

# Urban Trends

A quarterly newsletter published by



## HIV TESTING – Why It's Such A Hard Sell



Despite the fact that the overall number of AIDS cases is down across the United States, the number of HIV infections is rising steadily among certain populations. Initially thought of as a disease affecting gay white men, today's reality is that HIV has overwhelmingly spread within communities of color, affecting men, women and children.

The first step in helping to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS is to know one's HIV status—either positive or negative. However, for most people, HIV testing means having to think about and deal with deeply personal issues - intimate relationships, sexual behavior and even one's own mortality. The challenge is to convince members of the most affected communities that choosing to get tested, regardless of the results, is beneficial to their health, and the health of their community.

MEE has been researching these issues for a number of years, attempting to identify some of the major obstacles to HIV testing within at-risk populations. We have found several reasons that it's such a hard sell to convince people to get tested:

- Prevention efforts centered on scare tactics have backfired and led to a fearful public that sees little value in testing. People are in denial or have become fatalistic that testing will only confirm a possible death sentence: "If I don't know, I don't have to deal with it."
- The pervasive perception of HIV as a moral issue (God's punishment for at-risk or promiscuous behavior), rather than a public health issue, causes many not to protect themselves or get tested.
- Individuals do not envision themselves as members of a risk group or as being at risk. Even today, many believe that AIDS is a disease of well-off, gay, white males. Many say to themselves, "If I don't fit that profile, then I'm not in danger."
- They fear a lack of anonymity and/or confidentiality during testing. When people of color walk into a facility perceived to be "White," there is a feeling of exposure. In addition, there are fears of facing racism and homophobia at testing facilities where staffs have not developed cultural sensitivity to inner city clients. People want to go where they feel they will be treated with respect.
- They fear losing their partners, family and friends if they go in for testing, or if they test positive. They look

around and see that there is very little social support in minority communities for HIV-positive people. They fear having to disclose a positive HIV status to people they care about.

- Cost and difficulty in gaining access to drug assistance and other healthcare programs keep some from getting tested. People who feel that they can't get health insurance or afford treatment if they test positive often don't bother.

- Many minorities have a deep-seated mistrust in the medical community—grounded in the history of such things as the infamous Tuskegee experiments and fears of genocide.

- Traditions of pride and machismo, common to men in the African American and Latino community, mean that honest discussions between sexual partners about sex, adultery, and STDs, are out of the question—a situation that often discourages women from getting tested, and prevents early discovery of their HIV status.

- Most women of color look at themselves as caregivers first, and do not always prioritize their time in order to take care of themselves. For women and others living in poverty, the struggle for daily survival may take precedence over concerns about HIV infection, whose impact may not be seen for several years.

- With MSMs (men who have sex with men) of color, HIV testing campaigns targeted for the gay community are not successful, because these men, who often are married or still have relationships with women, tend to identify primarily with their ethnic/racial affiliation, and, in many ways, think like a "typical" heterosexual male.

- Lack of knowledge about testing procedures, fear of blood and needles, along with rumors about HIV infection through testing keeps many potential testers away.

...Continued on page 2

## OfftheShelf

**Tha DoggFather: The Times, Trials and Hardcore Truths of Snoop Dogg, William Morrow and Co., 1999**

Snoop on the movies:

"Maybe The Godfather had bigger stars and a megabudget, but the message wasn't all that different from Superfly. ...Whites might see a movie, get themselves a good look at all the sex and violence and the way the story shows how crime *does* pay, then they go home to their houses and turn on their personal security system and get a good night's sleep...A black might see the same movie then head on back to the ghetto, where the cops are looking for any excuse to drag his a\*\* off to jail...and half the brothers he knows are either in jail, on parole or dead...We're all getting the same message. It's just that some of us have got more reason than others to believe in it."

## UrbanTrends

☞ Contrary to popular belief, a large number of teens actually want to quit smoking. However, many of them have difficulty in succeeding, in part, because most cessation programs are geared towards adults. "There is a mythology out there that teen smokers don't want to stop," says Dr. Richard Hurt of the Mayo Clinic. "That is not true. We just don't know how to help them very well."

