

# *Do Negroes Have Equal Economic Opportunities?*

*Why?*



**NATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH CENTER**

**UNIVERSITY OF DENVER**

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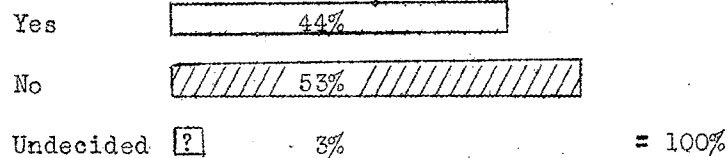
**April 1944**

DO NEGROES HAVE EQUAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES?

Even in wartime, a majority of Americans think that Negroes do not have the same chance as white people to make a good living in the United States. Today this opinion is held by 53 per cent of all civilian adults. As might be expected, the sharpest difference of opinion on this question is between whites and Negroes. Moreover, persons with a college background are more likely than those with less education to believe that Negroes do not have equal economic opportunities.

NORC asked this question of a nation-wide representative population sample:

*"Do you think Negroes have the same chance as white people to make a good living in this country?"*



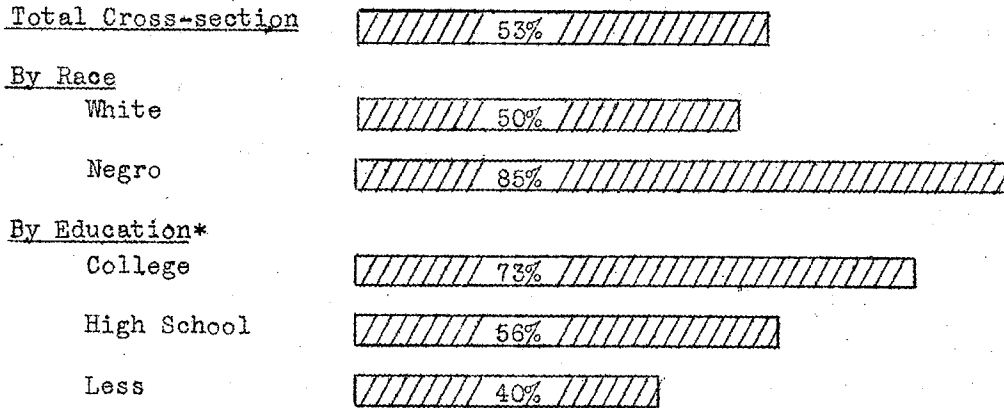
Almost every person interviewed has an opinion on the subject. The "Undecided" vote, even among persons with little education, is unusually small.

White people living in the southern states give a higher "Yes" vote -- 60 per cent -- than any other group in the survey. (Only 37 per cent answered "No.") The difference in response between southern and northern Negroes is negligible; only 1 per cent more in the South say opportunities are unequal.

## DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BY RACE AND EDUCATION

The chart below gives an exact comparison of the responses given by various population groups to the question: "Do you think Negroes have the same chance as white people to make a good living in this country?"

### Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities (Percentage Answering "No")



## DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BY OCCUPATION, SECTION, AND SIZE OF PLACE

Of the various occupational groups within the population, persons in professional, managerial, and white collar positions are most likely to think Negroes have an unequal chance to make a living (64%), and farmers the least likely (42%). When the vote by sections is analyzed, the distribution of "No" responses is as follows: Pacific and Mountain states -- 63%; Midwest -- 55%; New England and Middle Atlantic states -- 52%; and South -- 48%. Fifty-six per cent of city residents and 54 per cent of those in small towns, but only 42 per cent of the rural population think Negroes have unequal economic opportunities.

\*Persons interviewed in connection with NCRS surveys are divided by education into three groups. The "college" category includes those who have attended college for more than one year. The "high school" group takes in those who have had one to four years of high school work. The third group includes all others -- persons who have graduated from elementary school, persons who have attended, and some with no formal education at all.

## WHY?

All persons who answered either "Yes" or "No" were asked: "What do you think is the main reason for this?"

Those white people who think Negroes do not have an equal chance emphasize in this order:

1. Racial prejudice
2. Educational discrimination.
3. Economic discrimination

Negroes place chief emphasis upon economic factors.

Persons who think Negroes do have an equal chance are most likely to believe that Negroes fail to take advantage of opportunities when offered or that during the war when labor is at a premium Negroes can do just as well as whites.

