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## Valdosta Project Change

July 1999

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**Included Articles:**

7/14- Maybe it is all about race- Rebecca Yull

7/20- Macon could get first black mayor- Associated Press

7/22- Macon elects first black mayor- Associated Press

7/22- NAACP takes on the TV networks- Bill Maxwell

7/25- Every reason to stand proud- Juana Jordan

7/27- Minority farmers object to farm agent's firing- Collier terminated following arrest for solicitation- Tony Jenkins

7/27- 'Ragtime' racism still alive- Sara Eckel

7/28- Habitat plans to close on number of homes in coming weeks- Brian Lawson

July 1999- Study finds racial disparity in tech ownership- Eugene Ford

# Seeking treatment everyone needs

Every two weeks, Helen, my oldest sister, dutifully travels from Palmetto to Fort Lauderdale, a four-hour trip one way, to accompany our mother to one doctor or another. I make the trip when Helen cannot, about eight times a year. We did the same for our father, who lived three hours away in Fort Pierce. He died in April.

My father would not go to the doctors alone because he did not trust them. Over the years, all of his doctors — except one — were white. He did not believe that they would give him the treatment he needed. He believed that his doctors disliked blacks and did not value him as a human being.

He wanted me to accompany him because he knew that I would demand fair treatment, that, when I was there, the doctors would inform us of the full range of treatments available. Furthermore, I would always research his symptoms and have a long list of questions for the doctor. I am convinced that our father lived as long as he did because Helen or I accompanied him to the doctors.

Again, we are doing the same for our mother because she, too, believes that doctors will not offer her the best treatment if they are not encouraged to do so. In fact, Helen spent the Fourth of July weekend in Fort Lauderdale tending to our mother's medical concerns. More than eight years ago, Helen and I loudly demanded that our mother receive bypass surgery. Two days later, she was on the operating table. Less than two weeks later, she was at home cooking collard greens.

For decades, medical studies have suggested that African-

Americans like my parents have good reason to be wary of the treatment they receive from a mostly white health industry. The findings of one recent Duke University study, published in the journal *Stroke*, show that blacks are less likely to receive procedures that can prevent stroke.

The researchers combed the medical records of 803 men older than 45 who had been diagnosed with a mini-stroke in four of the top veterans hospitals in the nation. They determined the patients' eligibility for two procedures. One would surgically remove blockages in the neck arteries, and the other would simply search for clogs. As my father would have known, blacks eligible for the procedures were less likely than whites to be referred.

To their credit, according to a summary of the findings in the *Los Angeles Times*, the researchers did not automatically presume that race was the major cause of such disparate treatment. They concentrated on stroke because it is the third-leading cause of death and of the main causes of disability for American adults and because stroke is the most important factor in the higher mortality rate among blacks.

The researchers put in place enough controlled variables to determine that race alone gave white patients a 50 percent bet-



**Bill Maxwell**  
Columnist

ter chance of being referred than their black counterparts. "This study has broad implications," said Dr. Kevin Schulman of Georgetown University, whose study last February showed that doctors in the United States are more likely to order certain heart disease tests for white males than for women and blacks.

Dr. Eugene Oddone of Duke University and his fellow researchers suggest that such racial prejudice among white doctors might be subconscious and could be the result of how they interpret information. I do not believe that suggestion for a second. My sister does not believe it. My father did not believe it. And my mother does not believe it.

The researchers also suggest that the findings may indicate lower numbers for blacks receiving aggressive procedures because fewer blacks opt for such operations. They may have a point. I want to point out, however, that if my father was typical of many other blacks, the fear of being mistreated made him suspicious of some invasive operations. His fear came directly from his experiences.

I am not a doctor, nor am I an expert on how to solve what is obviously an unnecessary crisis. Doubtless, medical schools could do a better job of teaching future doctors to respect all of their patients, regardless of their skin color. If the health-care profession is a reflection of larger American society, then I have little faith that blacks will get the treatment they deserve any time soon.