A 1992, University of Massachusetts study found that 52% of 10th grade smokers surveyed had already tried to quit two or more times. Twenty-five percent of the teens felt they were addicted, and nearly half were concerned about their health.

Unfortunately, it appears to be much harder for teens to quit than it is for their adult counterparts. Whereas the average adult "quit rate" after a behavioral cessation program (not using nicotine aids like the patch) is 50%, for teens the average is closer to 7-10%.

The social aspect of smoking is the main reason why it is so difficult for teens to quit. In social groups where peer pressure dominates, friendships are often formed through smoking. Another deterrent, especially among teen girls, is the accompanying weight gain that comes with cessation. In fact, many teen girls *start* smoking in order to control their weight. It is clear that, when it comes to young people, the power of peer pressure and social smoking must be challenged in order to significantly impact behavior change.

*(Los Angeles Times)*

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340 N. 12th Street, 5th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
E-mail: MEEPROD@aol.com  
www.meeproductions.com

# Black and White Television: What Are We Watching?

To win meaningful ratings, producing a television show that appeals to urban markets must be accompanied by a culturally-relevant campaign to assure viewership. MEE has combined responses from focus groups and surveys with our insights from years of working with African American youth and adults in entertainment marketing to develop strategic recommendations for reaching the urban demographic.



reported that they only started to watch these shows when they hit syndication, where African Americans do most of their sitcom viewing. Before that, their awareness of such shows was low or non-existent.

## Changing the Marketing Focus

African Americans we talked to said they rarely "channel surfed." Instead of just flipping channels, looking for new programs, they turn on the television to watch a specific program. That increases the importance of developing alternative forms of program promotion—promotions that do not necessarily reach people in front of the TV, but rather when they are out of their homes and in their communities.

## TV Viewing Habits

MEE has found that television-viewing decisions of African Americans, especially in prime time (8-11 p.m.), are largely made based on race. This is particularly true when it comes to half-hour situation comedies, which Blacks often name as their favorite kind of TV program. Favorite shows among African Americans, not surprisingly, are those with a predominantly Black cast, including *The Steve Harvey Show*, *The Wayans*, and *Moesha*. As a result, favorite stations were usually UPN, the WB Network and Fox, in that order, because of the African American programming offered. Fox was less likely to be mentioned for sitcoms, but came up frequently for sports (among males) and for shows such as *Ally McBeal*, *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Party of Five* (among women).

among our focus group participants. Soap operas were the most popular programs during mid-day.

There is a perception among African Americans that there is no programming that will appeal to them on the "Big Three" networks. Instead, participants report that they find themselves watching more cable programming (especially HBO) or movies (including pay-per-view). Since Blacks have turned off the networks for their sitcom viewing, the gap between the shows that African Americans and Whites watch is wider than ever. (See chart.)

Interestingly, most of the focus groups' favorite programs were in syndication. Over the last few years, our participants have begun to list more "mainstream" shows like *Friends* or *Seinfeld* among their favorite programs. However, they

reported that they only started to watch these shows when they hit syndication, where African Americans do most of their sitcom viewing. Before that, their awareness of such shows was low or non-existent.

## Promoting Programming to Urban Audiences

### Take It To the Community

Find ways to promote to urban audiences from "within the community," by having co-promotions with local radio and television stations. Get people involved. Go to their barber shops, hair and nail salons, record stores and malls. Give away cool items that promote the name and theme of your show.

### Be Authentic

To make shows more appealing to an urban audience, promotions must reflect their lifestyle, language, and music. In authentic marketing will turn off the audience, and you may never get a second chance to reach out to them, once the effort has been branded as corny or offensive.

### Integrate the Cast

It may seem obvious, but audiences are more into programs where they see characters that they can relate to. Even a single African American character who has some significant "face time" could make a big difference in increasing the overall popularity of a show.

