

***NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE***

***TECHNOLOGY NEWS***

***PRESS CLIPS***

**APRIL – SEPTEMBER 1999**

NY Times 9/25/99

# What Price Will Be Paid By Those Not on the Net?

By PAM BELLUCK

**T**HE latest Federal survey of who is using the Internet presented some sobering results. The "digital divide" is widening, the Commerce Department said in July, and the gap is on its way to becoming a "racial ravine."

While more Americans of all demographic groups are going online, black and Hispanic families are less than half as likely as white families to have access to the Internet from home, work or school. And even at the lowest income levels, the gap is great — a child in a low-income white family is three times as likely to have Internet access as a child in a low-income black family and four times as likely as than a child in a low-income Hispanic family.

It is clear that people without Internet skills are increasingly likely to be less competitive in school and in the workplace. But what about as consumers? Are they missing out on shopping opportunities and information? Are they likely to end up the captive customers of unwired retailers who will do what some inner-city grocery stores do now — offer limited quality and selection at high prices?

The answer is still up in the air. But there is cause for concern, experts say.

"It's pretty easy to imagine that in a fairly short period of time, say within 10 years, to be a member of society and not be on line will be a little bit like living in Los Angeles and not having a car," said Paul Saffo, a computer industry consultant at the Institute for the Future in Menlo Park, Calif.

"Their choices will be restricted, and they're going to pay a little more for things and they'll have fewer options," he said. "And it's not going to be one of these things where you see the digital homeless on the street, or sleeping on the steps of City Hall. It's going to be an invisible problem. The people who are digitally dispossessed may

not even appreciate that they are dispossessed."

For now, most experts agree, those excluded from E-commerce are not losing out on any price-cutting bonanzas. Best sellers may be 50 percent off at Amazon.com, but other books are not sold at such deep discounts there.

Still, there are deals to be had, and not only through on-line auction houses. Some airlines offer discounts if customers buy tickets on their Web sites. And Mark Cooper, the research director for the Consumer Federation of America, said that long-distance telephone companies had been offering significant savings — 7 cents a minute for customers who pay with credit cards on line, compared with 19 cents a minute for the average customer billed on paper.

Analysts also predict that in a few years, so many companies will be selling on line that prices will become more competitive. But at the moment, the biggest plus for the on-line consumer is information — and convenience.

"Car sales are a good example," said Ann Winblad, a venture capitalist with Hummer Winblad Venture Partners.

"People are going to car dealers armed with information to negotiate," she said. "They can ask for information on many sites on the Internet. Even if they are not buying on the Internet, they know what they should be paying. They know what things cost."

Those shopping for compact disks can hear the music on line, read a review of an album, have a Web site like CDNow tell them what other artists they might enjoy and then walk into Tower Records and make an informed purchase.

"It's very different from a store clerk — they don't know you," Ms. Winblad said.

Researchers who study the digital divide say they are puzzled by its persistence, especially after substantial computer price cuts and give-aways in recent years.

James McQuivey, a senior analyst with



Preschoolers practice their mouse skills at the Essex County Child Development Center in Newark.

Photo by Duffell for The New York Times

Forrester Research, a technology research firm, said that because of affordable prices, the third of the population that earns less than \$25,000 a year is expected to account for 11 percent of on-line retail spending by 2003, up from 6 percent now. But he said that would still pale in comparison to the group's off-line buying, which makes up 25 percent of retail spending. And, in general, he said, these consumers buy smaller impulse items, like compact disks.

Donna L. Hoffman, a professor of management at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, said she was troubled that, according to her research and that of others, whites consistently have more Internet access compared with black people with comparable education and incomes.

"There's something going on here," Professor Hoffman said. "Personal computer prices have dropped dramatically. And African-Americans' adoption of satellite technology and cable is dramatic. We think there are social and cultural factors that are influencing certain segments of society so they don't feel that they are interested in adopting PCs."

Professor Hoffman said that one theory was that there is not enough that interests minority consumers on the Internet, something that may begin to change with the introduction this fall of www.bet.com, a Web site geared to African-Americans, which will include a store selling urban apparel, music and collectible items.

But other Web sites focusing on black consumers say they have found it hard to draw shoppers. B. Keith Fulton, the director for technology programs and policy at the National Urban League, says the problem is complex, essentially a new frontier for civil rights.

"There are two schools of thought," Mr. Fulton said. "One is that for African-Americans, our historical experience with automation has been one of disengagement and disenfranchisement. From the automation of plantations to industrialization in the North, whenever automation has come, it's been to the disadvantage of African-Americans, so there is a lot of distrust there. Phones, cable TV, these are proven technologies."

He said the "second school of thought

says that for African-American kids, teachers aren't as well trained, schools don't have as many computers, kids aren't bringing the demand home for parents to get this device."

With more transactions taking place on line, what will this mean to people who still shop in traditional stores?

Some experts, like Professor Hoffman, think that off-line stores will be under pressure to improve services, if not prices — both because of competition with on-line retailers and because of demands from Internet-educated shoppers. Retailers will have on-line divisions that they can use to augment their real-store services by, say, providing more information about items through a computer that customers can use in the store.

But Mr. Cooper of the Consumer Federation is less optimistic.

"Some think tank said this is not a case of have and have-nots, but have-nows versus have-laters," he said. "The real problem is that the have-laters never catch up. You're going to be paying more for a long time if you don't get on line."

The Dallas Morning News

## Sunday Reader

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## An interview with B. Keith Fulton

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## Urban League director sees link between civil rights, technology

06/27/99

*B. Keith Fulton believes technology has the capability to make African-Americans full participants in the "information economy" of the 21st century. As director of technology programs and policy for the National Urban League, he is putting the organization and its 114 local affiliates on the information superhighway.*

*The Urban League opened its first technology center in Los Angeles' Watts neighborhood in 1968. The Urban League recognized then the potential for computer training and employment in an area where riots had destroyed entire city blocks. Some of the early participants in that center are now software engineers and website entrepreneurs.*

*Mr. Fulton, who has degrees in urban planning, management and law, wants African-Americans and other minorities to know the impact computers and the Internet will have on their future. During an interview with*

*Dallas Morning News staff writer Ira J. Hadnot, Mr. Fulton talked about why technology has become a civil-rights issue. Following are excerpts:*

## Q: Technology and civil rights - what's the connection?

**A:** In 1910, when the National Urban League was founded, blacks from rural areas called upon the league to help them make the transition to the industrial age. Now blacks and other minorities are calling upon us to help them make the transition to the information age. We see the creation of new technologies and access to them as workforce-development and equal-opportunity issues. We have tied it squarely to achievement. Our children are entitled to be competitive, to be computer literate and to take advantage of all technology resources.

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There is an unevenness right now in how resources are allocated. It's being called a "digital divide" between the information haves and the have-nots. The civil-rights movement was about correcting disparities, be they social, political or economic. Think of this as a cyber-rights movement to provide universal access to the Internet and to equip our communities - nonprofits, schools, libraries, churches and homes - with the high-speed wiring necessary to run computers and telecommunications devices so our people will have the skills to be employable in the 21st century.

We don't want redlining, wiring around those communities with old phone lines and outdated electrical wiring. There is a Federal Communications Commission to develop policies that protect all American consumers. Our work in this area is consistent with protecting the rights of the disadvantaged. And right now studies show our communities are at a digital disadvantage.

**Q: Why is there the perception that minority communities are slow to embrace technological changes?**

**A:** Depending upon what the device is, minorities have been among the first users of some technologies. We consume pay-per-view, cellular phones and beepers.

But in many homes below a certain income range, computers are seen as extras. There may be an economic struggle for food, shelter and clothing that does not allow one to spend money on a computer, modem and a printer.

The television is a cost-effective entertainment center that every one can use, requires no access fee and is cheaper than going to the movies every night. That is why even in the poorest of households you will find a television. Its utility has been proven. That isn't the case with computers and minorities - not yet.

There are economic, educational and some cultural factors involved. When more minority parents begin to understand that a computer in the home will help their children succeed in school, you will see people making the financial sacrifice. African-Americans who use computers on the job already know their potential. They are more likely to have computers at home.

When you see a use for something, a relevancy to your life, then you see its practicality. Minorities are no different than any other group in that respect. They need to be taught how to use technology in ways that will matter to their lives. Technology must have a clear purpose for us to make use of it.

**Q: How will this teaching occur?**

A: That is what many of us in this field are exploring right now, what are the best ways to close the digital divide? The National Urban League has a much longer track record with this than the other civil rights organizations

We've seen how effective community training centers can be. So that is the model that is now being applied to churches, libraries and after-school programs. For these programs to be effective, there must be a vision for what the community needs, an infrastructure [a building, networked computers, and trained personnel], innovative content and curriculum and evaluation of what works and what doesn't.

The vision for how this equipment should be used comes well before any hardware is installed and switches flipped.

Tools work best when you know what they are for and how they should be used. None of this work can be done in isolation. Schools, churches, nonprofits and employers are going to have to work in unison.

Through grants from Bell Atlantic, the National Urban League has been able to start several pilot Technology, Education and Access Centers in New York, Boston, Maryland and New Jersey. At the Boston site, the Department of Housing and Urban Development is helping with installations in public housing complexes. We've also received funding from the Microsoft Corporation for software support and matching grants from the Commerce Department.

We are evaluating these operations and using their success to start others.

**Q: What got you personally involved?**

A: I got my first computer when I graduated from high school in 1984. While I was in high school, I learned how to write program codes for ATM machines and that got me hooked. My father is a mathematician and my mother an English teacher. I know they encouraged my interests. Virginia Tech was one of the first schools to require that incoming students have computers. So it was no secret where I wanted to go.

It seems that I have always been around computers, and they have become a part of how I work and communicate. I have 19-month-old sons, and my wife and I are introducing them to the child software, getting them comfortable with computers. They love it.

Think of what they are going to be able to do at my age. It is their future and that of other children that I am most concerned about. We need to make sure that they will not be left out. Computer literacy will be to the 21st century what reading and writing meant to my parents' generation. The league position allows me to tap into technical and community planning issues that interest me.

**Q: What do you say to people who say, "Let the marketplace take care of the digital divide."?**

**A:** Lower computer prices may eventually drive greater access. But prices have come down and so far it hasn't made a difference in closing the divide. And if you gave a low-income person a laptop, what would they do with it? The attention cannot be on the marketplace and hardware alone as solutions. It really will need a collaborative effort by government, private industry, educators and nonprofits to make a difference.

It costs from \$100,000 to a quarter of a million dollars to establish a community tech center. That often does not include salaries for staff. The divide will not be closed without the investment of all these groups. Churches must become smarter and talk to members about the benefits and blessings of being online. Nonprofits need to learn a new language. It's not needing a safety net. It is creating safety net.

**Q: Will focusing on technology distract from traditional civil rights issues, poverty and race relations, that haven't been resolved?**

**A:** I don't think it will. It will help us to understand that there are many dimensions to our problems as a society. Poverty is the "phantom menace" of the computer age. The Jedi knights are going to be the tech centers that allow workforce development and educational achievement.

This will be true for poor whites, blacks and Hispanics and for hidden pockets of the Asian community, the Southeast Asians who are trying to become full participants in American society.

The point was made at our Urban Technology Summit last year that access to technology is going to be the civil-rights issue of the new millennium because of the speed at which we are moving from a manufacturing to an information-based society. Technology can help us level the playing field.

The summit was the first of its kind to be convened by a civil-rights organization. Already, we have seen tremendous interest in the digital divide from the FCC, the Department of Education and the Commerce

Department, which is revisiting some of its programs. The AOL Foundation is preparing a major initiative. This is a movement, a grassroots one in much the same way every other movement in this country has been started.

The technology gap is not just about individual choices. If we are not responsive, entire communities will be without choices.

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## LOGAN HILL

7595  
Racial Digital Divide

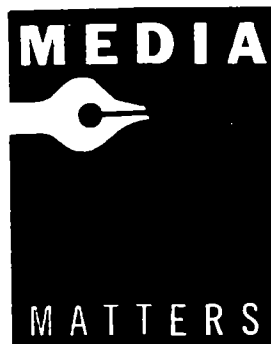
**R**ecord numbers of students are going online, according to UCLA's annual survey of college freshmen released this past January. But this new battery of Internet statistics—the latest in a field updated as rapidly as software—confirms that a digital divide persists between the races. Of the freshmen surveyed at private universities, 90.2 percent reported using the Internet for schoolwork, but just 77.6 percent of students at traditionally black public colleges said the same. The study reveals that this problem is linked to the lack of computer access at public high schools, which 92.2 percent of the respondents from black public colleges attended, compared with less than two-thirds of the students surveyed at private universities.

Unfortunately, the press garbled these results. First, the *New York Times*'s William Honan exaggerated the racial divide, reporting that the UCLA researchers found a "great disparity in computer mastery between students entering elite private colleges, 80.1 percent of whom say they use computers regularly, and those attending traditionally black public institutions, 41.1 percent of whom say that." These statistics actually refer to the percentage of students who use e-mail, not computers. The gap in scholastic Internet usage is significant (12.6 percentage points) but not inexplicably huge, while the e-mail discrepancy indicates that minority students, who are less likely to own PCs, are also less likely to have their own e-mail accounts or free time for nonessential computing at overburdened public terminals.

Honan's relatively benign conflation of these statistics soon mutated into a different and more troubling story. On January 25, *Slate* columnist Scott Shuger, dubbed a "cool cat" by William F. Buckley Jr. and recently wedged between Maureen Dowd and Matt Drudge as one of *Newsweek*'s "20 Stars of the New News," sent out his site's widely read "Today's Papers" e-mail brief. Shuger summarized the *Times*'s coverage but appended the following advice: "Before too much redistributive social policy gets made around such results, it might be good to add a question to the survey: 'Do you have a luxury sound system or a car less than two years old, or a luxury sound system in that car?'" Having stumbled upon such stereotypes—and students—at Freaknik, a spring break party for black college students in Atlanta, Shuger concluded that "computer Internet paucity... may be a function of [black students'] own interests and choices rather than that of affordability."

The *Times* granted Shuger three paragraphs of blustering self-defense (and just two words of quoted criticism) the following week, excusing him as a groggy nocturnal Web reporter. But logic like Shuger's is far from innocuous. In its report "The Myth of an Emerging Information Underclass," the Cato Institute opined that "the fact that people do not log on does not necessarily imply that they cannot afford to do so. They may simply have other priorities." Last year, a combination of such cyberculture-of-poverty arguments and hysteria over a "Gore Tax" led Congress to slash the VP's Internet access program from \$2.5 billion to nearly half that.

Advocates like B. Keith Fulton, director of technology pro-



grams and policy for the National Urban League, have little patience for such speculation. In predominantly white classrooms, Fulton points out, students are three times more likely to have Internet access than students in mostly minority classrooms. He says, "People like [Shuger] are not held accountable. They aren't out there working on studies, so they make a stereotyped comment and it gets attention. But we can train 1,400 people in an LA computer center, they can earn \$31 million in salaries, and nobody talks about that." Fulton and the organ-

izers of more than 250 community technology centers across the country (see [www.ctcnet.org](http://www.ctcnet.org) for more information) help provide computers, training and resources to minorities through schools, libraries and public centers.

The racial digital divide is real and cannot simply be attributed to income, as corroborated by a series of federal studies. With historically inferior technology access, minorities have been discouraged from computer education, recreation and professions. Currently, African-Americans and Latinos compose 22 percent of the Silicon Valley area's population, but only 4 percent of employees at its major firms are African-American, and just 8 percent are Latinos—and many work in service or support positions.

These stark numbers result from a systemic denial of training as well as access, which is bad news for techno-optimists who foresee democracy flourishing as every television set becomes an Internet node. Even as the Internet becomes more accessible, a skills gap will persist unless public schools are able to offer equitable teaching and other resources. Studies by the National Science Foundation and Vanderbilt University have found that even minority students who are able to surf do not receive the same levels of practical computer training that would allow them to share in the economic benefits of the high-tech boom.

Smaller class size and higher teacher pay might well do more to improve heavily minority schools than a blueberry iMac, but teachers can't even begin to impart technological knowledge until they have computers and support. Linda Sax, director of the UCLA survey, says that although "nearly everyone's misinterpreted something" about the study, it nonetheless offers some reason for hope in this regard: "Our survey shows that minority students are using the computers at school. That's excellent. That's working." But, she adds, African-American students own fewer computers, and "there won't be equity [in access] until every student has their own computer." Ramon Harris, who directs the Executive Leadership Foundation's Transfer Technology Project, a program that works to enhance computer course programs at traditionally black colleges, has the same goal in mind. He says, "Universal computing access is necessary and should be subsidized like a utility. Like water. Like light. It's that simple." ■

*Logan Hill is an editorial assistant at New York magazine and the author of an essay in the forthcoming Technicolor: Race and Technology in Everyday Life (NYU).*

PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

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# Closing Web gap

AT&T joins  
with NAACP  
in computer  
literacy plan

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Associated Press

NEW YORK — To help bridge the "digital divide" — the gap between whites and blacks and Hispanics in access to the Internet — the NAACP and AT&T will form a partnership to create technology centers in 20 cities, including Philadelphia.

"The technological segregation known as the digital divide must be narrowed," NAACP President Kwesi Mfume said.

Toward that end, Mfume announced that through the program, AT&T would supply hardware, software and on-site

technology in the centers, which will offer computer training and Internet seminars.

"The centers will be open after the school doors close so parents and children can learn computer usage together," Mfume said. "The old and the young learning together will help reduce that divide."

AT&T spokesman Burke Stinson said that, in addition to Philadelphia, sites for the centers would include Baltimore, Dal

See **NAACP** Next Page **B**

## NAACP

Continued from Preceding Page

las, Miami, New York and Seattle.

Ameritech Corp. and the National Urban League announced last week they would spend \$350,000 to build five new Internet community centers in Aurora, Ill., Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis and Milwaukee. And 3Com Corp. said it would spend \$1 million in donated equipment and training in 10 cities to help teach students to be computer network engineers.

Last week, a Commerce Department report, "Falling Through the Net," said the disparity on the Internet between whites and black and Hispanic Americans is growing.

The report found about 47 percent of all whites own computers, but fewer than half as many blacks do. About 25.5 percent of Hispanics own computers, but 55 percent of Asian-Americans do.

Asian families also are most likely to have Internet access, with 36 percent on-line.

