



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

Opportunity for
Black Men and Boys:

*Public Opinion,
Media Depictions, and
Media Consumption*

Acknowledgments

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About The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds, and policy over time, the organization works with social justice groups, leaders, and movements to advance solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and corresponding solutions; uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

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Executive Summary

Over the past half-century, African Americans have made remarkable progress in toppling legal segregation and discrimination, in accessing economic and educational opportunities, and in participating in our political process, including, most notably, as President of the United States. Yet significant barriers remain in countless domains, from high school graduation to employment and wealth, to physical health and the criminal justice system. And in each of those areas, African-American men and boys face challenges that differ in key respects from those of African-American women and girls, or from men and boys of other racial and ethnic groups.

Among the many factors that influence the opportunities and achievements of black men and boys are public perceptions and attitudes toward them as a group, and their own self-perceptions as well. Research and experience show that expectations and biases on the part of potential employers, teachers, health care providers, police officers, and other stakeholders influence the life outcomes of millions of black males, just as their own self-esteem, identity, and sense of empowerment affect their ability to achieve under difficult circumstances.

In turn, one of the most important avenues for maintaining (or changing) these perceptions is the mass media, with its significant power to shape popular ideas and attitudes.

Academics and advocates have spent significant time investigating the relationships among black outcomes, media representations, and other aspects of public discourse. However, this research has not been fully integrated into the work of advocates and organizations seeking to make change, in part because the findings are diffuse and even conflicting, and in part because they have frequently not been translated into actionable recommendations. To foster the incorporation of this research into the work of those trying to improve black male achievement, The Opportunity Agenda has commissioned a set of reports that review and summarize the key findings and recommendations in three significant areas:

- ▶ A review of the social and cognitive science literature to determine what researchers know and don't know about the relationship between media representations and the media's impacts on the lives of black men and boys;
- ▶ A meta-analysis of public opinion research relating to race, and what it suggests about advocacy for black male achievement; and
- ▶ An analysis of original data about black men as consumers of media, including broadcast, print, and online platforms.

In each case, the rationale for the report is to offer a clearer picture of what is already known about how engagement with the mass media and public communications may help improve the life chances of black men and boys. This research overview offers a brief summary of some of the key content from those reports, and readers are urged to pursue the exploration further in the reports themselves.

In reporting our findings and recommendations, we use interchangeably the terms “black” and “African American” to describe people who identified themselves using either of those terms in response to the research on which our analysis is based. In the *Media Consumption Trends among Black Men* portion of this report, we use the term “men” to describe males 18 years of age or older.

Findings

A review of social science literature and public opinion research relating to black male achievement

Hundreds of scholars in a range of disciplines — from experimental psychology to cultural criticism to sociology to ethnic studies — have explored questions relating to how media, and communications more broadly, affect outcomes for black men and boys in American society. In addition, dozens of recent public opinion studies have touched on Americans’ understandings of black achievement, awareness of racial disparities, and thoughts about the causes of and responsibility for addressing inequalities.

The reviews of this large body of work offer a digestible overview of an extremely rich and varied collection of research. Some themes and findings are well established and deeply documented in the literature, while other areas remain to be investigated further, or raise challenging questions with which scholars continue to grapple.

Distorted Patterns of Portrayal in the Media

One of the best-documented themes in the research is that the overall presentation of black men and boys in the media is a distortion of reality in a variety of ways. While individual studies may focus on a single genre or medium — such as TV fiction shows, magazine advertising, or video games — the research taken as a whole reveals broad patterns, including the underrepresentation of African Americans (and black males in particular) in a variety of roles such as “talking head” news experts, computer users in TV commercials, and “relatable” characters with well-developed personal lives (*e.g.*, fathers). Conversely, black males are overrepresented when media touch on certain negative topics, such as criminality, unemployment, and poverty, for instance. Also, the positive images and attributes with which black males are associated tend to be constrained to a small, stereotypic set which includes sports, physical achievement in general, aggressiveness, and musicality, to the exclusion of other everyday virtues.

The social science research also makes clear that important dimensions of black men’s and boys’ lives are largely *ignored* in the media — such as historical antecedents of black economic disadvantage and the persistence of anti-black male bias.

Especially problematically, scholars conclude that even “accurate” and “sympathetic” representations of black males can indirectly misrepresent reality: When reporters continue to explore real problems facing black communities and black men and boys, they may end up reinforcing the “problem frame” that associates these groups with intractable challenges.

Perceptions of African Americans

According to researchers, distorted media representations can be expected to create attitudinal effects ranging from general antagonism toward black men and boys, to higher tolerance for race-based socioeconomic disparities, reduced attention to structural and other big-picture factors, and public support for punitive approaches to problems.

In fact, a wealth of studies confirms that negative perceptions of African Americans linger in the American mind. A large body of research explores the nature of “implicit bias,” unconscious attitudes that are presumably shaped in part by media consumption. Experiment after experiment demonstrates that white Americans tend to have unconscious biases against African Americans. For instance, whites tend to more easily associate negative words such as *terrible*, *failure*, *horrible*, *evil*, *agony*, *nasty*, and

awful with unknown black faces, as opposed to white faces. To a lesser degree blacks too tend to show this bias against unknown faces of their own race.

Explicit measures of bias also confirm lingering negative attitudes. While there has been significant improvement in racial attitudes since the mid-twentieth century — as measured in surveys touching on black-white relations, segregation, and blatant prejudice — racial tensions and stereotypes persist. Some recent public opinion research has measured public assessments of different racial groups, including character traits, finding that Americans overall give higher ratings to “white Americans” than to “black Americans.”

These perceptions, in turn, can create negative effects any time a black man or boy is in a position where his fate depends on how he is perceived by others, particularly by whites, or on the kind of rapport he has with them. Real world impacts documented in the literature include less attention from doctors, harsher sentencing by judges, lower likelihood of being hired or admitted to school, lower odds of getting loans, and a higher likelihood of being shot by police.

While studies show that media images have the most impact on viewers with less real-world exposure to the lives of African Americans, African-American audiences are not immune. Scholars point to a connection between media consumption and diminished black perceptions of self, which may arise by various mechanisms. For instance, negative stereotypes such as portrayal of blacks as thugs, criminals, fools, and disadvantaged are demoralizing and reduce self-esteem and self-expectations. Dealing with negative expectations may also create stress and drain cognitive resources in some contexts — leading to the lowered performance associated with “stereotype threat.” It may also be significant that the common “role models of success” (*e.g.*, rap stars and NBA players) imply limited options, while other types of role models are lacking. The importance of this narrow range of models is amplified when we consider that sports (especially football and basketball) and music programming dominate the television and radio preferences of black men and boys. (See below for discussion of media consumption habits.)

In the end, black men tend to be their own harshest critics, according to public opinion research. They tend to believe that members of their group put too little emphasis on health, success at work, family, and other important areas. (Yet while black respondents express significant worries and see a great number of problems facing black men, they nonetheless express strong optimism about their group’s future.)

Perceptions of Inequality and Causal Factors

Given the observation by social science researchers that the media present little information about structural factors affecting life outcomes for black men and boys, we might expect limited public awareness and understanding of these factors as well. And in fact, public opinion research confirms that this is the case.

A first pattern to note is that few surveys even include questions about structural factors *per se* — *e.g.*, the need to improve public transit access in particular neighborhoods. Rather, they tend to emphasize questions that take an interpersonal perspective on race issues — *e.g.*, focusing on how people get along or whether blacks experience racial slights. On these measures, most Americans believe that race relations are good, that problems will be worked out, and that more dialogue will help. Blacks are more likely to report discrimination and to believe that discrimination is at the root of various serious consequences, such as disparities in income and education. (Even more fundamentally, white respondents tend to underestimate the gaps themselves: They are less aware of the disparities that face black Americans, and are more likely than blacks to believe that disparities are disappearing.)

In addition to the interpersonal perspective, surveys also measure attitudes related to personal responsibility as a root cause for racial inequality — *i.e.*, the idea that disparities exist because individuals of different races are not trying equally hard to achieve. This view is common among all races, and black respondents themselves have increasingly shifted toward a personal responsibility perspective to explain gaps in black achievement since the mid-1990s, although this view has not yet replaced the belief that prejudice hinders achievement.

In the few cases where opinions regarding structural factors are measured, surveys find differing perspectives between racial groups. For example, most black people believe the economic system is stacked against them, while white Americans tend to think “the system is fair to everyone.”

Causes for Distorted Patterns in the Media

Why are media patterns distorted? Social science scholars have offered a number of suggestions about the causal factors leading to the distortions and omissions, such as the fact that media content producers themselves may have distorted perceptions, or may make incorrect assumptions about what audiences want to see or who their audiences are. Some suggest that media-makers may be accurately reflecting and responding to the appetites and preferences of consumers who prefer these distortions, or may be working towards political ends by trafficking in stereotypes. One of the factors treated as most significant is the paucity of African-American producers, journalists, invited guest experts, and other shapers of content.

Deep Challenges

Beyond describing the negative impacts of distorted and incomplete media portrayals, the social and cognitive science literature points to a number of deep challenges that confront anyone hoping to make a real difference in perceptions. For instance:

- ▶ Anxieties tangential to race, *e.g.*, about terrorism or job loss, tend to promote a more conservative outlook, including negative attitudes towards those perceived as “other.”
- ▶ Some social science suggests relations among people of different races must always overcome some fundamental obstacles, such as more trouble differentiating the faces of other-race individuals.
- ▶ There is considerable debate about how to discuss the degree to which the actions and choices of black men may contribute to their problems and reinforce the default perception that they are entirely and always at fault.
- ▶ Some of the social science literature suggests that actual social contact between black men and boys and others may be one of the most critical factors in changing perceptions and outcomes. If this is the case, then communications attempting to change perceptions of black men and boys *per se*, no matter how well done, may be of secondary importance, except to the extent that they help break down the forms of isolation and segregation that marginalize black men and boys.

Relative Lack of “Prescriptive” Studies

The vast majority of the literature on this topic focuses on mapping out the problems relating to black men and boys and the media, and is essentially descriptive — that is, it describes and analyzes existing patterns in the media and their impacts on thought and behavior. Prescriptive studies, explicitly setting out to identify proven courses of action, including empirically testing hypotheses about what might help improve matters, are relatively absent from the literature.

An exception to this trend comes from laboratory studies of tasks or conditions that reduce implicit (unconscious) bias. For instance, various types of explicit and intensive training have been shown to reduce measures of implicit bias.

By and large, however, the existing research offers relatively little evidence about what works when it comes to improving media representations of black men and boys, or addressing the adverse effects of such representations.

Media consumption trends among black men

Those who hope to make changes in the media environment that shapes perceptions of and by black men and boys must understand how this group experiences and interacts with the media. For instance, if the goal is to influence content viewed by this audience, it will be helpful to focus on media venues that are both very popular and potentially amenable to content input. We examined a wide range of media platforms — including television, magazines, online outlets, newspapers, and radio — and identified the media sources, whether mainstream or targeted to this population, with the highest reach to African-American men. The results provide valuable information to those seeking to influence the media content received by this group.

The research shows that across all media platforms, sports (primarily football and then basketball) and music (Urban Contemporary and Urban Adult Contemporary) dominate the media preferences of African-American men. Mainstream media reaches the most African-American adults (men and women) in general, while ethnic media reaches fewer, but in a higher concentration. Both overall reach and concentration are important factors that should inform the design of media interventions.

Compared to the average media consumer, African Americans watch less TV news overall but are more likely to watch local news and cable news. They are also more likely to get news from the internet and less likely to read the newspaper.

Highlights of findings across all platforms and in each media platform follow.

Cross-Platform Findings

Across media platforms, sports and music-related media content are the most embraced by African-American men. Mainstream media, as expected, reach larger numbers of African-American men, and African-American adults in general, than media that specifically target these populations. However, African-American targeted media tend to have significantly higher concentrations of African-Americans among their consumers, and in a few cases — such as with the magazines *Ebony*, *Jet*, or *Essence* — they also deliver large reach.

- ▶ Specific online search, web portals, aggregation and social media sites (Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, and YouTube) and televised sporting events (NFL and NBA) reach the largest absolute numbers of black men. Outside of advertising, however, opportunities to influence the content of many of these platforms are limited.
- ▶ Among platforms that generate their own editorial or entertainment content, magazines reach the largest numbers of black men. Nine out of the top 10 “content-generating” media sources across all platforms are magazines, and their reach to African-American men is a little over 20 million. These titles include: *Ebony*, *Sports Illustrated*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Jet*, *National Geographic*, *Men’s Health*, *Black Enterprise*, *Essence*, and *People*.
- ▶ Among black-oriented media, lifestyle magazines and music-related TV shows top the list.

Television

- ▶ On television, sports dominate the viewing habits of African-American men. The popularity of sports, specifically the NFL, mirrors that of the U.S. population overall, except that the NBA finals are by far more popular with the African-American community than with the general population.

All of the top 25 viewed shows by all African-American adults, as well as by African-American men, are sporting events (NFL and NBA, with 10 and 4 million viewers, respectively).

- ▶ Secondary to the popularity of sports events on television are music-related programs. In this and many other arenas, broadcast television has significantly larger reach to African Americans than cable.
- ▶ The highest viewed non-sporting event by African Americans is the *Grammy Awards*. At 3.3 million viewers, it is the only non-sporting event/show in the top 55. Looking deeper, six of the top ten most watched non-sporting shows by African-American adults are music related: *The Grammy Awards*, *Glee*, *The Academy Awards*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *American Idol*, and *Soul Train Red Carpet*.
- ▶ On TV, Black Entertainment Network (BET) offers the most competitive combination of large reach and high concentration of African Americans. BET shows predominated the list of the top most watched non-sporting shows by this population.
- ▶ The Fox Networks have more shows geared towards African Americans, with a larger reach to African-American men, than any of the other major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC). Among the most popular of these are the variety show *In the Flow* and the *NAACP Image Awards*. Comedies such as *Are We There Yet?* on TBS are popular with African-American men and adults, although they do not compete with NFL, NBA, or music-related TV programming, nor with readership of top magazines, such as *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence*, whose reach is to the target audience.
- ▶ TBS is the only mass media cable network with shows targeted at African Americans — *Tyler Perry: The Family that Prays* and *Are We There Yet?* — which have a large audience of African-American men.

Magazines

- ▶ Magazines are the only national media platform where combined black-oriented titles reach larger absolute numbers of African-American men than do mainstream titles. In the other media platforms that are distributed on the national level (TV, online, and newspaper), the properties with the largest black adult audiences are geared toward the general population and not specifically to the African-American community.
- ▶ Four of the ten magazines reaching the largest African-American male audience — *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Jet*, and *Black Enterprise* — are black-oriented magazines with lifestyle content. Their reach to African-American men ranges from 1.7 to 3.5 million.
- ▶ The second most popular magazine genre among African-American men is sports. *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* are the second and third most popular magazines, with 3.1 million and 3 million African-American men, respectively, reading them monthly.
- ▶ The magazine preferences of African-American men resemble those of the African-American adult readership as a whole. Eight of the top eleven magazines with the largest readership by African-American men are also within the top eleven in African-American adult (male and female) readership.

Online

African Americans are using the internet in higher percentages than in years past. An estimated 67 percent of African-Americans are currently online, according to a Pew Internet & American Life survey conducted in May 2011,¹ compared with 78 percent of Americans overall. The present analysis found:

- ▶ African-American adults' online habits are very similar to the general adult population of the U.S., with Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter being among the most popular sites.
- ▶ African Americans are more socially active online than other ethnic groups. African-American adults, and African-American men specifically, regularly visit social media sites.² Nearly 12 million African-American adults visit Facebook each month, including 4.65 million African-American men, making it the third most popular site for both groups. Twitter and MySpace are also very popular among both groups.
- ▶ Like American adults in general, African Americans go regularly and in large numbers to specific content sites such as YouTube, About.com, Weather.com, ESPN.com, and Yahoo! (which is also a web portal). These sites have anywhere from almost 1.5 million (ESPN.com) to almost 13 million unique visits (Yahoo!) from African-American adults, and from almost a million to almost five million unique visits from African-American men, respectively.
- ▶ Four of the top six most popular content sites among African-American men are either entirely devoted to music or have a music component to their site: World Star Hip Hop, Black Voices, BET Interactive, Bossip.com, and DatPiff.

Newspapers

- ▶ Relative to the other media platforms, newspapers have a smaller reach to African Americans and African-American men in particular. Yet because they are often neighborhood-specific, they are a good vehicle for reaching particular geographic locations.
- ▶ There are four newspapers, two in the Chicago media market — *Chicago Sun Times* and *RedEye* — and two in the Washington, D.C., media market — *Examiner* and *Express* — in which African-American men are overrepresented in their readership relative to their presence in the population, ranging from 14 to 25 percent of readers of these newspapers.
- ▶ The three newspapers with the largest absolute numbers of black men are the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *New York Daily News*, and *USA Today*. However, black men still comprise less than 15 percent of the readership of these papers.
- ▶ Among all black-oriented papers we examined, only two have a circulation over 100,000: *N'DIGO* and *The Chicago Citizen*, which both serve the Chicago media market. Overall, the median circulation of African-American targeted newspapers is 30,000, compared to 386,000 for mainstream newspapers.

Radio

- ▶ Black men listen to music-oriented stations more than any other stations, and the most popular ones tend to follow the Urban Contemporary and Urban Adult Contemporary formats — except in the New York media market, where Rhythmic Contemporary radio is dominant.

1 Pew Research Center, Pew Internet & American Life Project's Spring Tracking Survey "Usage Over Time," May 2011. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Whos-online.aspx>.

2 Georgetown University, Center for Social Impact Communications and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, "Social Media Plays Greater Role in Cause Engagement For African Americans and Hispanics," May 31, 2011, at http://csic.georgetown.edu/OPR_SM_GT_Ethnicity_FS_Final.pdf.

- ▶ Radio news stations have a relatively small reach to African-American men and African-American adults altogether. Although in most of the media markets we analyzed the list of the top ten stations includes one or even two news stations, their reach to African-American adults (men and women) is a fraction of the reach of music stations.

Recommendations

A review of social science literature and public opinion research relating to black male achievement

A persistent finding in recent public opinion research is that white and black perceptions of equal opportunity are at odds. The two populations have different understandings of what the issue is “about” — *i.e.*, what the relevant causal factors are, who the players are, and so forth. The good news in this finding is that since these are the kinds of challenges that communications reframing can often address, there is cause for optimism regarding successful interventions.

While the existing research does not offer a great deal regarding particular ways forward, a review of this work does suggest a number of ideas that communicators should keep in mind as they work towards the rigorous communications strategies that can help create social change.

Communicators need to continue to create fuller and more accurate portrayals of black men and boys in the media through education and external pressure targeted at media producers, and by working to embed more African Americans in all links of the media production chain. Our research focusing on African-American men’s media consumption habits offers recommendations (see page 9) on specific media sources based on their reach to this population, which advocates should consider.

Advocates must also wrestle with significant questions of how to talk most effectively about the topic in order to take the best advantage of communications opportunities — especially given all the challenges discussed above. There are a number of important aspects to the challenge communicators must face, including:

- ▶ Explaining the role of structures and systems in leading to disparities, thereby helping people see past the “personal responsibility” and “personal racism” perspectives. If a person believes discrimination is largely a thing of the past, or that discrimination is solely about interpersonal slights and personal racism, or that success is due solely to personal pluck, a policy conversation can seem irrelevant.
- ▶ Finding new and compelling ways to address causes, rather than focusing solely on disparities, which can easily lead to counterproductive conclusions about who is responsible.
- ▶ Look for ways to characterize the unique challenges facing black men and solutions to the challenges without inadvertently implying that other groups will have less opportunity, e.g., “breaking down obstacles” instead of “addressing disparities.”
- ▶ Calling attention to effective solutions. Communicators can be confident that promoting stories about solutions and success stories — interventions or causal factors of any kind that have altered black male outcomes for the better — will help engage new audiences.
- ▶ Breaking the in-group/out-group cycle and establishing a sense of “we,” reinforcing shared fate and interdependence. How are the fates of *all* Americans linked, regardless of race and gender?
- ▶ Sharpen objectives and strategies for different audiences. Clearly this research suggests different starting points for the conversation with different racial groups. Black Americans are far more likely to see the systemic flaws that lead to disparities and support government action (though the personal responsibility perspective is gaining ground), while few white Americans even recognize the breadth and severity of traditional discrimination, let alone institutional racism.

- ▶ Promoting new perspectives and policies specifically in the areas of jobs, education, and criminal justice. These are the top three issue priorities for black families and black men, and there are reasons to believe that each offers promising communications opportunities:
 - ✓ All Americans see a collective stake and a collective responsibility for education, and this is an area that most strongly connects collective responsibility to economic mobility.
 - ✓ The current weak economy has made the role of broken systems more visible, as people think about their economic wellbeing. Black Americans, in particular, support an active, engaged government role in addressing the problem. On the other hand, communicators should note that any framing which implies benefits to one group (such as black men) at the expense of another is likely to strongly backfire with the general public; and that it will take careful framing to help many white audiences see government as part of the solution rather than part of the problem.
 - ✓ Although crime has declined as a national priority, black Americans rate it as a top priority. They also see police bias as a serious problem, and have low confidence in the justice system generally. A significant minority of white respondents admit that black Americans may receive different treatment in the justice system.
- ▶ One promising candidate for a focus of discussion may be implicit bias itself — as identified in psychology experiments. As a focus of communications, these points illustrate several criteria that our own research suggests can be important for effective communication on a fraught topic: (A) steering clear of the type of moral censure that can alienate many audience members; (B) pointing to “objective” facts that are harder to dispute; (C) conveying a relatively novel and unfamiliar point (rather than rehashing familiar claims and accusations); and (D) offering the hope that there are concrete steps that can help.
- ▶ Despite the useful body of knowledge that exists, additional research is needed to further test and hone language that is best for engaging different audiences — including effective spokespeople — in these conversations.

Media consumption trends among black men

The analysis of media consumption trends suggests a number of recommendations for those hoping to reach black men with positive content and information, or to improve depictions in the media that they consume:

- ▶ Sports and music content reach large numbers of black men through television, radio, magazines, and other media. Working with celebrities — who are the subject of interviews and feature stories, as well as creative and athletic content — as spokespeople is therefore one way to reach a broad audience. Fostering coverage of sports and music figures’ positive activities and activism as part of popular existing programming is a related avenue.
- ▶ Magazines can be particularly fruitful vehicles for communicating positive messages to and about black men and boys, both because they create their own content and because their black readership is high. Outreach to magazine publishers, editors, and authors could inform and increase the content relative to black men and boys. Johnson Publishing, which owns *Ebony* and *Jet*, is a particularly influential publisher with this audience, as is Time Inc., which publishes *Sports Illustrated* and *People*. Editorial meetings, story pitching, and advertising with these outlets are all possible strategies.
- ▶ Fox Networks and TBS each have black-oriented shows that reach a broad audience of black men, including sitcoms, variety shows, and awards ceremonies. Seeking to inform the content of these shows and their stars is a promising avenue. Public service announcements and paid advertising may also prove fruitful.

- ▶ The NAACP Image Awards show presents a particular opportunity. Because its purpose is to elevate positive images, the show can be further leveraged to convey constructive messages and information about and for African-American men.
- ▶ BET Network offers a unique combination of large numbers and a high concentration of African-American men as well as women. Working to inform the content of BET shows by pitching or even creating new content can influence a large audience, as may public service announcements and paid advertising on BET.
- ▶ While specific search, web portals, aggregation and social media sites that are very popular, such as YouTube, Google, Yahoo!, and Facebook, do not create their own content, they do highlight the possibility of user-created content (such as YouTube videos) capable of reaching black men, who tend to be active in social media, particularly on Facebook. These websites are prime vehicles for reaching this population, as well as black youth. While online advertising is in flux, it should also be monitored for possible interventions.
- ▶ While newspapers reach relatively small numbers of black men overall, they can be employed to reach people at the local level, especially regarding neighborhood information and opportunities.

Finally, additional research is needed in a number of areas in order to determine the best strategies for reaching and informing the thinking of this population. Priorities include:

- ▶ Further disaggregating the demographics of the black male community in terms of age, education, income, and other aspects relevant to their advancement. This should include studying the consumption habits of black boys.
- ▶ Identifying other audiences — such as employers, educators, and law enforcement officials — whose perceptions of black men and boys are important to their success and safety. The media consumption of these audiences should also be identified.
- ▶ An in-depth analysis of the digital world is necessary, given the increasing penetration of these media into the lives of all Americans. Technology, as well as people's behavior online, is changing at such a fast pace and with so many different platforms (search engines, content creators, social networks, mobile phones, and tablets) that it is important to gain a greater understanding of the digital world and its influence on African-American men and boys.
- ▶ An analysis of *how* African-American men and boys consume media would offer insights into the way information on different platforms engages this population and how communicators can leverage them. People consume information differently on different platforms, acquire it differently, and frequent it differently. For example, it is important to know whether African-American men and boys are going to a specific site via their desktop, cell phone, or tablet; whether they subscribe to a magazine or buy it on the newsstand; how much time they spend reading a specific magazine compared to the length of time they spend on a specific site or watching a television program.

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Literature Review

Executive Summary

This social science literature review focuses on the question of how media, and communications more broadly, affect outcomes for black men and boys in American society. The summary is intended to offer communicators — who come to the review with a wide range of backgrounds and depth of knowledge on the topic — a digestible overview of an extremely rich and varied body of research. It reviews a significant set of materials, representing many of the key approaches and themes that characterize the scholarship as a whole.

There are many, many forces — material, historical, cultural, and political — that shape and constrict the life chances of black males in the U.S. Some of these are long-standing legacies that may take generations to shift. But in other ways, the social, economic, and symbolic place of African-American men and boys is re-created and reinforced every day. In particular, public perceptions and attitudes toward black males not only help to create barriers to advancement within this society, but also make that position seem natural or inevitable. Among the most important mechanisms for maintaining (or changing) these perceptions are the mass media with their significant power to shape popular ideas and attitudes.

This study looks at the evidence scholars have gathered and the conclusions they have drawn about how media present a picture of black males and how this representation affects not only attitudes toward black men and boys but their actual life chances. It also explores whatever guidance the social science research offers for changing media practices and resulting black male outcomes for the better.

For the most part, we limit the discussion to “what is known” by social scientists looking at this field — based on experimental or other empirical evidence (as opposed to a cultural criticism approach, for instance), or on a consensus reached by scholars. At certain points throughout the review we offer perspectives based on our own empirical research into the framing of a wide range of social issues.

The core problem

The review focuses on the core problem as social scientists have described it — a troubling link between media portrayals and lowered life chances for black males. The review breaks this story down into several components.

Distorted patterns of portrayal

A robust body of research documents how the overall presentation of black males in the media is distorted in a variety of ways, relative to the real-world facts. While individual studies tend to focus on a single genre or medium — such as TV fiction shows, magazine advertising, or video games — the research taken as a whole reveals broad patterns, including:

Underrepresentation overall — for instance, as characters in video games; as “talking head” experts called in to offer perspectives and analysis in the news; as computer users in TV commercials; as users of luxury items in print ads; and as “relatable” characters with well-developed personal lives (*e.g.*, fathers) in fiction shows and films.

Negative associations exaggerated — particularly criminality, unemployment, and poverty. The idle black male on the street corner is not the “true face” of poverty in America, but he is the dominant one in the world as depicted by media.

Positive associations limited — particularly, sports, physical achievement in general, virility, and musicality. While the media’s version of America is populated by some black males intended to inspire, they tend to represent a relatively limited range of qualities to the exclusion of a variety of other everyday virtues.

The “problem” frame — Due to both distortions and also accurate and sympathetic discussion, black males tend to be overly associated with intractable problems.

Missing stories — Many important dimensions of black males’ lives, such as historical antecedents of black economic disadvantage and persistence of anti-black male bias, are largely *ignored* by the media.

Causal link between media and public attitudes

Naturally, the reason so much attention is devoted to media representations is that the collective image of blacks and black males has important effects. Many researchers discuss how distorted portrayals can be expected to create problematic understandings and attitudes among audiences, including:

- ▶ General antagonism toward black males;
- ▶ Exaggerated views of, expectations of, and tolerance for race-based socio-economic disparities;
- ▶ Exaggerated views related to criminality and violence;
- ▶ Lack of identification with or sympathy for black males;
- ▶ Reduced attention to structural and other big-picture factors;
- ▶ Public support for punitive approaches to problems.

Studies show that media images have the greatest impact on perceptions when viewers have less real-world experience with the topic; in other words, the “media world” can be mistaken for the real world, unless audiences have sufficient personal experience to counteract its effects.

Even audiences with real-world experience are not immune. Studies show, for instance, that stereotypic images depict black women as contributing to their domestic victimization by their black male partners. Considering these distorted images, it is not surprising that black television viewers, male and female, tend to lose more “social capital” through viewing TV programming — *i.e.*, to trust the community and those around them less in ways that can lead to reduced prosperity and other outcomes.

Impacts on thinking of black males themselves

Black males obviously draw on far more experience than others to form images of themselves and their peers. However, they are also members of the public, and they are not immune to the influence of the media, which they consume just as other Americans do.

Specifically, scholars state that images in the media have a negative impact on black perceptions of self, though there is no shared consensus on how exactly this plays out. Various mechanisms may be at play:

- ▶ Negative media stereotypes (thugs, criminals, fools, and the disadvantaged) are demoralizing and reduce self-esteem and expectations. Dealing with negative expectations may also create stress and drain cognitive resources in some contexts — leading to the lowered performance associated with “stereotype threat.”
- ▶ The most common “role models” depicted in media (*e.g.*, rap stars and NBA players) imply limited options.

Additionally, scholars have explored the ways in which black males can come to internalize biases and stereotypes and then, through their words and actions, reinforce or perpetuate those distortions.

Documentations of conscious and unconscious bias

Another robust area of study focuses on mapping current attitudes towards blacks and black males — which presumably have been and continue to be shaped by the media. Many of the most disturbing results come from cleverly designed psychology experiments, which limit people’s ability to disguise or hide biases that they know are not socially acceptable. For instance:

- ▶ The amygdala, a brain region associated with experiencing fear, tends to be active when whites view an unfamiliar black male face (regardless of their conscious reports about racial attitudes).
- ▶ After “seeing” unknown black faces flashed at subliminal speeds (too rapidly to consciously perceive), whites tend to show more hostility in various contexts — leading to a breakdown of social connection between different races.
- ▶ Whites tend to more easily associate negative words (*e.g.*, *terrible*, *failure*, *horrible*, *evil*, *agony*, *war*, *nasty*, and *awful*) with unknown black faces, as opposed to white faces.
- ▶ Some studies indicate that many African Americans have an implicit bias *against* unknown faces of their own race, similar to biases shown by whites against blacks.

Explicitly measured attitudes towards African Americans or racial policies have not changed significantly since the election of Barack Obama.¹

Practical consequences in lives of black males

Finally, of course, distortions in the media are ultimately significant because of the real-world effects they have on black males’ outcomes, which can be negatively affected any time a black male is in a position where his fate depends on how he is perceived by others, particularly whites, or on what kind of rapport he has with them.

The real-world effects alluded to in the literature include everything from less attention from doctors to harsher sentencing by judges, lower likelihood of being hired for a job or admitted to school, lower odds of getting loans, and a higher likelihood of being shot by police. For example, various experimental simulations have shown that whites are more likely to “shoot” an unarmed black male than an unarmed white male.

¹ For more discussion of explicit attitudes, see *A Review of Public Opinion Research Related to Black Male Achievement*, The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011.

Why media patterns are distorted

In order to combat the destructive causal dynamics delineated so far, communicators must confront the question of *why* black males continue to be underrepresented, framed in negative ways, offered limited roles in both fictional and news contexts, and so forth. Scholars have offered a number of suggestions about the causal factors leading to the distortions and omissions.

Producer bias — Most obviously, those responsible for media content may at times present a distorted, inaccurate view because of their own conscious or unconscious biases and stereotypes.

Incorrect assumptions about audiences — Scholars suggest cases in which portrayals are incomplete or distorted because producers of media content carry faulty assumptions about the composition of their audiences and their audiences' preferences. For instance, video game producers, who tend not to be African-American males themselves, underestimate how many black males and others who would identify with black protagonists play the games.

Audience preferences — In some cases, content producers may be responding to *accurate* assessments of their audiences' comfort zones with a certain range of presentations of black males — *i.e.*, ones that confirm their own fears and prejudices or reassure them that black males are not achieving “undue” power and status.

Lack of input from black constituents — One of the factors seen as most significant by scholars is the paucity of African-American television station owners, producers, journalists and experts invited to contribute content, etc.

Political motivations to traffic in stereotypes — Portrayals are also distorted by some (often white and/or conservative) communicators' interests in tapping into racial bias in order to promote or discredit various policies (*e.g.*, more prisons, less welfare).

“Prescriptive” studies

The vast majority of social science literature on this topic focuses on mapping out the problems relating to black males and the media, and is essentially descriptive — that is, it describes and analyzes existing patterns in the media, in thought and behavior. Prescriptive studies, explicitly setting out to identify proven courses of action, including empirically testing hypotheses about what might help improve matters, are relatively absent from the literature.

These would hypothetically include, for instance, studies about what happens when media representation of black males is fuller, more accurate and more sympathetic, or what kinds of media patterns help make people less biased, or lead to better outcomes. There are a few exceptional studies that offer this kind of evidence, such as political scientist Shanto Iyengar's experimental finding that news stories about racial discrimination helped reduce the tendency to blame individuals for outcomes (Iyengar, 1991); and a study showing that a combination of explicit training about stereotypes plus exposure to a series of “counter-stereotypical” news stories can help reduce unconscious bias. (Ramasubramanian, 2007) By and large, however, the social science literature offers relatively little evidence about what “works” when it comes to media representations of black males, or about other critical questions of guidance on how to effectively bring about changes in media representations, or how to talk about critical issues such as structural bias.

Much of the “good news” in the research comes from laboratory studies of tasks or conditions that reduce implicit bias. For instance, various tasks that force subjects to think of African Americans as individuals end up reducing unconscious bias (*e.g.*, asking subjects to practice distinguishing one black

face from another, or asking them to speculate about which of a random set of vegetables an unknown black person might like).

More explicit types of training also have very promising effects. For instance, subjects who undergo 45 minutes of intensive practice at rejecting stereotypes — literally clicking “No” when viewing a black face paired with a stereotypical description — showed a resulting reduction in implicit bias. Researchers liken the training (which cannot be accomplished more quickly) to practicing a new physical skill. (Kawakami et al., 2000)

While studies like these do not look directly at media or public discourse, are often not targeted at thinking about black males *per se*, and do not offer concrete suggestions for advocates to act on, they at least offer interesting food for thought for communicators interested in reducing bias on a societal scale.

Dilemmas and deep challenges

As noted earlier, scholars have suggested a number of reasons why patterns of portrayal of black males may be distorted across a wide range of media. Unfortunately, dealing with the problem may be even more complex than that discussion suggests. Recruiting more African Americans into media content production, for instance, or correcting producers’ assumptions about the makeup of their audience, still may not address some of the fundamental obstacles to constructive thinking and dialogue on race-related issues, as pointed out by social scientists. Many of these are areas of active research and debate, so a firm consensus about their exact dynamics and significance are still being worked out.

The difficulties of structural thinking — For both cultural and cognitive reasons, it is difficult for Americans to focus on the idea that individuals are not fully in charge of their own fate. Regardless of racial attitudes, systemic and structural explanations for social outcomes are extremely challenging to convey.

Anxiety and “the other” — Anxieties tangential to race, *e.g.*, about terrorism or loss of a job, tend to promote a more conservative outlook, including negative attitudes towards those perceived as “others.” In a time period in which anxiety is particularly prevalent, it is predictable that racial attitudes will deteriorate and policy preferences will shift in directions that do not favor “out-groups,” such as black males.

Fundamental/universal challenges to race relations — Some social science suggests that relations among people of different races must always overcome some fundamental obstacles. For instance, there is a consistent body of evidence showing that people have more trouble differentiating the faces of other-race individuals — not just whites looking at black faces, for instance, but also blacks looking at white faces. Given the importance of individuation as opposed to stereotyping, this face-recognition finding suggests a basic, though not insurmountable, challenge inherent in interracial relations.

Causation vs. correlation — Much of the available social science is able to point to correlations between, for instance, race and health outcomes, without being able to state the causes with strong confidence. The problem for communicators is that unless causation is clearly and persuasively presented, audiences will inevitably insert their own ideas about causation based on their preexisting understandings and biases.

Warts-and-all vs. idealization — There is considerable debate about the reality that some black men, like all human beings, at times contribute to their own obstacles. While discussing this fact can trigger the default perception that they are always and entirely to blame for their

circumstances, not discussing these choices evokes charges that communicators are not realistic or are not asking enough of black men.

Black masculinity as the problem — Hypersexuality, violence, misogyny, and elite athleticism are extreme versions of stereotypical male qualities, and each is used to caricature and stereotype black males in particular. Yet addressing the issue can mean confronting the idea that black males may embrace these stereotypes as a form of resistance to various external limitations on their achievement. There is no easy consensus about how best to handle these patterns — *e.g.*, some scholars condemn black males’ embrace of these images while others focus on explaining and contextualizing it.

Appeal of a color-blind society — The idea of a color-blind society is appealing to many Americans for a variety of emotional and ethical reasons — *i.e.*, it can seem both more fair and less stressful. However, those who advocate for a color-blind society are often responsible for suppressing discussions of race that are ultimately essential for addressing disparate obstacles.

Implicit prejudice as a political tool — Communicators must contend with a pattern of “codes” (*e.g.*, words like “urban”) used for stoking or taking advantage of racial tensions in order to promote their desired outcomes, such as cuts to social services.

Communication vs. contact — Finally, some of the social science literature suggests that actual social contact between black males and others may be one of the most critical factors in changing perceptions and outcomes. If this is the case, then communications *per se*, no matter how well done, may ultimately have limited effects, except to the extent that they help break down the forms of isolation and segregation that marginalize black males.

Looking forward

While the social science literature does not offer a great deal of specific guidance about ways forward, it does suggest a number of ideas that communicators should keep in mind about how to proceed.

Most straightforwardly, communicators and advocates must continue to work to create fuller and more accurate portrayals of black males in the media — through education and external pressure targeted at media producers, through production of new images, and by working to embed more African Americans in all links in the media production chain.

Communicators must also wrestle with significant challenges regarding how to speak most effectively about the topic, in order to take the best advantage of communications opportunities — *e.g.*, how to offer a clear and compelling picture of “invisible” systemic forces that stack the odds against black males in a range of areas. Our own research experience across a range of issues suggests that this is a very important challenge for communicators to tackle: Until people are helped to see the systemic forces that insiders are talking about (whether these have to do with economics, children’s well-being, the environment, or any other topic), even sympathetic audiences can draw the wrong conclusions about what is causing problems and how to address them.

Offering clear new pictures of large-scale causality is obviously very challenging, but may also be essential. It may help communicators get past vexing dilemmas, and help them address topics about which it is difficult to engage in constructive dialogues. For instance, discussion of gangs can easily promote fear of individual gang members, but an effective bigger-picture story might help focus attention on the lack of alternative opportunities for social and economic advancement in some communities.

Our research experience also suggests that hopeful stories and novel ideas can go a long way towards engaging new audiences and new support, whether in the context of fiction shows, news accounts, press releases, or informal anecdotes. For instance, communicators may make significant headway by focusing on interventions that have made demonstrably positive differences for black males (without obviously “taking away from” other groups). Such stories would be more positive and more novel than the very familiar claims and accusations in this area. Another example of potentially effective novelty would be an explanation of the phenomenon of implicit bias — surely unfamiliar to most Americans — and how widespread it is. But note that such discussions are more likely to be effective if they focus on objective description and explanation rather than moralizing (see below). Discussion of the factors known to reduce implicit bias might also be the basis for positive *and* hopeful stories about race.

The research strongly suggests that censure is an ineffective intervention in most communications contexts. It is likely to trigger resistance and more negative racial attitudes. (On the other hand, it may be an effective threat against public figures, for instance, who may act based on political calculation rather than feelings.) This finding challenges communicators to find ways of talking that rely on motives other than shame or guilt. It may be effective to point out the manipulative uses of race in the media and public discourse. While it is generally not very effective to simply argue that a particular perspective is wrong (*i.e.*, “myth busting”), some of the social science evidence suggests that explicit inoculation against *people trying to manipulate us* can be very effective, and the strategy of opening people’s eyes to how they are being duped has been effective in other issues areas, such as cigarettes.

Communicators should also keep in mind that any of their efforts that can help promote greater contact between African-American males and others may be among the most effective steps they can take.

Introduction

This social science review centers on the topic of how communications in the broadest sense impacts black male achievement. It is no exaggeration to say that tens (or hundreds) of thousands of pages have been written on the topic over the course of several generations. This review is intended to offer communicators on related issues, who come to the review with a wide range of different backgrounds and depth of knowledge on the topic, a digestible overview. What have social scientists studied and learned, particularly in the last decade, about how communications have impacted achievement of black males, and could impact it for the better? A range of longer reviews, including book-length studies, are available and have informed this piece — but The Opportunity Agenda would like to offer its colleagues and the field a user-friendly summary that captures the essence of what is known, and what is not known, in a very usable format.