The news is the most-watched show

Top 7 Shows for Black Viewers	Top 7 Shows for White Viewers
The Parkers (UPN)	Who Wants to Be A Millionaire*-Tues. (ABC)
Monday Night Football (ABC)	Who Wants to Be Millionaire-Thur. (ABC)
City of Angels (CBS)	ER (NBC)
Moesha (UPN)	Who Wants to Be A Millionaire-Sun.(ABC)
Grown Ups (UPN)	Frasier (NBC)
The Steve Harvey Show (WB)	Friends (NBC)
Malcom and Eddie (UPN)	Monday Night Football (ABC)

\* 8th highest popular show among African Americans  
Source: Nielsen Media Research/Philadelphia Inquirer

# From The Editor

This issue, covering the spectrum of urban life, is full of MEE's research-based, up-to-date information about reaching and influencing residents of America's inner cities. With new prevention initiatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) focusing on HIV antibody testing, MEE shares some of the latest challenges we've uncovered while designing HIV testing promotion campaigns for various urban populations.

Also in this issue, we preview MEE's upcoming series of parents' guides, as we talk to caregivers about what it's like trying to raise a son or daughter in the midst of the hip-hop revolution. We've heard a lot about the digital divide when it comes to computer access, but when you examine the television viewing habits of Black and White America, respectively, you'll see that Sunday morning church services aren't the only things that remain effectively segregated. The article on page 5 spells out some of the reasons. And for a bit of international flair, a Parisian journalist confirms what we've been saying all along: that hip-hop is everywhere, and is still growing strong!

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Pamela M. Weddington  
MEEComm@aol.com

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### **President & Publisher**

Ivan Juzang

### **Editor**

Pamela Weddington

### **Contributing Writers**

SheyeN-Chibcha

Thierry Fortune

Joshua Horowitz

William Juzang

Marie Onwuachi

Richard Usher

## HIV Testing (continued)

In spite of these and other barriers, the need for HIV testing has now become paramount, due to the severity of the HIV/AIDS epidemic within African American and Latino communities. However, HIV testing efforts will be futile without active community "buy-in" and involvement, in which testing becomes a socially acceptable norm for every sexually active individual. Too many testing promotion programs make assumptions based on Eurocentric worldviews, and on cultural or social class values not reflective of the life situation of urban people of color.

Yet, there is room for hope. Testing positive no longer means a "death sentence," because antiretroviral therapies are allowing HIV-infected people to live longer, healthier lives. Those who test negative have a second

chance to begin practicing safer sex and to eliminate the behaviors that may have been putting them at risk in the first place.

In either scenario, testing can help put a stop to the ravages of this deadly disease by: 1) helping to stop the spread of the disease by those who may not know they are infected; 2) enabling those who are already infected to obtain drug treatment as early as possible in the disease's progression; and 3) helping pregnant women receive treatment in order to protect their unborn children.

Ultimately, a successful HIV testing campaign can result in more open discussions around the issues of HIV prevention and treatment, and save the lives of thousands of people who are currently at-risk.



☞ The federal government is expected to release its 2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans soon, yet the report has already sparked a firestorm of controversy. The document, which seeks to lower the rising levels of sugar consumption in American diets, reads, "Choose beverages and foods that limit your intake of sugars." This wording has the sugar and soft drink industries up in arms, along with 30 United States Senators. They claim that this wording will greatly influence consumer-buying practices, which will adversely affect their business.

These industries are lobbying for the government to maintain its previous stance: to moderate sugar intake. "It sounds like a small change in language, when you consider the word moderate versus limited, but it is a big thing," says Sean McBride, a spokesman for the National Soft Drink Association. "Limit has a negative connotation that you should restrict or possibly even avoid a certain type of product. Moderate means you can have it. It is acceptable. It can fit into a balanced diet." The industries' main objection is that it has not been scientifically proven that sugar is the cause behind America's expanding waistline.

Between 1982 and 1998, Americans have increased their annual sugar consumption by 29%, or 35 pounds per person. In 1998, each American consumed a record average of 155 pounds of the sweetener. Meanwhile, the battle over America's sweet tooth rages on.

*(Philadelphia Inquirer)*

## What's Next...

Coming to you in the next issue of *UrbanTrends*...