*Bill Maxwell writes for the Scripps Howard News Service.*

# Maybe It is All About Race

I personally am on the level where race is obsolete. I accept that other people see race as an actual barrier between people and label people according to their skin color. Heck! The father of my unborn child sees people by their color, but also by their ethnicity and their individual personalities. So this I deal with and call people white or black in conversation and my column although I may not personally accept race as a way to define a person.

But what I am starting to realize is that racial lines are drawn and people do use them as barriers, as excuses and as reasons to degrade and uplift each other. Movies today do a grand job of portraying this.

Most people who are familiar with Spike Lee expect him to put something racial in his movies. He does so in "Summer of Sam" more than once. Lee uses racial slurs and comments to portray the actuality of its role in society. The Italians talk junk about the niggers and spics while the black characters do the same about whitey.

Lee even touches on the conflict of rejecting one's own race to get ahead in life. Lee plays the newscaster who is live on the scene in "Summer of Sam." He goes to talk to some people in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn about their views on the .44 Killer. A woman he interviews thanks God "that it is a white man killing all those white people, because if it was a black man killing all those people there would be the biggest race riot ever right here in New York City." She then says to Lee, "I'm surprised to see you here, I thought you didn't like black people."

Lee is not the only director/

screen writer to put the issue of race into his movie this summer. The creators of South Park also put race into their story while hitting the Canadians most of all. As the U.S. military prepares for ground troops to enter Canada the plan is to have an all-black company lead the way so they can get killed while the white soldiers move in from behind. It is called "operation get behind the brownies." Of course Chef is aware of the ploy and instructs his company to scatter on his command.

During the Vietnam war black Americans were among the first to be put in the thick of the man-to-man warfare and see the North Vietnamese gorilla fighters. Seeing only dark people, the North Vietnamese were under the impression Americans were all dark people. And in the Civil War, a black company fighting as Union soldiers were given the "honor" of being the first to take on Fort Sumter which was the best armed and defended fort in the Confederacy. The Union soldiers were slaughtered.

And so "South Park" creators take a humorous look at how the United States military has abused blacks in previous conflicts, making them out to be privileged to be the first to see fire when they may actually have been used as human shields.

Movies pretty much just mirror our own lives and people like myself are so few and far between that we'll have a different government and society before a movie mirrors my thinking.



Rebecca Yull  
Mailbox Post Columnist

## Macon could get first black mayor

MACON (AP) — For the first time in the city's 176-year history there are more blacks registered to vote than whites, which may give Jack Ellis a good shot at becoming Macon's first black mayor Tuesday.

Ellis is being challenged by Buckner F. Melton Sr. for the Democratic primary nomination. Another Democrat, Thelma Dillard, resigned her city council post to run, but was removed from the ballot after her qualifying check bounced. There is no Republican challenger. Records in the Macon-Bibb County Board of Elections office show that Macon has 43,004 registered voters. Of that, 22,306 are black and 20,349 are white.

"The general tendency in many southern elections is bloc voting," said Michael Binford, a political science professor at Georgia State University. "Black candidates are generally supported by blacks and white candidates are generally supported by whites. That's been the case, well, ever since we've had black candidates."

Both Ellis, 53, and Melton say lowering the crime rate, reducing substandard housing, improving educational opportunities and attracting new industry will be their top priorities.

## ▶ OUR STATE

### Macon elects first black mayor

Macon (AP) — Jack Ellis takes office as Macon's first black mayor on Dec. 20, assuming a spot in time that the 53-year-old son of a sharecropper has already considered.

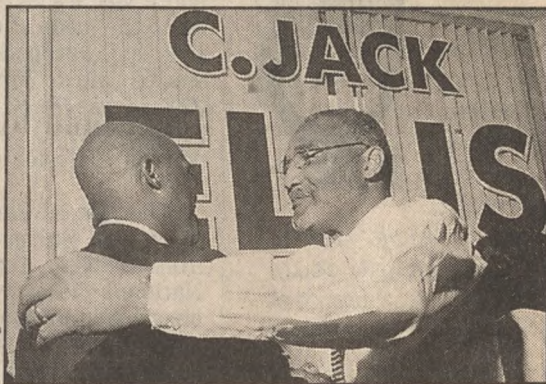
"I'll be the last mayor of this century and the first of the next one," said a jubilant Ellis, who won the primary vote Tuesday night over former Mayor Buckner Melton Sr.

