

A Roper Center Data Review

Mending the Fabric

An old teaching exercise involves staging a scene. Actors burst unexpectedly into a classroom and act out a bizarre incident before the eyes of astonished students. Afterwards, the students write accounts of what they have just witnessed; inevitably, no two descriptions are alike. The point of the exercise is to create a reality and then demonstrate just how different perceptions of that reality can be. The question lingering at the end of the lesson is, if we all see different things even when we're seeing the same things, how can we ever know what is the truth?

The data on the following pages are troubling on a number of levels. First, they are based on a contrivance—the division of Americans into racial groups. As Kerry Rockquemore has pointed out, these groupings are an artifice based more on manmade social constructs than on any kind of science. Yet inequality between the two groups that we call “black” and “white” in American society is an indisputable fact; and so, for the purposes of this analysis, the contrivance is maintained.

More disturbing is the pervasive, persistent divide that exists between black and white perceptions of the status of race relations in the United States today. We could have presented here the combined responses of all Americans to questions regarding race. In them we saw a promising picture, a tale of progress tinged with optimism for the future. The rosiness faded, though, as soon as we separated the views of the black minority from those of the white majority that had obscured them. In the end, we decided the story lay in the differences that emerged when responses were no longer masked by aggregation.

Most whites see race relations generally as being good; most blacks see them as generally bad. When asked to explain continuing disparities between the two groups in terms of jobs, income and housing, 6 in 10 African Americans see themselves being held back by discrimination, while nearly half of whites blame blacks for lacking necessary willpower. Indeed, fully a fifth of whites believe African Americans receive too many special advantages, while fewer than a third of blacks see their own treatment as even being fair.

How can we reconcile the differences in these points of view, bridge the racial divide in perception? One way is by finding common ground. It is encouraging to see that blacks and whites alike maintain a strong faith in democratic ideals, a

shared belief in opportunity, political participation, and the importance of hard work. Light also glimmers in the steadily growing acceptance by both groups of interracial marriage and the increased willingness of members of each group to call a member of the other “friend.”

And no one would question that things have improved vastly since the days, not so long ago, when the National Guard had to escort black children into white schools, and when even those African Americans who had fought for their country came home to tightly circumscribed job opportunities, a hostile housing market, and segregated drinking fountains. Today's debate is no longer over whether blacks and whites should be equal, but, rather, over how far we have come along the road to equality, and what more needs to be done.

Here again, the gap is plain to see. Virtually identical numbers of the two groups agree that the objective of racial policies should be equal opportunity. But blacks place far more importance on working toward that goal than whites, and are far more likely to feel that not enough attention is being devoted to the matter—an indictment of perceived complacency and indifference perhaps more stinging than any other statement emerging from these data.

In far greater numbers than their white fellow citizens, African Americans believe the problem of racial inequality in the United States remains a serious one that warrants serious attention. And, in far greater numbers than whites, they believe positive measures, such as equal protection laws and affirmative action programs, are necessary to address it.

What is the status of race relations in the United States today? As far as public opinion is concerned, there is no clear answer. The “two-ness” of the black experience described by Lawrence Bobo et al.—the split view of the nation as seen through African American eyes—extends to how both blacks and whites see the nation with respect to our views of each other. We look at the same things and see them differently; and until our perceptions come closer together, we may not be able to know—or to agree on how to deal with—the truth.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee, Associate Editor

Data follow—pages 23-31

Race Relations in Black and White

Question: In general, do you think race relations in the United States are very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad?

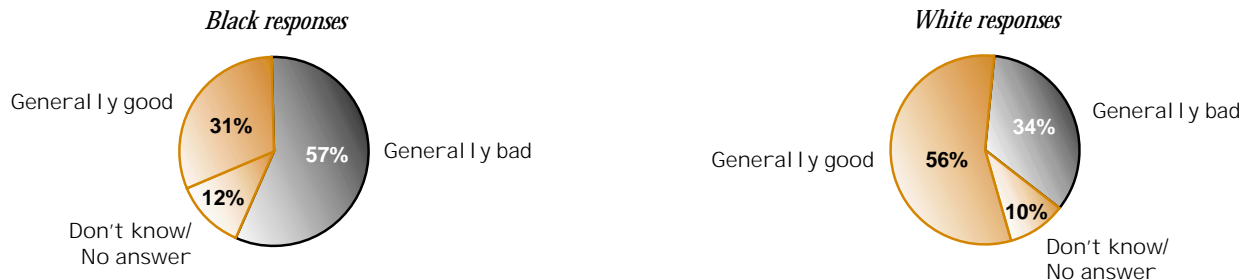
Race relations in the US



Source: Survey by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, March 2-5, 2000.