We will explore such topics as:

**MOVIE MARKETING: A STRONG  
OPENING WEEKEND**

**BLACK LEADERSHIP: WHO QUALIFIES  
WITH URBAN YOUTH**

**VALUING AFRICAN AMERICAN  
FEMALES IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS**

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# Raising A Hip-Hop Adolescent



**It's never easy raising a child. But when you're trying to do it in the face of street violence, poverty, racism, and other realities of urban life, it doesn't get any easier. Many parents raising the "hip-hop generation" are doing it in single-parent households, trying to cope with less money and more stress. Yet they are still determined to do what they can to give their children the best chance to survive, and even thrive.**

**MEE recently conducted focus groups with inner city parents to assess the challenges of raising a hip-hop adolescent. All of them were raising at least one child between the ages of 10 and 17.**

## Safety

The most important issue of concern to them, by far, was the safety of their children on the street and in school. They were struck by the fact that their children are in danger of being victimized by violence on any day, at any time. Marsha, a correctional officer, knows the emotional stress. "My son just recently got jumped in school," she said. "He's 12 years old, but he's 6-3, and he's

like a gentle giant. I personally would want to take him to school and pick him up, to make sure that he's OK."

## Respect

Parents were also concerned about the fact that young people do not seem to have respect for their elders any more, that they don't respect each other, and that they don't have enough respect for themselves. These days, parents say, too many young people think the only way to achieve respect is through violence or intimidation, acting "badder" or showing more attitude than the next person.

## Mixed Messages

Parents realize that young people get a lot of information outside of the home, and that many teens identify with rap videos and music, movies and television shows that glorify drug use and promiscuity. "Some kids out there who see those videos and don't have a responsible adult talking in their ear, will look at that and think, 'Hey, that's the way the world is'," said Charles, who has an adult daughter and several younger children. They are being fooled, however, he says. "They don't know that these rappers live a completely different life than the video is showing. That's an image."

Parents, they feel, can either say nothing and let their children's peers and the media fill their heads with inaccurate, often uninformed information, or they can take the lead, and try to present the facts, along with their own experiences, and their moral values about the tough issues. Even on subjects where it may not be easy to talk to kids or where they did not have a lot of "factual" or scientific information, parents are determined to be proactive, in order to increase their children's chances of survival.

## Don't Wait

While reports have recommended that the best time to start discussing tough issues with children is between 10 and 12, our parents felt that waiting that long is a mistake: "You can't avoid it, they're going to hear about it anyway." Around drugs for example, parents felt that you should start talking to children even before school age, as early as three years old. They recommended, as experts do, however, that you address the subjects in an age-appropriate manner.

Parents don't have a lot of faith that their children will get the information they need from the schools. Besides feeling that schools are performing poorly in terms of meeting the basic educational needs of Black students, materials that parents have seen are too "facts-only" oriented and don't reflect the daily cultural reality of their lives.

## Making A Difference

Parents are looking for support, guidance and tools to help them arm their children with basic knowledge and real information. Hip-hop adolescents need parents to give them some real, authentic and respect-maintaining tools for handling peer pressure and other challenges they face. Youth-service providers and community-based organizations should produce materials and programs to support parents, who want to be able to communicate effectively with their children, but are not always sure how to do it.

By working together, parents and other caregivers can come together to share strategies, give each other support, and develop joint solutions on how the "inner city village" can do a better job of raising the hip-hop generation. Some of the challenges may be unique, but ultimately parents still want the best for their kids: "You can't be around them all the time," said Rodney, father of a teenaged daughter, "and their life is their own. So when they're growing up, all you can do is just love them as much as you can. And if they respect you, they'll respect what you say."



## HIP HOP in France, 2000

PARIS—In France, hip-hop is still alive, growing and more powerful than ever. Its essence and energy are still ruling our lives. No violence is involved. Just dancing, painting walls, MC-ing and DJ-ing.

### Here are a few of our hip-hop milestones:

#### 1982-1984

Hip-hop arrives in France, slowly but deliberately. It starts with dance, as a few youngsters in Paris and its suburbs watch U.S. music videos, start to memorize the steps and movements and reproduce them in front of ever-growing crowds on street corners. With the 1984 release of the movies *Breakin'* and *Flashdance*, the dance aspect of hip-hop explodes. Paris City Breakers, the first French B-boy crew, is born.

