

THE JAMES E. GROPPI UNITY BRIDGE

In August 1967, a Catholic Priest named Father James Groppi led the first of the open housing marches across the 16th Street Viaduct. On the first night, over 200 protestors marched south across the Valley in protest of racial discrimination and housing segregation. The Menomonee Valley was considered the 'cultural divide' of black and white. However, Milwaukee became known as 'the Selma of the North', because as the marches grew they remained interracial, while racial separatism fractured the movement in other cities.



Father Groppi and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council helped the Milwaukee Common Council pass an open housing ordinance in 1968. The law made it illegal to discriminate in housing based on race, national origin, gender, family status, religion or handicap. The law is the first step toward fair housing in Milwaukee.

In 1988, Mayor John Norquist officially renamed the 16th Street Viaduct the "James E. Groppi Unity Bridge". Today the bridge is a symbol of racial and ethnic unity. Protestors met again on the bridge in 2003 calling for an end to street violence. That time they came from both the North and South sides in a show of unity.

*"When we see that fair housing bill passed and on our desk, we might consider going home for a rest."
"Marching is not only a protest, but a prayer."
- James E. Groppi*

LEARN MORE, DO MORE...
Visit the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Museum.
Get involved with the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council or the Milwaukee NAACP.



Father James Groppi (1930-1985)

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