

# A History of Madison

Thank you to the numerous community and campus members who contributed to this document.

Madison, Wisconsin has a long and diverse history, which has many implications for the city today. This piece highlights some of the significant events and people of Madison's past, as well as some of the prominent issues currently facing Madison.

## Indigenous peoples

Humans have inhabited the area in and around Madison for about 12,000 years. Starting around 3,500 years ago, Native peoples built earthen mounds for burial, ceremonial, and other purposes, and there are more effigy mounds and archaeological sites at UW-Madison than any other university in the world. Although many different Native American tribes lived near Madison, during the influx of European settlers in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Ho-Chunk Nation was the primary group living around Madison, although other tribes, including the Fox (Meskwaki) and the Sauk, also lived in the area.

## European settlers

Wisconsin became home to settlers as early as the 1600s as European immigrants set up trading posts in places like Green Bay and Prairie du Chien. The United States officially acquired the Wisconsin territory in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. During and after this time, settlers of various origins waged war with the Native Americans living on the land, resulting in conflicts such as the Winnebago War and the Black Hawk War. These clashes often occurred because the U.S. government forcibly removed Indian peoples from their lands and homes in Wisconsin multiple times, sending them to places uninhabited by settlers. Even so, many tribes used everything they had to hold onto their lands and cultures. Some Native Americans would even sneak back onto their land after being removed to other states. That perseverance is evident in the rich tribal histories and future visions of the Native people of Wisconsin today. Currently, there are eleven federally recognized and one federally unrecognized American Indian Tribes in Wisconsin.

Madison was proposed as Wisconsin's capital in 1837 by James Duane Doty, a former federal judge who purchased over a thousand acres of land in Madison. In 1848, Wisconsin became a state - the last state added east of the Mississippi. The University of Wisconsin was also created at this time, and in 1904, the Wisconsin Idea was born, which holds that the university should contribute "to the government in the forms of serving in office, offering advice about public policy, providing information and exercising technical skill, and to the citizens in the forms of doing research directed at solving problems that are important to the state and conducting outreach activities." Around the time of Wisconsin's statehood, many immigrants were coming to Wisconsin. Madison especially saw an influx of immigrants around the turn of the 20th century, including Germans, Italians, Sicilians, Russians, Irish, Jews, African Americans, and Norwegians.

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## South Madison

When Madison first became a city, its South side was largely composed of lowlands or wetlands. Therefore, property there was more affordable and immigrants on tight budgets often settled there. Several neighborhoods were part of South Madison, including the historic Greenbush Triangle neighborhood, which came to be known as the “ethnic triangle” in the area of Park, Regent, and West Washington Streets. The residents of South Madison shared characteristics that led outsiders to view them unfavorably: they were new immigrants, had different customs, and lacked resources. However, those who used to live there remember the neighborhood as a place full of camaraderie and togetherness. As one member of the Greenbush neighborhood said, “Everybody was poor and in the same boat, and other parts of the city were prejudiced against the neighborhood, so we all stuck together.” The first community center, the Neighborhood House, was built in the Greenbush in 1916 to teach new immigrants American ways. Because the area was such mix of different races and ethnicities, people naturally came together around their commonalities – being in a new place with new customs. Although they might have had limited resources, they were rich in family, friends, and community. As one resident said, “We didn’t know we were deprived until the social workers told us.”

But South Madison would be forever changed in the mid-20th century. In 1949, Congress began the federal urban redevelopment program, which gave federal monies to cities to get rid of slums and improve impoverished areas. In the 1950s, this program came to Madison. Greenbush residents were shown lovely drawings of what could be built in their neighborhoods, received \$5,000 or \$6,000 for their houses, and watched their history be destroyed. By the end of the 1960s, South Madison as its residents knew it was gone – the buildings had been razed. New low-income housing complexes were built, including Bayview, which is primarily used by new immigrants. The former residents of South Madison scattered to other neighborhoods and towns, sometimes ending up all over Dane County. The planners in charge of urban renewal and new planning made conscious decisions to spread the poverty around the county; today, there are about 15 different impoverished pockets within Dane County. These residential communities tend to be small, socially isolated, and lacking the institutions and networks to provide meaningful support. This creates a significant challenge for community residents to organize to improve conditions.

