Sherman Park Syllabus
(Teaching and Discussion resources)

“This is not us, we do not do this.” A statement made over and over again by residents of Sherman Park as they try to make sense of the August 13, 2016 riot on Burleigh Street between Sherman Blvd and Fond du Lac Avenue.

Key Ideas in this document:
1. Prolonged disinvestment in a community disrupts the social fabric of that community lowering capacity to constructively respond to conflict and change.
2. Resiliency on the neighborhood level requires intentional and ongoing investment in micro-level leadership.
3. Crisis emerges when the disintegration of the social fabric pushes people to physically, emotionally, and intellectually disinvest from the neighborhood and also from hope for themselves and their local community.

About Sherman Park –
Area: Capitol Drive to North Ave and between 35th and 60th streets
Population: 34,000
# Households: 12,000
Owner-occupied: 53%
Average assessed home value: $78,000
2015 median sale price single family home: $60,000
% population 25-44 years: 29%
Sherman Park is covered by three Aldermanic Districts. The current Aldermen are: Murphy, Rainey, and Stamper.

Groups actively organizing in Sherman Park
- Sherman Park Community Association (SPCA) www.shermanpark.org
- Common Ground http://www.commongroundwi.org/
- Safe and Sound http://www.safesound.org/
- Body and Soul Healing Arts Center (find on Facebook)
- Boys and Girls Club http://www.boysgirlscubs.org/
- Burleigh Street Development Corporation http://www.burleighstreet.org/www/about.aspx
- Center Street Business Improvement District (find on Facebook)
- Interfaith Older Adults –Sherman Park Northwest http://interfaithmilw.org/interfaith-locations/neighborhood-outreach/sherman-park-northwest/

There are also many faith communities in Sherman Park that are regularly working in the neighborhoods. These include among others Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and non-Denominational. Many of the faith leaders work with each other to address community problems. Sherman Park has a long history of being a well-organized and thriving on its identity of a home to diversity. However recent years have brought challenges for all the non-profits and congregations in the area as the neighborhood was not seen as high-risk and thus lost much of its funding sources. Overall the funding environment for non-profits has not rebounded with the market rebound the last few years.
What are some positives happening?

1. Sherman Park Community Association has hosted community meetings weekly since early July 2016. Participants include 7th District Police, Sheriff’s Department, Sherman Park residents, Sherman Park youth and youth organizations, and elected officials who gather on Wednesdays at 6pm at the Mary Ryan Boys and Girls Club to create a dialogue to strengthen relationships with each other.
2. Sherman Perk is always a positive. The coffee shop offers many opportunities for building community over good food and music.
3. The last two weeks of August the organization Safe and Sound is offering Arts week and then Sports week in Sherman Park.
4. The Interfaith Center for Older Adults has many projects that assist seniors who need help. Many of their volunteers are neighbors and their programs encourage positive neighborhood relationships.
5. Block watches and sub-neighborhood groups are critical to the neighborhood because Sherman Park is the size of a small city. Many of the sub-neighborhood groups are connected through Sherman Park Community Association and there is a growing recognition of the need to strengthen that relationship.
6. A group of religious leaders and non-profit staff are working closely together to build up one of the sub-neighborhoods, hoping that this will create synergy with other areas of Sherman Park. They have organized a process for bringing neighbors together to empower each other through change.
7. Common Ground has two major projects in the area. One is rehabbing foreclosed houses (MKE Rising) and the other is advocating for the redevelopment of Center Street and the improvement of fields at Washington High School (Neighborhoods Now). Sherman Park Action Network, formed through Common Ground meets monthly to work on neighborhood priorities.
8. The Sherman Park Community Association conducts yearly assessments of properties and supports residents in finding resources to help keep their properties in good condition. The efforts of the group are broad-based and mostly done through volunteer participation. Since the neighborhood is so large they play an important role in keeping city officials aware of declining properties in the area.

What are some challenges that residents are raising up?

1. Unemployment. Joblessness and underemployment (when someone is over qualified for the job they work) are a dominant issue for the residents of the neighborhood. Sherman Park is diverse racially, ethnically, religiously, and economically. There are pockets of deep poverty in the neighborhood that many do not recognize. There are also many working poor – those that have jobs but live just at the waterline. Those currently entering work age are finding it much more difficult to get jobs than their parents and grandparents did in past decades. People who do not own a car find it extremely difficult to find a job. Sherman Park is a classic example of the failure to recover economically after the 2008 recession, though the roots of job loss go even further back to the decline of the rustbelt during the rise of economic globalization. The idea that people are poor because they did not try hard enough continues as our prevailing social myth.
2. Incarceration and policing. A retributive justice model prevails in local policing methods. Wisconsin is often cited as an example of racial bias at all stops on the justice path (arrests, prosecution, sentencing, incarceration). Many refer to it as the school to prison pipeline. A 2013 study of Wisconsin found that 1 in 8 Black men of working age had spent time in correctional facilities. That was nearly double the national rate and 3 % points higher than the next highest state. Police and resident relationships are not positive in all parts of the neighborhood. Some of this is years in the making, though also reinforced by event over the last few years locally and nationally. Wisconsin’s dismal record on racial bias in the broader criminal justice system shapes attitudes and concerns both among residents and police. Black residents of Sherman Park generally seem to have a more difficult relationship with the MPD. Also the national issue around policing, use of violent force and being black is shaping the local responses.
3. **Neighborhood transitions.** Neighbors observe that over the past decade home ownership has declined and rentals have increased. Some of the rentals are long term residents but many are rotating through quickly. Also there has been an increase in non-resident landlords.

