



Black in America: The Study

Research finds that African Americans aren't a monolithic group

by Aisha Iman Jefferson

August 12, 2008 -- The thoughts and lifestyles of black Americans vary just as much as the hues of their skin. Nearly seven in 10 are Internet savvy. Some prefer to be called black. Others prefer to be called African American. And despite the appearance of things, an overwhelmingly large percentage of black youth respect the opinions of their elders.

While there are some commonalities among black Americans, the "Black America Today" study, by Radio One Inc., suggests that the 40 million people comprising this racial group are not a monolithic entity.

More than 3,000 black Americans between ages 13 and 74, from across the country and from various socioeconomic backgrounds, were surveyed last fall. Radio One spent close to \$1 million on this project.

"The truth is that there are all different types of black people," says Bruce Conner of Chapel Hill, North Carolina-based research firm Yankelovich, which was commissioned along with Hunter-Miller Group Inc. to conduct the study.

According to the study, the digital divide that's feared to be keeping black people behind mainstream America doesn't really exist. The study shows that 68% of black people surveyed are online. Of the black teens surveyed in the Radio One study, more than 90% were online, not far from the 94% of all teens Pew surveyed as Internet users last September.

"I was so happy to learn that there isn't a big digital divide between our community and others," says Radio One founder and chairwoman Cathy Hughes, adding that this information was the most rewarding surprise of the study.

For the study, Radio One cast a wide net to get results, surveying participants on a myriad of topics including media consumption, money and finances, Internet usage, diversity among friends, and faith. Yankelovich found 11 distinct segments among black Americans.

Other findings include 71% of black people think it's important to "stick together to achieve gains for their community;" 44% believe there's "too much focus put on the oppression of

blacks," compared with 34% who disagree. Only 14% of respondents agree that the only meaningful measure of success is money, and 46% say black slang should be avoided since it puts blacks at a disadvantage. About half of all black people are likely to have mostly black friends or interact mostly with blacks at school or work.

Another finding showed that 88% of those surveyed had "enormous respect for the opinions and desires of older family members," with 84% of teen respondents agreeing.

"What this research documented was that you can't judge a book by its cover," Hughes says. "You know that these kids may dress strange to us but they still have a strong respect for the opinions of their elders. Nowhere in mainstream media would you have ever have come up with that information or that conclusion that these are respectful individuals who just like to wear their pants down below their behinds,"

Sixty-four percent of respondents prefer businesses that give back to the black community. This shows that "African Americans have a consciousness as it relates to businesses," says Roland S. Martin, author, columnist, and radio talk show host. "We simply don't want businesses to take our money and don't invest back in. . If we don't see our dollars at work, we have problem," Martin says.

Most respondents suggest that mainstream media continues to reinforce stereotypes about black Americans and aren't doing a good job of portraying black Americans in a positive light. The findings also point out that about 30% of African Americans "really trust" black media compared with 13% who "really trust" mainstream media.

Ann Morning, an assistant sociology professor at New York University who specializes in race and ethnicity, says those percentages are a reflection of the media's tendency to portray blacks in a very simplistic way in the media, where very one-dimensional images of blacks often are depicted. "Journalism all too often uses black as a synonym for poor, being unemployed, being involved in criminal activity," Morning says.

Radio One's Hughes says she's hopeful the study will help change the negative stereotypes permeating about black American behavior, as well as trigger other research projects and encourage more corporations and individuals to more thoroughly understand the black community.

The study was born out of Radio One "looking for research on the African American consumer and [realizing that] at this level, no in-depth study had been done on the black community and as a family unit," Hughes says. Radio One owns and/or operates 53 radio stations located in 16 urban markets across the country. Its holdings also include Magazine One Inc., which includes Giant Magazine, TV One L.L.C., and REACH Media, which owns the Tom Joyner Morning Show and Black America Web.

Hughes says the study also will give her company a better understanding of Radio One's

target audience.

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