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When do we finally move beyond color?

I hadn't seen the practice of such a tradition since I stopped covering news in Toombs and Montgomery counties. Even then, I was shocked — especially since a school principal was fired for trying to change it — that it was something school systems in the '90s continued to uphold.

It wasn't until this past week I was reintroduced to this ugly remnant of the Old South. Right there, on the front of an area newspaper stood Dooly County's homecoming royalty. Only there were four of them — Black King Jimdrikus Sutton, White King Ryan Godfrey, White Queen Heather Thombley and Black Queen Latakia Daniels.

"What is this?" I asked a reporter, who had brought the photo to my attention. "You mean to tell me, this is still going on?"

When these students look back in their yearbook on their high school experience — in color photos — it'll display how they were distinguished by the color of their skin.

I can see the reunion now. "Hey, I know you, you were the White King of our homecoming that year." Forget that his

name was Ryan Godfrey.

It's hard for me to believe this, knowing that more than 30 years ago segregation was ended in this country and in 54 days we'll all be welcoming in the Year 2000.

When I saw the photo, for a moment I thought I had been transported into the twilight zone.

No such luck.

Arney Bryant, principal of Dooly County, assured me my eyes weren't deceiving me. The school does indeed practice the racially segregated social function — one I was almost sure he

would be embarrassed by when I inquired about it. He wasn't.

"We try as much as we can to have student involvement," Bryant said. "And this is

what the students have chosen. We try to reflect that of the community."

The comment took me for a loop as I wondered was it really the student body's idea or the idea of parents afraid of change.

It reminded me of an incident when I was smaller and a man asked me what was my favorite football team. I responded, "the Pittsburgh Steelers."

"Aww, you only like them be-

cause your mother likes them."

While I wouldn't admit it at the time, he was right. I was only familiar with the team I had grown up hearing about. It wasn't until I got older, away from the wings of my parents, that I began to develop my own mind set, rallying for a team I deemed better than the Steel Curtain.

Bryant said because his school is 80 percent black, there had been concern whites would not get a fair shot at being voted on the homecoming court.

While the point may be valid, it's one I don't buy. Many school systems with similar ethnic enrollment numbers have shown how the one-king, one-queen system works.

Take Lowndes High — a majority white high school that saw its first black crowned Miss LHS last year and black homecoming king and queen crowned this year. "We haven't had a problem with the way it's done," said Ann Rodgers, LHS principal.

Neither has Valdosta High, where a majority of its student

population is black.

"I know we haven't done (the dual queen-king system) in over 17 years," said Charles Bonner, VHS principal. "The student body president is white. And through the years, we've had both blacks and whites voted into positions. Kids tend to vote for who they like."

My point exactly. They vote for the person, based on their popularity and personality. Most can care less what color they are.

An article a few weeks ago in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* addressed this exact issue. East Coweta High, some 40 miles south of Atlanta, ended their three-decade practice — one students found embarrassing and backward — this year.

"I think that's how it should have been all the time," said Krista Kneuer, a senior at the school who was on the homecoming court and is white. "If everybody is supposed to be equal, then there shouldn't be two queens."

The students lobbied for the change, taking polls in the student newspaper.

Some 64 percent of them agreed the system should be abolished.

"Our school is so culturally diverse ... that that way just wouldn't work anymore," said school newspaper editor Jillian Brogan. "To put people in a cat-



Juana Jordan
Columnist

egory because of their race is just awful."

For educators to continue to perpetuate this is a disservice to the students they teach. We are living in a world where we, in order to survive, must learn how to live with people of different ethnic groups. So why not try it in a more liberal setting — in school, where new ideas are cultivated.

I'm amazed how we're able to talk about the Civil Rights Movement and the integration of schools, but yet continue a segregated practice within them. This system makes as much sense as crowning someone the Fat King or Skinny Queen.

At some point and time, those of us who know better, have to show the way.

A child isn't going to know whether he likes the taste of green beans until he tries them. A student body isn't going to know the one-king, one-queen system works until they try it.

It's time we move beyond this. It's time we shed our ignorance and open our eyes to possibilities, instead of another person's color.

It worked for the Miss America pageant.

Juana Jordan is the Assignments Editor for the Valdosta Daily Times. She can be reached at 244-1880, ext. 254. E-mail at juana.jordan@Thomnews.com

Hiding from race

"You can run, but you can't hide," world heavyweight champion Joe Louis said long ago.

I do not know the original context of these words, but I know for sure that they apply to today's black Republicans — especially Messrs. Ward Connerly, Alan Keyes and Clarence Thomas, who traipse around the country pretending that race does not matter, that their skin color has nothing to do with their success.

