its place (local, state, federal) affect the lives of people in real ways. This chapter explores how seemingly far-off federal government instability, such as the shutdown of 2019, affected people.

By the time of the shutdown, I had been working at the pantry for almost 8 months. By this time, I had the opportunity to build rapport with the patrons and staff and see how government mismanagement was really experienced. The information collected during these 35 days was through conversations with social workers, organizations, pantry patrons and volunteers who all detailed a general feeling of anxiety and feeling invisible – that no one cared about them - that reverberated through their lives. The shutdown had many different effects on many different groups of people going through very similar experiences. First, the recipients who rely on these services for basic needs suffered. Second, furloughed federal workers lacked access to services (which will be explained later). Third, the actual social workers who needed to assist people and also maintain a suitable level of calm and self-care for themselves were affected. Mirroring other instances of presence and absence, this chapter explores how millions of people needing assistance were made invisible by the intense focus on the 800,000 federal workers being affected by the shutdown, and how social workers stepped in to temper the flames of confusion.

Interviews, Data Collection & Analysis

While the data collected for this chapter was concurrent with the pantry volunteer work, it necessitated different questions for the pantry patrons while the shutdown was underway. The way in which I collected data was the same as with my pantry participants in the previous chapter, but I felt more compelled to ask about their mental and physical health during this time. At the same time, the energy in the pantry felt frenetic and panicked and the recipients were more insistent on receiving extra food to take home. No different than any other day at the pantry, I would not visibly take notes in front of the pantry patrons. Included in this chapter are experiences from social workers working at local Milwaukee food banks as well. Food banks are typically much larger and have support from larger governmental agencies like the United States Department of Agriculture, or USDA. Other interviewees included social workers from the Milwaukee Hunger Task Force (HTF), a local food bank that offers social services, and were necessary in helping beneficiaries that were either locked out from benefits or had their benefits stopped during this time.

During the time of the shutdown, the number of patrons using the pantries noticeably increased. At the pantry, there is capacity for 25 families of various family sizes - typically from single people to a family as large as 8. For lunch, the volunteers serve approximately 25-30 people. Depending on the time of the month, the pantry often accommodates everyone who walks through the door and places their name on the list. Benefits themselves are disbursed on a schedule that depends on the last two numbers of their social security number. Consequently, when the disbursement hits on the first of the month, there are fewer people signing up for the pantry. As the month goes on, each Wednesday sees increases in pantry participation. During the shutdown, because benefits were irregularly distributed, it meant that people were placed in a precarious position. During this time, our community lunch served about 40 people – which is a

significant increase and resulted in running out of food both at the community lunch and in the pantry cabinets themselves.

Social work agencies, like one under the direction of HTF, noticed an increase in Foodshare applications which correlated with an increase of anxiety when they were unable to have their needs met. Since there was no formal procedure during the shutdown, workers at HTF were given evening progress reports on what happened federally that day and what that would mean for recipients and applicants tomorrow. Each day, the social workers would come into the office with similar concerns about the challenges each new day would bring them during the shutdown.

#### The Shutdown Starts

The shutdown began on December 22, 2018-the longest government shutdown in American history, lasting 35 days, until it finally ended on January 25, 2019. Much of the news coverage stressed the issue of federal workers missing paychecks and unable to strike or call off work. While there were 800,000 federal employees who worked without pay during this time, not all federal workers were granted back pay for the shutdown period, including workers in low-wage sectors like custodian/janitorial and some food services. The shutdown was a bigger problem than even its coverage by the ceaseless 24-hour news media cycle made it out to be. Essentially, many government workers simply lost wages during that time never to be repaid in any way. Similarly erased from this mediascape were the 40 million cash, SNAP and rent assistance recipients – who rely on this assistance to feed themselves and their families. At the beginning of the shutdown, many of the patrons expressed various levels of unhappiness, but ultimately, they felt like it was a D.C. problem. As the shutdown wore on the D.C. problem landed at their doorstep when SNAP recipients discovered that they would no longer be

receiving their benefits for February. What started as a problem that recipients felt they could distance themselves from, came right to them in the use of their Link, Quest, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and rent assistance. Since food assistance is federally funded but distributed by individual states, the its name can vary by state. Therefore, the scope of the problem, once we include food insecurity and precarity, is significantly higher than just 800,000 federal workers. Given my long-term participant observation at a local community lunch and food pantry, the immediate effects of the shutdown were easier to understand.

### The Shutdown Showdown

Since the 1970s, there have been a total of 22 government shutdowns, with 10 of those shutdowns leading to furloughed federal workers. Therefore, the shutdowns during the most recent administrations are not foreign to United States residents. What was different about this shutdown were the prolonged and damaged residuals that it left upon people and other environments. The supposed purpose for the partial government shutdown was to procure funding for a wall along the southern border with Mexico— supposedly to protect American citizens from undocumented immigration. However, many of the people hurt during the shutdown were people living within American borders. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the disbursement of information about what would happen to benefit recipients and checks was abysmal at best.

At the beginning of the shutdown, the pantry patrons were relatively unconcerned with how this was going to continue. This should not be read as meaning that they did not care; they were just made unaware of what benefits would be cut depending on the length of the partial government shutdown. Therefore, community discussion started out framing the issues as merely bothersome and focused on the federal workers, expressed sentiments as, “these federal workers might have to work for free? That ain’t right,” because at the beginning of the shutdown



in December, around Christmas time, the forthcoming benefit issues were unknown. As the shutdown wore on, there was more focused and pointed frustration about the current commander in chief, being a ‘headass’, ‘rude’, ‘cold’, and in general, no one really had any positive things to say, nor did they think anything was worth making people work while not getting paid. Many of them stated that they thought all the workers should walk off the job (which was of course not possible), the only thing federal workers could do was just call-off/call-in or just be understandably grumpy at work.

During the shutdown, I had made two trips to visit family outside Milwaukee, and the TSA expressed a level of exasperated irritation regarding their situation. However, this exasperation had not yet trickled down to the recipients, until the early part of January. At this time, the news media was finally beginning to report that cash and SNAP/food assistance would be significantly impacted. Depending on what an individual or family receives; the amount dispersed every month is dependent on social worker assessment, W-2 (another type of social welfare assistance), and other evaluations of assets which range from \$15 and over \$300. I asked participants to state an amount where they could buy groceries and fill all their needs. Depending on family size, they stated between \$150-350 per month. I thought about how much I spend on groceries for myself, and it is similar.

Many of the patrons that use the pantry are recipients of multiple types of aid, whether it be cash, food, W-2, Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and rent assistance. In the days after the announcement that welfare assistance would be stopped – it was revealed that not only would food and cash assistance be halted but rent assistance would be affected as well. The level of precarity was increasing and the situation that seemed so far away was now affecting people in ways they thought impossible. Several patrons expressed frustration in food line, akin to, “What

does he want to do? Starve us?” At this point, pantry patrons and people who received benefits writ large were unsure of what is to come for the remainder of the month and on into February.

On social and news media, landlords were releasing documents about how if they did not receive their rent on time, they would begin eviction notices. Many landlords added to the stress by sending notices to their tenants detailing eviction procedures if their rent was not paid on time. While the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) prohibit landlords from evicting residents during times of government-caused instability, it does not mean that they will refrain from trying it. 1.4 million households are supported by these programs run by the USDA and HUD and because of the shutdown, thousands of contracts were not renewed, which placed about 40,000 people in housing precarity (CBPP.org). After one particular landlord was informed that she could not evict her tenants by several state legislative members, she not only failed at taking responsibility that she lacked knowledge on the program she participates in but went so far as congratulating the tenants on them and ‘thanked them for their *help* and that their voice matters!’ It is almost comedic to scare people for their livelihood and then thank them because of one’s own ignorance. At a time where people were experiencing uncertainty whether or not they were going to lose their home, this feels particularly callous.

The above inhumanity was compounded by incredible non-communication and miscommunication. In terms of how people were finding out about their benefit situation, many people were being emailed or contacted electronically, versus by mail, which is how a majority of poor people who might not have regular access to the internet get their notices. It is a little different with younger recipients because access to these more technological services is not so far out of their reach. However, for older recipients, many were kept in the dark about how this

process was going to be handled. They expressed this frustration expressed in anger toward the president and were angry that they were being used as pawns in his power game.

### Tension Increases

On January 16, 2019, Jenny shouted to get the attention of the pantry patrons to explain to them what was going to happen with their benefits. For many of the attendees, all of this was new information. It also displays directly the absolute shortsightedness and lack of preparedness that has emanated from this current administration. At this point, Jenny informed the crowd that the last disbursement of benefits was going to occur on January 19<sup>th</sup> and that there would be “no benefits for the month of February or maybe not even in March.” The crowd was informed that whatever they received on their card in the beginning of January would be the same amount that they received during their usual disbursement and that there would be nothing else after that point, until the shutdown ended. At that point, the feelings of despair and precarity began to wash over the patrons, and the worry sank in.

### Pantry Function

While food pantries are a source of food for people experiencing food insecurity and politicians tell people to use them, – they have limited resources by themselves. Many food pantries in the Milwaukee area either buy their food from Feeding America or use Hunger Task Force, which is a *Free and Local* food pantry that started in 1974 by Black mothers who wanted children to have access to food in schools. However, both of these services operate under the USDA, which was one of the federal departments that was hit hard during the shutdown. Therefore, the level of precarity was practically unnoticed by the Trump administration, thinking the food pantries have access to unlimited resources and can adequately cope with the influx of individuals overwhelming pantries around the city.

Highlighting the symbolic annihilation of the lives of welfare recipients is important at this moment. Pantries, like Feed the Need, are often operating on limited budgets and food supplies. Many of the 40 million people receiving benefits utilize many different food pantries and methods. Federally, many politicians unaffected by the shutdown either could not understand why people were panicking about their missing paychecks or food access and told people to either buy groceries on ‘good faith credit’ or to seek out local food pantries. Wilbur Ross, who is (at this time of writing) the Trump Administration’s Secretary of Commerce – could not understand why federal workers would even need to use food banks – why not just take out a loan – without understanding that at some point, those loans were going to have to be repaid with interest (Marchin 2019).

While I was serving in the food line, Harold usually covered the meat, Wynette handled the vegetables and starch and I usually distributed the salad or bread rolls and drinks. During these days during the Shutdown at the pantry, the atmosphere in the pantry felt frenetic and frantic. People were generally less amicable to each other than in days past. What did not help, were the increased numbers of patrons during this time, which added stress to the limited amount of food available at the pantry.

At the same time this shutdown was occurring, athletes from Clemson University in South Carolina were invited to meet Trump at the White House and were served what many found to be an inappropriate style of food for the reason of the celebration – it was tables upon tables of fast food, burgers and other high calorie items, which are rumored to be Trump’s favorite. Earl, a patron who comes rather sporadically looked at me, and I could see the worry in his eyes, and asked, “What are we going to do? How am I going to eat? I know those Clemson kids are eating that fast food and I think Trump should buy us all food to get us through this.

He’s an idiot.” Coupling the mounting confusion and mismanagement, Earl expressed dissatisfaction with how the Oval Office and associated parties were executing their plans. First, I find it comforting that Earl expressed concern for the whole group rather than just for himself during this time of heightened emotions. He also directed his anger, not at other recipients or federal workers, but at President Trump, while also expressing jealousy that the Clemson students were fed fast food. Earl, however, was not the only concerned pantry patron, as everyone that I spoke to that day were even more on edge, especially about their placement in the line to get into the pantry and open tables in the main room. Tensions were sometimes high in the pantry because having first and early pick of the materials that were set out in the main area and in the pantry created a sense of competition, and now with this added stress, people seemed hasty and expressed this unhappiness with their neighbors who tried to get in line and pick these items first.

