

# Black Youth Project

**For Immediate Release**  
February 1, 2007

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## **LARGEST EVER NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY ILLUMINATES THE ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES, HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICANS**

### **Black Youth Project Study Reveals Attitudes of Black, Hispanic and White Youth on Morality, Education, Marriage, Politics, Discrimination, Justice and the Future**

(Chicago, IL—February 1, 2007) -- The Black Youth Project, under the direction of Dr. Cathy Cohen of the University of Chicago, today unveiled the findings of a comprehensive survey of the experiences and attitudes of young African Americans. The national survey questioned 1,590 African American, White and Hispanic young people, ages 15-25, on everything from pre-marital sex to their beliefs about the “color-blind” society. The data present one of the most complete pictures to date of a generation that finds itself in the center of many of the country’s political and social debates.

“This generation of young African Americans is much talked-about, but rarely talked with and asked to engage in real dialog,” noted Dr. Cohen. “Religious leaders, social commentators and entertainers claim to understand Black youth. This survey, however, shows young Black Americans to be more thoughtful and complex than they are usually assumed to be, with strong opinions about education, the political system, and the future of race and racism in America—opinions and perspectives we should understand if we want to promote effective policies that can really change the lives of young Black Americans.”

The Black Youth Project national survey and analysis of the data was funded by the Ford Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The research was conducted by Dr. Cohen and a team of graduate student researchers at the University of Chicago. The Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago supported and housed the research team and the national survey was mounted by NORC: A National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago. Participants in the national telephone study were guaranteed confidentiality to ensure their honest responses. A subset of approximately 50 Black respondents participated in further in-depth interviews. The study has a margin of error of 2%. Among the key findings:

#### **Sex and Sex Education**

- While the majority of all youth had some form of high school sex education, Black youth were most likely to have received no sex education (31%), while 27% of White and Hispanic youth reported receiving no sex education.
- At the same time, Black youth were most supportive (93% support) of mandatory sex education and condom availability (76% support) in high schools. And strong majorities of all young people (81% of White, 79% of Hispanic and 76% of Black youth) oppose abstinence-only education.
- Black youth are more likely than their White or Hispanic counterparts to practice safer sex. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of Black youth report using protection every time or almost every time during intercourse, compared to 66% of White youth and 64% of Hispanic youth. Half (50%) of Black youth report using protection every time or almost every time in oral sex, compared to 37% of Hispanic youth and 35% of White youth.
- Black youth (23%) are more likely than White (14%) or Hispanic youth (18%) to strongly agree with the statement “When I have sex I feel in control.”

- Black youth are most supportive of government efforts to promote marriage through special benefits for married couples: 66% of Black youth agree the government should actively promote marriage, a position shared by 57% of Hispanic youth and 56% of White youth.
- Black and Hispanic youth are most likely to say that abortion is always wrong (47% of Black and 46% of Hispanic youth agree). Just 34% of White youth say abortion is always wrong.
- Black youth are much more likely (55%) than either Hispanic (36%) or White youth (35%) to believe that homosexuality is always wrong.
- The overwhelmingly majority of all young people (83% of White youth, 82% of Hispanic youth, and 79% of Black youth) say they know someone personally who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

## **Gender roles**

- There was near uniform agreement among all young people (95% of White youth, 94% of Black youth and 92% of Hispanic youth) that “men and women should share equally in childcare and housework.” Young Black males (38%) were more likely than their White (32%) or Hispanic (25%) counterparts to strongly agree with equal division of housework and childcare.
- Yet, Black youth across age groups and sex were much more likely to believe that “it is better if a man is the main financial supporter of his family.” Fifty percent (50%) of Black youth thought men should be the main financial provider, compared to 36% of Hispanic youth and 33% of White youth who said men should be the primary financial provider.
- Black and Hispanic youth are more likely to believe a single mother can raise her child as well as a married couple. Seventy-three percent (73%) of Black and Hispanic youth agree, while only 60% of White youth say a single woman could do as well as a married couple.

## **Culture**

- Black youth are more regular consumers of rap music and rap music videos than other young people. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of Black youth listen to rap music every day, as compared to 45% of Hispanic youth and 23% of White youth. Just 3% of Black youth report never listening to rap music.
- Yet, Black youth generally express greater concern about the content of rap music and rap music videos than do White or Hispanic youth:
  - 72% of Black youth agree rap videos contain too many sexual references
  - 41% of Black youth say that rap music videos should be more political
  - Majorities of all young people agree that “rap music videos portray both Black women and Black men in bad and offensive ways.” Young Black women and girls (66%) are more likely to strongly agree or agree than their White (60%) or Hispanic (53%) counterparts that Black women are portrayed in a demeaning fashion in rap music videos..
  - Ironically, while 57% of Black men believe that rap music videos portray Black women in bad and offensive ways, 44% of young Black men disagree that rap music videos portray Black men in bad and offensive ways.