Connerly is the California businessman and member of the Board of Regents who persuaded voters in California and the state of Washington to scrap affirmative action in college admissions and in awarding government contracts. He is leading a similar effort in Florida. Keyes, a talk show host, is a perennial presidential candidate. Thomas is the one black person on the U.S. Supreme Court.

If you recall, Thomas' real colored self broke through — in all of its naked rage — after some Senate Judiciary Committee members aggressively questioned him in 1991 about accusations of sexual misconduct leveled against him by Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill.

Thomas lost it, calling the content and manner of the interrogation "a high-tech lynching." Why did he use the word "lynching"? Because, under pressure, he became fully conscious of being a black man, of being out of place, of being a member of a group whose history is a chronicle of the gallows — both literally and symbolically.

Since joining the nation's highest court, Thomas — the designated black justice — has been hostile toward nearly everything in the interest of

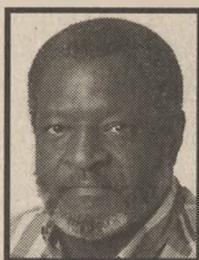
blacks that has come before him. He is trying his damndest to be an "ex-coloured man."

A few weeks ago, while playing up to a group of white Republicans in Florida, Connerly let his real "coloured" soul spring loose. He was angry about comments in an editorial about his Indian, Irish, French and African-American ancestry. He called the comments "very demeaning of my heritage. ... I think that's racist. Your damn paper gets away with it because I'm a black."

Is this the same Connerly who paints a colorblind America? Indeed, he is. He also is the same Connerly whose friend, then-California state legislator Pete Wilson, got him a job in housing and community development in the administration of then-Gov. Ronald Reagan. And guess how Connerly got rich? Through affirmative action. His consulting firm is a byproduct of affirmative action.

Following the recent Republican debate in New Hampshire, Keyes, the only black person in the GOP hunt for the White House, attacked the media for not taking his campaign seriously: "I often win these debates, and every time I stand before you press folks, you have no questions. I find it kind of amazing. At some point ... one has to start to wonder

"The people of this country have gotten over their racial sickness. I don't know that you



Bill Maxwell
Columnist

folks have. I think that merit means nothing to you because you can't look past race. And I think I'm deadly sick of it."

Needless to say, the journalists shook their heads in wonderment. What Keyes failed to see was that his race is not the reason his campaign is ignored. Journalists do not cover him because few voters see him as a viable candidate.

In speaking of Connerly, Tony Welch, an African American and director of communications for the Florida Democratic Party, aptly sums up this whole sorry trend of denial among black Republicans. His comments are worth quoting at length:

"Every breath Mr. Connerly breathes as the head of this petition drive is a breath of hypocrisy. You have to ask, who would listen to Mr. Connerly were he white? The answer: nobody. This only works with a black man leading the charge. Connerly was recruited for his current role because of the color of his skin.

"It's interesting to note that they're willing to abandon their talk of the colorblind society when discrimination in some form hits them. Then, it's discrimination. It seems to me they wear black just fine when it can do them some good. Professionally, they've carved out a niche for themselves — the black and anti-black. It's good pay. You just have to avoid mirrors."

In the end, Thomas, Connerly and Keyes can run, but they cannot hide from their "colouredness."

Bill Maxwell is an editorial writer and columnist for the St. Petersburg Times. E-mail maxwell@sptimes.com. Distributed by Scripps Howard News Service.

Students from 60 countries attend high school where no one is a minority

By Dan Hulbert

THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

LILBURN, Ga. — Up to the ceiling, at least, the student center of Meadowcreek High School looks like Anyschool, U.S.A. Clean brick walls and orange molded-plastic chairs lined up neatly at lunch tables fit the archetype of a middle-class, Gwinnett County school. On one wall, between Fruitopia vending machines, 10-foot-high, hand-lettered signs give the rosters of the Mustangs football team and cheerleading squads.

But above these familiar landmarks, the flags of 60 nations hang from the ceiling. They mean more to the students than an exercise in geography. For each flag, at least a few students can point and say, "That's where I was born." Which makes Meadowbrook one of the two or three most diverse schools in Georgia.

"My mother keeps telling me

I need to see other countries," says Sergio Lozano, 16, a native of Colombia. "And I tell her, all I have to do is go to school."

Meadowcreek is 26 percent white, 35 percent black, 20 percent Hispanic and 16 percent Asian. But those cold stats don't really describe the school's diversity; there are scores of students of Indian, Pakistani and Saudi Arabian backgrounds, for example, who list themselves as white. Taking in a Meadowcreek hallway between classes is a bit like strolling through a cheerful port city on market day. You see clusters of chattering friends where three or even all four of those major racial groups are represented.

