

DOUBLE ISSUE

TIME

'I HAVE A DREAM' ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

✓
NOMBRE DE LA REVISTA

FOUNDING FATHER

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., ARCHITECT OF THE 21ST CENTURY
By Jon Meacham

MEMORIES OF THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON
By John Lewis, Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez, Julian Bond and 13 others who were there

THE DREAM TODAY
By Michele Norris

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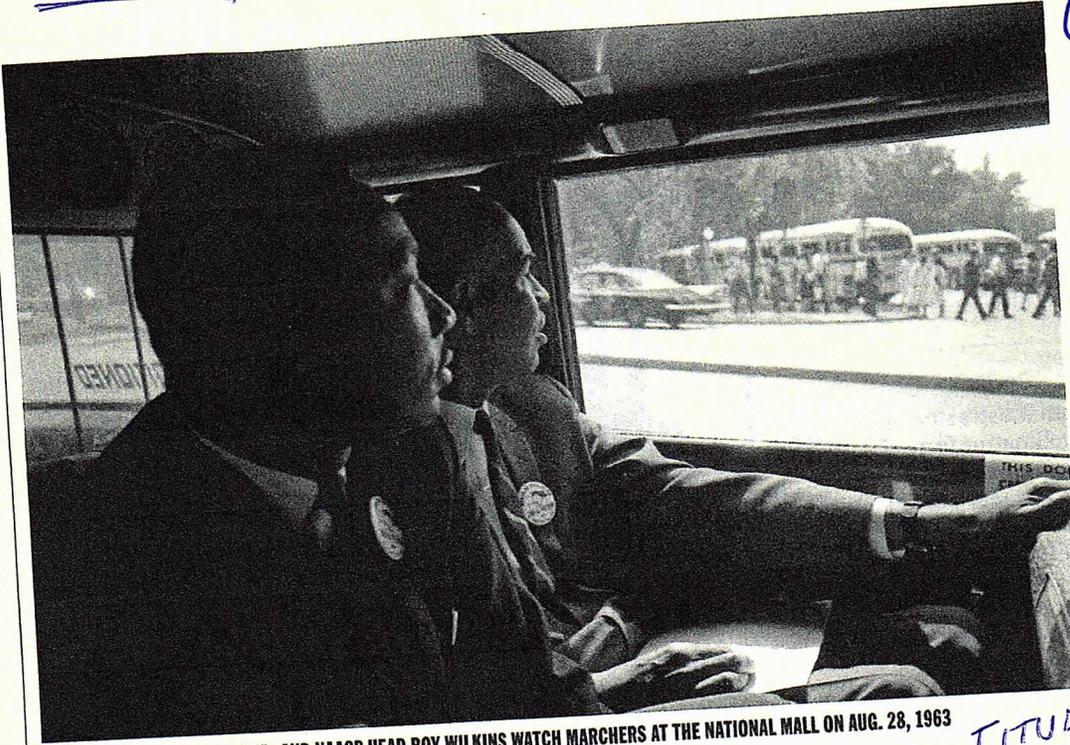
NOMBRE DE LA REVISTA

VOLUMEN

VOL. 182, NO. 9 | 2013

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ALL IN MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. AND NAACP HEAD ROY WILKINS WATCH MARCHERS AT THE NATIONAL MALL ON AUG. 28, 1963

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ON THE COVER: Photograph © Dan Budnik—Contact Press Images