4. **Educational declines.** Schools are underfunded throughout Milwaukee and Sherman Park has seen the resources decline at the schools at the same time that more needy families are moving into the area. The state budget for education has taken deep cuts over the past decade. All school districts are suffering but the Milwaukee Public Schools has been particularly hard hit as the weak tax base in the city limits more dramatically funds available for school support. Despite that MPS has a few award-winning and nationally ranked schools. In Sherman Park residents talk about the impact of the decline of their schools and school facilities as a reason that the area struggles to attract new homeowners.

5. **Youth recreation.** Youth programming has been cut back. In the last several years funding for youth programs has been difficult to find and many smaller programs offered by groups have been cut back. In addition safety issues have made it more difficult for parents to feel comfortable allowing children to play on the streets. The main programming in Sherman Park is offered by the Boys and Girls club. With the violence on the streets, the club moved to limit it hours. In addition access to the one large park in the area was curtailed by 6pm each night due to an order of the Sheriff’s department.

6. **Racial and ethnic segregation.** Stark racial segregation is a large structural issue that faces SE Wisconsin. We have the lowest rate of black suburbanization in the country about 90% of African Americans in our metro region live in the city of Milwaukee while whites dominate the suburbs. We also have deep socioeconomic class segregation. The overlay of race, ethnicity, and class segregation has undermined once thriving and peaceful neighborhoods.

**Why and how did the riot happen?**

There are a variety of explanations of what set off the riots. What might be most important to understand are the longer, deeper entrenched issues that have left people hopeless and angry. The challenges discussed above lead to a sense of hopelessness and feeling trapped. No job, no transportation, no money for college or technical training, and no mentors to help them find a path through the challenge – all of this fuels anger. The spark of crowd behavior leads to destruction. The destruction feels like a release. You know the depth of hopelessness when you burn the economic structures of your own neighborhood.

**What is needed?**

The answers are still under discussion and debate but residents are expressing that it needs to be major change. The call is for significant economic investment leading to the revitalization of the mixed-class, multi-ethnic community that they love. This needs to be combined with a strategy to address the problems of structural racism that impact the region. Once thought to be a stable neighborhood in the city, the recent events have raised much awareness of the fragility of the economic structure in that part of the city. Hopeful, the residents maintain that the existing social structure and neighborhood network still provides a good base for the residents to thrive if organizations, neighborhood relations and economic opportunities can be strengthened.

**Further reading**

- [http://dollarsandsense.org/archives/2015/1115schneider.html](http://dollarsandsense.org/archives/2015/1115schneider.html) (Great data on Wisconsin)

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- [http://www.ywcasew.org/site/c.7oJELQPwFhJWG/b.8962011/k.7F9A/Racial_Justice_Resources.htm](http://www.ywcasew.org/site/c.7oJELQPwFhJWG/b.8962011/k.7F9A/Racial_Justice_Resources.htm)

## Video and Radio

- Video: Around the Corner with John McGivern (Sherman Park Episode) –MPTV [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZouipRopzzE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZouipRopzzE)
- Video: Punching In: Milwaukee’s African-American Community – MPTV

## Curriculum resources, Organizations and Training/Action Opportunities

- [http://www.ywcasew.org/site/c.7oJELQPwFhJWG/b.8962011/k.7F9A/Unlearning_Racism_Tools_for_Action.htm](http://www.ywcasew.org/site/c.7oJELQPwFhJWG/b.8962011/k.7F9A/Unlearning_Racism_Tools_for_Action.htm)
- [http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/) (For Milwaukee events check Facebook)
- [https://cfjmilwaukee.org/](https://cfjmilwaukee.org/) (Milwaukee based group – check Facebook for events)
- [http://www.zeidlercenter.org/](http://www.zeidlercenter.org/) (Milwaukee based dialogue group)
- [http://county.milwaukee.gov/OAAA](http://county.milwaukee.gov/OAAA) Milwaukee County Office on African American Affairs
- [http://www.wbhs.org/Home.htm](http://www.wbhs.org/Home.htm) WI Black Historical Society
- [http://abhmuseum.org/category/resources/](http://abhmuseum.org/category/resources/) Resource page from the American Black Holocaust Museum
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