What is known is often discouraging, as a wide range of studies, analyses, and bodies of evidence point to persistent and destructive biases regarding the public image of black males, and ongoing forces that perpetuate the creation of these images. Equally frustrating is the fact that these patterns, while often very familiar to insiders, are more or less invisible to the general public, and seem implausible or exaggerated to them even when pointed out (an observation based on the authors' own research experience on related topics). Other problems widely known to insiders but mostly “invisible” to the public at large include the well-documented and nearly universal tendency of Americans to have unconscious patterns of bias against African Americans in general and black males in particular, as well as the psychological and sociological costs that these patterns exact on black males. In short, it seems very important that the nature of these patterns of images, their causes, their effects, and their potential antidotes, should in some sense be available “out there.”

The review focuses on the core problem as social scientists have described it — including aspects that are more robustly or more thinly addressed in the literature — as well as a discussion of the some of the more troubling dilemmas and dynamics that confront communicators.

Where possible, this review also points out the “good news” in the literature, including psychology experiments that look at tasks and contexts that can reduce bias. Despite the lack of “silver bullets,” the literature does offer some useful lessons that can guide communicators' efforts going forward.

Please note that the social science literature review is just one piece of a larger effort. It is intended to provide communicators with an overview of what is known (or not known) about the topic via the social sciences, and to inform future stages of the project; it is those later stages that will focus more on action steps going forward.

Methodology

A literature review is an overview of the published scholarship on a particular topic. In this case the topic is what social scientists know about how and why discourse (especially public and media discourse) shapes perceptions of black men and boys – and the consequences of these perceptions. The review has also sought out findings that offer evidence about *how to talk about black men and boys and achievement* in ways that can promote engagement, understanding, and progress in this area.

The authors of the review relied on four complementary approaches to identifying and selecting relevant and reliable source materials:

- ▶ Recommendations from a variety of experts about important, influential works;
- ▶ Citations and references in high-profile, popular works;
- ▶ Citations in well-regarded, specialized scholarly works (that is, studies and analyses that are accepted and cited by other researchers in the field);
- ▶ Our own expertise as academic reviewers and researchers.

The review focuses primarily on findings for which scholars have offered experimental or documentary evidence, or around which scholars in the field have reached a strong consensus. The selection of work is also based on its evident usability, and its potential to help a variety of stakeholders identify the most prevalent and malignant frames and adapt a set of best practices for reshaping them.

A select bibliography is offered for readers who may want to examine relevant research in more detail.

Even a relatively lengthy overview of such a vast field inevitably omits many studies, including important ones, from discussion. We hope, on the other hand, that the review does touch on the most important themes that shape current scholarly perspectives.

Media Portrayals and Black Male Outcomes

From the perspective of most scholars who focus on the topic, there is a clear causal story that links media representations of black men and boys to real-world outcomes. The story can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ For various reasons, media of all types collectively offer a *distorted representation* of the lives and reality of black males.
- ▶ In turn, media consumption negatively affects *the public's understandings and attitudes* related to black males (sometimes including the understandings and attitudes of black males themselves).
- ▶ Finally, these distorted understandings and attitudes towards black males lead to negative *real-world consequences* for them.

Taken as a whole, this is a rich area of study, which many scholars believe is central to understanding and addressing the stubborn challenges faced by black boys and men in American society. (Note that many studies refer to race without explicitly addressing gender, but many patterns, such as exaggerated associations with violence or sports, are clearly more relevant to males than to females.)

For advocates and other communicators concerned with issues related to black male achievement, it is important to be sharply aware of this story, and the findings that support it, so that they can address the problem in an informed way.

Note that other important components of the black male dilemma do not fall within the scope of this paper. Historical legacies of slavery and Jim Crow, the material and economic disparities related to that and other forms of historical racism, the role of the criminal justice system in controlling black males, the flow of resources toward and away from black males, and so on, are all important issues for understanding the current situation for black males in America. They will not be addressed here, however, except insofar as the distorted images in media make it easier for many Americans to tolerate, perpetuate, ignore or discount the many real disadvantages that black males face.

This paper breaks the story down into five “links in the chain” (some of which have been studied and discussed more than others):

- ▶ Distorted portrayal of black (male) lives/experience
- ▶ Why media patterns are distorted
- ▶ Causal link between media and public attitudes
- ▶ Documentations of the public's bias — both conscious and unconscious — against black males
- ▶ Practical consequences for the lives of black males

Distorted patterns of portrayal

In a wide range of ways, the overall presentation of black males in the media is distorted, exaggerating some dimensions while omitting others. Many scholars have contributed to a robust body of research documenting these distortions, which have several aspects.

Underrepresentation in media portrayals

A number of researchers have essentially conducted “censuses” (of representations overall, of fictional characters, of characters in ads, and so forth) and compared these findings to the numbers of black men and boys that would be expected if racial bias were not at work. As this research has progressed, analysts have grown more sophisticated in the distinctions that they draw about where black males do and do not appear in the media. A pattern reported again and again is that African Americans are *underrepresented* in various facets of the media’s portrayal of the world.

For example, although characters of color in video games have been increasing over time, blacks in general tend to be underrepresented especially as active, playable characters in video games. They are more likely to be stock characters in the story.

...outside of sports games, the representation of African Americans [in popular video games] drops precipitously, with many of the remaining featured as gangsters and street people ...
(Williams et al., 2009)

Black males also tend to be underrepresented as experts called in to offer commentary and analysis in the news. News programs frequently include “talking heads” invited to help clarify a given topic, but these tend not to be black males. In a 1997 sample of network news clips, black speakers accounted for less than 3 percent of the statements made by experts commenting on various issues. (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 69)

Black males are underrepresented in the roles of computer users or technical experts in television commercials, instead tending to appear in roles that put less emphasis on intellectuality (see below). (Kinnick & White, 2001) African Americans are also underrepresented as users of luxury items in commercials, instead being featured using more pedestrian consumer products. (Henderson & Baldasty, 2003)

In short, the studies paint a picture of an American media landscape that includes fewer black males overall, few associated with technical and other intellectual pursuits, and few who fit Tucker’s description of “competent, capable, and successful members of businesses and families who have attained some degree of material wealth.” (Tucker, 2007, p. 69)

More subtly, as Entman and Rojecki (2000) point out, even in the cases when blacks appear in the media as sympathetic and competent figures, they tend not to be “relatable” figures with whom the audience is asked to truly identify. They may not have names (black crime victims are often unnamed, as opposed to their white counterparts who are named); they may lack visible family lives (there are many fewer competent and successful black male fiction characters, compared with white characters); and so forth.

In the world as portrayed by the media, life is lived primarily by white (or other non-black) people, with black males, more or less sympathetic, in the background. (See also Bogle, 2003.)

Negative associations exaggerated

While many aspects of black males' real lived experience tend to be missing from the collective media portrayal, some aspects are very much present, and are, in fact, exaggerated.

Perhaps the most-discussed pattern is the association between black males and *criminality*, particularly in television news — where they are not only likely to appear as criminals, but likely to be shown in ways that make them seem particularly threatening (compared with white criminals, for instance).

Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime when news coverage is compared with arrest rates [but are underrepresented in the more sympathetic roles of victim, law enforcer]. (Entman & Gross, 2008, p. 98, citing Travis L. Dixon & Daniel Linz, 2000)

... [in a small sample of local Chicago TV news from 1993-1994] stories about Blacks were four times more likely to include mug shots [than stories about Whites accused of crimes]. (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 82)

African Americans are disproportionately represented in news stories about poverty, and these stories tend to paint a picture that is particularly likely to reinforce stereotypes and make it hard to identify with black males. For example, low-income blacks in news stories are more likely to live in slums or urban areas, as opposed to rural areas, than real-world averages would suggest; more likely be entirely unemployed and “idle” (as opposed to working); and so forth. The idle black male on the street corner is not the “true face” of poverty in America, but he is the dominant one in media portrayal. (Clawson & Trice, 2000, updated and confirmed in Clawson et al., 2007)

In the entertainment media as well, these and other associations continue to be systematically perpetuated. Analysts have gone into great detail about the way in which negative images of black males continue to be used for entertainment purposes, whether through traditional imagery of black inferiority (Bogle, 2003) or by using black male characters disproportionately to represent both the victims and perpetrators of violence. For example, one study examined music video violence statistically, for its impacts on adolescents:

Compared with United States demographics, blacks were overrepresented as aggressors and victims, whereas whites were underrepresented. White females were most frequently victims. Music videos may be reinforcing false stereotypes of aggressive black males and victimized white females. These observations raise concern for the effect of music videos on adolescents' normative expectations about conflict resolution, race, and male-female relationships. (Rich et al., 1998)

Positive associations limited

As discussed, even when black males are presented sympathetically, they tend to be absent from some important types of roles, *e.g.*, as fathers in parenting situations that audiences can relate to. On the other hand, black males are highly visible in other types of roles that can be considered positive. In the world as depicted by the media, blacks frequently excel in sports, and more generally, are associated with physicality and physical achievement — as well as the aggressiveness that usually goes along with this type of success.

In films, their characters tend to have “macho” qualities that are valued by Americans; however, these film representations can also exclude or obscure other everyday virtues.

... men of color are faced with achieving masculinity [in media representations] through their corporal selves as physical threats (*i.e.*, as athlete or gang member) as opposed to their intellectual contributions. ... To be viewed as assertive and aggressive is valued in the culture but comes at the expense of other highly valued qualities ... (Messineo, 2008, p. 755)

Black men [in mainstream print ads], with rare exceptions, are represented as workers, athletes, laborers, entertainers, criminals, or some combination thereof. (Tucker, 2007, p. 70)²

In short, the media world is populated by some black males we admire, but these tend to be associated with a relatively limited range of qualities, such as physical ability and/or entertainment skills.

The “problem” frame

A consumer of most of American media can hardly help thinking of black males in terms of *problems*. This is not only because of distortions in the collective media presentation of black males (discussed previously), but also due to patterns that characterize sympathetic and accurate portrayals. For valid and important reasons, mass media, advocacy, and policy-making discourses tend to focus on (real) problems of black males — relating to educational and economic outcomes, family life, or the criminal justice system, for instance.

What are the implications when Americans as a whole strongly associate black males with intractable problems? The challenge, discussed in greater detail in later sections, is that frequent repetition of the problems of black males can obscure other, more positive dimensions of their reality, and worse, can end up reinforcing prejudicial stereotypes. The literature suggests — and the authors’ own research experience on a wide range of issues confirms — that an emphasis on negative outcomes often ends up triggering default (false) assumptions about how those problems arose, particularly due to faulty personal choices.

Even if the proportion of Black victims and criminals were to reflect defensibly “accurate” readings of actual crime patterns, *in the absence of contextual explanations*, the heavy prominence of a racial minority in these stories of violence may worsen negative stereotyping. (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 81)

Negative stereotyping of minorities is often (if inadvertently) reinforced in newspaper reporting that addresses race-based health disparities. For example, [an article on high HIV rates among black males] reinforces negative stereotypes of Black men as threats not only to their own women and children, but to society at large . . . Because the article does not offer any underlying, structural reasons for the disparities mentioned . . . it ends up reinforcing negative racial stereotypes about Black criminality, drug use, destructive sexuality, and inadequate fatherhood. (Aubrun et al., 2007)

Advocates need to carefully consider the costs of such narratives, if they predominate to the exclusion of more positive narratives and images. (See discussion of “Dilemmas and Deep Challenges.”)

Missing stories

The media are principally in the business of story-telling, whether through journalism, fictional narrative and entertainment, reality TV, and even advertising, video games and music videos. Some analysts have tried to look not only at the kinds of characters that black males do or do not play, but also the kinds of stories that are told about them, or not told about them. Although we do not find much in the way of systematic or statistical censuses in the sociological literature, there are a couple of observations that seem clear.

Just as important as the patterns of distortion and exaggeration discussed so far is the fact that many important dimensions of black males' stories are largely *untold* in the media — in particular how the lives of black men and boys are affected by larger contexts, such as historical antecedents of black economic disadvantage, persistence of anti-black male bias, and relative disconnection from the social networks that help create wealth and opportunity.

The media contribute to the *denial* component of racial sentiments mostly by what they usually omit. Examples include: the pervasiveness of present-day discrimination and, given the importance of capital accumulation, the enormous financial harm still imposed today by discrimination against past generations; the role that poverty and joblessness play in raising crime rates and lowering marriage rates among YMC [young men of color]; and the part played by larger structural changes in the global economy. (Entman, 2006, p. 13)

In short, according to the world as it is presented by the media, the suffering black males can easily be presumed to be solely responsible for their own fates. Without knowing these larger stories, the average person is left to assume that black males are innately or culturally inclined towards low achievement, criminality, and broken families.

In the authors' own analysis of the stories that mass media tell about race,³ we found that:

The descriptions in the coverage tend to create and reinforce concrete images of people and families who are doing poorly and people who are “behaving badly.” While the focus on tangible, day-to-day problems such as sickness and poverty may help give readers a more vivid picture of disparities, this vividness actually works against bigger-picture understanding which would include more about causes, contexts, and solutions. (Aubrun et al., 2005)

Of course, stories addressing big-picture causality are not entirely absent from the media. For instance, they are a regular topic in the social network site BlackPlanet.com.⁴ They also appear sometimes in mainstream media discussions; enough, in fact, to be decried by racial conservatives such as African-American radio host Larry Elder:

The mostly well-intentioned but condescending members of the mainsream media go the extra mile to avoid having charges of “racist” directed at themselves, so they seldom challenge “black leaders” when these race-baiters confuse equal rights with equal results. Thus, lower black college enrollment becomes “underrepresentation” in higher education; the fact that white net worth exceeds black net worth becomes “disproportionate”; data showing banks decline black loans more readily than loans to whites becomes “discrimination”; blah, blah, blah. (Elder, 2008, p. xv)

But the social science literature makes the overall pattern clear: Consumers of mainstream media receive overwhelmingly more “information” about individual African-American males than about the broader forces that shape their experience.

If advocates are working to help foster a different media environment, and the benefits that would follow, they cannot ignore these missing dimensions of the black male story — even if telling the stories is difficult and often triggers resistance.

3 The analysis was based on a review of “over one hundred articles collected by the Center for Media and Public Affairs during May and June of 2004 from newspapers in various parts of the country, from Miami to Seattle to San Antonio to Washington, DC.”

4 See Byrne, 2008.

Causal link between media and public attitudes

Why study media portrayals? Of course, the reason that so much attention is devoted to media representations (in the broadest sense) is that the collective image of blacks and black males has important effects. Researchers state — sometimes with rigorous evidence, other times through common sense inference — that representations in the media affect viewers’ perceptions and, specifically, that distorted portrayals lead to distorted and/or negative perceptions. (Note that some of the evidence comes from studies of other ethnic groups.)

For instance:

- ▶ Patterns in portrayals of black men and boys can be expected to promote antagonism towards them.

[We] can predict what watching local news might do to us. If subliminal flashes of black male faces can raise our frustration, as shown by the Computer Crash study [in which subjects responded with greater hostility to a crashed computer after being shown subliminal images of black faces], would it be surprising that consciously received messages couched in violent visual context have impact, too? (Kang, 2005, p. 1551)

... White Americans tend to develop negative stereotypes towards Hispanic Americans when they depend on television to learn about them. This finding indicates that people are influenced by television images. The more negative images are shown on television, the more likely the viewers pick up the images and develop their stereotypes. (Dong & Murrillo, 2007)

- ▶ Patterns in portrayals of black males can be expected to promote exaggerated views of, expectations of, and tolerance for race-based socioeconomic disparities.

[M]edia content — not just news but entertainment and “infotainment” — usually promotes White privilege and the idea that Whites occupy the top of a racial hierarchy wherein Blacks are largely and naturally relegated to the bottom. (Entman & Gross, 2008, p. 97)

- ▶ Patterns in portrayals of black males can be expected to promote exaggerated views related to criminality and violence.
- ▶ Patterns in portrayals of black males can be expected to work against identification with them.

See Entman and Rojecki’s discussion of how television ads are much less likely to place African Americans in positions the audience relates strongly to (for instance, in close-ups, addressing the audience directly, first or last to appear on screen). (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 168)

- ▶ Patterns in portrayals of black males can be expected to reduce attention to structural and other big-picture factors.

Films that ameliorate White anxieties about Black men by turning them into comics or criminals to be laughed at and/or condemned further the state of racial denial that plagues the United States. ... They ease White America’s discomfort and make it easy to sidestep its responsibility to acknowledge and to address persistent racial inequalities and conflicts. (Tucker, 2007, p. 102, drawing on Guerrero, 1993)

- Patterns in portrayals of black males can be expected to promote public support for punitive approaches to problems.

For instance, presumably due to cumulative effects of viewing TV news that associates black males with crime, “heavy news viewers” in one study were more likely to support the death penalty after viewing crime news stories *that did not even identify the race of the suspects*. (Dixon & Azocar, 2007, p. 229)

An important research question has been whether media representations only *reflect* popular understandings that are already out there — or if they help *create* those understandings through repetition and exposure. A few studies help to directly establish this causal link.

It has been confirmed experimentally that exposure to stereotypical African-American characters and behaviors in entertainment programs has negative impacts on beliefs and attitudes about African Americans, as well as towards affirmative action policies. (Ramasubramanian, 2011)

If media consumption creates distorted understandings and attitudes, then more consumption should lead to more distortion. This is exactly the pattern observed in some studies, particularly when amount of consumption is balanced against amount of real-world experience with black males (or other ethnicities). Media images have the most impact on perceptions when viewers have less real-world experience with the topic.

[P]ersonal contact is critical to the development of a better understanding of other ethnicities. The more individuals interacted with other people who have different cultural backgrounds, the more likely these individuals could see the positive traits and characteristics of the other people. This finding suggests that human interaction and direct contact are keys to understanding between people and, in particular, among those who have different cultural backgrounds. (Dong & Murrillo, 2007)

[T]he more television White viewers consumed, the more their evaluations of Latinos reflected their [negative] TV characterization — markedly so when viewers’ real-world contact with Latinos was not close, resulting in a greater reliance on televised images in decision making. (Mastro et al., 2007, p. 362)⁵

Impacts on thinking of black males themselves

While black males obviously draw on far more experience than others to form images of themselves and their peers, they are not immune to the influence of the media portrayals, which they consume like other Americans. One of the most important general findings relevant to black males’ own thinking is that so-called “stereotype threat” is an important cause of black males’ relatively lower performance in certain contexts, such as standardized testing.

Research into stereotype threat usually involves giving people measurable tasks, while at the same time subtly reminding them of the stereotypes that might apply to them. A growing body of research led by Joshua Aronson, Claude Steele, and others shows that when a member of a group that suffers from stereotyping comes into a situation where that stereotype is highly relevant, they experience a number of effects that reduce performance. Increased anxiety, self-consciousness about performance, and efforts to suppress negative thoughts and emotions all use up mental resources needed to perform well on cognitive and social tasks. (Schmader et al., 2008) The more intense the stereotype threat, the more pronounced the impacts on the individual. (Aronson & Steele, 2005) For example, an elderly person, when reminded of how people often associate age with memory loss, will struggle more with memory

5 Also see Hawkins and Pingree, 1990.

tests. (Rahhal et al., 2001) Asian-American schoolgirls did worse than usual on math tests in situations that emphasized their gender (the stereotypical idea is that girls are supposed to be worse at math), and better than usual in situations that emphasized their Asian heritage (Asian Americans are “supposed to be” better at math). (Ambady et al., 2004)

Of course, black males are aware of stereotypes that peg them as unintelligent or under-achieving, and they consistently suffer from the self-handicapping that results from stereotype threat in contexts such as testing or job interviewing.

Interestingly, whites are also subject to a kind of stereotype threat. An experiment showed that when stereotypes about white racism were triggered, white males tended to place more physical and social distance between themselves and blacks, thereby acting in a manner that served to confirm the stereotype. (Goff et al., 2008)

Besides stereotype threat, researchers have also pointed to other damaging effects of media on the thinking of African Americans generally, and black males in particular. For instance, it has been shown that stereotypic images of black women increase their domestic victimization by their black male partners (Gillum, 2002), presumably by shaping males’ views of black female characters.

Another study focused on African Americans and “social capital.” There are a great many definitions of social capital in the literature, but most will agree that the term refers to people’s connections to each other in social networks (both virtual and actual), which provide financial, social, and other opportunities and important benefits. Telephone survey interviews conducted in St. Louis and Kansas City showed that African Americans are particularly vulnerable to diminishment of social capital as a result of media consumption (see Beaudoin & Thorson, 2006). Since blacks tend to watch more television overall, and tend to be especially attuned to representations of blacks (who are often framed negatively), their attitudes towards the people and community around them is negatively impacted, relative to white viewers. The survey showed that those who watched more television had less trust in and interaction with neighbors, lower likelihood of joining groups, and worse perceptions of the town they lived in. Together, these attitudes amount to a loss of social capital, making it less likely that blacks in these communities will be connected to others in ways that lead to improving life chances.

More generally, scholars find that images in the media have a negative impact on black people’s perceptions of self and of their communities, though there is no shared consensus on how exactly this plays out. Various mechanisms may be at play:

- ▶ Negative stereotypes (thugs, criminals, fools, and other disadvantaged types) are demoralizing and reduce self-esteem and expectations.
- ▶ The most common “role models” depicted in media (*e.g.*, rap stars or NBA players) present limited, often unrealistic, options.
- ▶ More positive or realistic role models tend to be lacking.

When certain types of negative or limiting images are produced by “black sources,” the impact can be particularly strong.

When these images of sex object and aggressive male are presented as part of the dominant ideology, men and women of color can reject the imagery as imposed from outside. However, when this imagery is presented as from the ingroup, the risks of self-objectification are heightened. (Messineo, 2008, p. 755)

Researchers also have confirmed that the media *creates* rather than *reflects* negative understanding, finding, for example, that the higher the consumption of media, the lower the self-esteem among African Americans. (Tan & Tan, 1979)

Psychological and developmental studies have also begun to look at particular times of life (such as childhood and adolescence) when black boys are most susceptible to media influences, and the psychological strengths or stresses that seem to affect how deeply these influences impact them. (Martin, 2008; Banks & Grambs, 1972)

Documentations of bias — conscious and unconscious — against black males

Another robust and profoundly important area of study focuses on mapping current attitudes towards blacks and black males, whether conscious or unconscious. Most importantly, a rich set of studies, including cleverly designed psychology experiments (especially Implicit Association Tests), makes it clear that many if not most non-blacks have negative unconscious associations with black males, even if they have no consciously biased attitudes. And many African Americans share these negative associations toward their own group.

As Kang observes in an extensive review of “the remarkable findings of social cognition,” among other topics:

Not only do they provide a more precise, particularized, and empirically grounded picture of how race functions in our minds, and thus in our societies, they also rattle us out of a complacency enjoyed after the demise of de jure discrimination. (Kang, 2005, p. 1495)

In this section we review several examples of the findings from this type of literature as well as more traditional investigations of attitude. While the topic of bias *per se* is not part of the scope of this review, it is worth keeping in mind the overall force of these studies, since conscious and unconscious attitudes are certainly shaped at least in part by what people take in from the media.

Unconscious patterns

A variety of reported patterns made use of experimental measures that revealed associations and attitudes we may not even be consciously aware of. For instance:

Automatic responses

At the most fundamental level, there is evidence that the amygdala, a region of the brain that is associated with experiencing fear, tends to be more active when whites view an unfamiliar black male face than an unfamiliar white male face, regardless of their conscious reports about racial attitudes (see Phelps et al., 2000).

Hostility

The “Computer Crash” study mentioned previously suggests that whites, on average, have greater feelings of hostility after seeing the face of an unknown black person, flashed at subliminal speeds, than they do after seeing a white face.

Another experiment involved white participants playing a “Password”-type guessing game. Whenever one player on a two-person team was subliminally primed with a black face, *both* players on the team ended up exhibiting greater hostility as the frustrations of the difficult game mounted, thanks to a vicious circle in which overall social cohesion, cooperativeness, and benefit of the doubt were hindered.

General negative evaluation

Many studies have confirmed that whites tend to more easily associate positive words (*e.g., laughter, peace, joy, friend, wonderful, love, happy, and pleasure*) with unknown white faces and negative words (*e.g., terrible, failure, horrible, evil, agony, war, nasty, and awful*) with unknown black faces, such as in the study reported by Smith–McLallen et al. in 2006.

African Americans' own implicit biases

Some studies have indicated that many blacks have an implicit bias *against* unknown faces of their own race, similar to the reactions of whites (*e.g., see Livingston, 2002*).

Conscious patterns

Whether surprisingly or not, research suggests that the election of Barack Obama does not reflect a sea change in attitudes towards African Americans or racial policies in the United States. For instance, Hutchings concludes that “there is no evidence that White support for racial preferences has changed [between 1988 and 2008].” He bases this conclusion on a comparison between responses in these two years to questions such as whether the Federal government should take more active steps to address unfair treatment of African Americans in the job market. In both years, roughly 90 percent of blacks supported that idea, while roughly 50 percent of whites did. Furthermore, “on matters of public policy dealing explicitly with race, there is little evidence that the racial divide is declining among younger cohorts.” (Hutchings, 2009, p. 929)

Despite the widely held idea that racism has become socially unacceptable, large percentages of the population harbor very traditional prejudiced views in which black males tend more than non-blacks toward violence, criminality, irresponsibility, hypersexuality, and so on.

Note that the companion piece to this social science literature review will assess key patterns in recent polls and surveys, including much more detail on explicit (as opposed to implicit or unconscious) racial attitudes.

Practical consequences in lives of black males

Usually implicit in the literature, but sometimes explicitly discussed, is the idea that attitudes and biases can lead to real, practical consequences for black men and boys. These attitudes and biases can affect a black male’s fate when it depends on how he is perceived by others, even including other blacks, and on what kind of rapport they have with him.

For instance, attitudes (shaped to some degree by media) can and do:

- ▶ directly affect the likelihood of being hired or promoted;
- ▶ directly affect the likelihood of school admission;
- ▶ directly affect school grades;
- ▶ directly affect treatment within the justice system;
- ▶ directly affect chances of getting loans;
- ▶ end up affecting health and life expectancy;
- ▶ end up affecting self-realization and individual development;
- ▶ end up affecting the state of social policy (*e.g., punitive laws and police practices that impact communities*).

Scholars have repeatedly documented the range of implications:

We find that judges harbor the same kinds of implicit biases as others; that these biases can influence their judgment; but that given sufficient motivation, judges can compensate for the influence of these biases. (Rachlinski et al., 2009)

Biased interpretation can have substantial real-world consequences. Consider a teacher whose schema inclines her to set lower expectations for some students, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Or a grade school teacher who must decide who started the fight during recess. Or a jury who must decide a similar question, including the reasonableness of force and self-defense. Or students who must evaluate an outgroup teacher, especially if she has been critical of their performance. (Kang, 2005, pp. 1518-1519)

[M]ediated images have many impacts on young men of color that work through their effects on White leaders and White citizens. These are people whose decisions on everything from hiring, to granting bank loans, to teaching or medically treating YMC [young men of color], to voting for officials who make public policies, are influenced by their conscious and unconscious racial views. In turn, those policies have important effects on the relationships, careers, and physical and psychological health of men of color during their youth and throughout their lives. There are well-known, self-reinforcing connections that link together under-funded schools in minority neighborhoods, the disappearance of jobs from the same communities due to global and domestic outsourcing, discrimination by employers who assume that YMC applicants are unreliable, higher rates of crime, lower rates of marital stability, and higher levels of medical problems (including premature death). ... [M]edia images play an integral role in perpetuating these vicious circles (Entman, 2006, p. 21)

The most serious possible consequence of negative attitudes concerns the ultimate questions of life and death. Besides the fact that black men are more likely to be sentenced to death than white men for the same crime, several suggestive experimental studies have shown that subjects in a video police simulation are more likely to “shoot” black men (holding objects that may or may not be guns) than white men under the same circumstances (*e.g.*, see Greenwald, Oakes, & Hoffman, 2003).

Why media patterns are distorted

Given the long list of negative effects for black males and for society at large, the question remains: “Why does the media perpetuate this destructive set of images and stereotypes?” Racism is often explicitly condemned in the media, yet black males continue to be underrepresented as positive forces in the mainstream, framed in negative ways, offered limited roles in both fiction and news contexts, and so forth. Why? If communicators are to make a positive difference, they must grapple with the roots of the problem.

The recent research on this question is relatively sparse compared to other topics covered in this review, but a number of scholars have offered suggestions about the causal factors that lead to the distortions. Understanding the causes behind these patterns is an important step towards altering them, or at least contending with them more effectively.

Bias among producers of media

The most obvious potential factor is that the people responsible for media content are deliberately presenting a distorted, biased view. This is certainly a historical fact, at least:

The media have not been kind to African American males. Throughout America’s history, black men, teenagers, and boys too often have been depicted as buffoons, criminals, or oversexed animal-like creatures who lust after white women. That followed a design in this country to maintain an inferior, second-class status for black people, dating from slavery on through the twentieth century. (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000)

Scholars have also pointed to a variety of reasons media representations might be biased and distorted, even in the absence of conscious bias or malicious intent on the part of media elites.

Audience preferences

In some cases, scholars assert that viewer preferences drive the distorted portrayals of black males in the media. Most directly, white audiences, according to one perspective, tend only to be comfortable with a certain range of presentations of black males — *i.e.*, presentations that confirm their own fears and prejudices or reassure them that black males are not achieving “undue” power and status.

How does one create and market a product to an audience [*i.e.*, the White majority film audience] willing to pay only to see counterfeit representations of African Americans? (Tucker, 2007, p. 103, drawing on Guerrero, 1993)

Less directly but perhaps equally damaging, the pressures to attract an audience lead to a focus on violence and other attention-grabbing topics, that “happen to be” associated with black males.

These findings [about patterns in news coverage] should not surprise us, given the strong financial incentives to focus on sensationalistic stories such as violent crimes. Financial success of broadcast stations requires high ratings, in order to sell more advertisements at higher rates. ... Violent crime news stories frequently involve racial minorities, especially African Americans. (Kang, 2005, pp. 1550-1551)

Incorrect assumptions about what audiences want

If some media content producers are right about what their audiences are interested in, the scholarship suggests that in other cases portrayals of black men are incomplete and distorted because producers of media content have *faulty* assumptions about demand. For instance, video game developers tend to create game characters that mirror stereotypes of players as young white males, rather than the actual market demographics, which include a significant percent of black men and boys.

[T]he most likely cause for the representation patterns [in popular video games] is a combination of developer demographics [*i.e.*, developers create characters more like themselves] and perceived ideas about game players [*i.e.*, developers create characters that mirror their imagined audience]. (Williams et al., 2009, pp. 830-831)

Lack of input from African Americans

Another clear and compelling hypothesis about distorted media presentations concerns the lack of black input — in various forms — into the production of content. This dearth of representation includes, for instance, limited African-American TV station ownership, and an underrepresentative share of African-American producers, journalists, and experts invited to contribute content.

Perhaps the most important prerequisite to achieving the journalistic ideal of balance is the requirement of having reliable, legitimate, and credible sources competing to advance alternative narratives ... contending elite forces working to impose different frames on the coverage of an issue ... (Entman & Gross, 2008, p. 95)

A Knight Foundation report shows that women and people of color continue to be underrepresented in the positions of journalist and editor. Even as other organizations have succeeded in bringing diversity to the workplace, the news media has lagged. In a 2002 census, over 90 percent of journalists were white. (Lehrman, 2005)

Political motivations to traffic in stereotypes

Scholars point out that communicators can score political points, for example, when they promote resentment about social program spending by tapping into racial bias, a kind of generalized “Southern strategy.” For instance, Lucy Williams describes how stereotyped images and misinformation were intentionally inserted into the debate about welfare reform during the Clinton Administration, including:

the use of direct mail scare tactics, the use of the media through televangelists and talk shows ... the rightist critique of media as “liberal,” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), the pressuring of mainstream media through boycotts of advertisers’ products and letter-writing campaigns, (Hardisty, 1995) the encouraging of think tank staff and “scholars” to write op-ed pieces — all toward the goal of “stirring up hostilities” and “organizing discontent” (Smith, 1991). ... Right spokespersons became regular media stars and newspaper columnists. (Williams, 1997)

Mistaken understandings

Finally, it is worth noting that people may traffic in these stereotypes simply because they have mistaken impressions of the facts. Without being conscious of biased attitudes, producers of media content of all kinds may, consciously or unconsciously, assume that people with low incomes tend to be black, or looking at this another way, that households with black males are likely to be dysfunctional, that discrimination against black males is limited to isolated acts of racial discrimination, and so on.

“Prescriptive” Studies

The vast majority of the social science literature on this topic focuses on problems relating to black males and the media, and is essentially descriptive — that is, it describes and analyzes existing patterns in the media, and in thought and behavior. Since there are so many current patterns that are problematic, much of the scholarship focuses on discovering the scope and details of the problem.

Prescriptive studies are relatively scarce in the literature, especially those that explicitly set out to determine, through the use of empirical evidence, how communicators (in the broadest sense) ought to be addressing the problems and handling relevant topics. The lack of prescriptive social science is related to the gap between theorists and activists noted in Charlotte Ryan’s analysis, “Building Theorist-Activist Collaboration in the Media Arena: A Success Story”:

As currently organized, academic-based framing theory focuses on frames as fossils – the products or remnants of political discourse. Framing theorists rarely involve themselves in a sustained fashion with working framers, the processes framers employ, or the audiences they mobilize. (Ryan, 2005)

This section reviews these areas where research is thin, if available at all.

Little “good news” about media effects

The studies referred to earlier in this report paint a picture of a deep and complex problem. A distorted portrayal in the media taken as a whole leads to flawed and biased thinking about black boys and men, which in turn leads to significant real-world consequences of various kinds.

Much less apparent in the social science literature is evidence of the good effects that may be created by promoting new patterns of media portrayal. What happens when representation is fuller and more accurate, and more sympathetic? What kinds of media patterns help make people less biased, or lead to better outcomes? What is the evidence (if any) about what “works”? While it is implicit in much of the discussion that changes in the media should lead to beneficial outcomes, there is very little evidence cited on this point.

One exception is political scientist Shanto Iyengar’s influential study of the effects of television news choices on viewers’ attitudes (*Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*). In an experimental setting, Iyengar showed subjects different types of news stories focusing on African Americans, embedded within longer news segments, focusing on a variety of topics. Subjects were then asked a series of questions regarding their racial attitudes, and the responses were compared based on whether subjects had seen “episodic” stories, coverage focusing on individuals rather than larger trends or forces, or “thematic” stories, focusing on broad, systemic patterns. The result:

News coverage of black poverty in general and episodic coverage of black poverty in particular increases the degree to which viewers hold individuals responsible for racial inequality. News coverage of racial discrimination has the opposite effect [emphasis added]. (Iyengar, 1991, p. 67)

That is, focusing on the outcomes for individuals ends up promoting counterproductive perspectives, while coverage that focuses on systemic discrimination can help move attitudes in a positive direction. Of course, coverage of the latter type is all too rare, as previously noted.

How to influence the media

While some advocates and other actors report successes in influencing media patterns, such as the Maynard Institute's efforts to raise journalists' awareness of how they cover race, the review uncovered no social science literature on the topic of how to effectively intervene in the media. That is, while various social scientists have pointed to the need to change various patterns, there is little guidance available from the research about how to insure the greatest likelihood of success in these efforts.

Clearly, some patterns have changed for the better over the generations, presumably in connection with broad cultural shifts in attitude. But how can advocates most effectively address the media in the contemporary context?

Good news from the laboratory

A review of the relevant literature reveals a large number of social science studies that shed light on hypothetical ways in which the media might potentially help reduce bias against black males. While these studies do not look directly at media or public discourse — and are often not targeted at consideration of black males *per se* — this large body of research on how to reduce bias effects should certainly be of interest to communicators pursuing the same goal on a societal scale.

For instance, one finding that is intriguing, if difficult to apply, is that exposure to comedy (no matter what the subject of the comedy is) appears to make it easier to distinguish other-race faces from each other, a task that can be quite difficult depending on the subject's life experience. The mechanisms are unclear here, and may have to do with links between positive emotional states and cognitive performance overall — *i.e.*, not relating to race in particular. (Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005)

A brief review of some other important examples from the literature follows.

Individuation

Psychology researchers have investigated various “individuation” procedures that can reduce unconscious bias against African Americans, *e.g.*, as measured in Implicit Association Tests. (Implicit bias is measured in tasks where reaction times are so fast that conscious consideration is not possible, and often in contexts where it is impossible for subjects to be aware that racial thinking is being tested.) For instance, when white college students receive hours of practice in distinguishing one black face from another, they ultimately show significantly reduced implicit bias, presumably because practice in thinking of blacks as individuals reduces the unconscious tendency to see them in terms of stereotypes. (Lebrecht, Pierce, Tarr, & Tanaka, 2009)

This individuation practice is helpful because researchers note that whites' unconscious bias against black faces may well represent a default mode of thinking, *i.e.*, “category-based” thinking, in which people are automatically thought of in terms of (often stereotypical) group characteristics — based on age, gender, or race, for instance. (Wheeler & Fiske, 2005)

In another study, subjects were asked to look at a photo of an unknown black face and guess whether the individual would like a particular vegetable (with no particular cultural or emotional significance). In this context, implicit bias was eliminated. The results contrast with a study in which subjects were asked to think about the black individual's age, which appeared to trigger default, category-based perception. Thinking of the face as belonging to an individual with particular tastes works against unconscious bias and stereotypical thinking.

Explicitly “breaking the habit”

Other researchers have found that explicit training in rejecting stereotypes can help to reduce unconscious bias. Study participants who spent roughly 45 minutes doing tasks such as clicking “No” when viewing a black face paired with a stereotypical description (positive or negative) later showed a reduction in their implicitly measured bias — *i.e.*, reaction times so fast they could not have been consciously controlled. Promisingly, the researchers found in a related task (focusing on biases about skinheads) that effects last for at least 24 hours. On the other hand, the researchers found that significantly briefer training periods had no effect — they liken the training to skill learning that requires repeated and intensive practice. (Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000)

In one of the studies most directly related to media (Ramasubramanian, 2007), the researcher examined the effects of a combination of explicit training about stereotypes, plus examples that implicitly worked against stereotypes. Participants saw one of two twelve-minute videos that either explicitly advised them about media stereotypes (the “media literacy” video) or did not (the “control” video). They then read and summarized five brief written news stories, including two that contained either stereotypes about black males (relating to violence and unemployment) or counter-stereotypes (focusing on “gentleness and entrepreneurial success”). Following these exercises, they participated in a standard type of “lexical decision task” in which faster recognition of stereotype words (*e.g.*, lazy, poor, uneducated) indicates that a stereotype is active in the mind. The results indicated that *a combination of “media literacy training” plus seeing counter-stereotypical news stories* reduced the activation of negative stereotypes — though neither by itself had this effect.

Reflex training

Experimental researchers have also found that study participants asked to internalize a particular new *reflexive response* can eliminate unconscious bias in contexts where it usually occurs. For instance, some subjects in the police simulation task discussed earlier were instructed to focus beforehand on the idea that they would think “safe” (rather than “quick”) when seeing a black face, and this procedure ended up reducing or eliminating the tendency to “shoot” more unarmed black males. (Stewart & Payne, 2008)

Note that this type of concrete reflex training procedure proves more effective than training officers not to be biased or not to shoot innocent people.

In another study, subjects were asked to repeat the following to themselves three times and then type it out (and told that this would improve their performance): “If I see a person, then I will ignore his race!” And in fact, these subjects too were able to perform the “shooter” task without race-based bias. (Mendoza, Gollwitzer, & Amodio, 2010)

Importantly, this if-then type of reflex training seems more effective than more “abstract” training in avoiding biased behavior.

Reducing stereotype threat

Researchers have designed controlled experiments to explore communications approaches that can lessen the impacts of stereotype threat, especially in tasks related to educational success. For example, teaching college students that intelligence is malleable rather than fixed (Aronson et al., 2002) or that race is socially constructed rather than biological (Shih et al., 2007) reduces the effects of stereotype threat considerably; and teaching people about the nature of stereotype threat itself has shown benefits. (Johns et al., 2005)

While this experimental work does not directly address public/media communications, there is reason to think that some of the lessons from this research could be applicable to changing the way that both blacks and non-blacks interact with stereotypes.

Motivation

Another body of studies has focused on the kinds of motivation that help people overcome prejudiced responses. For instance, several have suggested that *guilt* can be an effective tool for learning to reduce automatic bias. When whites are told that they have had negative reactions to unknown black faces, their level of implicit bias tends to go down when they are tested again. (Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002)

The important caveat is that this is much more true for people who already have *internal* motivation to think and act in a less biased way — *i.e.*, people who truly do not want to be biased. This pattern was confirmed in a study that combined an explicit survey of racial attitudes with a test of implicit bias. Whites with an *internal belief* that bias is wrong, but who were not motivated strongly by external judgment of their racial behavior, showed the least signs of implicit bias. (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002)

On the other hand, *externally imposed* guilt can backfire: Researchers reviewing a body of literature on intentional “stereotype suppression” — *i.e.*, experiments where participants were explicitly asked not to think in biased ways — conclude that this often leads to a “rebound effect,” meaning that prejudiced racial thinking can emerge *more strongly* after being suppressed for a particular interval, particularly when the suppression is based on the idea of being judged by others. (Devine & Sharp, 2009)

In short, censure may be an effective tool for eliminating some types of prejudiced behavior in some contexts, but it is not an effective tool for changing damaging patterns of thinking overall.