Through their reactions many respondents reveal a sympathetic understanding of the problems of the Negro race. Other comments reveal a definite anti-Negro bias -- in some cases an intense antagonism. Still others seem indifferent.

The individual comments presented are valuable because they give the real flavor of public opinion -- the flesh and blood of human attitudes that clothe the skeleton of cold statistics. These are honest reactions and should be respected as such, even though many of them reveal areas of serious prejudice and misapprehension. The existence of these attitudinal areas constitutes a challenge to liberal educators and to all intelligent people seriously concerned with the expansion of democracy -- economical and social as well as political -- within the United States.

The comments given in the following sections present typical attitudes representative of various sections of the country and various groups within the population. Those not specifically labeled are made by white respondents.

## Why People Think Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities

### RACIAL PREJUDICE

This is the largest single group of comments. Many are general and vague -- "prejudice ... racial prejudice ... discrimination" -- yet they indicate a recognition of a wide-spread attitude fundamental to a Negro's chance to make a living.

These are examples of the more general types of comments:

"Bigotry and prejudice of white people."	Woman office worker, Birmingham, Alabama
"Prejudice among our white race. We don't admit it, but it's there."	Farmer, near Sloan, Iowa
"People talk about being equal, but they don't practice it."	Blind pensioner, Milwaukee
"Deep-rooted prejudice of people against them."	Woman church secretary, Denver
"We draw the color line here too much."	Surveyor's widow, St. Louis
"Too much 'Jim Crow' and prejudice against the colored man."	Negro truck driver, Louisville

Some white people dislike Negroes because of their race and color:

"Because they're black and most people favors the whites."	Farmer, near Harveytown, West Virginia
"Their color -- people can't get used to the idea that a Negro is a human being like a white man."	Salesman, Brooklyn
"Too much discrimination against their race. They shouldn't be here, so treat them fair to make up for the white man's mistake."	Farmer, Marshall, Indiana
"Their very color excludes them here."	Welder's wife, Los Angeles
"I suppose most people just don't like colored people."	Woman insurance clerk, Pittsfield, Massachusetts
"Their race -- the average white person holds a distaste for colored people."	Wife of dairy manager, Kent, Washington
"Well, just 'cause we're colored, lady, and can't help ourselves."	Negro farmer's wife, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

A few persons suggest that dislike of Negroes is instinctive with white people:

"Because they are different from us. We just seem to have that dislike under our skin."	Farmer's wife, Western Iowa
"It's born in you; white people think they are better than Negroes."	Stenographer, Santa Ana, California

A number of those interviewed mention the fact that many people look down upon Negroes as inferiors:

"The white folks don't figger Niggers is worth as much as white folks."	Bundler, box factory, St. Louis
"White people's superiority -- at least they think they are."	Wife of army colonel, Manhattan
"We haven't learned to look upon the Negro as our equal."	Building contractor, Middletown, Connecticut
"I wouldn't want to associate with them. I feel superior."	Proprietress of candy store, Springfield, Massachusetts
"We look on Negroes as servants, not as equals."	Business woman, Sloan, Iowa
"White people feel too superior because of their color. I know many brilliant Negroes."	Woman photographer, Los Angeles

## Why People Think Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities (continued)

### ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

Respondents mention economic discrimination in general terms, in hiring and firing policies, in wage scales, in promotions, and in barring Negroes from the better jobs in industry and the professions. This consideration ranks first of reasons given by Negroes and third by whites.

People who speak of general economic discrimination and employment policies give answers such as these:

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| "White people can never be broadminded enough to let Negroes make a good living."   | Wife of engineer, Denver                  |
| "Most employers are white and prefer white help."   | Freight checker, Detroit                  |
| "Lots of big companies won't even consider hiring Negroes."   | Railroad fireman, Raleigh, North Carolina |
| "On account of their color they're the last hired and the first laid off."  | Carpenter, Meadville, Pennsylvania        |
| "One of the main reasons is the lack of opportunities where jobs are concerned. Here it is because the white man owns the factories and he in turn takes care of the white man first, which is no more than any other race would do." | Negro tailor, Chicago                     |
| "When a white man and a colored man go after the same job the white man will get it and also get more money."   | Negro machine operator, Detroit           |

Often mentioned are wage differentials:

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| "They are not paid on the same salary scale and not given the same consideration. This is due largely to color, not to lack of ability." | Wife of railroad conductor, Raleigh, North Carolina |
| "Folks just think Negroes should work cheaper than white people."  | Welder's wife, Atlanta                              |
| "We don't get paid for what we really do and we are <u>afraid</u> to complain."  | Negro housewife, South Carolina                     |
| "The white folks just don't think the colored amount to much. They want to make more money for the same work."                           | Wife of Negro laborer, Louisville, Kentucky         |

Both Negroes and whites emphasize the fact that even educated Negroes have difficulty securing the better jobs -- skilled and professional:

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| "Well, I can't picture a Negro being head of a big corporation, and I think that is true of a lot of us white people."  | Minister's wife, Pittston, Pennsylvania |
| "They are barred from certain jobs on account of their color."  | Wife of contractor, Wilmette, Illinois  |
| "Even educated Negroes have a hard time getting a decent job."  | Insurance executive, Dallas             |
| "We start Negroes in school when we do the whites and when they finish with the same education as the whites we pull down the curtain and shut many opportunities away from their reach." | Real estate man, St. Louis              |
| "They won't put more than one man in a million colored in a responsible job even if he is capable. The white people don't give you the opportunity."                                      | Negro dressmaker, Clayton, Missouri     |

Why People Think Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities (continued)

"It's been that way all my life. We are just shut out of good jobs." Negro laundress, Chester, South Carolina

"We can get the little jobs but we don't get a chance to go ahead to better jobs." Negro cleaner, South Carolina

"Negroes are not trained for the positions they can hold, and if they are trained are not allowed to hold them." Negro woman teacher, Baltimore

Also mentioned is the objection of some whites to working with Negroes:

"Prejudices of employers and fellow workers to their color." Newspaperman, Peoria, Illinois

"To avoid friction. If they were allowed to work with some white people there would be trouble." Wife of schoolteacher, Dyersburg, Tennessee

"Some plants where employers want Negroes, other workers block it." Negro janitor's wife, Boston

A few specifically mention discrimination on the part of labor unions:

"The unions won't let Negroes work in the cities and won't work with them." Carpenter, Oberlin, Ohio

"Before the war industry would not take them. The labor unions are much to blame." Automatic screw operator, Boston

EDUCATIONAL DISCRIMINATION

Respondents in both the North and South mention the unequal educational opportunities available to Negroes:

"The Negroes haven't been educated enough through generations back." Navy wife, Oakland, California

"Inadequate training on the part of the Negro -- due largely to our refusal to make this training possible." Woman executive, southern Louisiana

"They lack education and the facilities for education." Dairy farmer, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

"The Negro doesn't get the same educational privileges for his taxes." Negro postal clerk, Boston

"Our schools aren't as good as yours are so we don't get as good learnin' how to make a good livin'." Negro woman sharecropper, Rock Hill, South Carolina

Some persons believe that Negroes do not have the capacity to take advantage of educational and economic opportunities:

"They haven't the capabilities of taking an education and holding good jobs." Groceryman, Northern South Carolina

Why People Think Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities (continued)

"They aren't mentally able to take advantage of opportunities."  
Farmer's wife, near Wichita, Kansas

"Negroes are not as intelligent as white people."  
Grinder's wife, Detroit

Others are convinced that Negroes lack ambition and initiative:

"They have the chance to get the education, but won't apply themselves to work."  
Unemployed manicurist, Chicago

"They are a backward and shiftless race -- not industrious."  
Foreign language instructor, Birmingham

"They are Negroes and they like their way of living."  
Wife of defense worker, Ill.

SECTIONAL AND HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION

Many respondents feel that Negroes have more chance in the North than in the South:

"In the south there's discrimination against them -- jobs, votes, learning."  
Chemist's wife, Philadelphia

"In the North it is because the people don't like Negroes. In the South it is the custom for generations."  
Inspector, Chicago

"No, poor things, they don't have a chance here in Texas."  
Stenographer, Austin

"Politics in the South."  
Welder, Clarion, Iowa

"People in the southern section are against them and give them the lowest type jobs, and we in the North aren't much better."  
Ad. printer, La Salle, Illinois

"No matter what professional training Negroes have, they can't advance in the South -- due to pre-Civil War thinking."  
Woman medical worker, Boston