Question: Do you think race relations in the United States are generally good or generally bad?

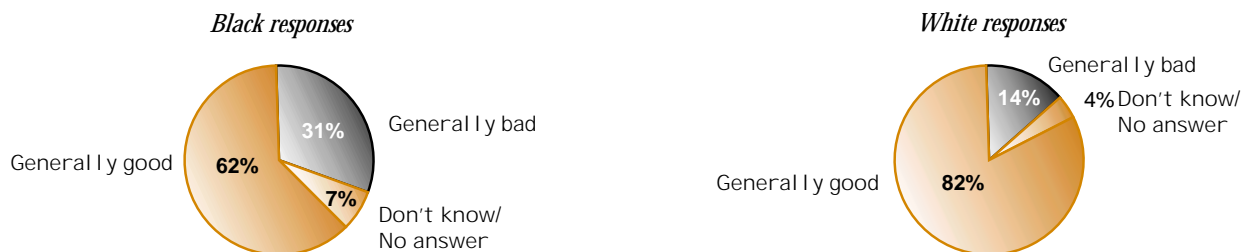
Race relations in the US



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: Do you think race relations in your community are generally good or generally bad?

Race relations in your community

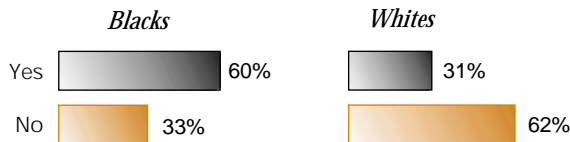


Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

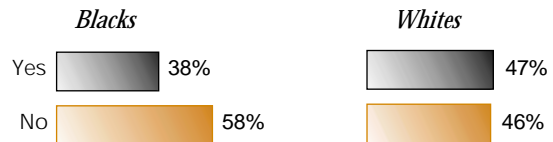
Differences and Differential Treatment

Question: On the average African Americans have worse jobs, income and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are...?

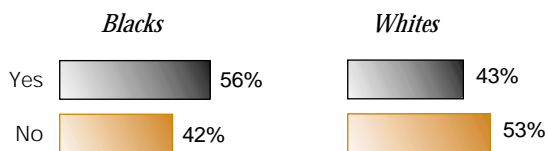
...Mainly due to discrimination



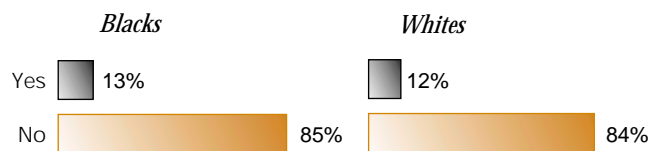
...Because most African Americans just don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty



...Because most African Americans don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty



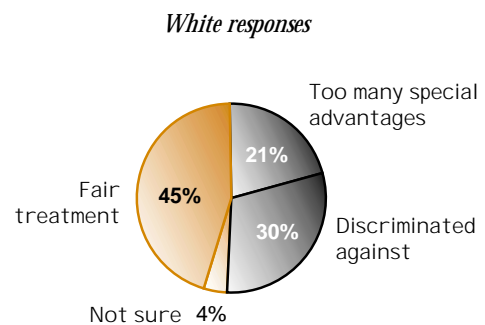
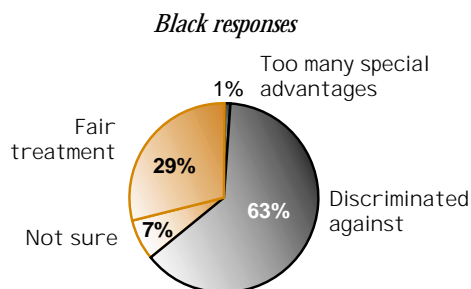
...Because most African Americans have less in-born ability to learn



Source: Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, February 1-June 25, 2000.

Question: For each of the following groups, please tell me whether you feel that they are receiving too many special advantages, receiving fair treatment, or are being discriminated against... Blacks.