While these findings suggest potential directions for advocates — *e.g.*, to avoid messages that focus on censure, or to promote programs to “train” Americans to reject bias — other kinds of work are needed in order to take the types of insights described in this section and apply them effectively to the design of real-world communications.

Messaging

Another virtual gap in the social science literature concerns messaging *per se* — *i.e.*, what to say about the issues, how to talk effectively about topics such as racial disparities, structural racism, lingering historical effects, and even the media problem itself (as discussed in section 1). There is substantial research on various dimensions of *portrayal*, but very little on how to talk about or explain key points.

There are certainly some hints in the literature, of course, including learning from public opinion research (which is the focus of the companion report to this social science review). For instance, it seems clear that whites respond more negatively to policy proposals that are framed as helping one group (blacks) at the expense of others, in part because these seem unfair to them, and in part because whites are cued to consider their own self-interest when considering the proposals. (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993)

Confirming this pattern, a study by Franklin Gilliam showed that participants exposed to an explicit statement about the need to treat minorities more “fairly” ended up having the most negative views of policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit or low-cost home loans for minorities. Some participants read a statement that included the following:

Whether overtly or more subtly, minorities are treated differently when it comes to such things as getting ahead in the classroom, applying for a home loan, and being able to see a doctor. According to this view, we need to renew our commitment to a just society by devoting more resources to policies that recognize and address fairness in our society. (Gilliam, 2008)

These participants ended up having more negative views of various supports for minorities than participants who saw no such statement or ones who saw statements less overtly geared to helping minorities. Indeed, years of public opinion data confirm the general pattern that whites tend to have a special antipathy for programs specifically targeted at helping blacks. (Steeh & Krysan, 1996)

On the other hand, some researchers echo many advocates' discomfort with avoiding the topic of race. For example in the context of welfare reform:

There may be good reasons for advocates of a racially fair welfare system to avoid invoking race or high-lighting the disproportionate presence of black recipients on the welfare rolls. On the other side, however . . . such a strategy risks participating in the silence that surrounds racial inequity in the United States; it fails to name or challenge the social and economic processes that make persons of color more likely to need public assistance. (Schram, 2003)

But the central question for this review concerns evidence about which strategies are likely to be effective, and there are at least some indications that communicators don't need to avoid the topic of race in order to be successful.

In one of the few social science studies addressing effective messaging practices that mention race explicitly, Gilliam and Manuel conclude that directly addressing race can be effective if communicators emphasize broad values, rather than focusing more narrowly on discrimination. The researchers found, using a national web-based survey, that messages focusing on ideas like *prevention*, *problem-solving*, and *strengthening all communities* do more to promote health and youth-development policies for minorities than messages focusing on how African Americans receive unfair treatment. (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

The more effective messages included statements like the following:

[P]reventing problems in African American communities is important because they will eventually become everyone's problems. Preventing declining school budgets, restrictive lending practices, and a scarcity of health professionals in African American communities will prevent worse problems in the future.

[E]ffective solutions do exist. Progress can be made if programs are routinely evaluated and the good ones brought to scale in African American communities. . . . smart states have significantly improved conditions in some African American communities . . . by raising teacher quality, creating lending policies for buying homes, and increasing the number of health professionals.

The reality is that African American communities are not enjoying the same benefits as the rest of the nation. This happens because the efforts that enhance a community's well-being, like economic development, availability of health care programs, and opportunities for a good education, have not benefited African American communities.

Most other discussions of effective references to race are not social science studies *per se*. For example, after looking at multiple examples of successful and unsuccessful affirmative action campaigns in several states, the Center for Social Inclusion's report "Thinking Change" concludes that, "If the goal is to educate the public about racial and gender unfairness to create long-term support for race and

gender-conscious programs, the evidence seems to suggest that race-neutral strategies will fail.” (Note that while this CSI document is not a social science study, it is informed by many of the same studies as reviewed in this report.)

As “Thinking Change” points out, the city of Houston was able to fight back an anti-affirmative action ballot initiative through messaging that explicitly referred to race, though not to blacks. The white mayor repeatedly made the point that “Anglo male contractors got between 95 percent and 99 percent of the business before the affirmative action program got started 12 years ago. Today, they still get 80 percent.”⁶

The mayor’s argument effectively neutralizes both the fairness and zero-sum perspectives that often stand in the way of support for affirmative action, by emphasizing that whites still get the lion’s share of contracts. Another important reason for its success is almost certainly *the mayor’s voice* itself. If whites feel confident their interests are being understood and looked after, they are less likely to respond negatively.

This example is a hopeful one, but the authors acknowledge that many factors combine to determine the success of a race-related campaign, such as the particular issue at stake, the messengers, and the organizational effectiveness of each side.

In “Moving from Them to Us: Challenges in Reframing Violence among Youth” (Berkeley Media Studies Group), Dorfman and Wallack discuss a promising framework for discussing issues relevant to black males (and particularly youth):

The structural racism framework offered by legal scholars Andrew Grant-Thomas and John Powell provides a much more complete understanding of the origins and consequences of racism. In this view, whether a person thrives in society is dependent upon the opportunities available, and opportunities are “produced and regulated by institutions, institutional interactions and individuals” together. Those interactions among institutions have a certain gestalt. Scholars liken it to a bird in a birdcage because it’s the network of bars working together, not a single bar, that traps the bird. (Dorfman & Wallack, 2009, p. 11)

While there is no reason to disagree that this bigger-picture perspective is desirable, there is little available evidence about how to talk about it in ways that effectively engage mainstream audiences and change their thinking.

For the moment, although some current “how-to” books for messaging in support of racial justice are informed by social science insights — see for example, the guides by Wallack et al. (1999) and Cutting and Themba-Nixon (2006) — these works rely mostly on the experience of practitioners rather than systematic research testing of practices and results.

⁶ The CSI report draws on a Berkeley Media Studies Group report (*A New Debate on Affirmative Action: Houston and Beyond*, 1998), which in turn quotes Mayor Bob Lanier from *The Houston Chronicle*, Oct. 26, 1997.

Dilemmas and Deep Challenges

This part of the paper steps back from the problems regarding the media and its content considered earlier in the review and looks at some additional challenging dynamics and problems that are noted in the research and that communicators must grapple with.

Put briefly, the problem goes deeper than factors such as how many African Americans are involved in media content production, or the assumptions of content producers about their audiences. These challenges involve fundamental patterns in human cognition (*e.g.*, the difficulty of focusing on systemic as opposed to anecdotal information) as well as dilemmas inherent in a fraught topic where it may be all too easy to offend or alienate one audience while appealing to another, or to trigger one problematic perception while combating another.

The difficulties of structural thinking

As explicit, individual racism (*i.e.*, the attitude that blacks are “inferior”) has gradually receded in recent decades, *structural* racism has emerged as a key concept in the analysis of race-biased perception — the idea that there are systemic and institutional barriers that impede racial equality, even if individuals were no longer racially biased (*e.g.*, see “Thinking Change,” Center for Social Inclusion, 2005).

Unfortunately, due to fundamental tendencies in human reasoning, there is a natural kind of “cognitive blindness” to patterns that are systemic and statistical in nature (see Aubrun et al., 2005). The result is that most attempts to draw attention to the phenomenon of structural racism meet with resistance and even backlash on the part of broad sections of the American public. The media contributes to this pattern by consistently transforming matters of structural racism into reports that emphasize individual stories and individual outcomes. (O’Neil, 2009)

Unfortunately, the literature offers no clear, evidence-based way forward for addressing this deep challenge more effectively.

Anxiety and “the other”

Many studies have shown that anxieties (*e.g.*, about terrorism, or loss of a job) can lead to a more conservative outlook, including negative attitudes towards those perceived as “other” (*e.g.*, Amodio, 2009; Jost et al., 2007). The result is that communications on issues even remotely connected to race can still end up triggering exclusionary negative racial attitudes, simply by evoking anxious feelings about the world — whether having to do with economic problems, war, or other threats. And in a time period that is particularly anxious for reasons that have little to do with race, it is predictable that racial attitudes and policy preferences will deteriorate.

Fundamental/universal challenges to race relations

This is a rich area of study that attempts to sort out patterns specific to a particular society from potentially more universal aspects of interracial dynamics. Both kinds of factors are certainly relevant

to black male achievement in the U.S., and this review focuses on challenges more specific to this country, since these represent particular challenges that are potentially more amenable to change — *e.g.*, through different patterns of media ownership, or training of journalists.

On the other hand, the universal type of challenge is also worth keeping in mind. For instance, there is a consistent body of evidence showing that people have more trouble differentiating the faces of other-race individuals — and this effect seems to hold when blacks look at white faces, as well as when whites look at black faces (*e.g.*, see Meissner & Brigham, 2001).

Causation vs. correlation

A great deal of social science literature quantifies the disparities in *outcomes* between African Americans and others — *e.g.*, black children suffer disproportionately high rates of obesity. Typically, these studies carefully distinguish between causation (*x* causes *y*) and correlations (*x* and *y* tend to be related). Causes are harder to prove and establish with confidence, especially in extremely complex situations like school success or incarceration rates, where a number of factors may be at work.

Unfortunately, the resulting focus on outcomes (as opposed to causes) can make social science a problematic resource for communicators. Correlations (*e.g.*, black male-ness and poor school scores go together) are open to different interpretations (*e.g.*, poor test scores are evidence of bias against black males vs. black males are “inherently” less well-equipped for school). In fact, depending on the assumptions that the audience is already making, a communications emphasis on *disparities of outcome* can reinforce people’s prejudices rather than drawing their attention to racial injustice.

In some cases, researchers are able to point to disparities in both inputs *and* outcomes, and can explicitly point to causes. For example, a report about race-based health disparities in California highlights the causes rather than the effects, namely that black children receive less physical education in school and have low rates of access to green space and therefore suffer disproportionately from obesity and other problems:

Much of Los Angeles is park poor, and there are unfair park, school, and health disparities based on race, ethnicity, income, poverty, youth, and access to cars. Children of color disproportionately live in communities of concentrated poverty without enough places to play in parks and schools . . . The human health implications of the lack of physical activity are profound. These children disproportionately suffer from obesity, diabetes, and other diseases related to inactivity. (Garcia & White, 2006)

But in many cases, researchers can only speak with confidence about correlations and disparities of outcome, which may not be as compelling.

Warts-and-all vs. idealization

The first section of the review focused in part on how the media portrayal of black males is *incomplete* — not a full and accurate portrayal of their real nature, lives, and experience. But presenting a full and accurate warts-and-all portrait of black males is problematic because of the well-documented tendency to blame victims for their problems (*e.g.*, see Brown et al., 2003). Advocates face a dilemma in which any discussion of how the actions and choices of black men and boys contribute to their problems can end up reinforcing the idea that black males “have mostly themselves to blame.” On the other hand, not discussing black men’s choices or their consequences evokes charges that communicators are not realistic, for instance, or not asking enough of black men (see the earlier reference to Larry Elder). Portraying black men and black boys as passive victims of fate has additional drawbacks.

Cognitive scientists and psychologists have described a basic pattern of human thinking — *confirmation bias* — which means that when people are given information, they tend to hear the parts that confirm what they already believe, and disregard the information that contradicts what they believe (e.g., Nickerson, 1998). This pattern creates problems for analysts who want to fully describe the problem of black male outcomes (e.g., relating to success gaps, family dysfunctions, or attitudes towards education), because they run the risk of “confirming” negative biases. There is little empirical research as yet to aid advocates in dealing with this dilemma.

The role of black masculinity

Feminist scholars have pioneered the study of gender as a social construction, overturning the assumption that gender roles are an essential, relatively fixed part of human nature. They have looked at how forces like media, cultural beliefs, ideology, and history all shape people’s gender expectations and their lived experience as men or women. Although this kind of analysis initially focused more on whites than blacks and more on women than men, there is a growing, rich literature that treats black masculinity as a similar object of study. (Brooks & Hebert, 2006)

Many analysts take as their starting point the way in which black maleness has interacted with the history of racism. Hypersexuality, violence, misogyny, and athleticism are all exaggerations of maleness that serve to caricature and stereotype black males and black masculinity. (Tucker, 2007; hooks, 2004)

Media imagery of blacks continues to stress gender and sexuality. As mentioned earlier, when it comes to males, the media leans towards individuals such as athletes, rappers, pimps, absent fathers, and criminals. Even “positive” portrayals of black men often highlight variations on these types. The stereotypes play out in both black and white communities, and analysts believe they are a major source of the distortions that interfere with black male success. (Mutua, 2006) In fact these exaggerated masculine types in the media come to symbolize a (narrow) path for success in society.

Most analysts attribute the durability of these attitudes first and foremost to white male anxieties about the threat of black men having sexual access to white women. The caricature of black masculinity has long been both the thing that excuses white oppression and stimulates the fear that motivates it.

On the other hand, addressing the issue can mean coming to grips with how black males themselves may embrace these stereotypes, often as a form of resistance to the lack of power they feel they have to actually shape their lives. In other words, black males, with ample encouragement from the media, may often “confirm” the hyper-masculine stereotypes. Among scholars we find a full range of responses to this dilemma. For instance, media stereotypes of hyper-masculine black males are treated as:

- ▶ false biases (Jones, 2009);
- ▶ partially true, but exaggerated by race hostilities and the media (Burrell, 2010);
- ▶ true, with the implication that black males should get their act together (see Neal, 2006);
- ▶ true, though black males are not at fault since:
 - ✓ they unfortunately buy into stereotypes and expectations just like everyone else (Hutchinson, 1996);
 - ✓ they face limitations created by a society that expects black males to behave in stereotypical ways, so that stars and athletes that embody those stereotypes are the ones lionized in popular culture (Tucker, 2007);
 - ✓ many of these behaviors have structural causes (e.g., lack of real power for black men; criminal justice system undermines black family structures, and so on).

In terms of methods, most of the literature is not rooted in quantitative or experimental data. Feminist studies owes much to literary criticism, and most of the studies that look at the media's role in the portrayal of black masculinity are based on interpretation and analysis of particular texts, movies, and television shows. For example, Orbe (1998) looked at MTV's reality show, *Real World*; Dines (2003) analyzed the content of cartoons in men's magazines; and MacDonald (2005) analyzed the television drama *Homicide* to demonstrate how the construction of black masculinity is depicted on television.

The problematic appeal of a “color-blind” society

One of the characteristics of the current period is the assertion that although racism may have been prevalent in the past, it is no longer a significant problem. In fact, asserting that white racism is the source of black people's problems is caricatured as not only excuse-mongering, but a form of “reverse racism.” (Schram, 2003)

Of course, most serious scholars treat discrimination and race-based effects as highly significant and current. Moreover, consciousness of race is important to seeing and solving the problem.

Race consciousness [is] a necessary antidote in order to effectively oppose, resist and reveal the institutionalized, systemic, and normative character of racism . . . moving beyond a liberal individualist framework of analysis, with its stress on “neutrality,” “colour-blindness,” and “integration” into an otherwise unchanged dominant society. (Warner, 2006)

But scholars have observed that the political right has systematically made use of “color-blind” framing to derail constructive discourse and policymaking to address the effects of discrimination:

In the Right's view, affirmative action and other programs designed to address institutional racism . . . become both unnecessary . . . and unjust (since they do not discount race and consider individual merit alone). Using polemical and divisive tactics, the Right attacks affirmative action as “racial quotas,” “preferential treatment,” and “reverse discrimination.” It cynically takes the language of the Civil Rights Movement, including the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., himself, to argue that individuals should be judged by their merit and character and not by their skin color . . . And, it warns that preferential treatment accorded to a particular ethnic or racial group will create resentment among others (read Whites). (Aziz, 2002)

One result of this framing has been that the media shy away from explicitly acknowledging bias as an underlying cause for social problems. (Williams, 1997) Advocates or media figures who do insist on bias as a primary cause are attacked for being obsessed with race and therefore part of the problem themselves. As a result, the public discourse about race has become more polarized and toxic, and much less likely to serve as a vehicle for open discussion in media that are often risk-averse when it comes to genuine controversy.

The widely disseminated report from the *New York Times*, “Proficiency of Black Students Is Found to Be Far Lower Than Expected” (Nov. 9, 2010, p. A22) is a case in point. The detailed article focuses on the effort to understand and address the school achievement gap for black males, yet the idea of discrimination is never raised. Readers are left to fill in their own explanation as to why young black boys do more poorly in school than their black sisters, more poorly than Latino boys, and worse than low-income whites.

Efforts to open up the conversation on problems of race will have to address or reverse this problematic imbalance — namely that in most media contexts, mentioning, much less insisting on, the role of discrimination is treated as a controversial or even racist stance, whereas failing to mention the

role of racial discrimination (even when it is clearly warranted) is considered a neutral or impartial stance. As Winant puts it, “a refusal to engage in ‘race thinking’ amounts to a defense of the racial status quo, in which systemic racial inequality and . . . discrimination . . . are omnipresent” (quoted by Warner, 2006). (Winant, 1997)

Implicit bias as a political tool

Further interfering with an open and constructive conversation about race is the way in which race has been used by politicians. Discourse about “welfare dependency” and the economic and social burdens of “handouts” have become a code for stoking and taking advantage of racial tensions in ways that help certain politicians and certain political projects (e.g., anti-tax, small government rhetoric).

When Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan swept California in the 1966 gubernatorial election, he sounded not only the familiar antitax, anti-social spending, antibureaucratic themes but at the same time baited “welfare mothers.” He brought the house down when he asserted that welfare recipients are on a “prepaid lifetime vacation plan.” (A careful survey experiment shows that voters hear these as code words for black welfare poor.) (Gilens, 1996)

It is clear that the public image of African Americans has suffered immensely by serving as a political football in the struggle between conservatives and progressives as they have sought to define some of the fundamental questions of the country — the distribution of wealth, the role of social policy and of government itself, the strength and direction of public institutions, and so on.

On this point, it is worth quoting at length from Sanford Schram’s 2003 work, *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform*:

With the “old-fashioned” brand of racism now largely discredited, we inhabit a discursive moment defined by a mixture of corrosive racial resentments, fears of being labeled “racist,” and uncertainties about whether it is wise to speak of race at all. Too often, race now operates by stealth, embedded in ostensibly neutral language. (Williams, 1997; Ansell, 1997) Many conversations take on a “we all know what we’re talking about” feel, trading on race-coded euphemisms regarding “urban” and “inner city” problems, “cultural backgrounds,” the need for “personal responsibility,” the troubles of the “underclass,” and so on. As George Orwell noted many years ago (1954), such euphemistic language nourishes political ideas that cannot bear the cold light of direct analysis; it protects the existing social order at the expense of clear thought and open deliberation.

The limits of communication — contact theory

Finally, the social science literature suggests strongly that communications efforts, while important, must always be considered alongside other more direct, experiential strategies. In particular, it is critical to continue finding creative ways of promoting direct contact (of a positive kind) between black males and others in American society.

Numerous scholars have adopted or tested aspects of “contact theory” — the hypothesis that interpersonal contact is an important causal factor for reducing prejudice of all kinds. (See one of the most seminal works in the field: Gordon Allport’s study *The Nature of Prejudice*, 1954.) A carefully researched and highly cited 2006 review of over 500 studies found that contact theory is overwhelmingly supported by the data, and that contact typically reduces prejudice towards whole groups, even including groups not included in the study.

Not only do attitudes toward the immediate participants usually become more favorable, but so do attitudes toward the entire outgroup, outgroup members in other situations, and even outgroups not involved in the contact. (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 766)

The studies involved groups of all kinds — defined by race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and other characteristics — and found similar patterns across all types of prejudice, as measured in a variety of different ways, from survey self-reports to experimental tests of implicit attitudes.

It is true that certain factors can significantly reduce the positive effects of contact:

Institutional support for contact under conditions of competition or unequal status can often enhance animosity between groups, thereby diminishing the potential for achieving positive outcomes. (*Ibid.*, p. 766)

But these are far and away the exceptions to the rule. Overall, researchers believe the studies indicate “that the process underlying contact’s ability to reduce prejudice involves the tendency for familiarity to breed liking,” and also point out that the effects can last:

To date, findings from longitudinal studies typically have shown the persistence of the prejudice reduction achieved by contact. (*Ibid.*, p. 768)

In short, advocates for better outcomes for black males almost certainly need to focus some of their efforts on promoting increased contact between black males and others. Certain types of contact are ideal — *e.g.*, individuals of equal status working together to achieve common goals — but the literature establishes that a very wide range of types of experiences will almost certainly help reduce bias and improve outcomes.

Looking Forward

The studies reviewed for this report paint a picture of a world in which black male lives and experience are distorted in public communications, in ways that lead to distorted understandings and attitudes towards them, and ultimately to serious obstacles to success and happiness in the real world. These patterns are critical for communicators to understand so that they know what they are up against.

Overall, the studies do not offer a great deal of specific guidance concerning exactly how to go about changing these patterns. They focus more on problems than solutions, and are more descriptive than prescriptive. It is clear that much more scholarship is needed on the ways in which communication can demonstrably help improve the situation for black males.

Nevertheless, taken along with the authors' own research experience on a wide range of social issues, the studies considered here do suggest a number of ideas that communicators should keep in mind about how to proceed.

The most obvious is that communicators need to continue to work to create a fuller and more accurate portrayal of black males in the media — through education and external pressure targeted at media producers — as well as by working to embed more African Americans in all links in the media production chain, and by producing their own media reflecting best practices.

In principle, the latter effort is likely to help with all the factors that lead to distorted portrayals, as African-American media owners, producers, writers, and so forth are less likely to fall into patterns of neglect and distortion. But we caution that simply having more African Americans involved in content production is not likely to be a silver bullet solution, for reasons discussed in the section on deep challenges and dilemmas. For instance, while a black news producer might be better prepared to address neglect of certain topics, he or she may have no clear idea about the best narratives or language for making systemic forces more visible, or about how to avoid various “blame the victim” dynamics.

Beyond working towards more representative and “relatable” portrayals of black males, communicators must face challenges regarding what to *say* about the topic, in order to take the best advantage of communications opportunities ranging from web pages, to speeches, interviews, and community conversations.

Some evidence, such as Iyengar's studies of the impact of thematic news stories, suggests that awareness of systematic patterns of bias against black males can have good results. For another example, see Losen's (2009) discussion of how the publication of significant high school graduation rate disparities between black males and others helped push national education policy in a constructive direction:

While internationally the denial of education to women is of primary concern, in the USA, black males are often the sub-group experiencing the greatest harm. ...

[But a report on high school graduation rate disparities] attracted national attention As public awareness grew ... many other researchers began studying and reporting similar findings. Several politicians, including Obama, added improving graduation rates to their election campaign's educational platform. Before election year in 2008, the Department of Education issued new regulations ... [that] added accountability for schools and districts if minority or ethnic groups, students with disabilities, English learners or socio-economically disadvantaged youth failed to make adequate improvements in their rate of graduation. (Losen, 2009, p. 67)

But it is clear that, beyond simply reporting on the facts, communicators must work to find more effective ways of conveying some very difficult points — *e.g.*, while structural racism is a familiar idea to insiders, there are reasons to believe that conveying a clear picture of it to broader audiences remains an important challenge. For a range of cognitive and cultural reasons, the focus easily remains on individual choices. Conveying the idea of “invisible” systemic forces that stack the odds against black males is a challenge that cannot be overestimated.

Yet finding ways to offer audiences new mental pictures of the causality related to black male achievement is critically important, not just as a way of reassigning “blame,” but also as a way of transcending some of the most challenging dilemmas communicators face. For instance, a new causal picture can help communicators get past the troublesome question of whether to avoid discussion of black men’s choices, thereby inviting charges of idealizing them or setting the bar too low, or to invite charges of blaming the victim. A new understanding of big-picture causality could potentially put a more constructive light on seemingly self-destructive choices made by black males, *e.g.*, the choice to join gangs because they seem to offer opportunities for social and economic advancement otherwise lacking in some communities. Making this big-picture case is far from easy, as communicators already know, but it may be essential.

Note that one promising candidate for a focus of discussion may be implicit bias itself — as identified in psychology experiments. As a focus of communications, these points illustrate several criteria that our own research suggests can be important for effective communication on a fraught topic: (A) steering clear of the type of moral censure that can alienate many audience members; (B) pointing to “objective” facts that are harder to dispute; (C) conveying a relatively novel and unfamiliar point (rather than rehashing familiar claims and accusations); and (D) offering the hope that there are concrete steps that can help. (For various reasons discussed in the social science literature, including the so-called “just-world” orientation, Americans tend to respond more favorably to messages that offer hope — see, for example, Feinberg & Willer, 2010.)

More generally, in fact, communicators can be confident that promoting stories about solutions and success stories — interventions or causal factors of any kind that have altered black male outcomes for the better — will help engage new audiences. Whether in fiction shows, news accounts, press releases, or informal anecdotes, communicators are sure to gain new kinds of attention by offering audiences fresh and hopeful takes on the topic.

Another potentially promising direction may be pointing out (and calling out) the manipulative uses of race in the media and public discourse. Some of the social science evidence suggests that explicit inoculation against manipulators and manipulative messages can be very effective, and the strategy of opening people’s eyes to how they are being duped has been effective in other issues areas, such as cigarettes and smoking.

Finally, communicators should keep in mind that any of their efforts that can help promote greater contact between African-American males and others may be among the most effective steps they can take.

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Public Opinion Review

Executive Summary

Without question, the last half-century has witnessed an enormous shift in public attitudes toward black-white relations, segregation, and blatant prejudice. At the same time, racial tensions, obstacles, and stereotypes persist, and Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds hold divergent understandings of the issues facing black men, discrimination, and the causes of racial disparities.

Besides contributing to a negative civic environment, stereotypes and fundamental disagreements in understanding issues matter because they may undermine support for policies that can help strengthen communities and address racial disparities.

The analysis that follows provides a (necessarily brief) overview of some central themes emerging from public opinion research regarding understandings of black male achievement, awareness of racial disparities, and the causes of and responsibility for addressing them. It is intended to offer communicators a synthesis of key ideas that exist in public understanding that can either derail the conversation or move it forward.

This analysis highlights the views *of* black men, and *about* black men and the issues they face. Throughout, much of the focus is on differences between black and white survey respondents, and the challenges suggested by divergent opinions.¹ It takes research findings that seem contradictory and divisive on the surface, and offers a perspective to make sense of the underlying dynamics at play.

Perceptions of and by black men

More African-American men experience significant life challenges than do white men. African-American men also have higher levels of worry, and are harsher in their judgment of black men as well. For example:

- ▶ Black men are more likely than white men to say they have faced a number of traumatic experiences, from murdered friends to wrongful arrest to being a victim of a violent crime.
- ▶ African-American men cite higher levels of worry about a range of concerns.
- ▶ Black men consider a number of problems facing them severe, and are harshly critical of the priorities of black men as a group. For example, they are critical of what they see as black men's insufficient emphasis on education, health, family, and work.

At the same time, more black men than white men say they are focused on achieving success in a career, or on living a religious life, and more black men say they are optimistic about a bright future. In just about every area, black men are their own harshest critics, as well as the most optimistic that things will be better.

¹ Few surveys include enough interviews to analyze responses by African-American men in isolation, though we include these findings when possible. Further, very few of the surveys in this review offered subgroup analysis among other racial and ethnic groups. Our references to views of other ethnic groups are therefore limited.

Disparities and discrimination

People of color, including African Americans, view discrimination as widespread and as leading to disparities in education, income, health, and imprisonment. White Americans recognize that discrimination still exists, and while they generally understand that disparities between the races exist, they underestimate the extent of racial disparities, downplay the prevalence of discrimination, and they do not see discrimination as an influence on disparities.

Though responses from whites and African Americans to questions about discrimination and disparities are almost always at odds, we see hope in this pattern, as it seems clear that responses diverge because white Americans and black Americans have different understandings of what racial disparities are “about” — just the kind of challenge that communications reframing is designed to overcome.

First, African Americans have a more encompassing view of how discrimination unfolds than white Americans do. For white Americans, discrimination tends to be about relationships between individuals — interpersonal relationships. Black Americans, however, have an understanding that extends beyond the personal to include the way discriminatory practices can be embedded in policies and institutions. So even if all people recognize that discrimination exists, white people tend to think it is due to personal prejudice and are less likely to see the influence of institutional racism, obscuring the role of collective action and policy solutions.

Questions in public opinion surveys almost always imply that discrimination is about personal prejudice and “race relations,” as though the issue is solely about personal interactions and individual behavior. The role of institutions and systems is largely unstated and rarely explored.

Similarly, black Americans and white Americans tend to have different understandings of how disparities arise, and therefore different interpretations of who or what is responsible for addressing disparities. Analysts often point to a contrast between “individual” and “structural” explanations for disparities:

- ▶ Overall, roughly equal percentages choose an explanation for disparities grounded in individual responsibility (*e.g.*, do individuals have the motivation to pull themselves up) and structural obstacles (*e.g.*, will individuals have the chance for education). However, black respondents are more likely to point to structural obstacles while white respondents are more likely to point to individual responsibility.
- ▶ Overall, one-third point to discrimination, but far more black respondents than white respondents say discrimination leads to disparities.
- ▶ Few choose the blatantly prejudiced belief that black people have less ability to learn.

With these divergent understandings of discrimination and disparities in mind, communicators need to take into account whether they are implicitly sending a message that works against the notion of collective responsibility. They need to keep in mind the following frames that dominate Americans’ thinking about responsibility:

- ▶ **“Me” and “Personal Responsibility”** — Individuals are responsible for achieving their own success; therefore, individuals have to create their own solutions.
 - ✓ As a general stance, Americans overwhelmingly believe in personal empowerment and self-determination.

- ✓ Similarly, as an explanation for disparities and problems facing black men, people turn to the idea of individual responsibility. In this view, racial disparities exist because individuals of different races are not trying equally hard to achieve, and black people need to take more responsibility.
- ✓ The “me” stance is gaining ground; black respondents have shifted toward a personal responsibility perspective to explain gaps in black achievement since the mid-1990s.

This approach is unlikely to lead to collective action.

- ▶ **“They” and “Interpersonal Relations” are Responsible** — Discriminatory behavior by individual white Americans directed toward individual black Americans is the cause of racial disparities; prejudiced individuals are responsible for disparities and attitude change is the solution.
 - ✓ This stance is the normative standpoint embedded in most public opinion research, and the default pattern that often results in an “us and them” confrontational conversation. In this view, the problem is defined as how individuals treat each other; therefore, the solution is attitude change and stripping culture of stereotypes.
 - ✓ White Americans and black Americans have divergent views regarding the prevalence of discrimination and its role in creating disparities.
 - ✓ Most Americans believe that race relations are good, that problems will be worked out, and that more dialogue will help.
- ▶ **“All of Us” and “Structures” are Responsible** — The choices we have collectively made, and the systems we have created, have led to disparities that hold us all back. This stance relies both on a sense of interdependence and an understanding of structural dynamics.
 - ✓ Public understanding of the influence of structures or systems in leading to gaps in achievement is a very limited area of inquiry in public opinion surveys.
 - ✓ The few questions that explore some aspect of systemic influences demonstrate divergent views between racial groups.

This stance creates more opportunity for collective action and policy change, compared to an individual responsibility stance.

Issue focus

There are reasons to be optimistic about developing an “All of Us” conversation that leads to broad-based support for collective action and policy change. While any number of issue areas may be advantaged by such an approach, three policies rise to the top:

- ▶ **Education:** Education shows potential as an issue that can cross race, engage white people in coalition with black communities, and energize black men on their own behalf and on behalf of their families. It affords the opportunity to discuss what we can do collectively to advance people’s well-being, rather than allow people to simply blame lack of ambition and hard work.
 - ✓ Education is a top priority and concern for all Americans, and one area where people readily see a collective stake and a collective responsibility.
 - ✓ There is widespread agreement that education matters to economic mobility, and the role of education in creating opportunity is particularly valued in the black community.
 - ✓ Importantly, Americans are willing to make low-income and minority children a priority in education efforts.

- ▶ **Jobs/Income:** The current weak economy has highlighted the role of broken systems in people’s economic well-being, although this issue can easily lead to racial divisions and zero-sum thinking if not framed carefully.
 - ✓ Jobs, income, and the economy are at the top of Americans’ agendas, and are central to efforts to address racial disparities.
 - ✓ In the current economy, people are more able to see the role of systems/structures in aiding or impeding individual success (though opinion continues to emphasize individual responsibility).
 - ✓ However, jobs and income represent an area where the role of race seems particularly divisive and where stereotypes are persistent.
 - ✓ There is widespread support for a number of policies that would improve economic mobility. However, African Americans support an active, engaged role for government, while white Americans are more likely to see government as the problem.²
- ▶ **Crime and Justice:** Black Americans rate crime as a top priority and police bias as a serious problem. Of all the issue areas, white respondents are most likely to respond that black Americans may receive different treatment in the justice system (though even here the percentages are not high and successful framing will be key).
 - ✓ Crime has declined as a national priority, and yet, crime continues to be a top concern among black respondents.
 - ✓ Surveys consistently show that black respondents have less confidence in police and in the justice system generally than white respondents do.

Finally, many organizations have taken up “fatherhood” as an important issue for black men and the black community generally. The public opinion research base for fatherhood initiatives is rather thin, and tends to focus narrowly on personal behaviors and involvement with children, rather than take a broader view on policy or social action.

Communications directions

In some respects, there has been a significant amount of research recommending messaging on issues of race. However, much of this research is limited in its utility either because it was designed to accomplish a narrow goal (and therefore is ineffective or even harmful for broader goals), or because its focus is so broad it can be difficult to demonstrate effectiveness in advancing specific policy objectives.

There are a number of framing choices that continue to be controversial: should advocates communicate about race or class, race or place, etc. Strategists often recommend avoiding race due to the well-known and obvious pitfalls in trying to have a frank conversation about disparities; advocates (quite rightly) are frequently dissatisfied with that recommendation, and seek research on how — not whether — to discuss race and equal opportunity.

Even researchers who have been studying and recommending strategies on this issue for some time may find it difficult to build support among communicators for a particular approach, to refine their recommendations, and to demonstrate success. While much work needs to be done, this review finds three promising directions for further consideration and development:

- ▶ Calling attention to effective solutions to disparities (and existing institutional bias), a color-conscious strategy that highlights proven solutions;

2 American National Election Studies (2008); Allstate/National Journal, Heartland Monitor Poll IX (2011).

- ▶ Explaining the role of structures and systems in leading to disparities, thereby overcoming the “personal responsibility” barrier; and
- ▶ Creating a sense of interdependence and shared fate, thereby breaking down the “group competition” that is pervasive in racial attitudes.

In sum, we need to develop communications strategies that join people in common purpose and shared fate, while not erasing race in the process. This analysis points to the need for a frame flip and a unifying narrative to break through deeply entrenched views on these issues. Specifically, new framing on this issue needs to: mend the in-group/out-group cycle and establish a sense of “we” in a shared fate; look for ways to characterize the unique challenges facing black men while not inadvertently implying that other groups will have less opportunity, *e.g.*, “breaking down obstacles” instead of “addressing disparities”; and harmonize the broad overarching narrative about black male achievement with specific issue categories that most matter to African-American men — jobs and income, education, and criminal justice.

The analysis that follows is just one part of a much larger effort to understand the current context, and to create a path forward.

Introduction

This analysis provides an overview of the central themes emerging from public opinion research regarding understandings of black male achievement, awareness of racial disparities, and the causes of and responsibility for addressing them. In addition, the review includes short discussions of four issues of particular interest to advocates — jobs and the economy, education, criminal justice, and fatherhood.

Much has been written on these topics, yet many questions remain to be investigated. This review is far from comprehensive. Rather, it is designed to offer communicators a synthesis of key ideas that exist in public understanding, which can either derail or move the conversation forward. These key ideas need to be taken into account in any message strategy.

This strategic overview takes research findings that on the surface seem contradictory and divisive, and offers a perspective that makes sense of the underlying dynamics. How can people both recognize that disparities exist, and still oppose efforts designed to address these disparities? How can people believe that discrimination is widespread, yet think it has nothing to do with limiting opportunity?

Note that the analysis is *just one piece of a larger effort*. It is intended to provide communicators with a strategic overview of key public attitudes, and to inform future stages of the project — and it is those later stages that will focus more on action steps going forward.

Methodology

Public opinion research relevant to black male achievement is an area rich with investigation, and dozens of books could easily be written summarizing each of the topics identified in this review. Indeed, hundreds of studies informed this analysis. Rather than cite every study or every statistic on a particular measure, the report highlights key themes and ideas for communicators to keep in mind, illustrated by targeted statistics.

Topos reviewed original data from more than 100 public opinion surveys, as well as survey analyses published in academic journals. In addition, qualitative research studies were also examined for the very specific purpose of understanding prescriptive communications recommendations. The studies included in this review were conducted by reputable, nationally known research organizations and media outlets, and meet best practices for quality including appropriate sample size and methodologically sound design. All of the data examined are publicly available.

The analysis relies most heavily on research conducted in the past five years, though some long-term trends are included, for three reasons: 1) many historical reviews of changing perceptions of race are readily available; 2) historical trends are very useful, but limited in providing actionable insights for developing strategy in the current environment; and 3) the election of the nation's first African-American president brought significant attention to issues of race, making it prudent to emphasize recent survey findings as much as possible.

To be actionable for advocates and other lay readers, this paper is necessarily brief and strategic, and undoubtedly raises new questions for researchers. The interpretations expressed are the authors' alone.

Perceptions of and by Black Men

Since the mid-20th century, the United States has seen an enormous shift in public attitudes toward black-white relations, segregation, and blatant prejudice. At the same time, racial tensions, obstacles, and stereotypes continue, and Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds hold divergent understandings of discrimination and the causes of racial disparities.³

Besides contributing to a negative civic environment, stereotypes matter because they may undermine support for efforts to reduce racial disparities. If white people view African Americans as lazy, they are less likely to support government anti-poverty programs. Or, if it is commonly believed that black people are unintelligent or violent, it will hinder efforts for school or neighborhood integration, for example. And if black people believe these negative things about their own group, it may contribute to low self-esteem and other problems.

Public opinion research suggests that positive and negative views toward black people may be grounded in multiple arenas. In other words, while one might assume that a particular experience or aspect of a person's background would cause an individual to feel *either* positively *or* negatively toward a racial group, or to ascribe to one of two opposing views (black people are hardworking *or* lazy, etc.), research suggests that responses toward a racial group may have different antecedents and be multifaceted.

For example, in research conducted by Patchen, Davidson, Hofmann, and Brown in 1977, they found that:

Positive behaviors toward black people are predicted by racial contact, while negative behaviors are predicted by aggressiveness and family/peer racial attitudes.

Lipset and Schneider, in their 1978 analysis of the Bakke case, and Katz and Hass in their study of "Racial Ambivalence and American Value Conflict" (1988) found that:

Positive attitudes toward black people are based in humanitarianism (sympathy toward the disadvantaged), while negative attitudes are based in individualism (self-reliance).

The conscious attitudes about racial and ethnic groups reviewed in this section probably tell only one small part of the story, and subsequent sections (for example, discussions of personal responsibility and altruism) are highly relevant to attitudes of racial groups as well.