The report also found a child in a low-income white family is three times as likely to have Internet access as a child in a comparable black family, and four times as likely as a Hispanic child.

Most troubling for government experts were indications these disparities can't be blamed solely on differences in income. Among

families earning \$15,000 to \$35,000, for example, more than 33 percent of whites owned computers, but only 19 percent of blacks did. That gap has widened nearly 62 percent since 1994 despite plunging computer prices.

During its 90th annual convention in Manhattan this week, the NAACP also issued "report cards" on how the hospitality and telecommunications industries treat blacks in hiring, promoting, contracting, marketing and philanthropic activities.

When the first survey was conducted in 1997, the NAACP and 55 other black organizations urged a boycott of 10 national hotel chains because of their hiring and promotion practices.

At the time, Westin Hotels, Best Western International, Radisson Hospitality Worldwide, Renaissance Hotels and Resorts, Choice Hotels International, Holiday Inn Worldwide and Omni Hotels refused to participate. All got "F" grades.

None of the 13 hotel firms studied in this year's survey got less than a "C."

Mfume said the improvement among telecommunications companies wasn't as dramatic as that of the hotels.

BellSouth and Bell Atlantic both received B+, SBC, Ameritech and GTE, B, AT&T, B, Cincinnati Bell and MCI WorldCom, C+, Excel, Sprint, Frontier, USWest and AirTouch, C, and Qwest, D+. Alltel, received a failing grade for not responding.

## ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

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# AT&T giving grants to NAACP, Urban League

By Michael E. Kanell

STAFF WRITER

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AT&T on Wednesday announced it will pay for starting "tech centers" to train and educate low-income people in Atlanta and nine other cities.

AT&T, which has regional headquarters in Atlanta, has issued grants totaling \$510,000 to the NAACP and the National Urban League, which will run the programs at their branch offices — possibly beginning in late summer. Those interested can contact local offices of either group.

The grants announcement came the day after AT&T earned a B-minus on a diversity "report card" issued by the NAACP. With that grade, AT&T placed sixth among 13 telecommunications companies. None aced the exam,

although Atlanta-based BellSouth topped the list with a B-plus. Lit in Atlanta, Ray Robinson, is the Rock-based Alltel was given the only failing grade.

Minority employees at AT&T have grown from 13 percent of the work force in 1972 to about 29 percent today, according to company spokesman Bryant Steele. In Georgia, about 46 percent of AT&T employees are minorities, including almost 30 percent of managers and professionals.

The company has won plaudits as a minority employer from Black Enterprise, Hispanic Business and Working Mother

magazines. AT&T's top executive

The company is not without facial controversies, however. AT&T has at least one outstanding suit pending in U.S. District Court in which a former employee alleges racial bias. The company denies the allegations.



# black america today the *new* Millennium



## *"Tech Know: The Digital Revolution"*

*August 3, 1999, Tuesday: Reuters Studios, Washington, D.C.*

*National Broadcast Window: August 9 - September 12, 1999*

*A panel discussion on the technology sweeping our nation and changing our economy. Will the digital technology leave Black Americans and those lacking access to technological advances, out in the cold?*

*Left to right: Hugh Price, National Urban League; Larry Irving, U.S. Department of Commerce; George Strait, host; Myra Peterson, Omniverse Digital Solution; Sinbad, Technology Outreach Advocate and Comedian; Tariq Muhammad, Black Enterprise Magazine; Omar Wasow, BlackPlanet.com; Barry Cooper, Black Voices. Not in picture: Anita Brown, Black Geeks Online.*



# ELECTRONIC MEDIA

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**Customer satisfaction:** Major high-definition TV manufacturers have recently stepped up to the plate financially to either underwrite or provide equipment in support of the networks' efforts to broadcast in high-definition television. But HDTV production pioneer Barry Rebo predicts another category of player will start underwriting such efforts as well, major electronics retailers such as Circuit City and Best Buy. After all, Mr. Rebo suggests, manufacturers and the retailers have the same goal—to get HDTVs into as many homes as possible. And the best way to do that, he says, is to give them something compelling to watch.

**Keeping up with the network:** That increased network HDTV output, in turn, will drive more local high-definition programming, predicts Bob Kisor, vice president of engineering and technical services for Paramount Pictures. After all, he says, stations can't allow their newscasts to look substandard when compared with the network fare. "The stations are being driven to do the news and everything [in HDTV] because of the network affiliation," Mr. Kisor says.

**Outdoor life:** While other stations mark their 50th anniversary with new-fangled HDTV, WTVH-TV, Syracuse, N.Y., is marking the milestone with old-fashioned TV on Saturday. The station plans to do an hour-long noon special broadcast and its evening news live and outdoors, and it expects about as many as 15,000 people to tour the station and enjoy popcorn and other treats. Officially, the station's anniversary was in January, but the celebration was planned for August because "it's the only month on record when it hasn't snowed in Syracuse," says general manager Gary Wordlaw. ■

reports by Jon Lafayette, elder and Steven J. Stark

## Is there www.minority.access?

By DAVID HATCH  
STAFF REPORTER

WASHINGTON  
Is there a "digital divide" between whites and blacks with regard to Internet access?

That's a question dividing the African American community, with some blacks insisting the gap is real and others saying it's a myth.

At a taping here last week of a one-hour segment of the syndicated "Black America Today" series, prominent African Americans and Republican presidential contender Steve Forbes squared off on the issue.

The question is more than academic. It cuts to the heart of cable industry plans to make broadband Internet service a core business. A growing divide could undermine those efforts if potential customers are left on the sidelines.

And it could bring closer scrutiny from government officials, who are already raising concerns that a gap exists.

"We don't think the picture

is quite as gloomy as the report indicates," said Barry Cooper, founder and CEO of the Web site BlackVoices.com. He was referring to a report issued last month by the Commerce Department that found the gap between Internet "haves" and "have-nots" is widening significantly.

"We believe that the numbers [of black Internet users] are getting higher and higher. At least that's what we're experiencing at BlackVoices.com," he said.

But Larry Irving, administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, a division of the Commerce Department that helped spearhead the report, said the divide exists and must be addressed.

He noted, for example, that 25 percent to 30 percent of whites are online at home, whereas only 11 percent of blacks are. If existing growth rates continue, every white American will have a home Internet connection in four years while only one-third of blacks

will.

"That's not acceptable," he said.

Several panelists emphasized that even if minorities have Web access at work or the library, that's no substitute for access at home.

"There are a lot of things you shouldn't be doing at work, such as looking for a job online," observed Hugh Price, president of the National Urban League.

But Omar Wasow, Internet correspondent for MSNBC and creator of the soon-to-be launched site BlackPlanet.com, sees the numbers differently. By the most conservative estimates, he said, 6 million African Americans are online now and 12 million are expected to be online by year's end.

Mr. Forbes, who was interviewed via satellite from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, said the best way to bridge the technology gap is to give parents more choice over the schools their kids can attend, but the response drew guffaws from invited guests in the taping

room, who apparently considered the answer inadequate.

Is the Clinton administration to blame for the digital divide? Mr. Irving insists no.

"The situation would be worse but for the things that Bill Clinton and Al Gore have attempted to do," he said after the taping.

"I don't think anybody should be casting blame. You didn't see anything in the [NTIA] report about casting blame. Instead it should be about finding solutions, and that's what we're about," he added.

"Black America Today" is a quarterly series produced by the weekly syndicated news show "America's Black Forum." The episode taped last week—titled "Tech Know: The Digital Revolution"—was hosted by George Strait, health and technology reporter for "ABC World News Now" and medical correspondent for ABC News.

The segment is slated to air in 76 markets across the United States between Aug. 16 and Sept. 12. ■



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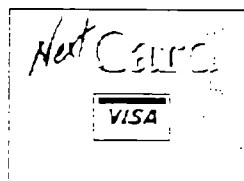
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## 'Digital Divide' Isn't Just About Internet Access

By Michelle Singletary

Sunday, August 22, 1999; Page H01

Ten days ago, BET Holdings Inc. made public its plans to launch a new site on the World Wide Web aimed at black consumers.

Robert L. Johnson, founder, chairman and chief executive of BET Holdings, owner of cable TV's Black Entertainment Television network, said his new venture should be online by November.

The Web site, called BET.com, would offer users free access to news, entertainment, chat rooms and shopping. Johnson said four corporate partners put up \$35 million--reportedly the largest investment ever for an online venture targeted to blacks.

BET Holdings officials predicted that this venture could help close the so-called "digital divide"--the fact that blacks are less likely than whites to own a computer or have Internet access.

"The failure of any community to avail itself of the resources of the Internet will limit its ability to succeed in the new millennium," Johnson said. "BET is bringing its media channels, content and brand resources together with those of our partners to create an online destination that will educate, enrich, empower and entertain African Americans."

If anyone is going to be enriched by this, I personally believe it will be BET alone.

I watch Black Entertainment Television at best once in a blue moon, and at one time I was a contributor on a business program that has since been canceled. Mostly, though, when I do tune in to BET I see music programs featuring videos with half-naked women gyrating to rap music. This doesn't exactly inspire confidence in BET as an educational tool.

"BET stands for entertainment, and that is their first priority," said B. Keith Fulton, director of technology programs and policy for the National Urban League. "To say that BET will become an alternative source for education for blacks is a bit of a stretch."

Johnson doesn't deny this at all. Rather than linking to outside

retailers. BET.com will serve as the direct seller of Afrocentric products from travel to urban apparel. The Web site will be promoted by BET's media properties, as well as by the various sites owned by its media partners.

"We are in this to make money. There's no doubt about it, and I would be lying if I told you we weren't," Johnson told me in an interview. "But in the process I hope we have a positive impact on people's lives."

It's true that a Commerce Department report titled "Falling Through the Net," released last month, found that 37.7 percent of whites have access to the Internet either at home or at work, compared with 35.9 percent of Asian Americans, 19 percent of blacks and 16.6 percent of Hispanics.

There's no mystery why the gap exists: Computers cost too much. And if you are low-income, I can see why paying a monthly bill for Internet access might not be a priority.

Unfortunately, this digital gap puts black and Hispanic children at a competitive disadvantage in a workplace where computers and even the Internet are becoming increasingly important.

A Web site sporting BET's popular brand name may attract blacks who already have access to the Internet. But it probably will do very little to open opportunities for those who are shut out by poverty.

"If the people who need to cross the digital divide don't have a computer, I'm not sure what adding another Web site will do," said Maudine Cooper, president of the Greater Washington Urban League.

Cooper brought it home for me. She said what we really need is a place for black folk to go to get computer training so they can get those good-paying technology jobs.

Happily, a number of organizations and corporations are trying not only to get people hooked up to the Internet but also to hook people up by bridging the digital gap. The Urban League plans to set up 114 computer training centers throughout the country that will prepare people for the growing number of computer-related jobs.

"The trick is how we use these devices to help folk help themselves," Fulton said. "Sitting down in front of a new entertainment portal doesn't do much for work-force development. What needs to happen is that these new resources lead to bona fide career training."

In fact, the Urban League will announce Tuesday plans to expand and upgrade equipment in its Northeast Washington computer center. The group also will announce plans to open a second computer center in Southeast. AT&T Corp. provided a \$70,000 grant to help pay for the purchase, installation and servicing on the 25 to 35 computers planned for the new center, Cooper said.

NatioNet, a for-profit Internet company, has developed a pilot program to provide free computer training to blacks. The company, based in Atlanta, funds this project through corporate grants.

"We want to close the digital gap and get people connected to the Internet," said Dorothy Dixon, executive director of Countdown 2000. Get Connected Campaign. Dixon said 800 people registered for classes during a recent training session in Washington.

I certainly hope that Johnson, who has enjoyed an enormous amount of economic success because of black consumers, will share the wealth and take a good chunk of that \$35 million and pass it on to community groups trying to provide free computer training to low-income families.

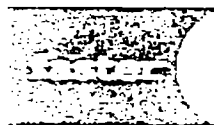
As Fulton of the National Urban League noted in a recent interview, what is really important is not just selling to blacks; it's "empowering black people not only to be consumers in this emerging market but to change their economic position."

Michelle Singletary's column appears in this section every Sunday. While she welcomes comments and column ideas, she cannot offer specific personal financial advice or answer detailed questions about individual situations. Her e-mail address is [singletarym@washpost.com](mailto:singletarym@washpost.com). Readers can write to her at The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071.

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# Study finds blacks, Hispanics are 'falling through the Net'

By LARRY WILLIAMS  
Herald Washington Bureau

9595

WASHINGTON — Americans are continuing their rush onto the Internet, but the gap between Internet haves and have-nots is widening dangerously, a new Commerce Department study shows.

More than 40 percent of U.S. households owned computers and one-quarter of all households had Internet access at the end of 1998, according to the report released Thursday. But black and Hispanic households are only two-fifths as likely to have home Internet access, the study showed.

"America's digital divide is fast becoming a 'racial ravine,'" said Larry Irving, assistant secretary of commerce for telecommunications, noting the lack of access to the nation's information resources for minorities, low-income groups and residents of rural areas and central cities.

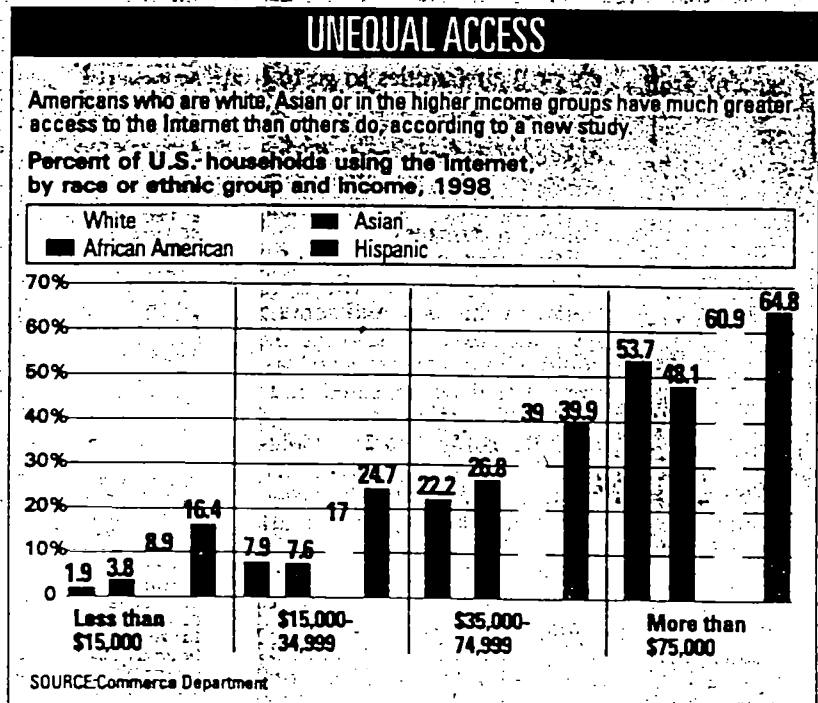
"It is now one of America's leading economic and civil rights issues, and we have to take concrete steps to redress the gap," he said.

Among the disparities cited in the "Falling Through the Net" report:

- Households with incomes of \$75,000 or higher are more than 20 times more likely to have access to the Internet than those at the lowest income levels, and are more than nine times as likely to have computers at home.

- Whites are more likely to have access to the Internet from their homes than blacks or Hispanics from any location. About 47 percent of whites own computers, but only slightly more than 20 percent of blacks do. About 26 percent of Hispanics own computers, while 55 percent of Asians do.

- Regardless of income level, those living in rural areas lag in



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Research/PAT CARR; Graphic/KEITH SIMMONS/KRT

Particularly disturbing to the report's authors was the fact that lower-income whites were far more likely to own computers than blacks at the same income level. Among families earning \$15,000 to \$35,000, more than a third of whites owned computers while only one in five blacks did.

But gaps in computer ownership and Internet access virtually disappear among whites, blacks and Hispanics earning more than \$75,000.

The study suggested that adding Internet capacity at community access centers like schools and libraries could play an important short-term role in increasing Internet access for poorer Americans.

To that end, the National Urban League announced Thursday that it would build five Internet com-

puter centers in Indianapolis, Milwaukee and Aurora, Ill. The centers will be financed with a \$350,000 grant from Ameritech Corp.

In a separate report Thursday, a comprehensive new study from eMarketer, a New York-based Internet marketing firm, estimated that 35.2 million people worldwide will gain access to the Internet this year, bringing the number of active Internet users to 130.6 million.

That study, which combined research data from hundreds of sources, also projected that worldwide e-commerce revenue will grow from \$98.4 billion in 1999 to \$1.2 trillion by 2003.

According to eMarketer, North America lost its majority share of the world's Internet user population in the first quarter of 1999 as the total number of users else-

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# Racial Divide on Net

By Rita Ciolli  
STAFF WRITER

9595

## Low use reported among minorities

While increasing numbers of Americans are on-line, Internet usage continues to be sharply defined along racial and class lines, according to a U.S. Department of Commerce report issued yesterday to bolster the Clinton administration's effort to encourage private investment in the effort to connect everyone.

The federal government's third annual study, "Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide," found that blacks and Hispanics as well as those with lower levels of income and education are rapidly becoming the "have nots" of the technology world.

The study found that Internet usage was greatest among whites, 38 percent, and Asians, 36 percent. Access by blacks was found to be 19 percent and for Hispanics, 17 percent.

"We do have a racial ravine in addition to a digital divide," said Larry Irving, assistant secretary for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the Commerce Department.

There is a danger of creating two societies if everyone does not have access to the tools of the Information Age, warns Martin Little, head of the National Urban League. "When you think of it in terms of equality of access and opportunity, which are the traditional civil rights words, then this is truly a civil rights issue," he said.

The national study reflects the situation in Nassau and Suffolk, according to Teresa Sanders, head of Long Island's Urban League. "The Internet and the World Wide Web are not even an option for most of the people" in minority communities, Sanders said. At the group's headquarters in Central Islip she said only two of the 15 computers in their technology training center have Internet connections. "We have people lined up to access those types of resources," she said.

The Commerce study found that income, race and geography made a major difference among those who were connected and those who were not. Even when comparable low-income households are compared, a child in a white family is three times as likely to have Internet access than a child in a black family and four times as more likely than a child in a Hispanic family.

"It's the unholy trinity of education, income and race that makes a difference," Irving said.