Treatment blacks receive



Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, March 2-5, 2000.

Blind Justice?

Question: In general, do you think the criminal justice system in the United States is biased in favor of blacks, or is it biased against blacks, or does it generally give blacks fair treatment?

Criminal justice system



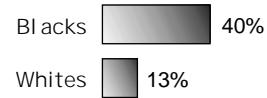
Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: Why do you think so many young black men are in prison today? Do you think the main reason is...?

More arrests and tougher sentencing in general



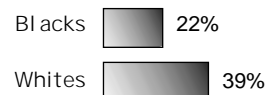
Unfair targeting of blacks by police



Failure of government social programs and policies



Bad character of the convicts themselves



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, April 16-19, 1999.

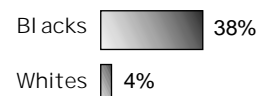
Question: It has been reported that some police officers stop motorists of certain racial or ethnic groups because the officers believe that these groups are more likely than others to commit certain types of crimes. Do you believe that this practice, known as "racial profiling" is widespread, or not?

Percent responding yes



Question: Have you ever felt that you were stopped by the police just because of your race or ethnic background?

Percent responding yes



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

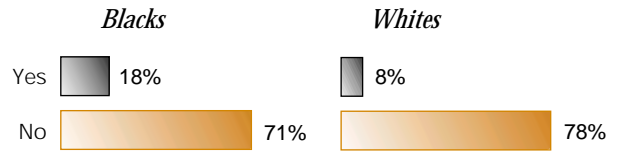
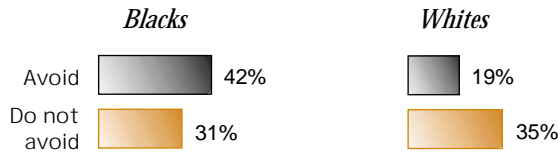
Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Perception Meets Experience

Question: Generally speaking, is it your impression that many taxi drivers in big cities try to avoid picking up blacks as passengers, or do you think they pick up blacks as often as anyone else?

Question: If you've ever hailed a cab, have you ever had a taxi driver refuse to pick you up, or not?

Taxi drivers



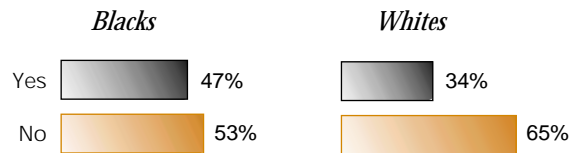
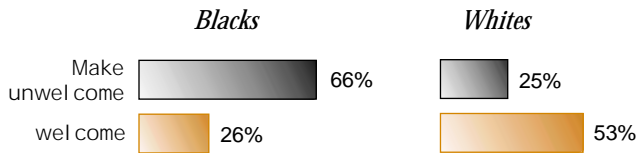
Note: 43% of those surveyed had no opinion.
Source: Survey by ABC News, January 26-February 1, 2000.

Source: Survey by ABC News, January 26-February 1, 2000.

Question: Is it your impression that the shopkeepers or sales clerks in expensive stores tend to make blacks feel unwelcome, or not?

Question: Have shopkeepers or sales clerks in an expensive store ever made you feel unwelcome, or not?

Sales clerks



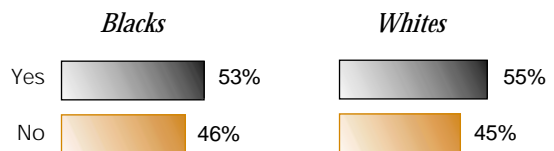
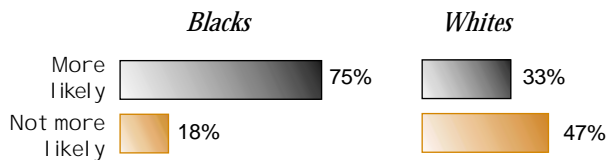
Note: 20% of those surveyed had no opinion.
Source: Survey by ABC News, January 26-February 1, 2000.

Source: Survey by ABC News, January 26-February 1, 2000.

Question: Is it your impression that the police are more likely to pull over black drivers for minor traffic infractions, or not?

Question: Have the police ever pulled you over for a minor traffic infraction, or not?