#### 1985-1988

"H-I-P-H-O-P," the first national TV show dedicated to breakdancing, debuts. Every Sunday, millions of French youth sit in front of the tube to watch their favorite show. Even then, despite its popularity across socioeconomic lines, most people think hip-hop is a fad that will soon fade away. To the French media, its fans are just "lost" people from the suburbs with too much time on their hands. Fortunately, everyone doesn't buy into that myth.

#### 1989-1990

The first album releases, by French hip-hopsters Supreme NTM and Little MC, emerge. People and record labels still don't know what to make of that energy, but they know something is happening.

Many young rappers are inspired by the cool, funny style of rapper MC Solaar. The hip-hop community begins putting itself together.

#### The '90's

More and more young people begin to identify themselves as members of the hip-hop community. They don't know its history or beginning in the streets of America's inner cities, but they don't really care. With the success of "gangsta" rap from America's West Coast, young "frenchies" follow a new, more aggressive kind of rap. This differs from the non-violent, Zulu Nation ideology followed by the first generation of rappers. Now, glory and money are the only things that matter.

#### Today

Tradition is being passed down to a new generation of hip-hopsters who have begun to "get props" internationally, even performing and collaborating with New York City artists. In the South of France, rap with a more intellectual flair has emerged. France's biggest theaters are opening their doors to hip-hop entertainment and shows, including the Bastille Opera of Paris, which has hosted breakdancers. Graffiti, which has faded a bit as a hip-hop phenomenon in America, is still alive and very present in France. It's mostly underground, and ignored by the mainstream media.

The future of hip-hop in France is bright. The positive ideology of the early days is often forgotten, but those who remain true to the tradition are winning over more and more converts to the cause.



☞ Traditionally relegated to the roles of villain or sidekick, Asian and African American actors and actresses are now starting to get top billing in commercial-ly and critically-successful films. In fact, both Hollywood and independent film makers are beginning to explore a mix of African American and Asian cultures. The biggest commercial example this year, *Romeo Must Die*, features Hong Kong martial arts star Jet Li opposite up-and-coming R&B artist Aaliyah, in a retelling of the classic *Romeo and Juliet* theme.

In a much different approach, maverick director Jim Jarmusch's latest offering, *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, stars Forest Whitaker as an inner-city mob hit man who follows bushido, the traditional code of the Japanese samurai. These recent developments can be traced back to the success of 1998's *Rush Hour*, which teamed perennial action favorite Jackie Chan with comedian Chris Tucker, to the tune of \$141 million in the bank. Buoyed that crossover success, Hollywood action films are starting to globalize. Marquees may never be the same.

(Vibe)

## DidYouKnow?

☞ The influence of urban music continues its extension to the silver screen. The list of rap and R&B performers to make the leap to film careers is rapidly growing; from mainstream acts like Ice Cube, LL Cool J, Will Smith and Queen Latifah, to "harder" stars like Method Man, Redman, Q-Tip, RZA, Raekwon, and to divas Mary J. Blige, Erykah Badu and Aaliyah.

Most of these artists see film as a way to expand their star power. Meanwhile, the studios see popular hip-hopsters as a way to produce bigger returns at the box office and boost sales for a film's soundtrack.

But not everyone is overjoyed with these recent developments. Veterans such as Samuel Jackson are concerned that these untrained actors are stealing roles that otherwise would be available to legitimate actors who have worked, trained and struggled for a chance to act in film roles.

(Vibe)

☞ Puerto Ricans are not doing as well as other U.S. Hispanics when it comes to their health, according to a recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics. They had more doctor's visits, hospital stays and sick days off from work or school than other Hispanic groups studied, which included Mexican-Americans and Cuban Americans. Public health implications are significant, especially in light of the explosive growth of America's Hispanic population over the last two decades, now at around 11% of the total. However, Hispanic public health experts say the study could reinforce stereotypes that Hispanics, who tend to have lower incomes than other Americans, are in poorer health. They point out that Hispanics live longer on average than whites, and Hispanic women have lower rates of breast cancer.

(Associated Press)