The Valdosta Daily Times

2A — Friday, Nov. 12, 1999

► **OUR NATION**

City's racial divisions exposed

DECATUR, Ill. (AP) — Fights at football games are nothing new in this blue-collar town, where one bumper sticker reads, "My Kid Beat Up Your Honor Student."

But a fight nearly two months ago — and the resulting expulsions of several black students — has stirred Decatur like nothing before, bringing the Rev. Jesse Jackson to town for days of negotiation and protest. In one sense, it's a dispute over whether the punishment fit the offense. But in a town already struggling with racial issues, the debate has been framed in terms of black and white.

"My neighborhood has been turned into a battlefield," said Tammy West, a white Decatur resident and mother of two students at Eisenhower High School, where the Sept. 17 fight took place during a game against MacArthur High.

Jackson led several thousand people on a protest march Sunday and brought a smaller group to Eisenhower's doorstep in the days that followed, prompting officials to close Decatur's three high schools over safety concerns.



excalibur@moody.af.mil

Moody Air Force Base, Ga.

Novel

Commander: zero tolerance to racial incidents

By Senior Airman Nickol Houston

347th Wing Public Affairs

Sometime between the hours of 10:30 a.m. Sunday and approximately 7 a.m. Monday morning, a 336th Recruiting Squadron trailer located at 8219 Knights Way was unlawfully entered and targeted by vandalism, according to Master Sgt. David Fawcett, 347th Security Forces Squadron Investigations.

An individual coming into work Monday morning called the Law Enforcement desk at approximately 7 a.m., stating someone had broken into the building and spray painted a racial slur in gray spray paint on an inside wall.

According to Fawcett, the slur was spray-painted across an individual's framed certificates and photos and the lettering was approximately 2 feet high.

"Incidents of this nature will not be tolerated by the wing and the Air Force," said Brig. Gen. Gene Renuart, 347th Wing commander.

According to Fawcett, security forces investigation personnel arrived and took paint samples, scoured the area for fingerprints, and have requested assistance from the Office of Special Investigations

Polygraph Center.

"Within the past six months, we've had an 80 percent solve-rate for incidences of vandalism," said Fawcett. "We are pretty confident we'll catch whoever is involved."

"This is an isolated and rare occurrence," said Staff Sgt. Mark Ducksworth, 347th Wing Military Equal Opportunity and Treatment office. "I've been here for more than two years and have never had something of this sort come through our office."

The MEO office has many proactive ways to ensure there is no tolerance for these types of incidents.

"If commanders want, someone from our office will go to the squadron and teach a class or seminar on Military Equal Opportunity and Treatment," said Ducksworth.

"We also brief during the newcomer's orientation, first duty station and during Airman Leadership School classes on these issues."

"Whoever is involved can expect to be punished to the fullest extent of the law," added Renuart.

The MEO office also has a website people can visit to learn more about MEO, added Ducksworth. It can be reached on the Moody homepage.

President lagging in race report

WASHINGTON (AP) — After more than a year, President Clinton has yet to deliver his promised report on the status of race relations in America, and one of the authors of a working draft cites possible White House concerns that some proposals are too strongly worded.



Bill Clinton

The report has circulated at the White House in draft form since the spring, when the authors delivered it to Clinton. The president planned to spend

the summer putting the report "in his own voice," as one aide said, and release it in September.

Instead, the 200-page draft languished for months and now is undergoing an extensive rewrite. The White House no longer tries to estimate when it will be completed.

"The White House staff is redoubling its efforts to help the president finish this project," said Maria Echaveste, the deputy chief of staff. "Ultimately, it has to be the president's words and the president's vision, but everyone is committed to getting it done."

The report, written by Harvard University law professor Christopher Edley and Clinton speechwriter Terry Edmonds, was built around information

compiled by Clinton's race advisory board during the one-year national dialogue on race. The race board completed its work in September 1998.

The board said Clinton should continue the dialogue on race through a permanent presidential council. It also called for a "multimedia" campaign to teach Americans how they developed their beliefs about race and institutionalized them through the notion of "white privilege."

Edley, who wrote Clinton's "mend it, don't end it" defense of affirmative action, said he believes the draft was bogged down by "strong disagreements at the staff level concerning tone and certain policies." He said it also is probable that Clinton simply did not like it.

Edley also said the issue "requires his sustained attention and it may have been unrealistic to think he could have done it while in office."

Neither Edley nor Echaveste would discuss the contents of the report. Edmonds did not return phone calls.

Two other White House officials familiar with the report, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a proposal in the draft that dealt with racial profiling typified the philosophical disputes that have hampered the project.

The draft suggested that Clinton issue an order barring all federal law enforcement agencies from engaging in racial profiling. But some aides felt such an action was too strong and too broad.

SOUTH GEORGIA SUNDAY

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Sunday, Nov. 14, 1999

Valdosta, Ga.