Police stop



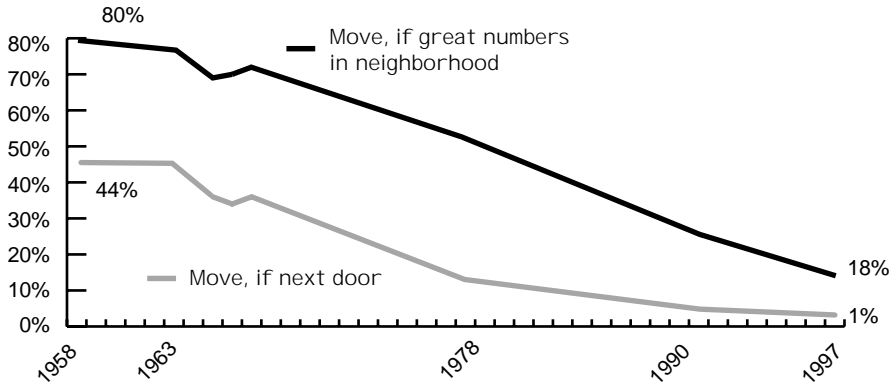
Note: 18% of those surveyed had no opinion.
Source: Survey by ABC News, January 26-February 1, 2000.

Source: Survey by ABC News, January 26-February 1, 2000.

The Personal Gap Narrows

Questions: If black people came to live in great numbers in your neighborhood, would you move? If black people came to live next door, would you move?

Percent responding would move



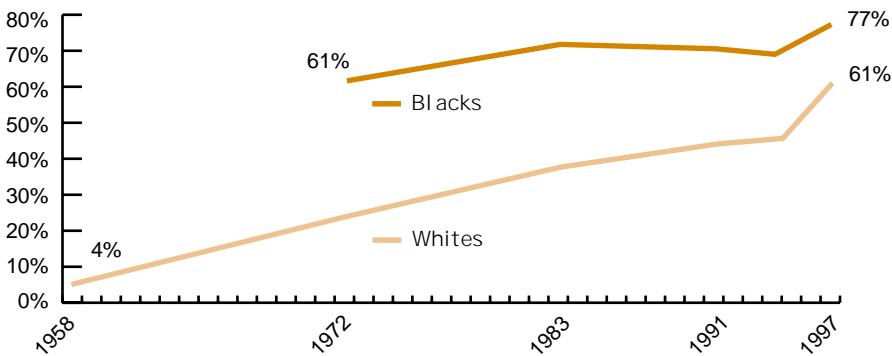
	<i>Move, if blacks next door</i>	<i>Move, if great numbers of blacks in neighborhood</i>
1958	44%	80%
1963	45	77
1965	36	69
1966	34	70
1967	36	72
1978	13	53
1990	5	26
1997	1	18

Note: Asked of non-blacks. Question wording varies.

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of January 4-February 28, 1997.

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of marriage between blacks and whites?

Percent responding approve

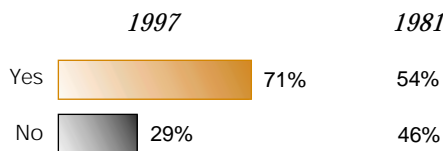


	<i>Percent responding approve</i>	
	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Whites</i>
1958	NA	4%
1972	61%	25
1983	71	38
1991	70	44
1994	68	45
1997	77	61

Note: Question wording varies.

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of January 4-February 28, 1997.

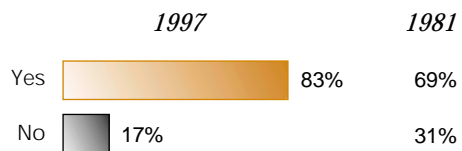
Question: Do you yourself know any black person whom you consider a fairly close personal friend?



Note: Asked of non-blacks.

Source: Surveys by ABC News/ *Washington Post*, June 5-8, 1997 and February 26-March 6, 1981.

Question: Do you yourself know any white person whom you consider a fairly close personal friend?



Note: Asked of blacks.

Source: Surveys by ABC News/ *Washington Post*, June 5-8, 1997 and February 26-March 6, 1981.

Democratic Ideals in Common

Question: On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the United States?

Percent responding very or fairly satisfied



Source: Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, February 1-June 25, 2000.

Question: I'd like to know how important each statement [about freedom] is to you... Freedom is having the right to participate in politics and elections.

