People, Opinions, & Polls

American Ideas and Ideals

How Fares the Experiment?

Some Worries...

Question: Think for a moment about what the American dream means to you. Is this something you think most people today can realistically achieve, or is it a goal few Americans can reach?

Question: Some people think that the U.S. will never again have it as good as we did in the past; others disagree. How about you? Do you think the country has already seen the best times we are going to, or not?

But the Idea Continues to Draw Strong Affirmation...

Question: A basic American belief has been that if you work hard you can get ahead—reach the goals you set and more. Does that still hold true?

Question: The Declaration of Independence proclaims that all people are created equal, ‘endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.’ Do you, yourself, really believe this, or is it just a fairy tale?

Note: Earlier on in American history, many people thought the U.S. was the very best place in the world to live. Do you think it still is, or not?

Note: Throughout this section, unless otherwise noted, the data shown are taken from a survey conducted by the Roper Center for Reader’s Digest, August-September 1994.
People, Opinions, & Polls

**American Ideas and Ideals**

...And Strong Affirmation Across Group Lines

Percent saying they personally believe in the Declaration’s Proclamation of Equality

Percent saying they personally believe that hard work is in fact rewarded by success

Percent saying they believe the US is the best place in the world to live

And One’s Own “Talents and Effort” are Recognized

**Question:** Are you more or less where you should be in your job, given your talents and effort, or has your hard work been overlooked?

- **More/less where should be:** 28%
- **Hard work/talent overlooked:** 72%
People, Opinions, & Polls

American Ideas and Ideals

The American Idea of Equality
Again, Some Worries on How Well We’re Doing

Question: Do most Americans today have an equal chance to succeed in life or not?

[Chart showing 51% with equal chance and 49% without]

Question: How about women—regardless of what they have faced in the past, do you think they have an equal chance to succeed or not?

[Chart showing 37% with equal chance and 62% without]

 Responses by Gender

Male: 64% with equal chance
Female: 59% with equal chance

Question: And how about black Americans—regardless of what they have faced in the past, do you think they have an equal chance to succeed or not?

[Chart showing 40% with equal chance and 60% without]

 Responses by Race

Blacks: 36% with equal chance
Hispanics: 62% with equal chance
Whites: 61% with equal chance

Note: All pies shown throughout this section are shown, for display purposes, with “don’t know” responses calculated out; however, group responses shown are the actual percentages.

But No Doubts on the Nature of the Goal

Question: [Do you agree or disagree...] There should be a top limit on incomes so that no one can earn more than $100,000 a year?

[Chart showing agreement and disagreement by income level]


Question: Do you think there should be a law limiting the amount of money any individual is allowed to earn in a year?

[Chart showing agreement and disagreement by income level]

Note: The "economic status" categories are coded by the interviewers, and whites only were included in the sample.

Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, December 1939.
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American Ideas and Ideals

The Goal is Extending Opportunity, Not Equalizing Result

**Question:** Should there be a top limit on incomes so that no one can earn more than one million dollars a year?

- **Yes:** 23%
- **No:** 77%

**Question:** Which is more important—insuring that each individual has as much opportunity as possible, even if that means some people enjoy far more success than others, or insuring greater equality of income, even if that limits individual opportunity?

- 9% Give each as much opportunity as possible
- 18% Greater equality of income
- 73% DK/Refused

**By Race:**
- Black: 32 Yes, 67 No
- Hispanic: 25 Yes, 68 No
- White: 21 Yes, 75 No

**By Gender:**
- Female: 27 Yes, 70 No
- Male: 16 Yes, 79 No

**By Income:**
- Less than $20K: 33 Yes, 62 No
- $20-$40K: 26 Yes, 70 No
- $40-$50K: 19 Yes, 78 No
- $50K+: 10 Yes, 87 No

**By Age:**
- 18-29: 19 Yes, 60 No
- 30-44: 20 Yes, 76 No
- 45-59: 23 Yes, 73 No
- 60+: 26 Yes, 68 No

**By Party ID:**
- Republican: 15 Yes, 80 No
- Democrat: 29 Yes, 68 No
- Independent: 23 Yes, 74 No

**Question:** If you were asked to use one of these four names for your social class, which would you say you belong to—the middle class, lower class, working class, or upper class?

- Upper Class: 4%
- Working Class: 32%
- Middle Class: 60%
- Lower Class: 4%

**Blacks:**
- Middle Class: 44%
- Lower Class: 44%
- Working Class: 4%

**Hispanics:**
- Middle Class: 45%
- Lower Class: 48%

**Note:** Throughout this section, unless otherwise noted, the data shown are taken from a survey conducted by the Roper Center for Reader's Digest, August-September 1994.
THE US IN CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

On Equality: Still a Distinctively Individual-Centered Conception

Questions: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement...It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes?, and Do you agree or disagree with the following statement....The government should provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income? Source: ISSP Surveys, 1992.

How do you prefer to be paid: fixed salary or incentive basis tied to accomplishments.

Questions: ...how would you most prefer to be paid—on a fixed salary basis, so that you always know how much you will earn—or mostly on an incentive basis which will allow you to earn more if you accomplish a lot, but may result in less earnings if you don't accomplish enough? ...For each statement, please tell me whether you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it....Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control? Note: Agree response shown is "completely agree" and "mostly agree" combined. Source: Times Mirror Surveys, 1991.

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THE US IN CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In Group Participation: Still a Nation of Joiners

Question: ...Which, if any [of these groups], do you belong to?

Composite of Group Memberships

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percent belonging to no groups</th>
<th>Percent belonging to 1-3 groups</th>
<th>Percent belonging to 4-6 groups</th>
<th>Percent belonging to 7 or more groups</th>
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Percentage Claiming Membership, By Type of Association

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<th>France</th>
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