#### The SNAP Gap

Just because the shutdown ended, does not mean that everything resumed as normally scheduled. Many agencies reported damage inflicted upon people in this process. The ‘SNAP gap’ ordinarily refers to how the monthly budgeted amount does not cover all of people’s food expenses, so they try to fill that need via pantries or money that might be useful for something else. The meaning during the shutdown signifies a temporal gap — indicating the length of time, which varied between 30-60 days, where recipients could be without any type of benefit or assistance. While the mainstream news discussed the eventual payment of back worker pay, additionally, 40 million people were placed in a precarious situation and held in limbo as to when they will be able to access food, cash and rent assistance.

#### Benefit Miscommunication

Jenny made an announcement from the stage area behind the food tables that benefits for February were to be distributed in late January. Therefore, whatever was distributed at the beginning of the month was what was received on January 19<sup>th</sup> and would be all that the recipients would get for February. The problem was this issue was not communicated in a way that everyone could understand nor was there consistent communication. Some recipients thought these were extra benefits and not benefits that would need to last them for the duration of the shutdown – at that time it was an undetermined amount of time. Therefore, people thought perhaps that these benefits would either last them through February, or they would get benefits in February, but this was far from what would happen. The issue of precarity becomes quite clear because as Oliver and Shapiro (1995) note, most money problems experienced by marginalized folks are not due to spending or overspending of purchases, but because their needs are not being met. Therefore, when benefits were distributed, depending on the amount, many people ran out of benefits before the end of the month. At the pantry, this became increasingly clear.

#### The Shutdown's Emotional and Physical Effects

While first able to access recipients, I asked them how the shutdown was making them feel emotionally and physically. Anxiety is an experience that can affect a person's wellbeing in many ways – like increasing heart rates and causing cardiovascular troubles (Martin and Ferris 2007; McBride 2007; Olson 1999; Sims and Rainge 2002). Not only can anxiety affect stress levels of the body, it can also affect one's emotional sense of self. During the 35 days of the shutdown, there were a range of emotions expressed, beginning with general annoyance at what they considered a temper tantrum by a grown man to increasing anxiety. Feelings of anxiety increased because of the confusion and lack of knowledge about how they were to simply provide food for themselves. For example, while Jenny was given the responsibility of informing

the pantry of how the benefit distribution was going to be structured, the pantry erupted in questions and ‘what the hell?’ and other exasperated exclamations.

Due to the lack of communication, Jenny was saddled with answering questions about which she had no authority, information or ability to manage the emotions of 40 people who were expressing their various levels of despair, confusion and anger. These feelings were accentuated further by how they thought people perceived them during the shutdown. For example, many of the patrons discussed not feeling cared for, when one patron stated, “[Trump] doesn’t care if we live or die” and “how are we supposed to eat?” as the people asked if there was any remaining food that they could transport home from the pantry.

To add to the notion of precarity, Feed the Need was added to the 211 list during the shutdown. The 211 number is Milwaukee’s non-emergency system which functions as a helpline for people who are facing insecurity in Milwaukee of any kind. Milwaukee residents can call into the information line and be connected to services in the city – food, housing and other social safety net providers. The only issue is that a person must have access to a phone and know that they would need to call 211 to be connected. At Feed the Need, everyone is a priority, and 211 is not necessary to use the pantry, but this helpline does help reach out to people that may be underserved in their communities.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the shutdown ended, with credit given to the Federal Aviation Agency and Flight Attendant Unions efforts to close down LaGuardia International Airport, a major airline artery that affected millions of travelers flying in and out of that airport. What became clear after the shutdown ended was that for many Americans, they were used as pawns in an unnecessary game. Not only were 800,000 federal workers placed in precarity, but 40 million people had their benefits and access to resources severely curtailed.

## Conclusion

This chapter acts as a microscope into a recent event in United States economic history – the shutdown of 2019. While many might see this as solely an economic event, this shutdown impacted people in ways not previously experienced. While shutdowns are not new to the United States, the duration of this most recent shutdown resulted in lasting effects that changed how people view how their government operates. The mass confusion led to recipients feeling disrespected and forgotten. Social workers were left feeling tired, overwhelmed and overworked. Neither their experiences nor their stories were told to the millions of people watching the news or keeping tabs on the federal governments processes during this time. It left people symbolically erased from the main focus. This chapter expanded the scope of the persons affected by the shutdown, which was significantly larger than the oft reported 800,000 furloughed federal workers in the 24-hour news media cycle. This chapter also introduced a local food advocacy organization in Milwaukee, Hunger Task Force, which will be discussed at greater length in an upcoming chapter. In combination with the recipients and federal workers trying to qualify for benefits, the following chapter details this struggle and the issues that social workers often encounter with working with various populations in the Milwaukee area.



## Chapter 6: “I feel like a rat in a race”: The Benefit Experience

Like a constant scavenger hunt, respondents described their experience with benefit assistance as being in an endless maze. I asked one respondent how she felt about the process of benefit assistance and she replied that it was like a large overlapping maze that led back to the beginning of the map. All of the recipients that I interviewed stated that the amount received per month is not enough to feed themselves or their families, and therefore they themselves must supplement in order to make it through the month – what is often called the SNAP Gap. The amount of money varies between families each month that they might get depending on circumstance and living situation. Interviewing the participants led to several different experiences that sometimes differed from the perceptions of social workers who provide this assistance and care. While these participant interviews capture different experiences, they also capture similarities. Whereas the general public perceives recipients as “takers” and lazy, this chapter tries to detail a more accurate snapshot of the average recipient. Participants crossed age, race, educational attainment and geographical areas, but all say the same thing: these programs help me eat, but I am still unable to meet my needs. This chapter explores both how the 26 recipients navigate the Wisconsin Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP)/Foodshare<sup>9</sup>, manage and navigate poverty, and how 15 social workers and state workers manage burnout, changing and unclear state regulations and perceive assisting people in need.

### Background

Before exploring the interviews from both the recipients and case managers, it might be important to look at what Eubanks (2018) calls “automating inequality”. Eubanks (2018) uses her experience with insurance claims systems and how digital platforms impacted how her

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<sup>9</sup>Foodshare and SNAP indicate similar programs and will be used interchangeably throughout the chapter.

husband received his medical care. The software flagged them as ‘fraud potential’ and stopped their claims, without contacting them about the investigation. Eubanks (2018) noted that without the vast resources that they had; they would not have been able to fight the reduction of services. Therefore, this creates a far larger issue: if one does not have ready access to privilege and resources in applying for social services, they might drop off from applying. One of the examples of automated eligibility software debuted in Wisconsin in 2015 and named the program Foodshare Employment and Training (FSET)<sup>10</sup>. Like some other governors, then-Governor Scott Walker wanted harsher restrictions and mandated new work requirements to receive SNAP benefits. The problem is that this much of the program was not deployed in a clear manner and people who could be eligible, i.e., homeless people and students, were told they were not. From the introduction of FSET, in order to qualify for benefits, recipients must meet the work requirements in one of three ways: “work 80 hours, or take part in FSET, Wisconsin Works (W-2), or certain programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for at least 80 hours, or work and also take part in an allowable work program for 80 hours each month<sup>2</sup>” (Wisconsin Department of Health Services 2018).

Many researchers have covered the W-2 programs in Wisconsin and how it affects people living in poverty and receiving benefits (Baldwin 2010a, 2010a; Gilens 1999) However, fewer have engaged with state programs- that are individual to each state, which by itself makes the SNAP program mired in confusion and unable to operate successfully. This perhaps is the ultimate goal: make a program so inefficient that it seals its own demise or shows inaccurate results of a program’s success. Eubanks (2018) noted that a similar problem of how online software is meant to “help” make things more efficient, but often fails, perhaps on purpose, in

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/fset/index.htm>

that goal, as did previous “remedies.” For example, I met with Rachel from the Hunger Task Force, who formerly was in charge of helping get teams out of to the community and help them sign up for benefits. She noted that FSET was good in theory but awful in practice. When you look at the FSET website, it shows that people are getting jobs above the minimum wage. However, Rachel explains that this is an incomplete picture, because it only captures jobs attained but not jobs kept. What this means is, it captured data that someone attained employment, but not what type of employment, such as temporary work that was not to last for very long, day work and other short employment. It also did not record starts and stops, only initial employment. For the purposes of the public, Rachel noted that state legislators were showing that the work requirements were beneficial to taxpayers because it looked like the program is working but people were potentially unaccounted and more than likely falling through the cracks. Rachel noted that during the rollout of the FSET and work requirement program, homeless people were ineligible for assistance, then after some lobbying at the state capitol, the SNAP requirement changed, but homeless people coming into apply for the benefit were still being told that they were ineligible.

Not only were there work requirements placed on people trying to access food security, they also had their habits, purchasing and amounts able to be deducted daily from an ATM monitored. State and federal governments routinely seek to monitor what they eat and how they spend their dollars, which the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system already tracks (Mulvany 2014; Sandler 2012). Wisconsin not only wanted to have more restrictive purchasing policies on meat, seafood and items with sugar, they also wanted to drum up support from taxpayers regarding drug testing recipients. The negative stereotype of the drug-addled recipient followed through to actual legislation (Gritter 2015). The problem is that the programs

effectively spend more than they save, as they only find a small population of individuals testing positive. Depending on the source used, Wisconsin tested between 42-80 people out of 1,800 and found between 1 to 5 people having tested positive for drugs, and they spent approximately three thousand dollars during the initial roll out (Gomez 2019; Gritter 2015). Other states instituted similar policies, tested millions of people and found that less than 5% of the population tested positive, but they spend almost a million dollars (Gomez 2019). However, people who engage in doing drugs are caught in a bind because many state-wide drug treatment programs are similarly underfunded. And at a basic level of humanity and apparently revolutionary concept, no matter what, food access is a human right and people who do drugs deserve food and nutrition in their bodies.

#### Social Workers/Case managers

As researchers note, the roadblocks set up to restrict access to government assistance often impact marginalized communities in harmful ways (Baldwin 2010; Eubanks 2018). A social worker from another social service organization that directly assists houseless individuals find stable housing and work denotes the terrible trials and tribulations they have to go through in order to access assistance. This worker I interviewed surmised that the process for the homeless, who admittedly were not part of the original project, is a long and winding road to finding stability. In the most basic way, Bridget explained that in order for her organization to help someone in need they cannot just come into the office. They must first call the Milwaukee Help Line which is 2-1-1. From there, they are routed through different programs that might be available to them. They can help the person access a bed in a shelter for a night. If they are reaching homelessness, there are rent assistance programs, you must have a set amount in your bank account to receive this assistance. For example, when I was trying to access benefits in

Illinois, I made 100\$ over the maximum income limit, but I did not have the \$1200 required in my bank account to qualify for rent assistance. Similarly, people who have just *become* homeless often cannot access all the services from this agency and must find alternative accommodations like one-night hotels. In order for agencies like this one in Milwaukee to assist anyone, under federal guidelines, someone must be homeless for a consecutive number of months. Therefore, just to recap, in order for social service organizations to assist someone here in the United States, they must already be homeless for some length of time. Eubanks' (2018) research is mirrored here due to all the hoops and ladders someone must endure to receive some level of assistance. This winding and confusing process is similar to the maze that people trying to access SNAP must navigate, which will be discussed shortly.

While FSET is a free program, it is still one of the requirements for benefit receipt. Jenny from the food pantry consistently found this program pointless and unnecessary. She had a job, worked over 80 hours but her wages still put her at poverty level, all while trying to raise teenagers. Her case manager informed her that if she wanted the benefits, she had to search for a job, that “[she] already had.” The other problem is that you have to already qualify for Foodshare to even start FSET. Eubanks (2018) describes similar challenges that Rachel and Jenny echoed above, when she examined the automated process in the similarly Republican-run state of Indiana. While the goal for Indiana was to improve the Department of Health and Human Services, it often created more hindrance.

