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[Previous story](#) [Next story](#)



The Cost of Segregation

Part I: Racial Attitudes

SITE INDEX

- Homepage
- Search
- CyberSurveys
- ▶ News Talk
- ▶ Autos Talk
- ▶ Sports Talk
- ▶ Lions Talk
- ▶ Pistons Talk
- ▶ Wings Talk
- ▶ Tiger Talk
- ▶ Tech Talk
- Horoscope
- Hot Sites
- Lottery
- Weather
- Staff

NEWS

- Autos
- ▶ Insider
- ▶ Auto Show
- ▶ Consumer
- ▶ Joyrides
- Business
- Careers
- Census
- Columnists
- Commuting
- Detroit History
- Editorials
- Health
- Metro / State
- ▶ Livingston
- ▶ Macomb
- ▶ Oakland
- ▶ Wayne
- ▶ On Detroit
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- ▶ Death Notices
- Politics / Govt.
- Real Estate
- Religion
- Schools
- Special Reports
- Technology

SPORTS

- Sports Home
- ▶ Lions/NFL
- ▶ Red Wings/NHL
- ▶ Pistons/NBA
- ▶ Shock/WNBA
- ▶ Tigers/Baseball
- ▶ MSU
- ▶ U-M
- More Colleges
- Golf Guide



Joseph and Marie Fantuzzi live in Sterling Heights with children Ryan and Lauren and family dog Sandy. "There is a stigma between the city and the suburbs," says Joseph Fantuzzi. "I think it's ignorant."



Police Sgt. Donald Coleman, with wife Constance, and son, Chris, prefer the comfort of a black community, despite the city's many drawbacks. In fact, Donald Coleman says he'd want to live in Detroit even if he weren't required as a member of the Police Department.

Two families, one history

Families' paths are worlds apart

Divergent routes of three generations show how skin color shapes boundaries

By Oralandar Brand-Williams / The Detroit News

They were children in 1943, growing up just a few blocks from each other on Detroit's east side, when their world exploded.

Sylvia, 7, cowered in her home, hearing the gunshots, the people running outside and the sirens wailing ever closer. Just down Brush Street, Angelo, 13, had heard the violence and was trying to get home when some black teens cornered him and kicked and beat him until he was comatose.

Angelo Fantuzzi, now 71, and Sylvia Rhodes, now 65, haven't forgotten the day they learned how race bitterly divided their city. Though they've never met, their family albums share a page, a page also shared by thousands of families across the region.

Today, the divergent paths taken by three generations of their families mirror the path that

CyberSurvey

Is the improvement in black/white relations permanent?

Will the current thawing in black/white relations in Metro Detroit (as measured by a Jan Detroit News/WDIV poll) is likely to be permanent, even though many social scientists say such a scenario would be unprecedented? Why or why not?

yes no

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- [Entertainment](#)
- [▶Casino Guide](#)
- [▶Movie Finder](#)
- [▶TV Listings](#)
- [Crossword](#)

HOMESTYLE

- [Homestyle home](#)
- [▶Decorating](#)
- [▶Food](#)
- [▶Gardening](#)
- [▶Home Improvement](#)
- [▶Home Life](#)
- [▶Home Tech](#)
- [▶Wine Report](#)

PHOTOS

- [Sports](#)
- [Red Wings](#)
- [Lions](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Joyrides](#)
- [News](#)
- [History](#)

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has made Metro Detroit, more than any other major city in America, a place where residential boundaries are shaped by the color of one's skin.

Sylvia and Constance

A native of Chattanooga, Tenn., Rhodes was a small child when the 1943 riot took place. She and her family have largely remained in Detroit.

"I've stayed here because I love the city," said Rhodes, who hates when the city has a bad reputation from the actions of people who don't live within its borders. "I'm defensive of the city. It's getting a negative image from things that happen in the suburbs and not in the city. It's not fair."

And each generation has had to relearn the hard lessons of segregation.

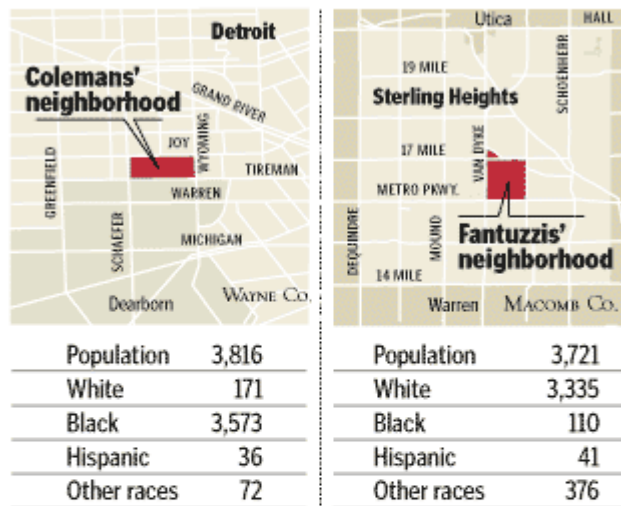
In the late 1960s, Sylvia, her husband and daughter Constance moved to a new home on Cloverlawn Street near Chalfonte. The family was one of the first black families to move to the neighborhood in the city's northwest.