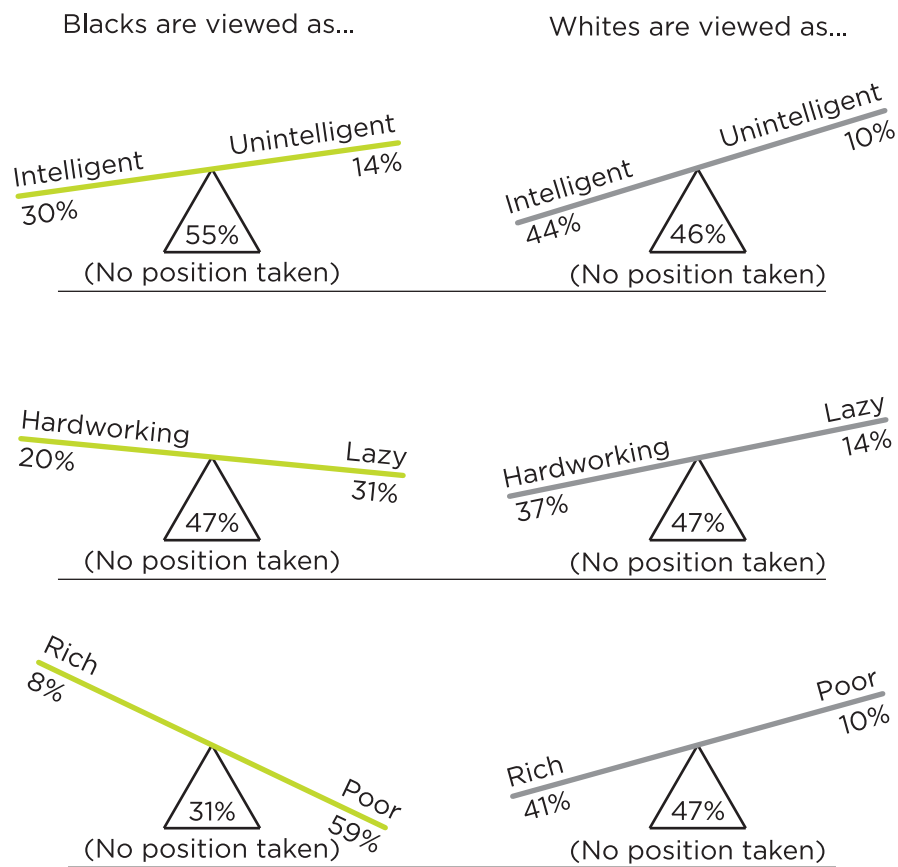
Though it has become less of a focus in recent years, public opinion research has at times measured public assessments of different racial groups, including their character traits. For example, when a Harris poll (2009) asked respondents to rate various racial and ethnic groups on a thermometer scale

³ Researchers should have healthy skepticism about whether self-professed views of race and ethnicity tell the whole story. Several dynamics have been shown to influence survey response including social desirability, question wording and context, and perceived race of interviewer. In addition to the results reported on here, readers should look to the Topos social science literature review for The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011, *Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys*.

“with 1 meaning extremely negative and 100 meaning extremely positive,” Americans overall give the highest ratings to “white Americans” (83.2) and the lowest ratings to “Hispanic/Latino Americans” (77.7). Respondents give almost identical ratings to “Black/African Americans” (79.9), “Chinese Americans” (79.9), and “Asian Americans” (79.7).

Many studies over the years have found that people are willing to assess groups on a variety of image traits with no description other than racial category. In research done by the National Opinion Research Center in 2010, people were asked to place racial groups on a 1 to 7 scale, with one end of the scale anchored by a particular trait and the other anchored by its opposite trait. Pluralities of survey respondents opted out of rating blacks or whites on intelligence, work ethic, and (to a lesser extent) wealth. However, of those who did give ratings, more said whites are intelligent than said blacks are intelligent (44 percent gave “intelligent” ratings for whites, 30 percent for blacks), and the same pattern held for “hard working” (37 percent for whites and 20 percent for blacks), and “rich” (41 percent and 7 percent, respectively) (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. RATING CONTRASTING PAIRS

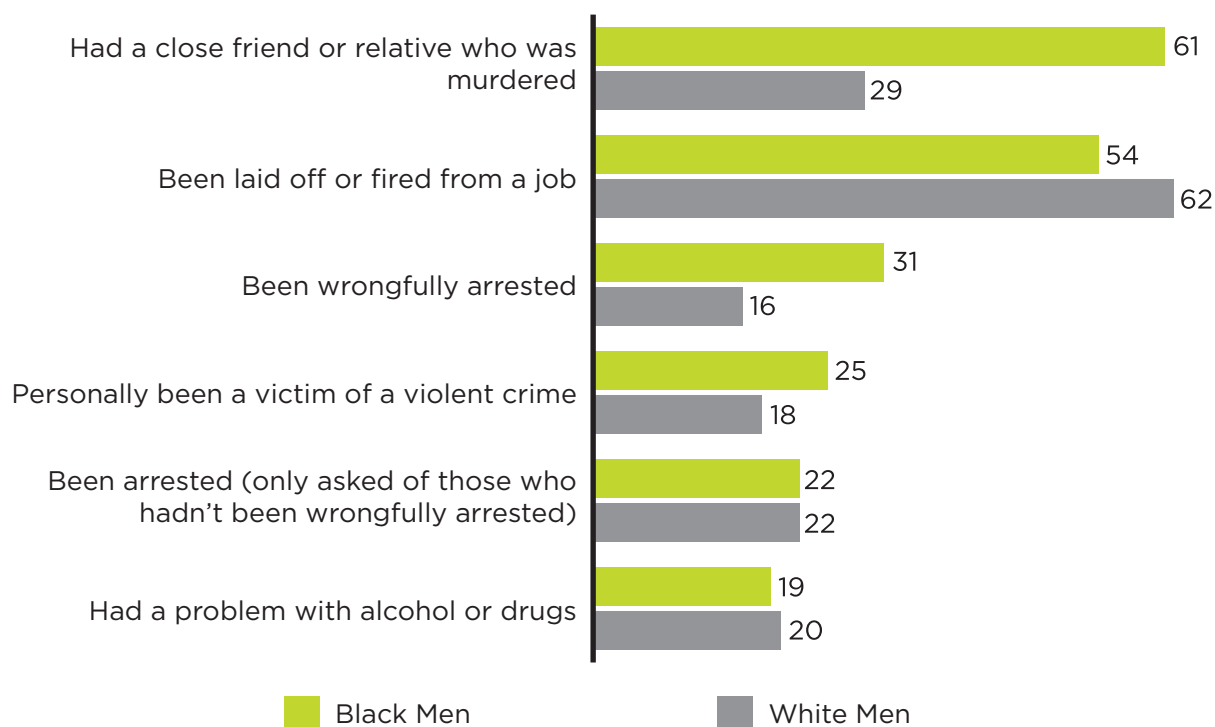


Source: National Opinion Research Center, August 2010.

More black men experience significant challenges than white men, have higher levels of worry, and are harsher in their judgment of black men. Even so, more are focused on achieving success in a career, on living a religious life, and are optimistic about a bright future. In just about every area, black men are their own harshest critics, as well as the most optimistic that things will get better.

Many black men have faced traumatic experiences in their lives. In a Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard 2011 study entitled “The Race and Recession Survey,” more black men than white men report having a close friend or relative who was murdered (61 percent and 29 percent, respectively), wrongfully arrested (31 percent, 16 percent), or the victim of a violent crime (25 percent, 18 percent). In only one area surveyed in this study have more white men than black men experienced a challenge — getting laid off or fired from a job (62 percent of white men, 54 percent of black men), a gap closed since the start of the recession (see Figure 2). Now, 27 percent of black people and 21 percent of white people say they have been laid off or lost a job in the past year, and more black people than white people say they are unemployed (44 percent and 40 percent, respectively) or underemployed (17 percent and 12 percent, respectively).

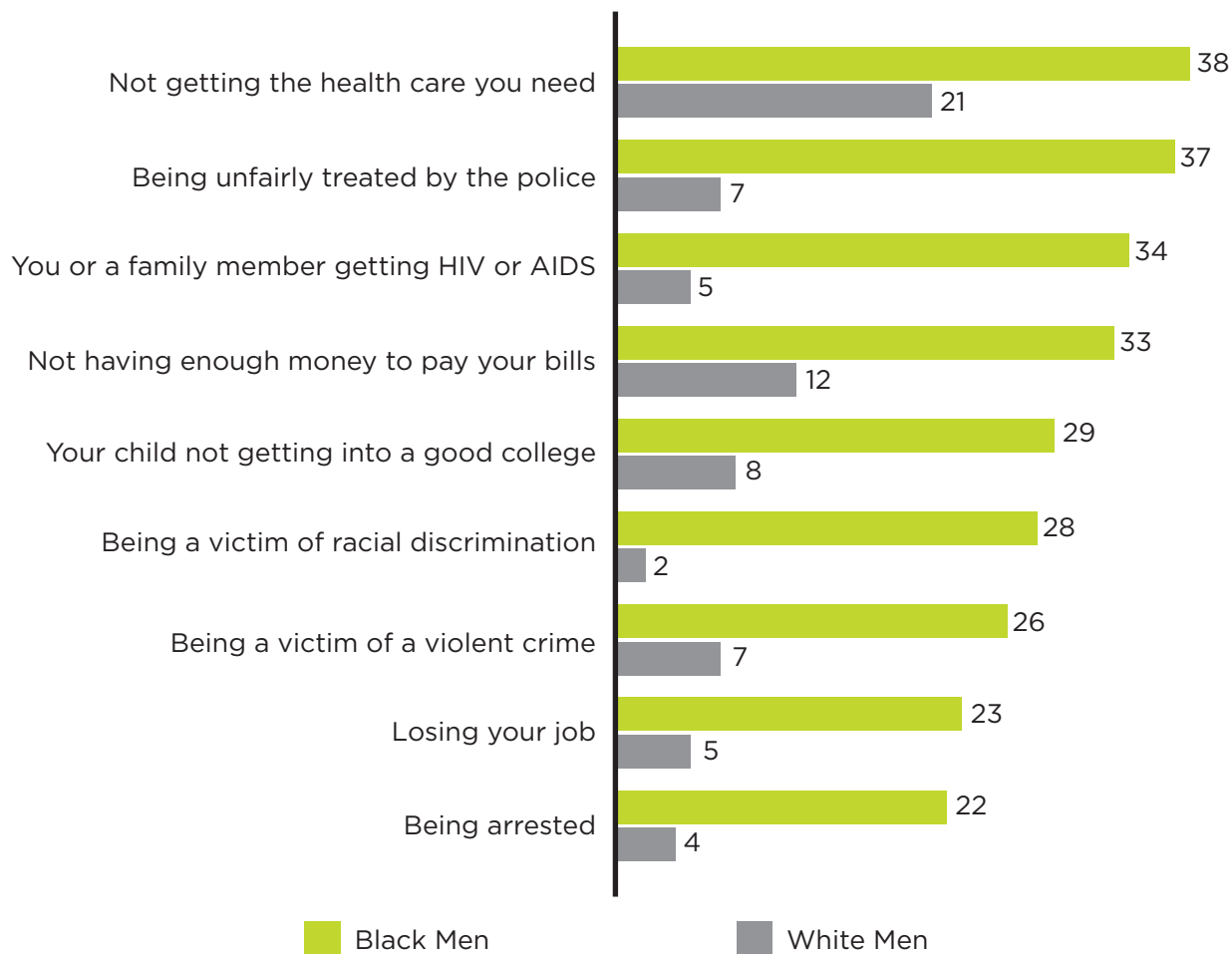
FIGURE 2. BLACK AND WHITE MEN’S EXPERIENCES
% WHO HAVE...



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

It follows that more black men cite high levels of worry about a range of concerns. Compared with white men, more black men are worried about every problem surveyed, from access to health care to getting arrested. A note of caution: This particular set of findings is based on a survey that occurred two years prior to the economic crash in 2008. It is highly likely that the same questions today would show far higher levels of worry on most measures, but particularly on economic measures. Important dynamics would likely remain unchanged: the gap in levels of worry between white and black men, as well as the high levels of worry on multiple issues among black men (see Figure 3).

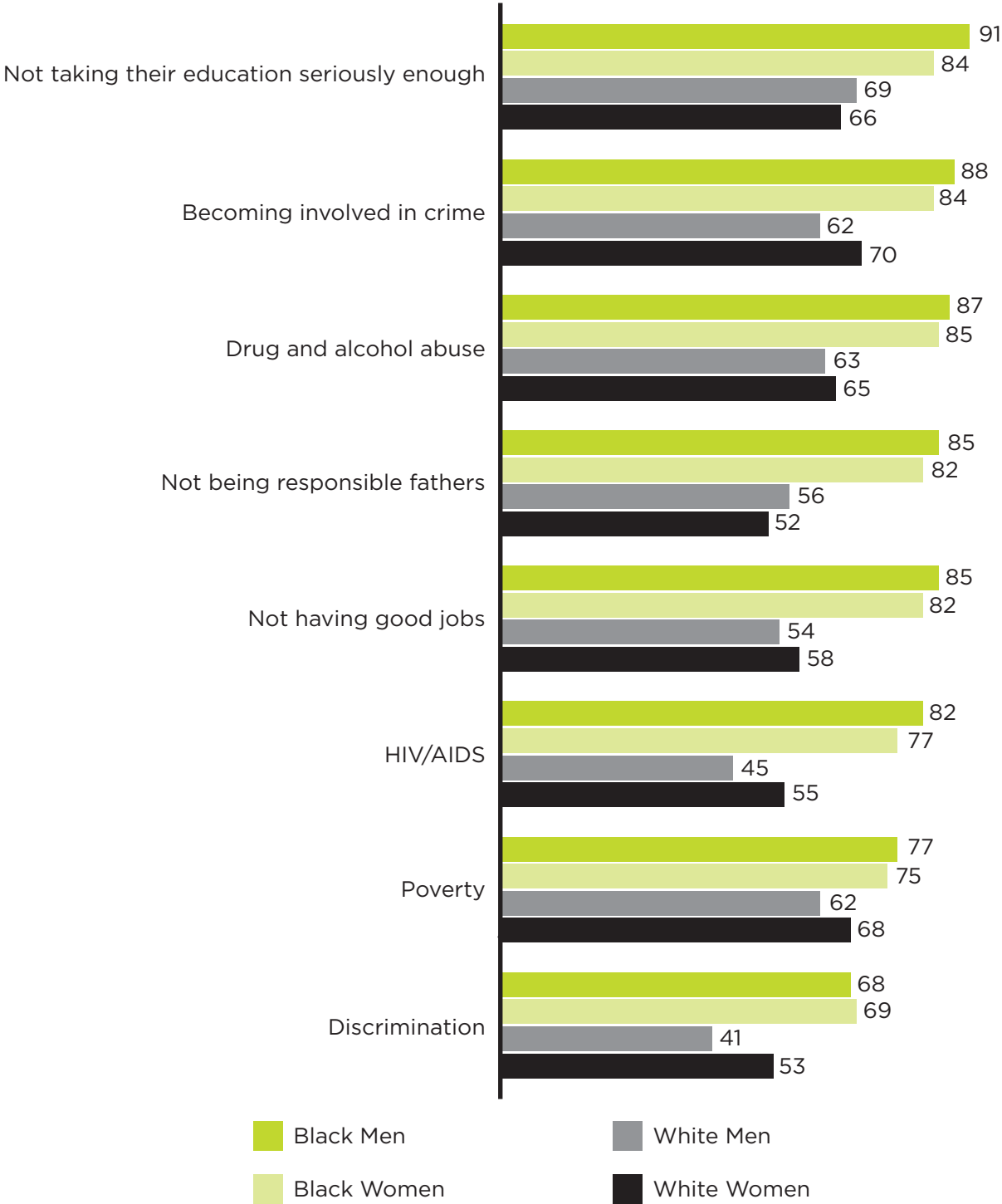
FIGURE 3. BLACK AND WHITE MEN'S CONCERNS
% "VERY WORRIED"



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

According to the 2006 Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard study, “African American Men Survey,” in rating a series of problems facing black men, black men themselves are more likely than other audiences to rate a range of problems facing them as severe, including not taking education seriously enough (91 percent), becoming involved in crime (88 percent), drug and alcohol abuse (87 percent), not being responsible fathers (85 percent), not having good jobs (85 percent), HIV/AIDS (82 percent), poverty (77 percent) and, lastly, discrimination (68 percent) (see Figure 4). Black women’s ratings are similarly high, while white men and women are not as grim in their assessment of the problems facing black men. Asked to choose the single biggest problem facing black men, 31 percent of black men chose “not taking their education seriously enough.”

FIGURE 4. PROBLEMS FACING BLACK MEN
 % "BIG PROBLEM," BY RACE/GENDER

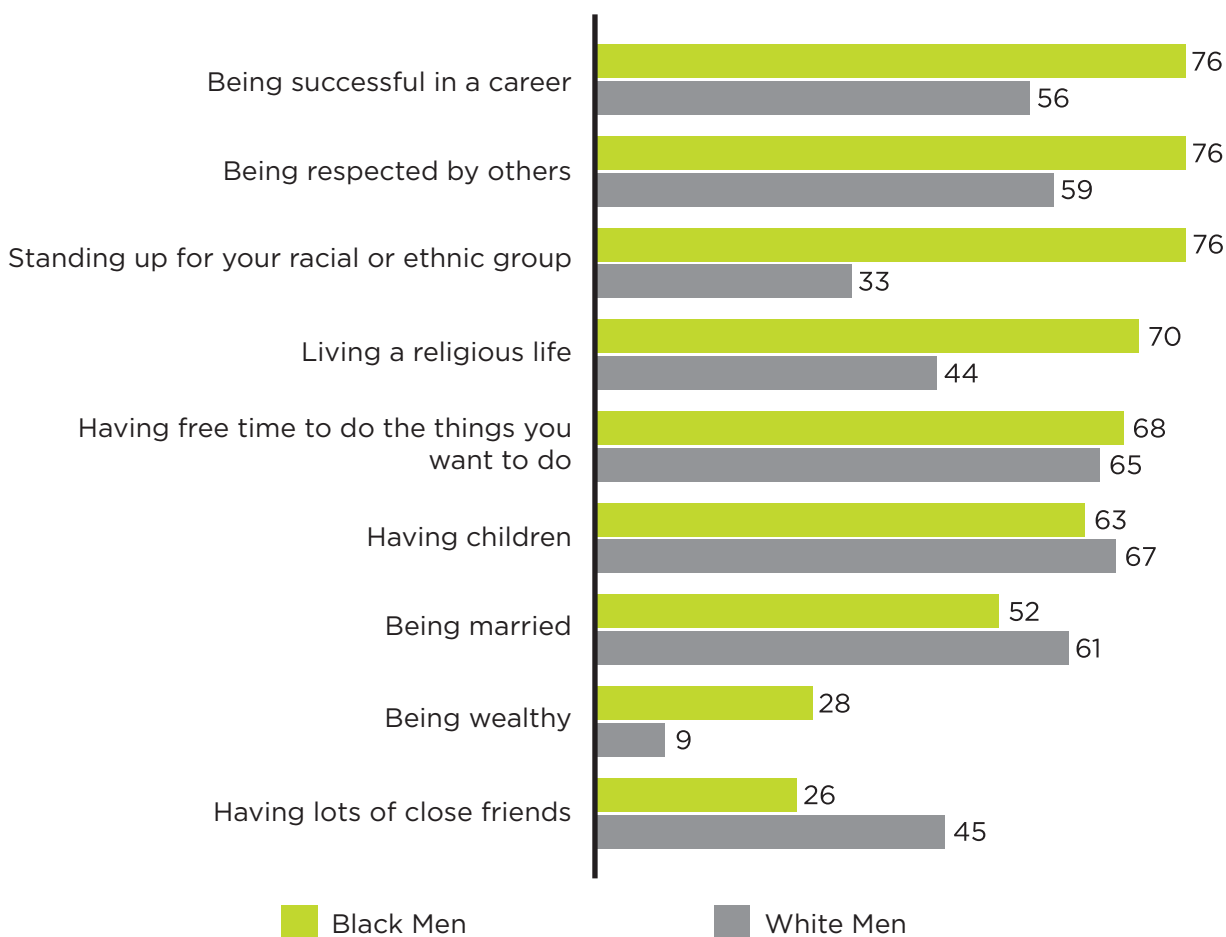


Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Note that many of these “problems” — not taking their education seriously enough, not being responsible fathers, becoming involved in crime, etc. — can be read as admonishment of black men or black families. Black men are their own harshest critics in this regard.

Black men and white men report very different priorities. For example, according to the Washington Post/KFF/Harvard 2006 study, compared with white men, black men put more importance on being successful in a career (76 percent of black men, 56 percent of white men), living a religious life (70 percent, 44 percent), being respected by others (76 percent, 59 percent), and standing up for their racial or ethnic group (76 percent, 33 percent) (see Figure 5).

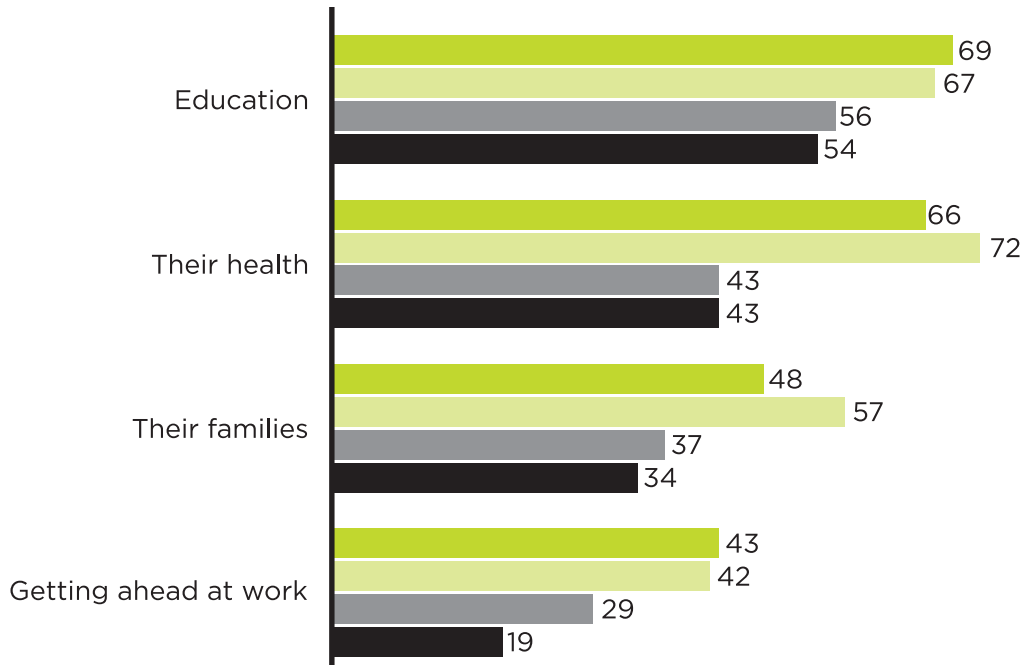
FIGURE 5. PERSONAL PRIORITIES
% “VERY IMPORTANT”



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

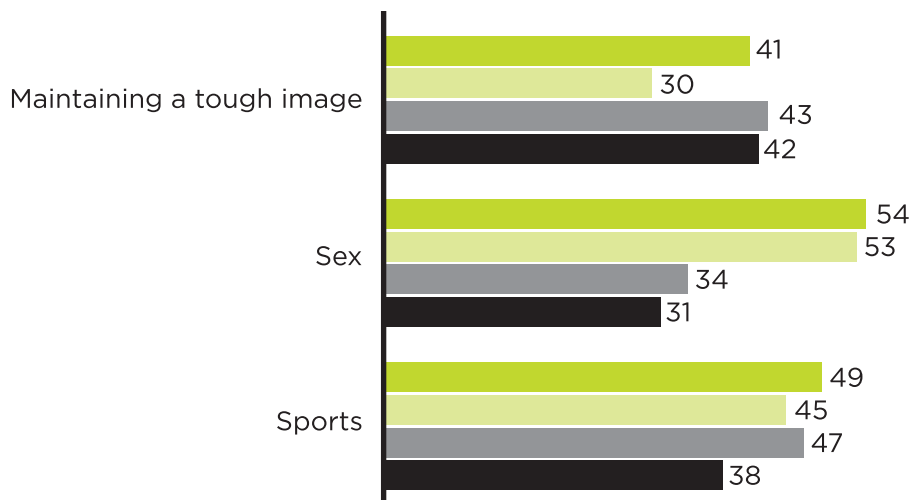
Black men are harshly critical of the priorities of black men generally, saying that black men put too little emphasis on education (69 percent), health (66 percent), their families (48 percent), and getting ahead at work (43 percent), and too much emphasis on sports (49 percent), maintaining a tough image (41 percent), and sex (54 percent) (see Figures 6a and 6b). Black men and black women tend to give far harsher ratings on these measures than white men and white women have of black men’s priorities, except the areas of maintaining a tough image and sports, where opinions converge.

FIGURE 6A. BLACK MEN PUT TOO LITTLE EMPHASIS ON
% BY RACE/GENDER



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

FIGURE 6B. BLACK MEN PUT TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON
% BY RACE/GENDER



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.



Though black respondents express significant worries and see a great number of problems facing black men, they still express great optimism about their future. Fully 85 percent of black respondents are optimistic about their future, compared with 72 percent of white respondents. A majority (59 percent) of black respondents say, “America’s best times are yet to come,” while a majority (53 percent) of white respondents take the alternative view, “America’s best years are behind us.” Overall, ratings on this measure have been surprisingly stable for the last 10 years, with just one noticeable shift shortly after the stock market crash at the end of 2008, with more people than ever (57 percent) saying that the “best times are yet to come.” Sixty percent of black respondents believe their child’s standard of living will be better than theirs, while just 36 percent of white respondents agree. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011)

Finally, according to the Pew Research Center’s 2009 report, “Racial Attitudes in America,” people may see socioeconomic status as more relevant than race when it comes to dictating shared values. Both black and white respondents see values between the races as converging, while values between classes may be diverging. Majorities of both white (70 percent) and black (60 percent) respondents say “the values held by black people and the values held by white people have become more similar.” But as black respondents consider class, a majority (53 percent) say the “values held by middle class black people and the values held by poor black people have become...more different.” Only 22 percent of black respondents say, “Middle class blacks and poor blacks have a lot in common.”

Disparities and Discrimination

Issues of race and race policy are understood by most Americans as being about individuals and relationships, not systems and structures, and that means the explanation for gaps in achievement are often understood as resulting from personal successes or failures rather than external influences.

Therefore, even if people recognize that disparities exist, they often blame disparities on individual failures alone, not systemic influences. Furthermore, if people recognize that discrimination exists, many think it is solely due to personal prejudice and do not see the influence of institutional racism. Overcoming this dynamic will be a central challenge for those who seek policy solutions.

Knowledge of disparities

White survey respondents recognize that disparities, such as economic disparities, exist between black and white Americans. However, research suggests that respondents, particularly white respondents, *underestimate* the size of the gaps. In an analysis by Kaplowitz, Fisher, and Broman entitled “How Accurate are Perceptions of Social Statistics about Blacks and Whites” (2003), in rating statistics, black respondents offered larger gap estimates than white respondents in three of four areas (excepting family income).⁴

Furthermore, white respondents tend to believe things are getting better for black men as a group (according to 58 percent of white men and 50 percent of white women surveyed), while black men are far more mixed in their views. Only 29 percent of black men believe things are getting better for black men as a group, while 34 percent believe things are getting worse, and 36 percent say things are staying about the same. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

But would more accurate knowledge help or hurt efforts to address disparities? If people had more accurate knowledge of the disparities that exist, would it inspire them to address them? Or would it just feed negative stereotypes?

The answer to this question depends in large part on people’s reasoning for why disparities exist. Even if there is widespread agreement that there are inequities between white and black Americans, there is a fundamental disagreement about the cause of inequities. According to Nicholas Winter (2008), some attribute disparities to individual factors, such as individual effort, while others attribute disparities to structural factors.

The General Social Survey (GSS), a survey conducted periodically since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago that tracks opinions of Americans on a large

⁴ Using data gathered in 1995, researchers found that white and black respondents dramatically underestimated the racial gap in “out-of-wedlock births” (actual gap in 1995 was 46.1 percent, white and black respondents averaged 16.1 percent and 23.1 percent, respectively); both groups underestimated the gap in “family income” (actual gap was \$12,500, white and black respondents estimated \$9,410 and \$9,500, respectively); both groups underestimated the racial gap in the “average income of male college graduates” with white respondents underestimating the size of the gap more than black respondents (actual gap was \$6,600, white and black respondents estimated \$2,370 and \$5,860, respectively); and finally, white respondents underestimated the racial gap in poverty rates while blacks who responded gave higher than the actual number. (According to Kaplowitz, the actual gap in percent in poverty was 22.3, white and black respondents estimated 17.9 and 25.3, respectively.)

range of issues, routinely asks questions designed to measure people’s understanding of structural *vs.* individual influences on disparities, such as economic disparities. Asked to explain why on average blacks “have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people,” respondents choose responses rooted in both individual and structural explanations. Equal percentages choose a measure grounded in individual responsibility (“motivation to pull themselves up”) and structural obstacles (“have the chance for education”). Few choose the blatantly prejudiced belief that black people have less ability to learn. One-third point to discrimination, a measure that white and black people may understand very differently. (GSS, 2010, NORC; see table)

Reasons for Racial Disparities	
<i>On the average, African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are...</i>	
...because most African Americans just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty	47%
...because most African Americans don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty	47%
...mainly due to discrimination	36%
...because most African Americans have less inborn ability to learn	10%

Source: General Society Survey, National Opinion Research Center, August 2010.

More accuracy in pinpointing the breadth and depth of disparities is unlikely to matter if people continue to hold onto explanations for disparities that absolve government or other structures from responsibility. The next section discusses three different types of responsibility for disparities that are addressed in survey data, and whether or not each leads to public support for collective action.

Who’s responsible?

This section discusses three perspectives regarding responsibility for disparities and solutions:

Interpersonal responsibility — Disparities exist because of those who demonstrate prejudice in their interpersonal relationships; therefore, prejudiced individuals are responsible for disparities and attitude change is the solution.

Structural responsibility — We all share responsibility in creating systems that allow disparities; therefore, institutions and structures continue to perpetuate disparities, and policy change is the solution.

Personal responsibility — Responsibility for achieving their own success belongs to individuals; therefore, it is up to individuals to create their own solutions.

Before further discussion of responsibility, it is important to describe people’s understanding of discrimination, and how it shapes their views of disparities and responsibility for action.

“Discrimination” is an issue that can be understood as “interpersonal” (meaning how individuals treat each other, or “individual racism”) or “structural” (meaning racism that is embedded in systems and institutions, or “institutional racism”). These marked differences in understanding often go unstated in public opinion surveys. In fact, surveys frequently ask questions that imply the existence of individual racism only, and obscure the role of structures.

Discrimination — widely divergent views

While Americans of differing races agree that discrimination continues in the United States, they assess the prevalence and consequences of discrimination differently. Black respondents are far more likely than white respondents to assert there is “a lot” of discrimination, that racism is “widespread,” and that it leads to a number of consequences.

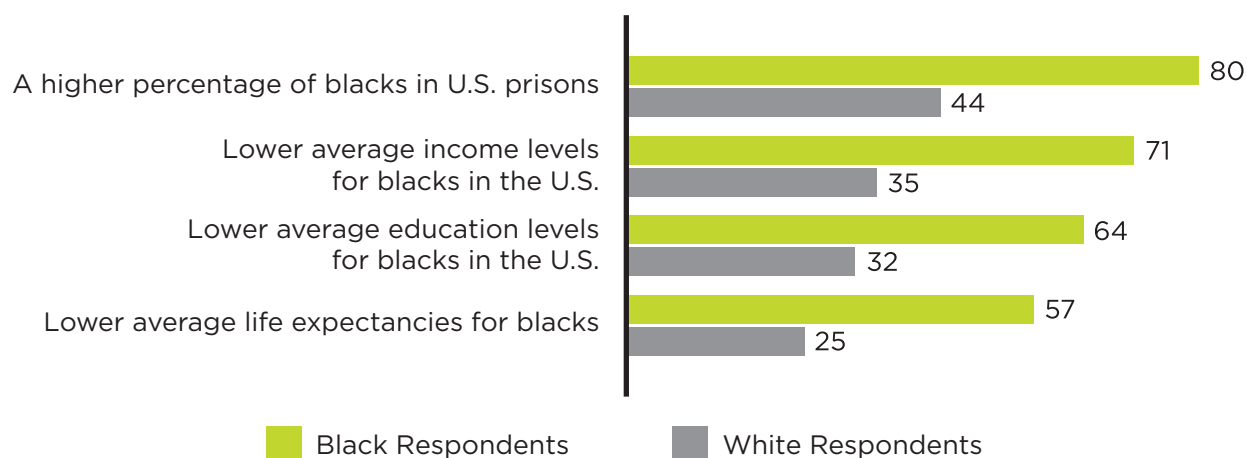
Overall, 69 percent say there is “a lot” or “some” discrimination against African Americans. Black respondents are more likely to say there is discrimination (82 percent, 43 percent “a lot”) than white respondents (70 percent, 13 percent “a lot”) or Latino respondents (54 percent, 19 percent “a lot”). (Pew, 2009) Similarly, black respondents believe racism against blacks is widespread in the United States (72 percent), but whites are divided (49 percent widespread, 48 percent not widespread). (Gallup, October 2009)

The marked difference between black and white respondents occurs even among the youngest age groups. While 61 percent of black youth agree with the statement, “it is hard for young Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination,” just 43 percent of white youth agree. (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

At the same time, the Pew Research Center found in its 2008 “Political and Economic Survey” that a majority (53 percent) of Americans believe the country is making progress in addressing discrimination against minorities. Among a number of challenges, this is the one area in which people think the country is making progress. Even so, young people are skeptical that discrimination will be eliminated — just 11 percent of black youth and 4 percent of white youth say that it is *very likely* racism will be eliminated during their lifetime. (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

For black respondents, discrimination matters in part because it leads to serious consequences — such as gaps in income and education (see Figure 7). Far fewer white respondents believe racial discrimination is a major factor leading to these gaps.

FIGURE 7. THE EFFECT OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACKS
% “MAJOR FACTOR LEADING TO...”



Source: Gallup, July 2008.

Responsibility — interpersonal relationships

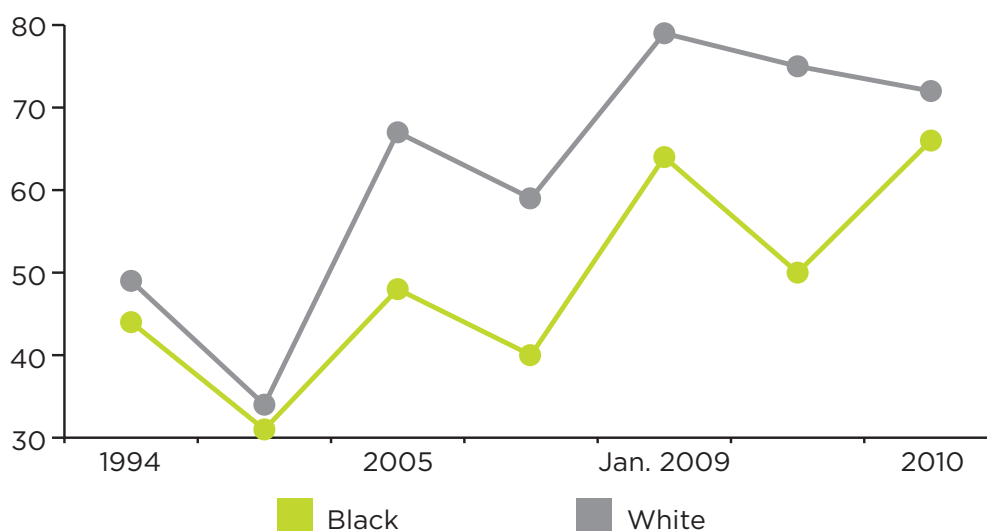
As noted above, one way of understanding what racial bias is “about” is grounded in interpersonal relationships. In this view, the problem is seen through the lens of how individuals treat each other; therefore, the solution is attitude change and stripping culture of stereotypes on an individual level.

A main focus in public opinion research has been the investigation of “relationships” between people of different races. In these types of questions, the focus is interpersonal: do people of different races get along, have people been treated unfairly by other individuals due to race, etc. The unstated assumption is that discrimination is based on interpersonal relationships and if people would treat each other fairly, disparities would close.

Most Americans believe that race relations are good, that problems will be worked out, and that more dialogue will help.

According to a Hart/McInturff survey for NBC/Wall Street Journal (2010), majorities across races believe relationships between the races are “good,” with white respondents rating race relations slightly more positively than black respondents — 72 percent of white respondents and 66 percent of black respondents say relations between whites and blacks are “very” or “fairly good.” These ratings jumped in the January 2009 Hart/McInturff survey, just prior to Barack Obama’s inauguration as president. In fact, at that time significant percentages of both white and black respondents believed race relations had gotten better since Barack Obama’s election (46 percent and 40 percent, respectively), but numbers dropped one year later (19 percent and 22 percent, respectively, said “better”).

**FIGURE 8. RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE:
% “GOOD,” BY RACE**



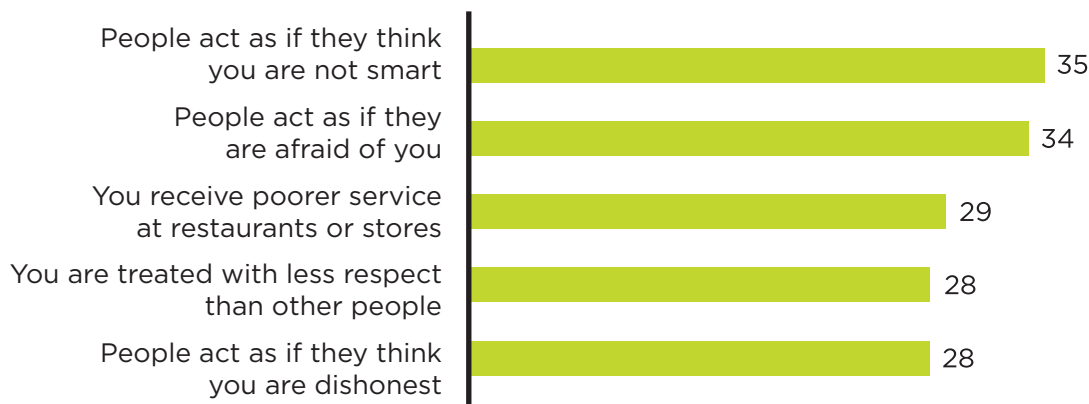
Source: Hart/McInturff survey for NBC/Wall Street Journal, 2010.

A Gallup poll from October 2009 showed that a majority (56 percent) believe relations between the races will eventually be worked out. Overall, the ratings have improved since the early 1990s, hitting a high of 67 percent in November 2008.

In looking at the issue from the “interpersonal” perspective, conversation is viewed as a valid solution. Most people believe greater dialogue about race would bring the races together (56 percent overall). Black respondents in particular believe this is true (70 percent). (Gallup, 2009)

Personal slights (being treated with less respect, receiving poor service, etc.) are often the focus of survey questions that purport to measure discrimination. Many black Americans, particularly black men, report that they have experienced this kind of behavior.

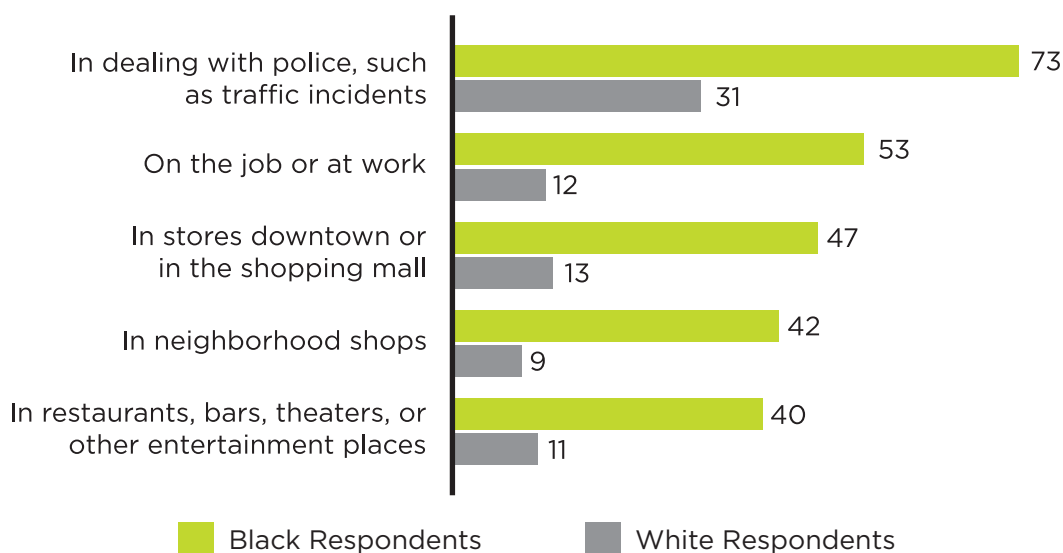
FIGURE 9. BLACK MEN SAY THEY EXPERIENCE DUE TO RACE...
% "VERY" OR "SOMEWHAT OFTEN"



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Between one-quarter and one-third of black men say they have experienced mistreatment by others due to their race very or somewhat often in their “day-to-day life” including: “people act as if they think you are not smart” (35 percent of black men experience this “very” or “somewhat often”), “people act as if they are afraid of you” (34 percent), “you receive poor service” (29 percent), “you are treated with less respect” (28 percent) and “people act as if they think you are dishonest” (28 percent) (see Figure 9). As a point of comparison, responses among white respondents are in the single digits in each category.

FIGURE 10. BLACKS IN YOUR COMMUNITY TREATED LESS FAIRLY
% "YES"



Source: Gallup, June 2007.