For some, the stigma of South Madison remains to this day. However, many individuals and organizations are working from within to transform its reputation. South Madison is home to many nonprofits and social service organizations that serve residents from all over the Dane County area. It’s also home to the Quann Community Garden, the seventh largest community garden in the city. Religious institutions and organizations such as the Catholic Multicultural Center, Mount Zion Baptist Church, and the Fountain of Life Covenant Church

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provide spiritual and physical sustenance for residents. Growing Power, a movement to bring gardening and good food into urban areas, has a thriving operation on the South side. Community organizations like Centro Hispano and the Neighborhood House work to strengthen communities and empower residents. The South side is also home to many delicious restaurants that are growing in popularity, like Tacqueria Guadalajara, Inka Heritage, and the Greenbush Bar. Additionally, South Madison is home to the new South Madison partnership, a space that aims to bring together UW and community partners in a shared location. Many residents enjoy living on the South side and feel the same sort of companionship and friendship that their predecessors felt.

## Madison Today

Today, Madison is the second-largest city in Wisconsin (after Milwaukee) with a population of 243,344. The median household is \$53,464, just above the national average of \$53,000. About 19.4% of Madison residents live below the poverty line, above the national average of 15%. However, the poverty rate is almost doubled for residents of South Madison. The city is primarily non-Hispanic Caucasian at 78.9%; the rest of the population is 7.3% African American, 0.4% American Indian, 7.4% Asian American, and 6.8% Hispanic and Latino/a. The two largest employers in Madison are the Wisconsin state government and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Madison as a whole is a highly educated city, with 53.8% of its population holding at least a bachelor's degree. Madison also has one of the highest number of PhDs per capita in the country. In South Madison, however, about one third of residents have less than a high school education.

## Racial disparities in Dane County today

In 2013, the Wisconsin Council on Children & Families released a report examining the well-being of children in Wisconsin. After examining multiple factors, it found that children of color in Dane County have some of the worst outcomes in the country. The jobless rate of African Americans is over five times that of whites (25.2% versus 4.8%). The poverty rate of African Americans is 54% compared to 8.7% of whites. Three-quarters of African American children live in poverty. These disparities extend to education. African Americans are 4.5 times more likely not to meet third-grade reading criteria. About 50% of African Americans graduate high school on time compared to 85% of whites. African Americans scored an average of 18 on the ACT while whites scored an average of 24. Additionally, African American students are suspended at a rate 15 times as high as whites and are six times as likely to be arrested as whites; adults are incarcerated at a rate eight times that of whites. This report shows it is clear there is much more work to be done in Madison to move toward equality.

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Want to know more about...

## The UW South Madison Partnership

[www.universityrelations.wisc.edu/smp/](http://www.universityrelations.wisc.edu/smp/)

## Restaurants in South Madison

A guide to restaurants in South Madison:

[www.savorsouthmadison.com](http://www.savorsouthmadison.com)

## The History of Madison

The People's Stories of South Madison:

[digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.MPLPeopleStory&isize=M&pview=hide](http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.MPLPeopleStory&isize=M&pview=hide)

## A Timeline of Black History in Madison:

[host.madison.com/ct/topics/race-in-madison/timeline-of-black-history-in-madison/html\\_daa15cee-ea6d-11e3-a605-0019bb2963f4.html](http://host.madison.com/ct/topics/race-in-madison/timeline-of-black-history-in-madison/html_daa15cee-ea6d-11e3-a605-0019bb2963f4.html)

## UW-Madison's Indigenous History:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSmjR1N8nyg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSmjR1N8nyg)

## Racial Disparities - And the Work Being Done so Far

The Race to Equity Report:

[www.wccf.org/assets/RaceForResults.pdf](http://www.wccf.org/assets/RaceForResults.pdf)

## The YWCA Madison's Race to Equity Toolkit:

[www.ywcamadison.org/site/c.cuIWLiO0JqI8E/b.9208687/k.6E74/Race\\_to\\_Equity\\_Toolkit.htm](http://www.ywcamadison.org/site/c.cuIWLiO0JqI8E/b.9208687/k.6E74/Race_to_Equity_Toolkit.htm)

## Madison Justified Anger:

[www.madisonjustifiedanger.com/](http://www.madisonjustifiedanger.com/)