

From raw numbers, a sense of anxiety

Youths' survey details concerns

By Maria Cramer

GLOBE STAFF

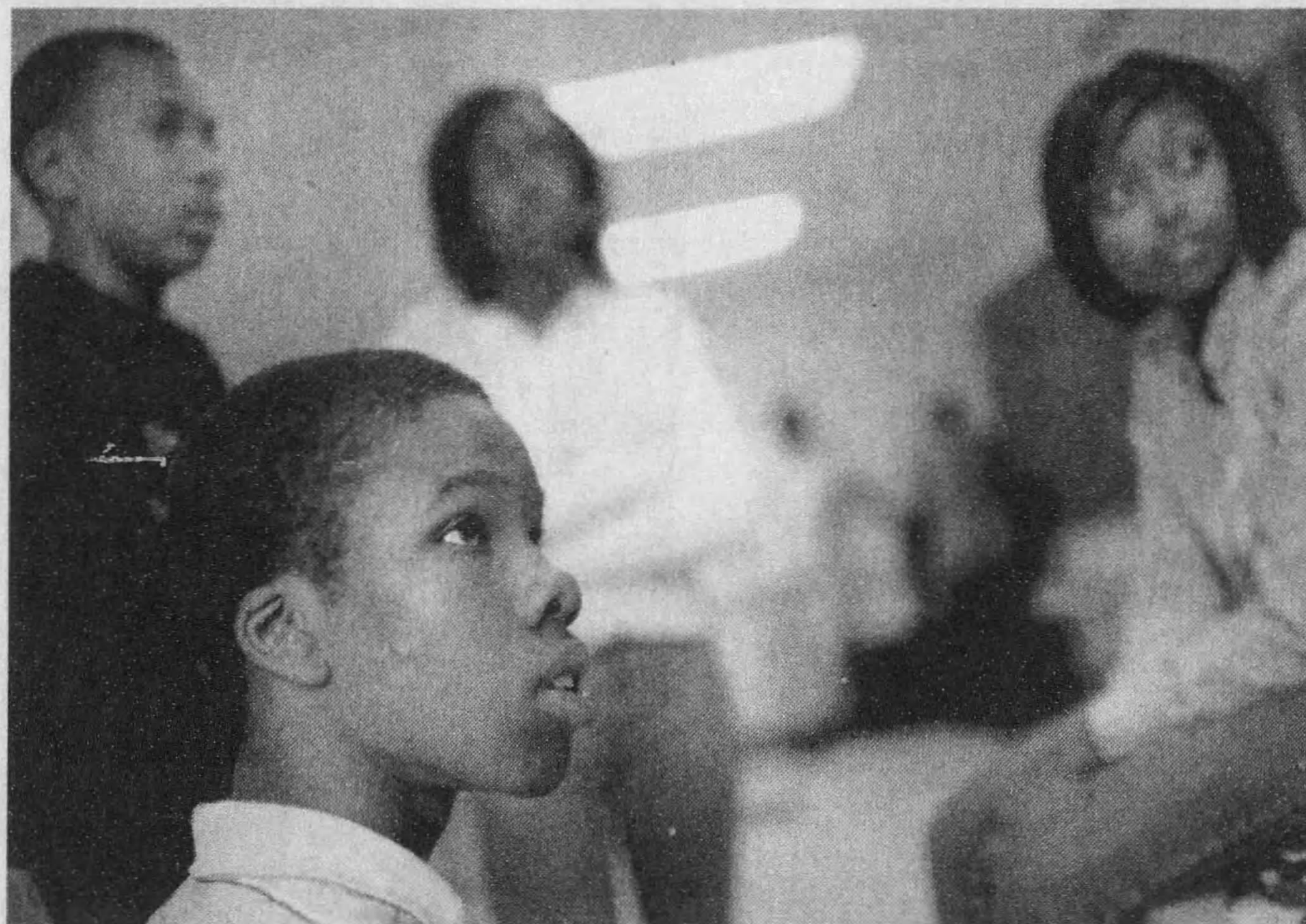
Tamisha Jackson-Young, 18, calls the gunfire and sirens that tear through her Dorchester neighborhood at night her "ghetto lullaby." Matt Williams, 15, said he developed an "unconscious mechanism" years ago to help him ignore the violence that has plagued his neighborhood since he was a baby.

So when they and 17 other teenagers from Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park canvassed the city early this month to learn how other people their age felt about violence in Boston, they were not surprised by the results.

Of about 200 people ages 14 to 24 surveyed during a one-week period, about 62 percent said violence was the biggest problem in their community. More than 85 percent of the respondents said they had at least one friend who was a victim of gang-related violence, and 70 percent had at least one friend who was a victim of domestic violence.

"We have heard and seen stuff like this all the time," Jackson-Young said yesterday, as she stood in a Boston University classroom, analyzing the results. "It's just in numbers, now."

After conducting the survey, the teenagers entered the data into computer spreadsheets and divided them into a series of pie charts they hope to present to Governor Deval Patrick today. They will go to the State House, toting their results and a two-page letter to the governor requesting a meeting with him so they can discuss their findings.



DOMINIC CHAVEZ/GLOBE STAFF

Matthew Williams (front), Marcus Peterson (back left), Candyce Baxter (center), and Tamisha Jackson-Young conducted a survey on crime, school, and other concerns in Boston.

"He should listen to us," said Samuel Demosthene, 16, who plans to enter his junior year at West Roxbury High School next month. "We deserve to be heard."

The survey, which polled mostly people from Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury, was part of a summer project known as Democracy Lab, a youth leadership program run by the New Democracy Coalition, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based at Boston University. The coalition focuses on raising civic participation.

During the seven-week program, which ends Friday, the teenagers met with city and state politicians, studied Patrick's gubernatorial campaign, and analyzed social issues, such as racial disparities in healthcare.

In the survey, the teenagers

also found that young people have little confidence in law enforcement officials and politicians. Only 5 percent thought politicians consistently respond to teenagers' concerns about their neighborhoods. About 84 percent said they believe police search people based on the color of their skin.

Told of the results, Commissioner Edward F. Davis said he was troubled by the number of young people personally affected by violence. He said his department is focused on develop-

ing trust among young city residents.

"I think the kids' concerns are valid," he said yesterday. "We have to take them into consideration."

Not all the survey results were grim. Although 75 percent said they believe city students do not get the same quality of education

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EDWARD F. DAVIS,
Boston police commissioner

as students in the suburbs, about 73 percent thought that teachers care whether they learn in class.

And about 66 percent of the people surveyed said they believed they had the power to make their neighborhood better. "Despite all that's going on, there's some optimism in the community," said Tony Van Der Meer, a professor of Africana studies at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and director of Democracy Lab.

Jackson-Young said she is confident Patrick will meet with them.

"He'll have no choice," she said. "He's not going to look very good if he doesn't listen to a group of teenagers."

Standing nearby, Marcus Peterson, 16, of Hyde Park invoked Patrick's campaign slogan when he was asked whether he thought they would get the governor's attention. "Together, we can," he said, smiling.

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