Third race forum digging into key topics

Staff reports

Valdosta Project Change, The Valdosta Daily Times and Valdosta State University will sponsor a third race issues forum at 7 p.m. Thursday at New Life Missionary Baptist Church, 1401 Cypress St.

Continuing the theme, "Do We Really Want to Talk About Race?", the third forum strives to complete discussions begun during the second gathering in August. Using questions accumulat-

ed during the inaugural forum in April, audience members will again break into teams and explore topics that include:

■ Affirmative action and hiring practices.

■ Media-generated perceptions of African Americans.

■ The background and philosophy that frames a discussion of race.

■ A scrutiny of success by African Americans and the obligation to one's race.

■ The voice of prejudice.

■ What action can be taken in the local community.

LaRonnie Williams and Dr. Linda Bennett Elder, members of the Project Change Community Empowerment Committee, will serve as moderators for the program.

Thursday's effort aims to push those attending toward projects or actions that will improve race relations in the community, said Frank Morman, Valdosta Project Change director.

"Most (breakout) groups

couldn't address all the issues concerning their topic during the second meeting," Morman said. "Hopefully, we can bring closure to this particular segment and find a direction for continued forums next year."

As was the format in August, facilitators will lead group discussions, record group members' thoughts and ideas, and then report back when the larger group reconvenes at the end of the evening.

While the first forums were

held on the VSU campus, Morman said Community Empowerment Committee members felt strongly that this final gathering of 1999 needed to be held in another part of Valdosta. "They wanted to move out into the community and bring more people into the discussion," Morman said. Larry Manning, pastor of New Life Missionary Baptist, offered the church as a meeting place.

The forum is open to the public.

Diversity needs rethinking

On Labor Day of this year, Jesse Jackson, speaking at Riverside Church in New York City, said that economic and educational divisions in America are more important than racial divisions.

In October, Bill Bradley noted that 36 percent of America's poor children are white, some 30 percent are black, and 22 percent are Latino. Accordingly, he called for "a multiracial coalition that would rekindle the same kind of purposefulness as the civil rights revolution in the 1960s."

On the other hand, Bill Gates, judging race and ethnicity instead of class to be the main fault line in the bedrock of the nation, has created a \$1 billion scholarship fund for minority students to be administered over 20 years by the Negro College Fund along with Hispanic and Native American college funds.

As Jesse Jackson (who has been to Appalachia) might tell Mr. Gates, there are plenty of white kids who are disadvantaged by class.

Those class divisions can also be found within racial and ethnic groups.

Harvard professor Gary Orfield notes that as public schools have become more segregated again, schools that are more than 90 percent black and Hispanic are 11 times more likely to have heavy concentrations of poverty than schools that are mostly white. Significantly, Orfield adds that poverty in those schools grows worse as much of the black middle

class moves to the suburbs.

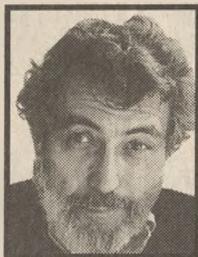
In 1974, when a federal court ordered busing to integrate Boston's public schools, black students from Roxbury were sent to working-class South Boston schools to the rage of many of the white residents of that area.

But little notice was paid to the fact that the previously nearly all-white South Boston High School had a very low percentage of graduates who went on to college. Their parents did not recognize that they shared a class grievance with the black parents from Roxbury.

Some of the kids at the bottom do rise, however. And in those states where race-preference in college admissions has been ended -- by the courts or by ballot -- factors of class, and not only SAT scores, are increasingly being taken into account by college and university admission offices.

They look for applicants who have overcome poverty or whose parents did not graduate from high school.

Lani Guinier, now a Harvard University law professor, noted in the New York Times two years ago ("The Real Bias in Higher Education") that "with-in every racial and ethnic



Nat Hentoff

Columnist

group, test scores go up with family income," and too often become the main determinant of admission.

Guinier cited a Harvard study of graduates over three decades which found that students with low Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and blue-collar backgrounds tended to be more successful -- with success defined by income, community involvement and professional satisfaction.

"This suggests," wrote Guinier, "that a student's drive to succeed -- along with an opportunity to do so -- may be a better indicator of future success than test scores.... (T)he challenge to public education institutions is to rethink how they admit everyone."

Accordingly, the goal of diversity does need rethinking.

The University of Washington Law School in Seattle prides itself on pressing for diversity, and once rejected a white welfare mother whose scores were good though not outstanding.

She was denied admission, said the school, because she would not contribute "significantly" to the diversity of the class -- not being "a member of a racial or ethnic group subject to discrimination."

This welfare recipient was later admitted to Harvard University Law School, which had a more inclusive definition of diversity.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the rest of the Bill of Rights.