"There was a white family next door and they didn't want their children playing with mine so the boys would sneak down the street to play together and then split when they came back home," Rhodes recalled.

"I felt so bad for that family," said Rhodes about the family's attitude toward integration. "They soon moved away."

Five years after Rhodes and her family moved into the neighborhood, Sylvia and her husband moved to Sterling Heights. The area started to gradually change as more whites moved away.

The neighborhoods of the Coleman family in Detroit and the Fantuzzis of Sterling Heights demonstrate just how racially different Metro Detroit neighborhoods can be:



The Fantuzzis, like many white families, have followed a path leading farther from the city over the decades. Over the same period, the Colemans have remained in an increasingly...



black city.
Source: 2000 census

The Detroit News

For most of Constance Coleman's youth, she was raised in a mixed environment. She attended Cody High School in the early 1970s, when she said it was still predominantly white.

Today, she lives a few miles away from her old neighborhood. With the exception of the diversity of the environment, Constance, 44, and her husband, Donald, have pretty much raised their children in the same environment she grew up in.

The middle-class couple raised their two sons, Christopher and Benjamin, in the city. They attended Detroit Public Schools academies and now are University of Michigan students.

The Colemans live in a west-side neighborhood where neatly kept ranch-style homes and wooden block club signs greet visitors.

It's a typical looking neighborhood in an area where manicured homes are the r

But beneath the beauty of the well-kept brick homes are the uncomfortable realities of life in the most segregated cities in America.

The racial division colors their lives in many ways.

The Colemans live in the Wyoming and Tireman area, just a few blocks from Dearborn.

But the quality of goods and services in each city is starkly different.

"We're on the edge of Dearborn," says 44-year-old Constance Coleman. "When you cross onto Tireman you have Hungry Howie's ... Kentucky Fried Chicken. Everything we don't have."

"In the city, people stock their stores with 40 ounces (of beer)," Coleman said.

The cost of remaining in Detroit goes far beyond food for the Colemans.

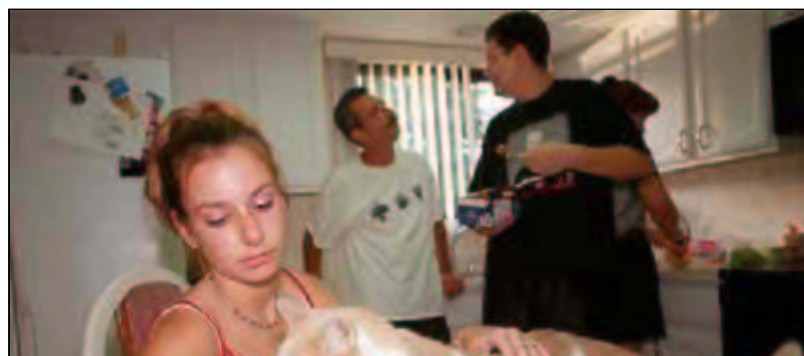
The family pays nearly \$3,000 a year in insurance on three automobiles. They pay the amount would be significantly less if they lived a few blocks away in Dearborn, but insurance agents don't deny.

Recently, a Detroit-based organization that helps homeless families began meeting with Coleman's block club, the Burton McFarlane Home Owners Association, to discuss establishing a shelter in the Colemans' neighborhood.

Donald Coleman says he believes that if he lived in a white neighborhood, there would be little discussion of moving the shelter into a neighborhood. Instead, it would be put in a business zone, as he says this one should.

"We have nothing against (the organization) but we think it's coming from outside sources," Coleman said. "They have other areas that are more zoned to a shelter."

"Why do they have to put it here?"



"The issue is always the race. It's always the status quo. I can't understand because we're ..."



**supposed to
be this
melting pot**

Joseph Fantuzzi:
Sterling Heights
resident

Lauren Fantuzzi plays with her cat as Joseph Fantuzzi talks with Ryan. Fantuzzi says anyone can live in his Sterling Heights neighborhood, if they can afford the housing prices and can maintain their property.