Perceptions of discriminatory treatment vary widely by race. Many black respondents believe that blacks in their community are treated less fairly than whites are, while far fewer white respondents have a similar perception. Note the wide discrepancy in responses between white and black respondents on every measure of discrimination tested. (Gallup, June 2007) Unfair treatment by police is the only category with a considerable percentage of white respondents seeing a problem. Fully 73 percent of black respondents say they see blacks in their community treated less fairly “in dealing with police, such as traffic incidents” while 31 percent of white respondents say blacks in their community are treated less fairly in dealing with police — a 42 percentage point gap. There are similar gaps between the races in their observation of unfair treatment on the job (53 percent and 12 percent, respectively), in downtown stores (47 percent, 13 percent), in neighborhood shops (42 percent, 9 percent) and in places of entertainment (40 percent, 11 percent). (Gallup, 2007) Note: This series of questions straddles both the “interpersonal” and “structural” understandings of the issue of discriminatory treatment, since some examples, such as treatment by police, concern institutions.

The prevalence of the “interpersonal” understanding of this issue embedded throughout public opinion research is troubling for those who care about changing culture and policy. When something as serious as discrimination is commonly trivialized in surveys as being mainly about personal interactions, it obscures the widespread, systemic obstacles and prevents people from seeing the role of collective action and policy change.

Responsibility — structural

Though experts and advocates understand the influence of institutional racism, surveys rarely explore this dynamic. Public understanding of the influence of structures or systems in leading to gaps in achievement is a very limited area of inquiry. Like the questions about relationships and unfair treatment, the few questions that explore some aspect of systemic influences demonstrate opposing views between racial groups.

For example, black Americans see the need for the country to make more changes to achieve equal rights (which implies national policy change), while white Americans disagree. A majority (54 percent) of white respondents believe “our country has made the changes needed to give Blacks equal rights with whites” while just 36 percent believe “our country needs to continue making changes to give Blacks equal rights with whites.” Black respondents feel very differently, with 81 percent believing more changes need to be made. (Pew, 2009) On the economy, most black people said that the economic system is “stacked against Blacks/Black men” while white Americans said that “the system is fair to everyone.”

A split sample experiment demonstrates that some groups may be more willing to see the system as “stacked against Black men” than against black people generally. A majority of black respondents believed America’s economic system is stacked against black men (56 percent of black men and 62 percent of black women agree) while white respondents think the system is fair to everyone (57 percent of white men and 47 percent of white women agree). Responses by black men and white women are consistent across both versions of the question. Black women, however, are more willing to say the system is stacked against black men (62 percent) than it is against blacks as a group (49 percent), and white men become less willing to assert the system is fair to everyone when asked whether the system is stacked specifically against black men rather than blacks as a group (dropping from 69 percent to 57 percent, a 12 percentage point decline). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

Even though most white respondents believe “the system is fair,” most also recognize that black men face more obstacles advancing in the workplace than white people or black women. While black

men are particularly likely to assert this is true (79 percent of black men say they face more obstacles than whites), even white men, the group least likely to acknowledge discrimination, agree black men face more obstacles than whites (59 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

These limited findings may indicate a foundation on which to build. It may be possible, indeed necessary, to highlight in our conversations the structures that impede black male achievement, so that people more readily recognize the systemic causes of disparities.

Responsibility — personal

With the influence of systems and policies invisible to many, all people, including black men, look to personal responsibility to explain success or failure. In this view, racial disparities exist because individuals of different races are not trying as hard as necessary to achieve. Black respondents have shifted toward a personal responsibility perspective to explain gaps in black achievement since the mid-1990s.

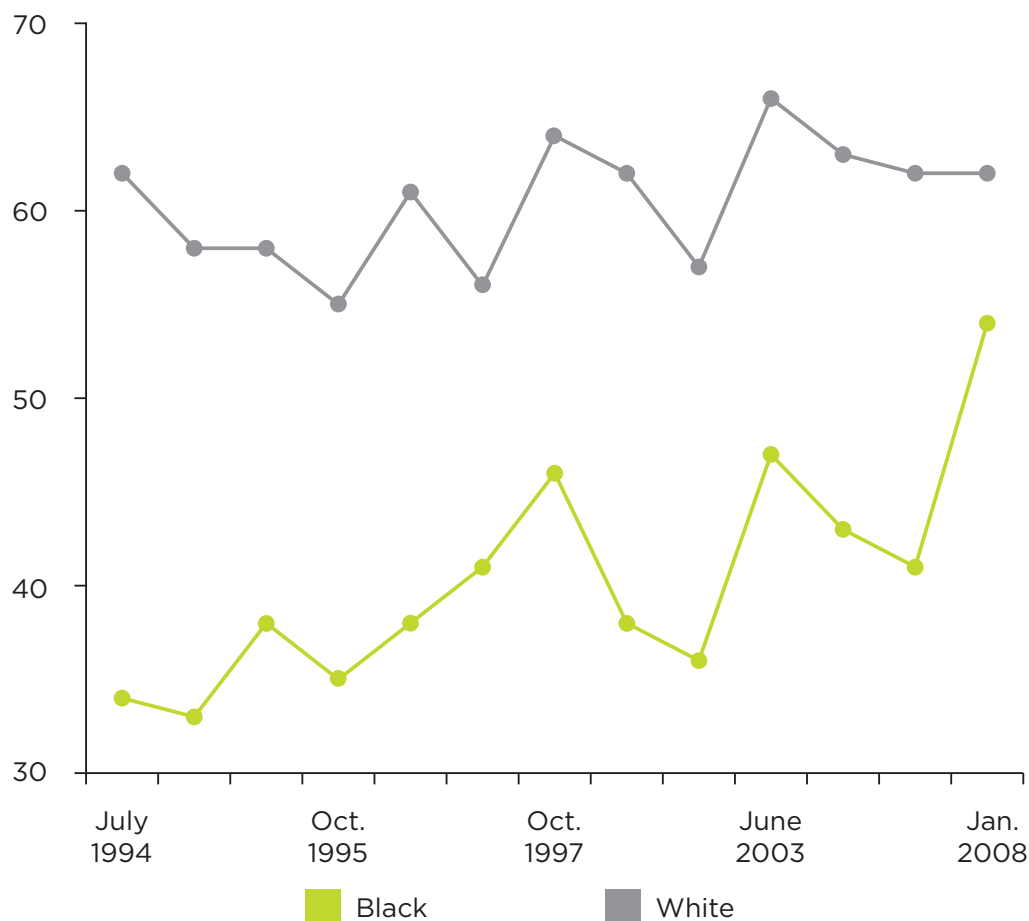
As a general stance, Americans overwhelmingly believe in personal empowerment and self-determination. Given two choices, 82 percent of Americans side with the view that “everyone has it in their own power to succeed” while only 12 percent side with the view “success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside of our control.” Fully 77 percent of blacks believe in self-determination, a far higher percentage than in the mid-1990s when it stood at 66 percent. (Pew, 2009)

Majorities of blacks (61 percent) and whites (58 percent) agree that “Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they’re willing to work hard,” while fewer choose the alternate view, “Hard work and determination are no guarantee of success for most people” (36 percent of black respondents and 41 percent of white respondents). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011) Two thirds of all respondents (69 percent) side with the view, “people get ahead by their own hard work,” while the remainder say “lucky breaks or help from other people” are equally important (20 percent) or more important (10 percent). (National Opinion Research Center, 2010)

When race is added to the consideration, most assert that people are responsible for their own fate and place little fault on discrimination.

Given two choices, most Americans side with the view, “Blacks who can’t get ahead in this country are mostly responsible for their own condition” over the alternate view, “Racial discrimination is the main reason why many Black people can’t get ahead these days” (67 percent and 18 percent, respectively). White respondents are particularly likely to side with individual responsibility (70 percent), but even a majority of black respondents agree (52 percent). A majority of white respondents have pointed to individual responsibility since Pew started asking this question in the mid-1990s, and this view has gained traction among black respondents in recent years. (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Sociological and Demographic Trends Project, 2009)

FIGURE 11. RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONDITION
% “BLACKS WHO CAN’T GET AHEAD ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OWN CONDITION”



Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Sociological and Demographic Trends Project, November 2009.

A majority (56 percent) of Americans believe the problems facing black men are more a result “of what Black men have failed to do for themselves” than “of what white people have done to Blacks.” White men are most likely to point to individual failure (63 percent), as do 59 percent of black men, 56 percent of black women, and 51 percent of white women. (Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, 2006) Finally, in a series of interviews conducted by Yankelovich/Radio One in 2007, fully 84 percent of black respondents agreed that “Blacks need to be more responsible for themselves as individuals.”

What is unclear, however, is whether “be more responsible for themselves” has the same narrow interpretation across the black community as it would in American culture more broadly. For example, the last statement, “Blacks need to be more responsible for themselves as individuals” might be interpreted as a call for collective action by the black community, *for* the black community, by at least some people. The same study found 71 percent of blacks saying it is important “to stick together to achieve gains for the community” and that the black “New Middle Class”⁵ segment was the “most likely to believe that problems in the Black community can best be solved by Blacks and that Blacks need to be more responsible for themselves.” (Yankelovich, 2007) So it may be that in some instances and for some segments of the black community, “personal responsibility” includes collective action.

⁵ The “Black New Middle Class” is defined in the study as follows: “the best educated, most employed and wealthiest segment is mostly between the ages of 25 and 44 and is the most technologically forward segment” of the survey population.

Generally, the “personal responsibility” approach undermines a role for government in addressing disparities. On a scale of 1-7, where 1 indicates “the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks” and 7 means “the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves” a plurality of black respondents side with the statement that government “should make every effort to improve” their lives (44 percent choose 1-3) over the government making no “special effort ... because they should help themselves” (23 percent 5-7). White respondents answer in the reverse (12 percent government help, 54 percent help themselves). (American National Election Studies, 2008)

The rise in the perception that personal responsibility explains success or failure among black Americans has not yet replaced belief that prejudice hinders achievement.

In 2007, 82 percent of black respondents said that it was “important for parents to prepare their children for prejudice.” (Yankelovich) Black men assert that black parents need to both encourage their children that anyone can be successful with hard work, and warn them that they will have to work harder to get credit and that unfairness exists. Few, however, go so far as to say that most white people aren’t trustworthy (see table).

Black Parents Should Tell Their Sons (responses of black men only):	
Anyone can be successful in this country if they’re willing to work hard.	94%
You will have to work harder than white people to get the same amount of credit.	64%
The police are looking for any reason to give a black man a hard time.	50%
Most white people cannot be trusted.	21%

Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

As communicators consider approaches to discrimination, disparities, and stereotypes, these largely invisible tectonics of “who’s responsible?” underlie public understanding and need to be taken into account. If a person believes discrimination is largely a thing of the past, or that discrimination is solely about interpersonal slights and personal racism, or that success is due solely to personal pluck, then a policy conversation seems irrelevant.

The Obama effect

The election of the nation’s first black president had a beneficial effect on people’s assessment of race relations. However, research suggests that Barack Obama’s administration has not ushered in a new era of support for racial policies.

While Americans may have many critiques of Barack Obama, the idea that he is providing preferential treatment to the black community is not typically one of them (though there are some conflicting notions in the research). Only 12 percent overall, and only 13 percent of white respondents, believe that he is “paying too much attention” to blacks. In comparison, more people think he pays too much attention to banks and financial institutions (33 percent), business corporations (25 percent), gays and lesbians (21 percent), and labor unions (17 percent). Black respondents report satisfaction with the level of attention the President is giving to “the concerns of Blacks”: 80 percent say he is giving the right amount of attention, 13 percent say “not enough,” and just 1 percent say “too much.” (Pew, 2009)

In “Change or More of the Same: Evaluating Racial Attitudes in the Obama Era” by Vincent Hutchings (2009), there is little proof that the election of a black president indicates increased support for policies to address racial gaps. Some research suggests that the racial divide on racial policy matters is as wide as ever.

Furthermore, recent research warns that one consequence of Barack Obama's election may be that people are less likely to believe discrimination is a problem. In pre- and post-election surveys, one researcher noted an 11-percentage point decline in the view that there is "a lot" or "some" discrimination against blacks. More than one in four, or 27 percent, of those surveyed revised their assessment of discrimination downward, and this shift occurred across a range of demographic groups. Declines in ratings of discrimination are associated with an increase in negative views of blacks and increased opposition to affirmative action and immigration. (Valentino, 2011) While it is too soon to know if this portends future obstacles in building public support for policies, advocates should be attentive.

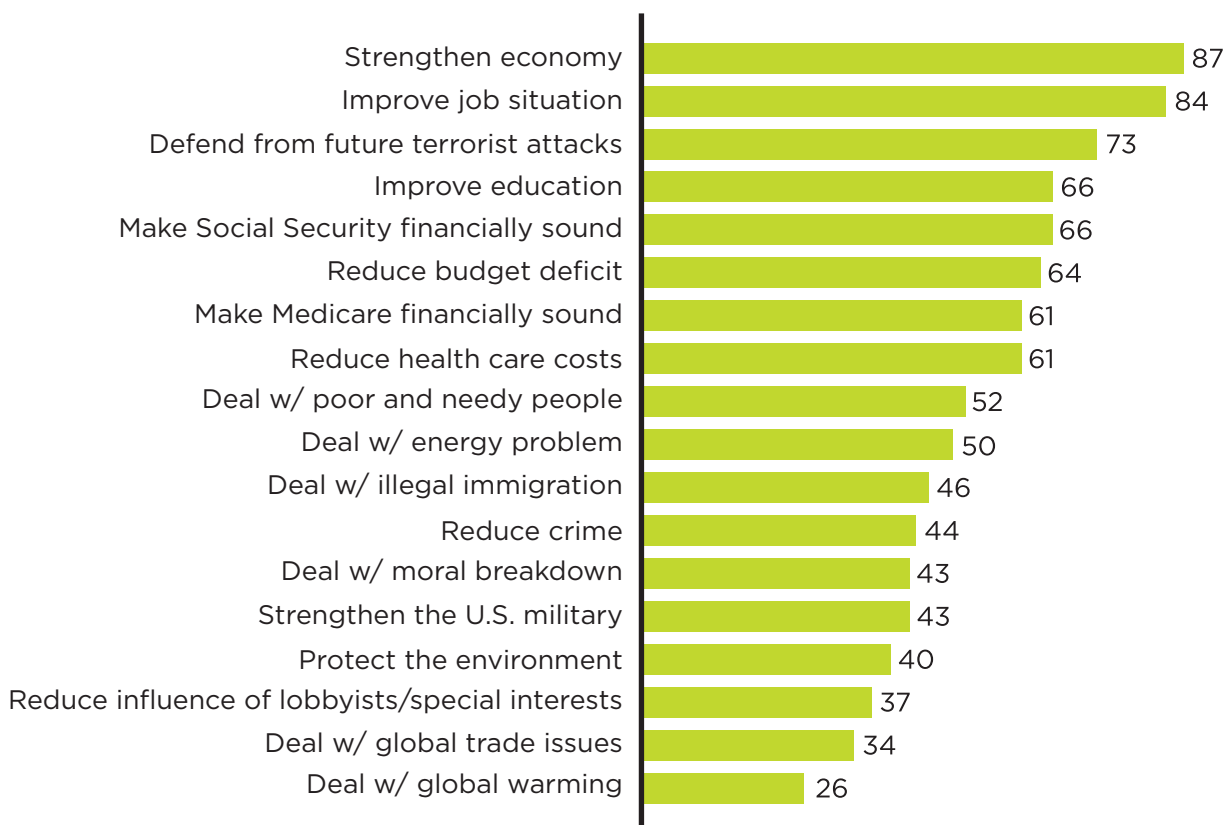
Finally, President Obama's real influence on the electorate may be more about mood than policy — he lifted black Americans' assessment of race relations and progress. Americans overall are more likely to believe that Obama's election made race relations better rather than worse (41 percent better, 22 percent worse), and this view is even more prevalent among black Americans (53 percent better, 20 percent worse). Americans are optimistic that Obama's presidency will make race relations better (61 percent), a view that is especially held by black Americans (79 percent). (Gallup, October 2009) In fact, just prior to his inauguration, surveys showed a jump in the percentage saying relations between the races are "good." (Hart/McInturff, 2010)

Issue Focus

Policy perceptions and relationship to race

Economic concerns dominate the nation's priorities (87 percent say strengthening the economy is a top priority, 84 percent say improving the job situation is a top priority). While economic concerns are often near the top of the nation's agenda, the dramatic economic downturn pushed national security concerns even lower on the agenda: dealing with terrorism (73 percent), followed by improving education (66 percent) and stabilizing Social Security (66 percent). Notably, crime (44 percent) is far lower on the national priority agenda. (Pew, 2011; see Figure 12)

FIGURE 12. PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS
% "TOP PRIORITY"



Source: Pew Research Center January 2011 Political Survey, January 2011.

As they consider the problems facing black families, black respondents point to some of the same priorities as the national priorities listed above. Jobs are the top priority (79 percent) and education is rated highly by a majority (56 percent). Interestingly, very high percentages of black respondents rate drugs (74 percent) and crime (67 percent) as top priorities for black families, even though crime does not rank as one of the higher national priorities in general. (Pew, 2009; see Figure 13)

FIGURE 13. PROBLEMS FACING BLACK FAMILIES
% “BIG PROBLEM,” AMONG BLACK RESPONDENTS



Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Sociological and Demographic Trends Project, November 2009.

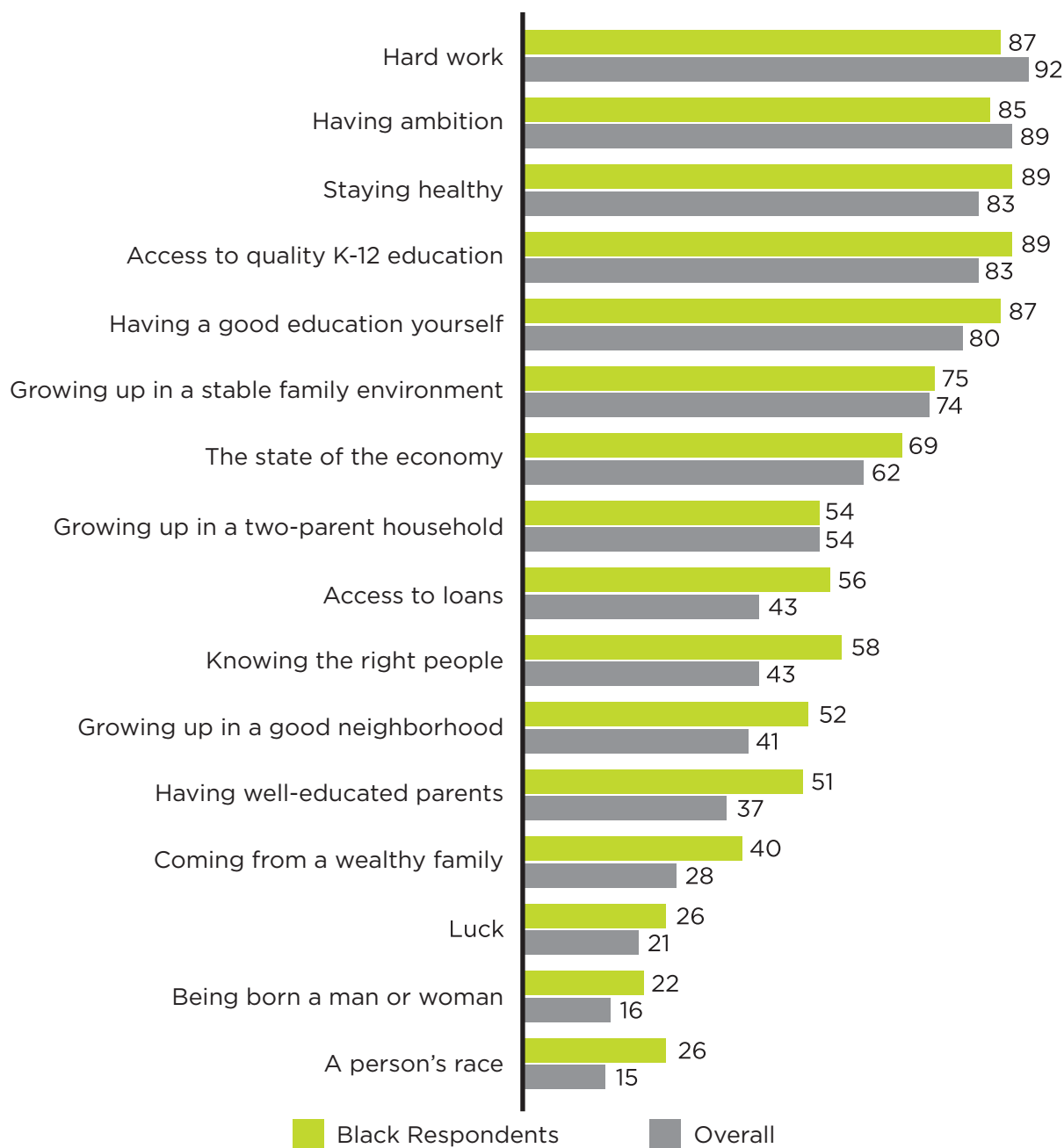
When it comes to addressing racial disparities, do some issue areas offer more opportunity for gains than others? Research designed to develop messages to address disparities offers guidance in answering this question, but existing public opinion data also provide some clues.

Jobs, education, and crime, among the top three priorities for black families, should be central to any strategy designed to advance policy on their behalf. Fortunately, there are reasons to believe that each of these areas offers promising opportunities. In addition, this section includes a brief review of the limited research related to fatherhood.

Education

Education shows enormous potential as an issue that can cross race, engage white respondents in coalition with black communities, and energize black men on their own behalf.

FIGURE 14. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY
% “ESSENTIAL” OR “VERY IMPORTANT”



Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009.

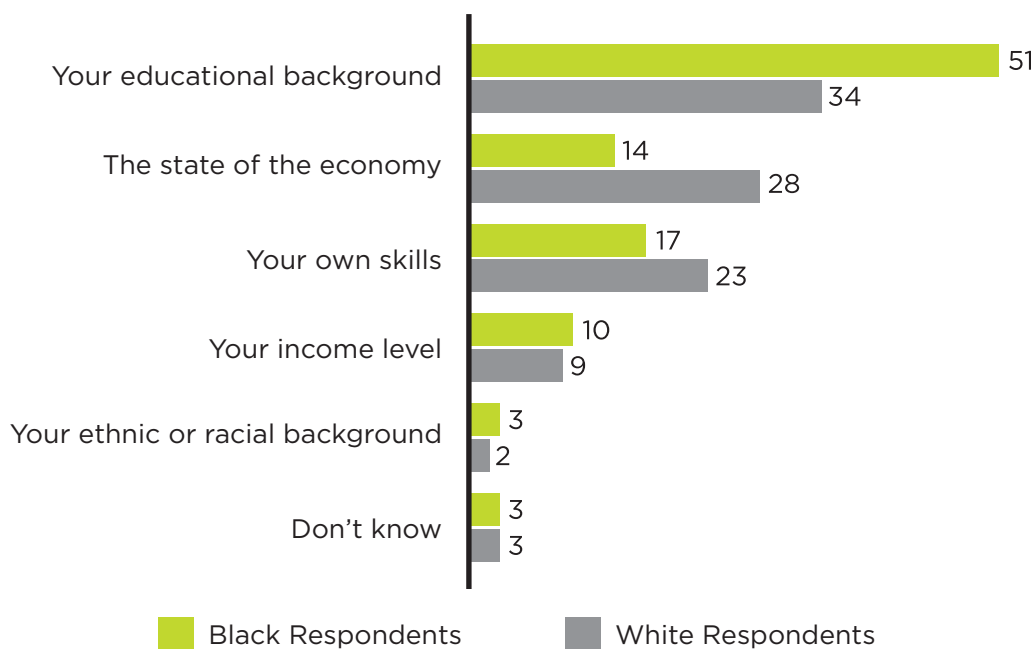
According to “A Tale of Two Fathers,” a study done by the Pew Research Center in May 2011, education is a top priority and concern for all Americans, and one area where people readily see

a collective stake and a collective responsibility. Though the economy is currently the top priority, education consistently ranks near the top of American concerns. Currently, 66 percent say improving education should be a “top priority.”

Further, there is widespread agreement that education matters to economic mobility. In fact, of a list of factors contributing to economic mobility, education is the only factor that is widely viewed as a collective responsibility. All other popular contributors to economic mobility are grounded in personal responsibility and family values, such as hard work, ambition, staying healthy, a stable family, knowing the right people, a good neighborhood, luck, gender, and race (see Figure 14). Interestingly, unlike so many other attitudes in this review, black respondents’ views are largely in line with the views of the population overall. Race is one of the few exceptions, with 26 percent of black respondents saying it is an important factor contributing to economic mobility, while just 15 percent of respondents overall agree. (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, 2009)

The role of education in creating opportunity is particularly valued in the black community. In Allstate’s 2011 Heartland Monitor poll, a majority of black respondents prioritize education as the most important factor in creating opportunity, compared with just one-third of white respondents. Additionally, of a series of problems, more black men choose “young Black men not taking their education seriously enough” over any other problem (31 percent), demonstrating the black community’s commitment to the issue. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006) But black youth (54 percent) are more likely than white youth (31 percent) to believe that black youth receive a poorer education on average than do white youth. (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

FIGURE 15. MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR OPPORTUNITY (%)



Source: Allstate, May 2011.

Importantly, Americans say they are willing to make low-income and minority children a priority in education efforts: 66 percent say they would be willing to pay more taxes “for funding preschool programs for children from low-income or poverty-level households,” 81 percent believe these preschool programs will help children perform better in school later, 81 percent believe it is possible

to close the achievement gap, and 88 percent say closing this gap is an important goal. However, respondents also feel the achievement gap is due to factors other than the quality of education received (77 percent), and 70 percent blame societal problems for the ills facing schools. (Gallup, 2006)

Education affords the opportunity to discuss what we can do collectively to advance people’s well-being, rather than simply allowing people to blame lack of ambition and hard work. Education also allows an opening to garner support for addressing the needs of black children (and low-income children). Leading with discrimination and racial disparities may not be the strongest starting point for the conversation, however.

First, as noted above, race is the least cited factor in economic mobility, and is viewed as far less of a factor than education. Overall, 75 percent of respondents believe that black children “have as good a chance as white children in your community to get a good education.” Fully 80 percent of whites agree, while just 49 percent of blacks agree. (Gallup, July 2008)

However, according to a 2008 study done by the Opinion Research Corporation for CNN and *Essence* magazine, many Americans also believe that public schools are worse in neighborhoods in which a majority of residents are black (48 percent) than public schools in which the majority of residents are white, while 33 percent think they are the same, and 11 percent think they are better. People may not link this difference to “discrimination” (which, as noted earlier, causes people to think of interpersonal relationships) even though they recognize a real disparity and a real problem exists.

Jobs, income, and the economy

Jobs, income, and the economy are at the top of Americans’ agendas, and are central to efforts to address racial disparities. There are opportunities and obstacles in connecting these issues to racial disparities. On one hand, in the current economy, people are more able to see the role of systems/structures in aiding or impeding individual success (though opinion continues to emphasize individual responsibility). Logically, then, the current environment should be conducive to a conversation about policy solutions to address disparities. However, jobs and income represent areas where the role of race seems particularly divisive and where stereotypes are persistent.

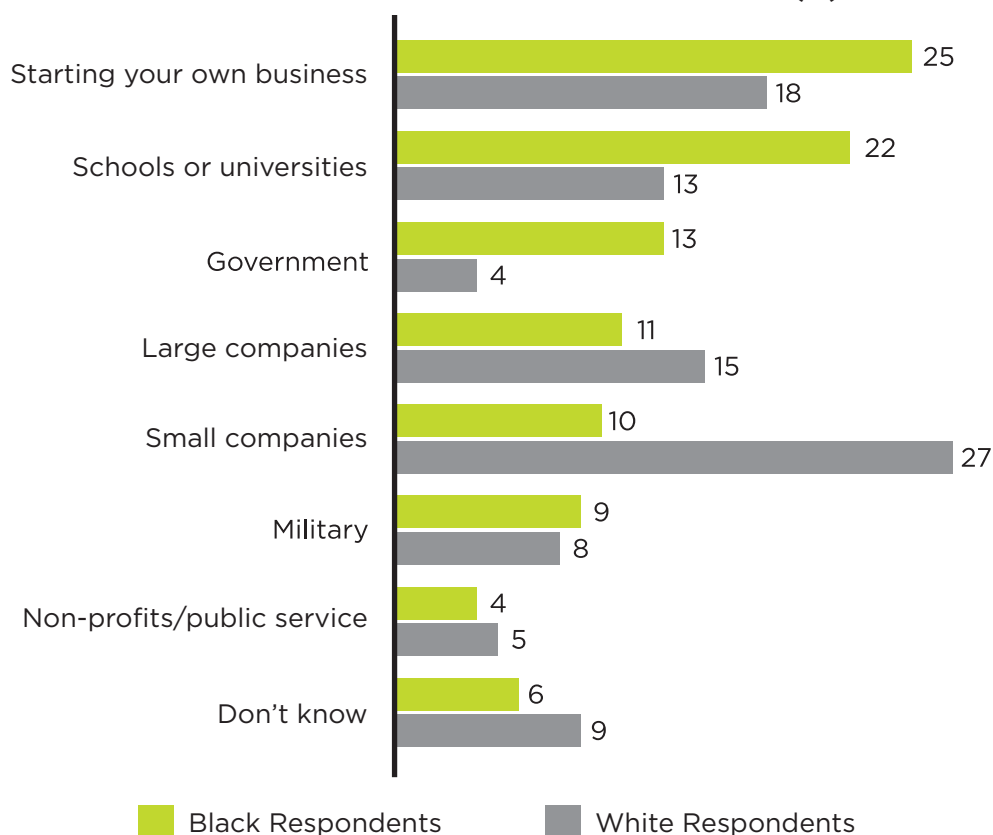
Black Americans are optimistic about the future of the economy, their opportunity to get ahead, and their children’s opportunity to achieve. Overall, Americans are optimistic that the economy will improve over the next year (61 percent say it will improve, though only 9 percent say it will “significantly improve”). (Allstate, 2011) A slim majority (54 percent) of white Americans are optimistic, compared with three-quarters and higher of every other racial and ethnic group: black respondents (86 percent), Asian respondents (80 percent), and Latino respondents (74 percent). (Allstate, 2011)

Similarly, among people of color, two-thirds and higher say they have more opportunity to get ahead than their parents did: black respondents (69 percent), Asian respondents (67 percent), and Hispanic respondents (62 percent) — but just 36 percent of white respondents see increased opportunity. Looking ahead, majorities of black and Hispanic respondents believe their children will have more opportunity to get ahead (57 percent and 56 percent, respectively), while fewer Asian and white respondents agree (37 percent and 24 percent, respectively). (Allstate, 2011)

Black Americans see obstacles to employment and are more supportive than white respondents of an active role for government in the economy. There is widespread support for a number of policies that would improve economic mobility.

There is some recognition that the black community faces unequal economic obstacles. Overall, a slim majority (53 percent) feel that racial minorities have equal job opportunities as whites. Only 24 percent of black respondents think there are equal job opportunities, clearly an area of serious concern for the black community. While 60 percent of white respondents believe there are equal job opportunities, this represents a lower level of response than other questions around disparities. (Gallup, July 2008)

FIGURE 16. BEST TYPE OF EMPLOYER FOR MY SUCCESS (%)



Source: Allstate, May 2011.

White and black respondents also disagree about the level of employment equality. Overall, 79 percent believe “that blacks have as good a chance as white people in your community to get any kind of job for which they are qualified.” Fully 82 percent of whites believe this to be true, while just 43 percent of blacks agree. (Gallup, October 2009)

Interestingly, fewer black respondents see corporate America as best for the kind of career opportunity they seek. Of a variety of choices for “Best Type of Employer,” black respondents most often select starting their own business (25 percent), followed by employment at an educational institution (22 percent) or government (13 percent). In contrast, a plurality of white respondents think small companies offer the best route (27 percent). (Allstate, 2011)

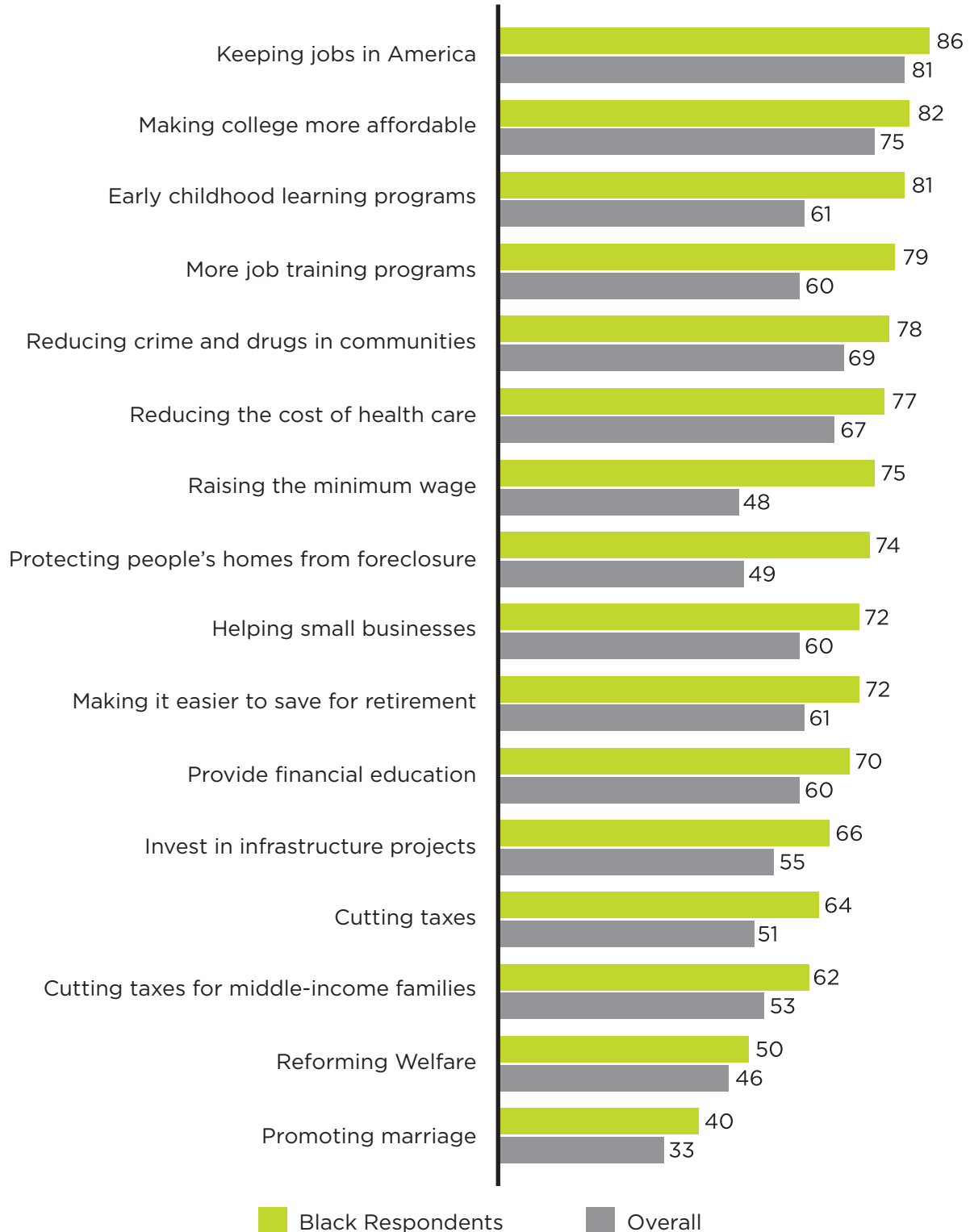
More generally, black Americans support an active, engaged government role, while white Americans are more likely to see government as a problem. A plurality of black Americans want an active role for government in ensuring that the economy works for all (42 percent), while just as many white respondents see government as the problem (42 percent). (Allstate, 2011)

Proper Role of Government in the Economy		
	Black Repondents	White Respondents
In the current economic environment, government is not the solution to our economic problems; government is the problem.	17%	42%
I would like to see government play an active role in the economy to ensure it benefits people like me, but I am not sure that I can trust government to do this effectively.	38%	33%
In the current economic environment, the government must play an active role in regulating the marketplace and ensuring that the economy benefits people like me.	42%	23%
Don't know	4%	2%

Source: Allstate, May 2011.

In fact, black Americans are skeptical about the consequences of the free market. Asked to choose, 49 percent of black respondents side with the view: “Left to itself the free market economy creates more opportunities than problems because it provides the most effective way to create economic growth and allow people to rise as far as their talents and hard work will take them,” while slightly fewer (43 percent) choose the alternate view: “Left to itself the free market economy creates more problems than opportunities because it creates too much inequality and leaves too many people in poverty.” This support for the free market view is the lowest of any racial group, with every other group choosing the free market by 61 percent or more. (Allstate, 2011)

FIGURE 17. IMPROVING ECONOMIC MOBILITY
% “EFFECTIVE”



Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009.

In fact, there is significant support for a range of policy priorities that would result in improved economic standing and reduced racial disparities (though none of these priorities is explicitly about race). Black respondents generally prioritize the same solutions as Americans overall, though support among black respondents for each given solution is higher than it is among the overall population. The most effective ways to improve economic mobility, according to respondents, are keeping jobs in America (86 percent of black respondents say that would be effective in improving economic mobility, and 81 percent of respondents overall say it would be effective), and making college more affordable (82 percent, 75 percent). While black respondents tend to share the same priorities as the population overall, there are a few notable exceptions where black respondents rate a solution much more highly than Americans overall: protecting homes from foreclosure (74 percent of black respondents say it would be effective in improving economic mobility, 49 percent of respondents overall say it would be effective), raising the minimum wage (75 percent, 48 percent), more job training (79 percent, 60 percent), and early childhood learning programs (81 percent, 61 percent). (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009; see Figure 17)

Black Americans want federal government intervention to deal with unfair treatment of black people in their jobs. At the same time, no group, including black respondents, wants race or past racial discrimination to be a factor in developing programs to address economic inequality.

Overall, few Americans are interested in or supportive of federal government intervention in dealing with unfair treatment in employment, but a majority of black respondents support intervention. Of all Americans, 28 percent side with the view, “Some people feel that if black people are not getting fair treatment in jobs, the government in Washington ought to see to it that they do,” while 25 percent choose the alternative view, “Others feel that this is not the federal government’s business,” and 47 percent say they have no interest in this topic. A majority of black respondents (59 percent) say government should see to fair treatment, while only 22 percent of white respondents feel the same. (American National Election Studies, 2008)

Neither black respondents nor any other group necessarily want *race* to be a primary factor in developing economic policy solutions. For example, all races agree that “government programs to address economic inequality” should “only take into account a person’s economic situation” (87 percent overall, 90 percent among white respondents, 78 percent among black respondents), while far fewer side with the alternative that government should “give special consideration to blacks because of past racial discrimination” (9 percent overall, 7 percent among white respondents, 18 percent among black respondents). (Gallup, July 2008) Given two choices, more white respondents would emphasize ensuring that “everyone has a fair chance of improving their economic standing” (71 percent) over reducing “inequality in America” (21 percent). African American respondents respond similarly (74 percent, 20 percent). (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Pew Economic Mobility Survey, February 2009)

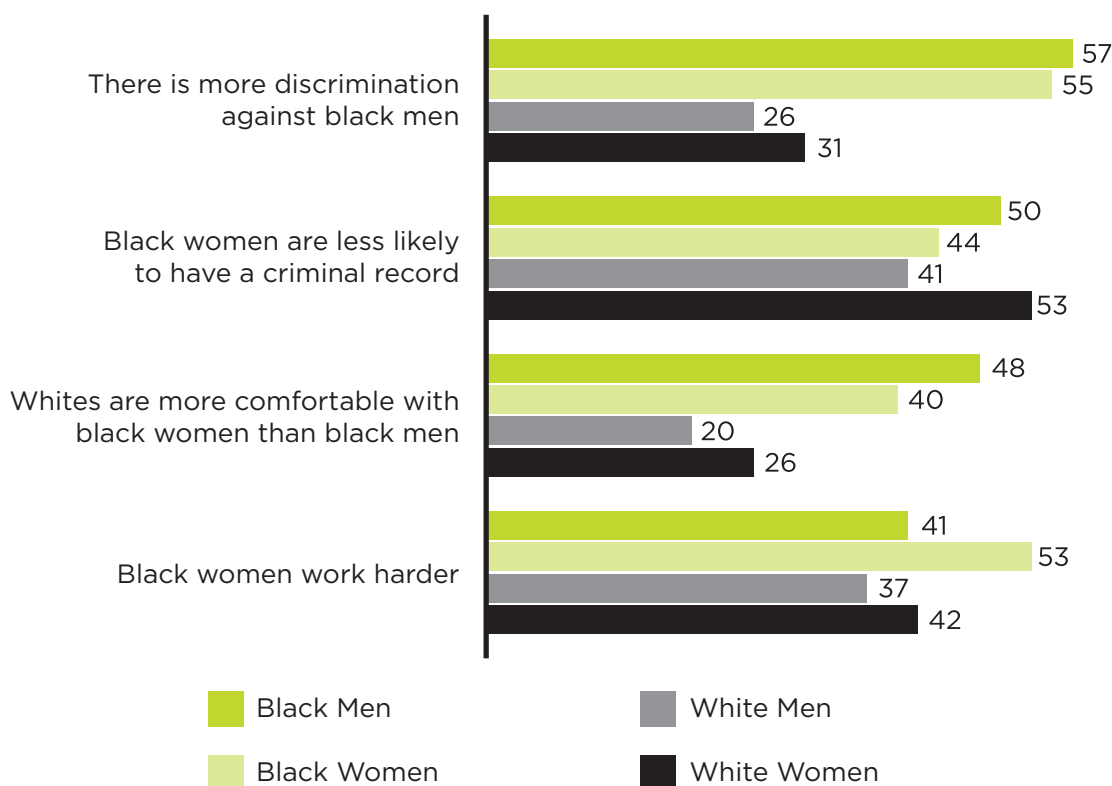
Two dynamics can undermine efforts to build broad-based support for policies to address racial disparities in jobs and income. Persistent negative stereotypes of black people have been shown to undercut support for government policies. In addition, there is a growing tendency to see individual factors, rather than the role of systems, as leading to outcomes.

