

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

STANDING AT THE INTERSECTION OF
RACE & TECHNOLOGY

Raneta Lawson Mack

PROFESSOR, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF LAW

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

Copyright © 2001
Raneta Lawson Mack
Reprinted in July 2002
All Rights Reserved.

ISBN 0-89089-641-0
LCCN 2001092053

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919)493-5668
www.cap-press.com

For my daughter Kandace,
you have blessed my life

Printed in the United States of America

Chapter 1

Fear of Science and Technology

One of the more recent Internet rumors to make the virtual rounds involves the slogan “NO FEAR.” For several years the term “NO FEAR” has been the catch phrase of a company that specializes in trendy sports apparel. However, it seems that David Duke, a proponent of the rights of white people and one-time candidate for governor in Louisiana, is now starting a new white-rights group called No Fear, which, according to Duke, is an acronym for National Organization For European American Rights.¹ While these facts probably establish the basis for a trademark infringement lawsuit, interestingly enough, they also provided the impetus for yet another race-related urban legend that circulated quickly across the Internet via e-mail.

The forwarded e-mail read, in part:

To make a long story short, David Duke, former grand wizard for the KKK, was in town to speak at a shopping mall. David Duke is the head of a group calling itself NO FEAR; it stands for: “National Organization For European-American Rights.”

All this time I thought No Fear was just something young white people placed onto their vehicles, meaning they fear nothing because of their youth. How wrong I was, so please pass this on so that more of our people know what No Fear really means.

1. The company No Fear, Inc. has sued Duke for trademark infringement.

Closer examination of the content of this e-mail reveals that the author has taken the basic facts of the "No Fear" dispute and merged them in such a fashion that readers are led to believe that the No Fear company and David Duke's organization are one and the same. Moreover, several race-based ideas are conveyed by this e-mail, both implicitly and explicitly. First, the author speaks of the term No Fear as if it is exclusively associated with young white people. In fact, there is no evidence that the company markets solely to white youth and No Fear has expressly disavowed any such marketing strategy.² Second, the e-mail, by its use of the term "our people," suggests that it was authored by a person of color with the intent that it be passed on to other people of color as a warning to avoid anything associated with No Fear. Although the company No Fear stepped in and attempted to quash this rumor shortly after it surfaced, chances are, given the relative speed of e-mail communications and the willingness by some to believe rumors of this nature, this urban legend will have some degree of staying power.

Race-related urban legends are not a recent phenomenon. What is new, however, is that e-mail and the Internet are being used to transmit them to a much wider audience; an audience that is, for a variety of reasons, particularly susceptible to belief in rumor and conspiracy. The Internet is thus serving as a medium to perpetuate longstanding fears and instill new ones. Other race-related urban legends that have enjoyed a long shelf life on the Internet include, the warning that black voting rights will expire in 2007, the idea that social security numbers are somehow encoded to reveal the race of the owner, a story that the Statue of Liberty was intended as a tribute to black slaves, and the ubiquitous and enduring tale of how Tommy Hilfiger made racist statements on the Oprah show.³ These mes-

2. No Fear Inc. issued a press release which stated, in part:

No Fear is a sports company founded a decade ago with the intent of instilling positive messages of self-esteem through the medium of competitive sport, and inspiring all people to perform to their potential.

3. So as not to participate in the perpetuation of these urban legends, I should note that each of them has been thoroughly or partially debunked. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is indeed due to expire and come up for re-

sages, at least when they are transmitted via e-mail, tend to follow a specific formula. For example, the messages are usually forwarded by a well-meaning relative or friend and arrive as a warning or alert to the recipient. The text of the message typically reveals stories of shocking discrimination or recently discovered conspiracies against minorities and may even claim to have been "verified" by "legitimate" sources. The message concludes by imploring the recipient to forward the message to as many people as possible. In most cases, it is either stated explicitly or implied by the context of the message that it should be sent immediately to other black people.

In these instances, the Internet is being used as a means for quickly transmitting information that would otherwise be shared orally, if at all. The fact that the Internet provides access to a global audience makes it difficult to locate the "root" of these urban legends, thereby making the debunking process much more problematic. One question that might be raised at this point is why do those who apparently embrace or at least utilize Internet and e-mail technology choose to use it in such a fashion? That is, what compels people to forward such race-based misinformation when a few minutes of additional research would reveal that the majority of these urban legends cannot be substantiated and are patently false? Additionally, and perhaps more important, can the virtual exchange of this type of information by those in minority communities who

newal in 2007, but according to the Department of Justice, the basic right to vote, which is guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment, is permanent and will not expire with the Voting Rights Act. The social security number urban legend warned that the fifth number on social security cards of minority citizens is always even and employers are beginning to use this code as a basis for discriminating against minority job applicants. In fact, statistically, it is more likely that the fifth number on *anyone's* social security card will be an odd number given the method used by the Social Security Administration to assign the numbers. The Statue of Liberty rumor has only been partially debunked and research continues into whether the statue may have some relationship to the abolitionist movement. However, historical documents tend to suggest that the statue was not intended solely as a tribute to black slaves. Finally, Tommy Hilfiger has consistently denied the racist statements attributed to him on the Oprah show and, indeed, he has never appeared on the show at all.

have developed some technological savvy provide insight (albeit ironic) into why others in those same communities might be reluctant to jump on the technological bandwagon? This chapter will explore those questions and demonstrate how legitimate historically-based fears concerning science and technology play a considerable role in the modern day reluctance of minority communities to fully take advantage of the digital revolution.

The Legacy of Slavery

It can hardly be disputed that the atrocities of slavery have left an indelible mark on the collective psyche of blacks in America. No other group of Americans shares a similar history of being subjected to utter degradation and humiliation both during and after the forced immigration of Africans to America as slave labor. This chapter does not propose to explore the history of black slavery in America. There are ample texts available that provide exhaustive analyses of this horrific chapter in American history. But, what this chapter will explore are some lingering beliefs and attitudes that likely trace their roots back to slavery and the post-slavery Jim Crow era and, as a consequence, directly impact the current thinking of black Americans about “advances” in technology.

