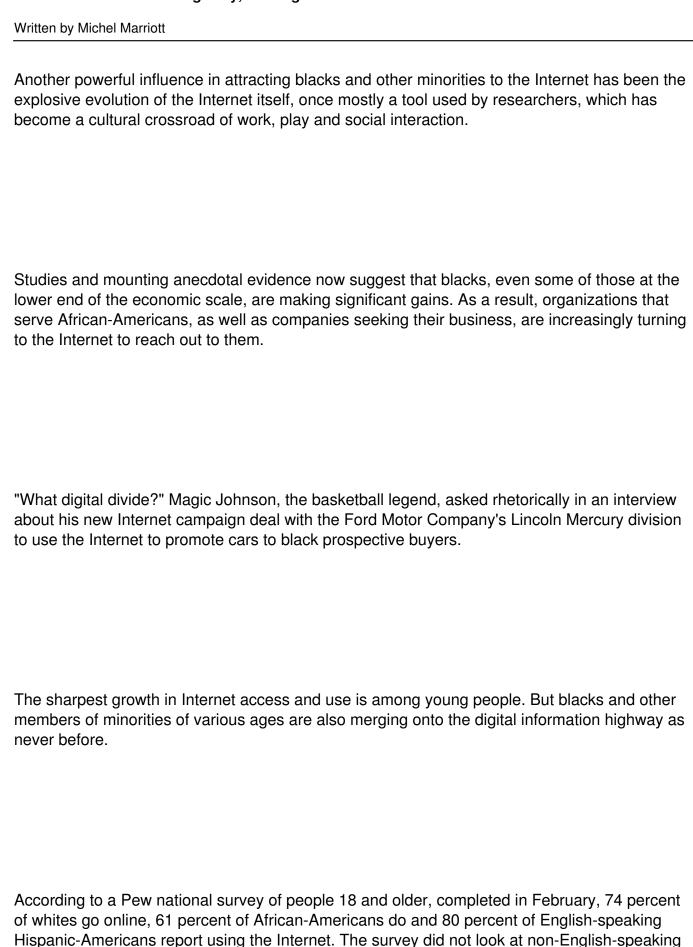
African-Americans are steadily gaining access to and ease with the Internet, signaling a remarkable closing of the "digital divide" that many experts had worried would be a crippling disadvantage in achieving success.

Civil rights leaders, educators and national policy makers warned for years that the Internet was bypassing blacks and some Hispanics as whites and Asian-Americans were rapidly increasing their use of it.

But the falling price of laptops, more computers in public schools and libraries and the newest generation of cellphones and hand-held devices that connect to the Internet have all contributed to closing the divide, Internet experts say.





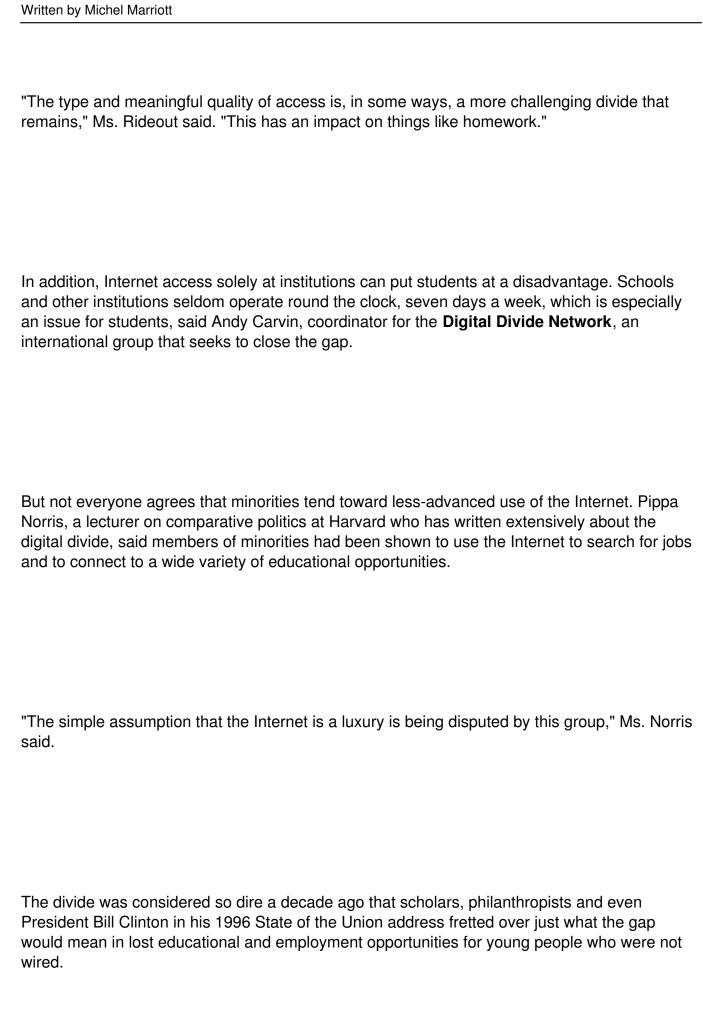
Hispanics, who some experts believe are not gaining access to the Internet in large numbers.