Affluence and geography make a difference. Among households earning more than \$75,000, both

blacks and whites have the same high Internet usage. While rural residents, no matter what their national origin, have the lowest.

The Commerce report contrasts with an April report by the United States Internet Council, a private nonprofit group that tracks and reports on the Internet, found only "digital potholes" on the road to universal Internet access. The USIC report said 23 percent of blacks were online and predicted that number would increase to 40 percent next year while Hispanic usage would grow from 36 percent to 43 percent.

"We think the trend lines point to greater access, not less access," said Mark Rhoads, legislative affairs director for the industry-funded group. Rhoads said their study by Forrester Research also counted those who had access from schools and libraries. The Commerce survey was done in December, 1998, while the USIC's was conducted in March, 1999. Internet usage is growing so rapidly that even three months could account for some difference in the finding, he said.

And Wendell Cherry, director of the Wyandanch Public Library, had the impression that Internet use was growing in his service area. He said the library had given out "quite a large number" of free e-mail accounts. "The biggest question is whether they can access it from their home computers. An awful lot of people come here because they have home computers," he said.

# Net access gap linked to race, pay

FRONT PAGE

## Use is rising, but many are shut out, report says

By Jim Landers

Washington Bureau of The Dallas Morning News

WASHINGTON — Millions of Americans gained access to the Internet last year, but they were more likely to be rich than poor, white than black, and married rather than single, the Commerce Department reported Thursday.

"The great news, the truly great news, is that computer access has doubled in the last four years, and millions more Americans have access to the Internet — 40 percent more than last year," said Larry Irving, the department's assistant secretary for communications and information.

"But far too many Americans are not part of this," he said.

Mr. Irving said Internet access disparities among Americans of different races and ethnic origins had grown into a "racial divide."

The disparities matter, the Commerce Department's report says, because telephones, computers and the Internet are becoming economic essentials.

"While these items may not be necessary for survival," the report states, "arguably in today's emerging digital economy they are necessary for success."

The findings, based on Census Bureau interviews with 48,000 households last December, showed 42.1 percent of households owned personal computers, and 26.2 percent had Internet access.

Internet access grew about 50 percent last year for whites, blacks and Hispanics alike and continues to expand rapidly. Louis Gerstner, chairman of IBM Corp., said recently that 50,000 Americans are gaining access to the Internet every day.

Thursday's report shows the most popular use of the Internet is for sending and receiving e-mail among family and friends. Jeffrey Papows, president of the software firm Lotus Development Corp., told Congress last month that Americans will send 2.7 trillion e-mail messages this year, more than four times the volume of postal-delivered mail.

But differences in the use of computers and the Internet persist across the nation. In Texas, 24.5 percent of homes had access to the Internet last year — not that different from the national average, but 31st among the 50 states. Texas ranked 34th in computer

# Race and income called factors in Net access gap

Continued from Page 1A

ownership.

Income differences account for the biggest national disparities in the Commerce Department's report, called, "Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide."

Sixty percent of households with annual incomes above \$75,000 were using the Internet last year, while just 19.1 percent of families earning between \$25,000 and \$35,000 a year were online. The percentage of users dropped off even more for families making less than \$25,000.

Mr. Irving said one of the surprises in the report was that the racial gap diminished substantially among those earning more than \$75,000 a year. "This suggests as the price of computers and access to the Internet continues to fall, the gap will narrow," he said.

Internet service providers are beginning to offer new customers rebates, leases and even free personal computers to overcome price resistance.

Kathy Bushkin, a senior vice president with America Online, Inc., said her company's CompuServe subsidiary was offering \$400 rebates this summer for a South Korean personal computer known as E-Machine. The rebate, given in exchange for a three-year subscription at \$19.95 a month, is enough to cover the cost of E-Machine's most basic computer, she said.

## Using libraries

Jedonia Wright of Dallas surfs the Internet at least three times a week, looking for jobs and entertainment. But she accesses the Web from the Martin Luther King, Jr. branch of the Dallas Public Library.

"I've thought about getting it at home," said Ms. Wright, 22. "But we only have one phone line in our house."

Most accessing the Internet from a public library said they have considered having access in their homes. However, a combination of factors — including affordability and availability — have prevented it.

Mr. Irving said race continues to

"I'm not a social anthropologist, but I think 'geek-chic' hasn't hit the brown and black communities of America. When you see those with incomes over \$75,000 signing on, that suggests they have already bought into the mainstream culture."

— Larry Irving  
Commerce Department

be a factor in who has access to the Internet and who uses it.

The report found 37.7 percent of whites have access to the Internet either at home or at work, compared to 35.9 percent of Asian Americans, 19 percent of blacks and 16.6 percent of Hispanics.

The percentages of those accessing the Internet only from home showed similar disparities.

Hispanics interviewed by the Census Bureau were most likely to cite cost as the reason they were not online, but "don't want it" was the reason given most often by whites, blacks and persons of other racial and ethnic origins.

Mr. Irving said experts dispute whether income, education or cultural factors account for the racial disparities.

"I'm not a social anthropologist," said Mr. Irving, who is black. "But I think 'geek-chic' hasn't hit the brown and black communities of America. When you see those with incomes over \$75,000 signing on, that suggests they have already bought into the mainstream culture."

Milton Little, executive vice president of the Urban League, said access to information technology was becoming "essential for citizenship."

"In a technology age, there can

## COMPUTER DISPARITY

White and Asian households have greater access to the Internet from their home computers than do Hispanics and blacks, the latest study by the U.S. Commerce Department shows.

Race, Percent of households using the Internet

|                  |       |
|------------------|-------|
| White            | 29.8% |
| Black            | 11.2% |
| Hispanic         | 12.6% |
| American Indians | 18.9% |
| Asian            | 36.0% |

Includes American Indians and Alaska Natives.  
Includes Americans of Asian and Pacific island descent.

For each racial group, households with higher incomes are more likely to be connected to the Internet.

Income, Percent of households using the Internet

|                    |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Less than \$15,000 | 1.9%  | 7.9%  | 22.2% | 53.7% |
| \$15,000-\$25,000  | 3.5%  | 7.9%  | 24.7% | 48.1% |
| \$25,000-\$35,000  | 16.4% | 24.7% | 39.9% | 64.8% |
| \$35,000-\$45,000  | 24.7% | 39.9% | 64.8% |       |
| \$45,000-\$55,000  | 39.9% | 64.8% |       |       |
| \$55,000-\$75,000  | 64.8% |       |       |       |
| \$75,000+          |       |       |       |       |

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

Percent of households with a computer and Internet access

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Elementary school   | 3.1%  |
| Some high school    | 1.9%  |
| High school diploma | 16.3% |
| Some college        | 30.2% |
| College degree      | 48.9% |

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

The Dallas Morning News

not be two societies separate and unequal. There cannot be information haves and have-nots," he said.

## Questioning race link

Not all research on the digital divide supports the view that race is a significant factor in determining who has access to the Internet. Forrester Research, a Cambridge, Mass., Internet consulting firm, mailed a survey asking about Internet access to 150,000 households in January and determined that race had no impact.

"There is no difference for race if you control for things like age and income," said Shelley Morrisette, Forrester's group director for quantitative research. "The reason isn't so much race as it is income, socioeconomic status, education, and age, all the things we know affect some racial groups more than others."

Thursday's report was the third in a series the Commerce Department has done on the digital divide since 1995.

The Commerce Department's latest report shows married couples

with children were nearly twice likely to have a computer in home (61.8 percent) as single women with children (31.7 percent) regardless of income. The same trend held for households with Internet access: 39.3 percent married couples with children, 15 percent for single-parent women.

Sarah Bartlett, editor in chief of Oxygen Media, Inc., said her company was working with talk-show Oprah Winfrey to produce a 13-video series aimed at walking single women through the use of personal computers and the Internet.

Staff writer Krista Larson in Dallas contributed to this report.

## 'Digital Divide' Widens, NTIA Study Says

Despite soaring use of the Internet and the widespread availability of low-cost personal computers, the "digital divide" between Americans of varying ethnic backgrounds and income levels widened in 1998, according to the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

A study released last week, *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*, examines data collected by the Census Bureau from 48,000 U.S. households. It analyzes citizens' access to telephones, computers, and the Internet according to race, income, education, and geographic location. The report is available at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov>.

The study shows that households with incomes of \$75,000 or higher are 20 times more likely to have Internet access than those at the lowest income level. Between 1997 and 1998, the report shows, the gap between whites and blacks with Internet access in their homes increased 6% over 1994 figures. The same dichotomy, or "racial ravine," exists between white and Hispanic households, the report says. And regardless of income levels, rural

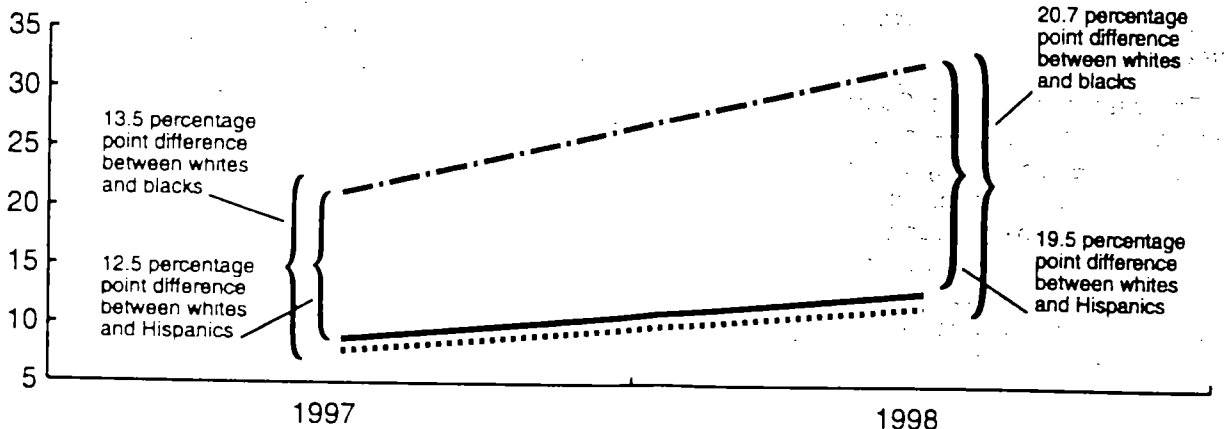
Americans are lagging behind the rest of the nation in residential access to the Internet.

The news is "not all bleak," the report says. At year-end 1998, more than 40% of U.S. households owned computers, and 25% of all households had Internet access. Further, for Americans with incomes of \$75,000 and higher, the disparity among whites and blacks regarding Internet access "has actually narrowed considerably in the last year," the study says. It suggests that if PC prices continue to decline, the divide between "haves" and "have nots" could narrow further.

NTIA Administrator Clarence (Larry) Irving Jr. said the Clinton administration hoped to eliminate the access disparities through a mix of public policies and private initiatives. The study "underscores the need for programs that support community access centers, such as schools, libraries, or community centers," Mr. Irving said at a press briefing unveiling the report.

Statistics showing that minorities and low-income households are twice as likely as others to use a public library for Internet access prove the effectiveness of the "E-rate" telecom service discount program, Mr. Irving said. "If it wasn't for the 'E-rate' program, those statistics would be lower," he said.

Percent of U.S. Households Using the Internet  
By Race/Origin  
1997-1998



|                    | 1997 | 1998 |
|--------------------|------|------|
| White non-Hispanic | 21.2 | 32.4 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 7.7  | 11.7 |
| Hispanic           | 8.7  | 12.9 |

--- White non-Hispanic  
..... Black non-Hispanic  
—— Hispanic

Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, using October 1997 and December 1998 Current Population Surveys

Asked about the administration's view of legislation that would require schools and libraries receiving "E-rate" discounts to install filtering software, Mr. Irving said the White House believed content-filtering issues should be handled at the local level "instead of by a federal mandate." He was less forthcoming regarding where the administration stands in the debate over whether cable TV operators should offer "direct access" to their cable modem plant. The White House is studying the matter and "hasn't taken a position yet," Mr. Irving said.

Several Bell companies cited the NTIA study in statements pushing for eased regulation of their high-speed Internet services and their provision of interLATA (local access and transport area) data services. **BellSouth Corp.** said the "best way to end the digital divide is to let local telephone companies deploy broadband capacity with a minimum of regulation."

iAdvance, a broadband coalition formed by **Bell Atlantic Corp.** and **SBC Communications, Inc.** (TR,

July 5), said the "chasm can be closed if Congress and the administration take action to spur innovation and investment in Internet backbone and high-speed local facilities.

"iAdvance urges Congress to remove barriers to investment and ease restrictions on data transmission over the Internet," it said.

Anticipating last week's report, several telecom and Internet firms unveiled initiatives aimed at closing the growing technology gap between the rich and poor. **AT&T Corp.** said it had donated \$1.42 million to several community organizations—with more than half of that amount going to education groups in southern California.

**Ameritech Corp.** and the **National Urban League** said they would set up "digital campuses" in Aurora, Ill., Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee. **America Online, Inc.**, and the **Benton Foundation** plan to launch a Web site on efforts to bring new technologies to underserved communities. TR

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WASHINGTON, DC

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COMMERCE DEPT. FINDS GROWING 'DIGITAL DIVIDE'

Despite increasing trends of computer ownership and Internet usage, gap between whites and blacks and Hispanics has grown significantly since 1994, Commerce Dept. said in new report, *Falling Through the Net*. Study is 3rd in series tracking computer usage and online use by factors such as race, income, geography, education. President Clinton was scheduled after our deadline Thurs. to discuss report and present some Administration proposals in Anaheim as part of his "New Markets" tour.

NTIA Dir. Larry Irving, presenting report at Washington news conference, said that even while "digital divide" encompassing all factors is growing, there also appears to be "racial ravine" that has been created and is widening at more than 50% rate. He said that 90% of African Americans don't have Internet access at home and 80% don't have access anywhere. Report said that between 1997 and 1998, home Internet access gap between white and black households increased 53.3% as disparity grew to 20.7 percentage points from 13.5. Gap between whites and Hispanics increased 56%, to 19.5% from 12.5%. Statistics emerged at time when more than 40% of

- American households have computers and 25% have Internet access. Report said "digital divide" between 2 groups is growing — one white or Asian, with advanced education and dual-parent household, other younger, with lower income and less education, some minorities, those in rural areas and central cities.

Irving said that it's impossible to isolate specific reasons for growing differences, but that race, income and education all play roles. For example, he said, in families earning more than \$75,000, computer ownership level was similar for whites (80%), blacks (78%) and Hispanics (74.8%) — each up from 1994. At next lowest income band — \$34,000-\$74,999 — 60.4% of white households had computers, contrasted with 43.7% of blacks and 49% of Hispanics. In \$15,000-\$34,999 band, 32.5% of white households had computer, 19.4% of blacks, 19.8% of Hispanics.

Those figures, along with telephone penetration statistics, can be traced over time because questions have been asked in past surveys. Significance of new study is that it starts trendline by asking new set of questions on Internet use so that those trends also can be observed. At heart of "digital divide" question is households' access to Internet. In 1997, there was 13.5% difference between white and black households — 21.2% Internet use for whites, 7.7% for blacks. In 1998, difference was 20.7% — 32.4% for whites, 11.7% for blacks. Gap between whites and Hispanic households also widened, study based on Census questionnaires found. But 1998 results also were broken out into more defined groups, such as by race, education, income, geography. Survey said for example that non-Hispanic racial groups, generally Asian, had highest usage at all income levels while 2-parent households and western part of country also were most likely to use Internet. Groups that ranked at bottom of most categories were black, rural, southern, poor.

States clustered at bottom of rankings for computer ownership and Internet access are largely in BellSouth territory. BellSouth Vp Robert Blau said best way to "end the digital divide is to let local telephone companies deploy broadband capacity with a minimum of regulation. Allowing us to deploy without costly regulation is the key to jump-starting competition in underserved markets."

Irving said study for first time also starts to measure Internet use outside of home. He said that without usage in schools, community centers and libraries, gaps between information haves and have-nots would be much wider. He said report showed that low-income users are more likely to use Internet access points for job searches and course work — exactly type of usage envisioned by e-rate program. Report said, for example, that unemployed persons are 3 times more likely to use libraries for Internet than national average, and use it to look for jobs at rate 3 times higher than national average. Rural residents such as Hispanics or Native Americans are more likely to use Internet access at schools. Report also pointed out that at lowest income levels, urban residents are twice as likely to have Internet access as rural residents.

Report said that as Internet becomes "more mature and pervasive technology, the digital divide among households of different races, incomes and education levels may narrow. This pattern is already occurring with regard to home computers." Report said that "even so, it is reasonable to expect that many people are going to lag behind in absolute numbers for a long time" and that "minorities will continue to face a greater digital divide as we move into the next century."

- Private industry representatives appeared with Irving at news conference to say they were hoping to help fill that gap. National Urban League Exec. Vp Milton Little said his organization wants to build more than 100 technology centers in cities across country. Ameritech legislative counsel Timothy Robinson said his company is contributing \$350,000 for 5 such centers in Aurora, Ill., Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee. Oxygen Media is putting together program highlighted by 13-part TV series with Oxygen partner Oprah Winfrey aimed at helping women learn about computers and go online. Winfrey is said to depend on her staff to print out e-mail and to be unable to access her Web site without help. America Online and Benton Foundation said they are teaming to create Digital Divide Clearinghouse with tools and resources.

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# Wardner mom is named to UN task force

By ANNETTE GRIFFUS

Staff writer, FRONT PAGE

**WARDNER** — Mary Heston, a mother of four, has been asked to become an online advocate for children.

The organization that did the asking surprised and excited Heston — the United Nations.

Heston was asked to serve on the Community Action Task Force Advisory Committee for the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization's (UNESCO) international children online project, "Innocence in Danger."

Heston is the founder of the Internet website Stay-At-Home Mom.com which has become a favorite of online moms and dads.

The Wardner mom also began an online book club which has taken off both inside and outside the valley.

Those two sites led to the invitation from Parry Aftab, president of the United States National Action Committee on the Innocence in Danger program.

"It's very fun," said Heston. "I'm very excited to be involved in this."

It is Aftab's intention to gather the leading experts in the United States from the computer, technology and Internet industry, schools, libraries and community Internet access groups, parent groups, content providers and the media as well as child advocacy groups, law enforcement and others.

Task forces organized by each industry will then implement action plans created by the experts.