In his book, *Shadows of Race and Class*, Raymond Franklin poses the question: Was the system of slavery benign or evil? This question is profoundly important because, as Franklin observes, it has relevance to current perceptions and judgments of and by contemporary blacks.⁴ According to Franklin, there is no precise answer to this question and scholars occasionally “reconstruct history in their endeavors to cope with present and often unanticipated events.”⁵ More specifically, if slavery was indeed a benign system then theoretically, there should be no lingering damage to black Americans, psychic or otherwise. Therefore, to the extent that blacks today have failed to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, then it must be largely a result of

4. RAYMOND S. FRANKLIN, *SHADOWS OF RACE AND CLASS* 23 (1991).

5. *Id.*

their individual character weaknesses.⁶ In contrast, however, if slavery was as evil and harmful to blacks as is widely believed, then lingering debilities render blacks as a group inherently incapable of caring for themselves and forever cast them in the role of “white man’s burden.” Thus, while the reasons may differ, all roads lead to perceptions of inferiority and dependency.

No matter how extensively scholars debate the nature and consequences of slavery, very few can dispute the fact that slavery was a social holocaust that brutally separated blacks from their homeland and resulted in a “form of raw economic exploitation in the American context not comparable to that experienced by other exploited immigrant groups.”⁷ It is also scarcely debatable that each side in this historic tragedy has been left with profound and lingering perceptions of the other. For many whites, slavery, whether benign or evil, was undoubtedly justified because blacks were lazy, unintelligent, uneducable, and in constant need of supervision lest they give in to their “natural” tendencies for crime and wanton sexuality. For blacks, the white slavemaster was not to be trusted. With the stroke of a pen, he could separate families or send them to their deaths. Everyday life was a struggle for mental and physical survival in the face of insurmountable odds. Long ago, Frederick Douglass passionately described the daily travails of slave life. He wrote:

The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this—“Trust no man!” I saw in every white man an enemy; and in almost every colored cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must need to experience it or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land—a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders—whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers—where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon prey!—I say let

6. The notion of a “benign” system suggests that the institution of slavery was the most compassionate and efficient means to educate and train the masses of Africans in America.

7. Franklin, *SHADOWS*, at 25.

him place himself in my situation—without home or friends—without money or credit—wanting shelter, and no one to give it—wanting bread, and no money to buy it,—and at the same time let him feel he is pursued by merciless menhunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go and where to stay.... I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation... then and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.⁸

Although slavery is no longer lawfully practiced in the United States, attitudes that find their roots in the inhumanity of slavery persist. As mentioned above, many whites continue to view blacks through a dehumanizing prism that casts them in the role of criminals, sexual predators and societal leeches. Correspondingly, many blacks continue to view whites through a prism of mistrust, believing that somehow whites are perpetually conspiring to deprive them of their liberty and bodily integrity. These dueling perceptions no longer revolve around the institution of slavery and discover new territories to invade with each successive generation. In the modern age, these negative, historically based perceptions have taken root in the areas of science and technology. Throughout history, whites have used science, research and technology to continue their subjugation of blacks. Blacks, in turn, have learned to fear and mistrust scientific and technological developments, believing that such advancements are easily manipulated to suit the purposes of the dominant society. One of the first areas of science to be used in a manner that mirrored and arguably gave validity to the dominant society's negative perceptions about minorities was the "science" of measuring intelligence, more commonly known as IQ testing.

The Pseudoscience of IQ Testing

Speculation concerning the genetic basis of IQ differences traces its roots back at least one thousand years. At that time, people of Eu-

8. FREDERICK DOUGLASS, NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AN AMERICAN SLAVE (1968).

ropean descent widely believed that Africans were intellectually inferior and sought ways to validate those beliefs with science in order to further justify the continued oppression of an entire race of people.⁹ Unfortunately, those patently racist efforts have been largely successful as over the years the notion of IQ difference inevitably raises the specters of race and class. Elaine Mensh and Harry Mensh, in their book, *The IQ Mythology*, observe that race and class are inextricably intertwined with IQ testing and further explain that:

To say somebody has a "high IQ" or "low IQ" is, as everyone knows, to pass judgment on whether a person is "smart" or "dumb." If such judgments were made about individuals as individuals, they would be damaging enough. But—because of the correspondence of IQ scores to race and class—they are not made simply about individuals as individuals. To say someone has a low IQ is, as a rule, to cast aspersions on that person in a racial and/or class sense.¹⁰

Historically, IQ testing is rooted in the pseudoscience of craniometrics, the measurement of human skulls and brain sizes as a means of extrapolating about an individual's relative position in society. Those who practiced craniometry during the time of slavery used it to demonstrate that black slaves, by virtue of their brain sizes, were biologically inferior to whites and therefore well suited to their roles as servants to the biologically superior race. As might be expected given what is now known about the dubious connection between brain size and intelligence, craniometric "proof" of biological inferiority was often falsified to correspond with expected and desired results and scientific logic was ignored. Indeed, as Mensh & Mensh point out, "if brain size correlated with intelligence, some animals would be smarter than human beings."¹¹ Nevertheless, these

9. It did not matter, of course, that the definition of "intelligence" was based largely on a white European view of intelligence and applied to a group whose cultural norms and values were dramatically different from that ethnocentric view.

10. ELAINE MENSCH & HARRY MENSCH, *THE IQ MYTHOLOGY: CLASS, RACE, GENDER AND INEQUALITY* 1 (1991).

11. *Id.* at 14.

pseudoscientific craniometric findings cemented the fundamental belief that mental acuity could be quantified and, thereafter, the race was on to develop a sound "scientific" way to justify subjugation of a race of people in the post-slavery era.

Not long after craniometrics was discredited as a means for measuring intelligence and it was generally acknowledged that brain size bears very little correlation to intelligence, French psychologist, Alfred Binet developed an intelligence scale that purportedly measured the education potential of mentally handicapped students. Binet's intelligence scales make him one of the most widely known and controversial characters in the history of IQ testing. While Binet maintained that his initial tests were designed to "discover" students who needed special education, many now believe that these tests were merely a subterfuge designed to confirm preconceived notions that the tested children were less intelligent. In fact, as Mensh & Mensh describe, Binet's race and class biases were readily apparent. For instance, when exploring reasons for the children's failure to achieve in the classroom setting, Binet neglected to consider that school conditions might be the reason for such poor performance. Instead, Binet's test "scientifically shifted the onus for school performance from school officials to school children."¹² Additionally, once the children were determined by Binet's intelligence scales to be in need of "special education" Binet concluded that they should be subjected to "lessons of will, of attention and discipline."¹³ This non-academic solution for academic difficulties suggests that Binet believed the children ineducable and simply in need of basic discipline so as not to become disruptive influences on others around them. Apparently buoyed by his successful categorization of these "special education" children, Binet further speculated that his intelligence tests could be used to formulate the ideal city, "where everyone could work according to his known aptitudes."¹⁴ Of course, it is understood that "ideal" means one's known aptitude would likely be a predetermined result validated by Binet's biased testing process. Binet's ideal city would there-

12. *Id.* at 21.

