The topic of black self-help has been the subject of increasing discussion among a diverse group of politicians, community leaders, and academics who are concerned with addressing the needs of the black poor. Simply stated, there is a widespread belief that upper- and middle-income blacks are not sufficiently engaged in charitable activities to aid poor blacks. In addition, there are those who have suggested that the black middle class should devote less of its energy lobbying the federal government on behalf of the poor and instead dedicate a greater percentage of its time, economic resources, and powers of moral suasion to altering the individual characteristics of poor blacks which contribute to their poverty.¹ To date, there has been only limited research on the charitable activities of blacks. However, recent findings from the Joint Center for Political Studies’ project, “Philanthropy In Black America,” may provide important information for addressing these and other questions.

One of the primary goals of the Joint Center’s ongoing study of black charitable activity is to provide detailed statistical information on the charitable giving and voluntarism of blacks and selected black charitable institutions. The study is organized into the following components: (1) a history of the evolution of black charitable activity, (2) an analysis of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure data, (3) an analysis of the findings of a Joint Center/Gallup Survey, and (4) profiles of selected black charitable institutions in eight metropolitan cities. This article focuses on the attitudes, charitable giving, and voluntarism of black Americans by examining some preliminary findings from the 1986 Joint Center/Gallup Survey.
THE JOINT CENTER/GALLUP SURVEY

The Joint Center/Gallup Survey differs from other national surveys of charitable activities in two important respects. First, most national studies of charitable activity have samples that are from 10 to 12% black. While these percentages accurately reflect the percentage of blacks in the overall population, the number of cases is too small to generate reliable estimates when disaggregated to control for various socio-economic characteristics such as age, income, and education. This consideration becomes even more troubling if one believes that charitable activity may be related to these characteristics.

To address the problem of sample size, the Joint Center/Gallup Survey used a two-pronged survey methodology. First, a national random sample of 1,009 individuals (916 whites, 77 blacks, and 16 others) were surveyed. Concurrently, a national random sample of 791 blacks were surveyed in areas that were known to have a large percentage of black residents. In the statistics which follow, the black sample referred to consists of the total number of blacks (868) who were surveyed. The entire survey was completed in four days during the week of August 8, 1986.

All respondents were surveyed in face-to-face interviews. In addition, 70% of the black respondents were interviewed by black interviewers. Face-to-face interviews are less likely to underrepresent low-income blacks than telephone interviews. Further, some survey research has suggested that respondents are less likely to give biased responses in face-to-face interviews with interviewers of the same race. Such a large sample of blacks allows for extensive analysis of their charitable behavior controlling for various socio-demographic variables.

The second distinction between previous studies of charitable giving and the Joint Center/Gallup Survey is that most studies of charitable activity have focused much of their attention on the monetary donations of the respondents in the sample. The Joint Center/Gallup Survey contains extensive questions on voluntarism as well as charitable donations of food, clothing, and shelter.

Preliminary Findings of the JCPS/Gallup Survey

Before proceeding, it would be useful to make two important observations about the data to be presented and how it relates to the concept of self-help. First, the data do not allow for a determination of the racial