### Social Work Process and the Shutdown

Similar to the issues that people in poverty or near poverty face, the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019 brought additional problems with how the system of benefit assistance functions. As described in a previous chapter, the shutdown created additional problems for

people who were not considered previously. When the shutdown began at the end of December 2018, there was a highlight of concern about how federal workers would be impacted. There are several layers to this particular problem. For one, the news continued to detail a number of 800,000 federal workers, such as, Transportation Security Administration (TSA), National Park Services and other important roles that help the government function. Second, due to the long duration of the shutdown, some federal workers missed their next paychecks. However, not all federal workers were entitled to back pay after the shutdown ended nor were people given a timeline of when they could expect their paycheck. Third, while some would receive a late paycheck, there were thousands of workers that essentially worked for free during this 35-day period. Regardless of their paycheck, all workers had to continue to report to work.

In order to qualify to receive benefits, you must show paystubs from the previous month, and depending on each state, there are different income maximums. Therefore, if you made over the maximum last month, a person applying for benefits would have to wait at least 2 paychecks to even apply for benefits, not to mention the waiting period for approval. Therefore, a person as to be in an even worse position to qualify for cash and food assistance. Therefore, the safety net that is supposed to exist, simply does not. To deal with this problem, government officials directed people to utilize food banks and food pantries in order to survive. It was clear from working in a food pantry, that the people running the government had very little information on how food banks, pantries and community lunches provide meals for people. It is from the help of organizations like Hunger Task Force and the USDA which was at a risk of shutting down additional services as the shutdown dragged on. One official suggested that workers go to the store and ask managers for an IOU to be paid, once they were. It is almost as if government officials lack the knowledge of how grocery shopping functions. Another suggested using credit

cards, payday loan advances and other high interest loan sharks to help workers through what many considered to be an unnecessary shutdown. During the shutdown, media outlets focused and made visible the plight of the 800,000 federal workers who would be lacking income and perhaps having financial trouble. However, made invisible were the workers who would not be receiving backpay during this time. Made even more invisible were the 30-40 million recipients, profiled in the shutdown chapter, who also would lose benefits that they so depended on. How does this fit into the larger problem of social workers and social services?

### Working Under Confusion

Imagine if your paycheck was suspended for an undetermined amount of time? Audre, a social worker I interviewed, noted that there were individuals who never considered themselves to ever be put into a situation where they might need assistance, and given how the benefit system is structured, they lacked the support necessary to avoid economic problems. Audre noted that there was no communication on how the benefit system was supposed to function during this time, which made it almost impossible for social workers to do their jobs effectively, or at least with minor issues. Associated with that, people that were already receiving benefits, had no recourse and were terrified of what might happen and how they would continue to survive and feed themselves and their families. Audre detailed expressions of anxiety, fear and frustration with the misinformation that was being given each day the shutdown went on. Similarly, Audre stated that each of us is one or two paychecks away from poverty and many of the people that she saw come through the door during the shutdown felt forgotten and erased. For many people who experienced the effects of the shutdown, Audre noted how the people were relatively confused about how the process functioned. For example, the social workers at Hunger Task Force were given daily updates about SNAP and other benefit assistance. They also had to

manage people either coming in for the first time or people worried about the continuation of their benefits, but both were worried about how they would simply survive.

I had the opportunity to interview social workers from several different organizations and the common thread through all were the ways that workers interacted with white colleagues and clients and colleagues and clients of color. For example, at a social service agency that served the homeless or recently homeless population, many of the white social workers commented on how their workplace was wonderful and had limited frustration with how things operated. Conversely, Aubrey, a Black supervisor from the same organization, detailed a picture significantly different. She detailed experiences with white managers and specifically with white males that were resistant to understanding notions of privilege. She noted that the Black workers and workers of color found white allies and were able to bring attention to some of the issues that they found could be remedied with some workshops and speakers on different subjects.

Aubrey detailed one of their first workshops was on whiteness and white privilege. She noted that many white people, but specifically white men, were particularly frustrated by the assumptions or their unrecognized privileges. She noted that many of the people objected to recognize that their privilege by using the usual rhetorical gymnastics of whiteness, by stating that they grew up poor, are currently poor or lack various abilities to do certain things. This is usually where white people have particular hang ups about being confronted with notions about privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Lipsitz 2006a). Largely, these phrases of rhetorical gymnastics work to bar learning possibilities by protecting white fragility – essentially shielding white individuals from having to consider that there are privileges to whiteness. Aubrey eventually had to take a break from the committee working to set up these workshops simply because of the emotional labor she felt she was putting out for her white colleagues, but not receiving the same



support from them. Mark, a white man, who was a rare ‘ally’ in trying to bring more equity to the workplace had a different perspective. I placed ally in quotations because he felt that the committee was trying to do many things, too quickly. Therefore, like many calls for equity in the past, this mirrored white resistance to Black and brown equity (King Jr 1992). It also brings to mind Derrick Bell’s assessment of interest convergence – white people or those with power will only support something if they see themselves also benefitting from that change. The issue is, there is no policy change where white people would lose anything. Bobo (1999) noted that whites would vote against policies that would in fact help them, if they thought people of color were going to get preferential treatment. Reyna, a petite white woman who was a worker at a local agency described her former agency as a Jekyll and Hyde operation – where the customer sees happy faces, but the work/life balance of the worker is anything but balanced. While there weren’t explicit ‘quotas’ to sign people up for benefits, there were implied quotas for the workers.

At a different agency, Aubrey noted some of the same issues with how some of her colleagues worked with their clients. Similar to how I needed to build rapport with my research participants, the same is true for social workers, especially if one is particularly interested in assisting them. It does not mean that her white colleagues were unable to offer the same level of service. She noted that some of her white colleagues excelled at listening to people’s concerns and trying to do the most to help them. There were, however, colleagues that lacked that particular quality and handled these cases differently. I asked her how she felt the colleagues succeeded in building the same level of rapport as her. The first thing she said was that you just need to listen because many of the individuals that walk through the door hardly get heard. Then, instead of offering what you think they *should* do, offer up a plan to work together to achieve

particular goals. If the goals are jobs, housing, food, the case/social worker and the client come up with a plan *together*. That process of achieving these goals together creates a space for assistance and self-reliance. Then they meet every two weeks to assess the plan and adjust where necessary.

Connecting building rapport to job success, self-care is important, and is a process not often taught to students when they are in process of learning how to be social or case workers. Self-care is not a new concept, but being open to talking about job stress, mental health and how these things can affect your body, is. Melanie, a white woman from the northern part of Wisconsin, and recent social work graduate now working in the field, noted that the education she received did not include proper classes or practices in self-care, without which, often leads social workers or people who care for others to methods that are not necessarily healthy and can lead to a faster rate of burnout. She also worked in Green Bay first and then in Milwaukee and had the ability to speak to two different local populations receiving assistance and how she felt about those cases.

Aubrey described some level of satisfaction with the ways that the organization she worked for handled the sometimes intense workload and emotional labor that they might have to do in a given week. Before her promotion, her old supervisor would take them out for lunch or away from the office. When something negative happens to one of the clients, grief counselors are provided for emotional support at any time. Now as a supervisor, she also works with her team and asks them what they would like to do for a particular event. She has taken her group out to spa days, lunch and some team building events.

In some cases, some of the social workers I interviewed did not have any social work education and had wanted a career in something people related, like marketing, which is the

story of Abigail. I met her one day at Starbucks, surrounded by folders and paperwork. She noted that her supervisor allowed them time away from the office, if they needed some air or different location. She, like some others I met, did not seek out social work but simply fell into it and found a career that felt rewarding. Bill, who was a tall, skinny, white man with a few tattoos and an infectious laugh, became a social worker because he struggled with addiction in his 20s and 30s and knew that other people did too. Audre, who I previously mentioned worked at social service agencies focused on workers and voting rights, but she was always focused on working jobs where she could directly assist people in need.

### Not Always a Rosy Picture: The Common Perception of Social Workers

However, not every moment is a Kodak moment and social workers are real people who live in a world where social constructions exist. Melanie, for example, knew people were simply looking for assistance but often wondered why they could not just get it together and get off assistance. To her credit for her honesty, she stated she felt more often felt this way when she had white clients but still invokes notions that benefit recipients are dishonest. Another social worker noted particular feelings regarding people who were ‘homeless’. I place homeless this way to highlight the way they discussed people in this situation. Per guidelines that pertain to homeless persons, they do not need to verify an address. This social worker stated, “you get homeless calls to do the renewal and you hear children in the background, so they clearly aren’t homeless.” For this worker, the mere perception that there was background noise indicated to this worker that there was an element of ‘fraud’, and this person wasn’t really ‘homeless’, but homelessness accounts for a variety of statuses. Another younger worker, a “novice” as she said some of the more veteran social workers called the new workers, stated that sometimes when you are new into the industry, you are more ‘wide-eyed and bushy-tailed’ and have a sense of

optimism that you are going to help. However, she stated that older workers take this as weakness because over time, they say the new workers will learn that ‘some’ people are just trying to scam the system. She ended that thought by saying that, she understands that people who are more senior have obviously seen more, but often that original optimism gets replaced with a more hardened sense of self because people can forget what poverty looks like or place themselves outside, as she stated, “I made it, so why can’t you?”.

One of my first interviews was with a social worker named Fred. I met him in a quaint coffee shop in the suburb/town of Waukesha, Wisconsin. A white man in his late 40s of average height greeted me in the coffee shop that looked like a converted old home. He seemed a little nervous to be interviewed, which is to be expected, but over time, loosened up and began to speak a little more freely. He spoke to me about his job, commuting from Waukesha which is predominately white and has larger pockets of higher socioeconomic statuses, how he handled stress, the process, and how many clients he usually has under his control on a given day – which can be between 50-100. Some case workers expressed that they might have approximately 1400 cases, depending on what is happening with people’s lives and economies. During the interview, Fred kept using the pronoun, ‘they’ to describe his clients or clients in general. At the end of the interview, I asked him, ‘when you say ‘they’ who are you talking about?’ Often, when speaking about an othered group, white people (but not exclusively) will code their language by using they and often it is seen as quite disparaging. This is different from when someone requests the pronoun they to be used for their gender identity. When I asked him what he meant by his use of the word ‘they’ and he chuckled nervously, and said, ‘I guess I never noticed I do that. I guess I am talking about Black people.’

White/white-identifying people account for 63% of the population, Latinx populations account for 13-14% and Black and African American populations account for around 12%, among other populations that currently live in the US. Depending on the state, the percentage of white people that receive welfare can vary from 38.9% to over 40% and the percentage of Black and African Americans that receive assistance is 39% (Census.gov 2010, Cole 2019). If we looked at solely these percentages and not the population rates that they come from, we might assume that Black and African American populations receive more assistance than other groups. However, when taking into consideration population size, African Americans' account for 12% of the population. White people in the US are a larger group of recipients simply because they account for a larger proportion of the population but receive less focus due to some of the work by legislators in the past, i.e., Reagan labelling Black women in particular 'Welfare Queens'. After one meeting with a social worker at an agency in Milwaukee, she slipped me meeting notes that detailed their demographic numbers for people receiving/requesting assistance which totaled 29% African American/Black, 47% Latino and 50% white<sup>11</sup>. She told me she wanted to change the perception that all welfare recipients were non-white. When placing these numbers within the population demographics, it becomes clearer that whites have a large share of recipientship.

Social workers can often be placed in a bind because while they work for the state to help people in need, the state is in a simultaneous desire to reduce welfare numbers, often to the detriment of the people that need assistance. For example, while talking to Audre, she detailed that she employed several former state workers from the Maria Coggs Social Service Building. She referred to the state workers as 'ineligibility workers' due to some of hoops and extra proof that a social worker might make a client provide. Audre told me an anecdote about a former

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<sup>11</sup> Information passed to me at an interview.

military service member that was trying to get enrolled in various assistance programs like SNAP and the social worker had the individual supply several different things, and sometimes multiple papers with the same information. This does not mean that all social workers are vindictive and out to kick everyone off from receiving benefits, but it does illustrate that there are discrepancies in how the state workers think the program works, from how the hunger task force access workers describe the program and how social workers in private offices think the program function.