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.* at 23.

fore be a mere perpetuation of the social and racial stratification that already existed in the less than ideal world.

Although Binet's testing procedure was purported to have a more scientific basis than craniometry, upon closer examination, it is clear that much like the pseudoscience of craniometry, Binet's tests were formulated in a flawed, self-fulfilling fashion. While the tests appeared to objectively measure intelligence, in fact, initial versions of Binet's tests were correlated to school performance. Binet gave the tests to groups of school children and their scores were measured against their teachers' rating of classroom performance. Then, "items were added or deleted to bring about the closest correspondence between test performance and educational age norms."¹⁵ Thus, students' success or failure on the tests depended largely on whether they were already doing well or poorly in school. Essentially then, the tests were keyed to a specific standard of school success that permitted no way to objectively validate the results.¹⁶

After the development of Binet's tests, the history of IQ testing took on more overtly racist overtones. At each juncture, test results continued to purportedly "verify" the intellectual inferiority of minority groups and simultaneously confirm the intellectual superiority of the white race. Moreover, many, not content to tolerate brushing elbows with the mentally inferior, took these "scientific" results one step further by advocating that those of inferior intelligence not only be separated from others in society, but that they be sterilized so as not to reproduce others of lesser intelligence.¹⁷

15. *Id.* at 42.

16. Binet nevertheless created the illusion of validity by introducing mystifying terminology such as "mental age" and arbitrary standards. *Id.* at 43.

17. The United States Supreme Court even ventured into the controversial call for forced sterilization of those deemed to be mentally inferior. In *Buck v. Bell*, Mr. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes declared that:

We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices...in order to prevent our being swamped by incompetence. It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute

In reality, what these tests did was provide a pseudoscientific rationale to act upon fundamental beliefs that were already pervasive in society. They lent credence to the notion that those who were in the elite classes were there because they were biologically superior and, of course, those at the bottom were there because they were biologically inferior. These pseudoscientific rationales not only provided the necessary stamp of objective authority, but also suggested that societal conditions were unlikely to change, and indeed it was futile to even attempt to effect change, because of immutable biological factors. Who could argue with the raw scientific data? Fortunately, many people eventually did, which launched a concerted effort to refute the pseudoscience of IQ testing.

For example, noted educator Horace Mann Bond wrote about a differential between the IQ scores of northern and southern blacks and surmised that any differences were not due to the biological superiority of northern blacks. Instead, Bond concluded that the differential was likely attributable to the difference in expenditures in northern and southern schools. Similarly, psychologist, Otto Klineberg, using army tests, compared the median scores of blacks from four northern states to whites from four southern states and found that blacks had outscored whites on these mental tests.¹⁸ The fact that these allegedly scientific claims were so easily refuted reflects the general theme of the Mensh & Mensh book that “[w]hile science advances to higher and higher stages, pseudoscience can produce no more than variations on one or another fallacious theme.”¹⁹ Pseudoscience also has the capacity to produce a great deal of seemingly intelligent verbiage to support it. For instance, Mensh & Mensh point to a statement made by Harvard psychologist, Edmund Boring, as an example of the arrogant and nonsensical lan-

degenerate offspring for a crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.... Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

Buck v. Bell, 274 U.S. 200, 207 (1927) (speaking about Carrie Buck, whom Justice Holmes described as the daughter of a feebleminded mother and the mother of an illegitimate feebleminded daughter).

18. Mensh & Mensh, *THE IQ MYTHOLOGY*, at 32.

19. *Id.* at 42.

guage offered in support of intelligence testing. Boring observed that “intelligence as a measurable capacity must at the start be defined as the capacity to do well on an intelligence test. Intelligence is what the test tests.”²⁰

Despite Boring’s patently circular rationale for IQ testing, Mensh & Mensh conclude, as have others, that the core difficulty with IQ testing is that the tests are obviously lacking in objectivity and simply do not measure intelligence, to the extent that intelligence can even be defined. Instead, the tests measure “surrogates” for intelligence “namely the skills, information, and social values called for by the test questions.”²¹ Because the tests are often developed by white middle-class men and women, it is perhaps not surprising that the tested skills, information and social values are tied to a white middle-class norm. (Realistically then, the majority of IQ tests simply measure one’s relative position vis-à-vis the established cultural norm and prove absolutely nothing about one’s specific capacity to learn and be successful in life.) More importantly, however, because these norms are mutable and are developing and changing over time throughout the larger society, IQ tests cannot legitimately attribute differences in abilities to reflect current cultural norms to genetics or biological inferiority/superiority. To put it simply, the IQ test standards were developed by whites, incorporated white values, skills and information and then measured minority groups’ deviation from this predetermined norm. The results were then said to prove the inferiority of those who deviated from the norm. As Andrew J. Strenio pointed out in his book, *The Testing Trap*, “[we] consciously and deliberately select questions so that the kind of people who scored low on the pretest will score low in subsequent tests. We are imposing our will on the outcome.”²²

Although the various scientific bases for IQ differentials between the races have been consistently and often successfully challenged, IQ test results have nevertheless become a focal point in the ongoing battle to obtain equal educational opportunity for black students.

20. *Id.* at 47.

21. *Id.* at 48.

22. ANDREW J. STRENIO, JR., *THE TESTING TRAP* 95 (1981).

This means that in the classroom setting black students potentially face two equally negative outcomes because of IQ testing pseudoscience. In one scenario, educational goals and expectations for black students are essentially abandoned because of a belief that biological inferiority is immutable. In most cases, however, black students are simply “tracked” to less academically rigorous programs, which places them at a tremendous long-term disadvantage with respect to education, employment and overall earning capacity.²³ Much of the academic tracking of black students came to the forefront after the official order to desegregate public schools in the United States Supreme Court opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Rather than comply with the Court’s order, many schools began a system of IQ testing that naturally purported to objectively place students on various tracks according to their known abilities. Hence, the pseudoscience of IQ testing was not only used to circumvent an order issued by the highest court in the land, but was again used to blatantly perpetuate the racial bias that had already doomed black students to a poor education and even poorer outlooks for the future.