Percent responding one of the most important, extremely important, or very important



Source: Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, February 1-June 25, 2000.

Question: Do you think it's still possible to start out poor in this country, work hard, and become rich?

Percent responding possible



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: Do you agree or disagree...? In America people get rewarded for their intelligence and skills.

Percent responding strongly agree or agree

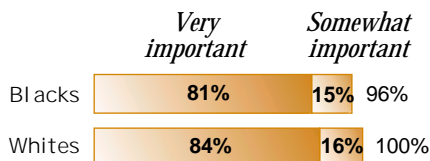


Source: Survey by the National Opinion Research Center-General Social Survey, February 1-June 25, 2000.

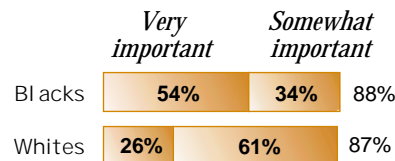
Shared Values

Question: How important is each of the following values to you personally, would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not that important, or not important at all...?

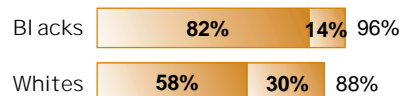
Hard work



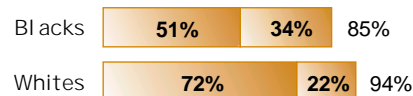
Money



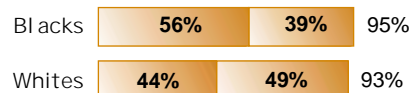
Religion



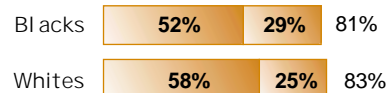
Patriotism



Community involvement



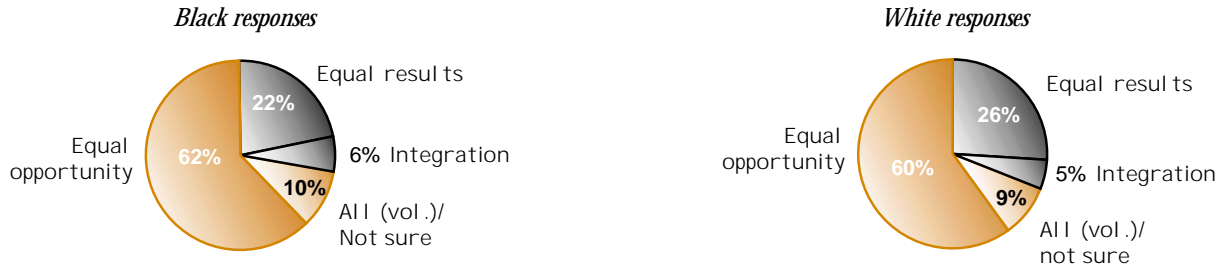
Having children



Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, February 26-March 1, 1998.

Ends and Means

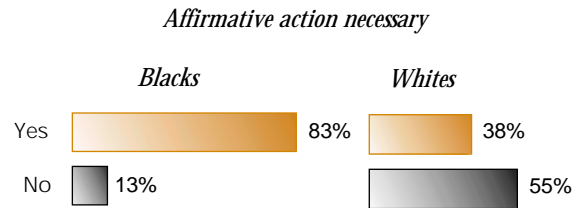
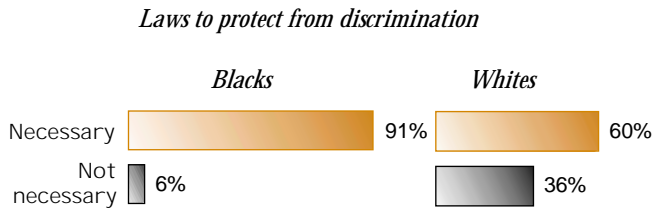
Question: When it comes to achieving racial equality among different racial groups in the United States, which do you think the objective should be—integration, equal opportunity, or equal results?



Source: Survey by NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, March 2-5, 2000.

Question: These days, do you think it is necessary to have laws to protect minorities from discrimination in hiring and promotion, or don't you think it's necessary?

