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The Cost of Segregation || Part I: Racial Attitudes

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Voices

Metro Detroit residents speak out on segregation

By The Detroit News

Mark Douglass, 54, Canton Township

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Although eight in 10 people in Canton Township are white, Mark Douglass doesn't see it as sinister. The [Ford Motor Co.](#) maintenance worker points to his cozy suburban neighborhood of \$300,000 homes near Ford and Lilley as proof that minorities are welcome in Canton. "It's like a Heinz-57 around here and I love it," Douglass said. "My neighbors are black, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, German, from Laos, Cambodia, Japan -- and everybody gets along great."

Canton Township, with 76,000 residents, is nearly 5 percent black and 10 percent Asian.

"We have quite a range of people and everybody understands everybody: No one wants to be robbed and no one wants their kids beat up in school.

"The way to end the segregationist mind-set is to get rid of the egos and the self-centeredness and to just go up to people who are different and talk. It brings us together here."

Douglass, who believes jobs dictate where people live, would like to see an end to what he calls the "bull's-eye."

"Detroit is the dot, then there's the white ring, the black ring, the white ring, and so on. Why is that? It's because for too long we have put up boundaries. We have to stop doing that and take the attitude the true freedom is making a choice: Adjust ... or move. In the end, the lesson is, good people make good neighbors, no matter who they are."

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"We're Catholic, the people across the street are Jewish, there are people of Oriental descent and our kids play with the African American kids down the street."

Jodoin family, Novi

Debbie Jodoin, 34, with children Christopher, 12, Samantha, 4, and Matthew, 8

While Debbie Jodoin acknowledges her street may not be well integrated along black and white lines, she notes the cultural mix along the street.

"It's very versatile," said Jodoin, who has lived in Novi most of her life. "We're Catholic, the people across the street are Jewish, there are people of Oriental descent and our kids play with the African American kids down the street."

She said a lot of people associate poverty and crime with black neighborhoods, which may be a barrier to integration.

"It also has a lot to do with how you're raised. If you look around, whites are raised with whites and blacks are raised with blacks. I'm not real sure why, but it's never been any other way. But why blacks don't want to live in Novi, I don't know. Everyone should have a choice."

Jodoin also said measures to fix segregation can also back fire, such as moving government-assisted housing to the suburbs.

"I think it may frighten people away because people are not open to that," she said. "People assume they live in public housing so they're all poor."





"Being Younger has nothing to do with your attitude. I think it has a lot more to do with how you are raised."

Steve Awaad, 18, Roseville

Steve Awaad isn't really sure what all the talk about segregation is about.

To him, there have always been people of different races around -- and most of his friends don't seem to notice.

"Everyone gets along here. They did at school too," said Awaad, who just started classes at Oakland University and works at The Home Depot.

"Sometimes people don't really take the time to get to know each other, but they're just normal people. Why would anyone expect them to be any different?"

Although Roseville, in southern Macomb County, is 93 percent white, Awaad said he has several close friends of different races. But he's not one to exempt people his age: they won't solve all of the problems of race relations in Detroit, he said.

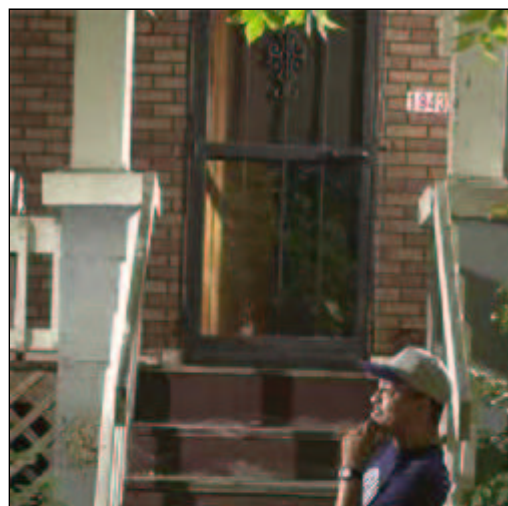
"Being younger has nothing to do with your attitude. I think it has a lot more to do with how you are raised."

**William Napier, 53,
Detroit**

William Napier has done his part for integration: He's the only African American in his Wednesday night bowling league.

"No problems," he said. "I don't knock every white person -- it's just like everything else, you have some good, some bad, just like with black people."

But Metro Detroit's



segregation does concern him. He likens it to highly publicized racial harassment cases at Big Three auto companies, and the occasional story about racist graffiti or other harassment in Detroit's suburbs.



"I would like to see it more mixed, more people communicating together. We're all the same, we've all got the same deal -- especially the ones who work hard every day."