Typical of the tracking phenomena was the case of *Larry P. v. Riles*, which challenged the use of standardized intelligence tests that tracked black children into special classes for the educable mentally retarded (EMR).²⁴ The EMR classes in the California school system specifically targeted children considered incapable of academic learning in regular classes and were designed to teach them minimal social adjustment and economic usefulness (shades of Binet). A subsequent review of the program determined that, from 1968–1977, black children were significantly overrepresented in EMR classes, which led the plaintiffs in the *Riles* case to argue that this could not be the result of chance. In response to this claim, the defendants theorized that because there is a higher incidence of mental retardation among the black population, this disproportion would “naturally” result in an overenrollment of black students in the EMR classes.

23. Additionally, tracking often stigmatizes students to such a degree that even those who have the potential to achieve begin to believe otherwise, thus resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

24. *Larry P. v. Riles*, 793 F.2d 969 (9th Cir. 1984).

Upon hearing the case, the district court found that IQ tests were either determinative or pervasive in the placement of black children in special EMR classes. Addressing the validity of using IQ tests as a sole criterion in the EMR placement process, the court concluded that:

the tests were never designed to eliminate cultural biases against black children; it was assumed that black children were less intelligent than whites. . . . The tests were standardized and developed on an all-white population and naturally their scientific validity is questionable for culturally different groups.²⁵

The court also observed that although IQ tests were subsequently standardized to eliminate gender bias, “[n]o such modification on racial grounds has ever been tried before by the testing companies . . . the experts have from the beginning been willing to tolerate or even encourage tests that portray minorities, especially blacks, as intellectually inferior.”²⁶ The court also rejected the defendants’ argument that the parents of the EMR students had consented to their children’s enrollment in the classes, thereby overcoming any deficiencies resulting from bias in the placement process. The court stated that “consent is rarely withheld, particularly by minorities, since the mystique of teacher authority and IQ scores tends to overwhelm parents.”²⁷

25. *Larry P. v. Riles*, 495 F.Supp 926, 956–57 (N.D. Cal. 1979).

26. *Riles*, at 955.

27. *Riles*, at 950 n. 51. Defendants also analogized the accepted use of testing in the employment context as a basis for arguing that predictive testing should be acceptable in the educational environment. The court rejected this argument, explaining that:

[I]f tests can predict that a person is going to be a poor employee, the employer can legitimately deny that person a job, but if tests suggest that a young child is probably going to be a poor student, the school cannot on that basis alone deny that child the opportunity to improve and develop the academic skills necessary to success in our society. Assigning a student to an EMR class denies that child the opportunity to develop the necessary academic skills . . . and [is] essentially a dead-end academic track. *Larry P. v. Riles*, 793 F.2d 969, 980.

This is but one example of the significant negative impact the pseudoscience of IQ testing has visited upon generations of minority youth. One can only imagine the countless numbers of black citizens who have been categorized as intellectually inferior by these biased testing procedures and thereafter precluded from realizing a host of benefits, opportunities, hopes and dreams. Raymond Franklin concludes in his book *Shadows of Race and Class*:

When one examines the long history of the misuse of biological scientism against African Americans, when one considers the history of scientists actually doctoring and falsifying their collected data to prove black inferiority, when one considers the gaps in knowledge about genetics that characterizes its use by social scientists, when one includes the large variety of ways that assumed endowment observations can be misspecified because of the prevalence of numerous environmental subtleties that are omitted from consideration, one reaches a simple conclusion: racially biased scientists are normal. Like ordinary folk living in a racially charged and stratified society, they have their racist theories that relate to social policies and practices. Unlike ordinary citizens who are upfront about their racial sentiments, hereditarians are sinister; they use the scientific enterprise as a screen to conceal biases. Since racially biased scientists are active respondents contributing to a racially biased social and class structure, changing the former must go hand in hand with changing the latter.²⁸

The Tuskegee "Experiment"

One of the saddest chapters in the history of what Franklin describes as our racially charged and stratified society involves what has become known as the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. This pseu-

28. Franklin, *SHADOWS*, at 68.

doscientific investigation of the long term effects of syphilis allowed doctors and scientists to implement their racist theories while jeopardizing the lives of 600 black men in Alabama. What began as a syphilis "control" program eventually devolved into a deadly syphilis "experiment" in which poor, uneducated black men were given meager sums in exchange for participating in a study that essentially left their syphilitic conditions untreated for purposes of "research." This notorious study began during a period of what has been referred to as racialized medicine. As James H. Jones describes in his book, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*, in the nineteenth century, physicians, as a group, were subject to the dominant culture thinking about race and "did a great deal to bolster and elaborate racist attitudes."²⁹ Just as in the case of IQ testing, physicians of the time had a vested interest in maintaining the existing social order and "medical discourses on the peculiarities of blacks offered, among other things, a pseudoscientific rationale for keeping blacks in their places."³⁰ Additionally, it was not uncommon for physicians to define black health problems in racial terms. Indeed, "[s]ome physicians of the day were overtly judgmental and spoke of blacks as having earned their illnesses as just recompense for wicked lifestyles" and concluded that blacks had become a "notoriously syphilis soaked race."³¹

The public health movement toward the end of the nineteenth century gave hope that not only would society's general health standards improve, but that blacks would also benefit from the renewed emphasis on medicine. Nowhere was this hope more evident than Macon County, Alabama, where, in 1930, blacks accounted for 82% of the 27,000 residents. Because extreme poverty left most of the residents without sufficient resources to obtain regular medical treatment, diseases such as syphilis were rampant among the black community. Thus, when the United States government stepped in with a syphilis "control" program in Macon County, public officials welcomed them with open arms and black residents willingly cooperated with the program. This was not the traditional physician/pa-

29. JAMES H. JONES, *BAD BLOOD: THE TUSKEGEE SYPHILIS EXPERIMENT* 17 (1993).

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.* at 22.