### The Recipients

Many of the recipients I interviewed were college educated, with extensive degrees, from various age groups (18 – 70) and from various locations all around the United States who ended up living in Milwaukee. The other side of the benefit side is that of the recipient, the ones that are trying to navigate a very confusing and convoluted system in which they almost feel is set up to hurt them. They feel it is set up in a way that is antithetical to the way they experience poverty. A difference of one hundred dollars over the income maximum does not mean a person or family is immediately out of living in poverty. Many of my participants used the phrase, ‘to rob Peter to pay Paul’ to explain how they made their living expenses work each month, or if something unexpected emerged. In the rest of this chapter, respondents recount their experiences with the system and their case managers, how they navigate poverty and how they shop at the store and make ends meet each month and how they themselves would fix the benefit assistance system.

Many of the respondents recalled having tenuous relationships with their benefit social workers. Or they only spoke to them when required when they would have to fill out or update any paperwork. For the most part, many of the recipients recalled that the process was never

really the same, nor did they always have the same case manager. While sometimes they found their caseworkers to be nice, they also recalled moments where they felt simply like a number, as was the story of one of my respondents named Ashley. When she waited at a southside Milwaukee social service office, she recounted several stories where she felt there was an adversarial attitude toward the respondents. Jenny from the food pantry always felt as though she was getting the run around because she would tell the case manager that she had a job, but the case manager kept telling her she needed to sign on to FSET, the program described at the beginning of the chapter, even though she worked over 80 hours per month. Jenny was never one to keep her feelings to herself about how she thought these social programs <did not> work.

### Restrictions and Shopping

Where the respondents differed amongst each other was how someone spends their benefits and the issues between what they want to buy and what they are able to buy in the stores. At a women's retreat for Gathering People's Lutheran Church, I interviewed six women who had wildly different opinions about how they spend their benefits. Mary, a Latina woman in her mid-50s, held a very common idea with how people should spend their benefits. Like many older women, she felt that SNAP benefits should only be spent on staples – bread, milk, flour, beans, meat and other non-perishables. These recipients received between \$15 and \$150 per month to spend on food.

I asked many of my respondents, including these women, how they plan out their shopping experiences and they detail a procedure that requires planning and time. Therefore, there are no impromptu trips to the store nor are things purchased outside the items that they clip from the papers or their lists. Being poor takes effort and time and significant energy to do things

that people who have reduced monetary concerns need not spend additional mental and emotional labor (Ehrenreich 2014; Weese 2018; Wellington 2017). The places that people most often frequented were Walmart, Aldi's, Piggly Wiggly or Pick n' Save. They also either had to secure rides from people with cars or take public transit.

Moving towards more technologically based programs, recipients can monitor their benefits either by calling the toll-free number on the card or there is an iPhone/android app where recipients can load their card and find out their card balance. Many of the older recipients simply called the number and the younger recipients used their phone app. The recipients I spoke with were particularly vigilant about when their benefits would drop for the month – which is dependent on the last digits of their social security number – to be either the 1<sup>st</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> or end of each month. Knowing the balance was incredibly important because it allowed the respondents to see if there was any money for extras that they could splurge on during that month, since if on the off chance they did not use all their money, it could roll over from one month to the next. Raquel, Alexa and Marina and several others talked about how even if they did know their balance, they still were anxious at the checkout counter, especially if the card failed to go through the first time. In my interviews, when women would go shopping, there was more accountability for their SNAP card, but this was not as common when men would go shopping. Alfred, a Black man in his late 50's, noted that sometimes if he went over, he would simply pull things off the list and then the workers would just need to put it back. Often, shopping is coded as feminine in contemporary America, therefore, men either lack the expertise, or *pretend* to lack it in order to protect notions of masculinity.

A majority of women I interviewed were far more budget conscious than most of the men. Antonio, a Latino man I met at the pantry, was very precise with what he would need to



purchase because he often had family that would come by to eat and he wanted to make sure that anyone who came into his house would have the opportunity to eat. He randomly shopped at the pantry in order to bulk up on items that most saw as kitchen staples. That way, he said he could purchase other items at the store, like larger cuts of meat or more fruits and vegetables. He found these ‘splurges’ to be something extra that he could provide his family during various months of the year, especially if there was a special occasion like a birthday, anniversary or holiday.

### Anxiety and Fear

When I asked my respondents about how they felt when they shopped they identified a variety of emotions from relief that they had the ability to food to anxiety like previously mentioned, as well as, a feeling of disappointment because many stated that they never thought of themselves as never in need, or people who would ever be in a position to need assistance. Ricardo, a Latinx identified person noted when I asked them how they felt, they stated, “struggle, like I and others are definitely trying hard, it’s not like, in my case and I’m willing to bet other people are not trying to live off the government its more as of, what I’m doing right now is not cutting it, it’s not meeting my needs of my daily expenses.” Millie, a Latina woman who moved to the United States 25 years ago expressed disappointment with what she referred to as the “American Dream”. She stated, “I am trying hard, I worked, I had children and they were followed by the police and yet I still cannot make it, and this is not where I thought I would be at this stage of my life.” Being critical of the place you are, is at its base, a notion of freedom, which she was happy to have, but felt that America was a place of contradictions that some had the privilege to ignore or the unwillingness to recognize.

### Disappointment

Many described feelings of personal disappointment. Anika, Freddie, and David among others said they did not want to or enjoy being poor or to rely on receiving these benefits, but they allowed them to eat.’ David infrequently attended the food pantry and sometimes worked the kitchen to clean up after food service was complete. He, like many of my recipients, had a college degree, but he was unable to attain the job he had studied so long for during his younger years. I asked him about what he did previously, and he detailed a story about how Milwaukee changed over time, echoing the same deindustrialization theme discussed by Wilson (1977). David talked about how he had been at one point gainfully employed with a good job, benefits and pay. Where the Walmart is currently on Capitol, there was an AMC car plant, which closed in the mid-1980s among other good manufacturing jobs. The respondents that I spoke to who were Black discussed that much of their later-life stage poverty was due to economic deindustrialization in the area versus issues of generational poverty. For the respondents who identified as white, their entrance into benefit assistance was accompanied by some sort of health-related issue or job loss, but neither group saw benefit assistance as something they would experience. They feel as though they failed to access the promise of a middle-class life that was yanked from through deindustrialization from corporations and employers who do not hire them despite their skills.

### Responsibility

When I asked how they felt about shopping for themselves, the respondents felt that at least they could provide for themselves. My next question was always, what about other people, ‘how do you feel when other people use their cards?’ Many of the respondents cited that they didn’t judge other people for relying on benefits because they knew what they were probably going through – they were just people trying to feed themselves and this is one way to do

it. Some of the other recipients stated that the new EBT cards that looked like debit cards reduced the stigma that they once felt before when they had to use the actual stamps in the booklet. Now, it is harder to identify a recipient in the store, unless you notice their card with the dark green color, yellow and white lettering and if they pay for household and personal items with cash or a different purchase altogether. Similarly, I asked if they ever looked in other people's carts and compared themselves – to which a majority said that it was unimportant what people bought because it is just good to feed yourself. There were about 5 women I spoke to who had particular objections were the older women, and in particular Mary, who frequently exclaimed, “how do they afford that! I scrape by with my small amount and struggle with just the basics.” Mary, among a few of the respondents who were particular about what people *should* be able to buy. Mary was probably one of my more ‘conservative’ respondents because she was fairly opinionated that people receiving benefits should be grateful for what they are able to get and should not have access to nicer foods – like better steaks and seafood. She rationalized this not in terms of spending but perceptions of how someone *appears* to be grateful. Mary, along with some of the other women were more restricted in what they cooked – they themselves placed harsher restrictions on themselves than the state did – based on the fact that they stated that they felt lucky that they were even able to provide this meager food for themselves.

#### Can You Fix a Broken System or is the System Working Just Fine?

Related to perceptions, it was important to ask the respondents what they wanted other people to know about experiences of poverty. Like David and the other respondents stated above, every time I asked this question, people just wanted other people to have a better understanding of what poverty is like and how they think it could be remedied. They were surviving the only legal way they could, but they would all prefer to have jobs that paid well enough to support

themselves and their families. All the respondents desire from others and government figures is for them to first, understand how poverty actually functions, second, to listen to them and third, make sustainable changes that helped improve their lives, not make them more difficult.

### Participant Led Change

The respondents had several ideas about how to ‘fix’ the system because they were disappointed with how it currently operates. For one, they all advocated for an increase to standards of living simply because the way prices are increasing, they are having to spend more of their benefits, but they fail to go as far as they did previously. They also advocated for the ability to purchase whatever they needed – ending the restrictive policies on purchases. For example, if a person solely receives SNAP/Foodshare, they are unable to purchase hygiene products, toilet paper, dish soap, or anything that might help with personal health. Instead of dividing social service programs into three directions like Women, Infant and Children (WIC), Cash assistance and Foodshare, where there are only some purchases that qualify, they desired to see less red tape and oversight over their purchases. If they are supposed to be ‘searching for work’ why make buying personal products more difficult. When I asked per month what would be sufficient for food, they stated between \$250-400 would make a huge difference in how much they would be able to buy for their families. After a conversation I had with Charles, a respondent in his early 60s, I started to be more vigilant on what I spent monthly for myself, a single woman living in a neighborhood that had access to several grocery stores, i.e. Aldi, Pick n’ Save and Walmart. I found that I spent around the range that the recipients specified – even shopping at stores that provided discounts. The most important statement that the respondents noted, however, was simply that they wished people had more realistic understandings of poverty. Understanding that the media played a role in configuring how recipients are

configured, Sam, a supervisor at a state benefit office noted that the actual amount of ‘welfare fraud’ was a negligible 1-5% of all benefit recipients.

In conclusion, the stories of people receiving benefits and those responsible for giving the benefits are intertwined. Some of the people who went into social work/case management had experiences of being on welfare and wanted to assist others in need. Other times, social workers who had been around the office for longer sometimes looked down on the new workers, as novices, not willing to see their clients as potentially engaging in fraud. As for the recipients, while the public perception is created and transformed over time to signify one group as one entity, from this collection of interviews, the ‘welfare recipient’ *is* college educated, trying to succeed, doing all they can and trying to get by – which is not unlike anyone else, recipient or not. Service providers also assist recipients with options – in the case of Hunger Task Force – which not only operates as a food bank but also a service point for SNAP and other types of assistance. Hunger Task Force as an organization is explored more in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7: Hunger Task Force: Your Free & Local Food Bank

Previous chapters attempted to untangle the web of social work, benefit recipients, and pantries but all of those things still need another component. Much of the food that comes into the doors of recipient homes or pantries is made possible by local food banks and organizations that collect donations from the community writ large. Hunger Task Force (HTF), Milwaukee's Free and Local food bank and advocacy organization that provides pantries, like the Feed the Need pantry profiled in Chapter 3, the ability to fill their shelves. This chapter goes into more detail about origins of a food bank and antipoverty organization in Milwaukee that provides food to local residents, how they came to be, their history and their current operations and what that means for recipients. The chapter also examines how the threads of symbolic annihilation and violence weave their threads within these organizations.<sup>12</sup>

While some might read this part as rather critical of organizations that assist those in poverty, it goes without saying that many people are able to access food through the programs that are provided by the Hunger Task Force and similar organizations, but it would be remiss to not mention that even organizations that are well-intentioned need to keep working on themselves. Why would organizations hide their origins? What purpose does that serve and who is that accommodating? While their intentions are good, often organizations that are led by majority white leaders often struggle with how to make those intentions actionable and less tinged with white savior syndrome.

Writer positionality

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<sup>12</sup>As a reminder, Bourdieu (1979) explains this as symbolic violence which manifests in power differentials between social groups. For Bourdieu (1979), symbolic violence is not necessarily deliberate but rather an unconscious reinforcement of what is considered 'status quo' or the norm for that particular social group. While discussing how a local Milwaukee Food Bank operates, this chapter pushes the boundaries of what might be considered elements of symbolic violence and annihilation that are described in previous chapters.