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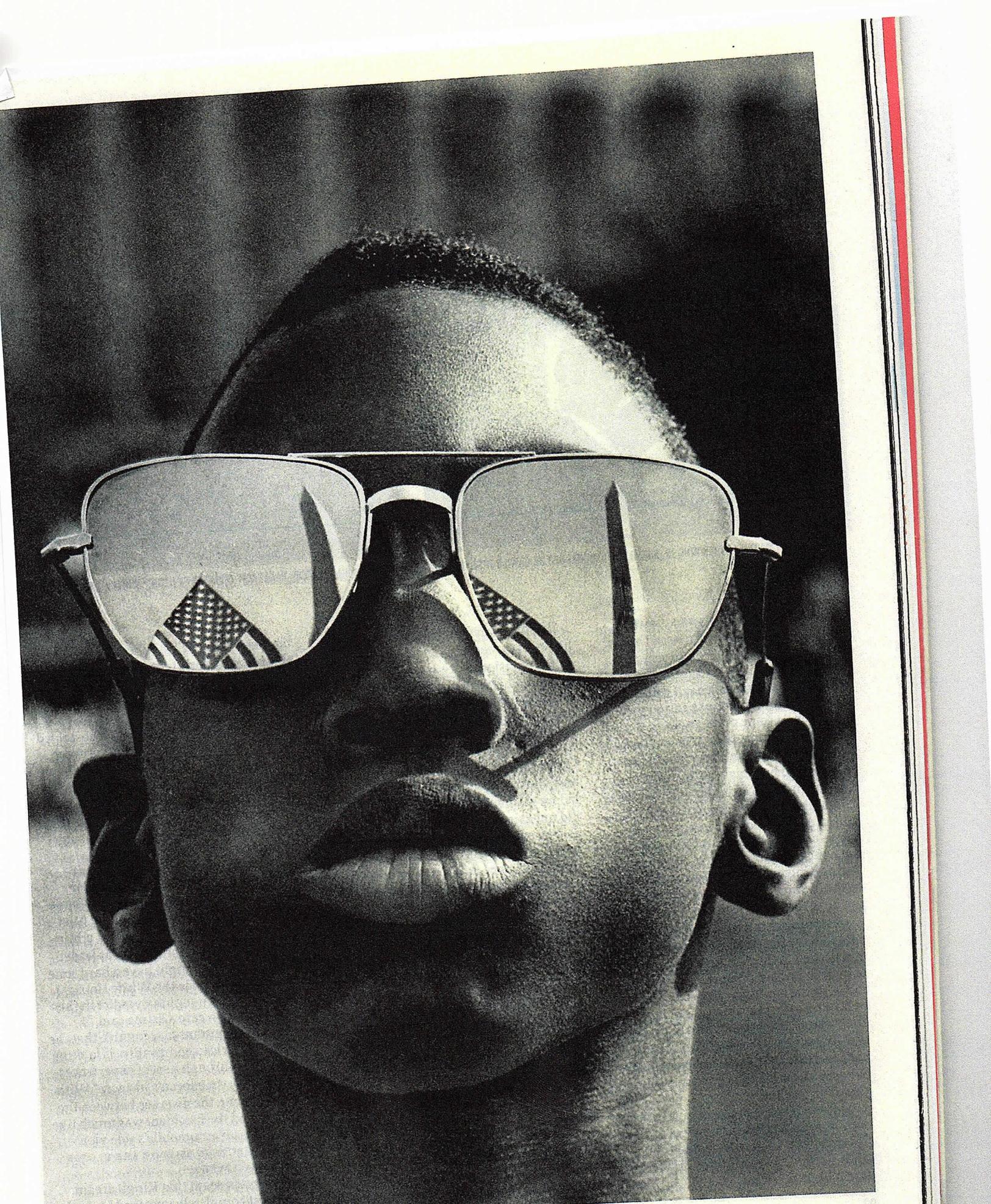
ONE DREAM.

→ TÍTULO DEL
ARTÍCULO

In some ways, America has exceeded King's visions. In others, however, his to-do list remains far from finished

BY MICHELE NORRIS → AUTOR

NÚMERO DE LA PÁGINA (AUNQUE NO ← 90
APAREZCA)



LOOKING AHEAD AUSTIN BROWN, 9, OF GAINESVILLE, GA., AT THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON IN 1963

AP

NÚMERO DE PÁGINA

← 91



LIVING HISTORY MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. MURALS PHOTOGRAPHED BY CAMILO JOSÉ VERGARA. FROM LEFT: IN PHILADELPHIA, IN DETROIT (PAINTED BY BENNIE WHITE), ON AN AUTO-REPAIR SHOP

I HAVE SPENT MUCH OF THE SUMMER talking to people who witnessed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech 50 years ago this month. While reaching back through time to understand that day, I collected a series of photographs of King on my computer. At some point I noticed something in these images. In most of them, King's arm is outstretched toward the crowd, hand held high, palm open. The way you might raise hands over someone in church who is standing in the need of prayer. As my reporting took me back to 1963—a year of tumult and bloodshed in the fight for racial equality—I realized that as King was reaching out over the crowd, he might as well have been reaching up to touch the sun.

The things he mused about in that speech were the stuff of fantasy in 1963. You needed more than just the audacity of hope to imagine that states "sweltering with the heat of oppression" could be "transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice." Even things that seem routine today—the idea that "little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers"—were well outside the bounds of reasonable expectations in 1963. So how far have we come since that hot August day when thousands flocked to Washington? Has King's dream been achieved?

In some ways the America of today has even exceeded what he allowed himself to envision. Fifty years after King delivered his speech, another black man will stand at the Lincoln Memorial to address the masses—this time at a lectern embellished with a presidential seal. And the crowd assembled to hear Barack Obama will include women, minorities and immigrants who have climbed a ladder of upward mobility that simply did not exist five decades ago. There will also be people in that crowd who can look into their own past and remember a time when they once enforced or embraced segregation, not necessarily out of hatred but because that is just the way it was. Rabid segregationists may have been the pistons that kept Jim Crow segregation humming, but apathy and the go-along-to-get-along mentality fueled the engine of racist America.