tient relationship however because rather than “burden” their syphilitic black patients with detailed explanations of their illnesses and treatment plans, government officials simply told them they were testing for “bad blood,” a confusing euphemism that masked the true focus of the control program. Concerning this failure to disclose the serious nature of the black patients’ illnesses, Jones notes:

How was syphilis to be controlled among people who were not informed that they suffered from a specific, definable disease; who were not informed the disease was contagious; who were not told that the disease was transmitted through sexual intercourse; and who were not informed that in congenital syphilis the germ passes from the mother through the placenta to the fetus?³²

The answer is that such explanations were simply not necessary given the very limited focus of the original program. Officials merely wanted to demonstrate to state and local officials that the disease *could be* discovered and controlled rather than educating black patients about the nature and extent of this potentially deadly disease. In other words, health officials were primarily interested in determining the prevalence of the disease and only secondarily concerned with treatment.³³ Arguably, this dispassionate attitude of doctors toward the obviously ill and poorly educated black patients set the stage for the next step in the syphilis control program: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment.

At the conclusion of the control program, public health officials discovered to their surprise that the rate of syphilis in Macon County was an alarming thirty-six percent.³⁴ Nevertheless, due to a

32. *Id.* at 73–4.

33. In fact, it was estimated that approximately 1400 black patients were *admitted* to treatment during the control program. Although about 33 of them received some minor treatment, not one of the patients ever received the full course of treatment for syphilis despite being diagnosed with the disease. *Id.* at 92.

34. An ironic twist to the prevalence of syphilis in black residents in Macon County was that the county sat in the shadow of the prestigious Tuskegee Institute, which was founded by Booker T. Washington and later became one of the leading black educational institutions of the time.

severe lack of state financial and personnel resources to support a larger syphilis health care program in Alabama, the initial syphilis control program was terminated. It was, however, deemed a partial success because the control program demonstrated that blacks could be treated for syphilis on a community wide basis. Indeed, this control program was the precursor for the nationwide syphilis health program that began in the late 1930s.

In the midst of this burgeoning emphasis on syphilis treatment and control, public health officials made the calculated decision to return to Tuskegee and Macon County, but this time for quite a different reason. Because they already knew Macon County had a high percentage of *untreated* syphilitic blacks, public officials believed that Macon County offered “an unparalleled opportunity for the study of the effect of untreated syphilis.”³⁵ Apparently, actually treating the affected population was not an option because of severely limited resources, but studying the population could at least offer some return on the investment of time and effort expended during the earlier control program.

But why was such a risky study even necessary? Dr. Taliaferro Clark, who initiated the idea for the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, believed a great deal could be learned about the course of syphilis by observing untreated blacks. To be fair, there had been at least two previous studies of untreated syphilis, one of which, the Oslo Study, focused upon white subjects. However, one major difference between these studies and the Tuskegee study was that the prior studies were retrospective in the sense that the researchers used case studies as a basis for their analysis rather than actual ongoing examinations with human patients. Yet, despite the obvious risks presented, Dr. Clark was encouraged by the opportunity to take a “new approach” to the study of untreated syphilis and argued that “it was time for a further study of the effect of untreated syphilis in the human economy among people now living and engaged in daily pursuits.”³⁶ Moreover, Clark knew that the key to a successful experiment of this deadly nature was gaining the confidence of local government offi-

35. Jones, *BAD BLOOD*, at 91.

36. *Id.* at 94.

cials and residents. With that in mind, he set about devising a plan to present the experiment as a *continuation* of the syphilis control program and enlist the aid of the Tuskegee Institute as a means of making the "experiment" more palatable to the local community. He succeeded at both.³⁷

In terms of scientific methods and processes, the stated goal of the Tuskegee study was to demonstrate that syphilis affected blacks and whites differently, although there was no legitimate scientific basis for such a belief and treatment for the disease in both groups was the same. Nevertheless, the study protocol was based upon this pseudoscientific notion and Dr. Clark was given virtually unfettered discretion as he set out to explore untreated or partially treated syphilis in blacks in Macon county. What is particularly noteworthy about this poorly designed racist study is that, despite obvious flaws in the scientific basis and design of the experiment, no one ever questioned the ethics or morality of the proposed study and Dr. Clark's "experiment" was approved and implemented with the full cooperation of the federal government and local officials in Macon County, Alabama.

As history now reveals, what began as a 6–8 month study lasted forty years. During that time, there were numerous personnel changes, the validity and value of the study were repeatedly criticized, subjects participating in the study dropped out of sight or died, subjects were lied to about the extent and purposes of the study, and yet the Tuskegee syphilis experiment continued. As Jones observes, it made little difference who was at the helm [of the Public Health Service], the study persisted "through the national syphilis campaign, WWII, the development of penicillin and public reaction to the Nuremberg trials."³⁸ The Tuskegee study had become a sacred cow within the Public Health Service and each successive wave of

37. In retrospect, the latter success is undoubtedly a particularly painful episode in the history of the Tuskegee Institute because the institution founded by Booker T. Washington as a place to assist in the advancement of black people was a conscious aider and abettor in the abuse and mistreatment of hundreds of ailing blacks in Macon County.

38. Jones, *BAD BLOOD*, at 180.

doctors and civil servants who came in contact with the study simply did their jobs without any apparent sense of moral or ethical concern. Jones does however describe one instance in which a government official was "skeptical and troubled about the scientific merits of the study and somewhat uneasy about its moral implications as well."³⁹ These concerns focused on the fact that the study was procedurally and conceptually weak because, among other things, some of the men in the study had actually been treated for syphilis while in the study. These concerns were easily assuaged though and, in the end, the government official merely recommended that the study be "scientifically improved."

The amorphous boundaries of the study protocol also became apparent over time as the purposes of the study mutated with the changes in personnel at the Public Health Service. At one point, a doctor associated with the study imagined even greater possibilities for the research findings and noted that "this Tuskegee project is only half realized. Its possibilities are only developing. Its conclusions will probably shed as much light on our understanding of the factors in aging and heart disease as in the problems with syphilis."⁴⁰ But perhaps one of the most egregious circumstances of willful neglect during the Tuskegee experiment came about in 1943, when it was discovered that penicillin provided effective treatment for syphilis. Those in charge of the Tuskegee experiment at that time were well aware of this new "wonder drug" for syphilis treatment. But instead of terminating the study and offering the men effective treatment, officials argued incredibly that the study had now become even more valuable because the new treatments being widely used to combat syphilis meant that never again would they have such a huge population of untreated syphilis patients to use in their experiment. So the men in the study went untreated even though effective treatment was widely available.

