



March On Milwaukee 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Brainstorm  
Session 1: April 21, 2016

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## Executive Summary

*Bridging the work of 1967 to 2017, honoring the history of what happened while translating its spirit to today's Milwaukee.*

The following report documents participant responses to a public brainstorm, hosted by the Zeidler Center for Public Discussion, a local non-profit, inviting individual residents and those representing organizations to collaborate on ideas to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Marches in Milwaukee.

### Agenda

The brainstorm began with introductory remarks made by Senator Lena Taylor, Vel Phillips, Peggy Rozga, Christian Matson, Rep. Gwen Moore's assistant, and Dr. Jasmine Alinder.

Dr. Katherine Wilson discussed the brainstorm's discussion method. Participants were then divided randomly into small groups facilitated by Zeidler Center facilitators using Reflective Structured Dialogue. This method, described in the next section, provides **equal time for each individual voice to be heard & recorded, no matter how large the group.**

During the small groups, Zeidler Center facilitators recorded participant responses anonymously to the best of their ability. Their responses are gathered below into major themes which emerged during the dialogue.

### Summary of Discussion – Main Ideas

The main themes that emerged in the small groups include the following, which are detailed further in the report:

- Diverse Voices & Youth participation essential to organizing (see pg. 5)
- Interest in Reenactments of the March; Rallies (see pg. 6)
- Ideas for Commemoration through Physical Forms (Buildings, Statues, Plaques, Billboards) (see pg. 6)
- Ideas for Commemoration through the Arts; Other Activities (see pg. 7)
- Strategies for Digital, Marketing & Social Media (see pg. 7)
- The Importance of Education, esp. Youth Education about the Marches (see pg. 7)
- Focus on Legislation/Legislative Goals & Economics (see pg. 8)
- Reconciling the Past -- Renaming the bridge; Official Apology (see pg. 8)
- Community Conversations on Racism (see pg. 8)

## Participation

Of paramount importance to the participants was having a broad and diverse group of individuals and organizations involved in the planning and work of commemoration. At this brainstorm, some of the organizations represented included: Milwaukee Turners, Greater Milwaukee Green Party, SURJ, Milwaukee Art Museum, Ex Fabula, Wisconsin Pirate Party, Black Lives Matter to Wisconsin UU's, Clean Slate Milwaukee, YWCA Southeast Wisconsin, Employ Milwaukee, Rid Racism Milwaukee, Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, Linking All Women, Coalition for More Responsible Transportation, Our Precious GEMS LLC, MP3 Health Group, Metro Milwaukee Fair Housing, among others. Participants hoped to substantially expand this list in future brainstorms.

## Next Steps

1. Read the below report & lead organizing around one or more of the ideas.
2. Stay up-to-date about upcoming brainstorms taking place over the next 18 months by emailing [info@zeidlercenter.org](mailto:info@zeidlercenter.org) to be added to the email list.
3. Assist in securing the next brainstorm location. Suggested locations: North Division High School; South Division High School; United Community Center.
4. Help spread the word and invite your network, once the next brainstorm locations & dates are set.

The Zeidler Center is grateful for the opportunity to serve collaborating organizations and individuals through facilitated dialogue. Questions about this report should be directed to:

The Zeidler Center for Public Discussion  
(414) 563-7265, [info@zeidlercenter.org](mailto:info@zeidlercenter.org)  
[www.zeidlercenter.org](http://www.zeidlercenter.org)

## Discussion Method

The dialogue on was facilitated by trained facilitators from the Zeidler Center using the Reflective Structured Dialogue method, which invites small circles of diverse individuals (5-7 people) to discuss personal experiences, values, and uncertainties in structured and facilitated conversations.

The specific focus of this method is to listen equally to all voices, encourage greater trust, and create a platform for mutual understanding and less demonization and polarization across difference. Participants experience both structured and unstructured portions of dialogue.

During the structured portion, each participant is given the same amount of time to speak, without interruption. After each speaker, there is a short pause of silence so that all may reflect upon the speaker's ideas.

The following communication agreements were used to facilitate the small group discussion:

### **Proposed Agreements for Communication:**

1. We will speak for ourselves, from our personal experiences.
2. We will refrain from criticizing others or attempting to persuade them to adopt our own views
3. We will share airtime and not interrupt each other
4. We will "pass" or "pass for now" if we're not ready to respond to a question

## Detailed Participant Responses

The below bullet points represent individual participant responses which have been grouped thematically. Responses were recorded anonymously by Zeidler facilitators to the best of their ability.

