Minority Stereotypes in Minnesota
by William J. Craig

Minnesotans hold racial stereotypes as deep as those of the rest of the country, according to a new survey conducted by CURA. Minnesotans, like their counterparts across the country, think members of most minority groups are lazier and more prone to violence than Whites. With a few exceptions these views are uniformly held across the state: they do not differ by demographic group or location.

The good news is that Minnesotans rated all minority groups better than average in both their strong work ethic and their low tendency toward violence. Similar national surveys have given lower ratings to communities of color. Perhaps this means that Minnesota employers and others may be more willing than their national counterparts to give minorities the opportunities they need to succeed.

On a seven-point scale, where four is middling and higher scores are more desirable, Minnesotans gave all groups an average score above four on work ethic. Just as Garrison Keillor tells us, all groups were rated “above average,” but more as George Orwell would have said, Whites were viewed as more above average than others.

Eight hundred adults took part in the survey conducted by CURA’s Minnesota Center for Survey Research. First they were asked about the work ethic of Whites, Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and Indians. Except for Asians, all groups rated significantly lower than Whites (Table 1).

The survey replicated a national survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, which used a seven-point scale where one meant most people in that group were lazy, seven meant most people were hard working, and a four meant people were not toward one end or the other. All racial/ethnic groups were rated higher in Minnesota than they were in the national survey. Where comparable data exist, the gap between ratings for Whites and other groups was as great in Minnesota as in national surveys, sometimes greater.

The survey also asked about each racial/ethnic group’s tendency toward violence. All racial groups were seen as significantly more prone to violence than Whites (Table 2). The score for Blacks on this measure was slightly below four, meaning that more Blacks were seen as prone to violence. As with the question about work ethic, Minnesotans rated all groups more positively than did the nation, but the gap between Whites and others was comparable to the national gap. On this issue, comparisons with national data are harder to justify because that data is six years old and there is reason to believe that national opinion is shifting.

Minnesota is a state new to diversity and may be carrying stereotypes learned from other parts of the country. In 1980 only 3.9 percent of the state’s population were people of color; the number grew to 6.3 percent by 1990 (still a fairly small proportion of the state). Some 93.2 percent of the people answering this survey were White. The number of non-White respondents was so small that no effort was made to remove them from the analysis.

There are some encouraging notes in the survey. Most groups scored better than average on both measures. The most popular response for all groups was “four,” neither good nor bad. A significant number of people refused to answer these questions, varying from twenty-seven to forty-four people depending on the question. Another eighteen to thirty-seven people insisted they did not know enough to answer questions about the minority groups. Below is a sample of the comments given by these people:

“Those questions are awful and unfair”
“I don’t want to generalize”
“It’s an individual issue, not race”
“I haven’t worked with them”
“My answers are the same across the board”
“Who makes up these damn questions?”
“Color has no effect”
“I’ve never had any contact with these people, so I couldn’t say”

Will Craig is CURA’s assistant director and a past director of the Minnesota Center for Survey Research. A thirteen-page report with more detailed analysis of the survey results is available from CURA, phone 612/625-1551.

Table 1. Responses When Asked to Rate Each Group’s Work Ethic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Lazy</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hard working</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>4.32*</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>4.40*</td>
<td>4.05*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significantly different from the rating for White.

Table 2. Responses When Asked to Rate Each Group’s Tendency to Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Prone to violence</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Not prone</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>3.73*</td>
<td>4.25*</td>
<td>4.02*</td>
<td>4.23*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significantly different from the rating for White.

* The survey was conducted from October 22 to December 21, 1996. The response rate was 65 percent and there was a sampling error of no more than ±3.5 percentage points.