With all 36 precincts reporting, Ellis had 10,356 votes to 9,261 for Melton in a race that drew 46 percent of the central Georgia city's voters.

"We expected to win, no question about it," said Ellis, who captured 53 percent of the vote in his third try for public office. "We believed we could do it. We didn't have a lot of money. They outspent us 3-to-1, but we just never gave up."

The contest was actually a Democratic primary, but because there were no Republican candidates, Ellis was declared the winner and new mayor. He will succeed Jim Marshall, who did not seek re-election.

Ellis, 53, a car salesman and political commentator, lost a 1991 bid for a state Senate seat. Four years later, he ran for mayor, losing the Democratic nomination to Marshall by 120 votes.



Associated Press

Jack Ellis, right, is congratulated by Georgia state Sen. Robert Brown, D-Macon, in front of his headquarters, after being elected as Macon's first black mayor.

# NAACP takes on the TV networks

NEW YORK — Here we go again, another well-intentioned but doomed diversity crusade, replete with threats, textbook oratory and enough political, social, historical and mythological allusions to wow an Ivy League doctoral committee on American popular culture in the 1990s.

By now, most Americans know that the NAACP, the nation's oldest civil rights organization, has promised to fight the major television networks over the ethnic makeup of fall offerings.

During a rousing speech the other day to nearly 3,000 members attending the 90th annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the group's president and CEO, Kweisi Mfume, said that of the 26 new prime-time shows slated for fall on ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX, not one has a minority, especially an African-American, as a leading star.

"This glaring omission is an outrage and a shameful display by network executives who are either clueless, careless or both," Mfume said. "When the television-viewing public sits down to watch the new prime-time shows scheduled for this

fall lineup, they will see a virtual white-wash in programming."

How does Mfume propose to fix this problem — one that I do not think needs urgent repair and one that diverts precious energy away from more pressing issues?

For starters, the NAACP will establish a watchdog arm in Tinseltown to monitor the TV and film industries. He said that, if meetings with network and advertising executives do not produce satisfaction, he may call for a boycott of these "highly segregated shows." Mfume's most exotic tactic would be pursuing civil action against these industries. Lawyers would base claims on the 1934 Federal Communications Act that makes the airwaves public property.

Mfume suggests that racism is to blame for the small number of blacks on prime-time TV.



**Bill Maxwell**  
Columnist

He is right — indirectly. Indeed, most advertising and programming bosses are white and air material that appeals to them. Mfume seems to have forgotten, however, that prime-time TV is showbiz and that showbiz is not about social and cultural crusades. It is about mega-bucks. Nielsen ratings. Market share.

The truth is that TV executives are not "clueless" or "careless." They know America. Surveys indicate that black shows, particularly sitcoms, and characters turn off most white viewers. With blacks constituting only 13 percent of the population and with only a tiny part of that number interested in network fare, network moguls do not see a natural need to create black shows. What is in it for them, when blacks flock to cable to see themselves?

I will bet that if the networks do what Mfume wants, African Americans will regret the long-term, unintended consequences. Our children watch three hours of TV a day. Enough already.

*Bill Maxwell is an editorial writer and columnist for the St. Petersburg Times. He can be reached on the Internet at [maxwell\(at\)sptimes.com](mailto:maxwell(at)sptimes.com).*

# Every reason to stand proud

SEATTLE — When I saw the title of the book, thoughts of a junior high conversation I overheard flooded my mind like a cascade rushing to meet calm waters.

It was an after-school discussion between one of Stanton College Preparatory's smartest, most popular ninth-graders and her best friend. It was also a discussion I wish I hadn't heard.

Sobbing uncontrollably in the first floor stairwell and slumped over in the arms of her friend, my schoolmate revealed her innermost secret.

"I hate being black," she cried, as she hiccuped. "I hate it! I hate it! I just wish I could die."

Immediately, my mouth fell open in shock, as I walked briskly away from the scene I wasn't supposed to see. After all, I had never thought of my pecan-brown skin as one to despise. I had always found pleasure in the complexion that honored the likeness of both my mother and father.