In the following research, some readers might wonder how I came to the conclusions that I did – whether it be how I interpreted what someone was saying or how I read portions of their website. For some, the systemic, structural and institutional issues of race and whiteness can be difficult for white people, in particular, to understand. Its subtly can confound many white researchers (irrespective of gender) and could result in potentially not batting an eye at some of the things that were said over the course of several interviews with the profiled individuals. As a white woman, I do not have lived experiences of what people of color endure at the hands of white supremacy or even ‘well-intentioned’ microaggressions. How I do understand those experiences is through my sociological training, literature, histories and most importantly, listening to people of color. In order to mitigate any potential for misunderstanding, I asked respondents to explain more clearly to reiterate what they said to confirm their statements during their respective interviews.

### In the Beginning

Per the organization website, Hunger Task Force began in 1974 as the Concerned Citizens for School Breakfast, after the actions of community members advocated for children to have access to lunches and breakfast in schools. This remains a consistent problem for school children, especially ones that receive less funding than other schools within and outside their districts. For example, current legislators tried to create programs where children would be required to do janitorial work to pay for their school lunches – essentially saying that poor children lacked work ethic when we know that is demonstrably not the case (Hibbard 2017; Terkel 2014). In its history, the Hunger Task Force tried and tries to maintain its food advocacy work for people in the state of Wisconsin. For example, it released a report on their school breakfast program for the 2016-2017 school year. Per Hunger Task Force, “in Wisconsin, 1 in 6

children live in poverty...and [ranks last] in the nation for offering school breakfast to children”  
(2). The school breakfast program includes 1 fruit or vegetable, whole grain rich item and a milk carton. The School Breakfast Program began in 1975 and is funded through the USDA.

Is that it?

Since research can also mirror detective work, I was curious how poverty organizations fit into the larger picture and who were these concerned citizens. As the above paragraph explains, the formation of the Hunger Task Force was due to advocacy by a local parents’ group. This description seemed intentionally vague and it felt important to dig a little deeper to the origination of this concerned parents’ group. In this research, I began contacting local residents who either had ties to the community during that time or knew people who were active. I also researched the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Archives which hold the Hunger Task Force notes and advocacy initiatives beginning in 1974 through 1996. While at some level, this is frustrating, it does lend itself to some interesting things that might come up from it. “Concerned citizens” aside, what lead me to explore this path was that through anecdotal conversations about Hunger Task Force, people alluded to the fact that the people being referred to as ‘concerned citizens’ were local Black community members. The idea that Black women specifically or Black people more generally were erased from the historical timeline of this antihunger organization increased my interest in the topic. It seemed as though too many people knew something was amiss but were not exactly sure where they learned this information. It also seemed pertinent to this research which is an exploration of symbolic annihilation regarding people of color whitewashed from history.

Heynen (2005:3) and Witt (2007:72) notes the formation of the Hunger Task Force through the efforts of the local chapter of the Black Panthers meeting with Reverend Ellwanger



from Milwaukee Cross Lutheran Church. The Panthers were seeking a space for their breakfast program. After this meeting, Ellwanger was confronted with a problem that needed a solution. Therefore, the Citizens for Central City School Breakfast Program (CCCSBP) eventually became the Milwaukee School Breakfast Coalition, which evolved into what is now known as the Hunger Task Force (HTF).

#### Removing the History from the Task Force

Before we can understand the Milwaukee Panther Chapter, we must understand how the Black Panther Party (BPP) nationally came together, since their history is tarnished with white fright and misinformation. Given the perception disseminated by the media, most white people have a very different feeling about the Black Panther Party. It is no secret that the BPP operated with a ‘by any means necessary’ framework, of what some might consider militant. However, that perception of militancy overshadows the important social justice work the party completed for Black communities specifically and people of color more generally. Even with the original party breaking up a few years after Hampton’s assassination, much of that hostility towards Black liberation groups lingered and is mirrored in the perceptions of the present-day Black Lives Matter movement. Many researchers highlight the connections between the COINTELPRO surveillance of the 1960s-1970s on the BPP and the current FBI surveillance of Black Lives Matter supporters and members that is ongoing. Some researchers note that the BPP was not particularly organized nor had a long duration. However, given that it was incumbent on Hoover to create whole task forces to monitor, infiltrate and destroy BPP chapters in cities like Oakland, Chicago, Milwaukee and Winston-Salem, it seems that at least in terms of the FBI, the group piqued their interest. At the time, it seems important to mention that the United States was still engaging with the USSR and in the Cold War, so any organization that was critiquing

capitalism and using socialized methods to do it, was going to be investigated more thoroughly. However, the BPP had two strikes, not only were they anti-capitalist, they were also Black.

### Service Programs

The BPP<sup>13</sup> had several main points that collectivized them as a group. Most importantly, they focused on providing services that were missing in the Black Community. Many of its social service programs were quite popular and were creating change in communities in ways that the BPP and the communities they live and work in felt the Federal and State government assistance was lacking. Heynen (2005) noted that the Black Panthers had approximately 65 survival programs running for their community. They were titled survival programs because the BPP felt that the United States government was not concerned with the survival of Black people. Heynen (2005) noted that he felt that the official US policy was to pacify the community, not sustain the community. Some examples from these 65 survival programs included: Child Development Centers, health classes, ambulance, prison shuttles, access to clothing, dental care, plumbing and home maintenance, a newsletter and the school breakfast program, among others (Heynen 2005).

Food insecurity is a health problem and in the 1960s and 1970s, the BPP were trying to find ways to combat this issue that affects millions of children still today. The BPP was observing a community that while there were some initiatives aimed to assist those in poverty with healthcare, many Black Americans were still lacking in quality care. Therefore, the BPP launched community health programs with people on staff ready to assist Black people and those

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<sup>1313</sup> It is important to note that the Black Panthers were not a perfect group. They, like most groups led by men, struggled with issues of patriarchy, which led to the creation of the Combahee River Collective and other intersectional Black women's groups during this time that have carried through to the present. Therefore, the Black Panthers do allow for an intersectional conversation of experiences of racism via being Black people and then also Black women experiencing misogynoir and sexism by being Black women. This also does not discount the fact that the BPP discussed gender in very binaried and gendered terms.

in poverty with healthcare, screening for diseases, such as sickle cell anemia and other issues deemed prevalent in the Black community specifically and communities in poverty more generally. They also began helping students in school with breakfast, which assists greatly with academic achievement and better and more positive health outcomes (Heynen 2005, Morabia 2016).

Many of the programs, like school breakfasts, that were started by the Black Panthers eventually were made into national programs – due to the pressure placed on government officials and also via cooption of these programs because of their overwhelming success with poor and low-income Black and African Americans. One example of this is in California, where the original Black Panthers were founded – had future President Ronald Reagan as governor. At the time, the Panthers were gaining followers and support for their programs. Reagan had his hand forced to accept some of these BPP-lead initiatives, but clearly reversed them during his presidency, undercutting a lot of plans that have actually made a positive difference in the lives of those experiencing poverty.

### Symbolic Annihilation

Symbolic annihilation is the simultaneous presence and absence of something or group wherein controlling images are created, maintained, changed or destroyed. To give weight to how popular these breakfast programs were, during the peak of the school breakfast program, it is estimated that the BPP and associated volunteers were feeding approximately 250,000 children nationwide (Heynen 2005). Heynen (2005) notes that Hunger Task Force owes its much of its existence to the Milwaukee Chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and that meeting with Reverend Ellwanger. Without listening to the BPP and their ideas about alleviating hunger insecurity and the support of local community members, Ellwanger himself even stated he was

unsure if the Panthers did not contact him who knows how long for there to be a food bank or pantry in Milwaukee. While the BPP was not directly involved, plans were put into motion because a relatively well-connected pastor was able to bring awareness and attention to the issue of food insecurity and Milwaukee children now had the possibility of school breakfasts.

Given what is known now, one would be unaware of that tangential history, even if fleeting, from their website. For example, referring back to the website history, it states that the HTF emerged from a group named Concerned Citizens for School Breakfast, but this is not exactly accurate. Speaking with Audre, a community organizer with familiarity with HTF, gave me a sense of the organizational history. I wanted to get to a knowledgeable source namely because every person I spoke with outside of the organization alluded to this BPP history, but it was completely anecdotal. With this information, I was curious how people within the organization understood its history. This connection is not discussed readily, but people do treat it as a secret fact that gets talked about in hushed tones. This hushed sense is seen not only in how it is discussed within the organization, but that they changed the original organization name.

Audre noted that the reason why the history, tenuous at best, is not discussed is because of the perceptions of white people might have that donate to the pantry. Bluntly, Audre asserted that if white people knew that the Black Panthers were connected to the organization, they might reconsider their donation. The Hunger Task Force owes its presence in Milwaukee to the meeting of Ellwanger and the members of the BPP – without which could have delayed the development of such an important organization. HTF note that they assist a majority of Black and brown residents, but just like the grocery stores, they have no physical presence on the northside. The service centers described below are on Milwaukee's south side, including one location in a rural suburb just southwest of the city.

May the Force be with you

Given this interesting and important history, and that the pantry where I volunteered relied on Hunger Task Force as the free and local Milwaukee food pantry and organization that works closely with those in poverty, getting in contact seemed of high importance. To my surprise, I received a response quicker than I expected. Mark invited me to visit the facility and check out the farm that supplies many of the pantries and individuals in the Milwaukee area more specifically and Wisconsin more generally. Mark led some of the educational instruction programs for students around the Milwaukee area. As a food educator, he develops and uses simulations through the state-wide program, *Food for Today*. This program focuses on food insecurity using various vignettes where participating students assume an identity that is based on a real person and must make ends meet with breakfast, lunch and dinner with the allotted money. Mainly, the program brings many students together to discuss poverty while also breaking down the animosity and negative perceptions towards poor people<sup>14</sup> or individuals that use food assistance.

During my tour of the main distribution facility, Mark was adamant about their advocacy and how the right-wing general public disagree with the work that the organization does because they believe it is too political. While the Hunger Task Force does not have a stated political stance, simply advocating for food *security* equates to the belief it leans more left than center, given that much of their advocacy predicated calling your representatives, via examining their archives at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, much of their advocacy focuses on keeping the heat on more right-wing, benefit-cutting or amnesty focused Republicans. As some archives detail, in a letter written by Dan Canadeo from Waukesha, Wisconsin dated June 24, 1993, to

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<sup>14</sup> Drug testing, laziness, surveillance

Michele Goldstein, then Director of HTF states, “I am withholding my contribution until I receive word from you that not one cent will go to some liberal state or federal representative or senator for your political cause.” Even in 1993, the general public felt notion of food access was a partisan issue. While the organization is not “political”, i.e. right/left but their job is certainly *political*.

During the interview, Mark definitely held some opinions that are not outside the realm of most left/right, democrat/republican circles, especially when it comes to issues of social justice or welfare. Mark noted that when he does do educational outreach, he often receives and perceives the most pushback from more right-wing aligned students. He noted that the rhetoric of people who use pantries as being lazy or lacking work ethic often emerge in these conversations. Mark often responds to these comments in a manner-to-fact way, wherein people who use these services are looking to survive and would probably rather not be using the pantry, but people “use it because it helps.” He has hope for the future and told me he was concerned about breaking these generational opinions about people experiencing poverty.

While food security should not be a partisan issue, often the way social inequalities impact different residents of the Milwaukee area make food insecurity to be seen as political. The organization does not shy away from the fact that it is a hunger advocacy organization and received throughout its existence push back from various members of the public, regarding food assistance. The organization was keen on maintaining this positive image of helping those in need, which is something that an advocacy organization should be doing.

At the same time Mark expressed hope for the future, later in our interview, Mark had some interesting things to say about the Northside of Milwaukee. While at some level admonishing right wing opinions, stated that he was Northside averse and would tell others to

stay away from the area. Perhaps realizing that what he admitted was explicitly coded, he noted he should not say that, but that is how he felt, even though his job is to help the exact people in the area he feels 'uncomfortable' traveling in and through. My tour included two of the three locations in the Milwaukee area: the Hawley Center, the Robles Center and the Farm.