Even more troubling, lack of support for welfare was driven by an image of the undeserving poor as black, lazy, and lacking in work ethics, according to *Why Americans Hate Welfare* by Martin Gilens (1999). The racialization of welfare is persistent. Even following significant welfare reform in the mid-1990s (which included work requirements and addressed aspects of welfare that Americans most dislike), positive public reviews of reform efforts, an improved media environment, and improved support for welfare spending, opposition to welfare continued to be conflated with stereotypes of black people’s work ethic. In 2008, *Public Opinion Quarterly* published Joshua Dyck and Laura Hussey’s

article entitled “The End of Welfare As We Know It,” in which they wrote: “Salience, racialization, and negative tone [of public discourse surrounding welfare policy] have all decreased substantially ... [but] we find that stereotypes about blacks’ work ethic continue to predict opposition to welfare spending just as strongly as they did prior to the passage of welfare reform.”

There is a growing question among the black community about black women’s role in the economics of their community. While there is not a lot of existing public opinion data in this area, some research suggests the role of personal responsibility seen in other areas related to success or failure also applies here. When asked why black women tend to be better educated and make more money than black men, white men and women point to individual factors: black women are less likely to have criminal records, and they work harder. Black men, however, are most likely to point to discrimination and are less likely to see hard work as the distinguishing factor. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

FIGURE 18. REASONS BLACK WOMEN ARE BETTER OFF
% “BIG REASON”



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

The justice system

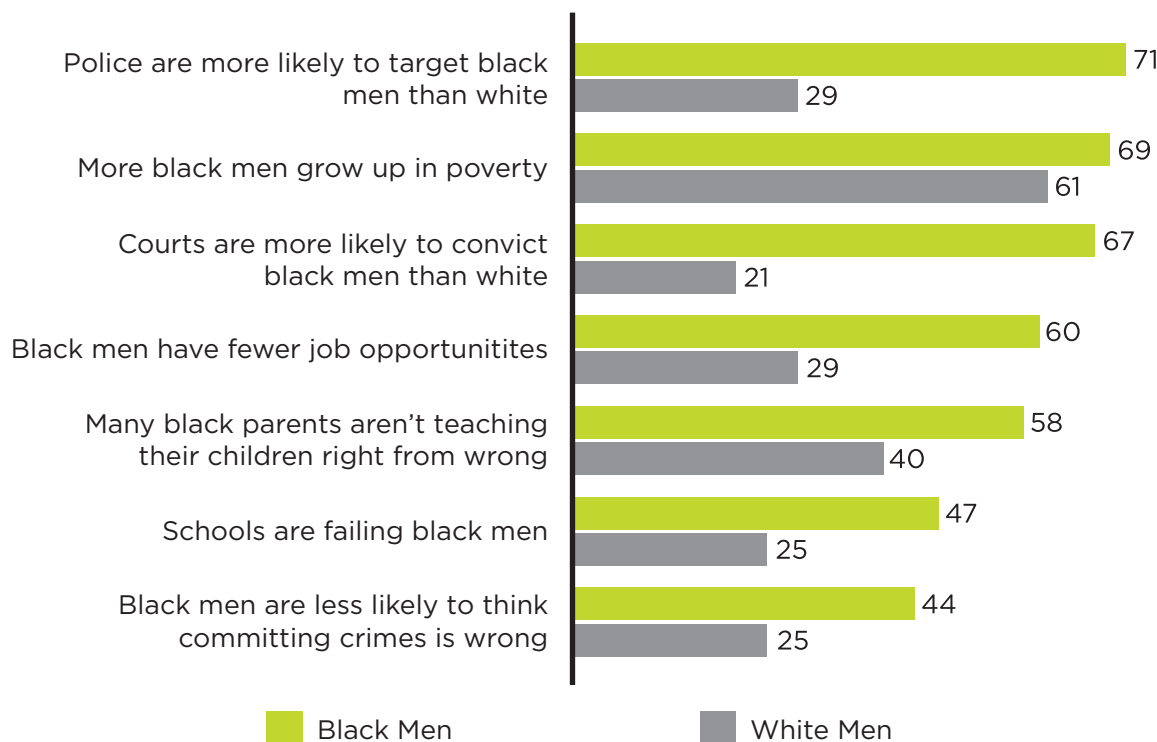
Of all the issue areas, white respondents are somewhat more likely to see discriminatory treatment against black Americans in the justice system. It may be that frequent news coverage of mistreatment, including video evidence, has influenced public opinion on this measure.

Crime has declined as a national priority. In 2001, 76 percent of Americans said that “reducing crime should be a top priority” but in a recent study that figure stands at just 44 percent. (Pew, 2011) And yet, as noted earlier in this report, crime continues to be a top concern among black respondents. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2011)

Also, as noted earlier, when people consider the role of discrimination in leading to different kinds of disparities, white Americans are most likely to say racial discrimination is a major factor in explaining why there is a “Higher percentage of Blacks in US prisons” (44 percent) over any other reason. (Gallup, July 2008)

However, when offered other reasons for imprisonment, the role of discrimination quickly fades for white respondents, especially white men. While black respondents readily point to a range of influences accounting for racial disparities in crime, white respondents do not typically see the same influences. Black men point to a number of reasons for higher levels of imprisonment among black men. The gap between views is largest on discrimination as a factor, such as “Police are more likely to target Black men than whites” (71 percent of black men say this is a big reason black men are more likely to be imprisoned, 29 percent of white men say this is a big reason black men are more likely to be imprisoned), and “courts are more likely to convict Black men than whites” (67 percent and 21 percent, respectively). White women are more likely to recognize the role of police targeting (40 percent cite it as a “big reason”), but not court bias (28 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

FIGURE 19. REASONS BLACK MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE IMPRISONED
% “BIG REASON”



Source: Washington Post/KFF/Harvard, April 2006.

Opinion is closest on the idea that more black men grow up in poverty (69 percent of black men, and 61 percent of white men). Other systemic factors show a divergence in opinions, such as black men having fewer job opportunities (60 percent and 29 percent, respectively) and schools are failing black men (47 percent, 25 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

Black men rate every reason higher than other demographic groups do, including reasons that seem to blame blacks overall and black men specifically, such as being less likely to think crime is wrong (44 percent of black men, 25 percent of white men) and black parents not teaching their children right from wrong (58 percent, 40 percent). (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006)

Surveys consistently show that black respondents have less confidence in police and in the justice system than white respondents do. While across all respondents 73 percent have confidence (37 percent a great deal of confidence) in the local police to treat blacks and whites equally, among white respondents there is far more confidence (81 percent in total, 42 percent “a great deal” of confidence) than among black respondents (45 percent and 12 percent, respectively). (Gallup, July 2008)

Furthermore, white respondents are far less likely than black respondents to raise concerns about police bias. White respondents have confidence that police in their community will “do a good job enforcing the law” (78 percent), “not use excessive force on suspects” (71 percent), and “treat Blacks and whites equally” (69 percent). Black respondents are less sure of any measure (54 percent, 41 percent, and 38 percent, respectively). (Pew, 2009) In addition, 67 percent of black respondents believe the American justice system is biased against blacks, while just 32 percent of white respondents believe that. (Gallup, July 2008)

Interestingly, young people may be more open to this conversation. Across race, youth believe police discriminate *much more* against black youth than they do against white youth (79 percent of black youth, 63 percent of white youth). (Black Youth Project, University of Chicago, 2005)

Fatherhood

The public opinion research base on fatherhood initiatives is rather thin, and tends to focus narrowly on personal behaviors and involvement with children, rather than take a broader view on policy or social action.

Clearly there has been a shift in the last half century: more children live apart from their fathers, but those who live with their fathers are getting more care and attention from them.

In 2010, 27 percent of minor children lived apart from their fathers, up from 11 percent in 1960. Black fathers are twice as likely as white fathers to live apart from their children (44 percent and 21 percent, respectively). (Pew, 2011)

At the same time, fathers who live with their children are spending far more time with them than in past generations. In the mid-1960s, fathers spent an average of 2.6 hours per week caring for their children. By 2000, that number had increased to 6.5 hours per week. (Pew, 2011)

Americans value the role of fathers in raising children, and give today’s fathers mixed reviews in the job they are doing.

Americans agree that a child needs a father in the home to grow up happily (69 percent), and even higher percentages agree that a child needs a mother in the home to grow up happily (74 percent). (Pew, 2011)

Americans are mixed on whether fathers today play a greater role (46 percent) or lesser role (45 percent) in raising their children compared with 20 or 30 years ago. Survey respondents do not think

fathers compare well with their own fathers — 40 percent say today’s fathers are doing about the same job as the last generation, while 34 percent say they are doing a worse job, and just 24 percent say “better job.” Fathers, however, tend to say they are doing about the same job as their fathers did (47 percent) or are doing a better job (47 percent). (Pew, 2011)

A large majority (57 percent) believe it is more difficult to be a father today than 20 or 30 years ago. (Pew, 2011)

When they consider the problems facing black families today, far fewer black respondents point to unmarried parents as a big problem, compared to other problems. As noted earlier, they are far more likely to emphasize the lack of good jobs, and the prevalence of drugs, alcohol, and crime, as shown in the table below. (Pew, 2009)

Big Problem for Black Families Today (black respondents only)	
Not enough jobs paying decent wages	79%
Drugs and alcoholism	74%
Crime in their neighborhoods	67%
Public schools not providing a good education	56%
Too many parents never getting married	50%
Not enough successful blacks for young people to look up to	42%

Source: Pew, November 2009.

Communications Directions

In some respects, there has been a significant amount of research recommending message directions on issues of race. However, much of this research is limited in its utility, either because it was designed to accomplish a narrow goal (and therefore is ineffective or even harmful for broader goals), or because its focus is so broad it can be difficult to demonstrate effectiveness in advancing specific policy objectives. Most important, even those who have studied and recommended framing directions on these issues for some time are struggling to refine their recommendations and prove they can have an impact in policy debates. Much work still needs to be done.

A consistent question in communications strategies to build support for policies that will address racial disparities is whether to deliver messages that are explicitly “about” race, knowing that some explicit racial messages reduce support for equitable policies. Should advocates focus on race or class, or on race or place?

Highlighting or avoiding race

In a paper prepared for Ohio State University’s Kirwin Institute, “The Dangers of Not Speaking About Race,” Philip Mazzocco (2006) suggests that highlighting race, a color-conscious approach, can be effective in reducing discrimination and lead to support for racial policies. Though this particular research is limited to college students and should be viewed with caution, the general perspective is shared among some social scientists who suggest race consciousness is a necessary precursor to problem solving. (For more on this see *Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys* by Topos for The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011.)

From a communications perspective, much of the research sponsored by the FrameWorks Institute has cautioned about framing the conversation as being about “race” or “racism.” Strategists often promote messages that avoid race and instead focus on a broader value or connection (e.g., opportunity for all; disparities in place, not race). Using a series of frame experiments, some explicitly referring to race, some not, Gilliam and Manuel (in *The Illogic of Literalness: Narrative Lessons in the Presentation of Race Policies*, 2009) conclude that communicators should start with core values, not race:

...while it is true that racism as a value did have some positive effects, they were, in the main, about half as effective as exposing people to core American values that did not cite historical discrimination as an explanation for disparities in society. The fact that more generalized treatments were able to elevate support for policies that were specifically targeted to racial and ethnic minorities makes these effects even more compelling. It suggests a kind of disjunctive irony – in order to garner support for race-based policies, advocates need to begin the conversation by invoking broader core American values. Being literal about racism in the public dialogue about race is not the most effective way to build public will for progressive race policy reforms.

While starting the conversation in a different place may have utility, avoiding race completely is unlikely to achieve targeted racial equity policies. For example, based on research designed to develop effective communications for affirmative action, Westen Strategies, in “Neutralizing the Affirmative

Action Debate” (2009), recommends the following as the top-performing message against the opposition message in dial testing. This message avoids a focus on race (instead highlighting gender and age discrimination), denounces discrimination in all its forms, and positions the issue as being about “flexibility to ensure fair treatment” rather than “quotas.” It is easy to see how the following text would score well on a dial test — it is hard to disagree with. But it is unclear whether it builds support for affirmative action more broadly.

In this country, we don't believe in discriminating against people, regardless of their color, ethnic background, sex, or age, and government shouldn't tie the hands of employers or colleges with inflexible rules that prevent them from making sure every qualified candidate gets a fair chance. We all know that women don't get hired or promoted in a lot of companies the same way as men, particularly if they took time off to raise their kids, [and all of us should care about that] whether we're women, fathers, or husbands. We all know that employers look differently at older workers than younger ones, and we shouldn't be telling a 55-year-old guy, [“Sorry, there's no place for you here,”] when he got laid off from a job. And we all know that underfunded rural or urban schools with crumbling walls and 1980s textbooks put kids at a disadvantage, whether they're black, white, or brown. We need to let business and educational leaders act responsibly and flexibly to make sure everyone is treated fairly, without resorting to quotas or one-size-fits-all programs that don't do right by anyone.

Avoiding race may be an attractive short-term strategy, but over the long term it may also avoid the central issues and lead to no significant change in public understanding or culture.

Two other promising directions that have received some limited attention are: begin with structures/systems first and then connect to race; and emphasize positive connections and interdependence among racial groups rather than differences.

Structures/Systems

One promising approach is to highlight a broken or flawed system of which all Americans are part, and then bridge to the dynamics of race. For example, Americans value education, want to improve the education system, and recognize that urban, black communities often have the weakest schools. Problematically, without careful framing, this approach can lead to blaming the individual (thinking that parents are at fault) or toward highlighting another problematic dynamic (such as “class” or “poor people”), rather than focusing on weaknesses in the system.

One tool that has been identified that keeps attention focused on systems and resources rather than individuals is the “Prosperity Grid” simplifying model. The basic idea is to communicate a metaphorical grid that underscores the role of resources and institutions in creating opportunity and prosperity. Communities, including the black community, for example, can be characterized as having more or less access to the resources afforded by the Prosperity Grid. Aubrun, Brown, and Grady, in their 2006 work, *Moving Beyond Entrenched Thinking About Race: The Homeowner/Stakeholder Effect*, note that:

Experts say the most prosperous communities have thriving institutions that provide opportunity, like quality schools, community banks and so on. Think of it as a Prosperity Grid, where everyone, all parts of the community, can plug into and benefit from these institutions of opportunity...

Another approach that keeps attention focused on systems and resources, while advocating the value of opportunity, demonstrates an ability to lift support for policies:

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that African-American communities still face many barriers to opportunity. They have more declining school budgets, restrictive lending practices, and fewer health professionals. The American Dream has always relied on creating an environment where everyone has an opportunity to achieve — including African Americans. According to this view, we need to devote more attention to ensuring that every community — including African American communities — provides an opportunity to succeed for all its residents. This will result in a better quality of life and future prosperity for the nation as a whole. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to improving conditions in African American communities. (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

It should be noted that while Gilliam and the FrameWorks Institute have recommended a number of frames to address issues of race, in their survey research, the message listed above was the only one of several messages tested that lifted policy support while also bridging to a conversation about race. Other messages that didn't test well in the survey should still be considered promising approaches, but ones that need further development.

Connections and interdependence

A dynamic that hinders broad-based support for change is people's inability to see their connections to others. Sixty percent of white respondents reject the idea that what happens generally to black men in this country will have something to do with what happens in their own life. (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University, 2006) Cueing zero-sum thinking increases the sense that members of other racial groups are competitive threats and is likely to undermine support for policies to address disparities. In "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition," Bobo and Hutchings (1996) wrote:

Perceptions of competitive group threat thus involve genuinely social-psychological processes that are not reducible to a single cause nor to purely individual-level psychological dynamics... We find that perceptions of competition and threat from other racial groups can be reliably measured. Such perceptions, while not acute in our data, are fairly common. Substantial percentages (though typically less than 50 percent), of Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians perceive members of other groups as zero-sum competitive threats for social resources... Perceptions of group competition tend to be based on a mix of racial alienation, prejudice, stratification beliefs, and self-interest. (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996)

Instead, can communications create a sense of shared fate, a sense that what happens to one segment of society affects all of society? Individualistic thinking leads to competition between the races:

However, rather than decreasing perceptions of threat, individualistic thinking tends to encourage Whites to view Asian Americans and Latinos as competitive threats, to encourage Asians to view Latinos as competitive threats, and to encourage Blacks and Latinos to view Asians as competitive threats. (*Ibid.*)

So can creating a sense of interdependence alleviate competition between the races? Survey experiments with affirmative action policy suggest that redefining the issue as one that affects society more broadly helps build support even for subgroups.

For example, with no priming, 63 percent support affirmative action programs for women and just 50 percent support affirmative action programs for racial minorities. When primed with a question about affirmative action for women first, support for affirmative action for minorities increased by 7 points. This occurs because people respond based on criteria for the first question they hear, then end up using the same lens to judge the subsequent question:

The theoretical explanation for this shift in views is what Schuman and Presser (1981, p. 28; also see Moore 2002, pp. 82–3, for an operational definition) term “consistency” effects. When asked first about either type of AA [affirmative action] program before being asked about the other type (what Moore termed a “non-comparative context”), people make their evaluations based on whatever criteria they bring to mind. But when asked about the second type of AA program after having been asked about the first type (a “comparative context”), many people will make their evaluation of the second type of AA program in comparison with their evaluation of the first. Thus, many respondents who first said they support AA programs for women then feel obligated (when asked the second question) to express support for AA programs targeted to racial minorities. Similarly, people who first said they oppose AA for racial minorities are then less inclined to turn around and support it for women (when the latter question is asked second). The comparative context thus elicits a “norm of reciprocity” (Schuman and Presser 1981, p. 28) leading to more consistent expressions of support for each type of AA program than are found in the noncomparative context. (Wilson, 2010)

Some suggest that people view gender inequality through a lens of shared interest (we are all affected by gender inequality), while racial inequality is not typically viewed through an interdependent lens (Winter, 2008), so perhaps the prime puts people in an interdependent mindset rather than a competitive mindset.

In addition, qualitative testing of an interconnectedness approach shows promise in helping people see that addressing racial disparities benefits all of society. In quantitative research that followed the qualitative study, however, analysis demonstrated that the following prime had effects on support for child and youth development policy, but not other policies:

Lately there has been a lot of talk about how we are all connected in our country. Some people believe that we will only succeed when all parts of the nation are in good shape. Problems of poor health and education that happen in one part of the nation end up affecting us all. For this reason, moving ahead as a country requires promoting programs and improving services everywhere so that we all benefit from our interconnection. According to this view, all communities must be able to realize their potential and contribute to the country. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to recognize the connections among communities? (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

Note also that this prime included no racial cues, so it is unclear how it would perform in the context of a conversation about racial disparities. Interconnectedness is core to the progressive narrative and will be an important element of conversations on race. However, it is a direction that needs more development and testing before communicators can use it with confidence.

Communicators should be cautious about how they deploy a connectedness message. Sometimes strategists recommend messages that cue negative connections using fear, failure, or prevention (*e.g.*, educate now or pay for prison later). Using racial problems as a threat to meet our short-term policy goals is likely to exacerbate the long-term problems in perception. Note the following examples from a series of framing experiments. The general prevention prime was effective in lifting policy support, but when it was translated to a prevention prime emphasizing race (with negative connections) it lost effectiveness:

Lately there has been a lot of talk about prevention in our country. Some people believe that we should prevent health and education problems before they occur. When we don't address them, they eventually become worse and cost more to fix. For this reason, it is important to promote programs and improve services that keep problems from occurring in the first place. According to this view, we can save lives and money if we make good prevention programs

easier for everyone to access. Have you heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to prevention?

Lately there has been a lot of talk about social conditions in America. Some people believe that preventing problems in African American communities is important because they will eventually become everyone's problems. Preventing declining school budgets, restrictive lending practices, and a scarcity of health professionals in African American communities will prevent worse problems in the future. According to this view, we can prevent further damage to our nation by devoting more resources to addressing these problems in African American communities before they become more serious. Please tell us if you have heard this explanation of why we should allocate societal assets to preventing problems affecting African American communities. (Gilliam & Manuel, 2009)

Solutions orientation

Finally, a “best practice” that is often overlooked by communicators is the importance of highlighting solutions. Advocates can easily assume that if people just know how terrible a problem is, how much of a crisis is on the horizon, they will rise up to fix it. Instead, people can easily become paralyzed with inaction because they become overwhelmed by seemingly intractable problems. They cannot imagine what the solutions could be. Lynn Davey offered this idea in her 2009 FrameWorks Institute message brief, “Strategies for Framing Racial Disparities”:

One of the common mistakes made by advocates in all fields is the tendency to bury solutions messages deep in their communications material, while routinely according inordinate attention to defining the problem. ... When people are presented with effective solutions, they are able to more clearly understand where the system breaks down and how we might fix it.

Reorienting communications around solutions, rather than problems, will go a long way toward building support for public policies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a significant body of work exploring public opinion of race relations, experiences with discrimination, differences between races in how they understand this issue, and so on. Yet most research largely seeks to understand the “snapshot” of public opinion — where opinion currently stands and the variables that influence a particular view — rather than how to change opinion.

Still, this overview provides important insights about how people understand the nature of the problem. Implicitly, discrimination is often viewed as being about relationships and personal interactions, not systemic bias or policy. Disparities can easily be blamed on lack of personal ambition or hard work. The role of systems and structures has to become more apparent if we hope to spark broad-based support for policy change.

Importantly, issue conversations often trigger competition between races, as though success is zero-sum and what is “given” to one group is “taken” from another. Instead, we need to find communications strategies that join people in common purpose and shared fate, while not erasing race in the process.

Specifically, communicators should consider the following recommendations.

Conduct new research and message testing, designed with precise, short-, mid-, and long-term goals in mind. The limited message development that has been done on these issues tends to lie at either end of a continuum. Either it is done in service of a narrow goal (*e.g.*, pass “bill X”) or a vague, ill-defined goal (*e.g.*, talk about race). Or, it has not yet proven its ability to create change. We need to define specific goals relevant to improving the achievement of black males to which we can hold our strategy accountable.

Sharpen objectives and strategies for different audiences. Clearly this research suggests different starting points for the conversation with different racial groups. Black Americans are far more likely to see the systemic flaws that lead to disparities and support government action (though the personal responsibility perspective is gaining ground), while few white Americans even recognize the breadth and severity of traditional discrimination, let alone institutional racism. What is the call to action for core, mobilizable audiences within communities of color? What call to action makes sense for opinion influencers in white communities? These and similar questions must be asked and focused on.

Develop frame flips and unifying narratives. The old storylines have limited ability to gain traction. This analysis points to the need for a frame flip and a unifying narrative to break through deeply entrenched views on these issues. Specifically, new framing on this issue needs to:

- ▶ Mend the in-group/out-group cycle and establish a sense of “us.”
- ▶ Reinforce shared fate and interdependence.
- ▶ Avoid the competitive and zero-sum assumptions that are so prevalent in public perceptions of these issues.
- ▶ Look for ways to characterize the unique challenges facing black men and solutions to the challenges without inadvertently implying that other groups will have less opportunity, *e.g.*, “breaking down obstacles” instead of “addressing disparities.”

- ▶ Emphasize effective solutions. Focus on structures, systems, and policies, not personal offenses.
- ▶ Do not lose sight of or avoid race and racial disparities in the conversation.

Engage audiences around specific issue categories. Harmonize the broad overarching narrative about black male achievement with specific issue categories that most matter to black men – jobs and income, education, and criminal justice. Gains in image and perceptions matter most when they lead to real gains in closing disparities in these areas.

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Media Consumption Analysis

Executive Summary

This analysis of African-American men’s media consumption habits is part of a three-part research study by The Opportunity Agenda to inform the strategy of those working to improve the opportunities and achievement of black men and boys. We investigated a wide range of national and regional media platforms to provide insights into how African-American men consume media. We identified which media sources are likely to have the greatest impact on the thinking and attitudes of this segment of the American population and offer a series of recommendations about where interventions may be most fruitful.

We examined five media platforms — television, magazines, online outlets, newspapers, and radio — nationally or regionally, depending on the reach of market. Regionally, we focused on five of the top six designated market areas (DMA),¹ also known as media markets, with the largest black populations: New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Washington, and Los Angeles.

The black population in the United States is greater than 42 million and makes up 12.6 percent of the population. Black males comprise about half of the black population. Of all black males, 70 percent (15.8 million) are men 18 years of age and older, and the rest, 5.8 million, are under 18 years of age.²

Using standard media industry data sets such as the Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report and GfK MRI Database 2011, we identified the media sources with the greatest “reach” and highest “concentration.” In this report, “concentration” refers to the percentage of consumers of a particular medium or program who are African American and/or African-American men, and “reach” refers to the total number of African Americans and/or African-American men who are exposed to a particular medium. We looked both at mainstream media sources geared toward a general audience, and at programming geared specifically toward black people or black men in particular (“black-oriented media”). Where data were available, we compared black men’s consumption numbers with those of the broader black adult population and with the national population as a whole.

In reporting our findings and recommendations, we use the terms “black” and “African American” interchangeably to describe people who identified themselves using either or both of those terms when responding to the industry researchers who collected the data sets. We use the term “men” to describe males 18 years of age or older.

1 A Designated Market Area or DMA is composed of sampling units (counties or geographically split counties) and is defined and updated annually by Nielsen Media Research, Inc., based on historical television viewing patterns. A county or split county is assigned exclusively to one DMA. Arbitron Inc. http://www.arbitron.com/ad_agencies/tradeterms.htm.

2 U.S. Census 2010.

Findings

Highlights of findings across platforms and in each media platform follow.

Overview Across All National Media

Across national media platforms, sports and music-related content are the most popular among African-American men. Mainstream media reaches larger numbers of African-American men and African-American adults in general than black-oriented media. However, black-oriented media has significantly higher concentrations of African-American consumers, and in a few cases — such as the magazines *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Essence* — they also deliver large reach. Both overall reach and concentration are important factors to consider in the design of media interventions.

- ▶ Specific online search, web portal, aggregation and social media sites (such as Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, and YouTube) and televised sporting events (NFL and NBA in particular) reach the largest absolute numbers of black men. Outside of paid advertising, however, opportunities to influence the content of these platforms are limited.
- ▶ Among platforms that generate their own editorial or entertainment content, magazines reach the largest numbers of black men. Nine of the top 10 content-generating media sources across all platforms are magazines, and their reach to African-American men is a little over 20 million monthly. Titles include *Ebony*, *Sports Illustrated*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Jet*, *National Geographic*, *Men's Health*, *Black Enterprise*, *Essence*, and *People*.
- ▶ Among black-oriented media, lifestyle magazines and music-related TV shows top the list.

Television

Broadcast television has a larger reach than cable to African-American audiences. TBS is the only mass media cable network with black-oriented shows — *Tyler Perry's The Family That Prays* and *Are We There Yet?* — both of which have large reach to African-American men.

- ▶ Sports shows dominate the television viewing habits of African-American men. This pattern mirrors the habits of American men in general, except that the National Basketball Association (NBA) finals are far more popular with African Americans than with the population at large. Sporting events, such as the Super Bowl, AFC Championship, and NBA finals, comprise the top 25 shows viewed by African-American men and by all African-American adults as well.
- ▶ Music-oriented programs are the next most popular television shows for African-American audiences. The highest viewed non-sporting event by African Americans is the *Grammy Awards*. At 3.3 million viewers it is the only non-sporting event/show in the top 55. Six of the ten top non-sport shows are music-related: *The Grammy Awards*, *Glee*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *American Idol*, the *BET Awards*, and *Soul Train Red Carpet*.
- ▶ On TV, the Black Entertainment Network (BET) offers the most competitive combination of large reach and high concentration. BET shows dominate the list of most-watched non-sporting shows, mainstream and black-oriented, by this population.
- ▶ The FOX Network has more black-oriented shows with a large reach to African-American men than any other major network. Among the most popular are the variety show *In the Flow* and the *NAACP Image Awards*. Comedies such as TBS's *Are We There Yet?* are popular with African-American men, although in terms of absolute audience numbers, they do not achieve the reach of NFL, NBA, or music-related TV programming.

Magazines

Magazines are the only national media platform where combined black-oriented titles reach larger absolute numbers of African-American men than do any mainstream titles. In the other media platforms which are distributed nationally (TV, online, and newspaper), the sources with the largest black adult audiences are geared toward the general population and not specifically to the African-American community.

- ▶ Four of the ten magazines reaching the largest African-American male audience — *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Jet*, and *Black Enterprise* — are magazines with lifestyle content targeted to African Americans. Their reach ranges from 1.7 to 3.5 million per issue.
- ▶ The second most popular magazine genre among African-American men is sports. *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* are the second and third most popular magazines, with 3.1 million and 3 million African-American men reading an issue, respectively.
- ▶ Magazine preferences of African-American men resemble those of African-American adult readership as a whole. Eight of the top eleven magazines with the largest readership by African-American men are also within the top eleven in overall African-American adult (male and female) readership.

Online

African Americans are using the internet in higher percentages than in years past. An estimated 67 percent of African-American adults are currently online, according to a Pew Internet & American Life survey conducted in May 2011,³ compared to 78 percent of Americans overall. The present analysis found:

- ▶ African-American adults' online habits are very similar to the general adult population, with Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter being among the most popular sites.
- ▶ African Americans are more socially active online than other ethnic groups. African-American adults and African-American men in particular regularly visit social media sites.⁴ Nearly 12 million African-American adults visit Facebook each month, as do 4.65 million African-American men, making it the third most popular site for both groups. Twitter and MySpace are also very popular with both groups.
- ▶ Like American adults in general, large numbers of African-American adults, and men in particular, regularly visit specific content sites such as YouTube, About.com, Weather.com, ESPN.com, and Yahoo!, which is also a web portal. These sites have anywhere from just under one million (ESPN.com) to almost 13 million unique visits (Yahoo.com) from African-American adults and from three million to almost five million visits from African-American men per month.
- ▶ Four of the six content sites most popular among African-American men are entirely devoted to music or have a music component: World Star Hip Hop, Black Voices, BET Interactive, Bossip.com, and DatPiff.

3 Pew Research Center, Pew Internet & American Life Project's Spring Tracking Survey "Usage Over Time," May 2011. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Whos-online.aspx>.

4 Georgetown University and Ogilvy Public Relations, "Social Media Plays Greater Role in Cause Engagement for African Americans and Hispanics," May 2011. http://csic.georgetown.edu/OPR_SM_GT_Ethnicity_FS_Final.pdf.

Newspapers

Compared to the other media platforms, newspapers have a smaller reach to African Americans and African-American men in particular. Yet because they are often neighborhood-specific, they are a good source for reaching a particular geographic location.

- ▶ In terms of concentration there are only four mainstream newspapers in which African-American men are overrepresented in readership relative to their presence in the population: *The Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Chicago Tribune's RedEye*, *The Washington Examiner*, and *The Washington Express*.
- ▶ The three mainstream newspapers with the largest absolute numbers of black male readers are the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *New York Daily News*, and *USA Today*. However, black men comprise less than 15 percent of the total readership of those papers.
- ▶ In each of the five media markets included in this study there are a number of black-oriented newspapers. Although their concentration is high, their reach to African Americans in general is much smaller than the reach of the other media platforms we examined.
- ▶ Of the 28 black-oriented newspapers we examined, only two have circulations higher than 100,000: *N'DIGO* and *The Chicago Citizen*, both of which serve the Chicago media market. Overall, the median circulation of black-oriented newspapers is 30,000 compared to 386,000 for mainstream newspapers.

Radio

Black men listen to music-oriented stations more than any other stations, and the most popular stations tend to follow the Urban Contemporary and Urban Adult Contemporary formats, except in New York City where Rhythmic Contemporary Hit Radio is dominant.

- ▶ Radio news stations have a very small reach to African-American men and African-American adults overall. Most of the media markets have one or two news stations on the list of the top ten stations with the largest reach to black men, but the absolute numbers are quite low.

Recommendations

Based on our research we make a series of recommendations regarding entry points for improving both the content and the reach of media with respect to African-American men:

- ▶ Sports and music content reach the largest numbers of black men in television, radio, magazines, and other media. Working with celebrities — who are the subject of interviews and feature stories, as well as creative and athletic content — as spokespeople is one way to reach a broad audience. Fostering coverage of sports and music figures' positive activities and activism as a part of popular existing programming is a related avenue.
- ▶ Magazines can be particularly fruitful vehicles for communicating positive messages to and about African-American men, both because they create their own content and because their African-American readership is high. Outreach to magazine publishers, editors, and writers could inform both the quality and the quantity of information and depictions reaching black men and boys. Johnson Publishing, which owns *Ebony* and *Jet*, is a particularly influential publisher with this audience, as is Time Inc., which publishes *Sports Illustrated* and *People*. Editorial meetings, story pitching, and advertising with these outlets should be considered.
- ▶ The FOX Network and TBS each have black-oriented shows that reach a broad audience of black men, including sitcoms, variety shows, and awards ceremonies. Working with producers and

writers to inform the content of these shows is a promising avenue. Public service announcements and paid advertising are also possible entry points.

- ▶ The NAACP Image Awards show presents a special opportunity. Because its purpose is to elevate positive images, the show can be further leveraged to convey constructive messages and information about and for African-American men.
- ▶ BET offers a unique combination of large numbers and a high concentration of African-American men as well as women. Working to inform the content of BET shows by pitching or even creating new content can influence a large audience, as can public service announcements (PSAs) and paid advertising.
- ▶ In media markets with radio stations whose audience is primarily African Americans, such as Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., outreach to popular radio DJs can potentially result in influencing a highly concentrated population of African Americans.
- ▶ While specific search, web portals, aggregation and social media sites that are very popular, such as YouTube, Google, Yahoo!, and Facebook, do not create their own content, they do highlight the possibility of creating content (such as YouTube videos) capable of reaching black men, who are highly active in social media, and particularly on Facebook. These websites are prime vehicles for reaching this population, as well as black youth. While online advertising is in flux, it should be monitored for possible interventions.
- ▶ While newspapers reach relatively small numbers of black men overall, they can be employed to reach people at the local level, especially regarding neighborhood issues and information.
- ▶ We recommend that additional research be undertaken in order to determine the best strategies for reaching and informing African-American men. Research priorities include:
 - ✓ Disaggregating the demographics of the black male community in terms of age, education, income, and other aspects relevant to their advancement. This should include studying the media consumption habits of black boys.
 - ✓ Identifying other audiences — such as employers, educators, and law enforcement officials — whose perceptions of black men and boys are important to their success and safety. The media consumption of these audiences should also be identified.
 - ✓ Conducting an in-depth analysis of the digital world is important, given the increasing penetration of new media into the lives of all Americans. Technology, as well as people's behavior online, is changing at such a fast pace and with so many different platforms (search engines, content creators, social networks, mobile phones, and tablets) that it is necessary to gain a greater understanding of the digital world and its influence on African-American men and boys.
 - ✓ A deeper analysis of *how* African-American men and boys consume media would offer insights into the way information on different platforms engages this population and how communicators can leverage them to create positive change. People consume information differently on different platforms, acquire it differently, and frequent it differently. For example, it is important to know whether black men and boys are going to a specific site via their desktop, cell phone, or tablet; whether they subscribe to a magazine or buy it on the newsstand; how much time they spend reading a magazine compared to the length of time they spend on a website or watching a television program.

Introduction

This analysis of African-American men’s media consumption habits is part of a three-part research study by The Opportunity Agenda to inform the strategy of those working to improve the opportunities and achievement of black men and boys. We investigated a wide range of national and regional media platforms to provide insights into how black men consume media. We identified which media sources are likely to have the greatest impact on the thinking and attitudes of this segment of the American population, and we offer a series of recommendations about places to intervene in the content of those sources. Five media platforms are included: newspapers, magazines, broadcast and cable television, online outlets, and radio shows.

The nation’s African-American population is over 42 million and makes up 12.6 percent of the overall population. African-American males comprise about half of the African-American population, or about 6.3 percent of the overall population. Seventy percent (13.5 million) of African-American males are adults and the rest (5.8 million) are under 18 years of age.⁵ The population of each designated market area (DMA), or media market, we examined is shown in Table 1. For further information on the geographic coverage of each media market, please see the Appendix.

TABLE 1. POPULATION INFORMATION ABOUT THE FIVE DESIGNATED MEDIA AREAS THIS STUDY EXPLORED

	Population	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Women (18+)	African-American Men % of Population
United States	308,745,538	29,442,711	15,810,736	13,631,975	6%
New York, NY (DMA)	21,050,074	3,463,527	1,602,648	1,860,879	8%
Atlanta, GA (DMA)	6,530,223	1,840,593	868,902	971,691	13%
Chicago, IL (DMA)	9,742,200	1,690,195	786,822	903,373	8%
Washington, DC-MD (DMA)	6,428,857	1,503,373	710,559	792,814	11%
Los Angeles, CA (DMA)	17,741,181	1,243,231	599,377	643,854	3%

Source: Marketing Systems Group, October 2011.

This analysis identifies the media outlets, both mainstream and black-oriented, that have the highest reach to African-American men. Those working to promote a fairer and more accurate depiction of black men and boys in the media can use this research to identify outlets and sources to target in their efforts.

In reporting our findings and recommendations, we use the terms “black” and “African American” interchangeably to describe people who identified themselves using either of those terms when responding to the industry researchers who collected the data sets. We use the term “men” to describe males 18 years of age or older.

Findings

Overview of nationwide media

Across all five media platforms, sports and music-related content are the most popular among African-American men. Mainstream media has a larger reach to African-American men and African-American adults in general than media that target this population. However, black-oriented media does have a significantly higher concentration of African Americans (where the great majority of the audience or readership is African-American), and in the case of magazines like *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Essence*, it also delivers large reach. Both overall reach and concentration are important factors to consider when designing media interventions.

The current analysis identifies the top five to ten sources in each platform — print, broadcast, and online — based on their reach to adult African-American men, and where gender-specific data were not available, to adult African Americans. Table 2 shows the top 30 media sources, mainstream or black-oriented, across all platforms that reach at least a half million African-American men.