And besides, how could she complain, with her mocha-colored skin, near-white features and Lisa Bonet hair. White society would accept her more readily than they would me, a little black girl who could have easily played the role of "Penney" on "Good Times."

Now, I understood why my schoolmate chose to surround herself with only white friends and refused dates from our school's most handsome blacks. She disliked her blackness and anyone who reminded her of it.

Kind of like the characters detailed in Lawrence Otis Graham's "Our Kind of People," a book that chronicles the life of upper class blacks and their place in society. In a section of the book, Graham's great-grandmother, a fair-skinned black, sits on the shaded porch of their Martha Vineyard summer home, constantly warning her grandsons to stay out of the

sun, lest they get too dark.

"You boys stay out of that terrible sun,"

Great-grandmother Porter would say in a kindly, overprotective tone. "God knows you're dark enough already."

It's that type of negative emphasis on skin tone that has some people of color hate themselves. And it's because of that self-hatred Sandy Holman (who attended the Unity '99 journalism conference) saw it necessary to write, "Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?"

Penned in a mere 15 minutes, edited for hours, the 32-page book is the story of an African-American boy, Montsho, who questions the goodness of his black skin after seeing so many black things considered bad.

*"I like watching TV, but sometimes I'm sad because most white things are good and most black things are bad."*

*Black widow spiders are dangerous and quick. They have poison in their bites*

*that can make people sick. Tell me Grandpa, is everything black bad? I'm black. So, does that make me bad too?"*

It was that question from a little girl that prompted Holman, a former counselor for the North Sacramento School District, to write her book.

"There was a class having a discussion on slavery," Holman said. "And this little girl got really frustrated about it. Her teacher sent her to me. She said she didn't want to be black. That's when she asked the



Juana Jordan  
Columnist

question, 'Is everything black bad?'"

Holman said she would talk with the young girl, often giving her books that told stories of her culture.

"That's when I decided to write this," she said. "It was like a poem in my head and I needed to get it out. I wanted to use that title, because I believed kids could handle a honest, entertaining and healing book."

Healing indeed. In the short time the book has been on the market, Holman has received numerous responses from children familiar with its message:

*Dear Ms. Holman,  
"I really appreciated you coming in and telling all of us about how special we are. Before you came I used to be ashamed of the little bit of black I have in me. I got the black from my grandfather who died about two years before I was born. I never knew anything of my grandfather, but his name is Wade."*

It's in the wonderfully illustrated pages — designed by Lela Kometiani — Holman shares the story of her African heritage, passed down to her by her grandfather, Rufus Holman. It's in this book Montsho learns he comes from a history of great people.

And it's because of those same stories, Holman said she didn't find herself suffering from an identity crisis.

"My grandfather's belief was if you didn't know your history, your heritage would be lost," Holman said of the man who inspired the book but died before it was published. "He made me learn about Africa so that I would have a foundation and would not fear learning about another's culture."

And he made it possible for people of color to stand proud in our heritage. For that, we are thankful.

*Juana Jordan is Assignments Editor for The Valdosta Daily Times. She can be reached at 244-3400, ext. 254.*



# THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Tuesday, July 27, 1999

50 cents

## Minority farmers object to farm agent's firing

### Collier terminated following arrest for solicitation

By Tony Jenkins  
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — A group of minority farmers are upset over the termination of Small Farm Program Assistant Ed Collier and want him reinstated.

About 25 farmers gathered

Monday night at the Lowndes County Extension Office to discuss efforts to get Collier his job back. The group ended up agreeing to start a petition and to contact the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners for support.

Collier, who had been employed by the University of Georgia Extension Service for 15 years, helping farmers implement and improve their farm operations, was recently fired.

According to Extension Director John Baker, Collier was fired effective July 21 by action of his

**"What we want to know is what are they going to do to provide this service to the farmers as it was before."**

**Ulysses Marable**  
Lowndes County Area Adult Farmers

superiors. He deferred further comment to the district director, Lamar Martin, South District Extension Service.

"He is no longer employed with us," Baker said. "This process has been going on for a couple of months, since the situ-

ation occurred April 17."