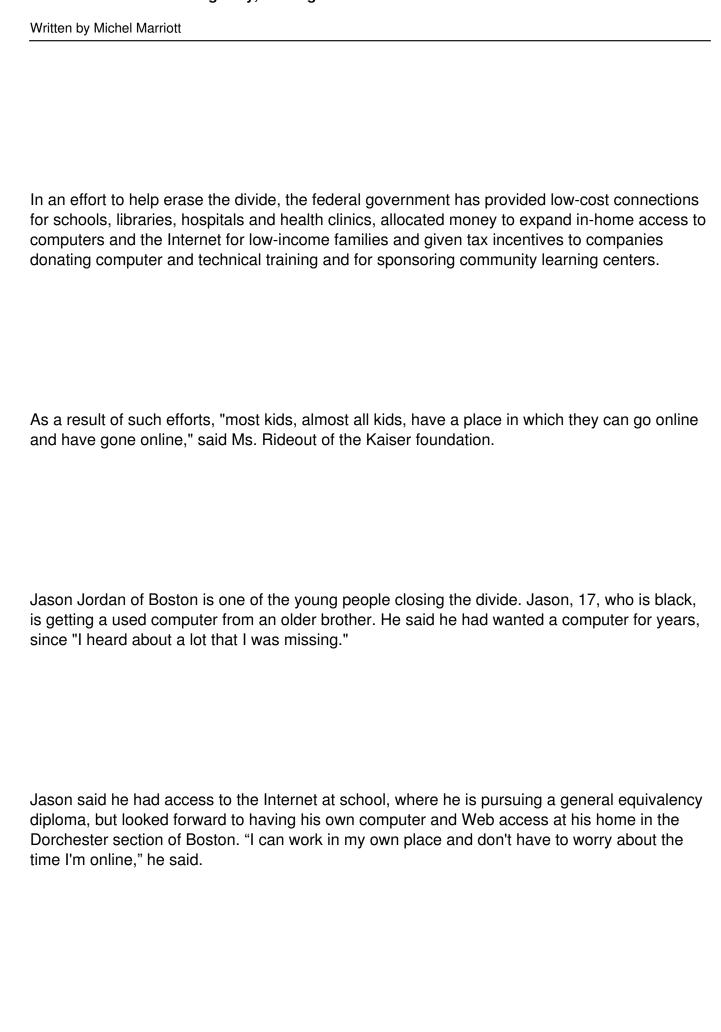
In a similar Pew survey in 1998, just 42 percent of white American adults said they used the Internet while only 23 percent of African-American adults did so. Forty percent of English-speaking Hispanic-Americans said they used the Internet.

Despite the dissolving gap, some groups like the Intel **Computer Clubhouse Network**, which introduces digital technologies to young people, say the digital divide is still vast in more subtle ways. Instant messaging and downloading music is one thing, said Marlon Orozco, program manager at the network's Boston clubhouse, but he would like to see black and Hispanic teenagers use the Internet in more challenging ways, like building virtual communities or promoting their businesses.



Vicky Rideout, vice president of the **Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation**, which has studied Internet use by race, ethnicity and age, cautioned that a new dimension of the digital divide might be opening because groups that were newer to the Internet tended to use less-advanced hardware and had slower connection speeds.