Fantuzzis go north

Angelo Fantuzzi was the son of Armando, an Italian immigrant from a village of Rome. Armando came to the United States in 1912 and landed in New York, joined the U.S. Army and eventually landed in Detroit.

With his wife, Angelina, he had five children. Angelo was the oldest.

Within a few years of his beating in 1943, Angelos parents moved to Redford Township and he joined the Army. He would later move to Berkley and then Sterling Heights when he started his own family.

His son, Joseph, a postal worker with a family of his own, now lives in the 17100 and Van Dyke neighborhood of Sterling Heights, a neighborhood that until recently saw diversity only from a distance -- a fact that bothered the 44-year-old postal worker.

"I feel there is a stigma between the city and the suburbs," said Joseph, Angelo's son. "I think it's ignorant."

A large part of the racial segregation in Metro Detroit exists because of mistrust and lack of understanding, Joseph Fantuzzi says.

"I remember a black co-worker saying to me that he thought all white people were rich."

Joseph has a 12-year-old daughter, Lauren, and a 15-year-old son, Ryan, who attend a predominantly white school in Sterling Heights.

Like many Metro Detroit parents, he worries about how his children will learn racial tolerance once they are outside the home. Joseph says he is concerned about the effects of raising them in a racially segregated area, such as Macomb County.

In Sterling Heights, for example, blacks make up just over one percent of the city's 124,471 people.

"If you never raise your children around other people, then it causes your children to be leery of people different than themselves," Joseph said.

"What are you going to do? Stay in a cocoon all your life?"

Several months ago, two black families moved onto Fantuzzi's block on Chantilly Street.

"People drive by their houses and point and say 'A black family just moved there,'" Fantuzzi says.

"I don't care if different kinds of people move into my neighborhood. As long as they can afford their home and keep up their property, it doesn't matter to me."



**"All the black
kids group
together. It**



...
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cultures."

Donald Coleman and his wife, Constance, cook in their Detroit home, where beneath the beauty of the well-tended lawns and homes are realities of living in a segregated city. There are fewer goods and services.

Benjamin Coleman
Senior at University of Michigan

1943 riot remembered

Detroit's 1943 riot erupted when blacks and whites clashed on Belle Isle on a summer night in June. Tensions between blacks and whites had been building for months in the city. A skirmish between blacks and whites broke out on the island after blacks became angry that Detroit Police were searching their cars and not that of whites.

The disturbance spread from Belle Isle throughout the city. Rumors that whites had thrown a black woman and her baby from the Belle Isle bridge escalated the fracas.

Thirty-six hours after the melee began, 34 Detroiters lay dead, 25 of them black. Twenty-four years later, the more-remembered riot of 1967 left 43 dead, giving the city a history of racial violence more deadly than many.

More than a half-century after that first riot shaped their lives -- and the life of home town -- segregation continues to affect the two families.

The physical and mental scars left behind from his beating surface from time to time for Angelo Fantuzzi, but he refuses to talk about it.

"It was a vicious beating," says Joseph Fantuzzi about his dad's ordeal. "He still has the scars across his head. His hair covers them."

"He's still bitter but he didn't raise us to hate people," Joseph said.

On a recent August afternoon, Angelo Fantuzzi's grandson, Ryan, and his friends pondered the question of how race affects their young lives.

"I don't care what color someone is as long as they treat me right," Ryan says.

For Benjamin Coleman, now a senior at U-M Engineering School, growing up in mostly black Detroit meant an adjustment when he arrived at the university as a freshman.

"It was something of a culture shock," Benjamin Coleman said. "It wasn't like I went to a white school, where 95 percent of the school was black."

Expecting to finally have escaped segregation, Benjamin quickly discovered that

CyberSurvey

Will segregation end on its own?

Do you think segregation in Metro Detroit will eventually go away on its own, without the intervention of government, business or other groups?

yes no

[▶ Check Survey Results](#)

Segregation in Metro Detroit :

[▶ Would you be willing to participate in a town-hall forum on the issue of segregation?](#)

students segregated themselves.

"All the black kids group together," he said. "It kind of closes doors to you because you don't get to interact with people of different races and cultures."

Both Fantuzzi and the Coleman families worry about segregation's tangible and intangible costs to their families, particularly their young children.

"The issue of race is always there," Joseph Fantuzzi said. "It's always the status quo. I can't understand it because we're supposed to be this melting pot."

They were children in 1943, growing up just a few blocks from each other on Detroit's east side, when their world exploded.

Different families, different worlds

"The issue of race is always there. It's always the status quo. I can't understand it because we're supposed to be this melting pot."

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