### The Hawley Center

The Hawley Center is located off I-94 in the suburb of West Allis, a low to medium income suburb of Milwaukee that is positioned between the more affluent suburbs of Milwaukee further west and is the main distribution center for the products that come in from local donations and collection points. The distribution center is approximately 15,000 square feet, but all together, the centers are a combination of 50,000 square feet of space. Throughout the year, they also have approximately 15,000 volunteers each year between the farm and distribution centers. This warehouse contained all the food that was to be distributed at some point to either pantries, families or seniors and people were coming in the building to drop off deliveries while I was on my tour. The Hawley Center receives upwards of approximately nine million pounds of food and 2 million of that is through direct donations, from Summerfest, Stamp Out Hunger drives where Postal Service workers help gather food items for people as they make their deliveries and other drives throughout the year. For example, Summerfest is one of the largest music festivals who partners with Hunger Task Force to allow free admission to the festival grounds for anyone that brings non-perishable items for donation. This drive is probably the largest one that they do throughout the year. Mark, though was a little hesitant to say that it was a success because many items that do end up being donated are expired goods, which thus may not detail the inherent care of those donating. However, expired food is not wasted but taken to the farm to be used as compost for the items grown there.

While they will take all food, they will only distribute what they consider to be ‘healthy food’ as dictated by the USDA My Plate program, the updated version of the food pyramid that dictated food proportions for so long. The notion of intention and impact become prevalent again. The intention might be one thing, which is often seen as non-harming or with good meanings behind it, but the impact often stings. Therefore, while the intention might be in the best interest, the way that it is carried out might differ from the end result. For example, while the intention is to help people, you may inadvertently impact them in a negative way depending on how that impact is distributed. Therefore, what the Hunger Task Force considers ‘healthy food’ and what people receiving assistance *should* eat is one of those examples of well-intentions with different impacts. Many studies about poverty display that much of the general public believes that people receiving food assistance should have their benefits monitored or be barred from purchasing certain items like candy, sweets or soda. It implies that poor people and recipients are unable to make decisions for themselves which is why they need to be monitored and what led them to be in poverty in the first place.

People in poverty should not be situated as needing to accept everything and anything because it is food and they happen to be poor. Perceptions of wealth and poverty are key in determining access to free choice. Stating that they only accept and distribute healthy food is still placing some sort of failure on the perceptions of the poor people they are supposedly trying to help. Treating poor people as if they do not know what consists of healthy food erases the larger problem in many of these neighborhoods which is the lack of a sustainable income, grocery stores with fresh foods and simply the cost of those items. Much of the rest of the populace similarly lacks proper nutrition education, but because they are not actively receiving food share, their poor nutrition habits are of no concern to anyone.



Tariffs close to home

In the Hawley Center, they also are the storage point for the USDA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The TEFAP essentially allocates money for places like Hunger Task Force to buy food from the overstock of the USDA. If there is a significant overstock of items, they can be added as free bonuses and Hunger Task Force can add to their stock of items – which help supply food pantries, families and senior stock boxes.

One might ask themselves; how can the USDA have an overstock of items and the simple answer is trade wars and increased tariffs where places are no longer purchasing American goods for trade. Instead of US farmers selling their goods to other nations, the USDA will buy up the food and then it gets allocated to places like the Hunger Task Force and then they buy it through the allocation program. To account for this, the USDA pays these farmers for their goods. It works like this, if there is an overabundance of food - at present there is about 1.2 billion of commodities – mostly apples, milk and pork – which are largely excess food that farmers are unable to trade as rapidly. The USDA buys that from the commodities market and much of that is purchased by pantries, schools and food banks. The Hunger Task Force is allocated money from the USDA and purchase items from them. However, there are items that are considered 'bonuses' which are food turned down from other places or if there happens just to be a lot of it. Hunger Task Force does not turn down any food, they collect it, separate it by item type: fruit, vegetable, snack foods, etc. and then those are the items that are available for food pantries/banks and people on request.

Therefore, we might think that larger government operations might not affect groups and organizations like Hunger Task Force, but in actuality, issues, policies and decisions trickle down and directly affect those who need assistance. There is a saying in Chicago, 'all politics is

local' because even though we might imagine federal policies as far off and not readily affecting people directly, these decisions directly impact people's lives. There are also other effects as well that have a negative trickle-down effect, and that comes from decisions about social safety net assistance programs like SNAP, Foodshare and cash assistance. Just like the USDA governs food pantries, they are also managing these programs as well, so when changes are made at the top, everything below must be juggled and moved around. Therefore, when changes are made, people are kicked off and need to seek other methods of obtaining nutrition, so while statistically it looks like less people are on receiving assistance, it does not mean that people are able to provide for themselves – they become invisible. Therefore, the flow between federal policies, to government institutions, to assistance organizations, to the actual consumer/individual creates a large interconnecting web.

#### Robles Center

The Robles Center is located in what many consider the South side of Milwaukee, in the historic Mitchell Street District. Formerly, this was a highly concentrated Polish district over time transitioning into a high population of Latinx families. Situated in an old store front, the center is intended as a self-service station, but with ACCESS service team members available for any questions, issues or problems. The center is staffed by approximately 5 people, including a center manager and State representative. They also have signs up detailing that assistance is available in many languages – English, Polish and Spanish as the primary ones. The Center is clean, with computer stations lining the sides of the walls, with the assistance workers present in the center, with the manager and state representative in the back. Robles Center is where much of the advocacy develops and where the ACCESS team is located. This ten-person access team goes out into communities and help people sign up to receive Foodshare benefits – they act as

access points to social services because people in need might not know about these benefits, may be afraid to ask for them or feel like they should not ask for them because of the negative perceptions of benefit assistance. I was able to meet with Elaine at the center and she helped answer my questions about the services that the center provides, as well as, HTF more generally. How I got in touch with Elaine included working and talking with local community members about HTF, because all my contacts at the organization had been white individuals, but I was interested in interviewing someone with a potential differing outlook and take on how the organization functions for a more well-rounded examination throughout this chapter.

### The Farm and Hatchery

The Farm is located out in the suburbs in a town called Franklin and is approximately 200 acres and accounts for much of the production of vegetables and fish. The farm itself produces about 500,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables, including 16 apple varieties. The farm also includes a fish hatchery that operates under the condition that 40,000 fish will be redeposited into the lakes and ponds around Milwaukee. The farm and hatchery employ only 9 people that oversee the grounds and 5,000 volunteers annually. Almost all of the farm implements were donated or bought secondhand from local farmers. Food banks usually don't have their own farms. However, this farm seeks to distribute food to a larger distance.

### Local Labor Force

The farm was worked by the nine employees and also there was a work release program from the county jail that sits across the street from the farm. After 2012, former Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke, stopped the program. Though Clarke 'officially' halted the county-wide work release program unexpectedly, the program in Franklin did not shutter, but continued. The work release program at the Milwaukee County House of Corrections operates several

programs, but the one that is used in connection with Hunger Task Force works to allow for every 24 hours worked, the inmate has 1 day removed from their sentence. These solutions address just part of the problem and as HTF using prison labor while not compensating the people doing it with horticulture, farming or other certificates or money, seems like an extension of chattel slavery. Education and treatment programs actually have a deeper impact for people in prison and often reduce recidivism (Gomez 2019; Gritter 2015).

While this was helpful, Mark still held perceptions about the inmates working on the farm. For example, if there were volunteers on the grounds, there could be no inmates present. However, the county jail that sits across the street enabled men convicted of non-violent crimes to volunteer. What this means is that the perceptions of inmates, regardless of non-violent offence, were still seen as dangerous because of their inmate status. At this jail, non-violent indicates property crime, inability to pay bail, traffic violations, etc. In short, many of the men incarcerated at this prison were poor or working class before entering its gates. Mark even described the inmates as “non-violent but idiots who had just made dumb mistakes.” Perceptions of these inmates drifted into the work that they did at the farm and how they <did not> connect with individuals from the outside. The perceptions held by Mark are not any different than any average individual – however, we might think that at a work release program for non-violent individuals there might be a specter of treating these individuals with a level of respect.

The farm described above also has other programs on its grounds, which include a large kitchen where local chefs from area restaurants come in and hold cooking classes for people in poverty. Recall that Hunger Task Force is well-intentioned but often has problematic impacts because quality nutrition access affects groups across class and race lines. For example, wealthy children might engage in poor nutrition habits that are worse than low-income children, but

because they are afforded the veil of wealth, they are hardly a focus. More often, we attribute the lack of nutrition habits on low-income children and their families. For example, the Hunger Task Force states that they, “just don’t feed kids – we also teach them about healthy eating!” The Force employs an on-staff Dietitian Educator that travels to different Milwaukee Public Schools and teaches low-income children nutrition education. While this is noble, this is perhaps one of those intention/impact approaches that means well in theory but has the appearance of attempting to be a white savior in practice. For example, the assumption is that low-income children do not understand what good nutrition is nor how to cook. The issue with that is that is not solely something experienced by poor people, yet the Force sets its sights on people in poverty, which is important, but also creates and maintains perceptions of those in poverty.

#### Hunger Focus

In other ways, symbolic annihilation can emerge in a series of ways – which help navigate particular beliefs about people. Websites of organizations are important to examine since they are an extension of their focus and goal; simultaneously, they can reinforce perceptions about people. Many of the children and families pictured on the HTF website are Black children. Just like many of the other perceptions of Black families and children, this becomes an extension of that media focus. For example, positioning Black children as the only ones that need assistance or nutrition assistance erases the fact that other children may benefit from this as well. Using Black children as the figurehead of poverty and then using their images configures in the minds of those who may donate to the Hunger Task Force that they are doing a noble task and can avert feelings of negative racial bias. For example, people that donate to the Hunger Task Force might think they are helping alleviate issues of racial inequity with their donations.

While people of color do experience high rates of poverty, by using their images *as* the face of poverty, it creates the continuations of negative perceptions in the mind of the general public. Hunger Task Force itself helps service Milwaukee and works with local pantries in other parts of Wisconsin, *but* donations can come from anywhere. For example, when looking at an electoral map of Wisconsin, Milwaukee County is overwhelmingly blue, and its surrounding counties are staunchly red. Wisconsin residents harbor particular negative and racialized feelings about Milwaukee. However, the Black population in Milwaukee accounts for 6% of the state population (40% in Milwaukee) and the state itself is 88% white. Therefore, the rest of the state and parts of Milwaukee harbor racialized feelings for a very small part of the demographic makeup of the state. Routinely these populations are blamed for the state's problems, instead of looking at structural, systemic and institutional factors at play, as described above. Therefore, the website could be working to maintain the narrative of poor Black children via this focus, as well as, forgetting that families in these predominately white areas are also disproportionately impacted by poverty.

Symbolic annihilation, regarding the Hunger Task Force emerges in a multiplicity of fronts because one group can be affected in two ways. Either Black families are always seen a certain way – as poor, even if they are wealthy nor have ever used assistance programs. White families are never seen as poor, even if they are able and have used assistance programs. By making the presence of Black families as needing assistance the main focus, it also places white families as somehow persevering in ways that Black families are not able. White families have the luxury of never being seen as needing assistance even though their participation in the SNAP program is half their representative population in the nation.

Where Symbolic Violence and Annihilation Intersect

These perceptions can also materialize in other ways. The lens that people use to gaze onto poverty often sees this issue in a particular manner – one they have personal failings, two things that people in poverty do to supposedly keep themselves in poverty, and three, they just do not know how to care for themselves. Hunger Task Force tends to focus on the final one – that poor people simply don't know how to make good, nutritious food for themselves or their family. For example, assuming that the organization knows better about how people should live their lives.

Thus, again while being well-intentioned, it capitalizes on the idea that Hunger Task Force thinks that it holds the key for people to live better lives. It also shows the significance of the lack of an inclusive and diverse workforce – with the invisibility of voices of color and the echo of white voices, being critically and systemically aware goes unchecked.

