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From Journal Sentinel readers

Last Updated: Jan. 23, 2003

SEGREGATION

Consider that many seek family, familiarity

In all I've read regarding segregation, one thing is not mentioned: human nature. My father's family, German immigrants, settled in Milwaukee in the 1840s and remained in the Milwaukee area for more than 150 years. Why? Human nature.

Documentaries on immigrant history show Little Italys, Chinatowns, Polishvilles. Why? Human nature. They accepted a drastic change to move to a foreign country leaving behind family and familiarity to start a "better life," and human nature brought them to create their own little "homelands" in America.

When I study my German Milwaukee heritage, I find that few family members made moves out of the community. My great-great-grandmother's family homestead started on 16th St. and Fond du Lac Ave. in 1848. She moved to 17th and Brown streets, was a grocery store/tavern owner on 11th St. and made her final home on 39th and Galena streets - never far from her church and her children.

Were the immigrants racist because they wanted family and familiarity around them? Why is it so unusual for families to want to stay near each other?

My favorite line to my children is "Who said life was fair?" Life is what you make of it, and it is every human's choice. When did we stop giving people choices?

Andrea Ward

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Cedarburg

New ranking no reason for celebration

Journal Sentinel readers who were pleased with Milwaukee's adjusted segregation ranking among the top 100 U.S. metropolitan areas should get out more. Instead of announcing that we are no longer the second most segregated city, we should mourn for the other cities that have now joined our shame.

Truly, if there are that many cities as racially divided as ours, then our nation is in for a wake-up call. I hoped that ours was the only one, other than Boston, that needed a dramatic transformation.

While there is some integration in my Sherman Park neighborhood, the rest of the city has been plagued by "white flight" and clearly defined racial boundaries.

Most white suburbanites never venture past certain landmarks that they see as the start of urban blight. Our streets, like our malls, become strangely devoid of white faces when people of color start to frequent them.

Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist, when asked about the racial tensions in Milwaukee during the project "Through One City's Eyes: Race Relations in America's Heartland," said that there is no race problem in this city. Yeah, like there is no fecal matter in Lake Michigan.

So maybe we don't smell like roses after all.

Christian Vettrus Milwaukee

Research patterns that lead to crime

Journal Sentinel coverage of racial housing statistics methodology is about as useful as the debates of medieval philosophers on how many angels could fit on the point of a needle. What does it matter how we rank in relation to Salt Lake City in terms of integration or segregation? What does matter is finding solutions to urban problems that have worsened for several decades.

Might some future research productively focus on the correlation of central city housing patterns with the debilitating cycle of violent crime, drugs, teenage pregnancy and truancy? For openers, we might measure the incidence of crime and related problems in neighborhoods

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where homes are owner-occupied compared with rental properties, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Austin Goodrich
Port Washington

Would some propose forcible integration?

Is Milwaukee hypersegregated? According to several writers on Jan. 19, the answer is yes. Why is it that when people move where they are most comfortable it becomes someone's fault that the races aren't as integrated as some would like? Perhaps their solution would be to forcibly integrate the races.

As far as I can tell, professors Marc V. Levine, Gregory D. Squires And John F. Zipp did not interview black people who moved as to why they moved where they did. They did remark about a Journal Sentinel editorial that stated some blacks did not want to move to a white neighborhood because they felt the whites would be hostile.

When my wife went into black neighborhoods as a visiting nurse, the man of the house would escort her in and back to her car. When a friend of mine played Santa to poor children in a black area of the city, his car was guarded by some of the fathers. Would any of these learned professors care to move into those areas?

There are no fences around the suburbs. Real estate firms are required to show houses in whichever area the client expresses an interest. People move where they want.

This discussion is much ado about nothing and is counterproductive. It is playing the race card for all it's worth.

Don Gableman
Greendale

Don't waste chance to improve race relations

Many of the articles I have read on segregation seem either focused on downplaying the validity of the new study's findings or altogether dismissive of the study's ramifications, positive and negative.

I believe both approaches are incredibly self-serving to those who want to disagree with the findings. More important, both approaches are detrimental to creating an open dialogue about how we can move forward. That to me is the key point - we should use the interest

generated from this study to spur further conversations about how to improve race relations.

I have not heard any credible supporters of the study suggesting that race relations in Milwaukee are satisfactory. To the contrary, I recall reading a quote from the authors of the new study in which they specifically stated that "problems of segregation in Milwaukee are persistent."

So why all the debate?

The message of the study is pretty simple. We are not as segregated as we once thought we were, but we are still segregated. Let's not waste time and energy debating exactly how segregated, but rather how best to fix the situation.

If all of our time and energy is focused on debating the merits of the study, we have wasted an excellent opportunity to move forward.

Larry Wiemer II
Milwaukee

A version of this story appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Jan. 24, 2003.

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