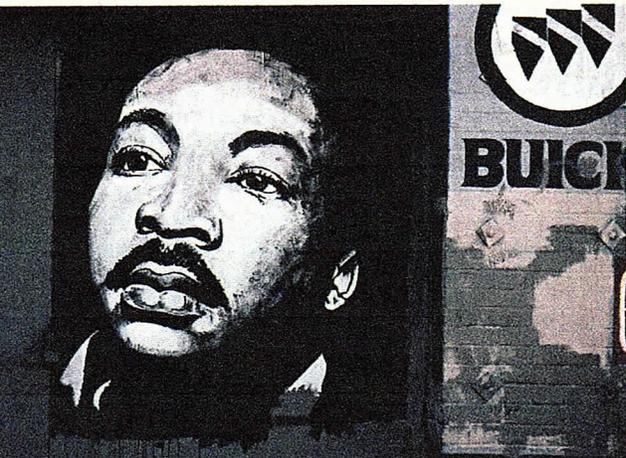
King knew that, and it is why throughout 1963 his speeches, his interviews and his "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" were aimed not just at dispossessed blacks but also at "do nothingism" among moderate whites who he said were "more devoted to 'order' than to justice." His words at the Lincoln Memorial were directed not only to the assemblage but also to the much larger and largely white audience that would be listening on the radio or watching

black-and-white TVs. When you look at those two historic tent poles spanning a half-century—the preacher and the President—it is clear that irrefutable aspects of King's dream have been realized. King's lawyer Clarence Jones, who helped draft the March on Washington speech, said those who worked closely with King "never contemplated the possibility of a black President in our lifetimes."

But as we measure progress since that sweltering day in August, are we using the right mile stick?

America twice elected a President who is black. That's one for the history books—but so too was the day that same President visited the White House briefing room to remind America that while the world rises up to meet him as leader, as a black man he might have a hard time hailing a cab outside the White House. Speaking of the not-guilty verdict in the Trayvon Martin case, Obama said, "I think it is important to recognize that the African-American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away." With that statement, the distance between the preacher and the President was much like an image in an automobile's side-view mirror: OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR.

It can often seem that King's dream has almost completely upstaged his to-do



ANGELES AND SHARING SPACE WITH JESUS AND PRESIDENT OBAMA IN HIGHLAND PARK, MICH.

list. The full name of the 1963 event was the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the organizers realized that if thousands of people were flocking to the nation's capital, then the demands ought not be fuzzy. Planners distributed organizing manuals that detailed the reasons for the grand effort. "What We Demand"—the manual stated. The answer was a 10-point plan that included "dignified jobs at decent wages," "desegregation of all school districts" and a ban on discrimination in "all housing supported by federal funds."

"Why We March"—the manual spelled that out too. "To redress old grievances and to help resolve an American crisis ... born of the twin evils of racism and economic deprivation."

That last bit got lost over the years. How does one assess the current state of King's dream without also examining the items on that wish list that have yet to be realized? There is little doubt that had he lived, King today would be concerned about prison rates, murder rates, wars and persistent racial inequality—the so-called opportunity gap. That specific list of demands for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom also suggests that King would be particularly upset about the growing wealth gap.

Consider the cruel irony in a now familiar image. King's name adorns major

thoroughfares in many American cities, and most often the name of the civil rights icon is attached to streets that run through communities of color. But those streets are too often boulevards of broken dreams and limited opportunities. While the black and Latino middle class is growing, financial stability still remains beyond reach for a large sector of society. Since the mid-1970s, the unemployment rate for blacks has consistently been roughly double the unemployment rate for whites. Even the concept of wealth is relative when assessed in black and white terms. The median wealth of black families in which the head of household graduated from college is less than the median wealth for white families whose head of household dropped out of high school. Eighty-five percent of black and Latino households have a net worth that falls below the median wealth for white households. Closing the gap would require black and Latino households to save 100% of their incomes for three consecutive years. Talk about trying to touch the sun.

In the decades following the March on Washington, much of the work focused on integration. It was often about terrain: Who got to go to what schools or live in what neighborhoods? Who had access to the management track? There were busing, affirmative action, equal-

opportunity programs and diversity training. The result of all those efforts can be summed up quite powerfully in six simple words: "We wanted equality. We got integration."

Those six words recently arrived in my inbox from Rondrea Danielle Mathis of Tampa. For the past three years I have been collecting six-word stories on race and cultural identity at the Race Card Project to help foster a dialogue on differences and to better understand the experience around race in America. More than 30,000 people have shared their stories, and collectively they provide potent lessons for us all. One of the things I have come to realize during this summer retrospective is that the equality King called for involves not physical terrain but the geography of the mind. What kind of baggage do we carry? What assumptions do we make? What kinds of boxes do we check off or put people in ... or even create for ourselves?