América Online, Microsoft, The American Library Association, U.S. Attorney Lynne Battaglia (U.S. Federal District

of Maryland and home of Innocent Images of the Federal Bureau of Investigation), and the National Urban League are just a few of those who have already agreed to join the initiative.

UNESCO is the UN agency in charge of Internet matters. The Innocence in Danger initiative is the first truly global Internet education and safety program.

The organization believes the Internet is an extraordinary learning and communication tool and that children must have access to in order to

succeed in the future, Heston said.

UNESCO formed the program in September 1998, shortly after the arrest of the largest worldwide child pornography ring. UNESCO's

Director General Federico Mayor announced the organization would hold an experts conference in Paris in January 1999.

The focus would be child pornography, pedophilia and child sexual abuse on the Internet.

See HESTON, Page 1

## HESTON

**Continued from Page 1**

Leaders from around the world in online safety attended the conference including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and The U.S. Department of Justice.

No matter how much parents monitor the Internet for their children, they still don't know exactly who their children are talking too, Heston said.

"You can still get a ton of e-mail from porn sites even through filtered programs," she said.

Heston said she doesn't know yet what her role will be because the initiative is still fairly new.

One thing is for certain, UNESCO and Heston will be working hand in hand to help make the original intent of the Internet a reality.

## NEWS SENTINEL

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# No Net discrimination

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One of the favorite tactics of people with political agendas is to blur the crucial distinction between correlation and causation. If something disproportionately affects members of minority groups, for example, there will be no shortage of people willing to offer a race-based explanation – and to demand race-based remedies.

But the fact that there is a correlation between race and certain statistics hardly means that race (or racism) caused the disparity in question. Nobody seriously believes, for example, that the National Basketball Association discriminates against white men, even though their numbers are disproportionately small. The predominance of blacks in the NBA is clearly due to a host of other factors: social, cultural, environmental, economic, etc.

The need to examine and discount these and other factors that influence personal behavior and decisions before presuming racial causation was made obvious this week by word that whites are rushing onto the Internet at much faster rates than minorities. One local headline concluded this disparity constitutes a “race-based limit to Internet access.”

But that is obvious nonsense. Nobody seriously believes that minorities are being denied access to the information superhighway because of race. Clearly other factors are at play – factors that must be addressed, but won't be if the cause of the problem is misidentified.

The Urban League's new emphasis on improving education among minorities will do far more to correct this problem than emotionally misleading talk about “access denied.”

By Kevin Leininger for the editorial board

# LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES, CA  
FRIDAY 1,021,121  
JUL 9 1999



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## Racial Divide Is Growing in Internet Use

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By JUBE SHIVER Jr.  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—A vexing racial divide is developing on the Internet as America's blacks and Latinos fall further behind whites in accessing the booming global computer network, the government says.

The Commerce Department's third annual examination of the Internet across the nation found big increases in the number of Americans going online. But the gap between minority and white households using the Internet nearly doubled from a 13 percentage point difference in 1997 to a 20-point gap in 1998, according to the report, titled "Falling Through the Net."

Officials said differences in income and education and geographical distances hindered minorities who want to use a global network that is fast becoming an essential communication and research tool.

"While we are encouraged by the

dramatic growth in the access Americans have to the nation's information technologies, the growing disparity in access between certain groups and regions is alarming," Commerce Secretary Bill Daley said.

The Clinton administration, which has made support of the Internet a key component of its domestic policy, pointed to the report as evidence that much remains to be done to help the poor and minorities get online. The obstacles go beyond money, they acknowledged, since the digital divide has persisted despite falling computer prices and an ambitious, 2-year-old, multibillion-dollar federal campaign to wire the nation's schools and libraries for Internet access.

Larry Irving, who heads the Commerce Department's national telecommunications and information agency, said that poor blacks and Latinos who live in rural areas and have little education are the least likely to be wired and benefit from the Internet's information re-

sources.

Indeed, the government's report paints a much grimmer portrait of Internet use among minorities and the poor than other independent surveys, some of which have extolled the rate at which Latinos in particular are accessing the network. But Irving defended the government's work, which is based on U.S. Census data, as being more accurate. Some experts agreed.

"I think the report shows that it's more than about money, wires and e-mail; it's also about training and development" and encouraging people to see the value of going online, said B. Keith Fulton, director of technology programs and policy at the National Urban League in New York.

Vera Slaughter, who heads the Gum Springs Community Center in Alexandria, Va., said even residents who are motivated to learn about the Internet can be discouraged from using free computers at community centers because of the limited privacy and cumbersome rules.

# CHICAGO TRIBUNE

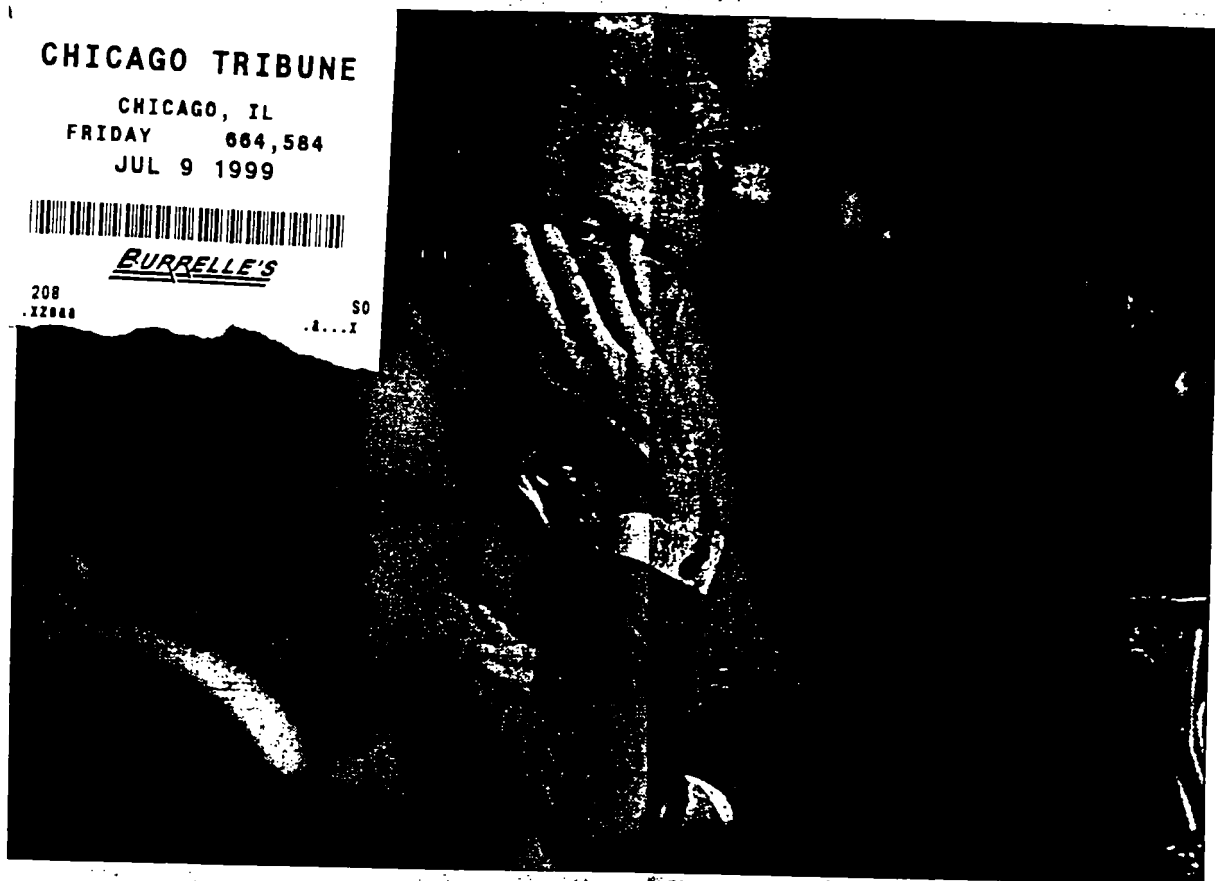
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President Clinton listens to a discussion on youth opportunities Thursday in Los Angeles. He announced an \$8 million initiative with corporations to create "information academies" in inner-city and rural schools. AP photo by J. Scott Applewhite

## Digital economy has 'racial ravine'

### U.S. report: Hispanics, blacks falling behind

By Paul McKibben

WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON—Even as the digital economy creates new jobs and millionaires, the "technology gap" is widening between whites and black and Hispanic in computer ownership and access to the Internet, a government report said Thursday.

The study by the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration found 33 percent of white households had home Internet access in 1998 compared with 12 percent for black households and 13 percent for Hispanic households.

The 21-percentage point disparity in Internet use between whites and African-Americans compared to a 14-point gap in 1997. Likewise, the gap between whites and Hispanics widened to 20 percentage points in 1998 from 13 in 1997.

NTIA administrator Larry Irving urged private industry to help bridge the "racial ravine" by creating more access centers for those who don't own personal computers.

The survey said the gap exists even when income is not a factor.

Among households earning between \$15,000 and \$35,000, more than 33 percent of white households owned personal computers compared to 19 percent for blacks.

The study also shows that as income rises, computer ownership and Internet access increases. Among households earning more than \$75,000, the racial gap on computer ownership narrows substantially, though minority households still lag slightly.

At every income level, households in rural areas are significantly less likely as those in urban areas to have Internet access.

Coupled with the release of the study, leading technology businesses announced new initiatives to combat the widening gap.

Ameritech Corp. said it will provide \$350,000 for "digital campuses" at five National Urban League sites in the Midwest, including one in Aurora, Ill. These centers are designed to give communities computer technology and staff to teach basic computer skills. The National Urban League hopes to have 114 such centers throughout the country by 2006.

3Com Corp. said it will give \$1 million in computer equipment and training to 10 cities for students.

computer-networking. Also, the AOL Foundation and other technology philanthropic groups said they will combine information and resources on one Web site for communities seeking to improve their Internet access.

Release of the study coincided with a visit by President Clinton to Los Angeles, where after visiting with high school students in the Watts neighborhood he urged private businesses to help disadvantaged young people gain the skills they need for high-tech jobs.

He announced an \$8 million initiative to help create "information academies" within inner-city and rural schools. The initiative is a partnership between the Department of Labor and corporations such as AT&T, Lucent Technologies and Cisco Systems.

Clinton announced the plan at the annual conference of the National Academy Foundation, an organization launched in 1982 by Citigroup chief Sanford Weill to help prepare disadvantaged high-school youths for careers in finance, tourism and other fields.

An estimated 4 million people ages 16 to 24 are out of school and lack a high school diploma.

Tribune news services contributed



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# Two studies show Net full of holes

**RACIAL DIVIDE WIDENS:**  
A government report says the gap between white and minority use of the Internet rose 7 percentage points from 1997 to 1998.

Los Angeles Times 9595

WASHINGTON — A vexing racial divide is developing on the Internet as America's blacks and Latinos fall further behind whites in accessing the booming global computer network, the government says.

The Commerce Department's third annual examination of the Internet across the nation found big increases in the number of Americans going online. But the gap between minority and white households using the Internet increased from a 13 percentage-point difference in 1997 to a 20-point gap in 1998, according to the report, "Falling Through the Net."

Officials said differences in income and education and geographical distances hindered minorities

who want to use a global network that is fast becoming an essential communications and research tool.

"While we are encouraged by the dramatic growth in the access Americans have to the nation's information technologies, the growing disparity in access between certain groups and regions is alarming," Commerce Secretary Bill Daley said.

The report does not suggest specific ways to close the gap.

"I think the report shows that it's more than about money, wires and e-mail; it's also about training and development" and encouraging people to see the value of going online, said B. Keith Fulton, director of technology programs and policy at the National Urban League in New York.

The Clinton administration, which has made support of the Internet a key component of its domestic policy, pointed to the report as evidence that much remains to be done to help the poor and minorities get online. The obstacles go beyond money, they acknowledged, since the digital di-

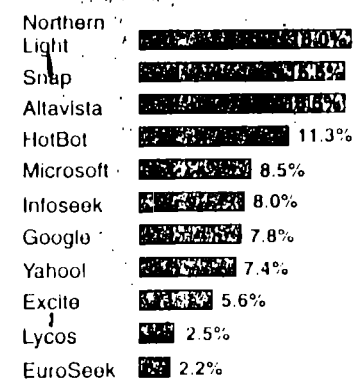
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## Start your engines

Search engines seem to cover less and less of the growing Web, a study shows. Researchers found that the highest ranked engine covers just one-sixth of the searchable Internet, compared with one-third for the best engine a year-and-a-half ago.

### Web coverage

Here is how much of today's searchable Web each engine covers.



Source: NEC Research Institute

AP

**SEARCH ENGINES LAG:** A research institute reports the top 11 search engines have fallen even further behind on indexing information on the Web.

Bloomberg News

Internet search directories such as Yahoo! Inc. and Lycos Inc. are falling behind in creating links to the fast-growing amount of information on the World Wide Web, a research institute has found.

Even the most comprehensive search engine today is aware of no more than 16 percent of the estimated 800-million pages on the Web, according to a study in the current issue of the scientific journal *Nature*. Moreover, the gap between what is posted on the Web and what is retrievable by the search engines is widening fast.

"The amount of information being indexed (by commonly used search engines) is increasing, but it's not increasing as fast as the amount of information that is being

put on the Web," said Steve Lawrence, a researcher at NEC Research Institute in Princeton, N.J., one of the study's authors.

Together, the 11 leading Web search directories have indexed 16 percent of existing Web pages down from 60 percent of an estimated 320-million pages in late 1997, according to the study.

The rest of the Web — trillions of bytes of data ranging from scientific papers to family photo albums — exist in a kind of black hole of information, impenetrable by Web surfers unless they have the exact address of a given Web site. Even the pages that do end up indexed take an average of six months to be discovered by the search engine, Lawrence and fellow NEC researcher C. Lee Giles found.

The study also underscores a little-understood feature of the Internet. While many users believe that Web pages are automatically available to the search programs employed by such sites as Yahoo, Excite and AltaVista, the truth is that finding, identifying, and categorizing new Web pages require

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# Search from 1E

great expenditure of time, money and technology.

Web directories also are more likely to list commercial sites than educational sites, and much of the information is out of date, the study found. That could lead to problems such as scientists duplicating others' work because of delayed indexing, or new Web retailers losing potential customers if their sites are not listed.

The top search engine was Northern Light of Cambridge, Mass., which indexed about 16 percent of the Web, the study found. However, about 10 percent of its links were invalid. General Electric Co.'s Snap and Compaq Computer Corp.'s AltaVista were next, grabbing about 15.5 percent of the web.

Coincidentally, the three largest search sites — Yahoo!, Lycos and Excite At Home Corp. — came in near the bottom of the group. Yahoo! retrieved 7.4 percent of the Web, compared with 5.6 percent for Excite and 2.5 percent for Lycos.

EuroSeek, a European service, had the smallest amount indexed

at 2.2 percent.

People seeking information on the Internet can use strategies for getting better search results, Lawrence said.

"If you're looking for more recent or harder to find information, then combine the results of several search engines because they index different sets of Web pages," he said. "Try to formulate more precise queries or adding additional terms" to get more precise results.

Specialized search directories are useful for certain Web queries, such as Excite's NewsTracker service, which tracks news stories, Lawrence said.

Part of the problem, Lawrence said, is that search services have been focusing on adding free services such as e-mail and calendars to attract more users and advertisers. The companies may be less interested in investing in computers to improve their core search technology, said Lawrence, who noted that he didn't talk with any companies included in the survey.

"There are diminishing returns for improving indexing on the Web," he said. "All of the free calendars and e-mail, maybe it's better for getting advertising revenue than more computers to keep

them running."

Kevin Brown, director of marketing for Inktomi, whose search engine is used by the popular search sites HotBot, Snap and Yahoo!, said that search companies have long been aware that they are indexing less and less of the Web. But he argued that users are seeking quality information, not merely quantity.

"There is a point of diminishing returns," he said. "If you want to find the best Thai food and there are 14,000 results, the question isn't how many returns you got, but what are the top ten."

Kris Carpenter, director of search products and services for Excite, said the future of search engines lies not in bigger indexes, but more specialized ones, in which having everything on a given subject, such as baseball, could be indexed and displayed to viewers.

"You may be covering a huge percentage of the Web, but you're presenting it in smaller slices," she said. "Lumping everything into one big, be-everything index would be incredibly overwhelming."

— Information from the Los Angeles Times was used in this report.

# Bridging the digital divide in San Diego

By Susan Myrland

**T**he U.S. Department of Commerce recently released its annual report on the state of the "digital divide" — which now appears to be a widening "racial ravine." Low-income blacks and Hispanics are lagging further behind in computer ownership despite falling PC prices. A child in a low-income white family is three times more likely to have Internet access than a child in a comparable black family, and four times more likely than a Hispanic child.

Meanwhile, President Clinton is touting the economic power of inner cities where, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, residents have buying power of \$331 billion but no place to spend it. Inner cities are now being recognized for their value as untapped markets and sources of employees.

None of this is news to the people working on the front lines of the information revolution. All over San Diego County, community technology centers and libraries are trying to meet the demand of people who want access to the Internet and help in learning how to use it.

These centers are producing real economic and social change. In San Ysidro, Jackie Harris of the San Diego Housing Commission called to check on someone who hadn't dropped by the computer lab recently. The answer? "Been too busy. I found a job with the skills you taught me."

In Barrio Logan, UCSD and City College students oversee a small computer lab for the children and teens of Mercado Apartments. The undergraduates receive course credit; the kids benefit from multilingual literacy instruction — and learn about UCSD and City College in the process.

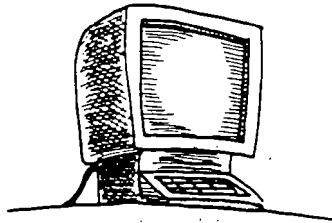
Such programs are doing great work, but are they enough to close the gap? No. They're just the beginning.

Closing the digital divide will take effort on four fronts: ownership, access, training and content. Real computer literacy — and real empowerment — comes from computer ownership. That's what allows the entrepreneur with a home-based business to sell products while her children take a nap. It's what allows students to do homework in the evenings under parental supervision.

Savvy computer manufacturers recognize this and have started to offer financing packages. More of these low- or no-interest loans would help, along with expanding the few local programs that upgrade recycled computers.