“A lot of people talk about rap music and it’s impact on young people without any data,” noted Dr. Cohen. “This study shows us that young people are actually discerning viewers who have thoughtful insights about cultural representation. Instead of condemning young Black people for watching rap videos, we might encourage music and television companies to provide a broader range of images for young Black people, who say that what they’re seeing now is overly sexual and demeans women. This audience deserves to be paid attention to as consumers.”

## ***Government and politics***

- Seventy-nine percent (79%) of Black youth believe they can make a difference participating in politics, and 74% believe they have the skills and knowledge to do so -- levels similar to those expressed by White (79%) and Hispanic youth (77%).
- Yet, fewer than one in five young people participated in political activism (e.g., contacting a public official or agency; attending a protest meeting; joining a political group; volunteering on a political campaign or for candidate or political party; or working with people in their neighborhood on a political issue or problem in the twelve months before the survey).
- Black youth (66%) and Hispanic youth (62%) are more likely than White youth (50%) to believe that a few big interests run the government.
- Only about 4 in 10 young people (40% of Black youth, 38% of Hispanic youth and 42% of White youth) believe that people in their neighborhood are able to get the government to respond to their needs.

“Young black people told us overwhelmingly that they want to participate in politics and have the skills to do so. But the majority of young black people also believe that the leaders in government care little about them,” said Dr. Cohen. “Black youth are largely alienated from a political process where leaders seemed more concerned with their own interests than with the needs of young Black people. We should be talking about changing that process and those leaders, to ensure that young people are really included in the process and mobilized.”

## ***Perspectives on discrimination***

- Young Black people are much more likely than White or Hispanic youth to agree that Black people are systematically discriminated against in the United States:
  - Nearly half (48%) of Black youth agree that “the government treats most immigrants better than it treats most Black people in this country.” Just 29% of White youth and 18% of Hispanic youth agree.
  - Black youth are twice as likely as White youth (68% vs 34%) to believe that race slows government efforts to address HIV/AIDS -- a view shared by half (50%) of Hispanic youth.
  - Sixty-one percent (61%) of Black youth agree “it is hard for young Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination.” Forty-six percent (46%) of Hispanic youth and 43% of White youth agree.
  - More than half (54%) of Black youth feel that young Black people receive a poorer education than White youth. Less than one-third (31%) of White youth agree.
  - A majority of Black youth (59%) and Hispanic youth (52%) believe Blacks are treated less fairly than Whites in the healthcare system, a perspective shared by only 32% of White youth.
  - Across races, most young people (79% of Black, 73% of Hispanic and 63% of White youth) agree that the police discriminate much more against Black youth.
- Still, nearly half of Black youth say they have only rarely or never personally been victims of racial discrimination. Less than 20% of Black youth state they were discriminated against because of their race very often or often, while 48% of Black youth report they were discriminated because of their race rarely or never. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of Hispanic youth and 83% of White youth state they rarely or never experienced racial discrimination.

- Young people are very skeptical that racism will be eliminated during their lifetime. Only 11% of Black youth, 12% of Hispanic youth, and 4% of White youth see the elimination of racism in their lifetimes as very likely.
- Black youth are much more likely than White youth to believe that women face a lot of discrimination in this country. Thirty-six percent (36%) of Black females and 32% of Black males agree that women face a lot of discrimination. That belief that is shared by 21% of Hispanic females and 25% of Hispanic males, and by only 15% of White females and 17% of White males.

“Our society outlawed outright discrimination and many hoped that society had really changed,” said Dr. Cohen. “What the data suggest, however, is that young people still face discrimination and limited opportunities. We see that they are trying to make sense of the society. Is it an open, colorblind society that some claim will elect a Black president? Or is it a society that still holds on to the remnants of Jim Crow? More than anger, we saw in the young people surveyed a sense of disappointment and disillusionment that the country is not the open society the government claims it is. Young people, in particular young Black people, are struggling to make sense the rhetoric of inclusion, and the reality of exclusion. The challenge is to understand how we can use the information from this study to help form effective policies that will make us live up to the promise of an open, democratic, and just society.”

## **Methodology**

The Black Youth Project survey utilized a multi-methodological research design, including a new national survey of 1590 young people ages 15-25 from across the country with an over-sample of African American and Latino/a respondents. The survey was mounted using the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC). A total of 59 interviewers worked on the project. The data collection involved a 45-minute computer-assisted phone interview for eligible participants with a 5-minute screener. A random digit dial sample was used to identify survey participants. The final unweighted interviewer response rate was 62.1%. This survey data is being paired with in-depth interviews with African American respondents in Chicago, IL, Detroit, MI, Milwaukee, WI, St. Louis, MO and Gary, IN.

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