A tall task for Jesse Jackson

Once again America has witnessed an event that shows how divided we are along cultural and racial lines. This revelation was delivered to us courtesy of the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who is either the peace-maker or self-promoter par excellence.

I'm talking about last week's brouhaha over the expulsion of a half-dozen hoodlums (my word) from a Decatur, Ill., high school because they caused a riot after a football game.

At first Rev. Jackson pushed his way to the front of the crowd to demand that the rioters' sentences be reduced from two-year expulsions to immediate reinstatement and psychological counseling. While he didn't exactly get what he wanted, Jackson did succeed in cowling local school board officials (many of whom are black) into reducing the punishment from two years to one.

At first he claimed victory. Then America witnessed a videotape of the incident, which took place in mid September. It was almost as horrible as the videotape of the now infamous Rodney King beating.

If you haven't seen it, the camera looms as students punch, kick, step on top of and otherwise brutalize peaceful onlookers in the stadium stands. For the life of me, I could not understand why even Jesse Jackson would want to stand up for such gratuitously

violent behavior.

Jackson's response was, according to media reports, "If there's some hell in them, let's educate the hell out of them."

Then I appeared as the only white on a mostly African American talk show on one of our local public TV stations in Washington, D.C. I was on a panel with three other middle-class journalists like myself. But I was the only one to call the violence indefensible. To a person they agreed that while some form of punishment was called for and the violence was not to be condoned, it is usual and normal for kids to riot after a football game.

One of the journalists, whom I respect greatly, said that when he was growing up, African American sports teams who competed against one another would routinely rumble after the games. "We had a saying: if we didn't beat them in the fourth quarter, we'd beat them in the fifth quarter," he said, meaning after the game was over, the losing team would routinely reward the winners



Bonnie Erbe
Columnist

with a severe beating.

Never having been in a fist-fight or riot myself, I find any form of violence repulsive, reprehensible and worthy of immediate and severe punishment. My African American friends considered me more than a bit naive and clearly out of touch with the real world.

Obviously there are African Americans who are raised without violence in their homes or in their schools. And there are plenty of whites who brutalize each other in private and in public. But the impression I came away with was that violence was acceptable, even expected in the culture of the other three journalists, and it was shocking, unexpected and unacceptable in mine.

Rev. Jesse Jackson has repeatedly embarrassed the U.S. government, making peace with and freeing prisoners held by foreign dictators. Most recently, he freed three U.S. servicemen held by Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic.

This one man has bridged gaps that not even the muscle and might of the world's greatest power could close. But Jackson's got an even bigger chasm to traverse if he holds among his goals helping blacks and whites understand each other.

Bonnie Erbe, host of the PBS program "To the Contrary," writes this column for Scripps Howard News Service. E-mail bonnieerbe@CompuServe.com.

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Thursday, Nov. 18, 1999

www.sgaonline.com

Third race issues forum planned for tonight

Staff reports

Valdosta Project Change, The Valdosta Daily Times and Valdosta State University will sponsor a third race issues forum at 7 p.m. today at New Life Missionary Baptist Church, 1401 Cypress St.

Continuing the theme "Do We Really Want to Talk About Race?", the third forum strives to complete discussions begun during the second gathering in August. Using questions accumulated during the inaugural forum in April, audience members will again break into teams and ex-

plore topics that include:

- Affirmative action and hiring practices.
- Media-generated perceptions of African Americans.
- The background and philosophy that frame a discussion of race.
- A scrutiny of success by

African-Americans and the obligation to one's race.

- The voice of prejudice.
- What action can be taken in the local community.

LaRonnie Williams and Dr. Linda Bennett Elder, members of the Project Change Community Empowerment Committee, will

serve as moderators for the program.

As in August, facilitators will lead group discussions, record group members' thoughts and ideas, and then report back when the larger group reconvenes at the end of the evening. The forum is open to the public.

The Valdosta Daily Times

4A — Thursday, Nov. 18, 1999

▶ YOUR OPINIONS

Let racism die

I'm responding to Bill Maxwell's column in the Nov. 11 edition of The Valdosta Daily Times in which he criticizes black leaders Ward Connerly, Alan Keyes and Clarence Thomas for not being race-conscious enough.

I know it's a truth many people don't want to hear, but those in leadership positions have a moral obligation to embrace the concerns of all people, regardless of race, religion and sex; in short, all members of the human community.

They are not elected or appointed to promote the cause of one group over another. Government should not be run like a football game made up of opposing sides. It may be that the leaders he criticizes have grasped the fact that racism itself would die out if we didn't constantly work so hard to revive it.