Meanwhile, the bar keeps going up as Web sites become more graphics-heavy, and even a 28.8 modem seems slow today. But the telecommunications infrastructure in low-income neighborhoods is usually the last to be upgraded. It's an understandable, unfortunate, market reality.

What if our Smart Growth plans included advanced telecommunications as a tool to improve low-income neighborhoods? Affordable-housing developers, like MAAC Project and the San Diego Housing Commission, are building computer centers into their multi-family projects. They have to



MARGARET SCOTT

rely on a patchwork of grant programs to pay the bills. Partnerships with high-tech companies seem like a natural fit.

Ownership and access aren't enough if you don't know how to use the equipment. Here's where community technology centers fill an essential role, providing free instruction at the learner's pace. Drop by the Urban League or Cesar Chavez Continuing Education Center to see people lined up for training. They are just two of the 20 or so sites that offer free classes — it's hard to say for sure how many because there's no tracking system.

This lack of visibility hurts us as a region. Community technology centers in San Francisco and Los Angeles are part of

the fabric of those cities, regularly receiving corporate support and news coverage. They have a higher profile when it comes to federal, state and foundation dollars, winning two or three grants compared to one — or none — here.

The U.S. Department of Education will award \$10 million to community technology centers this year, receiving more than 700 applications nationwide. It hopes to disburse \$65 million next year. To leverage this funding, more employers should follow the lead of Cisco Systems, partnering with technology centers to train people in job-oriented skills.

The Internet is about interaction — being able to e-mail your grandkids, post an opinion or put up a Web page. Interaction is what makes you a participant, regardless of whether you make \$14,000 or \$140,000. It's what makes you part of a community.

But the digital divide extends to online content. "Building online communities" is hot right now, but those communities are largely targeted at upper-income consumers. If you're not earning much, there's not much out there for you.

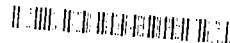
In San Diego, home to hundreds of software developers, there's a startling lack of public or private interest in online content for low- and middle-income people — online content that recognizes them as participants and consumers. Content that builds real communities as well as virtual ones.

That's why B. Keith Fulton of the National Urban League says, "Computer ownership will increase when there is a 'clear' reason for it. Not your reason or my reason, but 'clear' for the potential owner."

We have the talent and resources. The demand is there. If our businesses, government, educational system and nonprofit organizations worked together, the San Diego region could be the first to close the digital divide.

SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

SAN DIEGO, CA  
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Myrland is a community technology consultant. She can

High Tech as the New Civil Rights Battleground

## Digital Divide

BY DONNA LADD

The world's most outspoken civil rights leaders left a message in New York last week for the high-tech industry: Think diverse.

The plea to close the "digital divide" between whites and minorities, voiced repeatedly at the NAACP's annual convention in midtown, hangs in the air as Apple Computer arrives in town for its MacWorld Expo and celebration of its latest good news: \$203 million in profits for the last quarter.

But the quarter also saw some bad publicity for Apple, courtesy of the Reverend Jesse Jackson. In April, the civil rights leader accused the Silicon Valley mainstay of not thinking differently enough and challenged the company to live up to the hallowed images portrayed in its ad campaign by recruiting, hiring, and training more minorities.

"I am not fooled when Apple Computer uses the images of Jackie Robinson, César Chávez, and Miles Davis in its advertising campaigns, but fails to include a single African-American or Latino on its board," Jackson said on his son's Web site ([www.jessejacksonjr.org](http://www.jessejacksonjr.org)) when he announced he would not run for the presidency. Of 384 board members of the 50 top tech firms, five are African American and one Hispanic, Jackson reports.

The "Think Different" campaign also uses images of Rosa Parks, Muhammad Ali, and Martin Luther King Jr. to help sell Macintosh computers. Apple's board is made of seven

male members; one is Asian, the rest white.

High tech is the new civil rights battleground, Jackson argues. Because tech companies "control the allocation of capital in this country," they "must come to understand the value of inclusion."

Jackson went to Silicon Valley in April to drive his point home, meeting with tech leaders, including Apple interim CEO Steve Jobs. His civil rights group, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, purchased stock in 50 Silicon Valley and high tech companies. And Jackson established the Silicon Valley Project in the midst of the world's richest technology region.

These efforts seem to be paying off. Apple, a company that historically has donated computers to schools and low-income communities, is working with Rainbow/PUSH to do even more, although the company has repeatedly declined comment on Jackson's crusade—including for this article.

Apple is hiring minority interns lined up by Rainbow/PUSH for the summer, reports Butch Wing, the director of the Silicon Valley Project. And the project's last advisory meeting was held at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino on June 25.

Last week, Apple attended a planning meeting for the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition trade bureau, which Wing says will bring together a base of minority- and women-owned businesses to develop "strategic partnerships" with tech companies. He hopes tech companies will reach out to these minority businesses to fill their outsourcing needs—the "modus operandi in Silicon Valley," Wing says. That could include any services from temporary workers to architects to marketing firms, he adds.

"It's a good strategy to involve [minority] advertising and marketing firms who can reach that [minority] market and expand their consumer base," Wing says. "It would be good for Apple and be good for the community. I believe some steps are being taken in that direction. But I'd say that Apple would say that more could be done."

At last week's NAACP convention, president and CEO Kweisi Mfume called on public and private initiatives to ensure that minority children have equal access to technology and, ultimately, high-tech jobs.

In his keynote speech, Mfume said the civil rights battle has moved from lunch counters and buses to the "so-called 'superhighway' . . . the Internet." "The gap in Internet use between whites and blacks expanded to 20.7 percent last year. . . . The stakes are far too high for our children, who are being subtracted out of the equation," Mfume said.

Mfume further emphasized during the convention that the NAACP will keep score of the tech community's outreach efforts, and direct its members' business accordingly. He announced a partnership with AT&T in 20 cities, including New York, to build after-school technology centers "so parents and children can learn computer usage together."

In this climate—further charged last week by a Commerce Department report confirming the racial tech divide—other companies are scurrying up to the diversity plate. Ameritech Corp., the Illinois-based Baby Bell, recently announced a partnership with the National Urban League to build Internet community centers in five major midwestern cities. And 3Com Corp., the maker of Palm handheld devices,

said it is donating \$1 million worth of equipment and training to help students become computer network engineers.

Wing sends his own message to start-up tech companies in New York's Silicon Alley and the rest of the country: This means you, too. Minority leaders aren't watching only the Microsofts, Suns, and Apples of the world; they need the support of the "little guys as well," he says.

Wing points to San Francisco-based OpNet, a company that is training urban youth, ages 18 to 25, for longer-term jobs. "Diversity is especially effective when it becomes part of a company in its start-up. Then it's part of the company's natural growth and evolution," he says.

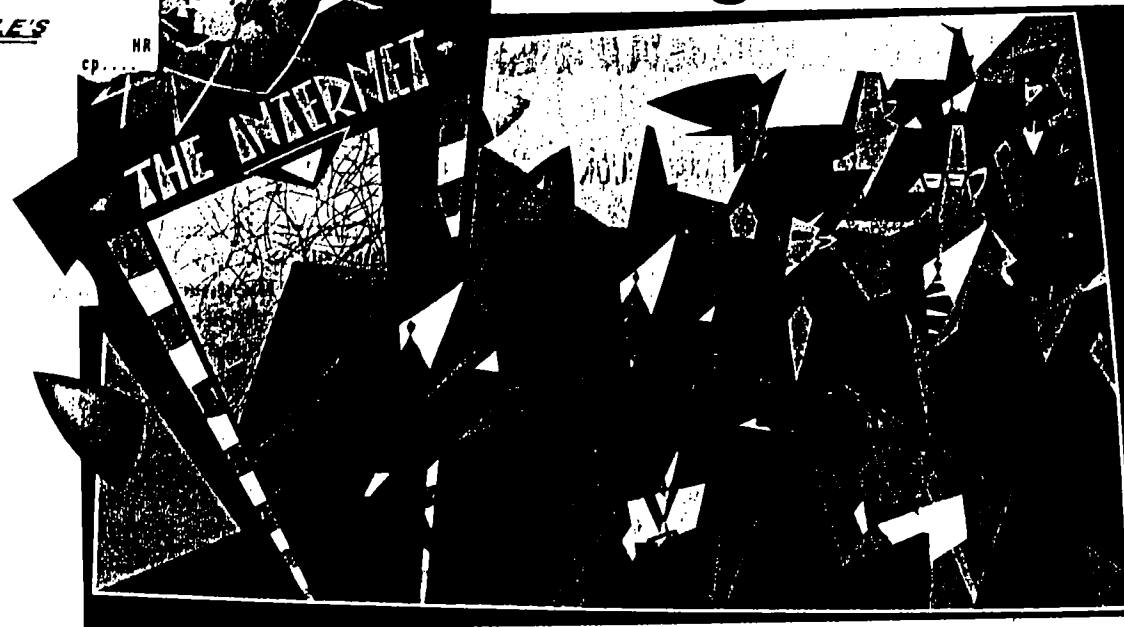
At least one Silicon Valley tech leader isn't joining Jackson's bandwagon. In an editorial published in the *San Jose Mercury News* and on his Web site ([www.cypress.com](http://www.cypress.com)), Cypress Semiconductor Corp. chief executive T.J. Rodgers says Jackson's effort is about "shaking down corporations." He calls Jackson "a hustler who exploits white shame for his own financial and political ends."

Jackson says that only 4 percent of Silicon Valley employees are African American; 7 percent Hispanic. Rodgers says his company has 35 percent minority workers, including Asians, and faults Jackson for disregarding Silicon Valley's sizable Asian worker population (28 percent).

Joe McCarthy, a Cypress spokesman, says that a number of other Silicon Valley CEOs agree with his boss. However, he said, for them to go on the record against Jackson would be "too political."



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# Making Net Firms More Ethnically Diverse

## Companies are urged to make minority hiring a top priority

By Kathleen Murphy

It's obvious on any computer-related trade show floor that the IT industry looks pale.

A study last year by the Office of Technology Policy at the U.S. Department of Commerce showed that African-Americans made up 7 percent of computer systems analysts and 5 percent of computer programmers. Hispanics made up just 2.5 percent of computer systems analysts and scientists, and 4.6 percent of computer programmers. The Commerce Department will update the study next month.

But with the Internet sector still so young, it's difficult to say yet whether employers in the Internet industry have failed to be color-blind in their hiring practices. And

the Commerce Department isn't measuring the growth of minority jobs specifically in Net companies.

David Ellington, co-founder, chairman, president, and CEO of **NetNoir**, based in San Francisco, said the Internet is offering opportunities for blacks and minorities in greater numbers than the software and hardware industries, where the disparity is stark.

"Black people are getting jobs at Internet companies as they grow up," said Ellington, whose site includes **BlackJobs.com**, an employment listing.

"I think the Internet industry welcomes anyone with certifiable skillsets," said B. Keith Fulton, director of technology policy for the National Urban League. "I don't think

IT companies are saying that they don't want a certain group. That would be foolish in this period of high demand for skilled IT workers."

Ekaterina Walsh, an analyst with Forrester Research, Cambridge, Mass., said that if it is true that minorities aren't getting jobs in the Internet sector, race isn't the primary reason. Familiarity with the Web is a more important determinant of whether someone can get a Web job, and Walsh's research shows that more Asian American and Hispanic households are online than white households. Sixty-four percent of Asian American households are online, 36 percent of Hispanic, 31 percent of Caucasian, and 23 percent of African American.

But Walsh cautions that the story

of who is familiar with the Web is less a function of race than it is a product of other factors. "It really isn't about race or ethnic background," she said. "It has more to do with education and income."

One area where Net companies need to do better is recruiting, said Penny Francis, director of online publishing for Black Collegiate Services, which produces the **Minorities Job Bank**. Based in New Orleans, the service was created to provide employers a way to reach minority job candidates. The site's virtual villages address the employment needs of each individual minority group. "Visibility is the name of the game," Francis said. "If you make the effort to reach [minorities], those people will come."

Francis said Internet companies should have a diversity recruitment plan with strong commitment from the top. Existing recruitment functions must be examined to detect any adverse effect on diversity recruiting, she added, and the plan should include a diversity vision and mission statement, with strategies for achieving goals.

Happy and successful minority employees are a company's best salespeople for attracting other job candidates, she said. Organizations like the **National Black MBA Association** or the **National Association of Asian American Professionals** also could produce leads for recruitment, she said.

Jim Shunk, Hewlett-Packard's corporate college recruiting manager, said he travels to college campuses in New Mexico and Alabama to find minority job candidates.

"We go to a lot of trouble, because we think it's very important for us in the long run," Shunk said. "We do make a sincere attempt."

Of 925 summer interns last year at least 30 percent were from underrepresented minorities, Shunk said. Regarding minority recruitment, Shunk said, "My personal opinion is, you can do it. You have to make it a corporate priority."

On a recent visit to Silicon Valley, the Rev. Jesse Jackson delivered more sobering message: Digital apartheid, he said, has taken hold. During a March visit to San Jose, Jackson pointed out that many companies, including Hewlett-Packard, have no African-Americans on the boards. And he said many black and brown professionals say they are being locked out of the industry, despite receiving training from the best universities or from established, respectable businesses. Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition announced plans to purchase stock in 50 corporations in Silicon Valley to forge new relationships.

"We don't want to slow down Silicon Valley," Jackson said in statement. "We want to enhance it. We want to do them a favor. We want them to expand the market and include us, because inclusion leads to growth."

search: CAREERS

## SOUND OFF

How would you assess the Net industry's efforts to create diverse workplaces?

Let us know what you think at [letters@in.com](mailto:letters@in.com).

## COMMENTARY

By Richard S. Dunham

### ACROSS AMERICA, A TROUBLING 'DIGITAL DIVIDE'

**F**ew would disagree that the New Economy has brought a wave of prosperity to America. But increasingly, we see that the rewards are not distributed evenly—and not just because your employer hasn't dreamed up a way to dot.com you into millionaire status. A serious "digital divide" is emerging, creating gaps between technological haves and have-nots by region, race, and socioeconomic class, according to several new studies.

The most recent: a report by the Progressive Policy Institute, the think tank of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council. The study ranks the 50 states on how well they're adapting to the New Economy. It uses criteria such as number of high-tech jobs, quality of educational technology, percentage of population online, commercial Internet domains, and available venture capital. The report identifies a clear geographic pattern: The West Coast and Eastern Seaboard from New Hampshire to Virginia are at the forefront of the 21st Century Economy. The Deep South and the upper Midwest lag far behind. The keys to success: elementary and secondary schools that prepare workers for diversified, export-focused economies, plus college research centers that provide brainpower for innovation.

**ROLE MODELS.** There are some unlikely success stories. Delaware and Minnesota are transforming themselves from industrial and agricultural centers into cyberfriendly domains, the PPI study says. But too many states still adhere to outdated models. "Some states still have a 1980s industrial mentality," says urban planner Robert D. Atkinson, the study's co-author. "They grab every

job they can find rather than looking to create an innovation-based economy that is going to produce higher incomes."

Laggard states should imitate those at the top. Utah Governor Mike O. Leavitt recalls how, a decade ago, the Provo-Orem metropolitan area was "absolutely in the dumps." But state policies focused on attracting software, biotech, and aerospace technology, and lawmakers poured millions into updating schools with new technology. The payoff: Utah has become home to some 2,000 high-tech companies, and the Provo-Orem area is a thriving hub for software development. The PPI ranks Utah sixth in the U.S. but third in

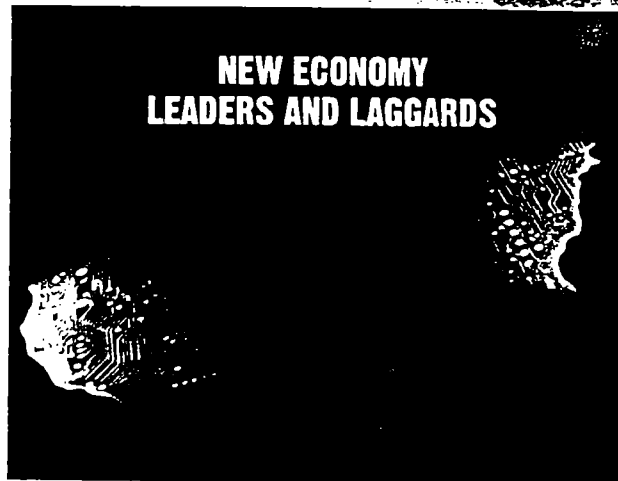
workforce education and fifth in education technology.

Addressing the racial and sociological divide may be far more difficult. A Commerce Dept. report, *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*, found that households with annual incomes above \$75,000 are more than 20 times as likely to use the Internet as those earning less than \$15,000. Single-parent households are less than half as likely to be wired as two-parent families. The disparity is even greater among African American families: Black children living with one parent are less than one-fourth as likely to have Net access as those in two-parent households.

**SETTING THE STAGE** In the poorest neighborhoods, the National Urban League reports that just 16% of schools have access to the Internet. "Policies we're setting now will shape the [economic] opportunity sets for the next 10 or 20 years," says B. Keith Fulton, the Urban League's Director of Technology Programs & Policy. "If folks don't get plugged in now, they will probably be marginalized into a low-wage economy."

It's up to government and the private sector to bridge the opportunity gap so have-nots can participate in the New Economy. Studies such as these should prompt other governors to follow Virginia's James Gilmore, who created the nation's first Secretary of Technology. If states don't take action now, America could soon have a Digital Dustbowl, with families loading their PCs onto their trucks and heading to California or Colorado or Connecticut in search of a better future.