**TABLE 2. THE TOP NATIONWIDE (MAINSTREAM AND BLACK-ORIENTED) MEDIA SOURCES
BASED ON THEIR REACH TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
(CONTENT-GENERATING SOURCES ARE HIGHLIGHTED. TITLES IN BOLD INDICATE BLACK-ORIENTED MEDIA.)**

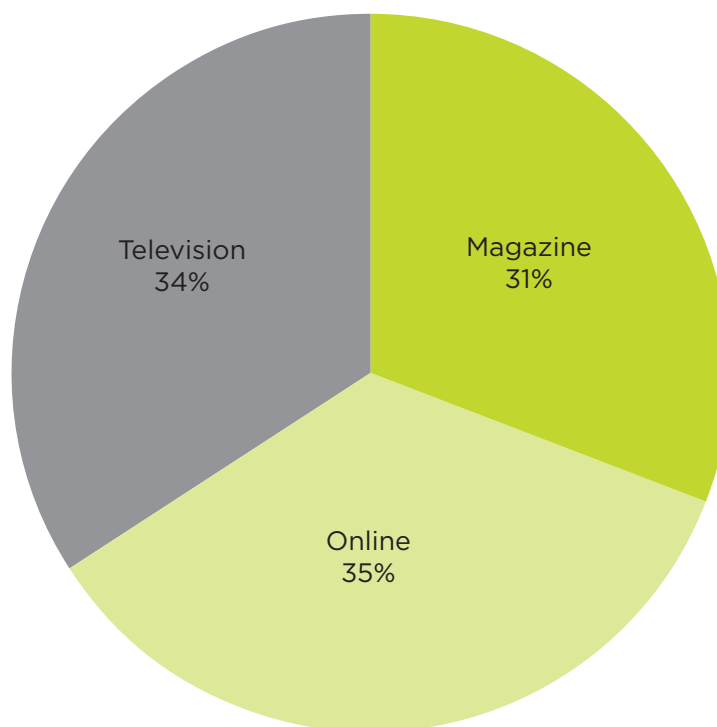
	Platform	Title (Mainstream)	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Adults (18+)	All Adults
1	ONLINE	Google.com	5,338,000	13,413,000	130,195,000
2	TV	Super Bowl XLV	5,050,000	10,043,000	93,711,000
3	ONLINE	Yahoo.com	4,952,000	12,742,000	113,768,000
4	ONLINE	Facebook	4,648,000	11,806,000	113,365,000
5	ONLINE	YouTube.com	3,874,000	9,428,000	88,045,000
6	TV	AFC Championship	3,792,000	6,367,000	48,953,000
7	TV	NFC Championship	3,727,000	6,068,000	46,672,000
8	TV	NBA Finals — Game 6	3,505,000	6,076,000	21,077,000
9	MAGAZINE	Ebony	3,434,000	9,863,000	10,776,000
10	TV	NFC Wild Card Playoff	3,384,000	5,269,000	35,640,000
11	MAGAZINE	Sports Illustrated	3,102,000	4,149,000	20,779,000
12	MAGAZINE	ESPN The Magazine	2,983,000	4,170,000	15,892,000
13	MAGAZINE	Jet	2,514,000	6,587,000	6,958,000
14	MAGAZINE	National Geographic	1,810,000	3,130,000	32,267,000
15	MAGAZINE	Men's Health	1,756,000	2,217,000	12,039,000
16	MAGAZINE	Black Enterprise	1,729,000	3,271,000	3,510,000
17	MAGAZINE	Essence	1,715,000	7,160,000	7,738,000
18	MAGAZINE	People	1,579,000	5,476,000	44,859,000
19	MAGAZINE	AARP The Magazine	1,554,000	4,928,000	35,665,000
20	ONLINE	Ask.com	1,524,000	4,327,000	35,441,000
21	TV	Hawaii Five-O	1,191,000	2,434,000	18,018,000
22	TV	Grammy Awards	1,181,000	3,333,000	23,190,000
23	TV	Glee	1,139,000	2,472,000	23,263,000
24	ONLINE	Weather.com	1,096,000	2,629,000	33,212,000
25	ONLINE	About.com	1,077,000	3,272,000	33,656,000
26	ONLINE	Myspace.com	1,025,000	2,483,000	20,918,000
27	ONLINE	Twitter.com	1,010,000	2,582,000	19,803,000
28	ONLINE	ESPN.com	898,000	1,483,000	15,220,000
29	TV	Academy Awards	801,000	2,254,000	35,101,000
30	TV	BET Awards*	665,000	1,787,000	1,997,000

Source: Magazines: 2011 Spring GfK MRI Prototype Estimate, Run Date: 9/27/2011; Television: The Nielsen Company, NPM, Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11 based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes; Online: Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2, August 2011; Publishers' statements. * Average for BET Awards, after-party, and pre-show.

The data shows that online sites such as Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, and YouTube, and televised sporting events, especially those featuring the NFL and NBA, have the greatest reach to African-American men. However, advocates seeking to influence the content of these sources by reaching out to producers and writers might find little room for intervention. Content-generating sources, such as magazines, online portals, or newspapers are better choices. The good news is that there are many sources in these categories that offer both an opportunity for intervention and large reach. Magazines,

especially but not exclusively black-oriented magazines, emerge as the best vehicle for reaching African-American men. Nine of the top ten content generators are magazines, and their reach to African-American men is a little over 20 million per month. Titles include *Ebony*, *Sports Illustrated*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *Jet*, *National Geographic*, *Men's Health*, *Black Enterprise*, *Essence*, and *People*. The *AARP Magazine*, although membership-based, also has large reach to African-American men. The black-oriented magazines *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence* are by far the most effective vehicles for reaching African-American men across the country in that they promise maximum reach and concentration as well as opportunities for intervention.

FIGURE 1. CONSUMPTION OF MEDIA AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (TOP 30 SOURCES)



Source: *Media Market Research: Media Consumption Trends Among Black Men*, The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011.

We also looked at black-oriented media to see how they compare to one another and to mainstream media. These outlets are often targeted by advocates due to their perceived high concentration of African Americans.

**TABLE 3. THE TOP NATIONWIDE BLACK-ORIENTED MEDIA SOURCES
BASED ON REACH TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
(CONTENT-GENERATING SOURCES ARE HIGHLIGHTED)**

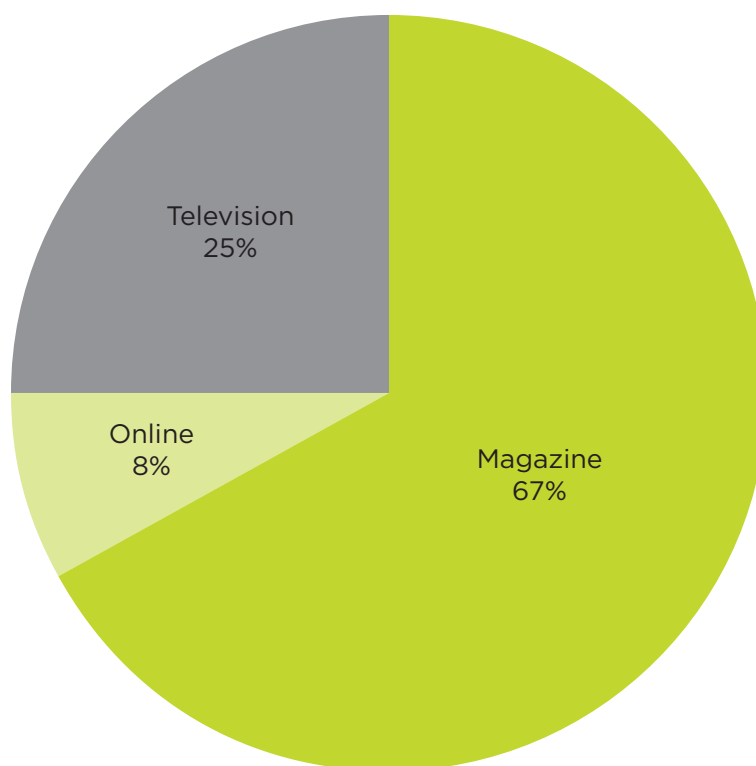
	Platform	Title /African-American-Targeted	African-American Men (18+)	All African-American Adults (+18)	Total Adult Reach
1	MAGAZINE	Ebony	3,434,000	9,863,000	10,776,000
2	MAGAZINE	Jet	2,514,000	6,587,000	6,958,000
3	MAGAZINE	Black Enterprise	1,729,000	3,271,000	3,510,000
4	MAGAZINE	Essence	1,715,000	7,160,000	7,738,000
5	ONLINE	Woven Urban Network	N/A	2,210,000	2,866,000*
6	TV	BET Awards, BET*	665,000	1,787,000	1,997,000
7	TV	Soul Train Red Carpet, BET	486,000	1,661,000	1,739,000
8	ONLINE	World Star Hip Hop	409,000	989,000	1,755,000
9	TV	106 & Party, BET	380,000	920,000	1,025,000
10	TV	42ND NAACP Image Awards, FOX	356,000	1,324,000	2,077,000
11	TV	In the Flow, FOX	346,000	754,000	2,149,000
12	TV	UNCF Evening of Stars, BET	316,000	1,213,000	1,265,000
13	TV	The Game, BET	274,000	807,000	913,000
14	TV	Are We There Yet, TBS	255,000	754,000	1,018,000
15	TV	Let's Stay Together, BET	226,000	718,000	779,000
16	TV	The BET Honors, BET	212,000	662,000	702,000
17	ONLINE	BlackVoices	202,000	677,000	1,556,000
18	ONLINE	DatPiff	201,000	353,000	862,000
19	ONLINE	BET Interactive	169,000	611,000	725,000
20	ONLINE	BlackPlanet	143,000	484,000	613,000
21	MAGAZINE	Heart & Soul Magazine	N/A		1,500,000*
22	MAGAZINE	The Source Magazine	N/A		1,500,000*
23	MAGAZINE	Vibe Magazine	N/A	N/A	300,000*

Source: Magazines: 2011 Spring GfK MRI Prototype Estimate, Run Date: 9/27/2011; Television: The Nielsen Company, NPM, Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11 based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes; Online: Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2, August 2011; Publishers' statements. * Average for BET Awards, after-party, and pre-show.

Unlike the most popular mainstream sources for African-American men, the top 20 sources of black-oriented media do not include sports-related content. Instead, lifestyle magazines and music-related TV shows top the list. Magazines — *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise* and *Essence* — lead the parade with their combined reach of 9.4 million.⁶ Music-related television shows, most of them one-time events such as the *BET Awards*, *Soul Train Red Carpet* or *106 & Party*, follow, but with far less reach to African-American men. World Star Hip Hop, a music-related website, has a larger African-American male audience than any of the television shows. Finally, a handful of television sitcoms are in the top 20, including *Are We There Yet?* and *Let's Stay Together*, which average 235,000 black adult male viewers each, a little more than the audience of popular online outlets such as Black Voices or DatPiff.

Black-oriented sources, with the exception of the top magazines and the online site World Star Hip Hop, have limited access to African-American men and the African-American community overall.

⁶ At the time of this study, readership data was not available for *Vibe* magazine, which resumed publication after shutting down for six months in 2009. The last time *Vibe* was included in readership surveys it ranked as high as *Ebony* and *Jet*.

FIGURE 2. CONSUMPTION OF BLACK-ORIENTED MEDIA AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (TOP 23 SOURCES)

Source: *Media Market Research: Media Consumption Trends Among Black Men*, The Opportunity Agenda, October 2011.

Television

American television viewing habits are still strong in spite of the many alternatives such as mobile phones and high-speed internet. Television still has many competitive advantages over other content streaming options. The general size, speed, and low maintenance of television, with available enhancements like cable, satellite television, video game consoles, on-demand systems, high-definition content, and digital video recording (DVR) and playback options, make it a top choice for most Americans. The average African-American household has four or more television sets and spends an average of seven hours and twelve minutes each day watching them.⁷

The analysis of television programming ratings that follows is based on Nielsen's National People Meter sample from September 20, 2010 to August 28, 2011. The National People Meter panel is used to produce ratings for national broadcasting, cable, and syndicated television programming. It is composed of randomly selected households that reflect the overall U.S. population. Nielsen uses electronic meters to continuously measure what shows are being watched and who is watching them.

Mainstream television programs

African-American men's viewing habits are very similar to those of African-American adults overall. The top 25 viewed shows by African-American adults as well as African-American men are all sporting events. The popularity of sports, especially football, mirrors the general population. The NBA finals,

⁷ Source: "The State of the African-American Consumer," The Nielsen Company and The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), September 2011.

however, are far more popular with the African-American community than the population overall. Among the top 50 shows, African-American viewing habits mirror those of the general population, except that the *Academy Awards* are viewed proportionately less by African Americans.

TABLE 4. TOP FIVE TELEVISION PROGRAMS AMONG ALL AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS

Originator	Program Name	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Adults (18+)	Total Viewers (18+)
FOX	Super Bowl XLV	5,050,000	10,043,000	93,711,000
CBS	AFC Championship	3,792,000	6,367,000	48,953,000
ABC	NBA Finals — Game 6	3,505,000	6,076,000	21,077,000
FOX	NFC Championship	3,727,000	6,068,000	46,672,000
FOX	NFC Wild Card Playoff	3,384,000	5,269,000	35,640,000

Source: The Nielsen Company, NPM. The Nielsen Company, NPM. Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11. Based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes.

The highest viewed non-sporting event by African Americans is the *Grammy Awards* at 3.3 million viewers, which is the only non-sporting program in the top 55. When we look at all non-sporting events on television, the popularity of music programs among African Americans is clear. Six of the top ten most watched non-sporting programs are music-related, and two of them, *The BET Awards* and the *Soul Train Red Carpet Awards*, are black-oriented and are competitive with mainstream programs. *The BET Awards* are slightly more popular with African-American men, while the *Soul Train Red Carpet Awards* are slightly less popular when compared to the African-American adult community as a whole.

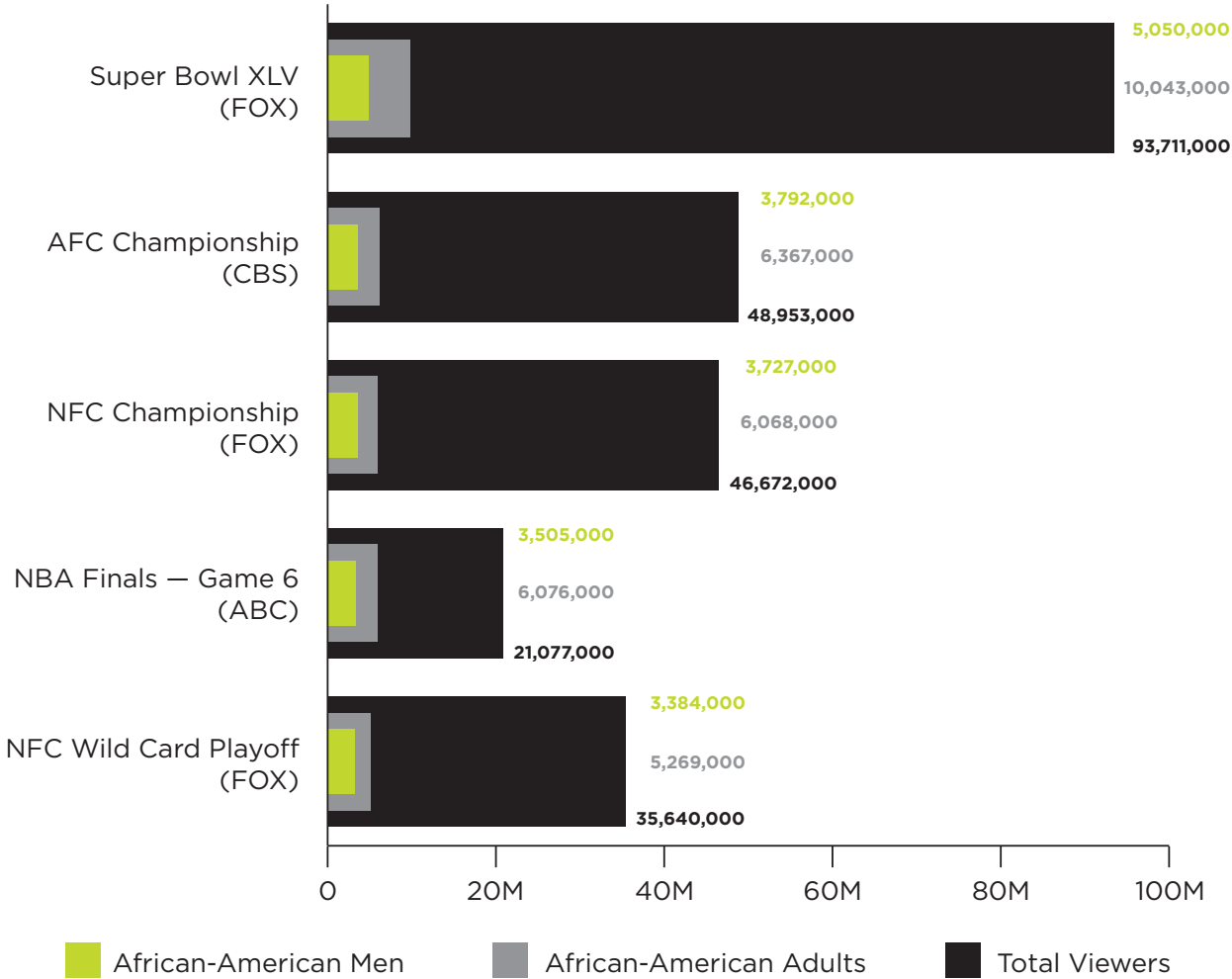
FIGURE 3. TOP NON-SPORTS TELEVISION PROGRAMS AMONG ALL AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS (BOLD INDICATES ANNUAL EVENT PLAYED ONCE IN THE SEASON EXAMINED)

Originator	Program Name	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Adults (18+)	Total Viewers (18+)
CBS	Grammy Awards	1,181,000	3,333,000	23,190,000
FOX	Glee	1,139,000	2,472,000	23,263,000
CBS	Hawaii Five-O	1,191,000	2,434,000	18,018,000
ABC	Academy Awards	801,000	2,254,000	35,101,000
ABC	Dancing With The Stars	486,000	2,091,000	19,674,000
ABC	Barbara Walters Special	447,000	2,082,000	12,355,000
FOX	American Idol	585,000	1,910,000	20,961,000
BET	BET Awards*	665,000	1,787,000	1,997,000
BET	Soul Train Red Carpet	486,000	1,661,000	1,739,000
CBS	The Young and the Restless	346,000	1,383,000	4,553,000

* Average for BET Awards, after-party, and pre-show.

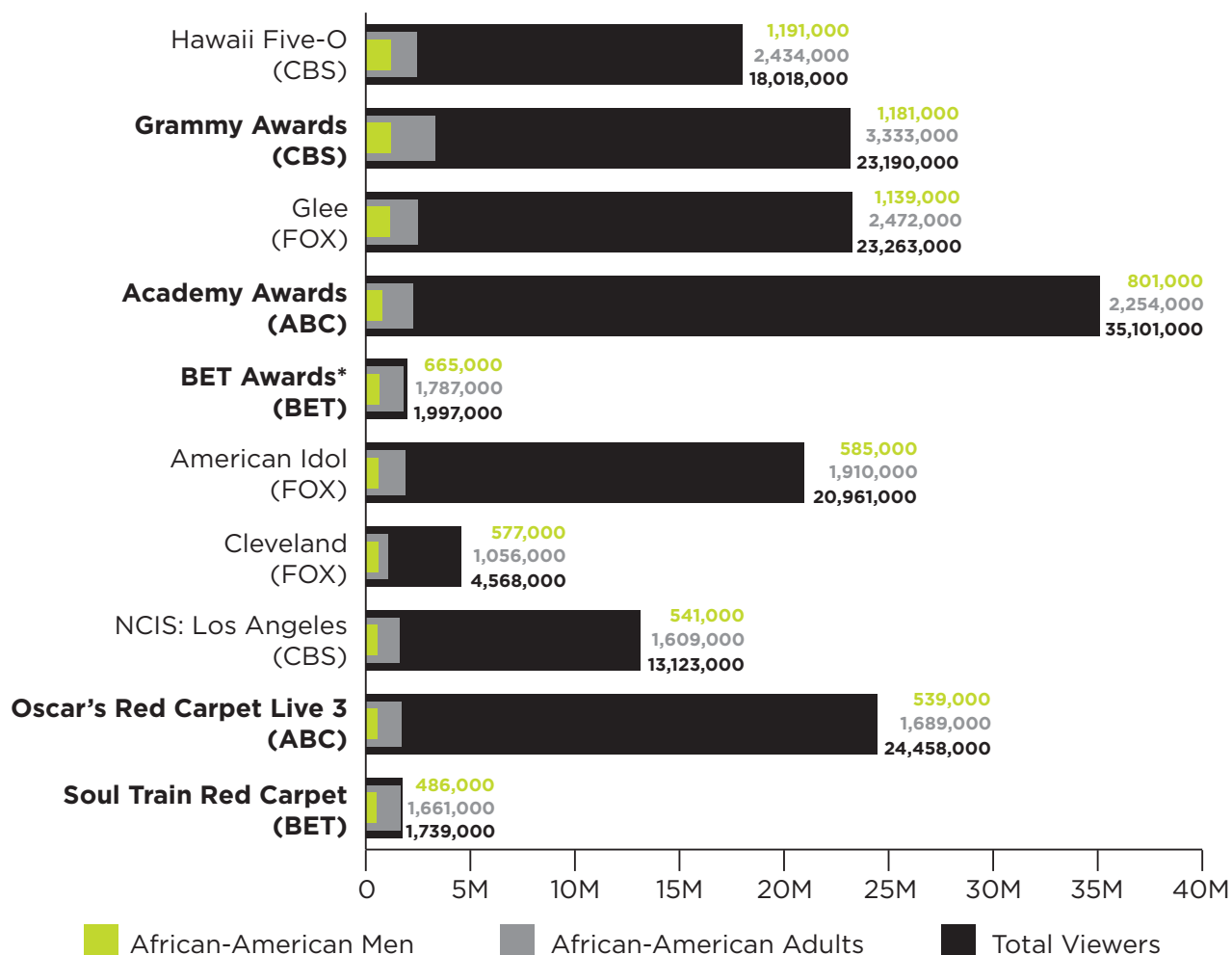
Source: The Nielsen Company, NPM. Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11. Based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes.

FIGURE 4. TOP FIVE TELEVISION PROGRAMS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN



Source: The Nielsen Company, NPM. Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11. Based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes.

FIGURE 5. TOP NON-SPORTS TELEVISION PROGRAMMING AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
(**BOLD INDICATES ANNUAL EVENT PLAYED ONCE IN THE SEASON EXAMINED**)



* Average for BET Awards, after-party, and pre-show.

Source: The Nielsen Company, NPM. Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11. Based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes.

Black-oriented television programs

Not surprisingly, programs that specifically target African Americans generally have a predominantly African-American audience. On average, 85 percent of viewers of these programs are African-American. One exception is *The NAACP Image Awards*, 36 percent of whose viewership in 2011 was non-African-American.

The BET Network is dominant in its reach among black-oriented TV programs. Eight of the top ten black-oriented shows air on BET. Seven of the top shows with the largest reach to African-American adults and six with the largest reach to African-American men are music-related and feature large annual events. A few examples include the *BET Awards*, *Soul Train Red Carpet Awards*, *42nd NAACP Image Awards*, *UNCF Evening of Stars*, and *106 & Park*.

Black-oriented situation comedies are on the list of top ten most-watched shows by African Americans. *Let's Stay Together* on BET and *Tyler Perry's The Family That Prays* on TBS each attract an average of 224,000 African-American men and about 800,000 African-American adults. Sitcoms are popular

with African-American men as well. *In the Flow*, which airs on FOX, has an audience of 346,000 men. Situation comedies offer opportunities for intervention and impact on a frequent basis since they are regularly scheduled programs, as opposed to the most-watched music events which happen once a year.

Because of its large reach and high concentration among African Americans, BET Network may be the best option for television-based advocacy.

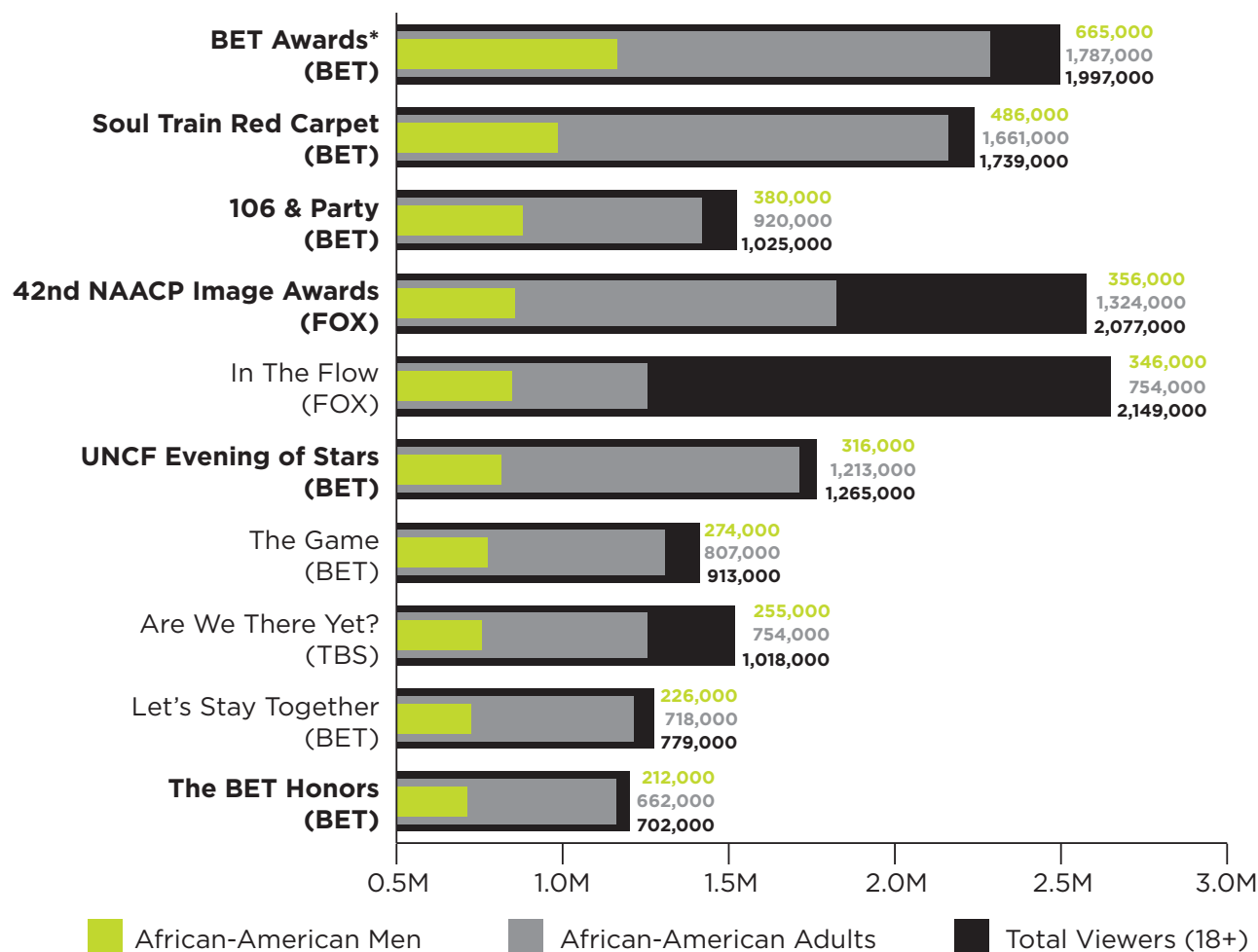
TABLE 5. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED TELEVISION PROGRAMS AMONG ALL AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS
(**BOLD INDICATES ANNUAL EVENT PLAYED ONCE IN THE SEASON EXAMINED**)

Originator	Program Name	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Adults (18+)	Total Viewers (18+)
BET	BET Awards*	665,000	1,787,000	1,997,000
BET	Soul Train Red Carpet	486,000	1,661,000	1,739,000
FOX	42nd NAACP Image Awards	356,000	1,324,000	2,077,000
BET	UNCF Evening of Stars	316,000	1,213,000	1,265,000
BET	Soul Train Awards	289,000	862,000	943,000
BET	106 & Party	380,000	920,000	1,025,000
TBS	Tyler Perry's The Family That Preys	223,000	905,000	1,481,000
BET	The Game	274,000	807,000	913,000
BET	Celebration of Gospel	197,000	733,000	768,000
BET	Let's Stay Together	226,000	718,000	779,000

Source: The Nielsen Company, NPM. Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11. Based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes.

*Average for BET Awards, after-party, and pre-show.

FIGURE 6. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED TELEVISION PROGRAMS AMONG ALL AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
(**BOLD INDICATES ANNUAL EVENT PLAYED ONCE IN THE SEASON EXAMINED**)



* Average for BET Awards, after-party, and pre-show.

Source: The Nielsen Company, NPM. Season-to-date 9/20/10-8/28/11. Based on Live +SD TV only, excluding programs less than 30 minutes.

Magazines

To get a complete view of the space magazines occupy in the lives of African-American men, we used data provided by the Survey of the American Consumer conducted by GfK MRI, also known as the Survey.⁸

Magazines are the only national media platform where certain black-oriented titles surpass mainstream titles in their reach to African-American men and African-American adults in general. Four of the top ten magazines with the largest readership of African-American adults are black-oriented: *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Jet*, and *Black Enterprise*. *Ebony*, which is number one in readership for both African-American men and all African-American adults, delivers nearly twice the number of African-American adults as *People* magazine, which has the largest African-American adult readership among mainstream

8 Source: 2011 Spring GfK MRI, PE – Publisher’s Estimate. Base: Adults (18+)—Population: 229,264,000. Run Date: 9/27/2011. The Survey provides demographic, lifestyle, and attitudinal information about the audience of a magazine and is the industry standard for magazine audience ratings in the United States.

titles (9.86 million for *Ebony* and 5.47 million for *People*). The other three titles, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence*, are ranked fourth, seventh, and eighth, respectively among African-American men as shown in Figure 7.

Sports magazines are also a popular genre among African-American men. *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* are the second and third most popular magazines with about 3 million African-American men reading each of them monthly. Other magazines popular with both African-American men and adult men in general include *National Geographic*, *Men's Health*, *People*, and *AARP The Magazine*.

The magazine preferences of African-American men generally overlap with those of African-American adults as a whole. The exceptions are *Better Homes & Gardens*, *O - The Oprah Magazine*, and *AARP The Bulletin*, which are less popular with men than with women, and *National Geographic*, *Men's Health*, and *Men's Fitness*, which are more popular with men than with women.

Ebony, *Essence*, *Jet*, and *Black Enterprise* are the only black-oriented magazines that are monitored and surveyed by GfK MRI. To look more broadly at this market and include more black-oriented magazines, we have to rely on data supplied by the publishers, which are not verified by GfK MRI's Survey. *Heart & Soul Magazine*, *The Source* and *Vibe Magazine* each report a circulation of 300,000. *Heart & Soul Magazine* and *The Source* claim total readership of 1.5 million each, according to their own readership studies.⁹ Other black-oriented magazines include *Uptown Magazine* with a circulation of 225,000, *XXL Magazine* with a circulation of 210,000, and *American Legacy Magazine*. No information about the race and gender of the circulation and readership of any of these magazines was available.

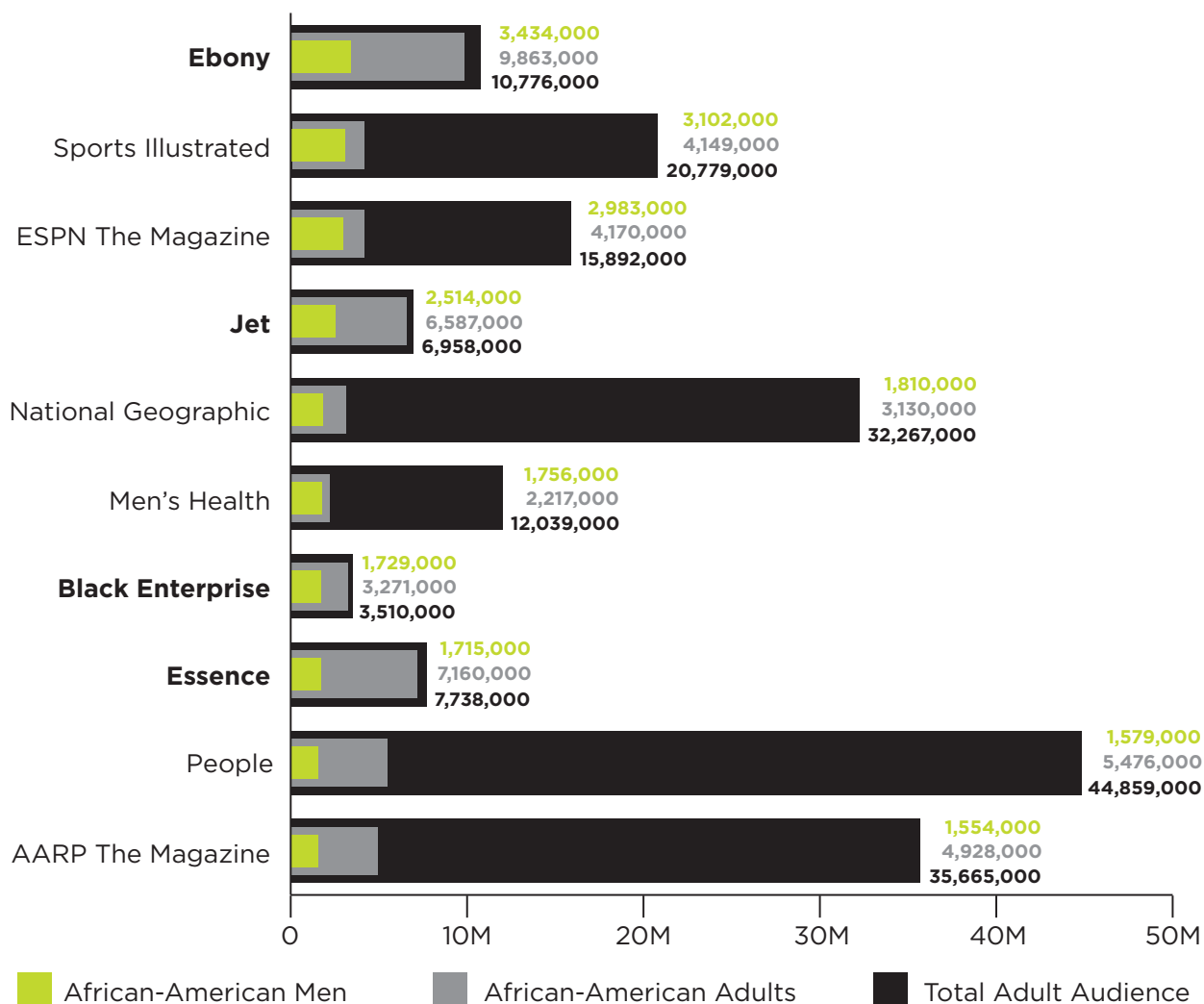
**TABLE 6. TOP MAGAZINES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS
(BOLD INDICATES BLACK-ORIENTED MAGAZINES)**

Title	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Men (18+)	Total Readership (18+)
Ebony	9,863,000	3,434,000	10,776,000
Essence	7,160,000	1,715,000	7,738,000
Jet	6,587,000	2,514,000	6,958,000
People	5,476,000	1,579,000	44,859,000
Better Homes & Gardens	5,261,000	N/A	39,562,000
AARP The Magazine	4,928,000	1,554,000	35,665,000
O, The Oprah Magazine	4,363,000	N/A	15,422,000
ESPN The Magazine	4,170,000	2,983,000	15,892,000
Sports Illustrated	4,149,000	3,102,000	20,779,000
AARP, The Bulletin	3,601,000	N/A	29,700,000
Black Enterprise	3,271,000	1,729,000	3,510,000

Source: 2011 Spring GfK MRI Prototype Estimate, Run Date: 9/27/2011.

9 Before its brief hiatus in 2009, *Vibe* had a circulation of 818,000.

FIGURE 7. TOP MAGAZINES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
(**BOLD INDICATES BLACK-ORIENTED MAGAZINES**)



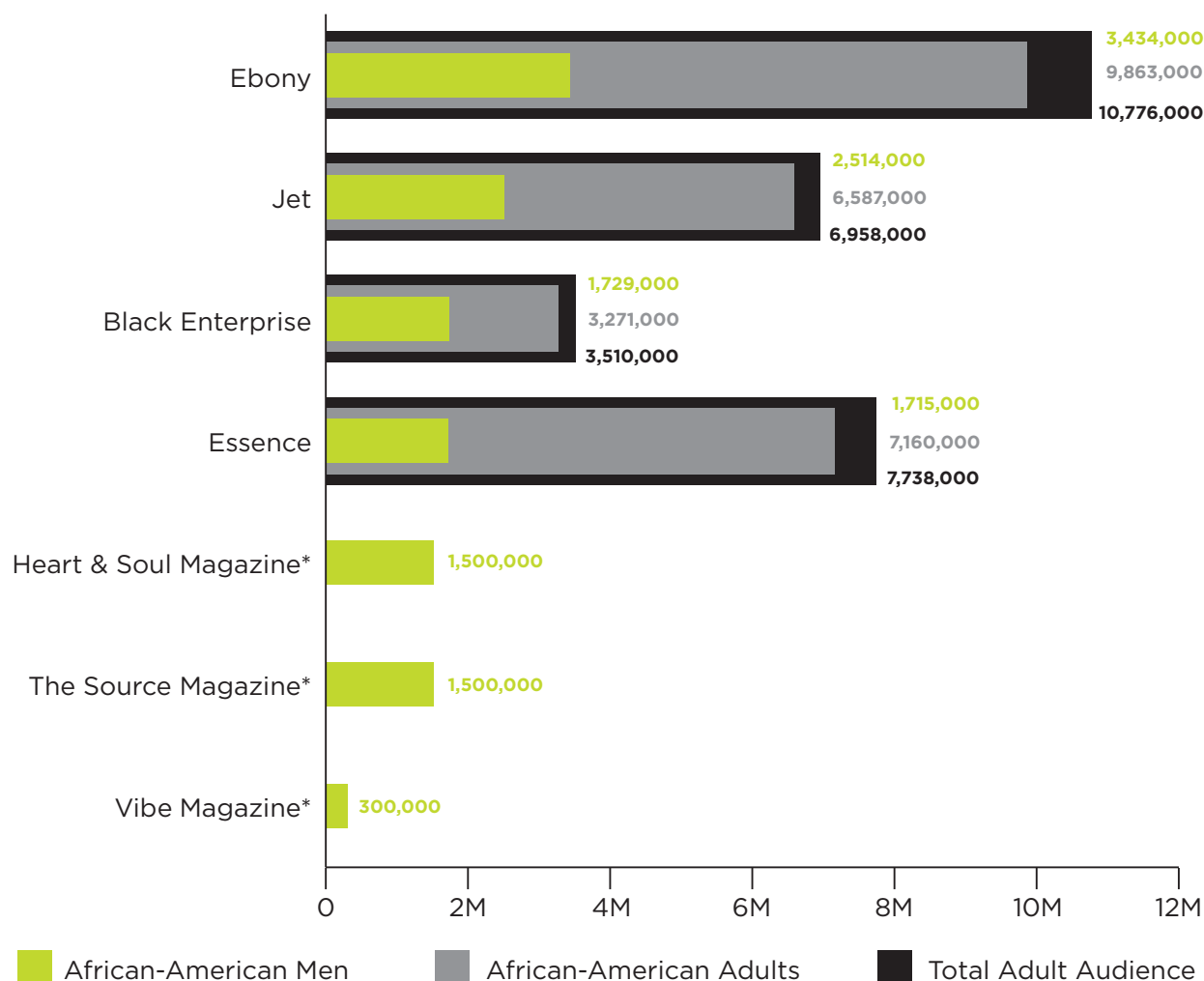
Source: 2011 Spring GfK MRI Prototype Estimate, Run Date: 9/27/2011.

TABLE 7. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED MAGAZINES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS

Title	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Men (18+)	Total Adult Audience (18+)
Ebony	9,863,000	3,434,000	10,776,000
Essence	7,160,000	1,715,000	7,738,000
Jet	6,587,000	2,514,000	6,958,000
Black Enterprise	3,271,000	1,729,000	3,510,000
Heart & Soul Magazine*	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
The Source Magazine*	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
Vibe Magazine*	300,000	300,000	300,000

Source: 2011 Spring GfK MRI Prototype Estimate, Run Date: 9/27/2011. *Data provided by the publisher.

FIGURE 8. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED MAGAZINES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN



Source: 2011 Spring GfK MRI Prototype Estimate, Run Date: 9/27/2011. *Data provided by the publisher.

Online

African Americans are using the internet in higher percentages than in years past. An estimated 67 percent of African-American adults are currently online, according to a Pew Internet & American Life survey conducted in May 2011,¹⁰ compared to 78 percent of Americans overall.

Analyzing the public’s online media choices is challenging. The digital landscape is more complex than traditional media because technological advances are being made almost daily and the methods used to monitor user preferences are in flux. Significant discrepancies exist because of varying methods of monitoring traffic. For example, TheGrio.com, a black-oriented news website, is shown by ComScore, a company that measures online audiences, to have more than half a million unique visitors.¹¹ However, TheGrio.com is not included in the most recent Nielsen’s @ Plan Optimizing Report. There are also websites that Nielsen monitors and ComScore does not. For the purposes of this analysis we

10 Pew Research Center, Pew Internet & American Life Project’s Spring Tracking Survey “Usage Over Time,” May 2011. <http://www.pewinternet.org/Trend-Data/Whos-online.aspx>.

11 Data shown in “State of the Media 2011” by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, Pew Research Center.

obtained data from the Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report¹² and, in the few places where there were gaps, we referred to other sources to complete our overview.

The most relevant and dominant online outlets among African Americans are social media sites, specific content sites, search engine sites, targeted advertising networks, and web portals:

- ▶ **Social media** are online services, platforms, or sites that focus on building social networks or relations among people, who, for example, share interests and/or activities. Popular examples are Facebook, Twitter, and BlackPlanet.
- ▶ **Specific content sites** are websites whose business is the creation and distribution of original content. Examples include ESPN, Black Voices, Essence.com, and Bossip.com.
- ▶ **Search engine sites** are designed to search for information on the World Wide Web and FTP servers. The search results are generally presented in a list of results called “hits.” Google and Ask.com are examples of search engine sites.
- ▶ **Targeted advertising networks**, sometimes called “next generation” or “2.0” ad networks, utilize behavioral and contextual targeting technologies that have been built into an ad server. They specialize in using consumer clickstream¹³ data to enhance the value of the ad space they purchase. More specialized targeted networks include social graph technologies which attempt to enhance the value of ad space by using connections in social networks. Woven Urban Network, BET Networks, and Vibe LifeStyle Networks are examples of targeted advertising networks.
- ▶ **Web portals** are sites that provide a starting point or a gateway to other resources on the internet. Yahoo.com is an example of a web portal, and is the largest in the U.S.

Overview

The online habits of African-American adults are very similar to those of the general adult population of the U.S., with Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter being among the most popular sites. Only one of the top media sites, Woven Urban Network, is a black-oriented site, and it is not a single site but rather a targeted advertising network.