Baker confirmed the action against Collier was related to Collier's arrest on a charge of soliciting a prostitute. Further details about that case were not immediately available Monday.

Baker said the incident came

to his attention April 19, the Monday following the weekend arrest.

"It was first brought to my attention because it was heard over the radio," Baker said.

But at Monday's meeting, farmers showed little concern about the April incident, saying it was unrelated to Collier's job performance. The farmers said Collier has proven himself as a wealth of agricultural advice.

"What we want to know is

Please see **FIRING**, page 3A

what are they going to do to provide this service to the farmers as it was before," said Ulysses Marable, a member of Lowndes County Area Adult Farmers.

Fifth-generation farmer Donald Crawford said Collier was someone who could be called on day or night for help.

Crawford dismissed the charges against Collier as "a personal issue."

"He would come out and give us advice on what chemicals to use for insects or answer any question we had," Crawford said. "We need him back."

Farmer Eddie Tucker said without Collier, the farmers are like lost sheep.

To contact reporter Tony Jenkins, please call 244-3400, ext. 246.

# 'Ragtime' racism still alive

On stage, Alton Fitzgerald White plays Coalhouse Walker, a man who is harassed by a fireman simply because he's black. The play, "Ragtime," takes place nearly a century ago. But as White recently learned, the racial issues it tackles are still very much alive at the turn of the millennium.

The incident occurred in White's New York City apartment building earlier this month. Dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, White was leaving his building to go to the bank and then the gym before heading to the Broadway theater where "Ragtime" is playing.

But White never made it to the theater that night. When he saw some police officers outside the front door, he let them in. They returned this courtesy by arresting White, three other black men and two Hispanic men. The police, it turned out, were looking for two Hispanic men who were reported to have brought drugs and weapons in the building.

"The neighbors were vouching for us," White told the New York Times. They told the police, "He's starring on Broadway."

It didn't matter. White was handcuffed and led out of his

building. At the 33rd Precinct station house, he was strip-searched and held for five hours, missing his performance. "I can hardly remember

my name," he told the Times the next day. "They took us out of the cells and made us strip and squat." He said he was thinking, "You don't care. You don't care if I am homeless or starring on Broadway. The second time they pulled me out for questioning, a 35-year-old man, all I could do was sit there and cry out of frustration."

The most chilling aspect of White's ordeal is what it says about the stories we haven't read. Because he is a Broadway star, White's wrongful arrest made it to the B section of most New York City newspapers. But what about all those black men who aren't stars? How many of them have been similarly humiliated?

Far too many, says Pierre



Sara Eckel

Columnist

San, secretary general of Amnesty International, who told the Ethnic Newswatch that this kind of racial profiling is commonplace in the United States. "One police officer was asked, 'How do you describe a suspect?' He said, 'A young black male in a white neighborhood.' That's the profiling of the criminal suspects," he says.

White says that sitting in prison made him wonder how many other innocent black men must be in jail. It's a good question, especially now that DNA testing has launched the release of a string of African-American men, men who surely would have died in prison were this technology not available.

When White was finally released, a police officer apologized to him and explained that he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But White demurred. He was not in the wrong place. He was in his home.

*Sara Eckel's column is distributed by the Newspaper Enterprise Association.*

*Send comments to the author in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at [saraeum@aol.com](mailto:saraeum@aol.com).*

# Habitat plans to close on number of homes in coming weeks

By Brian Lawson  
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — The local Habitat for Humanity chapter plans to enforce labor requirements before granting home ownership, scale back its building schedule and close on a number of homes in the coming weeks.

During a board meeting Monday evening, the Valdosta-Lowndes County Habitat affiliate also received a performance review from its regional office.

The review noted the affiliate had done a lot of things well, including being very active in building houses.

But the review also found the affiliate:

- Lacked a clear policy for transferring title to residents.
- Should insist residents fulfill "sweat equity" labor commitments.
- Needed to establish a family support committee to work with residents in Habitat homes.
- Needs to improve its fund raising efforts.

The board took several steps to address those issues Monday, revising its sweat equity policy, reestablishing the family support committee and establishing a closing committee.