At this point, one might be tempted to question whether these men were *involuntarily* being used as subjects in this study. After all, weren't they aware of their illnesses? Couldn't they have learned of the use of

39. *Id.* at 181.

40. *Id.* at 184.

penicillin as a treatment for syphilis and chosen to receive such treatment? Shouldn't they shoulder some of the blame for the long-term nature of this study? These questions touch upon the complex issue of informed consent to participation in medical experiments. Almost certainly, poverty and ignorance played a major role in the men's participation in the study. The financial incentives were minimal, yet given the stark nature of their daily existence, an occasional hot lunch, periodic physical examinations and a burial stipend may have seemed like plenitude. Moreover, it is now widely believed that these particular black men were chosen because they were "poor, illiterate and completely at the mercy of the 'benevolent' Public Health Service."⁴¹ Under these circumstances, the subjects could hardly be expected to protest the treatment or seek other options when many didn't completely understand the nature of their illnesses and may have believed that they were actually being treated while in the study.

The issue of race was also a driving factor in selecting "patients" for this deadly experiment. When the experiment began, it had been more than sixty years since the Emancipation Proclamation officially freed the slaves, but the United States was still in the midst of a legalized system of segregation known as Jim Crow. This "official" form of segregation continued the dehumanization of blacks even though the yokes of slavery had been released. Thus, it can scarcely be denied that racism played a significant role in selecting and keeping 600 black men in a woefully unscientific and deadly study for forty years. In fact, when the study was finally revealed, many observed that this type of thing could only happen to blacks because America's racist society completely disregarded the humanity of its black citizens. As a result, most white Americans could not have cared less that scientists were engaged in a scientifically, morally and ethically unsound experiment that unnecessarily exposed hundreds of black men to a potentially deadly disease.

The Tuskegee study demonstrated that, once again, science could be manipulated in the shameful pursuit of the oppression of blacks in America. Moreover, in the Tuskegee case, the "scientific" study continued for an unusually lengthy period with the express or tacit ap-

41. *Id.* at 14.

proval of several large institutions including a United States government agency *despite its dubious validity*. Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that black people regard scientific and technological advance with a marked degree of suspicion and, in some cases, outright fear. When your intellectual capacities are consistently challenged and denigrated with "science" and when your physical being is regarded as less than human and exposed to the untreated rigors of a deadly disease in the name of "science," fear of science and technology is not unwarranted paranoia, but a matter of sheer survival.

Against this backdrop, an aura of mistrust has developed in the black community where matters of science and technology are concerned. As Jones describes in the final chapter of his book, one of the ramifications of the Tuskegee study is that many blacks mistrust and/or fear doctors. Additionally, newly discovered diseases are regarded with the utmost suspicion, particularly if the diseases tend to impact races or certain populations differently. For example, the advent of AIDS engendered widespread speculation among blacks that the disease was created by the government in order to intentionally infect black people. In other words, AIDS was considered a form of government supported conspiratorial genocide. While many may scoff at this seemingly ridiculous notion, one need only consider the history of race relations, government sanctioned discrimination, and the manipulation of science to suit racist agendas to understand the foundations that underlie these beliefs. This long history of racism also leaves many blacks particularly susceptible to belief in myths and "urban legends," especially those that purport to describe instances of discrimination or oppression.

As Patricia Turner discusses in her book, *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, "[r]umors and contemporary legends capture modern anxieties by commenting on the effects of urbanization, mass society, technology and strained ethnic relations."⁴² This type of storytelling is an attempt "by people to negotiate their current reality, and to deal with the changes in their personal environment."⁴³ For

42. PATRICIA A. TURNER, *I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE* 126 (1993).

43. *Id.* at 82.

blacks, of course, this current reality invariably involves racism, which increasingly occurs covertly and frequently leaves an informational void in terms of explaining biased outcomes. This vacuum is usually filled with suspicion and rumor that, not surprisingly, often confirms the subject's own view of the world.

For example, Turner describes a rumor that spread throughout the black community alerting those in the community that a particular fried chicken fast food restaurant was owned by the Ku Klux Klan. According to the rumor, the Klan was adding an ingredient to the chicken recipe to "make black men sterile and effectively wipe out the continuation of the black community."⁴⁴ This persistent rumor illustrates several themes. First, there is a pervasive belief by many blacks that their physical beings are regarded as less than human and therefore subject to physical, mental or chemical attack at any time by the powers that be. Second, as Turner points out, this type of rumor allows the potential victims of racism to name their aggressor, in this case, the KKK.⁴⁵ As noted above, since modern day racism is primarily covert, the sources of racist attack can be easily disguised. This type of rumor, which names a historical enemy of black people as the aggressor, gives those spreading the rumor the sense of empowerment that comes from being able to specifically identify their attacker. Finally, by sharing this with fellow black people, a feeling of community is created through the shared struggle for survival in a racist society.⁴⁶

Turner also describes some common threads that appear to determine when a particular product will be targeted for rumor (and informal boycott) in the black community. According to Turner, the product price, its potential risks and a perceived negligible utility often coalesce to form a web of suspicion around a product and contribute to the black public's wariness of that product.⁴⁷ In other words, when the costs and risks associated with a product outweigh its perceived usefulness to black consumers, the product will likely

44. *Id.* at 105.

45. *Id.* at 106.

46. *Id.* at 106-7.

47. *Id.* at 174-9.

be avoided. To illustrate this avoidance phenomena, Turner cites the example of Reebok International, an athletic shoe retailer that was beleaguered in the late 1980s by rumors that the company was owned by South Africans who were surreptitiously seeking to profit from the sale of shoes that were very popular in the United States, particularly in the black community. In fact, the shoes were so popular that some in the black community were afraid to wear them outdoors for fear that their lives would be at risk if someone else wanted the coveted shoes badly enough.