Written by Michel Marriott

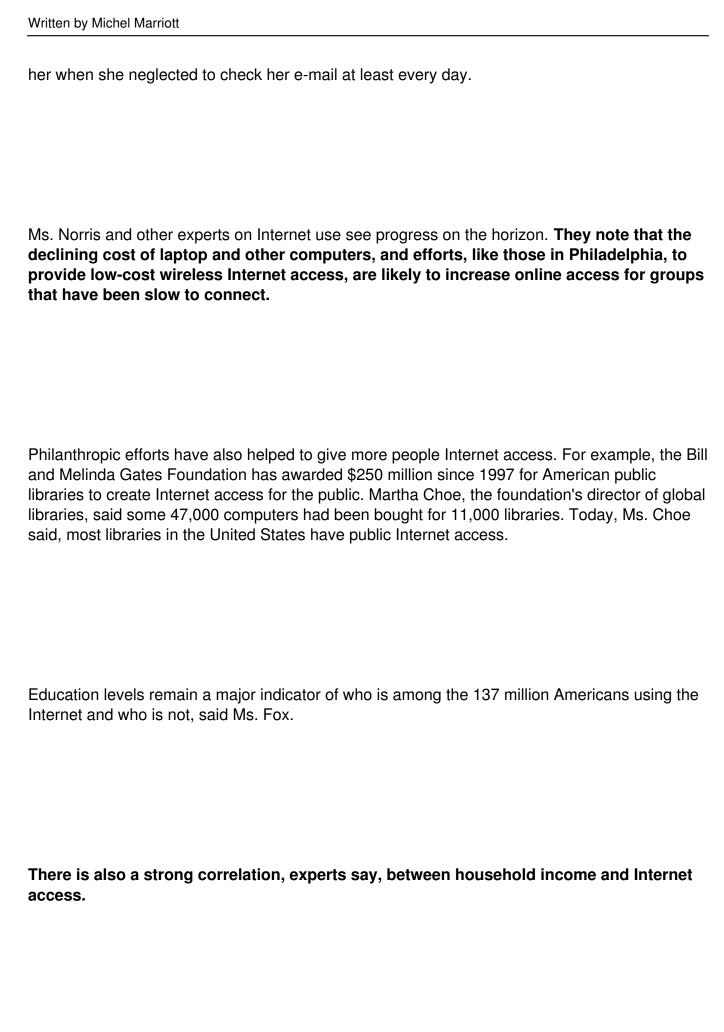
Like Jason, almost 9 out of 10 of the 21 million Americans ages 12 to 17 use the Internet, according to a report issued in July by the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Of them, 87 percent of white teenagers say they use the Internet, while 77 percent of black teenagers and 89 percent of Hispanic teenagers say they have access to it, the report said.

The gap in access among young Americans is less pronounced than among their parents' generation, said Susannah Fox, associate director of the Pew project. "Age continues to be a strong predictor for Internet use," Ms. Fox said.

While, overall Internet use among blacks still significantly trails use among whites, the shrinking divide is most vividly reflected in the online experience of people like Billy and Barbara Johnson. Less than two years ago, the Johnsons, who are black, plugged into the Internet in their upscale suburban home near Atlanta for the first time. Mrs. Johnson, a 52-year-old mother of four and homemaker, said she felt she had little choice because her school-age children needed to use the Internet for research.

And then there is e-mail. "No one really wants to take the time anymore to pick up the phone and keep in touch," lamented Mrs. Johnson, who said that so much of the communications with her children's school was done through e-mail correspondence. "I felt like I was pretty much forced into it."

Even so, Mrs. Johnson said her husband, an assistant coach for the Atlanta Falcons, still chided



With so many more members of minorities online, some Web sites are trying to capitalize on their new access. For example, the New York/New Jersey region of the State of the African American Male, a national initiative to improve conditions for black men, is encouraging men to use digital equipment to "empower themselves" to better their lives. The site, which includes studies, public policy reports and other information about issues related to black men, promotes using digital cameras, mobile phones and iPods, but mainly computers, to organize through the Internet, said Walter Fields, vice president for government relations for the Community Service Society, an antipoverty organization, and a coordinator of the black-male initiative. Users are encouraged to submit articles, write blogs and upload pertinent photographs and video clips.

"What we're doing is playing against the popular notion of a digital divide," Mr. Fields said. "I always felt that it was a misnomer."

Michel Marriott 2006 ©The New York Times

Written by Michel Marriott								
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·								
http://zonezero	.com/magazir	ne/articles/r	narriott/ind	ex.html				