**Discussion Prompt: "With the 50th anniversary of the 200 days of fair housing marches approaching, what kind of organizing and work do you think would be most successful or effective in commemorating the impact of these marches on our city's past, present, and future? And why?"**

### **Theme: Diverse Voices & Youth participation essential to organizing**

- Young people should be involvement from the beginning will be crucial, esp. because of the historical roots (e.g. N.A.A.C.P Youth Council Initially driving the effort)
- Involve the city's youth in the commemorative activities. They are the present, and the festivities need to be an educational movement that unites them. This is a continuum. Housing/imprisonment/employment, etc, is an issue impacting the community today.
- On the 49th anniversary this year, we should organize a panel with key players that partook in the marching and other civil rights efforts. The conversation could focus about the strategies and tactics employed to make such a big impact.
- Collaborate with Community Brainstorming at St. Matthews CME
- I think that mobilizing on the next issue as well as the current one. There should be better recognition for those involved from the beginning. Involve the youth in the movement. The importance of public gathering.
- Be certain to invite and include the older people who were a part of the process 50 years ago.
- I think a process of multiple tiers and multiple events that commemorate. I also think recognizing the past but yet moving toward the future.
- Most efforts for the last commemoration were independently orchestrated [by their sponsoring organizations].
- I think that organizing on all levels and a black city council president is needed. The city council should be more involved with the young. Especially, with the planning and mobilization. There are a lot of activists in out backyard to assist as well.
- Involve a diverse facet of community in creating the message. Take the message out into the larger city.
- We need to form a bigger brainstorming group so that everyone [who wants to] can participate. Let other groups and organizations know that we have begun to plan, and they can come and be a part of planning.

- I understand how hard it is to do things 200 nights in a row. Creating a ritual that makes everyday different. Engaging the faith based communities for involvement and use biblical references.
- The original marches were an integrated movement. The organizing now must be integrated, across political, racial and class lines.
- We need to include Vel Phillips in everything we do.
- Orgs to involve: Urban Underground, NAACP, MATC and other universities.
- Bring the Latino and Hispanic communities into this process. We must unite and work together with our African-American counterparts in this process.
- I feel strongly about the youth being more involved. Protesting is taken for granted now a days. The schools should be more involved.
- Church and Faith community involvement Crucial and Necessary
- Invite states within the region to be a part of the celebration (Illinois-Minnesota-Indiana-Michigan-Iowa)

### **Theme: Reenactment of the March; Rally**

- Recreate the march, and have the African-American community from the north and the Hispanic/Latino communities from the south side meet up in the center of the bridge. This will be an important impactful action with power to move us all forward for the next 50 years.
- Reenactments would be an integral part of any celebration. The reenactments will be at all the locations that were either the focus of planning and marches.
- Provide mapped pick up points for the elderly and disabled.
  - If commemorative signs were placed at those points, the march could be replicated annually by any group.
  - Create a phone app of the walking tour for young people.
- I think it's important to reenact historical civil rights moments. It's important to pay attention to the physical remainders – the "living memories" - of past civil rights work.
- Recreate the march. Start at the location of the former St. Boniface Church on Center Street, and finish at Kosciusko Park. Involve the community. Make it Milwaukee-centric with Milwaukee groups and youths.
- There needs to be speakers. We need to get to the center of the viaduct and have a program. It needs to include city administration.
- Doing something that represents the 200 nights of the original march. The connecting and uniting of the north and south side together.
- A march from the church to the bridge is important, but that's a LONG march.
- A rally at the former St. Boniface locale is vital. Before any marches took place, there was always a rally beforehand at St. Boniface.

### **Theme: Ideas for Commemoration through Physical Forms (Buildings, Statues, Plaques, Billboards)**

- Commemoration takes many forms. We need to build something like a building or statue to last throughout time.

- I want to see more signage dedicated to civil rights issues
- It's important to identify and preserve historical locations – for example, place a plaque in front of Vel Phillips' childhood home.
- We need to collect versions of oral history and create physical commemorations like plaques.
- We should build a library that contains the history of the march.
- Build a historical marker where St. Boniface once stood. It is an important part of the history of this topic, and it was an insult that it was demolished.
- We need more statues of black leaders.
- Look at what's been done in the past and add the difference. Whatever is done needs to have impact, and have a historical marker.
- I think a memorial where the body of work is represented more than an actual person.
- We need to have signs erected that show the trail of the march. These would be permanent signs in commemoration of the Fair Housing Marches.
- We need to create historical replicas of the Freedom Houses that were burned down. They are an important part of Milwaukee's history.