*Dunham, a technophile, covers the White House.*



| HIGH-TECH JOBS         | ONLINE POPULATION                           | R&D INVESTMENT                         |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Percentage of all jobs | Percent of adult population with Net access | As a percentage of total state economy |
| <b>TOP</b>             |                                             |                                        |
| NEW HAMPSHIRE 7.8%     | ALASKA 52%                                  | MICHIGAN 4.9%                          |
| COLORADO 7.5           | COLORADO 47                                 | DELAWARE 4.0                           |
| MASSACHUSETTS 7.5      | MARYLAND 46                                 | MASSACHUSETTS 3.8                      |
| CALIFORNIA 6.2         | UTAH 46                                     | NEW MEXICO 3.6                         |
| VERMONT 5.2            | NEW HAMPSHIRE 41                            | CONNECTICUT 3.3                        |
| <b>BOTTOM 5</b>        |                                             |                                        |
| MISSISSIPPI 1.7        | KENTUCKY 23                                 | LOUISIANA 0.1                          |
| HAWAII 1.5             | LOUISIANA 21                                | NORTH DAKOTA 0.1                       |
| LOUISIANA 1.4          | WEST VIRGINIA 20                            | SOUTH DAKOTA 0.1                       |
| MONTANA 1.2            | ARKANSAS 19                                 | MONTANA 0.1                            |
| WYOMING 1.0            | MISSISSIPPI 17                              | HAWAII 0                               |

DATA: PROGRESSIVE POLICY INSTITUTE

Technology's Black Digital Warriors

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# COMMUNITY DIGITAL WARRIORS

## Experts Who Bring the Technology to the Neighborhood

They're hip, and they are smart. They know how to bring Web pages to life in corners of America the Web's originators never thought about. They understand intimately why the Internet is the Hot Medium of the turn of the century, and they know how the community works its way through issues.

They are highly educated, highly placed to influence what technologies will be used and what African Americans should learn about the technology shaking up the workplace, the social and economic environment, and many other elements of daily life. They are sought-after speakers, advocates who are eagerly listened to at government forums, in corporate office suites, and community meetings.

But they don't fit the profile of the digerati showing up in *Wired* magazine and other magazines trumpeting the Digital Age. They are Black, and they represent a new thrust among community leaders: Digital Warriors who write and provide grants, lay plans, and build access for minority communities seeking ramps onto the Information Superhighway.

There are others out there working to boost African Americans' share of the opportunities flowing over the digital pipeline, of course, but we must begin at the beginning, where everyday people from the Black community come together to see that their children learn enough to join this Digital Age. Each of the four people profiled here is a mover and shaker, sophisticated in the language of public policy as he is savvy in the ways of technology.

What they work hardest at is pushing corporations, government, and community organizations to build the training laboratories, adult-education programs, and computer skills training groups that can erase the Digital Divide, putting African Americans in the inner city on a more equal footing with their better-financed neighbors in the suburbs in the rush to hook up online. The Internet doubles in traffic every 100 days, and until high-capacity

access to fiber-optic lines, telephone digital subscriber lines, and cable TV modems is ubiquitous, the technology "haves" will always outdistance the community's "have-nots."

Young people who have no access to computers and the 'Net at home cannot use it as flexibly and learn to use digital tools as completely as those who do: it's as simple as that. But through churches, community centers, schools, and libraries, concerned parents and organizations can provide increased access for African-American youth.

The Digital Warriors profiled here work at the interface of public policy and technology, using their own access to the powers that be to open up access for the community into the networks reshaping the way this society shops, does business, communicates, even selects its elected officials. The challenge they face is huge, because Blacks historically have been slow to embrace new technologies, and because the imagery associated with technology is unfriendly to newcomers.

Blacks are often at the center of technology developments, but the main mass of Black citizens is just as often unaware of it.

That's because news reporters, themselves unfamiliar with the principles and players behind the technology, all too often ignore the prominent roles played by today's Black engineers, computer scientists, and other science professionals. They have missed the significance of African Americans' drive for education, in the sciences as well as in other areas.

The four warriors profiled here are the harbingers of change. In future editions, *USBE & Information Technology* also will report on others who work to connect the Black community into the Information Age. It's work that has been a long time coming to fruition.

— Garland L. Thompson

## B. KEITH FULTON: URBAN DIGITAL WARRIOR

In the winter of 1991, *Ebony* magazine selected B. Keith Fulton as one of its "30 Leaders of the Future." At the time, he was only 25 years old. Eight years later, Fulton has become a technology leader of the present, a young man whose work as director of technology programs and policy of the

National Urban League is helping to direct the growing involvement of urban Blacks in the world of information technology.

At the Urban League, Fulton advises the leadership of the nation's second oldest civil rights organization and its 115 local



Fulton views his mission as one that "brings the benefits of information and communications technology to under-served communities."

offices. He also manages the development and expansion of state-of-the-art technology and education access centers across the country.

Fulton has not neglected his own education. He holds a J.D. from New York University Law School and an M.S. degree in urban policy and management from the New School for Social Research in New York. He also has a professional certificate in public policy analysis from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Intense, energetic, and sharply focused, Fulton sets his goals high and invariably achieves them. From his high school in Newport News, Va., where he graduated at the top of his class, to straight A's in graduate school, to being one of 12 finalists from around the world for the prestigious "Warren Weaver Fellows" program of the Rockefeller Foundation, Fulton has been climbing the ladder at full throttle.

One of his many responsibilities is to manage the Urban League's World Wide Web site and develop its corporate Internet strategy.

"The Internet is evolving into a nervous system for our emerging information economy," says Fulton. "Historically, personal development was based on book-based knowledge archived in university libraries for the elite. In the future, new media-enhanced knowledge will be available via ubiquitous devices for all Americans."

Fulton views his mission as one that "brings the benefits of information and communications technology to under-served communities." To deliver on this mission, he and his colleagues at the League aim to build 114 technology and education access centers by the year 2006. In addition, his department works to inform Congress and other policy makers about the impact of their programs on low-income communities.

Fulton's vision for technology is highly regarded. He is a sought-after speaker on the technology lecture circuit. His recent projects include the Urban Technology Summit in June, 1998, which was shown on C-SPAN and broadcast over the Internet, and a technology presentation for the Aspen Institute in the fall of 1998. Each month he lays out his vision as the technology columnist for *The Black World Today*, the Internet's leading African-American news and information site.

And, with such a full plate, Fulton still finds time to be

involved in civic and professional organizations such as the American Bar Association, 100 Black Men, and the American Museum of Natural History. And he's making history of his own, every day.

## BARNEY TAYLOR JR.: PUTTING SOUL INTO THE NEW MACHINES

With his doctorate in computer science, Barney Taylor can pick and choose a well-paid position at any of the country's leading information-technology companies. But Barney instead chooses to pursue a road strewn with obstacles and challenges, but, as he would characterize it, a road towards spiritual satisfaction.

Taylor is an entrepreneur with an intriguing concept, not to mention a deeply held social conscience. As founder and CEO of the Atlanta-based Thirteen Scribes Inc., Taylor leads a team of talented and committed, young, Black men and women building a company with a software engineering division, an Internet service provider component, and a "Computers in the Hood" program that has fired the imagination of community-based organizations across the country and caught the attention of prominent media outlets such as CNN and MSNBC.

Computers in the Hood manufactures and sells computers at a discount to citizens of "The Hood." Two years ago, Barney and his team took a crack house in one of Atlanta's poor communities, gutted it, and refurbished the building as a manufacturing and learning center using, employing, and training at-risk men and women.

Says an earnest Taylor: "I often cry when I see the hopelessness in our community — the kids, the brothers, the sisters, the elders. There's a lot to do, and we are only a few people here at Thirteen Scribes. Sometimes we cry out for help, but none comes. However, we persist, we will always persist, as long as there's breath in my lungs and people in our community who are being mistreated."

Computers in the Hood recently graduated the first group of children from its Technology Training and Mentorship pilot program with the Dekalb County Juvenile Justice System in Georgia.

The six youths were required to partici-

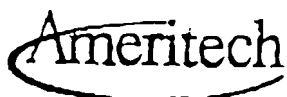
partate in the two-month program as part of their probation. They learned about the Internet, were taught programming skills, and learned to assemble computers. The youths, aged 12 to 17, also got guidance from mentors about career options, teamwork, and the benefits of higher education.

Taylor's company is working with U.S. Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) and the African Children's Fund to create a national program that provides this type of training and mentoring across the country. Computers in the Hood is now the official technology advisor to the World Congress of Mayors and soon will start a radio program on technology at Clark Atlanta University.



"Let's turn our sights back to America, back to those being left out of the American dream."

Barney Taylor, founder and CEO, Thirteen Scribes Inc.



## Newspaper Clipping

Page 1 of 2

City Milwaukee Name of Publication Journal Sentinel  
 Section \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1M Date July 6, 1999

# Families can profit from online-education program

By STANLEY A. MILLER II  
 of the Journal Sentinel staff

Several schools in the Milwaukee area will be part of an Internet education project that plans to teach students how to use the Web safely and make parents more comfortable with what their children are doing online.

The project, which is called Cruise Control, aims to make Internet novices more savvy by teaching them the basics of the online world, such as using e-mail, news groups, chat rooms and the Web.

More than 30 schools in the Midwest are involved in the program, including Allen-Field Elementary School in Milwaukee and Mitchell Elementary School, Gilmore Middle School and J.L. Case High School in Racine.

The project is geared toward giving teachers, families and children a safe way to learn about the Internet through a Web site, free CD-ROMs that will be available in the fall.

Seminars and teacher training.

Ronald Brown, principal of Malcolm X Academy in Milwaukee,

said that the school has applied for a grant so it can be included in the program and expects to hear sometime in August whether it has been accepted.

"We are interested in this because we are technologically behind here," Brown said. "We need to be where other schools are, and this program is a way to get adults interested, and, in doing so, we also bring in more children."

Brown also said that the program offers another pool of resources from which the school can boost its community learning center offerings through technology education.

"We know that there is a need for this," he said. "We want to make ourselves available to the community, and this is a good way to do it."

Schools participating in Cruise Control get free CD-ROMs and have access to teacher training from Tech Corps, a national non-profit group of volunteers that helps integrate technology in kindergarten through grade 12 schools nationwide.

Michael Pitsch, coordinator for Tech Corps Wisconsin and a member of the Racine School Board, said that the project fo-

cuses on three themes: what is the Internet, what is its value; and how people can stay safe in cyberspace.

"We have to put forth an effort to educate people, because technology is starting to dominate all parts of people's lives," Pitsch said. "I don't think all of our teachers know the value of the Internet, so this will be valuable."

Cruise Control covers topics such as online safety, child-friendly Web sites, meeting new friends online and learning at home.

The effort will also offer help through sessions about the Internet for interested parents and one-on-one work with teachers to encourage using the Net in classrooms.

Ameritech.net, which is Ameritech's Internet access service, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the National Urban League and Tech Corps unveiled the program last week at the Chicago Urban League.

Ameritech.net created the program with the help of Internet experts Jean Armour Polly, author of "The Internet Kids & Families Yellow Pages," and syndicated columnist Larry Magid of the Los Angeles Times, who is author of "The Little PC Book" and host of the Safe Kids and Safe Teens Web sites.

The two Web gurus host the CD-ROM and will conduct a series of seminars in Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Columbus, Ohio, and Indianapolis in the fall. Internet demonstrations and question and answer sessions are to be part of the events.

The Cruise Control Web site has links to other safety and educational resources and also has some of the content from the CD-ROM, which teaches safe Internet use and is designed for



## Newspaper Clipping

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classrooms and homes.

Web site topics include basics from the CD-ROM along with information on how people can connect to the Internet; what a Web browser is and how it works; demonstrations on how to send and receive e-mail; and details on how filtering programs work.

"The CDs have to be simple and easy to use because they are going into people's homes," Pitsch said. "This is a way to allay some parents' fears and educate them. The majority of people will benefit because they don't know the basics."

Ameritech.net will announce further details in fall about how people can order the CD-ROM and participate in local seminars.

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*Schools that are interested in joining the pilot program can visit the Cruise Control Web site at [www.ameritech.com/cruisecontrol](http://www.ameritech.com/cruisecontrol)*

## "SPIA" - The School of Public and International Affairs

The School of Public and International Affairs continues to be directed by James Bohland, Urban Affairs and Planning. Efforts were initiated this year in several areas. In instruction and curriculum, the very successful Washington Semester Program was continued for the fourth year (see story below); the common specialty tracts in the undergraduate degree programs within the School were approved at the University level and implemented; and initial efforts at creating a new Masters degree in Public and

International Affairs began. The new degree would replace UAP's existing Masters of Urban Affairs. The intent is to offer the degree at Tech's northern Virginia campus as well as in Blacksburg. Final touches on the curriculum revisions will be made this year and submitted for approval. The School has also developed a plan for a London Semester program. Patterned somewhat after the Washington Semester, the London program would integrate professional, field-based experiences with formal seminars. Internships in international organizations will be provided as an option for students who are interested.

The School also began efforts towards the

creation of several inter-disciplinary research programs on campus. One program in Rural Health Policy received an internal grant and has completed several policy studies on rural health issues. A research team in the environmental field has begun several projects on sustainable development and collaborative environmental management. A NSF proposal was submitted for funding and approval is pending. Also, a third research thrust has begun in the area of assessment of information technology. The focus here is analysis of the social and economic impacts of information technology. A joint project with the National Urban League is underway. The project will evaluate current Urban League efforts in using information technology for community improvement and will examine more broadly the issue of the "digital gap" that seems to be emerging in many urban environments.

Some very preliminary efforts were begun in developing a funding base for the School. We are actively researching possibility for "naming" the School and endowing several instructional research programs. As always, assistance in this endeavor would be greatly appreciated. The School has instituted some excellent programs, and has plans for others which can improve significantly the planning and policy professional programs at Virginia Tech.

## Washington Semester Program

The Washington Semester Program of the School of Public and International Affairs successfully completed its fourth summer this year. The Program continues to grow in the number and quality of students. This year we had 52 applications for the twenty-four positions in the program. Twenty-three students completed the eleven-week program and received their certificates on July 29th. Over sixty persons attended the first formal convocation. Professor Richard Rich spoke at the Convocation on the role of the public sector in providing leadership in the environmental field.

Professor Edward Weisband from Political Science and Professor James Bohland, Urban Affairs and Planning, were the faculty for the program. Some students interned at a variety of federal agencies within the General Accounting Office, U.S. Information Agency, Congressional Offices, Environmental Protec-

tion Agency, and Housing and Urban Development. Others held positions in nonprofit agencies such as Street Law and Program for Appropriate Health Technologies. Washington Semester continues to be one of the featured programs of the School and its success has not only provided students with unique learning experiences, but it has also enhanced the name of Virginia Tech in the Washington policy community.



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## Is Racial 'Digital Divide' Worrisome or Self-Correcting?

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*Tuesday*  
May 25, 1999  
5:47 p.m. EDT

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WASHINGTON (AP) — At this embryonic stage of the Internet's development, no one disputes figures showing minorities trailing whites in computer ownership, cyberaccess and Internet know-how.

But the impact of "the digital divide" is a matter of dispute between some Internet experts and civil rights advocates.

Some, like B. Keith Fulton of the National Urban League, see the gap as a sign that minorities might find themselves relegated to second-class citizenship in cyberspace due to a lack of computer aptitude.

"We are talking about the new information age and heart of a new economy," said Fulton, director of technical programs and policy for the civil rights group. "The ramifications are enormous in terms of jobs and where minorities will be in the new millennium."

But E. David Ellington, a founder and president of one of the Internet's most popular black-directed sites, believes it's too early to fret over the paucity of blacks and Hispanics on the Internet.

"I'm tired of how I see this issue being positioned in the media, of black folks being perceived as in need and not having the wherewithal to deal with the computer age," said Ellington, founder of a San Francisco company that runs the popular NetNoir Web site.

"We are less than five years into the Internet age. Look at how minorities have embraced pager or telephone or cable technology," Ellington said. "Black folks will embrace the technology of the Internet as

soon as it becomes more relevant to our lives."

Government data illustrate the gap.

A Commerce Department report showed that whites are more than twice as likely to own home computers as blacks or Hispanics, and the racial disparity exists even among families earning more than \$75,000.

Across all incomes, about 41 percent of white families own PCs, but about 19 percent of black and Hispanic families do.

The report, called "Falling through the Net II," said about 76 percent of white families with incomes over \$75,000 own home computers, compared with 64 percent of black families at the same income level.

A third report is scheduled for release in June.

Most believe that owning a computer is just part of the fight to get minorities online.

"The biggest problem in the underserved community is not necessarily the hardware," said David Eisner, vice president for corporate relations for America Online, the world's largest Internet access and online service provider. "We can put all the hardware in the world into a community, but until it's valued, it won't do well. The content has to be what people want."

Towards that end, Eisner said, AOL is working on bringing greater organization to the broad array of topics on Internet sites.

As an example, Eisner said the Web site of the Benton Foundation, a nonprofit group devoted to public policy, children's issues, community activism and philanthropy, has useful information that could win a wide audience but isn't easily accessible.

"We are looking at ways to take that content and make it more easy to use," Eisner said.

Also on the AOL docket are plans to help colleges with large minority enrollments develop programs for students in mathematics, science and engineering, Eisner said.

The Urban League's Fulton said the key to getting more minorities on the World Wide Web is to tie greater Internet use to real life matters such as better-paying jobs or higher test scores for children.

"There are huge demands for workers with technical skills. Critical thinking skills are enhanced when children work with computers," Fulton said.

The league became the first civil rights organization to broadcast a program live on the Internet with its Urban Technology Summit last year.

The New York-based organization also plans to build 114 technical education and access centers around the country by 2006. Some of the 65 centers now operating offer free classes ranging from personal computer assembly to using Microsoft and Window programs, Fulton said.

By PAUL SHEPARD, Associated Press Writer

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### Bringing Technology Home:

#### **Access Programs for the African-American Community**

*Groups nationwide are working to prepare young people for the future by expanding computer literacy and availability*

**By Grady Wells**

Larry Irving, U.S. assistant secretary of Commerce for communications and information and administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration: "Every day we get confirmation that tomorrow's jobs will require workers with both a quality education and technology skills."

A 1995 Rand Corporation study concluded that e-mail should be available to all citizens.

"African-American children are much less likely to use computers in school than white children... (and) have less access to computers at home." 1996 NTIA report

The National Urban League has established state-of-the-art technology access centers in Roxbury, Binghamton, Newark, White Plains, and Baltimore.

The rapid growth in the last decade of software applications and the online world has revolutionized business, educational and social life world-wide. Telecommuters, as those who work from home using computers, fax and telephones are called, Internet Web site developers, online marketers and service providers, software engineers and programmers, even car mechanics and machine operators all use computers these days to increase their efficiency. Their mastery of many software applications — or of even just one — gives them a tremendous competitive edge in doing business and, often, in being hired in the first place.

Learning to be efficient and effective on a computer isn't complicated. It takes time to learn about the operating system, the basic software which runs the computer itself, and still more time to learn the intricacies of each application, such as word processing, spreadsheets for accounting and financial projections, or database or communications software. Learning requires making mistakes, recovering, and moving forward, which builds up a discipline for each program. It also wires into the learner's brain personal computers' unique symbolic language.