12 Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2 2011. Profile point estimates are based on the U.S. adult (18+) active online population of 164,926,743. Unique audience estimates for sites based on a 3-month average of online panel metered site visitation.

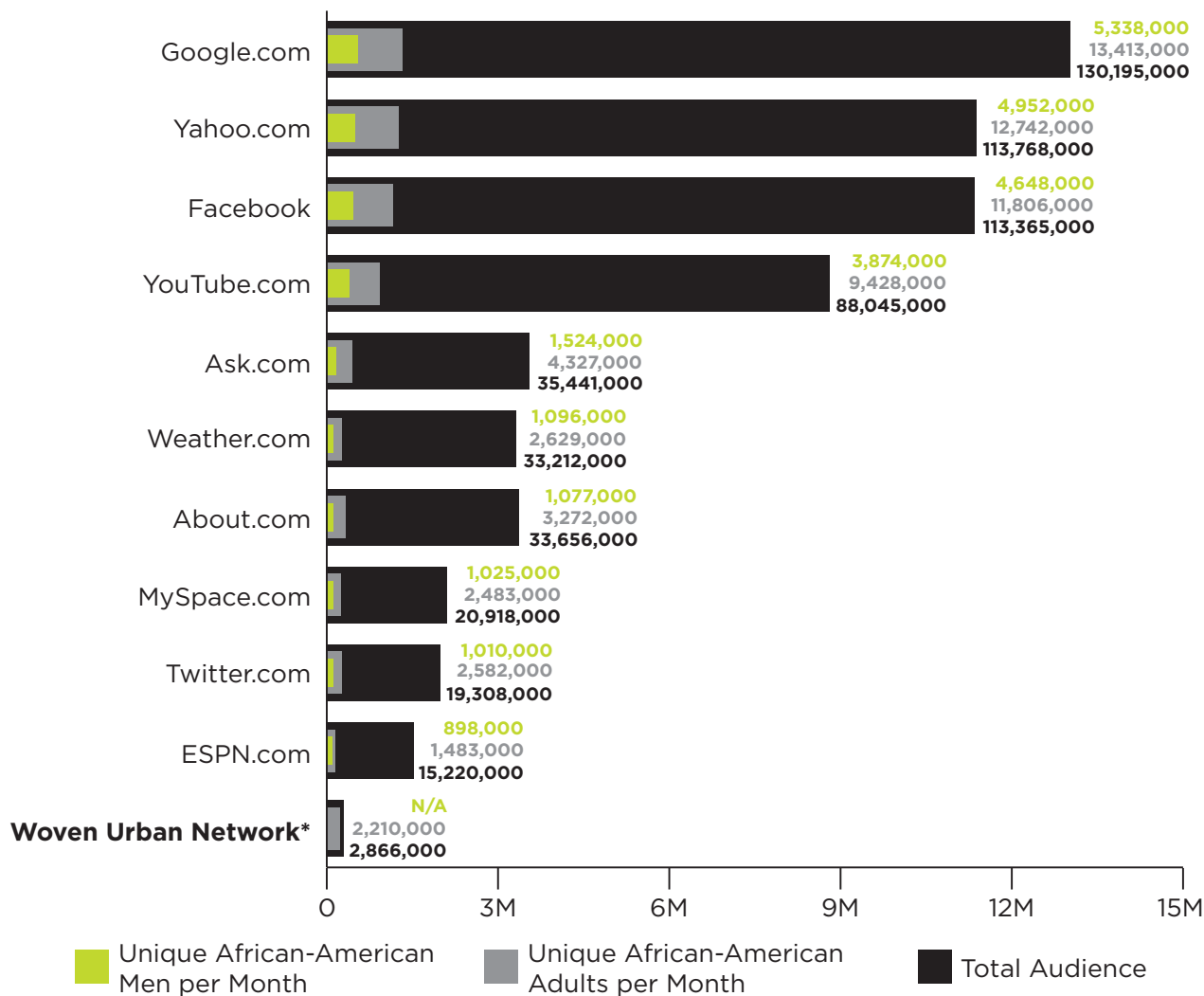
13 Clickstream is “the sequential path of mouse clicks executed by a user when browsing one or more Web sites, analyzed to determine interest in particular content. Clickstream analysis is useful for web activity analysis, software testing, market research, and for analyzing employee productivity.” Source: Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/clickstream>.

**TABLE 8. TOP ONLINE SITES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS
(BOLD INDICATES BLACK-ORIENTED MEDIA)**

Name	Unique African-American Men per Month (18+)	Unique African-American Adults per Month (18+)	Total Unique Adults per Month (18+)
Google.com	5,338,000	13,413,000	130,195,000
Yahoo.com	4,952,000	12,742,000	113,768,000
Facebook	4,648,000	11,806,000	113,365,000
Youtube.com	3,874,000	9,428,000	88,045,000
Ask.com	1,524,000	4,327,000	35,441,000
About.com	1,077,000	3,272,000	33,656,000
Weather.com	1,096,000	2,629,000	33,212,000
Twitter.com	1,010,000	2,582,000	19,803,000
Myspace.com	1,025,000	2,483,000	20,918,000
Woven Urban Network*	N/A	2,210,000	2,866,000

Source: Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2, August 2011. *Data provided by source.

FIGURE 9. TOP ONLINE SITES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
(**BOLD INDICATES BLACK-ORIENTED MEDIA**)



Source: Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2, August 2011. *Data provided by source.

Social media

African Americans are more socially active online than other ethnic groups.¹⁴ They also use social and professional online networking sites at a higher rate than whites. Seventy-one percent of African Americans said they used online networking sites like LinkedIn or Facebook, compared with 58 percent of whites.¹⁵ Nearly 12 million African-American adults visit Facebook each month, including 4.65 million men. Twitter and MySpace are also very popular with African-American men: each attracts a little more than a million unique visits per month. BlackPlanet, a social network targeting African Americans, is the fifth most popular black-oriented site among African-American men, with 143,000 of them visiting the site at least once a month.

14 Georgetown University and Ogilvy Public Relations, “Social Media Plays Greater Role in Cause Engagement for African Americans and Hispanics,” May 2011 http://csic.georgetown.edu/OPR_SM_GT_Ethnicity_FS_Final.pdf.

15 “Usage Over Time.” Pew Internet & American Life Project, May 2010.

Specific content sites

Mirroring the habits of the general adult population, African Americans go to specific content sites such as YouTube, About.com, Weather.com, ESPN.com, and Yahoo! in large numbers on a regular basis. Among African-American men the dominance of specific content sites is quite pronounced: five of their top ten mass media sites are specific content sites. The most popular black-oriented sites are music sites: World Star Hip Hop, Black Voices, DatPiff and Live Mixtapes.com. These sites have 145,000 to 409,000 unique visits from African-American men per month.

Gaming sites are very popular among African-American men although they did not make it to the list of top ten. They provide content and information about video, role-playing, and board games. African-American men visit more than 375 gaming sites including Electronic Arts Online, IGN Entertainment Network, and Wild Tangent Network. The traffic ranges from a few thousand to a million unique visits per month by African-American men.

News websites are popular with African Americans: 35 percent say they get most of their news on the internet, making the internet the second most-turned-to source, after television, for news.¹⁶ Three black-oriented news websites attract a significant number of unique visitors: NBC's The Griot, TheRoot.com, owned by *The Washington Post*, and Radio One's NewsOne.

TABLE 9. BLACK-ORIENTED NEWS WEBSITES TRAFFIC

Title	Unique Visitors
The Griot	671,000
The Root	545,000
NewsOne	359,000

Source: State of the Media 2011, Project in Excellence in Journalism, Pew Research Center.¹⁷

Search engines

When it comes to search engines, African-American adults mirror the habits of the general population: they visit Google more than any other site on the web. Every month Google receives 5.3 million unique visits from African-American men, and 13.4 unique visits from African-American adults. Yahoo! occupies the second position, but because it is also a web portal, a news aggregator, and an e-mailbox, it is not known how many people are visiting Yahoo! for its search engine capabilities alone. Ask.com and Bing are two other popular search engines, with the former being more popular with African Americans and the latter more popular with whites.

Targeted advertising networks

Targeted advertising networks are, by definition, designed to connect advertisers with their target audiences and can be used to reach African-American adults. Two networks made it to the list of top ten black-oriented sources, Woven Urban Network with 2.2 million African-American adults and BET Interactive Network with 611,000 (see Table 10).

¹⁶ "Internet Gains on Television as Public's Main News Source," Pew Center for People and the Press, January 4, 2011.

¹⁷ It should be noted that the numbers for TheRoot.com were provided by the publisher while the numbers for the other two websites were provided by ComScore. A demographic breakdown of their audiences was not available.

Web portals

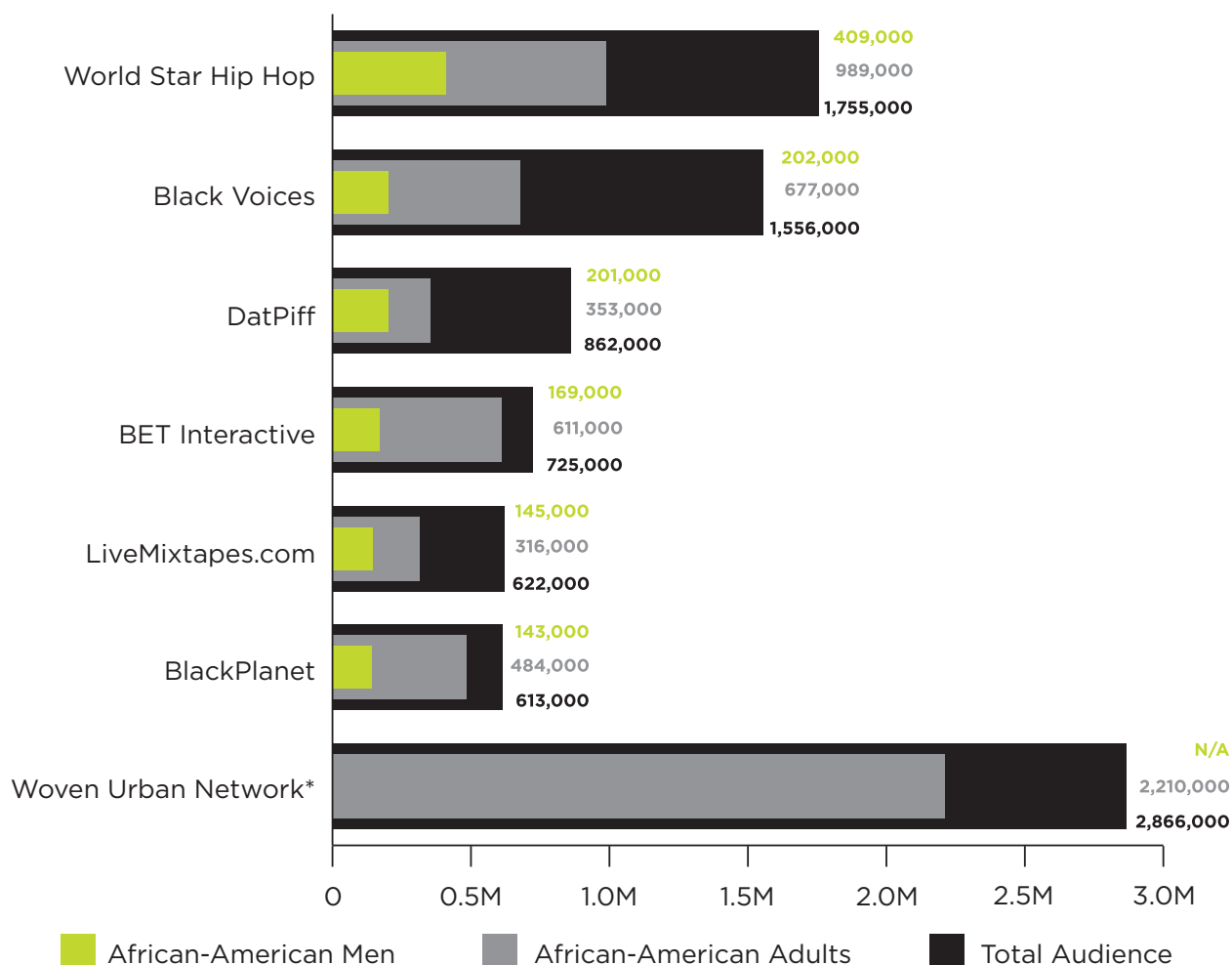
Yahoo! is many things: a web portal, a search engine, a news aggregator, a shopping center, an e-mailbox, a travel directory, a horoscope provider, and a games center. It is also the second most popular site with African-American men, with 5 million unique visits per month. Due to its popularity, size, and versatility, Yahoo! warrants special attention as a means of reaching African-American men, and African-American adults in general.

TABLE 10. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED ONLINE SITES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS

Title	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Men (18+)	Total Audience
World Star Hip Hop	989,000	409,000	1,755,000
Black Voices	677,000	202,000	1,556,000
BET Interactive	611,000	169,000	725,000
BlackPlanet	484,000	143,000	613,000
Bossip.com	371,000	89,000	633,105
DatPiff	353,000	201,000	862,000
Woven Urban Network*	N/A	2,210,000	2,866,000

Source: Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2, August 2011. *Data provided by source.

FIGURE 10. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED ONLINE SITES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN



Source: Nielsen @ Plan Site Optimizing Report; Nielsen @ Plan Release 2, August 2011. *Data provided by source.

Newspapers

In addition to looking at the three mainstream newspapers with a nationwide circulation — *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, we looked at regional daily papers in the five top media markets with the largest African-American populations: New York/New Jersey, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C./Virginia/Maryland.

Newspaper audience is measured by circulation and readership. Circulation is the number of printed newspaper copies sold and is audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC). Readership is the number of adults in a market who read the newspaper, including “pass-along” readers (*i.e.*, a single copy of a newspaper can be read by numerous individuals). Readership numbers are determined through surveys which also provide demographic, lifestyle, and purchasing behavior information. Most newspapers targeting African-American communities have small circulations and low readership and are therefore not represented in the readership surveys.

Our analysis is based on data from several different sources including Audit Bureau of Circulations, Audit 2010 and 2011; American Research Surveys, 2009; The Media Audit March/April 2011; GfK

MRI Doublebase 2011; Scarborough Research, and Scarborough 2011. The population estimates for the United States and the five designated market areas also known as media markets were provided by Marketing Systems Group, October 2011.

National newspapers

African-American adults comprise a relatively small segment of the overall readership of most mainstream newspapers, whose readership tends to reflect the racial makeup of the population the media market serves. There are four newspapers — *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Chicago Tribune's RedEye*, *The Washington Examiner* and *Express* — where African-American men are overrepresented in the newspapers' readership relative to their presence in the population.

TABLE 11. TOP NEWSPAPERS WITH NATIONWIDE CIRCULATION AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN

	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adult (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Readership	Circulation	U.S. African-American Men (18+) %	U.S. African-American Adults (18+) %
USA Today	256,000	8%	400,000	13%	3,200,000	1,829,099	6%	9%
The Wall Street Journal	110,400	5%	117,600	5%	2,400,000	1,678,498	6%	9%
The New York Times	N/A	N/A	163,000	7%	2,314,000	N/A	6%	9%

Source: GfK MRI Doublebase 2011 and publishers' statements.

There are some newspapers that attract men in larger numbers than women. Nationwide, *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* draw more African-American men than women; men make up 95 percent and 65 percent of those papers' African-American readerships, respectively.¹⁸ In Los Angeles, men make up 60 percent of the African-American readership of the *Los Angeles Times*. Only *Metro New York*, a free daily newspaper, and *The Chicago Tribune* skew significantly more towards women, who make up about 75 percent of each paper's African-American readership.

Nationwide and across the media markets we analyzed, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *New York Daily News*, and *USA Today* have the largest reach to African-American men. However, the concentration of African-American readers is still small, ranging from 8 to 14 percent.

¹⁸ Gender breakdown among national African-American circulation or readership was not available for *The New York Times*, the only other national newspaper.

Mainstream newspapers by media market

Media Market of New York

New York City is the largest media market in the country and has the most mainstream daily newspapers among the five markets we looked at. Adult African Americans and African-American men make up 16 and 8 percent of the population of the media market, respectively. Looking closely at reach and concentration for African-American men, *The Daily News* tops both with a reach of about 300,000 and a 14 percent concentration. *The New York Post* follows in reach, but *Metro* has a higher concentration of African-American men.

TABLE 12. TOP NEWSPAPERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF NEW YORK
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 3.34M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 1.6M

Newspaper	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adult (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Readership	Circulation	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
New York Daily News	301,200	14%	577,100	26%	2,225,100	512,520	8%	16%
New York Post	151,382	7%	279,628	14%	2,051,850	522,874	8%	16%
New York Times	90,300	6%	161,500	11%	1,472,000	386,000	8%	16%
Metro New York	70,484	11%	205,045	32%	640,765	328,296	8%	16%
AM New York	59,491	8%	132,201	18%	726,380	338,139	8%	16%
Newsday	26,621	3%	54,329	6%	905,476	298,759	8%	16%

Source: Scarborough 2011, Audit Bureau of Circulations Fas-Fax March 31, 2011, and publishers' statements.

Media Market of Atlanta

Although New York has a larger black population in terms of absolute numbers, Atlanta's media market enjoys a higher concentration of African-American men and adults — 13 percent and 28 percent, respectively. The Atlanta market is unique because it is served by only one daily newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. One-third of that newspaper's readership is African-American, and a little over one-eighth is African-American men, reflecting the demographic composition of the media market of Atlanta.

TABLE 13. TOP NEWSPAPERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF ATLANTA
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.84M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 868,902

Newspaper	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adult (18+)	African-American Adults (18+) Concentration	Total Readership	Circulation	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
Atlanta Journal-Constitution	93,003	13%	221,778	31%	715,413	183,415	13%	28%

Source: Publisher's statement.

Media Market of Chicago

There are four daily newspapers in the Chicago media market. In that city, more African-American men read the *Chicago Sun-Times* than any other mainstream newspaper, and make up 14 percent of the newspaper's readership even though African-American men represent only 8 percent of the population in that market. The *Chicago Sun-Times* is very popular among African-American adults generally, reaching a little more than one out of every four. The other newspapers have a significantly smaller reach: *RedEye*, for example, reaches just over 77,000 African-American men and 157,000 African-American adults in total. Although its reach may be small, *RedEye* does offer a high concentration of African-American adults, who make up one out of three of its readers.

TABLE 14. TOP NEWSPAPERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF CHICAGO
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.69M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 786,822

Newspaper	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adult (18+)	African-American Adults (18+) Concentration	Total Readership	Circulation	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
Chicago Sun-Times	334,505	14%	624,097	27%	2,327,105	449,764	8%	17%
RedEye	77,007	17%	157,158	34%	462,229	250,000	8%	17%
Chicago Tribune	56,004	4%	154,011	11%	1,400,098	508,616	8%	17%
Daily Herald	18,629	3%	33,871	6%	609,531	113,403	8%	17%

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations Audit 2010, Readership: Scarborough 2010 and 2011.

Media Market of Washington, D.C.

The mainstream newspapers in the media market of Washington, D.C., have the largest concentration of African-American adults across the markets we examined, ranging from 23 to 53 percent. Two out of the three daily papers, *The Examiner* and *The Express*, also have the largest concentration of African-American men.

**TABLE 15. TOP NEWSPAPERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN
IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF WASHINGTON, D.C.
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.5M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 710,559**

Newspaper	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adult (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Readership	Circulation	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
Washington Post	143,869	11%	299,840	23%	1,299,878	545,345	11%	23%
Examiner	104,497	20%	211,881	40%	535,054	243,127	11%	23%
Express	81,432	25%	170,971	53%	324,747	181,286	11%	23%

Source: Media Audit March - April 2011, Certified Audit of Circulations Audit 2010, Scarborough 2010 and 2011.

Media Market of Los Angeles

At about 1.2 million, Los Angeles has the smallest population of African Americans of the five major media markets. The New York media market has almost three times as many African-American men as the Los Angeles DMA. *The Los Angeles Times* has by far the largest reach to African-American men at almost 78,000, but they represent only four percent of its total readership. The Los Angeles Newspaper Group (see table below) is a group of nine daily newspapers, the largest of which is the *Los Angeles Daily News* with an overall readership of 441,000, of whom about 75,000 are African-American.¹⁹

¹⁹ The readership of the *Los Angeles Daily News* is estimated by the publisher.

TABLE 16. TOP NEWSPAPERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF LOS ANGELES
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.24M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 599,377

Newspaper	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adult (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Readership	Circulation	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
Los Angeles Times	77,752	4%	128,704	7%	1,830,000	605,243	3%	7%
Los Angeles Newspaper Group	59,496	4%	118,993	8%	1,487,410	447,084	3%	7%
Orange County Register	3,537	1%	6,431	1%	643,114	267,881	3%	7%

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations 2009, Readership Scarborough 2009, Audit Bureau of Circulations Audit 2008.

Black-oriented newspapers by media market

Determining the consumption habits of African-American men with respect to black-oriented newspapers is difficult because these newspapers are not measured by relevant industry surveys, while the newspapers themselves do not always have up-to-date information regarding circulation, readership, or the demographics of their readership. Thus, while we have compiled a list for all five media markets, in most cases we are not able to provide verifiable information about the reach and impact that these publications have on adult African Americans in general or African-American men in particular. We have had to base our findings on the circulation numbers provided by the various publishers, since that was the only data available to us.

According to circulation numbers, the reach of black-oriented newspapers on a city-wide basis is rather low, although it may be greater within African-American neighborhoods. In any event, many more African Americans in all five media markets read mainstream newspapers than black-oriented newspapers. Among all the papers listed in the table below, only two have a circulation of over 100,000: *N'DIGO* and *The Chicago Citizen*. The median circulation of black-oriented newspapers is 30,000, compared to 386,000 for mainstream newspapers. On the other hand, black-oriented papers have a much higher concentration of African-American readers than mainstream newspapers do.

TABLE 17. TOP BLACK-ORIENTED NEWSPAPERS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKETS OF NEW YORK, ATLANTA, CHICAGO, WASHINGTON, D.C., AND LOS ANGELES

Black-Oriented Newspapers	Circulation	Total Readership	Black Male Readership
New York: African Americans (18+) 3.34m, African-American Men (18+) 1.6m			
The New York Carib News	67,000	N/A	N/A
The Culver Chronicles	60,000	N/A	N/A
Black Star News	50,000	N/A	N/A
The Hudson Valley Press	31,800	N/A	N/A
New York Beacon	28,000	N/A	45%
Our Time Press	20,000	N/A	N/A
New York Amsterdam News	11,958	N/A	N/A
Atlanta: African Americans (18+) 1.84m, African-American Men (18+) 868,902			
The Atlanta Inquirer	40,000	N/A	N/A
Atlanta Voice	30,000	N/A	41%
Atlanta Daily World	27,000	N/A	N/A
Chicago: African Americans (18+) 1.69m, African-American Men (18+) 786,822			
N'DIGO	125,000	625,000	39%
The Chicago Citizen	119,500	416,867	37%
The Chicago Crusader	90,071	N/A	N/A
The Gary Crusader	56,519	N/A	N/A
Chicago Defender	30,000	125,000	48%
North Lawndale Community News	15,000	N/A	N/A
Washington, D.C.: African Americans (18+) 1.5m, African-American Men (18+) 710,559			
Washington Sun	55,000	N/A	N/A
The Metro Herald	42,000	N/A	N/A
Washington Informer	16,980	41,601	N/A
The Prince George's Post	10,000	N/A	N/A
Washington Afro-American	8,374	N/A	N/A
Los Angeles: African Americans (18+) 1.24m, African-American Men (18+) 599,377			
Precinct Reporter Group	80,000	N/A	N/A
The Compton Bulletin/Carson Bulletin/ Wilmington Beacon/The Californian	75,000	N/A	N/A
Los Angeles Sentinel	30,000	N/A	N/A
L.A. Watts Times	25,000	N/A	N/A
Inland Valley News	15,000	N/A	N/A
The Pasadena/San Gabriel Valley Journal	12,000	N/A	N/A
American News	10,000	N/A	N/A

Source: Publishers' statements

Radio

Overview

To interpret the radio consumption habits of African-American men compared to African-American adults in general and the U.S. population as a whole, we used data produced by Arbitron, an international media and marketing research firm. Since radio is regional, we looked at data from the five media markets with the largest African-American populations: New York/New Jersey, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C./Virginia/Maryland.

There are numerous ratings systems that measure a radio station's popularity in a given market. We used "Weekly Cume Persons" — the estimated number of different individuals exposed to a station for at least five minutes in a quarter-hour during a one-week period. We looked specifically at programming between 6:00 a.m. and midnight ("six in the morning to midnight Arbitron daypart").

African-American adult men listen to music stations more than any other kind of radio, and the most popular stations tend to follow the Urban Contemporary²⁰ and Urban Adult Contemporary formats,²¹ except in New York City, which is dominated by Rhythmic Contemporary Hit Radio (Rhythmic CHR).²²

News stations have a relatively small reach to African-American men and African-American adults in general. Although in most of the media markets the list of top ten stations includes one or even two news stations, their reach to African-American men is a fraction of the reach of music stations.

Radio stations by media market

Media Market of New York City

In the New York media market, the top four radio stations with the largest reach to African Americans in general and to African-American men are black-oriented music stations. They include WWPR-FM, WQHT-FM, WBLS-FM, and WRKS-FM.²³ Each of these stations reaches close to half a million African-American men. The most popular stations use the Rhythmic CHR format. The only top-ten news station, WINS-AM, reaches a little over 200,000 African-American men (9 percent of its entire audience).

20 Urban Contemporary (UC) is a musical genre from the 1980s and 1990s that features recordings by rhythm-and-blues and soul artists with broad crossover appeal. UC began as an American radio format designed to appeal to advertisers who felt that "Black radio" would not reach a wide enough audience.

21 Urban Adult Contemporary (UAC) is similar to UC; radio stations using this format would not include rap music on their playlists.

22 Rhythmic Contemporary Hit Radio (Rhythmic CHR) includes a mix of electronic dance music, upbeat rhythmic, pop, hip-hop and R&B hits.

23 These stations also attract a significant number of non-black listeners.

TABLE 18. TOP RADIO STATIONS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF NEW YORK
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 3.34M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 1.6M

Station	Station Type	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Audience (18+)	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
WWPR-FM/ POWER 105.1	Rhythmic CHR	503,100	20%	1,144,500	45%	2,566,900	8%	16%
WQHT-FM/ HOT 97	Rhythmic CHR	489,700	19%	1,046,500	41%	2,547,500	8%	16%
WBLS- FM/107.5 WBLS	Urban AC	477,900	27%	1,146,000	65%	1,766,400	8%	16%
WRKS-FM/ KISS FM	Rhythmic CHR	468,000	27%	1,088,000	64%	1,709,800	8%	16%
WKTU- FM/103.5 KTU	Rhythmic CHR	322,800	7%	807,300	18%	4,486,800	8%	16%
WLTW- FM/106.7 LITE FM	Adult Contemporary	288,500	6%	706,600	15%	4,841,300	8%	16%
WHTZ-FM/ Z100	Pop CHR	220,400	6%	527,600	13%	4,002,200	8%	16%
WINS- AM/1010 WINS	All News	207,900	9%	384,000	17%	2,257,200	8%	16%
WCBS-FM/ WCBS FM 101.1	Classic Hits	183,200	8%	387,900	17%	2,325,900	8%	16%
WWFS-FM/ FRESH 102.7	Adult Contemporary	161,300	5%	355,000	11%	3,193,300	8%	16%

Source: Arbitron Inc. Average of Arbitron August 2011, July 2011, and June 2011.

Media Market of Atlanta

African Americans in Atlanta primarily “tune in” to listen to music programming. In this media market, Urban Contemporary and Urban Adult Contemporary formats are dominant. The four radio stations with the greatest reach to African-American men are black-oriented stations and their listenership is overwhelmingly African-American. The most popular stations, WVEE-FM and WALR-FM, deliver the best combination of reach and concentration for both adult African Americans in general and men in particular.

Atlanta has one news station among the top ten: WSB-AM reaches about one-ninth (70,000) of African-American men in Atlanta.

TABLE 19. TOP RADIO STATIONS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF ATLANTA
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.84M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 868,902

Station	Station Type	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Audience (18+)	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
WVEE-FM/V-103	Urban Contemporary	357,500	38%	759,500	80%	951,300	13%	28%
WALR-FM/KISS 104.1	Urban AC	311,300	39%	699,100	89%	789,800	13%	28%
WHTA-FM/HOT 107.9	Urban Contemporary	264,100	36%	511,000	71%	724,800	13%	28%
WAMJ-FM/MAJIC 107.5/97.5	Urban AC	250,100	36%	579,300	83%	694,100	13%	28%
WPZE-FM/PRAISE 102.5	Contemporary Inspirational	184,700	35%	470,000	89%	529,400	13%	28%
WWVA-FM/WILD 105.7 & 96.7	Rhythmic CHR	106,500	18%	173,500	29%	599,300	13%	28%
WSB-AM/AM 750	News Talk Information	70,600	7%	184,600	18%	1,012,500	13%	28%
WSB-FM/B98.5 FM	Adult Contemporary	68,500	5%	142,200	11%	1,260,400	13%	28%
WWWQ-FM/Q100	Pop CHR	50,700	5%	130,200	13%	1,000,500	13%	28%
WSTR-FM/STAR 94	Hot Adult Contemporary	49,100	5%	N/A	N/A	933,000	13%	28%

Source: Arbitron Inc. Average of Arbitron August 2011, July 2011, and June 2011.

Media Market of Chicago

As in the other markets, music stations are the top choices for both African-American men and African-American adults, and UAC and UC are the dominant formats. The top three stations with the largest reach to African Americans are black-oriented stations.

Chicago has only one news station on the top ten list, WBBM-AM, which reaches 67,000 African-American men, representing only five percent of its audience.

Based on these findings, WVAZ-FM and WGCI-FM would deliver the best combination of concentration and reach to African Americans.

TABLE 20. TOP RADIO STATIONS AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF CHICAGO
POPULATION: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.69M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 786,822

Station	Station Type	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Audience (18+)	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
WVAZ-FM/V-103	Urban AC	329,100	32%	827,000	79%	1,044,500	8%	17%
WGCI-FM/107.5 WGCI	Urban Contemporary	301,600	28%	654,100	61%	1,079,600	8%	17%
WPWX-FM/POWER 92	Urban Contemporary	187,400	27%	419,200	60%	703,900	8%	17%
WKSC-FM/103.5 KISS FM	Pop CHR	125,100	7%	236,600	14%	1,716,100	8%	17%
WBBM-FM/B96	Rhythmic CHR	112,500	7%	220,500	13%	1,682,600	8%	17%
WSRB-FM/REAL RADIO 106.3	Urban AC	101,900	N/A	265,300	N/A	—	8%	17%
WSRB-FM/REAL RADIO 106.3	New AC/Smooth Jazz	91,000	19%	258,400	53%	484,200	8%	17%
WBBM-AM/NEWSRADIO 780	All News	67,000	5%	143,400	10%	1,469,300	8%	17%
WILV-FM/REWIND 100.3	Adult Contemporary	65,300	5%	92,800	7%	1,417,400	8%	17%
WGRB-AM/INSPIRATION 1390	Contemporary Inspirational	44,700	31%	139,000	96%	144,400	8%	17%

Source: Arbitron Inc. Average of Arbitron August 2011, July 2011, and June 2011.

Media Market of Washington, D.C.

Four music radio stations — two Urban Adult Contemporary, an Urban Rhythmic CHR, and an Urban Contemporary — top the list for African-American men in Washington, D.C. WHUR and WMMJ have the highest reach and concentration. A gospel station, WPRS-FM, comes in fifth with only a third of the reach of the top station, but its African-American concentration is 94 percent. This station skews heavily toward African-American women, who make up two-thirds of the station's audience.

The only news station on the top-ten list occupies the sixth spot. WINS-AM reaches 16 percent of the African-American adult male population, making it the most popular news station for African-American men across the five media markets we looked at.

TABLE 21. TOP RADIO STATIONS IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF WASHINGTON, D.C.
POPULATION: AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS (18+) 1.5M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 710,559

Station	Station Type	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Audience (18+)	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
WHUR-FM/96.3 WHUR	Urban AC	247,100	37%	559,800	84%	665,400	11%	23%
WMMJ-FM/MY MAGIC 102.3	Urban AC	241,700	38%	537,800	84%	643,200	11%	23%
WPGC-FM/ WPGC 95.5	Urban Rhythmic CHR	218,500	30%	489,500	67%	729,300	11%	23%
WKYS- FM/93.9 KISS FM	Urban Contemporary	197,200	32%	437,400	70%	624,600	11%	23%
WPRS-FM/ PRAISE 104.1	Contemporary Inspirational	123,400	34%	335,000	92%	365,400	11%	23%
WTOP-FM/ WTOP RADIO	All News	120,500	10%	214,800	19%	1,154,800	11%	23%
WASH-FM	Adult Contemporary	88,900	8%	221,800	20%	1,122,400	11%	23%
WTEM-AM/ ESPN 980	All Sports	88,400	29%	107,900	35%	309,000	11%	23%
WIHT-FM/HOT 99.5	Pop CHR	86,600	8%	203,100	20%	1,038,300	11%	23%
WERQ- FM/92Q JAMS	Urban Contemporary	75,500	N/A	155,900	N/A	N/A	11%	23%

Source: Arbitron Inc. Average of Arbitron August 2011, July 2011, and June 2011.

Media Market of Los Angeles

The top six stations are all music stations, and reach a significant number of African Americans in the Los Angeles area, but concentration is weak. KJLH-FM has the highest concentration, with 68 percent adult African Americans and 23 percent African-American men. The other top stations have much lower concentrations and for African-American men they are in the single digits. Given these statistics, radio may not be the best way to reach African-American men or adults in Los Angeles.

TABLE 22. TOP RADIO STATIONS IN THE MEDIA MARKET OF LOS ANGELES
LOS ANGELES: AFRICAN AMERICANS (18+) 1.24M, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN (18+) 599,377

Station	Station Type	African-American Men (18+)	African-American Men (18+) Concentration	African-American Adults (18+)	African-American Adult (18+) Concentration	Total Audience (18+)	Concentration of African-American Men in the Market	Concentration of African-American Adults in the Market
KHHT-FM/ HOT 92.3	Urban AC	146,900	9%	310,000	18%	1,703,800	3%	7%
KPWR-FM/ POWER 106	Urban AC	125,400	6%	291,700	13%	2,227,800	3%	7%
KTWV- FM/94.7 THE WAVE	Smooth Jazz	117,200	7%	278,100	17%	1,680,700	3%	7%
KDAY-FM/93.5 KDAY	Urban Contemporary	94,400	9%	196,600	19%	1,037,900	3%	7%
KJLH-FM/ RADIO FREE 102.3 KJLH	Urban Contemporary	92,100	23%	271,500	68%	396,800	3%	7%
KIIS-FM/102.7 KIIS FM	Pop CHR	87,600	3%	193,900	6%	3,043,800	3%	7%
KRTH-FM/K- EARTH 101	Classic Hits	59,100	3%	101,600	5%	2,241,300	3%	7%
KKJZ-FM/ KJAZZ	Jazz	51,300	16%	N/A	N/A	317,500	3%	7%
KFI-AM/KFI AM 640	News Talk Information	30,000	2%	60,900	5%	1,205,700	3%	7%
KPCC-FM/89.3 KPCC	News Talk Information	17,100	3%	32,800	6%	532,200	3%	7%

Source: Arbitron Inc. Average of Arbitron August 2011, July 2011, and June 2011.

Recommendations

Based on our research we make a series of recommendations for improving both the content and the reach of media with respect to African-American men:

- ▶ Sports and music content reach the largest numbers of black men in television, radio, magazines and other media. Working with celebrities — who are the subject of interviews and feature stories, as well as creative and athletic content — as spokespeople is one way to reach a broad audience. Fostering coverage of sports and music figures' positive activities and activism as part of popular existing programming is a related avenue.
- ▶ Magazines can be particularly fruitful vehicles for communicating positive messages to and about African-American men, both because they create their own content and because their African-American readership is high. Outreach to magazine publishers, editors, and writers could inform both the quality and the quantity of information and depictions reaching black men. Johnson Publishing, which owns *Ebony* and *Jet*, is a particularly influential publisher with this audience, as is Time Inc. which publishes *Sports Illustrated* and *People*. Editorial meetings, story pitching, and advertising with these outlets should be considered.
- ▶ FOX Network and TBS each have black-oriented shows that reach a broad audience of black men, including sitcoms, variety shows, and awards ceremonies. Working with producers and writers to inform the content of these shows is a promising avenue. Public service announcements and paid advertising are also possible entry points.
- ▶ The NAACP Image Awards show presents a special opportunity. Because its purpose is to elevate positive images, the show can be further leveraged to convey constructive messages and information about and for African-American men.
- ▶ BET offers a unique combination of large numbers and a high concentration of African-American men as well as women. Working to inform the content of BET shows by pitching or even creating new content can influence a large audience, as can public service announcements and paid advertising.
- ▶ In media markets with radio stations whose audience is primarily African Americans, such as Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., outreach to popular radio DJs can potentially result in influencing a highly concentrated population of African Americans.
- ▶ While specific search, web portals, aggregation, and social media sites that are very popular, such as YouTube, Google, Yahoo!, and Facebook, do not create their own content, they do highlight the possibility of creating content (such as YouTube videos) capable of reaching black men, who are highly active in social media and, particularly, on Facebook. These websites are prime vehicles for reaching this population, as well as black youth. While online advertising is in flux, it should be monitored for possible interventions.
- ▶ While newspapers reach relatively small numbers of black men overall, they can be employed to reach people at the local level, especially regarding neighborhood and opportunity information.
- ▶ We recommend that additional research be undertaken in order to determine the best strategies for reaching and informing African-American men. Research priorities include:
 - ✓ Disaggregating the demographics of the black male community in terms of age, education, income, and other aspects relevant to their advancement. This should include studying the media consumption habits of black boys.

- ✓ Identifying other audiences — such as employers, educators, and law enforcement officials — whose perceptions of black men and boys are important to their success and safety. The media consumption of these audiences should also be identified.
- ✓ Conducting an in-depth analysis of the digital world is important, given the increasing penetration of new media into the lives of all Americans. Technology, as well as people’s behavior online, is changing at such a fast pace and with so many different platforms (search engines, content creators, social networks, mobile phones, and tablets) that it is necessary to gain a greater understanding of the digital world and its influence on African-American men and boys.
- ✓ A deeper analysis of how African-American men and boys consume media would offer insights into the way information on different platforms reaches this population and the ways advocates can leverage them to create positive change. People consume information differently on different platforms, acquire it differently, and frequent it differently. For example, it is important to know whether black men and boys are going to a specific site via their desktop, cell phone, or tablet; whether they subscribe to a magazine or buy it on the newsstand; how much time they spend reading a magazine compared to the length of time they spend on a website or watching a television program.
- ✓ Lastly, a study of the genre of media content should be considered in order to compare different genres to each other, such as music against comedy or sports or politics against celebrity content, and identify which ones are the most popular among the target population. This type of analysis could inform decisions on the types of spokespersons who are right, if any.

Appendix

Description of the geographic coverage of the designated market areas (DMAs) examined in this study.

New York DMA: In New York State: New York City (all five boroughs); Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties; parts of Dutchess, Sullivan, and Ulster Counties. In Southern Connecticut: Fairfield County; parts of Litchfield and New Haven Counties. In New Jersey: Bergen, Union, Passaic, Sussex, Warren, Morris, Hunterdon, Somerset, Mercer, Middlesex, and Monmouth Counties; parts of Ocean and Burlington Counties. In Pennsylvania: part of Pike County.

Atlanta DMA: In Georgia: DeKalb, Rockdale, Newton, Morgan, Walton, Oconee, Barrow, Jackson, Gwinnett, Hall, Forsyth, Cherokee, Cobb, Paulding, Pickens, Bartow, Floyd, Haralson, Carroll, Douglas, Fulton, Clayton, Henry, Spalding, Butts, Jasper, Lamar, Pike, Heard, Coweta, and Fayette Counties; parts of Greene, Oglethorpe, Madison, Jackson, Banks, Hall, Dawson, Lumpkin, Gordon, Polk, Putnam, Troup, Monroe, Meriwether, and Upson Counties.

Chicago DMA: In Illinois: Cook, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, and Will Counties; parts of DeKalb, La Salle, Lake, Livingston, and McHenry Counties. In Indiana: Jasper, La Porte, Lake, Newton, and Porter Counties.

Washington, D.C.-MD DMA: All of Washington, D.C. In Maryland: Frederick, Montgomery, Howard, Anne Arundel, Prince George's, Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties; parts of Baltimore and Carroll Counties. In Virginia: Fairfax, Prince William, and Loudoun Counties; parts of Stafford, Fauquier, and King George Counties.

Los Angeles DMA: Los Angeles and Orange Counties; parts of Riverside, Inyo, Ventura, San Bernardino, and Kern Counties.



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to Expand Opportunity in America*

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