

Opinion

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(B&F)

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Young: 2 faces to suburbs

WILL THE REAL Coleman Young please stand up?

To say the least, the Detroit mayor's attitude toward the suburbs is confusing.

This is a man who in February 1983 told a group of Oakland County business leaders: "I have come across Eight Mile bearing an olive branch. What's good for the city of Detroit is good for its suburbs. And what's good for the suburbs is good for Detroit."



Nick Sharkey

Recently, he told the Detroit Free Press: "I am unwilling to seek alliance or coalition with the suburbs on the basis of surrendering the jewels of the city of Detroit. I don't know of any other city in the nation where there's such a preoccupation in the suburbs for control."

It's confusing trying to figure him out.

WHEN YOUNG strikes out against the suburbs, he makes it more difficult for anyone promoting suburban-Detroit cooperation.

Said Oakland County Executive Dan Murphy, who was chairman of the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), a voluntary group of local governmental leaders seeking regional cooperation:

"For every time the mayor opens his mouth, I've got to make 10 speeches out here to tell the people in Oakland County that he's just speaking for political effect."

Leaders such as Murphy are not always successful in soothing suburban fears about Young. Let's admit it: The city of Detroit is not easy to "sell" in the suburbs.

Part of the reason is bias. Many suburbanites are not interested in Detroit's problems because the majority of the population is black.

But many suburbanites care deeply

about Detroit. They worry about the downtown. They support the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Science Center. They pledge money to keep libraries open. They work at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. They walk to raise money for FocusHope.

It's suburbanites from this second group to tell me they are turned off by Coleman Young. That's troublesome. Anti-Young feelings can easily become anti-Detroit.

YOUNG COULD become a statesman for regional cooperation.

He has such a strong constituency in the city of Detroit that he does not have to satisfy anti-suburban radicals. He has a record of achievement in leading Detroit through difficult economic times. He has brought national attention to this area by promoting the Super Bowl, Republican Convention and Grand Prix.

In other words, he is in the best position of anyone to be a regional leader.

The problems Young faces are formidable — including the transportation system, Detroit Zoo, Detroit Institute of Arts and the water board. All require cooperation among governments in southeastern Michigan.

What has Young's record been in regional cooperation? Practically nil. He held a session a few years ago with the mayors of western Wayne County communities. Last year he spoke at a meeting of the joint chamber of commerce in Oakland County. That's about it.

Who is the real Coleman Young? Is he the suburban-Detroit conciliator or the angry, suburb-hater?

How that question is resolved may determine the future of southeastern Michigan.

Murder city: bad rap

PEOPLE TELL me from time to time that they would like to see more "good news" and less reporting of the darker side of life — crime, killings, wars, tragedy.

Every once in a while, someone attempts to publish a "good news" newspaper that focuses on the brighter aspects of life and ignores the horrors.

These newspapers quickly go out of business because they have attempted to color reality to a certain way of thinking. The public, which prefers big doses of unreality in its entertainment, can't really abide unreality in the news.

When a daily newspaper prints a story that points out that Detroit has the highest murder rate in the country, per capita, it is understandable that the Detroit mayor is unhappy with the newspaper.

MAYOR YOUNG would prefer, at least in this instance, a "good news" approach. That would mean nobody would say anything about the number of murders in Detroit.

On one side, Detroit is a city in a long, slow downward slide toward becoming inhabited mostly by people who don't have the money or opportunity to live elsewhere.

But a headline proclaiming Detroit the murder capital of the United States helps accelerate the slide.

No matter how many times police and other authorities point out that most murders are committed during family strife, or arguments between friends, or at least by people who know each other, most residents will translate the murder statistics into meaning unsafe streets.

WE WHO LIVE in the suburbs and who tend to regard the inner city as an unsafe

area, to be visited only during trips carefully planned for safety and protection, will have even more of a reason to stay away.

Staying away for long stretches tends to reinforce without good reason a sense of unease.

When I lived in downtown Detroit, I rarely felt uncomfortable about being in any part of the city, at any time of the day or night. I moved to Livonia and did not have occasion to go into Detroit for more than a year. The only thing I know about it during those months was what I read in the newspapers.

I can remember my first trip back clearly. I drove down the I-96 freeway toward the center of town. It was the middle of the afternoon. As I began to notice more and more the ramshackle and abandoned buildings, my sense of unease grew.

I looked with suspicion at the drivers and passengers of cars going by me. I found myself reaching over and pushing the lock button on the passenger door. I parked near the City-County Building and looked around carefully before I left the car to cross the street.

Of course, as I moved around the downtown streets, I became more accustomed to being there. I felt safer because I was becoming familiar once again with the turf.

BUT I RETURNED to the suburbs and have found, except for a few occasions, that almost anything I want to do can be done in the suburbs.

Sometimes I chide myself for not going to the city more, to a particular restaurant, or to the Art Institute, or to a play, and determine to overcome any sense of discomfort about Detroit.

I don't think that knowing there are more people murdered in Detroit, per capita, than anywhere else will change my determination.

But then again, perhaps against my better judgment, it might.



Bob Wisler

oral quarrel

This week's Oral Quarrel asked Farmington and Farmington Hills residents what actor or actress should be cast in the role of you in the movie of your life?

Following are the responses:

• Since I am an actress, I would pick me. Since I am not famous, I would

pick Merle Streep.

• Any actress that can tell a good mother-in-law joke because she is a joke.

• That's easy, Shirley MacLaine. She is a fine sensitive actress, who I believe could understand my life and get the feeling across to the audience. She is similar enough in appearance and age too, which wouldn't hurt.

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