Turner theorizes that the Reebok rumor evolved because the escalating price of the shoes at the time, coupled with the risk of wearing them (potential death), exceeded their desirability and usefulness to many black consumers, thus creating a situation where rumors about the product were likely to develop. As Turner points out, "one way for folk to show their concern about a desirable commodity with dubious practical value, particularly in a community whose financial resources are limited, is to subscribe to and circulate rumors that diminish the product's attraction."⁴⁸ It is clear then that "the folk imagination does not randomly identify products to avoid. A logical and practical process is at work, with the power of folk belief behind it."⁴⁹ Indeed. The next section will adopt Turner's price, risk, utility equation to demonstrate how a similar logical and practical process imbued with the power of folk belief may very well explain the black community's avoidance of technology.

Overcoming the Avoidance Factor

Turner's theory on the process of how rumors develop when set forth as a formula is as follows:

$$\text{Price} + \text{Risk} > \text{Utility} = \text{Rumor}^{50}$$

48. *Id.* at 98.

49. *Id.* at 179.

50. *Id.* at 174.

Rumor, of course, then leads to avoidance or, at minimum, a diminished appreciation for the product. Let's examine each of the elements of this formula as it might be applied in the area of computers and technology.

Price

Several years ago, a reliable desktop computer system may have required expenditures ranging from \$2-3000. Today, such systems can be purchased for approximately \$900 brand new with all the modern bells and whistles. In order to realize the full potential of computer ownership in the digital age and take advantage of the Internet and e-commerce, most users would need to add the cost of an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to the total cost of owning a computer system. Today, ISP accounts range in price from free to approximately \$21.95 for unlimited monthly usage.⁵¹ With a typical ISP account, users gain access to the World Wide Web (WWW) and other Internet communication tools, obtain one or more e-mail accounts, and are allotted space on the ISP's server to establish a personal webpage. At first glance, these prices certainly seem reasonable and well within reach of consumers with even modest incomes. It appears then that the low cost of owning a computer and accessing the Internet should be a positive factor in the price/risk/utility formula. However, upon closer examination, this may not necessarily be the case.

Although economic factors contributing to the technology gap will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2, a brief discussion at this point will be helpful in analyzing why even the low cost of computer ownership may not translate into increased ownership in the black community. As Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro note in their book *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective On Racial Inequality*, despite the progress that blacks have made over the past 40 years, "poor education, high joblessness, low incomes, and the subsequent hardships of poverty, family and community

51. The free ISPs are good deals for those who don't mind viewing an onslaught of advertisements as they surf the Internet.

instability, and welfare dependency plague many African Americans."⁵² As a further commentary on the dire economic circumstances of blacks in America, Oliver & Shapiro point out that nearly one out of three blacks lives in poverty and one in four remains outside private health insurance or Medicaid coverage.⁵³ Given this economic reality, it is hardly surprising that there exists a sharp disparity between the incomes and wealth of blacks and whites. To illustrate this disproportion, Oliver & Shapiro discuss the results of the 1988 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which showed that for every dollar earned by white households, black households earn sixty-two cents. Additionally, whites possess nearly twelve times as much median net worth as blacks, or \$43,800 versus \$3,700. Finally, the SIPP revealed that the average white household controls \$6,999 in *net* financial assets while the average black household possesses no *net* financial assets at all.⁵⁴

To say that the average black household maintains no net financial assets paints a very precarious and disturbing picture of the day to day, month to month existence of these black families. Indeed, the SIPP data showed that this resource deprivation is so severe among black families that only eleven percent of black children grow up in households with enough net financial assets to survive three months of no income at poverty level. This means very simply that the overwhelming majority of black households are entirely dependent upon an income stream that is consumed each month and does not allow for any significant savings or diverse asset accumulation. In these types of "touch and go" financial circumstances, when emergencies arise, the family is typically required to borrow from relatives or "rob Peter to pay Paul" in order to meet their financial obligations. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that purchases will be made when the risk of owning the product is perceived to be high and the utility is believed to be low, *no matter how reasonable the cost of the item*. Each additional purchase must be justified according to the price/risk/utility formula or it simply will not become part of the family's asset

52. MELVIN L. OLIVER & THOMAS M. SHAPIRO, *BLACK WEALTH/WHITE WEALTH: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON RACIAL INEQUALITY* 24 (1995).

53. *Id.* at 24.

54. *Id.* at 86.

base. Thus, the price of an item is inextricably intertwined with the perceived risk of owning it and its potential usefulness. But, what risk could possibly arise from owning a personal computer or accessing the Internet? After all, advertisements continually prevail upon people to purchase home computers and join the digital revolution. As discussed in the next section, the *perceived* risks to black people in owning personal computers are partially rooted in reality and partially a painful byproduct of unpleasant historical experiences with science and technology.

The Risk to Privacy

It was recently discovered that the FBI is using a software system designed to allow law enforcement personnel to intercept and analyze vast amounts of e-mail being transmitted over the Internet. The system, known as "Carnivore," is placed with an ISP (usually the ISP being utilized by the suspected criminal), which then allows it to scan all incoming and outgoing e-mail intended for the target of a criminal probe. While Carnivore is in place on the ISP network, it is completely controlled by the law enforcement agency that requested its placement. According to opponents of the system, although law enforcement should limit its interception to the incoming and outgoing e-mail of the suspect, while in place, Carnivore is capable of intercepting all of the e-mail traffic on its host ISP. Thus, users of the ISP must simply trust that the government will limit its activities to the target of the criminal probe.

In another recent news item, it was reported that Microsoft intentionally left open a "back door" in its software to enable the National Security Agency (NSA) to access the software at will. This back door would, in effect, allow anyone with access to an individual's personal computer to decrypt anything on that computer and also modify the operating system. Although Microsoft has vehemently denied that the NSA would ever have a key to the "back door" of the software, the key was mysteriously named NSAKEY.

Finally, in another privacy invasion incident, the White House recently revealed that it might have violated federal privacy guidelines by allowing its office of National Drug Control Policy to use soft-

ware that tracked computer users who viewed the government's anti-drug messages on the Internet. Apparently, if web surfers visited the National Drug Control website, a "cookie" was placed on their computer systems that tracked their subsequent Internet travels. Although the purported reason for the tracking effort was to measure which ads were more effective in sending users to anti-drug sites, the use of cookies to track sites visited by Internet users gives rise to serious concerns that the government may indeed be compiling this information for other less savory purposes.