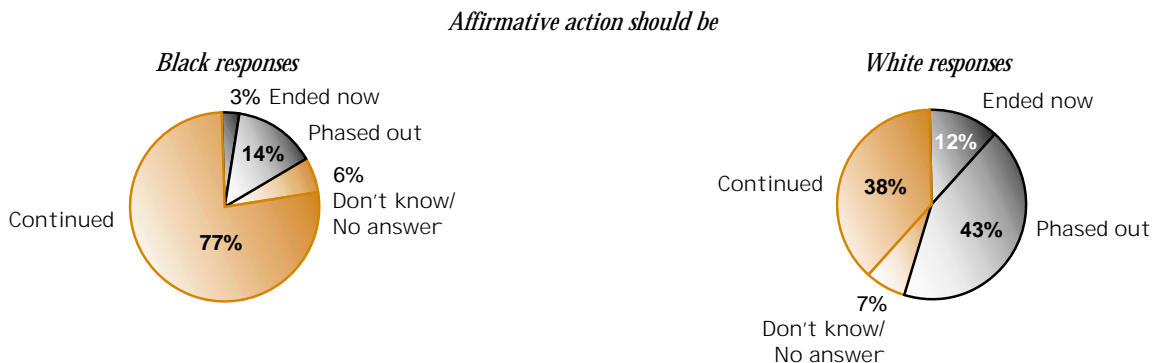
Question: These days, do you think it is necessary to have affirmative action programs to make sure companies have racially diverse workforces, or don't you think it's necessary?



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: What do you think should happen to affirmative action programs? 1. Should they be ended now? 2. Should they be phased out over the next few years? 3. Should affirmative action programs be continued for the foreseeable future?

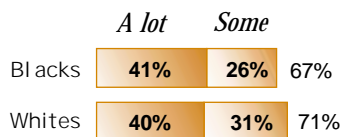


Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

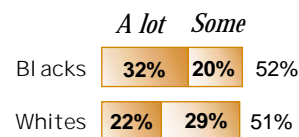
Mending the Fabric

Question: Please tell me how much, if anything, you think each of the following has done to improve conditions for black Americans in recent years. What about... has this done a lot, some, only a little, or nothing to improve conditions for black Americans?

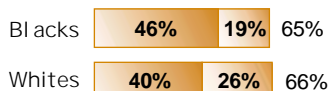
...Self help



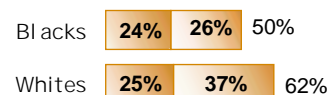
...Affirmative action programs



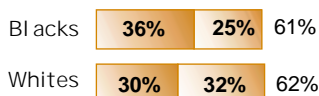
...Black churches



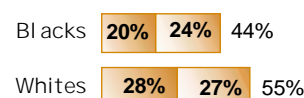
...Economic conditions



...Community action



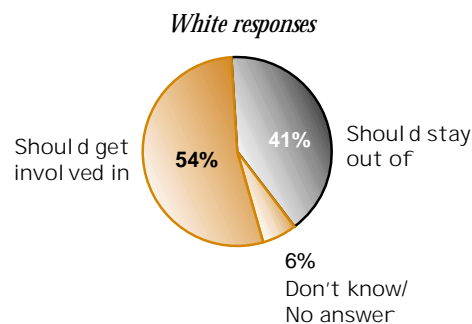
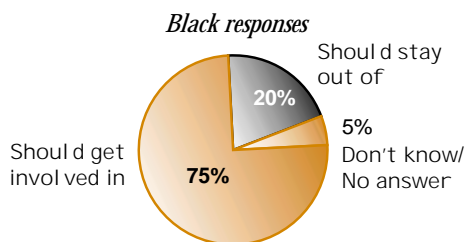
...A more color-blind society



Source: Survey by Princeton Survey Research Associates for *Newsweek*, April 16-19, 1999.

Question: Are race relations something the government in Washington should get involved in, or is that something the government should stay out of?

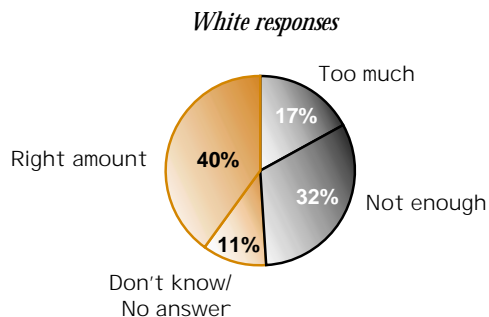
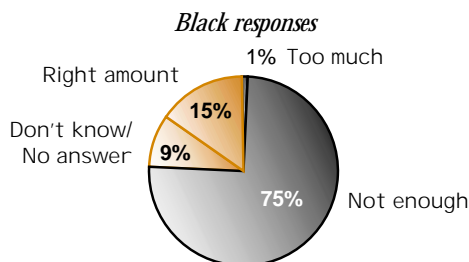
Government involvement in race relations



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: Do you think the government in Washington is paying too much, not enough, or about the right amount of attention to the needs and problems of blacks and other minorities?