The earlier in life people start to learn that symbolic language, as with music and foreign languages, the more easily that discipline becomes second nature. Each program becomes a steppingstone to later applications and can lead to access to college and careers. That's why groups around the country are working to provide access to computers, the Internet, and other technology for under-served communities.

#### **Business Applications**

Clearly, the main drive behind computers' growth has been the proliferation of business applications. Job-seekers who can demonstrate mastery of popular business applications have a much easier time finding jobs, and have a leg up on their competitors who lack the experience of mastering any computer software.

Larry Irving, U.S. assistant secretary of Commerce for communications and information, and administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), clearly sees the need for such training in schools.

"Recent studies show that when prudently applied, technology — including Internet access — leads to important performance gains," he says, "and every day we get confirmation that tomorrow's jobs will require workers with both a quality education and technology skills."

And those skills will be needed. Government experts predict that 60 percent of jobs soon will require skills that few possess today. So one of NTIA's programs, the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIAP), is providing grants and seed money for technology access in underserved communities nationwide. Irving's agency also provides support for NetDay, the annual, nationwide, grassroots volunteer program that is working to wire all 140,000 K-12 schools for connection to the Internet. NetDay 1999 will take place on March 20.

### E-mail Explosion

One of the most common uses of current communications technology is the widespread use of electronic mail in business. Just as virtually all businesses and government agencies now do, many civic and community boards also rely on e-mail as the fastest, easiest, cheapest (no long-distance charges), most reliable and least intrusive way to keep in touch with people who share interests.

E-mail has become so much a part of corporate and government business that familiarity with the various systems and protocols is a prerequisite to career growth in either sector. When available, e-mail can give low-income and minority communities greater access to information, and much greater ability to create virtual communities of interest that can demand greater shares of power and political influence. A 1995 Rand Corporation study that looked at the implications of universal e-mail access concluded that it should be available to all citizens.

### Access at Home Varies

National statistics about computer access at home paint a bleak picture for low-income and minority communities. An October 22, 1998 article in *The New York Times* noted that teachers nationwide are seeing great disparities in computer literacy between children of different groups. At the elementary-school level, some children come into their first computer classes with high computer literacy they gained at home, while others are completely unfamiliar with the keyboard and mouse. Citing figures gathered by ZD Marketing Intelligence, the article noted that the "percentage of households with home computers has jumped from 33 percent in 1995 to 45 percent this year. . . . More telling, 58 percent of households with children have computers, up from 52 percent a year ago."

However, the article points out, "Income is certainly a factor. Of households with

annual incomes of \$75,000 or more, 68 percent have computers. Of households with annual incomes of \$20,000 or less, only 19 percent do."

An Educational Testing Service study found that schools with more than 90 percent minority students had 17 pupils for each computer, while the national average is 10 to one.

A report from the NTIA in 1996 confirms this racial divide: "African-American children are much less likely to use computers in school than white children: 56 percent of white students, but only 39 percent of African-American students use computers in school. African-American students also have less access to computers at home: 36 percent of white students are in families that own computers, while only 15 percent of African-American students have access to home computers."

### **National Access Efforts**

Seeing the gulf between computer "haves" and "have-nots," private and corporate groups nationwide are working on computer literacy for under-served populations. Programs sponsored by the National Urban League, for example, provide youth training in computer literacy. With grants from TIAP and Bell Atlantic, the Urban League has established flagship state-of-the-art technology access centers in Roxbury, Mass., Binghamton, N.Y., Newark, N.J., White Plains, N.Y., and Baltimore, Md. Microsoft Corp. has donated some \$2.5 million worth of its latest software which the Urban League will distribute to its affiliates around the country.

Microsoft is also a major player in "Libraries Online!" Together with the American Library Association and the Center for Technology in the Public Library, the company initiated the program to increase Internet access in under-served communities. The \$15-million program began in nine library systems, including Los Angeles, Baltimore County, and Brooklyn, N.Y., and eventually reached 260 communities nationwide and in Canada and Ireland.

### **Gates Joins In**

The success of Libraries Online! led Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates and his wife to create the Gates Library Foundation, which plans to spend \$200 million to increase Internet access and staff training at still more libraries, mostly in low-income areas. Microsoft will match that sum in software donations.

Some other projects around the country that are working to increase technology awareness and hands-on experience in low-income, minority, and under-served communities include:

- \* ACENet in Appalachia
- \* United Neighborhood Houses of New York
- \* The Kids Computer Workshop in Washington, D.C.
- \* BrookLynX in Brooklyn, N.Y.
- \* Charlotte's Web in Charlotte, N.C.

- \* Break Away Technologies in Los Angeles;
- \* MCI LibraryLink, a national program;
- \* Virtually Wired in Boston;
- \* The Women's Economic Agenda Project in Oakland, Calif.; and
- \* Plugged In in East Palo Alto, Calif.

In South Central Los Angeles, Break Away Technologies offers technology classes for students and residents, teaching leadership and building career opportunities through technology in a 15,000-square-foot access center.

Another Los Angeles-based program is Computers in Our Future, a multi-year, \$6-million program established by the California Wellness Foundation to bring computer-training centers to 11 low-income communities.

More than 250 technology access programs are affiliated with CTCNet, a membership organization based in Newton, Mass., that partners with a variety of academic, church, and community organizations to promote the widest and fairest access to technology.

The Children's Partnership offers advice and links to resources for parents and others looking to integrate computers and other technology into classrooms.

Another government program, Computers for Learning, moves surplus federal government computers into schools and educational nonprofit organizations. Qualified groups register on a General Services Administration Web site, and federal agencies use the institutions' and organizations' statements of need to pair their surplus computers with programs nationwide.

For more information about technology access, try the following Web sites:

-  Benton Foundation at [www.benton.org](http://www.benton.org)
-  National Urban League at [www.nul.org/tpp/about.html](http://www.nul.org/tpp/about.html)
-  The Children's Partnership at [www.childrenspartnership.org](http://www.childrenspartnership.org)

## BLACK FAMILY TECHNOLOGY AWARENESS WEEK



**Crossing the**

**DIGITAL DIVIDE**

# Solutions to the Digital Divide are Many

*By Marvin V. Greene*

Social movements often are diffuse, and it is clear that it will take action across a broad front to move African-American families into

the information technology mainstream. Summing it all up, this story examines a cross-section of activities and organizations which

must come together to help Black America connect with the high-tech future.

In the lexicon of today's information-technology-rich society, the phrase "Digital Divide" has come to symbolize a spectacular inequality of the telecommunications and computer revolution.

It means that if you are poor, African American and minority, and poorly educated, the train of technology is rolling relentlessly down the tracks passing you by. At stake will be the way you learn, find jobs, do your banking, shop, communicate and even meet new friends and associates.

do. "Standing at the Edge of the Digital Divide," in the National Urban League's 1998 "State of Black America" report: "African Americans — who own and have less access to computers in their homes and schools and on the job — must act so that the network technology becomes a tool of empowerment, not disenfranchisement."

Some say the divide of the technology haves and have-nots is ominous. Others are laying down prescriptions and solutions and say help is coming. Whatever the view, the word is that it will be all of America and its economy that will suffer if this technological inequality isn't remedied.

## Interactive Era

"We're moving to an interactive era and a digital era. I see information literacy as a fourth basic. It's reading, writing, arithmetic and information literacy."

Information literacy is the ability to apply reading, writing and arithmetic in an interactive environment," says B. K. Fulton, director of technology programs and policy for the National Urban League in New York.

"Imagine the child who hasn't at their fingertips a

"It is critical that African Americans understand the information superhighway because the telecommunications networks and the telephones, computers, televisions and other equipment connected to them significantly affect all Americans," said Allen S. Hammond in his perspective article.

## BLACK FAMILY TECHNOLOGY AWARENESS WEEK

base so they can find where the internships and scholarships are," Fulton adds.

In a 1996 study, one of the first research projects to survey the impact of differences in the way the races use the Internet, Vanderbilt University management professors Donna Hoffman and Thomas Novak determined that 73 percent of white college and high-school students are likely to own home computers, compared with 32.9 percent of African-American high-school and college students. Correspondingly, white students overall are more likely than African Americans to use the World Wide Web, the research findings reported.

#### Foreboding Findings

What is foreboding is that the researchers found that these statistics are likely to be true even when Black and white household incomes are the same. According to a report from New York-based Mediamark Research Inc., an estimated 72 million Americans have access to the Internet, including 35.3 million from home.

The way to get African Americans and other minorities in tune with technology is simply to create a market for it in those households, says Jeffalyn Johnson, vice president and chief operating officer for OmniVerse Digital Solutions, a Black-operated digital media company in Springfield, Va.

"It's not that the money isn't present in the community," Johnson says. "Blacks pay as much for those lockers and those shoes."

It will be more critical in the millennium that minority students become proficient in the use of information technology, given that the number of U.S. colleges and universities that incorporate technology into the classroom has risen dramatically, according to a report by the Campus Computing Project in Encino, Calif. A recent survey of 371 U.S. colleges and universities showed that 44 percent of college courses use electronic mail for communication, compared to 8 percent in 1994. Additionally, one-third of courses at the surveyed colleges use the Internet as part of the syllabus.

#### Education is the Key

The Vanderbilt researchers and other observers say education holds the key to erasing the Digital Divide.

"Overall, increasing levels of education positively influences both computer access and Web use," Hoffman and Novak reported in their findings, which can be found on the Internet at [www.1090.org/etn/etnmain.html](http://www.1090.org/etn/etnmain.html). "The policy implication is obvious: to ensure the participation of all Americans in the information revolution, it is critical to improve the educational opportunities for African Americans."

Quentin R. Lawson, executive director of the Washington-based National Alliance of Black School Educators, says historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) must play a deepening role in the introduction of Black and under-served students to technology through the years they graduate.

"You will find that the minority and African-American students using the computer as technology tool is proportionally far less than the majority population," Lawson says.

#### Teacher Technophobia

African-American teachers themselves tend to fear technology, making it incumbent on HBCUs to create "massive and comprehensive" staff development, training and certification programs that will give the teachers the confidence and expertise to use available technology, he says. A study from Market Data Retrieval, a Shelton, Conn., market-research company, reports that 85 percent of U.S. public schools have Internet access, but only 14 percent say that teachers use the Web as a teaching resource. Factors for this discrepancy, according to the study, include inadequate in-service training for teachers, many of whom have no computer experience, and the feeling that it is impractical to go online in a 45-minute class.

"As I look at the historically Black schools, they are still preparing teachers the way they used to. They're not using technology in the preparation," Lawson says.

**It's time to make it introduce Black and under-served students to technology through the teachers they graduate.**

In addition to improved teacher training in technology, other solutions put forth for mitigating the Digital Divide include:

- Closer coordination of interested groups, including private companies and industry, churches, libraries, after-school programs and day-care centers. "If we make a collective effort, then it doesn't become the single burden of any one institution," Lawson says.
- Getting computer hardware and software into the hands of the under-served. That even means making equipment available for poor students to take home and use, says Johnson of OmniVerse Digital Solutions. "It's a not a big step for these youngsters to go from the Nintendos to computers. They're ready. It's just access to the hardware," Johnson says. Fulton of the National Urban League advocates "learn and earn" programs that help students get jobs and provide additional incentives by letting them take computers home for use and practice.
- Wire older schools for Internet access. Inherent in the Telecommunications Reform Act of 1996, which overhauled more than 60 years of the nation's telecommunications laws to foster competition and greater consumer choice, are provisions for companies to wire schools and libraries for high-speed Internet access. Lawson says officials and administrators in order, city schools must be vigilant in ensuring their schools benefit from telecom reform "despite their obsolescence."
- Get minority households to understand that purchasing a computer is not the major investment it used to be. Typical consumer prices have dropped below the \$1,000 mark for home computers and are dropping even further as they become a commodity, Fulton says. While that may represent a significant cash barrier for many families, computer companies and retailers offer consumers the ability to finance purchases, just as for cars and furniture, he says.
- Monitor and evaluate results from programs that introduce young people to technology and encourage high standards. "The installations must yield meaningful results,"



## Crossing the Digital Divide

Fulton says, "How many people were trained? How many jobs were created? How much was paid in taxes? Did reading and math scores and standardized test scores go up? Those are the kinds of things we have to expect from an infusion of technology."

### Technology in the 'Hood

One initiative of the National Urban League is the development of state-of-the-art technology centers for use by the populace. So far pilot centers have been established in Baltimore, Boston, Newark, N.J., and Binghamton, N.Y., Fulton says. The National Urban League also plans to offer courses in information technology through its Web page at [nua.com](http://nua.com).

While African Americans and other minorities may be slow to embrace the advantages of technology, research has shown that the ones who adopt technology do so very aggressively. According to Chicago market research company Target Market News in its 1997 report "Buying Power Of Black America," African Americans are spending more than \$10 million annually on subscriptions to Internet and online services like America Online, CompuServe and Prodigy. African Americans spent \$741 million on computer

equipment and software in 1996, the latest year for which statistics are available from Target Market News.

### Hispanic Thrust

Among U.S. Hispanic households, computer ownership and Internet subscription numbers have soared since 1994, according to the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute in Claremont, Calif. In 1994, 13 percent of all Hispanic households had computers in 1994, but that figure has risen to 30 percent in 1996. Fifteen percent of all Hispanic households currently subscribe to the Internet, compared to only 2 percent in 1994.

Solving the Digital Divide will take leadership and the utmost diligence, according to observers. Fulton suggests that part of that leadership requirement is that African-American leaders themselves become conversant in technology.

"You've got to get the leaders to understand that these tools are so important. Once they realize how easy it is to share information and to network with each other and to get ideas and solutions from your colleagues, they will say, 'Wait a minute, I need to make this available for my staff.' Then it's a natural extension to go out and train people so they can work for others and use these tools," Fulton says. ■



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Digital Nation

## Reaching Out to Bring Low-Income Blacks Across the 'Digital Divide'

By GARY CHAPMAN

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**T**he most important factor in American politics and society, at the end of this century, is still race--especially the relationship between white and black Americans.

This centuries-old tension has nearly always had a technological dimension, as black Americans have commonly found their economic prospects altered, usually for the worse, by technological developments. Slaves were freed just as new agricultural technologies devalued human labor. African Americans who migrated to cities for factory employment weren't there very long before automation decimated those jobs.

Now African Americans are confronting the digital revolution, and the picture they again see is a decidedly mixed blessing.

There are, of course, many black American leaders helping shape the future of high tech. They include William Kennard, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (and a Los Angeles native), and Larry Irving, assistant secretary of commerce and director of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

There is a new group of black entrepreneurs making money online, such as E. David Ellington, president and CEO of NetNoir Inc., an online service for African Americans on the Web (<http://www.netnoir.com>) and on America Online (<http://www.aol.com>), and Robert L. Johnson, the wealthy founder and head of Black Entertainment Television, who has launched MS-BET on the Internet (<http://www.betnetworks.com>).

Middle-class blacks in the U.S. are the fastest-growing segment of first-time buyers of home computers, especially now that there are PCs selling for \$600, studies have found. A study reported a year ago by Vanderbilt University (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu>) professors Donna Hoffman and Thomas Novak estimated that there were then about 5 million blacks in the U.S. using the Internet, and the figure has undoubtedly grown since then. More black people have reported wanting to get on the Internet than have white people.

However, there are also stubborn disparities in technological access and participation in the high-tech economy. As the Rev. Jesse Jackson pointed out last month, high-tech companies are

overwhelmingly, even embarrassingly, white. Jackson's Rainbow Coalition has purchased stock in 51 Silicon Valley companies in order to press shareholder resolutions for greater diversity on corporate boards. Out of 384 board directors of those companies, only five, or 1.3%, are African American.

For low-income African Americans, the boom in the "new economy" threatens to pass them by. Poor schools with predominantly minority students have twice as many students per computer, on average, as middle-class white schools. White families are roughly twice as likely to own a home computer as black families, according to Hoffman and Novak.

This well-known problem has been characterized as the "digital divide," the subject of a recent workshop at the annual convention of the National Forum of Black Public Administrators in Austin, Texas. Herman Lessard, president and CEO of the Greater Austin Urban League and a workshop speaker, called equalizing access to technology and training "the new frontier of civil rights."

One tool for providing training and access to low-income African Americans is the community technology center model, or CTC, a physical place that provides computer access for people who can't afford one. Black leaders throughout the U.S. are beginning to regard CTCs as an essential part of the African American community, especially in inner cities and poverty zones. And there are several CTCs in Los Angeles that are leading the way.

Blue Line Televillage, a project of Compton and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, is one model that has an international reputation. It is a center with computers, Internet connections, videoconferencing facilities and training classes for its roughly 2,000 members, mostly African American, who pay \$10 a year for adults and \$5 annually for students and seniors.

Blue Line Televillage is situated next to a public transit hub in Compton as an experiment in creating a "telework" center, according to Walter Siembab of Siembab Associates, a Los Angeles consulting firm that helped get the project started. Siembab advocates the proliferation of what he calls "personal network access facilities" no more than half a mile away from anyone's home, primarily as a way to reduce traffic and air pollution, promote telecommuting and reconfigure urban areas into more convivial spaces.

Another L.A. program, Break Away Technologies, was founded and is run by local African American community activist and entrepreneur Joseph Lobe. Break Away has a "200 by 2000" project that is aimed at establishing 200 community technology centers in central Los Angeles--in schools, churches and nonprofit organizations--by 2000. Sony Entertainment in Culver City has given computers to the program, and Microsoft has donated software. The group expects to mark its 100th center, which will be at the Magic Johnson Foundation in Los Angeles, with a ceremony on April 29 at USC.

The Urban League, one of the nation's oldest civil rights organizations, has been sponsoring technology centers for low-income minorities for a long time--its first center was opened in Los Angeles in 1968, said B. Keith Fulton, director of technology programs and policy for the National Urban League

in New York.

Fulton said that welfare reform and the national effort to put people back to work require new approaches, and that CTCs are the most promising development. "Welfare was a deficit model," he said, "and technology training and access is an asset model."

"We need 'safety.net' now."

Because of this interest in CTCs in low-income communities, the Clinton administration's next fiscal year budget, now under review in Congress, contains a \$65-million line item for community technology centers, spending that will be part of the Clinton education program. This initiative is being led by Rep. Maxine Waters of Los Angeles.