Matt Flumerfelt
Valdosta

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Friday, Nov. 19, 1999

www.sgaonline.com

Friday, Nov. 19, 1999 — 3A

Closing in on racism

Affirmative Action, stereotypes addressed in third race forum

By Brian Lawson
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — Area residents squared off and came together Thursday in addressing questions about racial stereotypes, Affirmative Action and the roadblocks to community understanding during the third local race issues forum.

A crowd of about 50 gathered in small groups at New Life Missionary Baptist Church to consider a number of questions including media portrayals of crime suspects, how the term "race" originated and whether university admissions standards have been raised to keep minorities out.

LaRonnica Williams, one of the event's co-hosts, described the weighty discussions going on in the racially mixed groups.

"I saw brows furrowed, heads nodding, looks of bewilderment and friendships starting," she said.

The forum was sponsored by Valdosta Project Change, The Valdosta Daily Times and Valdosta State University.

Speakers in both the large and small groups emphasized the value of dialogue and the need to fo-



Reverend George Bennett, third from right, leads a discussion Thursday night during the third "Do We Really Want to Talk About Race?" forum held at New Life Missionary Baptist Church. Joining in the discussion are, from left, Tangela Fiffie, Janice Hines, Julie Armstrong, Franklin Williams, Tom Hallock and George Rhynes.

cus on individuals rather than members of racial groups.

The group considering questions about the "voice of prejudice" discussed how a person's "comfort zone" often leaves school cafeterias, classrooms and other social gatherings filled with only people of the same color.

One of the men participating in the discussion said conversa-

tions about race are often made more involved than necessary. Rather than continue to be divided by history, he said, we should take the present problems and address those directly, between individuals.

"I think we complicate it too much, trying to avoid saying this word or that one," he said. "If I don't like you because you are white, I should be able to tell you.

I'm not talking about the past with you, but right now. The best way to solve a problem here is to allow me to tell you why I don't like you. And, for you to tell me what you don't like about me because I'm black."

One small group agreed on the value of Affirmative Action, but was unsure how to make it work

Please see RACISM, page 3A

Continued from page 1A

Racism: Media portrayals often result of lack of diversity

on the local, small business level.

"There were suggestions about going to the streets, knocking on doors and asking people what it would take to see more minorities hired and promoted and we talked about a survey," said group member Cissy Burnette. "But we agreed the problem is we have to change our hearts. The most segregated place is still our churches. Until we get the message of Jesus in our hearts, we'll still be facing problems."

A group considering the background and philosophy which frame race discussions noted how race was a concept developed in places like colonial Africa by the new power structure for economic reasons.

Consideration of media stereotypes and the role of successful African Americans found that media portrayals are often the result of a lack of diversity in a newsroom or network programming center.

"Minorities make up 11 percent of the newsroom staffs across America," said group facilitator Juana Jordan. "A smaller number are employed in decision-making roles. Many times it is difficult for the media to

portray minorities in positive situations because they don't have people working there who can give them another perspective. So they gravitate to their own background. And portray people who look like them."

The group charged with outlining action in the local community considered stories that illustrate the lingering problems with racial attitudes locally.

One young man, an African American student at Valdosta High School, said he complained to a teacher Thursday about a bomb threat and its disruptive effect on learning.

The teacher, a white woman, was said to reply, "One of your friends is making those bomb threats."

The young man was encouraged by the group to go back to the teacher and tell her how her remarks made him feel.

Another woman in the group recalled an African American job applicant appearing at her workplace and turning in a solid, polished resume. After the young woman left, the narrator recalled her boss throwing away the application. The woman said she felt too shy to speak up.

Participants in the forum

were encouraged to fill out two cards with a brief description of what they would do to end racism. One card was left for each person to take home and the other, placed in an envelope. That card will be mailed back to them next year as a reminder from Project Change.

To contact reporter Brian Lawson, please call 244-3400, ext. 238

Black businesses see decline in South Africa

President blames fall on racism

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — President Thabo Mbeki said Saturday that racism remains rampant in post-apartheid South Africa and indicated it is stunting the development of a black business class.

In a speech to black business executives, Mbeki noted that newly-released figures show that black control of companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange has fallen from 9.6 percent to 6.8 percent in the past year — the first drop since statistics were first kept in 1996. He said a strong black business class must be created “to eradicate racism in our country.”

“These figures make the important point that five years after the arrival of the democratic order, we have not made much progress, and may very well be marching backward,” Mbeki told the Black Management Forum. “Clearly, something is not right.”

He also lashed out at blacks who “lend their faces to white owners of capital so that the latter can appear to satisfy black

empowerment requirements” and whose sole aim is to enrich themselves.

“They believe that the first charge on the corporate revenues is not the expansion of the business (and) therefore the economy, but the acquisition of more personal wealth such as a grand house, a grand car and a grand salary,” Mbeki said.