"You would never think it would still be like that," said Napier, a retired General Motors assembly line worker. "I would like to see it more mixed, more people communicating together. We're all the same, we've all got the same deal -- especially the ones who work hard every day."

He sees positive signs in the beginnings of a rebound in downtown Detroit, a city that is 12 percent white. Hopefully, he said, new stadiums and businesses will bring more whites into the city, and demonstrate to them that Detroit isn't all bad.

"At one time they moved out, just handed the city to blacks, lived way out, had their big homes out there," he said. "It seems like maybe they're starting to come back."



"I do business in Detroit so I know where to go and where not to. But 10 years ago, I wouldn't even do that. It wasn't safe."

Martin Tepatti, 65, Wixom

It's taken several decades, but Martin Tepatti has finally started coming back to Detroit for fun: jazz festivals and concerts.

It's taken that long for the native Detroit resident to trust the city again, that it would be safe to take his family to Jazz Fest and other downtown events.

"I do business in Detroit so I know where to go and where not to," Tepatti said. "But 10 years ago, I wouldn't even do that. It wasn't safe."

Tepatti said. "But 10 years ago, I wouldn't even do that. It wasn't safe."

Tepatti still remembers getting trapped at work during the 1967 riot, even being asked to man a fire hose on the roof of the dairy where he worked, in case anyone tried to break in or firebomb the place.

But it was the former mayor Coleman Young that finally turned him off on Detroit.

"He let the city deteriorate. A man like Archer might have been able to turn the cycle, but Young made whites feel very unwelcome."

Today Tepatti lives in Wixom, a southwestern Oakland County suburb that has about 330 blacks among its 13,000 residents.

For Tepatti, the segregation issue isn't about skin color: it's whether you're willing to work.

"We have a lot of blacks out here, and they're all well-educated and have good jobs," he said. "But in Detroit, you have a poor class of people. Not all of them, of course, just pockets."

Michelle Carravallah, 22, Macomb Township



To Michelle Carravallah, the main benefit of integration is simple: freedom from fear.

"When I was young, I went to a Montessori school," said the 22-year-old Oakland University student from Macomb Township. "I was exposed to Asians, African Americans, all different races. And being young, nothing mattered to me -- it was my friend Anna and my friend Jamie, not an Asian or African American."

"You realize there's nothing to be afraid of."

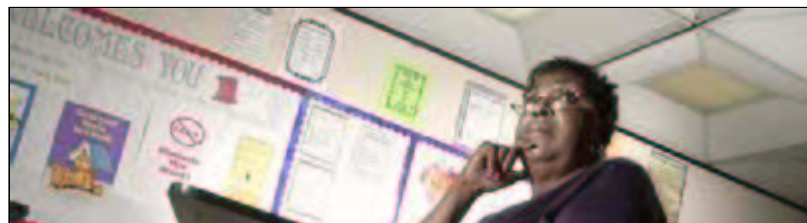
Instead, she said, many Metro Detroiters are simply afraid of coming close to people of different races -- a fear she believes is one reason this is the most segregated metro area in the country.

"I just think that most suburban whites are afraid to go to the Detroit area."

The benefits of integration don't stop in preschool, said Carravallah. As part of her training in elementary education, she has spent time in mostly black schools in Pontiac.

"Being exposed to that different lifestyle completely opened my eyes to that experience," she said.

"I think it would definitely make both races appreciate one another more."





"Once we moved in and they saw we weren't going to destroy the neighborhood, the neighbors were pretty friendly. I think in this area it's better, more open now."

Geneva Edwards, Rochester Hills

Segregation is no longer a worry to Geneva Edwards -- at least, not for her and her family.

They moved from a mostly black neighborhood to mostly white Rochester Hills in 1985, looking for a better life. As early African-American newcomers to their largely white neighborhood, they faced tension, uncertainty ... and Christmas carolers.

"That winter they came Christmas caroling," Edwards said. "All these people walking up to my house -- until they started singing, I didn't know what they were going to do."

Earlier events had given her cause to worry. Days after the family moved in, they overheard a white neighbor cursing loudly, apparently about their arrival. That neighbor moved out not long after. And Edwards' sons were stopped by a man -- a police officer, the man said, though he wore no uniform or badge -- who told the teen-agers they didn't belong in the city.

But Edwards said those are relatively few complaints in 16 years of living in Rochester Hills. The city now has about 1,700 blacks among its nearly 69,000 residents.

"Once we moved in and they saw we weren't going to destroy the neighborhood, the neighbors were pretty friendly," she said. "I think in this area it's better, more open now."

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