The Commerce Department's Irving said, "This is a strategy for all at-risk communities. Community technology centers are just as valuable in Carthage, Tenn., rural Kentucky or on an Indian reservation as they are in South-Central Los Angeles."

User experience seems to bear this out. CTC-Net (<http://www.ctcnet.org>), an umbrella organization of more than 250 affiliated CTCs in the U.S. and headquartered near Boston, did a survey last year of 817 CTC users at 44 community sites. Their survey revealed that two-thirds of the users identified themselves as "nonwhite"; 37% as African American. About 65% of the survey respondents reported taking classes at their CTC to improve their job skills, and, of 446 job seekers, 43% had either found a job or were a lot closer to getting one.

Many companies are doing their part. IBM is experimenting with putting computers and network connections in public housing projects in Oakland. Microsoft is donating software, and the Gates Foundation is increasing a multibillion-dollar program of grants and donations. Dell Computer is about to launch a special program of discounts for students at historically black colleges and universities.

But most CTCs are still too dependent on one-year government appropriations and foundation grants, which are unreliable and too easily cut off.

Lessard says that black America has a window of two to three years to get on the high-tech train--after that, he believes, patterns of inequality may become a permanent part of the Information Age. And low-income Americans cannot get on this train without widespread public support for CTCs and similar programs.

The alternative is a "digital nation" that falls far short of its promise and potential.

\* \* \*

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The Dallas Morning News

# The Net Effect

The Front Page



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## Digital divide

### Experts wonder how to close gap between whites and minorities in computer use

06/27/99

By Ira J. Hadnot / The Dallas Morning News

In 1900, he predicted the social, economic and educational separations by race and the struggles for equality that helped define the century.

But Du Bois could not foresee a "digital divide" - a cyber gap between the haves and have-nots that has become a hot civil-rights issue on the eve of the 21st century.

Since 1995, various studies have shown a disparity between whites and minorities in computer ownership and access. Much research remains to be done, and there is a controversy over how wide the gap is and how to close it.

Some experts describe a crevice, others see a crack.

A 1997 U.S. Commerce Department study, the department's second on the subject, showed that whites are more than twice as likely to own computers as blacks or Hispanics and that whites are roughly three times as likely to have Internet access as blacks and Hispanics. (Studies of the Asian and Native American communities are too incomplete to draw many conclusions, analysts say.)

"There is a gap, it is widening and what should be done is not only a civil-rights issue but a matter of public policy," says Larry Irving, administrator of

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the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

His agency, part of the Commerce Department, is working on a third report that will be released in July. He expects the new figures to show a more dramatic disparity.

Meanwhile, "digital divide" has become a catch phrase among social scientists, educators, computer-industry executives, federal administrators, civil-rights leaders and nonprofit executives.

Is the gap forming for racial, economic or educational reasons? Experts cite a range of causes - from distrust of technology to marketing stereotypes to the need for more Internet content of specific interest to minorities.

"We are dealing with communities that have some historical issues with what technology has done to them, not for them," says Laura Jeffers, who runs Access by Design.

The \$3.2 million project, funded by The National Science Foundation, explored how different groups perceive and use technology. The "digital divide" also has geographic dimensions, including poor people in rural communities.

Ms. Jeffers and others with the project visited roughly 40 communities across the country where computers had been set up to give access to poor people and minority-group members.

"We didn't go in with the computer first and say 'use this.' We tried to learn how the community functioned and what its needs were," says Ms. Jeffers.

Helping minority communities see the practical application of computers is an issue, she says. And there is concern about how to handle the changes technology brings about.

In an *Atlantic Monthly* article in January titled "Blacks and Technology," Anthony Walton wrote of the "negative encounters" blacks have had with

technological advances, dating to slavery.

Mr. Walton looked at the impact of the cotton gin on the rise of slavery, the development of nautical equipment to handle strong winds and currents that gave a boost to the slave trade, and a mechanical cotton picker that, he writes, resulted in the migration of thousands of blacks to the north's industrial cities

He argues that the historical displacement rate of blacks due to technology is "greater" than any other group, creating mistrust

Income is another factor, according to experts. As earnings rise, the cyber gap narrows

However, it does not disappear - not even for households earning more than \$75,000 a year, according to the Commerce Department study, one of the few to incorporate income. The report, "Falling through the Net II," says about 76 percent of white families in that income group own home computers, compared with 64 percent of black families

Not willing to wait Time, some argue, works against increases in income quickly closing the cyber gap

"The argument that we should wait until salaries rise to an equitable level does not work," says B Keith Fulton of the National Urban League "The problem is people with resources maintain a technological advantage and even greater access because of what they are able to spend on computer classes and equipment upgrades That is widening the gap "

Money equals access, compounding the problem

"If you don't have a telephone, you can't connect to the Internet," says Mr. Irving "And one-third of poor minorities do not have telephones One out of every seven African-Americans doesn't have a home phone People in some rural and urban areas lack access because the infrastructure never existed or has not been updated Some communities will need to be completely rewired

If they had computers, they wouldn't be able to use them."

It is not a "matter of having a box in every house," says Mr. Fulton, director of technology programs and policy for the league. "The price of computers will come down. But without education and training, there is still a gap."

Several civil-rights organizations have made race and technology a cause, say Mr. Fulton and others, because many minorities lack computer skills and will not be economically competitive in the next century.

"The future is technological and access to the information age is the ticket," says Cicero Wilson, an Atlanta nonprofit executive who is trying to wire America's black church community. "Where we as a people are used to punching in at a time clock, we are going to have to start signing on to a computer."

Mr. Wilson spoke at "Closing the Racial Divide in The Information Age," a recent seminar sponsored by the George H. Gallup International Institute in Princeton, N.J.

Throwing hardware at the problem is "too simplistic," says Mr. Wilson, executive director of the Interdenominational Theological Center. His organization is seeking 30,000 computers to create a communications network for mainline black denominations. The churches, he says, are the social and economic base of black communities and should become computer learning centers.

### **New underclass?**

Predictions of a new underclass are linked to the rapid growth in technology jobs and minorities' lag in "technological literacy" - the ability to use computers to improve learning, productivity and job performance.

A great deal of pressure is on schools to help minority students become computer literate because of the low percentage of minority

students with home computers. Mr. Wilson says. At schools with low-minority enrollment, there is a computer for every 6.6 students. The figure is 8.4 for schools with high-minority enrollment, according to the 1998 report, "Technology in Education."

By the end of the next decade, according to U.S. Labor Department projections, 60 percent of American jobs will require skills that currently only 20 percent of Americans have.

"There are entry-level computer repair jobs starting at \$40,000 a year. Not even five percent of these jobs are currently going to minorities," says Mr. Fulton, who has started computer training programs in 65 of the Urban League's 114 local affiliates. His goal is to have such programs in all local leagues by 2006.

"As a society, we are bridging gaps in cultural awareness and race relations. But we are still very far from closing the digital divide," he says. "This has become a very sexy topic, but there are some people making Internet projections using light data."

### Studying disparity

One study that prompted considerable debate was done by Vanderbilt University professors Thomas Novak and Donna L. Hoffman. They looked at Internet access according to race, income and education. At incomes of \$40,000 and higher, race differences in Web use vanish, according to the 1997 telephone survey of 5,813 people that was published in *Science* magazine last year.

However, the sample was small and, Mr. Irving says, "doing it by telephone as opposed to in-person interviews eliminates minority households that do not have phones."

The professors' conclusion, however, supports what civil-rights groups have been saying: "a significant segment of our society is denied equal access to the Internet."

The study found a disparity among students

regarding computer use and access. While 73 percent of white students owned a home computer, only 32 percent of African-American students owned one. The gap held even when the researchers adjusted for the students' household income

"Right now, minorities are in a catch-up position," says Ronald Blackburn-Moreno, president of the ASPIRA Association, which helps develop young Hispanic leaders

"Hispanics buying computers is becoming the fastest-growing segment of the market. Hispanic parents know that their children need an advantage. The high school dropout rate for our children is very, very high."

With consumer use of the Internet being such a new phenomenon, several minorities who operate Web sites say it's too early to blame the digital divide on race. Although many entrepreneurs say the Internet doesn't have enough material for minorities, they believe content and business opportunities eventually will draw minorities to the Web

"The focus doesn't have to be on what we [minorities] lack," says E. David Ellington, creator of NetNoir, a popular Internet site with African-American content. "This is more about income and education than race. I am tired of the dependency thinking. We are smarter than that. The Internet is the one sector of capitalism that *is* accessible to minorities. I have plenty of competition."

### **Closing the gap**

Vice President Al Gore has been leading the Clinton administration's drive, including tax credits and grants, to provide Internet access to all Americans. Companies like Microsoft, Dell, IBM, AT&T and Bell Atlantic have made multimillion dollar commitments to equip technology centers in rural and urban schools and libraries

The Civil Rights Forum, a Washington, D.C.,

center, acts as a clearinghouse for technology research and for addressing communications policy as a civil-rights issue

"It is time to take the discussion off gadgets," says Mark Lloyd, the forum's executive director. "Civil-rights organizations have been instrumental in shaping communications policy from the equal employment side. Their focus is shifting. How our national conversation will be conducted and through what means are issues that are too important for minorities to be missing."

Why isn't that message coming across?

It is "a marketing stereotype," Mr. Lloyd says, that minorities are slow to embrace technology. "Some companies were under the false impression that blacks would not subscribe to cable or use cellular phones. So they let early advertising campaigns be developed that excluded minorities

"They were some of the biggest users of this technology early on. The same will happen with computers and digital television."

It could be that some minorities are missing the message about technology because the industry has not found the right messenger.

"Some blacks, at the moment, don't get geek chic," says Mr. Irving. "They don't want to grow up to be like Bill Gates. But put Michael Jordan in a commercial with a laptop computer and see what happens. We need to teach our kids that being successful through the NBA is far less likely than via technology. Silicon Valley produces 62 new millionaires every day."

In his day, Du Bois did not foresee a Silicon Valley or a "digital divide." The late historian, author and leader believed black people are part of a global community.

Du Bois wanted to erase the color line. Until his death in 1963, he was seeking ways to link people of color.

He would have loved the World Wide Web.



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BUSINESS

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

# Report showing racial gap on Internet sparks debate

**Blacks, Hispanics trail whites in computer ownership, Web savvy.**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

At this embryonic stage of the Internet's development, no one disputes figures showing minorities trailing whites in computer ownership, cyber-access and Internet know-how.

But the impact of "the digital divide" is a matter of dispute between some Internet experts and civil rights advocates.

Some, like B. Keith Fulton of the National Urban League, see the gap as a sign that minorities might find themselves relegated to second-class citizenship in cyberspace.

"We are talking about the new information age and heart of a new economy," said Fulton, director of technical programs and policy for the civil rights group. "The ramifications are enormous in terms of jobs and where minorities will be in the new millennium."

But E. David Ellington, a founder and president of one of the Internet's most popular black-directed sites, believes it's too early to fret over the small number of blacks and Hispanics on the Internet.

"I'm tired of how I see this issue being positioned in the media as black folks being

perceived as in need and not having the wherewithal to deal with the computer age," said Ellington, founder of a San Francisco company that runs the popular NetNoir Web site.

"We are less than five years into the Internet age. Look at how minorities have embraced pager or telephone or cable technology," Ellington said.

"Black folks will embrace the technology of the Internet as soon as it becomes more relevant to our lives."

## Data illustrate gap

A Commerce Department report showed that whites are more than twice as likely to own home computers as blacks or Hispanics, and the racial disparity exists even among families earning more than \$75,000.

Across all incomes, about 41 percent of white families own PCs but about 19 percent of black and Hispanic families do.

The report, called "Falling through the Net II," said about 76 percent of white families with incomes over \$75,000 own home computers, compared with 64 percent of black families at the same income level.

A third report is scheduled for release in June.

Most believe that owning a computer is just part of the fight to get minorities online.

"The biggest problem in the underserved community is not

necessarily the hardware," said David Eisner, vice president for corporate relations for America Online.

"We can put all the hardware in the world into a community, but until it's valued, it won't do well. The content has to be what people want."

Towards that end, Eisner said, AOL is working on bringing greater organization to the broad array of topics on Internet sites.

As an example, Eisner said the Web site of the Benton Foundation, a nonprofit group devoted to public policy, children's issues, community activism and philanthropy, has useful information that could win a wide audience but isn't easily accessible.

The Urban League's Fulton said the key to getting more minorities on the World Wide Web is to tie greater Internet use to real-life matters. "There are huge demands for workers with technical skills. Critical thinking skills are enhanced when children work with computers," Fulton said.



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## ON THE WEB:

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## Racial Divide on Net

### Low usage reported among minorities

By Rita Ciolli  
Staff Writer

WHILE INCREASING NUMBERS of Americans are online, Internet usage continues to be sharply defined along racial and class lines, according to a U.S. Department of Commerce report issued yesterday to bolster the Clinton administration's effort to encourage private investment in the effort to connect everyone.

The federal government's third annual study, "Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide," found that blacks and Hispanics as well as those with lower levels of income and education are rapidly becoming the "have nots" of the technology world.

The study found that Internet usage was greatest among whites, 38 percent, and Asians, 36 percent. Access by blacks was found to be 19 percent and for Hispanics, 17 percent.

"We do have a racial ravine in addition to a digital divide," said Larry Irving, assistant secretary for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the Commerce Department.

There is a danger of creating two societies if everyone does not have access to the tools of the Information Age, warns Martin Little, head of the National Urban League. "When you think of it in terms of equality of access and opportunity, which are the traditional civil rights words, then this is truly a civil rights issue," he said.

The national study reflects the situation in Nassau and Suffolk, according to Teresa Sanders, head of Long Island's Urban League. "The Internet and the World Wide Web are not even an option for most of the people" in minority communities, Sanders said. At the group's headquarters in Central Islip she said only two of the 15 computers in their technology training center have Internet connections. "We have people lined up to access those types of resources," she said.

The Commerce study found that income, race and geography made a major difference among those who were connected and those who were not. Even when comparable

low-income households are compared, a child in a white family is three times as likely to have Internet access than a child in a black family and four times as more likely than a child in a Hispanic family.

"It's the unholy trinity of education, income and race that makes a difference," Irving said.

Affluence and geography make a difference. Among households earning more than \$75,000, both blacks and whites have the same high Internet usage. While rural residents, no matter what their national origin, have the lowest.

The Commerce report contrasts with an April report by the United States Internet Council, a private nonprofit group that tracks and reports on the Internet, found only "digital potholes" on the road to universal Internet access. The USIC report said 23 percent of blacks were online and predicted that number would increase to 40 percent next year while Hispanic usage would grow from 36 percent to 43 percent.

"We think the trend lines point to greater access, not less access," said Mark Rhoads, legislative affairs director for the industry-funded group. Rhoads said their study by Forrester Research also counted those who had access from schools and libraries. The Commerce survey was done in December, 1998, while the USIC's was conducted in March, 1999. Internet usage is growing so rapidly that even three months could account for some difference in the finding, he said.

And Wendell Cherry, director of the Wyandanch Public Library, had the impression that Internet use was growing in his service area. He said the library had given out "quite a large number" of free e-mail accounts. "The biggest question is whether they can access it from their home computers. An awful lot of people come here because they have home computers," he said.

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MAY 25, 14:34 EDT

## Impact of 'Digital Divide' Debated

By PAUL SHEPARD  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — At this embryonic stage of the Internet's development, no one disputes figures showing minorities trailing whites in computer ownership, cyberaccess and Internet know-how.

But the impact of ``the digital divide'' is a matter of dispute between some Internet experts and civil rights advocates.

Some, like B. Keith Fulton of the National Urban League, see the gap as a sign that minorities might find themselves relegated to second-class citizenship in cyberspace due to a lack of computer aptitude.

``We are talking about the new information age and heart of a new economy,'' said Fulton, director of technical programs and policy for the civil rights group. ``The ramifications are enormous in terms of jobs and where minorities will be in the new millennium.''

But E. David Ellington, a founder and president of one of the Internet's most popular black-directed sites, believes it's too early to fret over the paucity of blacks and Hispanics on the Internet.

``I'm tired of how I see this issue being positioned in the media, of black folks being perceived as in need and not having the wherewithal to deal with the computer age,'' said Ellington, founder of a San Francisco company that runs the popular NetNoir Web site.

``We are less than five years into the Internet age. Look at how minorities have embraced pager or telephone or cable technology,'' Ellington said. ``Black folks will embrace the technology of the Internet as soon as it becomes more relevant to our lives.''



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Government data illustrate the gap.

A Commerce Department report showed that whites are more than twice as likely to own home computers as blacks or Hispanics, and the racial disparity exists even among families earning more than \$75,000.

Across all incomes, about 41 percent of white families own PCs, but about 19 percent of black and Hispanic families do.

The report, called ``Falling through the Net II," said about 76 percent of white families with incomes over \$75,000 own home computers, compared with 64 percent of black families at the same income level.

A third report is scheduled for release in June.

Most believe that owning a computer is just part of the fight to get minorities online.

``The biggest problem in the underserved community is not necessarily the hardware," said David Eisner, vice president for corporate relations for America Online, the world's largest Internet access and online service provider. ``We can put all the hardware in the world into a community, but until it's valued, it won't do well. The content has to be what people want."

Towards that end, Eisner said, AOL is working on bringing greater organization to the broad array of topics on Internet sites.

As an example, Eisner said the Web site of the Benton Foundation, a nonprofit group devoted to public policy, children's issues, community activism and philanthropy, has useful information that could win a wide audience but isn't easily accessible.

``We are looking at ways to take that content and make it more easy to use," Eisner said.

Also on the AOL docket are plans to help colleges with large minority enrollments develop programs for students in mathematics, science and engineering, Eisner said.

The Urban League's Fulton said the key to getting more

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minorities on the World Wide Web is to tie greater Internet use to real life matters such as better-paying jobs or higher test scores for children.

``There are huge demands for workers with technical skills. Critical thinking skills are enhanced when children work with computers," Fulton said.

The league became the first civil rights organization to broadcast a program live on the Internet with its Urban Technology Summit last year.

The New York-based organization also plans to build 114 technical education and access centers around the country by 2006. Some of the 65 centers now operating offer free classes ranging from personal computer assembly to using Microsoft and Window programs, Fulton said.

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