The figures released this week by McGregor’s Who Owns Whom put a cloud over what had been a sunny economic picture for black-owned companies.

In just four years, the value of shares of black-controlled companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange had skyrocketed from \$800 million dollars to \$9.8 billion, BusinessMap, a research group, said last April. The percentage dropped for this first time over the past year.

But the new survey, reported in Business Day newspaper of Johannesburg, blamed the downturn on “some questionable governance and the inevitable cost of a steep learning curve,” rather than on racism.

Weed and Seed reports progress

Staff reports

VALDOSTA — Positive reports continued from neighborhood representatives participating in Monday's Weed and Seed meeting.

Hollie Williams, neighborhood representative for Area 1, said residents were pleased with the community response to last month's Make a Difference Day.

Williams said resident concerns about substandard housing continue, but there has been a significant number of abandoned and substandard houses

torn down in recent months.

Richard Joyner, Valdosta's substandard housing inspector, said there have been 29 structures torn down since October.

He said Municipal Court prosecutions have resulted in a number of fines and compelled owners to repair or pay to tear down the structures.

Joyce Lewis, representative for Area 2, said there has been a reduction in speeding cars and people loitering in her neighborhood.

The steering committee will also consider how to disburse

about \$8,000 in funds for various programs. Nearly \$20,000 in subgrantee applications presented to the committee will be reviewed in the coming weeks.

A committee has been formed to evaluate the performance of Executive Director Jeremiah Lawton.

The review comes on the heels of a consultant's report outlining Weed and Seed's efforts over the past year. Lawton said he welcomes the review and is looking forward to considering additional ways to improve the program.

Nation

Cohen: Military must do more to end racism

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary William Cohen called for a military-wide review of conduct on Tuesday after a Pentagon study said up to 75 percent of blacks and other ethnic minorities reported experiencing racially offensive behavior.

At the same time, a companion study indicated the percentage of minority and women officers had more than doubled in 20 years.

Cohen, in a letter to service chiefs, said the survey on race relations, the most extensive ever taken by a government agency, should be used as a guide "as we work to improve our processes and practices."

"There is no place for racism in our society," Cohen told a Pentagon news conference. "There is certainly no place for it in the military."

The 296-page congressionally mandated survey was conducted in late 1996 and early 1997. It was mailed to 76,754 active duty enlisted Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard members and officers. More than 44,000 were returned.

The report indicated that racial minorities in uniform remain more pessimistic than whites about their chances for advancement.

Seventy-five percent of blacks and 67 percent of Hispanics said they had experienced

racially offensive behavior in the 12 months before the survey was taken, compared with 62 percent for whites.

Even though the military prides itself on moving against discrimination, major differences remain between whites' and minorities' perceptions of progress, the survey said.

For example, while half of white service members believed investigations into racially offensive conduct were thorough, only 38 percent of blacks and 39 percent of Hispanics felt that way.

Some 18 percent of blacks and 13 percent of Hispanics said they believed they were given poor assignments or evaluations based on race, compared with 4 percent of whites.

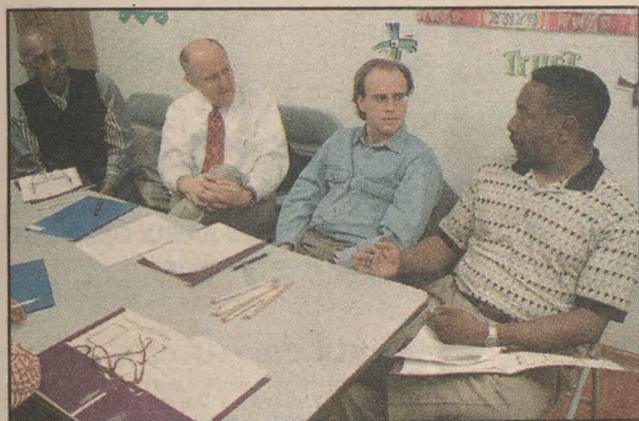
At Fort Jackson in South Carolina, the report drew mixed reactions from Army officers outside the base's retail store.

Staff Sgt. Sedrick Banks, who is black, said he hadn't noticed overt racism in military units, but he encountered it while in training — derogatory comments that he said included "the 'n' word."

"I would tend to agree with what's written," Banks said.

But Capt. Katrina Birkelien, a white army nurse who participated in the survey, said she has never been in a unit where punishment varied according to race.

In today's Mailbox Post ... The Race Issue



Since the beginning of time, one of the more pressing issues for mankind has been to get along with each other in a specified community. Whether it be black or white, man or woman, people often times have trouble with each other because of barriers.