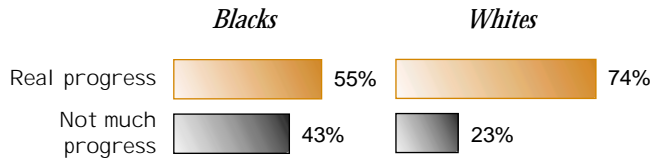
Amount of attention by government



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

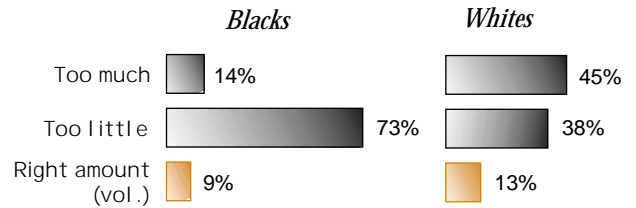
Past, Present, Future

Question: Some people say that since the 1960s there has been a lot of progress in getting rid of racial discrimination. Others say that there hasn't been much real progress for blacks over that time. Which do you agree with more...?



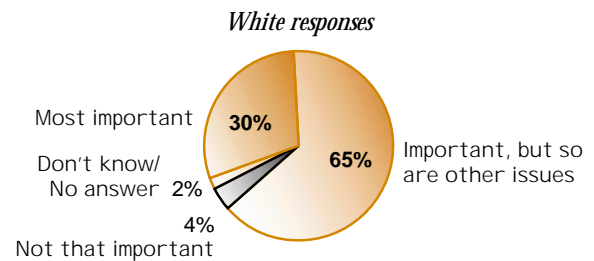
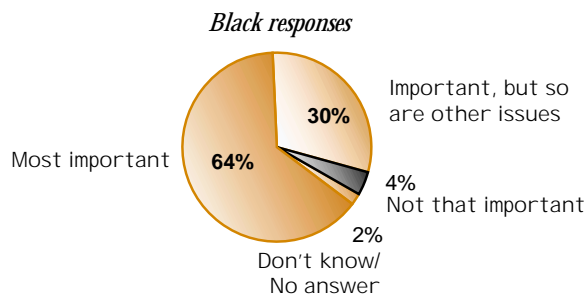
Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: Do you feel that we devote too much attention to dealing with the issue of race relations in our country today, or too little attention to dealing with the issue of race relations?



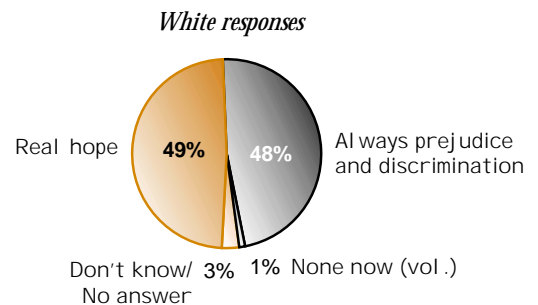
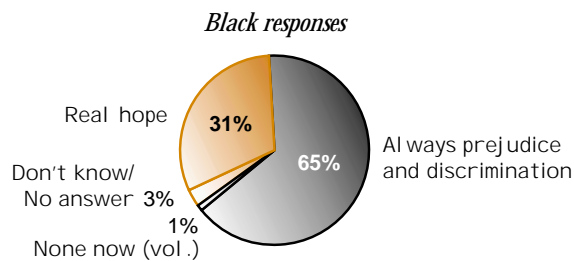
Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, March 2-5, 2000.

Question: How important do you think improving race relations is to the future of the United States—do you think it's one of the most important things we need to do for the future, or it is important, but so are other issues, or it's not that important to the future of the US?



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.

Question: Do you think there will always be a lot of racial prejudice and discrimination in America, or is there real hope of ending it in the long run?



Source: Survey by CBS News, February 6-10, 2000.