



LAURENCE WATSON FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

"THE WHITE MAN will divide and conquer." I've heard that argument. It's time to move beyond that," says attorney Nicolas Vaca of Walnut Creek, author of a new book on race relations.

Book exposes tension between blacks, Latinos

Walnut Creek attorney contends that the groups battle for jobs, resources as they put on united front

By Katherine Corcoran

SAN JESU, MICHIGAN

Call it the myth of a rainbow coalition, or the newest elephant in America's living room. Either way, Walnut Creek attorney Nicolas Vaca wants a frank discussion on the latest taboo subject in the race milieu: the growing tension between Latinos and blacks.

Long presumed to be aligned on issues of civil rights and economic opportunity, Latinos and blacks in fact are locked in a struggle for jobs and educational resources. They're more likely to form political coalitions with whites than with each other, Vaca contends in his new book, "The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Blacks and Latinos and What It Means For America."

Members of both groups are loathe to talk about their divisions, believing they must show a united front against a white majority, says Vaca. He said Latinos are the most critical of him for airing the issue in public. One attorney, a longtime colleague whom Vaca describes as Chicago, stormed out of a bar when Vaca told him over drinks that he intended to lay out the conflict in a book. The friend said it would foster more division. "The white man will divide and conquer." I've heard that argument. It's time to move beyond that," Vaca said in a recent interview in his Walnut Creek office. "It's a way of not confronting the question."

Vaca, 60, a Harvard Law School graduate with a doctorate in sociology from UC Berkeley, decided to write a book as he watched the nation's burgeoning Latino population. He wondered why no one was discussing the impact of that growth on African-Americans, who have always led the nation's civil rights agenda.

The U.S. Census Bureau released Latinos last year showing that Latinos have surpassed blacks as the nation's largest minority group, making up 13.4 percent of the population, slightly more than the 13.3 percent for blacks.

Whether it's the ouster of a black superintendent in predominantly Latino public schools in East Palo Alto, or renaming a

MARIE WASN'T DOING well in school. The 7-year-old girl rarely talked. She missed school a lot and seldom smiled. Her parents and teacher were concerned about her, but they weren't sure what the problem was.

Fortunately, a visit to her school by a mobile dental van, which screens children for dental diseases, revealed what was wrong. She was suffering from many cavities and had a severe oral infection. When the teacher asked why she hadn't told her mother she had a toothache, Marie said she knew her mother had enough worries and her toothache didn't seem that important.

Marie attends school in East Contra Costa. Hers is not an isolated case. All across Contra Costa County, there are children like Marie who suffer from undetected dental disease that can lead to serious infection, poor performance in school and chronic pain. Marie's mother and teacher didn't realize that her learning problems might be related to

cavities. Some children drink nonfluoridated bottled water. Rarely, too much fluoride also can cause problems, so talk to your doctor or dentist about this if you are concerned.

For young children, the problem can be their baby bottle and what's in it. Infants who suck for long periods of time on baby bottles containing fruit juices, formula or other sugary drinks are at high risk for early childhood cavities. Sucking a bottle in bed without the head propped up, can increase the risk of ear infections. If a bottle is necessary, wipe the infant's teeth with a damp towel before bedtime, and use plain water in the bottle if possible. This can be a difficult adjustment at first, but reading a bedtime story, giving the child a special stuffed animal or doll or rubbing the child's back until the child falls asleep can help.

All children should get a yearly dental checkup starting at age 1 (yes, before their second birthday) even if they don't complain of tooth problems and their teeth appear normal.

HEALTHY OUTLOOK

By Lynn Pilant

tooth and gum disease. In screening programs conducted by Contra Costa Health Services' Oral Health program, two of every three children needed oral health treatment.

That's a lot of youngsters with a problem that is preventable. February is Children's Dental Health Month, and it's a good time to take a look at what causes children's oral health problems. For children younger than 8 or 9, not having enough fluoride in their diet means their teeth won't develop with the extra protection that fluoride provides. Some parts of Contra Costa County, such as Brentwood, Byron, Knightsen and Bay Point, have nonfluoridated tap water, which can increase the risk of

Early dental care urged for kids

Wipe an infant's teeth soft, damp cloth after you teach children how to brush at least twice and minimize candy and iced beverages.

Helping children take their teeth can help mold their smile. Ask your pediatrician about your dental health. Here are sources if you don't have a dentist: Lynn Pilant at 925-313-6163; Dent-Ca at 800-322-6384; or the Health and Disability Program at 925-313-6161.

Lynn Pilant is the manager of Contra Costa Health Services' Dental Health Program. Health Outlook weekly column written by professional staff of Contra Costa Health Services, county health department comments and queries sent to comments@cchealth.org or to series coordinator at Stephen J. Daniels at sdaniels@radio4net.com. Health information, go to <http://cchealth.org>.

A garden of bright lights for a big city memor



DEBORAH WATSON FOR THE TIMES

JESSICA KMETOVIC was on a team of designers whose plan was a finalist for the World Trade Center memorial. The three-person team produced the "Garden of Lights" design. "I'm grateful to have been a part of it — it's amazing," Kmetovic said.

stressful and rewarding. "How do you memorialize 3,000 people? For us it was about memorializing life, so for us it was a garden and nature and light," said Kmetovic, 26.

Born in Santa Cruz, Kmetovic grew up in Berkeley. After the terrorist attacks, Kmetovic landed a spot in a Columbia University program that offered students in New York and then Paris. It was in Paris where she learned of the competition. She joined up with a fellow student just two weeks before the deadline and quickly enlisted a professor in the project. "He hadn't even heard of the competition," but he said, "How wonderful! Let's do it!" Kmetovic joked in a French accent.

In just two weeks, the team came up with the garden. At street level, there would be orchards and meadows; and open spaces below the surface, there would be a sanctuary for family members of the victims. Below that level, there would be another sanctuary for the public — with light shafts representing the victims and connecting all the levels. The idea was to keep the family area private for a generation, in order to provide extended time for healing.



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