With the infinite uses and misuses of Internet technology occurring today, there are without a doubt a plethora of existing and anticipated technological instruments designed specifically to intrude upon the privacy of online users. Cynics among us might respond: "So what? Using the Internet is not a private endeavor anyway. By the very nature of the construction of the Internet, it is apparent that online activities are potentially open to view by others. It's the chance we take to have access to this technology. Besides, those who aren't doing anything wrong will have nothing to hide."

Addressing the latter issue first, there are millions of people engaged in legitimate activities who would rather not have their activities tracked. Quite simply, they believe that where they go on the Internet and who they correspond with by e-mail is not anyone else's business. Second, while using the Internet implies a certain willingness to consent to a lesser expectation of privacy, most users probably expect that whatever private information is revealed about them is eventually disseminated throughout the ether to become part of the vast anonymous jungle of bits and bytes. Few expect that personal information will be compiled and uniquely tied to them to create a "profile" of online behavior for marketing purposes or otherwise. The United States Supreme Court has addressed this privacy issue in the case of *United States Department of Justice v. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*.⁵⁵ Although this case did not deal specifically with computer technology, the Court discussed general privacy interests that may be implicated when the government or

55. *United States Department of Justice v. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press*, 489 U.S. 749 (1989).

other entities compile databases of personal information. The Court began by recognizing that "both the common law and the literal understanding of privacy encompass the individual's control of information concerning his or her person."⁵⁶ Next, in determining what constitutes private information, the Court noted that Webster's dictionary defined as private any information "intended for or restricted to the use of a particular person or group or class of persons; not freely available to the public."⁵⁷ The Court then summarized this broad concept of personal privacy by observing that simply because "an event is not wholly private does not mean that an individual has no interest in limiting its disclosure or dissemination of the information."⁵⁸

Applying this concept to online activities suggests that one could reasonably conclude that Internet users implicitly "agree" that some information about them will be revealed while online, but they maintain a privacy interest in that information to the extent that they do not agree that the information will be further compiled and disseminated without their knowledge and consent. In other words, there is some degree of privacy afforded by the bits and pieces of information that are released online incrementally and potentially forgotten over time. But, if an entity is collecting these bits and pieces of information and compiling them to create online profiles uniquely tied to individual users, then the potential loss of privacy posed by this aggregate information is much greater than any loss associated with the intermittent release of the bits and pieces.

When these actual and potential privacy breaches are viewed by black Americans through a historical prism of mistrust in the areas of science and technology, the risk of owning a personal computer and accessing the Internet is magnified. Indeed, the risk may be perceived as the equivalent of forfeiting one's right to personal privacy, particularly when the inner workings of computers are largely incomprehensible to the average layperson. This is certainly not meant to imply that black Americans have more to hide

56. *Id.* at 763.

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.* at 770.

and are therefore more concerned about privacy than the average computer user. Instead, it is to suggest that because of a unique historical perspective, blacks are more likely to have a heightened sense of awareness where personal privacy issues are concerned and, accordingly, act more vigilantly when it comes to protecting against unwarranted governmental intrusion into their private lives. To the extent that computer technology is associated with the intolerable risk of invading personal privacy, blacks are less likely to purchase and utilize such devices no matter what the price. Moreover, because the risk is so high, the combination of price and risk is likely to outweigh utility (discussed below) in the minds of many blacks, thereby leading to avoidance of the technology and the development of rumors. For example, it is not uncommon to hear that some black Americans refuse to own computers because they believe that the government or some other intrusive agency will be able to watch them and monitor their physical movements through their computer screens.

Thus, in order to increase black ownership of personal computers and increase black participation in the online arena, it is not enough to simply reduce the price of personal computers. Additional steps must be taken to reduce the actual and perceived risks to personal privacy. This will require the enactment and enforcement of laws designed to protect everyone's privacy in the digital age, as well as stiff sanctions for those who violate those laws. It will also require education and training to empower online users in ways that enable them to protect their personal information without sacrificing their enjoyment of technology resources.

Utility: But What Good Is A Computer?

This question is likely posed by many of the technology uninitiated everyday. Many people simply cannot envision how a computer can fit comfortably into their lives, especially when their daily routine involves a complex juggling of family, work, school, church and other social obligations. How can a stationary plastic box with an assortment of tangled wires make any of this more efficient and convenient? Although the utility of computers and other digital technol-

ogy will be discussed in detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, at this point, it will simply be noted that the issue of utility is largely an educational process. To many, computers are a mystery; a mystery that many blacks are afraid to unravel because of the aforementioned risks. Uncloaking this mystery means explaining the nature of computers and what they can accomplish in layperson's language *and* making it relevant to daily experience.

For example, the cell phone revolution appears to have crossed all racial and class boundaries in its infiltration of modern society. Based upon general observation, it seems that, on average, blacks are probably just as likely to own or have access to cell phones as whites. What accounts for the fact that the black population seems to have embraced this technology with very little trepidation? The answer may be found once again in the price/risk/utility formula. While the price of obtaining a cell phone and service varies, there is enough competition in the wireless market to enable practically anyone to find a wireless phone and calling plan to fit their budget. This ease of ownership makes price an attractive factor in the equation. There are certain risks associated with cell phone usage such as driver distraction and a purported link to increased risks for certain cancers. These risks probably seem too remote, however, and either do not evoke a response based upon historical baggage or any such response is overcome by the usefulness and relevance of the product in daily life. The ability to communicate with friends and relatives while "on the go" is a valuable commodity to all sectors of society because it makes navigating the logistical complexities of life a bit more manageable. Having the ability to communicate at will is efficient, convenient and enhances feelings of connectedness with one's family and friends. All of this translates into greater acceptance of this technology by members of the black community. Moreover, in its initial stages, cell phone technology was likely an easier "sell" in terms of persuading people of all races to adopt the technology because it is simply a more convenient offshoot of a device that is now fairly commonplace: the home telephone. Computers and the Internet have no such predecessor to recommend them and help facilitate overall public acceptance of the technology. Widespread acceptance of computer technology by the public, and particularly the black

public, will therefore require innovative approaches that recognize the varieties of ways that people carry out their daily activities and a concerted effort to make computers and Internet technology relevant to and compatible with these activities. As mentioned earlier, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will explore the numerous ways in which technology is enhancing lives everyday and will hopefully serve as an important step toward increasing the perception of computers as useful components in this digital age.