Try this exercise. Read the following descriptions and visualize the people from these scenarios in your mind: A banker. A chief of staff at a hospital. A law-school valedictorian. A family out on a Sunday afternoon hoping to purchase a new home. A man who spends his retirement fly-fishing. The woman who is juggling family, work and aging parents and still trying to make a weekly yoga class.

Now be honest. What did the people look like? Did they resemble members of your family or people in your community? Were the images based on what you see and hear in your life or in the media? Did that bank president have a South Asian name that included so many syllables that it seemed to dance across the tongue? Did that law-school valedictorian have a deep Southern accent, or did she give a shout-out to grandparents in the audience who have prospered in America but do not speak fluent English?

Most likely the answers are no. But by 2023, the majority of children under 18 in this country will be minorities. And yes, that will call for a new terminology—but also a new way of thinking. The socio-economic indicators that once marked people for automatic privilege are shifting. The next generation of 18-year-olds isn't going to look or sound like the last. If America is to prosper, kids who listen to reggaeton, eat kimchi, celebrate their *quinceañeras*, work weekends at the small-town Dairy Queen and wear oversized hoodies have to believe in the promise of King's dream. The geography of the mind requires that we challenge our assumptions and see past differences to place all kinds of people in a category marked "bound for success." While it is regrettable that King's "unfinished" list is still too long, the brilliance of his riff on the dream was that it challenged us to think differently.

King could see the future from where he stood. The March on Washington is remembered as a civil rights protest, and many of the historic images show close-ups of brown faces. But the massive crowd that day was largely integrated. People of all colors flocked to Washington. The U.S. press did not linger on that fact, but the international press was awestruck by the diversity. It was a central theme of the foreign coverage. Decades later, it is still a focal point when people look to the U.S. from overseas. Our diversity is seen as one of the best things America has going for it. Perhaps we should recognize that too. ■

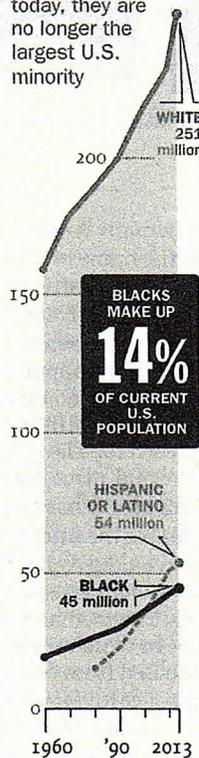
Norris is a special correspondent for National Public Radio and director of the Race Card Project (theracecardproject.com)

MEASURING THE DREAM

IN THE PAST 50 YEARS, AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE SEEN PROFOUND IMPROVEMENTS IN EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES. BUT A CLEAR RACE GAP REMAINS

POPULATION

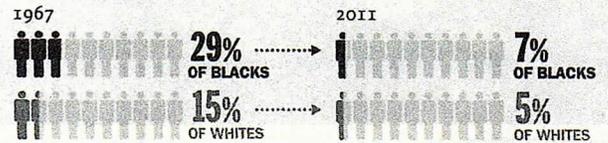
Although blacks have climbed from 11% of the population in 1960 to 14% today, they are no longer the largest U.S. minority



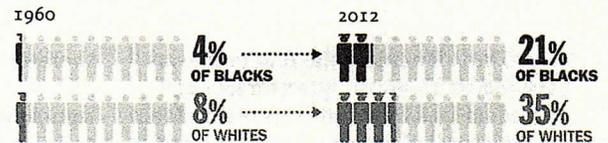
EDUCATION

African-American dropout rates have fallen, and blacks are collecting more advanced degrees, but they still trail whites

Drop out of high school



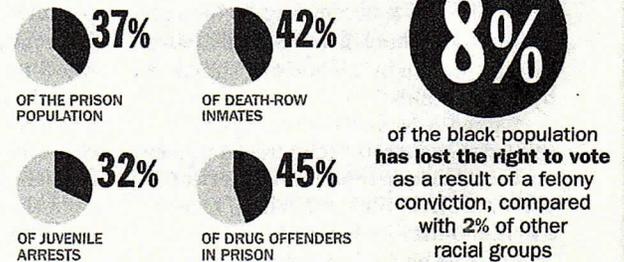
Hold a bachelor's degree or higher



CRIME & PUNISHMENT

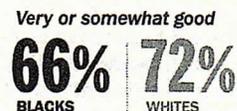
The black prison population has grown: 1 in 3 black men can expect to go to prison in his lifetime

Blacks make up



AMERICAN ATTITUDES ON RACE RELATIONS

■ Are relations between whites and blacks very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?



■ Are new civil rights laws needed to reduce discrimination against blacks?



■ Do you favor programs that make special efforts to help blacks and other minorities get ahead to make up for past discrimination?

