



Race, Politics and Sex:  
Understanding the Attitudes and  
Behaviors of African American Youth

Cathy J. Cohen  
University of Chicago

# Overview of Black Youth Project

- African American youth reflect the challenges of inclusion and empowerment faced by the U.S. in the post-civil rights period.
- Whether the issue is mass incarceration, high stakes educational testing, HIV/AIDS, welfare reform, or affirmative action, African American youth are at the center of these debates and policies.
- The systematic presentation of the perspectives and voices of African American have often been absent.
- This project explores the attitudes, decision-making and behaviors of African American youth ages 15-25 in a range of areas, making their voices primary.

# Methodology

- Three Stage Research Design
  - New National Survey
    - 1590 respondents; over-sample of Blacks and Latinos
    - Summer-Fall 2005
    - Fact Sheets available at [www.blackyouthproject.com](http://www.blackyouthproject.com)
  - In-Depth Interviews
    - 30-50 in-depth interviews with Black survey respondents
    - Summer and Fall 2006
  - Rap Music Content Analysis
    - Based on Billboard Charts
    - Summer 2007

Rap Music:

What Young People Have to  
Say—Data!

# Attitudes about Rap Videos:

- The overwhelming majority of young people agree with the statement: “Rap music videos contain too many references to sex.” The percentage who agree with that statement are:
  - 72% of Black Youth
  - 72% of Hispanic Youth
  - 68% of White Youth

# Attitudes about Rap Videos:

- In general, most young people agree with the statement: “Rap music videos portray Black women in bad and offensive ways,” however young Black females are more likely to strongly agree with the statement.
- 66 % of young Black females agree; 26% of those strongly agree
- 60% of young White females agree; 19% of those strongly agree
- 53% of young Hispanic females agree; 15% strongly agree
- 57% of young Black males agree; 17% of those strongly agree
- 55% of young Hispanic males agree; 13% strongly agree
- 61% of young White males agree; 10% of those strongly agree

# Attitudes about Rap Videos:

- While the majority of young people agree with the statement that “Rap music videos portray Black men in bad and offensive ways,” nearly a majority of young Black men and boys disagree with the statement. The percentage that disagree with that statement are:
  - 44% of young Black males
  - 35% of young Hispanic males
  - 29% of young White males

# Race and Racism:

Senator Obama on Top  
Black Youth on the Bottom—  
Fiction of a Color-Blind Society



# Race and Racism:

- Twenty-three percent more Black youth than Whites believe that Black youth receive a poorer education on average than White youth. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 54% of Black youth
  - 40% of Hispanic youth
  - 31% of White youth

# Race and Racism:

- More than 60% of Black youth agree with the statement that “it is hard for young Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination.” The percentage of youth who agree with this statement are:
  - 61% of Black youth
  - 45% of Hispanic youth
  - 43% of White youth

# Race and Racism:

- Nearly half of Black youth agree with the statement that “the government treats most immigrants *better* than it treats most Black people in this country.” The percentage of youth who agree with this statement are:
  - 48% of Black youth
  - 18% of Hispanic youth
  - 29% of White youth

# Race and Racism:

- The overwhelming majority of Black youth believe that the government would do more to find a cure for AIDS if more white people had the disease. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 68% of Black youth
  - 50% of Hispanic youth
  - 34% of White youth

# Race and Racism:

- A majority of Black and Hispanic youth believe that Blacks are treated less fairly than Whites in the health care system. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 59% of Black youth
  - 52% of Hispanic youth
  - 32% of White youth

# Race and Racism:

- The overwhelming majority of all youth believe that on average, the police discriminate *much more* against Black youth than they do against White youth. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 79% of Black youth
  - 73% of Hispanic youth
  - 63% of White youth

# Race and Racism:

- The percentage of youth who believe that it is *very likely* that racism will be eliminated during their lifetime are:
  - 11% of Black youth
  - 12% of Hispanic youth
  - 4% of White youth

# Race and Racism—Black Youth

- More than 40 percent of Black youth agree with the statement that “people judge me by what I can buy and what I own.” The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 41% of Black youth
  - 34% of Hispanic youth
  - 26% of White youth



Politics:

Frustration and Hope

# Politics

- The percentage of youth who believe that they have the skills and knowledge to participate in politics are:
  - 74% of Black youth
  - 66% of Hispanic youth
  - 70% of White youth

# Politics

- The majority of both Black and Hispanic youth believe that the leaders in government care very little about people like them. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 56% of Black youth
  - 52% of Hispanic youth
  - 44% of White youth

# Politics—Community

- Only about four in ten young people believe that people in their neighborhood are able to get the government to respond to their needs. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 40% of Black youth
  - 38% of Hispanic youth
  - 42% of White youth

# Politics--Community

- Yet, an overwhelming majority of all youth believe that people working together in their neighborhood can solve many of their problems. The percentage of youth who believe this are:
  - 76% of Black youth
  - 72% of Hispanic youth
  - 79% of White youth

So where do we go from here?

What does it mean for our work?