This is not solely a problem with Hunger Task Force. Elaine noted that being a Black woman in many social welfare-oriented offices, she noticed some of the same well-meaning or well-intentioned behaviors of her white co-workers that were often out of place or missing the point. For example, she expressed frustration when she would bring up a new idea to solve a problem and people would treat it as a talking point or non-issue, but when a white male meeting attendee said a similar solution, it was met with support. She discussed at length the proper ways to express and *do* allyship. She would confide in a white, male coworker who had her back<sup>3</sup> and he would bring up her ideas, give her credit and also bring attention to the double standards within the office culture.

Another social service office, dedicated to homeless and houseless people in the Milwaukee area also struggled with these same issues of race, place and people that they serve. This organization created a committee staffed with employees seeking greater awareness of how

whiteness, privilege and race play within the workplace. While not always successful, specifically when trying to educate white people on their own whiteness, the intention is important to note.

This last chapter explored how organizations that combat poverty operate, but even within these organizations, they also provide social services. Exploring how these advocacy organizations interplay with social workers, food pantries and people is an important role. Providing a pathway for people to access food is imperative. There is no doubt that Hunger Task Force provides a valuable resource for people in Milwaukee – especially given its historical and current segregation issues. While HTF is noble, they also struggle with many of the issues discussed in previous chapters, where whiteness and privilege often go unchecked. Good intentions are important but there must be attention paid to the impact that these programs may cause.



## Chapter 8: An Ode to My Time at Feed the Need

August 7, 2019 was an emotional day as it was my last day at the pantry. The last year and a half was incredibly important to me. Without the assistance and welcoming environment of the Gathering Peoples Lutheran Church and Feed the Need pantry, this project would not be possible. During the last few months of my volunteering, I was hired as a visiting professor at a university in Oregon and my research participants would say how much they would miss me or that I in fact, could not go because they would not let me. Over my time at Feed the Need, I learned much about myself and others – specifically in how people navigate their lives through poverty. The observation at Feed the Need informed much of how I was able to approach recipients met outside the pantry and the social workers that assist in accessing benefits.

The theoretical thread symbolic annihilation and violence wove through this work to explore the ways in which different people are made present or absent and how that works to highlight (often in negative ways) some groups over others. While white people are the majority population and welfare benefits of all kinds in the United States, nationally they see others as the problem and more importantly, middle-class over all other self-identified class statuses feel the most strongly about the bootstrap mentality. All the while, probably forgetting all the benefits and assistance received over time. The thread of symbolic annihilation was seen in the ways recipients are consistently configured in media and news discussions, which map onto national survey data regarding welfare spending. It continues weaving through to the daily lives of people, recipients, people locked out from benefits and those benefit providers. In addition to all these experiences, well-meaning poverty organizations focus their marketing strategies on communities that most definitely are generationally locked out from healthy food access, but also infantilize them at the same time.

Exploring the web of benefit recipientship includes not only the people themselves, but also social workers, poverty organizations and advocacy groups but also state and federal agencies up through the legislative and executive branches. All of these pieces are interconnected and matter to how the process benefit receipt functions. However, receiving welfare assistance need not be so convoluted nor difficult. As other researchers note that a concerted effort is made to create processes that place unnecessary barriers in place to disincentivize applying for assistance. The ‘automation’ of inequality is the latest barrier created to disenfranchise people in new ways that geographical barriers, food deserts and infrastructural barriers that existed previously.

As Milwaukee is one of the most segregated places in the nation, it was imperative to explore the historical formations of urban geography. Through these formations, the unspoken or hidden demarcations of racism, stratification inequality become visible. Exploring the geographical component cements the idea that the creation of the city in this was completed through active, decisions from governmental entities, and not on just ‘natural’ tendencies. The appearance of segregation, food insecurity and deserts are created through systemic, institutional and structural constructions. From white flight in the 1950s through 1970s, these movements of concerted effort created the northside and segregation that we see presently. Similarly, the lack of food security is a symptom of the movements and infrastructural projects, prompted by the development of I-43 which bifurcated a growing and prosperous neighborhood.

Inextricably linked to the geographical connections are the lives of welfare recipients and how they provide for themselves. The barriers placed by built environments impact how recipients access food and markets cannot be understated. The outcome of this study details a variety of results. Many of the recipients simply just want to provide food for themselves and

their families. While they felt this way about themselves, at times they would oscillate between placing themselves in the shoes of people in the similar position or they would repeat opinions held by the general public. Often, they would use this common rhetoric about welfare abuse towards their own communities. This implicit bias is not unusual – but also displays how this language is effective.

While I was able to interview and develop rapport with the community I was engaging with, they also cared for their fellow neighbors. During many of the parties that I was invited to attend, Wynette, Harold, Jenny and Mikayla opened up their homes and community rooms to their neighbors around them. While food was a limited commodity, they all described ways where they provided food for their friends and neighbors who they considered an extension of their families – typically for holidays or if there was a particularly nice summer day.

The shutdown bridged the gap between the experiences of the recipients, people unable to receive assistance and the social workers themselves. All of these groups had to endure administrative chaos that was definitely avoidable, and most families are still climbing out of this set back. The media focused its reporting on 800,000 federal workers not receiving paychecks and having no ability to strike – led to the ability for everyone to erase the 40 million individuals, families and children who were unable to access services and food via their SNAP benefits. It also erased the work completed by social workers to quell the anxiety and fear that surrounded this shutdown. Government confusion only increased how recipients were given instructions about their benefits.

In order for the above to occur, social workers are the link that connect recipients to the benefits to survive. From these interviews, it became clear that many social workers do care about the people in their caseload but can often feel and be overloaded and overworked. The

respondents of the interviewees often detailed various self-care activities that they came up with because that was something that was not discussed while achieving their degrees. While social work is not always an easy experience, there were workers that held viewpoints not outside the general public – because they work with many recipients on any given day. Consequently, the respondents commented on the organization themselves that they work in – that often hides or erases social workers of color.

Therefore, within the respective social worker organizations there were not just opinions about the recipients themselves (why can they not lift themselves up) but also how their workers interacted with one another as well. This coworker interaction revealed unchecked white privilege and classed connotations exhibited within various interactions. Many of the social workers who identified as white, felt as though there were no problems at their workplace or how they themselves worked with their clients. Conversely, the social workers of color noted a variety of issues, as well as, the often disconnectedness they felt between the white social workers and the clients that they served. The social workers of color consistently felt as though they could connect, built rapport and keep that rapport over a longer period of time because of the understanding of how intersectional oppression affects different people in different ways.

However, some poverty organizations, like Milwaukee's Hunger Task Force provide both services – for food access and SNAP/Foodshare access. These social workers often left other state or private social work agencies because of the disagreeable or negative workspace that they encountered. As a multifaceted organization, the HTF provides unquestionable aid to communities and that should be commended and rewarded. At the same time, as HTF does all this great work, they also hide their very important and radical history because any mention or

alignment or credit given to a radical Black empowerment group, may figure negatively from white donors onto HTF.

What does this all mean?

The government shutdown highlighted the impact that government issues can have on real people. The miscommunication and mismanagement highlighted eventually for the respondents that they felt neglected by it. It also created general feelings of hopelessness and loss, in terms of what happens when the social safety net disappears. This fear and tension were exacerbated and contributed to how people acted at the pantry amongst each other, given the increased number and the worry that food might not be available for them.

Adding to poverty literature, geographical components are important for understanding how Milwaukee came to be is the way it is today – through coded language of northern segregation completed through de facto segregation. The unavailability of healthy foods and grocery stores details not just redlining, but nutritional redlining that white residents need not worry about. Additionally, the ways in which the participants and respondents access this food is no different than how any other person would similarly feed themselves and their families.

As for how people “get out” of poverty, what the participants unanimously note is that the amounts they receive for rent, cash and food assistance are not keeping in time with dollar inflation and increased prices. Depending on the items being purchased, tariffs no doubt will transfer the cost onto the consumer. From their experiences, prices are increasing but they are getting less for their money. Similarly, the respondents also noted that because they fail to go as far as previously, they end up filling the gap with food banks and pantries but can never be sure what they would receive for that week – so there is limited ability to meal plan for themselves or their families. The other goal was to humanize poverty, since the precarity of food is only going

to increase because of segregation and speeding towards irreversible effects from climate change – that will affect crops, food access, etc.

All the participants in the study wanted very similar outcomes. For recipients, they wanted an individual who experienced and understood poverty to be the ones making informed decisions and policy improvements at local, state and federal government levels. Connected to that, recipients simply wanted their voices to be heard and their concerns taken seriously. Similarly, social workers consistently advocated for better access to self-care and more equitable workplaces. However, the social workers I met with voiced concern as being particularly unhelpful to those in need. Lastly, poverty organizations, such as Hunger Task Force, wanted to simply have their services no longer be needed. In sum, all of the respondents in each area noted that they just want to feel secure, safe and have access to healthy food.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB PROTOCOL APPROVAL

**From:** IRB, UWM <irbinfo@uwm.edu>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 7, 2018 10:39 AM  
**To:** Stephanie M Baran <sbaran@uwm.edu>  
**Subject:** IRB Notification: IRB Submission Received

This email is to notify you that the UWM IRB has accepted your recent submission for Intersectional Study of Perceptions of Self and Others About Welfare Assistance..

The submission is now being reviewed by the IRB. To view the current review stage of your submission, or to find out what review category (exempt/expedited/full board) it is being reviewed under, log in to IRBManager (<https://irbmanager.becirb.com/?clientid=uwm> ) and find the study listed on your home page.

If you have questions, please contact the UWM IRB at [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu) or call 414-229-3173 or 414-229-3182.

Thank you,  
UWM IRB

## APPENDIX B: IRB PROTOCOL CHANGE APPROVAL



Department of University Safety & Assurances

Melody Harries  
IRB Administrator  
Institutional Review Board  
Engelmann 270  
P. O. Box 413  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413  
(414) 229-3182 phone  
(414) 229-6729 fax

### Modification/Amendment - IRB Expedited Approval

<http://www.irb.uwm.edu>  
[harries@uwm.edu](mailto:harries@uwm.edu)

**Date:** September 28, 2018

**To:** Aneesh Aneesh, PhD

**Dept:** Sociology

**CC:** Stephanie Batan

**IRB #:** 18.179

**Title:** Intersectional Study of Perceptions of Self and Others About Welfare Assistance

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has received modification/amendment approval for:

- Adding compensation

IRB approval will expire on **May 10, 2019**. If you plan to continue any research related activities (e.g., enrollment of subjects, study interventions, data analysis, etc.) past the date of IRB expiration, a Continuation for IRB Approval must be filed by the submission deadline. If the study is closed or completed before the IRB expiration date, please notify the IRB by completing and submitting the Continuing Review form in IRBManager.

This study may be selected for a post-approval review by the IRB. The review will include an in-person meeting with members of the IRB to verify that study activities are consistent with the approved protocol and to review signed consent forms and other study-related records.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. The principal investigator is responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. The principal investigator is also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

As Principal Investigator, it is also your responsibility to adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., FERPA, Radiation Safety, UWM Data Security, UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts, state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation, and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melody Harries".

Melody Harries  
IRB Administrator

## APPENDIX C: IRB PROTOCOL EXTENSION APPROVAL



**Leah Stoiber**  
*IRB Administrator*  
*Institutional Review Board*  
Engelmann 270  
P. O. Box 413  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-0413  
(414) 229-7455 phone  
(414) 229-6729 fax  
<http://www.irb.uwm.edu>  
[lstoibcr@uwm.edu](mailto:lstoibcr@uwm.edu)

### Continuing Review - Notice of IRB Expedited Approval

**Date:** May 10, 2019

**To:** Aneesh Aneesh, PhD  
**Dept:** Sociology

**CC:** Stephanie Baran

**IRB#:** 18.179

**Title:** Intersectional Study of Perceptions of Self and Others About Welfare Assistance.

After review of your research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol has been approved as minimal risk Expedited under **Category 6 and 7** as governed by 45 CFR 46.110.