Project Change, along with The Valdosta Daily Times, is committed to bringing down those barriers relating to race in order for all to get along a little better. A race forum was held last week in Valdosta to help people understand race issues.

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Citizens Talk, Progress at Forum

By Rebecca Yull

Talk may not be enough to eliminate racism in Valdosta, but it is a start. A third in a series of talks which have posed the question, "Do we really want to talk about race?" was held Thursday.

"I do know that just talk by itself is not enough," LaRonnia Williams told those in attendance. But it is a start, she said. She mentioned Project Change and a prayer group which meets every Monday as two groups which have the mission to erase racism in Valdosta.

This one picked up where the other left off with discussions about affirmative action, the definition and philosophy of race, the voice of prejudice, media portrayals of African Americans and what action can be taken in the community to eliminate racism with this generation. Small groups discussed these topics further and brought back their findings and recommendations to the entire group at the end of the night.

"If you bring people together from different backgrounds who care, they can have an intelligent conversation," Julie Armstrong said in her summation of the group who discussed the background and philosophy of race.

The group which discussed affirmative action concluded it was working and if it was ever needed, it was needed now. The one place the group felt it needed improvement was in small business hiring practices.

For media-generated perceptions of race to be changed, there needs to be some training of journalists to be more aware of how they cover different events and issues, the group concluded.

"Blacks only make up 11 percent of the newsroom," group facilitator Juana Jordan said. "And I know it's less than that who are in decision-making positions." The group also decided people in the community need to be active in the local media and hold newspapers and television accountable for what they present to the public. Reactions to reporting considered unfair or limited should be made immediately so to avoid repeating the same thing.

The voice of prejudice is a personal one, John Ebron reported for his group. People need to express the internal issues they deal with regarding race so that everyone can understand where each other is coming from. Holding things inside is holding back progression to racial peace.

"I think Valdosta is catching on. I think we are getting the message out," Mattie Rountree, who was a facilitator for the group which discussed community action, said. This group came to the conclusion there should be more young people involved in these discussions. A young man who was in the group asked the question, "Shouldn't there be more parents here," Rountree said. The group agreed with this as well because parents need to know how they can teach their children to accept racial differences and embrace cultural similarities.

The general consensus from all the groups was that to improve race relations and dismantle racism in this community people need to take a look inward. People have to deal with their personal issues on race and communicate their feelings to each other before the whole can get beyond the use of race as a measurement or description of individuals.

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City schools in limbo?

BOE wants explanation as consolidation talk spreads

By Weenam Chua
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta board of education doesn't know for certain what will happen with their charter should county and city government consolidate.

Superintendent Sam Allen distributed a letter with opinions of four attorneys about the fate of the independent city school system to board members at Monday's board meeting.

The opinions of Gary L. Moser, L. Warren Turner Jr., George T. Talley and Oris D. Blackburn Jr. were that Valdosta City Schools could not exist in a unified government.

According to the lawyers, the physical boundaries of the school system are contiguous with the City of Valdosta and there are no provisions in the law to set up a tax base other than the boundary limits of the city for revenue to operate the school system.

The opinions still leave the city school with their original dilemma, board members said.

"To me I don't think it answers the question as to what will happen to the city (school) charter if city and county consolidates," said Dr. Joe Crane,



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

Valdosta City Schools superintendent Sam Allen holds a drawing of the proposed changes to Cleveland Field as school board chairman Dr. Joe Crane Sr. takes a closer look during Monday's called meeting.

school board chairman.

Crane said the law probably isn't clear on this either and the school board should make it a priority to have the legislature clarify the law during the upcoming session.

"I do understand once city and county consolidates, our boundaries would remain as it is forever," Allen said.

Should the governments merge, the city schools' funding would also be called into question, according to Allen.

Whether the city school gives up its charter will be left in the hands of voters, even if the school board vote 9-0 to absolve the charter, Crane said.

"If we gave up our charter today, Lowndes County Schools will have to educate our children," Allen said.

In other business, the board saw a color pencil rendering of a renovated Bazemore-Hyder Stadium at Cleveland Field. The drawing, provided by Valdosta State University, depicts a Spanish-style facade. Allen said this drawing was just to help everyone get a grasp of the project.

"This process is a long way from being a done deal," he said.

Facilities chair Ricky Rowe told his colleagues they needed to move on the joint management proposal with the university soon.

"We need to make a composite, a list of items as a board ... we need to do this way soon as possible," Rowe said.

Valdosta High School Athletics Director Mike O'Erien, Valdosta Touchdown Club President Dennis Herrington and Valdosta Schools Director of Operations William Aldrich are serving on the stadium management team on behalf of the city schools.

The university will appoint three representatives to serve on the team.

To contact reporter Weenam Chua, please call 244-3400, ext. 237.