Glen Barton and Steve Bissonette of the regional office noted the affiliate was at a stage where it needed to improve its "organizational structure" in order to move forward and improve the effectiveness of its operation.

The regional representatives also emphasized the need for the affiliate to focus on tightening internal procedures and policies before embarking on another building campaign.

The affiliate was urged by Clive Rainey, director of the 21st Century Challenge for Habitat for Humanity International, to

Continued from Page 1A

## Habitat

view its problems as a "great opportunity" to build on what has already been accomplished.

"You have nothing to apologize for, you've done nothing wrong," Rainey said. "You're doing a good job, you have some great collaboration with other organizations going and now it's important to move to the next level."

Rainey helped develop the sweat equity concept, which requires each Habitat family to work on their own home and volunteer on other projects to become eligible for ownership. He urged the board to back off its plans to charge \$10 per hour for unfulfilled sweat equity requirements. The local affiliate had intended to close on up to 14 homes, despite some families lacking the required 500 sweat equity hours. In those cases, it planned to charge the \$10 rate for every outstanding hour.

Rainey said to allow families to pay off their hours was to violate a key Habitat principle and he was supported by three Habitat residents in attendance Monday. Each of the residents noted they had fulfilled their requirements and suggested it was unfair to close on houses where residents had not.

The board agreed and formed its new Family Support Committee to consider expanding programs to allow families to work off hours. The committee will also determine a deadline for completion of the hours and subsequent closing on those houses. If the hours are unfulfilled at the deadline, the residents are expected to be evicted.

Ralph Jackson, executive director of the local affiliate, said

there were five resident families slated to receive the titles to their homes who had equity hours outstanding. He said outstanding hours ranged from 67.5 hours to 240 hours.

The board has also formed a "closing committee" charged with reviewing relevant pricing and paperwork in order to close on houses. The affiliate hasn't closed on a home in more than four years.

Jackson noted seven other families in the Sweet 16 Neighborhood near Hudson Dockett had fulfilled their equity obligations and six of those were being considered for closing. Three other families, including one in Hahira, another on Pendleton Avenue and a third in Valdosta, have met the requirements as well, and are on track for closing. No timetable has been given for the closings.

To contact reporter Brian Lawson, please call 244-3460, ext. 239.

# Nonprofits & Technology



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Details, *page 14*

## IN THE NEWS:

Minorities face digital divide.

Stories, *page 4*  
Opinion, *page 6*

PAGE 4

# Study finds racial disparity in tech ownership

BY EUGENE FORD

**B**lacks and Hispanics still lag far behind whites in personal computer and telephone ownership and on-line access, according to a study by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

White households are more than twice as likely to own computers as are black or Hispanic households, even though minority ownership has risen substantially since 1994, says the study, "Falling Through the Net II: New Data on the Digital Divide."

The study used data from the October 1997 and November 1994 census reports.

In fact, statistics indicate that the racial divide between personal computer ownership has grown since 1994.

In 1997, the difference in PC-ownership between white and black households was 21.5 percent – a rise of 4.7 percent since 1994.

The disparity in PC-ownership rates between white and Hispanic households, 14.8 percentage points in 1994, grew to 21.4 percent in 1997.

Moreover, researchers found there is still a significant racial divide in telephone ownership. While 95.9 percent of white households own telephones, 86 percent of black households and 86.5 percent of Hispanic households own them.

Researchers found this figure to be espe-

cially stratified at incomes below \$15,000: 90.3 percent for whites, 76.3 percent for blacks and 78.4 percent for Hispanics.

**White households are more than twice as likely to own computers as are black or Hispanic households.**

"This study exposes a growing problem in our economy, one that must be taken seriously: too many Americans are not able to take part in the growing digital economy," says U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley. "The growing trend of information 'haves' and 'have

nots' is alarming."

"We must continue to reach out to under-

served communities," he says, "and aggressively work with community and business leaders to seek solutions to this problem."

The study "underscores President Clinton's commitment to connect all American's to the information infrastructure," says Larry Irving, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and Administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

## BOOKMARK

Falling Through the Net II: New Data on the Digital Divide  
[www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/net2](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/net2)