This protocol has been approved on **May 10, 2019** for one year. IRB approval will expire on **May 9, 2020**. If you plan to continue any research related activities (e.g., enrollment of subjects, study interventions, data analysis, etc.) past the date of IRB expiration, a Continuation for IRB Approval must be filed by the submission deadline. If the study is closed or completed before the IRB expiration date, please notify the IRB by completing and submitting the Continuing Review form found in IRBManager.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. The principal investigator is responsible for adhering to the policies and guidelines set forth by the UWM IRB, maintaining proper documentation of study records, and promptly reporting to the IRB any adverse events which require reporting. The Principal Investigator is also responsible for ensuring that all study staff receive appropriate training in the ethical guidelines of conducting human subjects research.

As Principal Investigator, it is also your responsibility to adhere to UWM and UW System Policies, and any applicable state and federal laws governing activities which are independent of IRB review/approval (e.g., FERPA, Radiation Safety, UWM Data Security, UW System policy on Prizes, Awards and Gifts, state gambling laws, etc.). When conducting research at institutions outside of UWM, be sure to obtain permission and/or approval as required by their policies.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation, and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

Leah Stoiber  
IRB Administrator

# CURRICULUM VITAE

## Stephanie Marie Baran

### Education

**2014 to December 2019**      **University of Wisconsin Milwaukee**      **Milwaukee, WI**

Ph.D. Defended 11/8/2019

Dissertation under advance book contract with Lexington Books: *Food Insecurity in an American City: Intersections of Race, Gender and Precarity*.

Research: Perceptions of welfare recipients, case managers and poverty organizations in Milwaukee.

Chair: Dr. Aneesh Aneesh

**2010 to June 2013**      **DePaul University**      **Chicago, IL**

Master of Arts in Sociology.

#### M.A Thesis

*"Parsing White Supremacy: Exploratory Study of Political Affiliation and Gender and Racial Beliefs"* –

Published to Heathwood Institute and Press, 2014.

Committee Chairs, Dr. Traci Schlesinger and Dr. Roberta Garner

**2003 to 2007**      **Loyola University**      **Chicago, IL**

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with minors in Spanish, Women's Studies and Gender Studies

Study abroad – Puebla, Mexico    Dean's List recognized student

### Areas of Specialization

Racism, White Supremacy, Poverty, Inequality, Theory, Body and Embodiment, Feminism/Global Feminism, Marxism, Qualitative and Quantitative Methodology

### Awards and Accomplishments

Mentor for Undergraduate Research Symposium, "The Carryover Effect of Stereotype Threat on Women", Madeline Fruehe, 2019.

LGBT+ Studies Advisory Board, 2018

Campus-Wide Common Read Facilitator, 2018

American Sociological Association Marxist Sociology, Public Engagement Liaison, Appointed 2018

UWM Online and Blended Teaching Certificate, 2018

UWM Sociology Graduate Student Teaching Award, March 2018

American Sociological Association Marxist Sociology, Graduate Representative, Elected 2017-2019

Professor Watch List, Turning Point USA, 2017

Chancellor's Grant Recipient, 2014

### Teaching Experience

**August 2019 to December 2019**      **Pacific University**      **Forest Grove, OR**

#### *Visiting Assistant Professor*

- Sociology 304 – Criminological Theory (Fall 2019)
- Sociology 366 – Deviance (Fall 2019)
- Sociology 301 – Introduction to Statistical Theory (Fall 2019)

**August 2014 to August 2019**      **University of Wisconsin Milwaukee**      **Milwaukee, WI**  
***Instructor - LGBT+ Studies***

- LGBT 200 – Introduction to LGBT+ Studies (Online Summer 2018, Spring 2019, Summer 2019)
  - Focus on LGBT+ history, pre/post-Stonewall, theory, advocacy

***Instructor - Sociology***

- Sociology 224 – American Minority Groups (Fall 2015, Spring 2016, Fall 2016, Spring 2017, Fall 2018, Spring 2019)
  - Focus on theory, scholars and writers of color, white supremacy and privilege
- Sociology 376 – Modern Sociological Theory (Online Summer 2017, Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Fall 2018)
  - Focus on sociologists of color, feminist theory, intersectionality, theory application

***Teaching Assistant***

- Sociology 361 Research Methods (Online Spring 2015)  
Dr. Marcus Britton, Supervising Professor
- Sociology 361 Research Methods (Fall 2014)  
Dr. Noelle Chesley, Supervising Professor

**UWM Professional Service**

***Diversity Services Intern***      **UWM Libraries**      **Milwaukee, WI**

- Facilitate research workshops for Milwaukee area middle and high school students
- Design library exhibits that have an intersectional focus
- Create events for Library Student User Services
- Assist in creating employee diversity events
- Member of the Library Diversity Advisory Committee

**Teaching Experience**

**March 2017 to October 2018**      **Upper Iowa University**      **West Allis, WI**

***Instructor - Sociology***

- Sociology 240 – Sociological basics and introduction to theory (Spring 2017, Summer 2017, Fall 2017, Winter 2018)
- Anthropology 110 – Anthropological basics and introduction to culture, groups and norms (Spring 2018)

**June 2014 to August 2014**      **Prairie State College**      **Chicago Heights, IL**

***Instructor - Sociology***

- Sociology 101 – Sociological basics and introduction to theory (Summer 2014)

**August 2013 to August 2014**      **Kankakee Community College**      **Kankakee, IL**

***Instructor - Sociology***

- Sociology 101 – Sociological basics and introduction to theory (Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Summer 2014)
- Sociology 103: Race and Ethnicity (Spring 2014)

**Research Assistantship**

**June 2015 – October 2015**      **BMoC/My Brother's Keeper Initiative**      **Milwaukee, WI**

- Qualitative project researching local, statewide and national initiatives targeting men of color
  - Focus on education, jobs, transportation, housing and resources

### Publications

Book Contract: *Living on the Edge: Food Insecurity in an American City*  
Routledge: New York, May 2020

#### Journal Articles

Baran, Stephanie. 2018. "Policing Poverty: An Exploratory Study of Police Misconduct Rates in 30 U.S. Cities". *Epolis* 10: 1-24.

#### Peer Reviewed Book Chapters

Laestadius, L., Deckers, J., & Baran, S. 2018. Food crimes, harms and carnist technologies. In Gray A. & Hinch R. (Eds.), *A handbook of food crime: Immoral and illegal practices in the food industry and what to do about them* (pp. 295-312). Bristol: Policy Press at the University of Bristol.

Baran, S. 2017. Visual patriarchy: PETA advertising and the commodification of sexualized bodies. In Vakoch D.A. & Mickey S. (Eds.), *Women and Nature?: Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment* (pp. 65-78). Routledge: New York.

#### Under Review

"Digital Masks/Real Oppression: Analyzing Anonymous Discourse About Poverty"

"The PETA Paradox: A Visual Analysis of Oppression in the Quest for Animal Rights."

"Transgressive Sociology: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of How Graduate Students Can #LeanOut and Disrupt the Hidden Curriculum."

#### Other Publications

"Access to Parlay: Freedom of Speech" Heathwood Institute and Press, February 2015

"Scars, Womanness, and Motherhood" Feministing.com, May 2014

### Public Sociology

Interview with Wisconsin Public Radio *The Morning Show*. April 10, 2019.

### Conference Session Organizer

- **American Sociological Association** – August 2019 – Marxist Sociology Roundtable Organizer – 5 Sessions
- **American Sociological Association** – August 2018 – Marxist Sociology Roundtable Organizer – 5 Sessions
  - Queer Capitalisms: Examining the Strange, Unusual and Excluded
  - Trampling on Trump: Sociological Examinations of Trump, U.S. Expansion, and Inequality
  - Ecological and Class Entanglements in Capitalism
  - Intersections of Race, Gender, and Poverty Under Capitalism
  - Political Economy and World Systems



## Conferences & Presentations

- **Society of the Study of Social Problems** – August 2019 – Critical Dialogue – “More Than the Bare Minimum: How White Women Ethnographers Can Avoid Whitewashing Research”
- **Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference** – April 2019 – Panel Presentation – “It’s a Longstory: Relationship Development in Queer Video Games”
- **Wisconsin Sociological Association** – October 2017 – Panel Presentation – “When Anonymity Erases Humanity: Examining Online Discourse About Benefit Recipients”
- **American Sociological Association** – August 2017 – Roundtable presentation – “Symbolic Annihilation and Violence: An Exploratory Analysis of Online Discourse About Welfare Recipients”
- **Society of the Study of Social Problems** – August 2017 – Panel Presentation – “How Online Anonymity Fuels Systematic Oppression: Using Symbolic Annihilation and Violence to Analyze Welfare Recipient Discourse”
- **Midwest Sociological Society** – March 2017 – Panel Presentation – “Understanding Humanity in the News: Examining Welfare Recipient Discourse”
- **Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference** – 2017 – Volunteer Coordinator
- **American Sociological Association** – August 2016 – Roundtable presentation – “Exploratory Study of Right and Left-Wing Political Affiliation and its Effects on Color-Blind Ideology”
- **Society of the Study of Social Problems** – August 2016 – Panel Presentation – “Racism: Is it Just a Right-Wing Phenomenon? An Exploratory Study of Left-Wing Party Affiliation and Color-blind Ideologies”
- **WPC 17** – April 2016 – Workshop entitled “Exploring the Interconnectivity of Capitalism and White Supremacy”
- **Midwest Sociological Society** – March 2016 – Panel Presentation – “Visualized Patriarchy: PETA and the Intersections of Race, Class and Gender”
- **American Sociological Association** – August 2015 – Roundtable presentation – “Advertising and PETA: Sexualization and Objectification in Social Justice Causes”
- **Society of the Study of Social Problems** – August 2015 – Panel Presentation – “Policing Poverty: An Exploratory Study of Police Misconduct in 30 U.S. Cities”
- **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Graduate Student Colloquium** – April 2015 – “PETA and Visual Patriarchy”
- **WPC 16** – April 2015 – Presentation - “Visual Patriarchy and Overt Sexual Objectification”
- **Public Sociology Conference, George Mason University** – Panel Presentation – October 2014– “Social Justice Activism and the Approach to PETA: How Can We Better Assess Our Activist Allegiance?”
- **Association of Humanist Sociology Conference** – October 2014 – Workshop entitled “Racism as Accessory: How Capitalism and Consumerism Make Cultural Co-optation the norm.”
- **WPC 15** – March 2014 – 2 workshops at Madison Conference entitled “Racism as Accessory: How Capitalism and Consumerism Make Cultural Co-optation the norm.”
- **Eastern Sociological Society** – Annual Meeting 2014 - Thesis Roundtable – “Parsing White Supremacy: Exploratory Study of Political Affiliation and Gender and Racial Beliefs”

- **DePaul University Undergraduate Research Panel Presider** – May 2013 – Juvenile Crime and Prisons

### **Completed Graduate Coursework**

- Course work: Advanced Statistics, Data Analysis, Qualitative Methods, Sociology of Social Networks
- Seminars: Critical Geographies of Race, Institutional Theory, Sociological Instruction, Sociology of Inequality, Place Stratification, Social Policy and Change, Social Deviation, Street Gangs, Advanced Introduction to Sociology, Gender and Society, Sociological Perspectives, Sociology of Social Movements, Intergroup Relations, Racism and Resistance, Independent study: Problems of Contention, Research Paper Instruction, Teaching Sociology, Classical and Modern Theory, Social Research, Sociology of the Body, Queer Theory, Sociology of Culture

### **Graduate Travel Grants**

Received \$1,000 in travel grants from UWM

Received \$400 travel grant from Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD)

### **Relevant Skills**

SPSS and STATA statistical programs, Design Program Canva

Managing courses on the Desire to Learn (D2L), Angel, Canvas and Blackboard course systems

### **Professional Memberships**

Alpha Kappa Delta, American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems, Pacific Sociological Association