#### **Theme: Ideas for Commemoration through the Arts; Other Activities**

- I'd love to see a bus tour.
- I'd like to see our city host 200 events to commemorate the 200 days of the marches.
- There was a play and dinner at the Wisconsin Historical Society Museum. Dick Gregory was brought in.
- I as a young person want to see a play to get a better understanding of the times during those 200 nights.
- Have another panel of speakers and authors.
- Have more activities at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum.
- It needs to be more than a single day
- There should be an annual holiday for the Groppi march in Milwaukee.

#### **Theme: Strategies for Digital, Marketing & Social Media**

- We need to focus on marketing and social media as a big part of involving all of the Milwaukee community.
- Figure out what our message is and get it down to a slogan or mantra. *A group participant responded that there was a slogan as part of the last event, which is on the bookmarks that were distributed at tonight's brainstorming session.*
- I would like to see more of the history involved with the movement. Creating a digital hub where all of this is captured.
- Increased marketing effort over and above the 40<sup>th</sup>. Year celebration, the utilization of all social media essential to getting the word out and creating a buzz around all the events.

#### **Theme: The Importance of Education, esp. Youth Education**

- Intergenerational exchange to share oral history and provide guidance to the younger



generation with respect to "Economic"- "Political"- "Social"- "Educational" etc, aspects of people activity in our community.

- There is a large body of work that I am uneducated about. We need to be informed and push education through things like magazines, radio, and newspapers. We need to also work with schools and partner with school districts to educate Milwaukee youth.
- We should talk to students and tell them about their history. The generations should be more united.
- We should show the documentary on the March on Milwaukee and Vel Phillips for every school in MPS on one day during 200 days of the anniversary.
- People want to be heard. History is layered and has different perspectives. We need to share and listen to stories of past marches at schools and public events.

#### **Theme: Focus on Legislation/Legislative Goals & Economics**

- Co-sponsorship of "New Legislation" and increase attention focused on current laws already on the books and include laws and awareness of existing laws and statues currently available in the public record.
- We did a lot of work in the 60s, but what really changed things for Milwaukee was the involvement of the federal government. We need to focus on pushing legislation to the federal level.
- We need to petition legislation to set aside a period of time to celebrate civil rights history in Milwaukee. We can also use petitions and legislation for greater and permeant change in the Milwaukee community.
- We need to establish concrete legislative goals on housing issues.
- "Honor The Past" by commemorations, yes, however; new focus on today's current housing and economic plight should be a high priority in any effort to mark the celebration.

#### **Theme: Reconciling the Past -- Renaming the bridge; Official Apology**

- The upcoming commemoration needs to include recognition of the effort in renaming the bridge. (It took a long time, and a lot of pushing back and forth against city officials before approval was finally granted.) It was a big deal with the sign and all [naming the viaduct the Father Groppi bridge].
- Have an official apology on behalf of the city given by the mayor of Milwaukee. No official apology has ever been given to the people who initially fought in this struggle, walked across the bridge and were met with opposition, nor their surviving ancestors. An apology is a recognition of a wrongdoing, and that needs to happen on behalf of the City of Milwaukee

#### **Theme: Community Conversations on Racism**

- I would like to see a chance to embody and create better conversation in the city about these issues.
- The Zeidler Center regularly hosts public community conversations on aspects of racism and segregation. Register to attend an upcoming event at [www.zeidlercenter.org](http://www.zeidlercenter.org).

- I think housing is one thing but racism is an issue that affects it. I feel that addressing it in public by its name. Learning and understanding from the past.

#### **Misc.**

- Latinos in Milwaukee are being played against African Americans. We need these two populations to work together.
- I am curious about what is going to happen beyond these events. How it is going to push things forward.
- We need to think outside the box and get black and brown folks together and break segregation. Events need to be multicultural and multiracial.
- We need to go beyond Father Groppi. Lloyd Barbee is never mentioned.
- I think the city has changed over time. The community is changing and don't have an idea of what's going on. We are struggling to create and work toward success.
- This is a perfect opportunity to "Move the ball down the field" for addressing all concerns whether Racial-Economic-Political-Educational etc,

<h3><b>Next Steps</b></h3>
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