"It's according to what kind of a living you mean. If they're not satisfied, let them go to the North. That's the way I feel about it. Because they're not equal."  
Railroad fireman, Austin

"In the South there is no compulsory education, so they're illiterate."  
Wife of business man, Houston

"The Negro in the South has never been allowed to show his ability. It doesn't apply so much in the North where he has educational chances."  
Wife of banker, Halifax, Massachusetts

"Unions don't want Negroes. I tried several jobs but they always tried to get out of having me. It's easier to get a job in the South, but law and justice aren't on your side as they are in the North."  
Negro service station attendant, Milwaukee

"Not in this state or any southern state. Maybe they have a chance up North. It's just that way down South."  
Wife of Negro truck farmer, Greenpastures, Oklahoma

"Whites who migrate from the South bring ideas of Negro suppression with them."  
Woman Negro teacher, Baltimore

Others believe that Negroes are still being discriminated against because of their background of slavery:

"It dates back to the Civil war. They were brought over as slaves and many people feel that way yet."  
Farmer's wife, Issaquah Washington



Why People Think Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities (continued)

"They are very young in the time of their freedom and haven't had as long a life as the whites to make a success."	Truck gardener, Honey Brook, Pennsylvania
"When they come down from the first generation they were slaves. They should be now."	76-year-old farmer, Talladega, Alabama
"It's prejudice held over from the Civil War."	Farmer's wife, Tulsa
"The Negroes have never lived down being slaves."	Machinist's wife, Los Angeles

OPPRESSION

Negroes are in general denied an equal chance and opportunity in life. They are intentionally "held down," say some:

"Whites don't want Negroes to have a chance. Whites are keeping them down."	Merchant, Bluffton, Ohio
"They're still being held down by white people."	Saleslady, Crestwood, Kentucky
"They just don't want to give us an equal break."	Negro yardman, Oklahoma City
"Some of the white people just don't want the colored to advance."	Wife of Negro baker, Baltimore

Other white people feel strongly that Negroes should be "kept in their place," that their own aggressiveness is a handicap:

"Negroes don't know their place."	Diesel inspector, Peoria, Ill.
"You can't give them too much freedom, as they take advantage of it."	Assembly worker, Hollis, Long Island
"They have themselves to blame; they push too hard."	Wife of coast guard employee, Cleveland
"Negroes are too aggressive."	Defense worker, Detroit
"When Negroes get too much money they become wild and don't know how to use it."	Undertaker, Orange, New Jersey
"Whites want to keep Negroes in their place."	Wife of Negro truck driver, western Pennsylvania

CONVERSELY:

"A Negro is not as aggressive as a white."	Contractor, Ogden, Utah
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Why People Think Negroes Have UNEQUAL Economic Opportunities (concluded)

SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

A number of respondents speak of the fact that many white people don't like to associate or mix with Negroes:

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|---|--------------------------------|
| "The white race doesn't care to intermingle too intimately with Negroes."                             | Car dealer, Clayton, Missouri  |
| "Most white people don't want to mix with Negroes."   | Chauffeur's wife, Manhattan    |
| "A line should be drawn at inter-marriage, but Negroes should be given an equal chance to get ahead." | Farmer's wife, Beaverton, Ore. |

A few persons refer to Biblical teachings as a basis for one of these two diametrically opposed attitudes:

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| "Negroes are not supposed to have an equal chance to make a living. The Bible says they're the white man's slave." | Woman cashier, Atlanta |
| "Failure to recognize the principle of the brotherhood of man."  | Minister, Houston      |

Each of the following comments represents a definite point of view held by at least a small group within the population:

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| "White people usually don't trust Negroes."   | Farmer's wife, Goshen, Indiana            |
| "White people outnumber Negroes and never will accept them as equals."                        | Manager, finance corporation, Minneapolis |
| "Negroes should have a country of their own."   | Widow, Collinsville, Oklahoma             |
| "Negroes have been largely discriminated against even in this war."                           | Highway worker, southern California       |
| "The environments from which Negroes have to start never let them get off on the right foot." | Merchant marine seaman, Los Angeles       |
| "Lack of understanding between the two races."  | Negro laborer, Oklahoma City              |
| "Whites haven't learned to get along with Negroes. It's a matter of education on both sides." | Accountant, Pittsburgh                    |
| "Negroes are not ready to assume the responsibilities such a change would incur."             | Woman clerk, Nashville                    |

## Why People Think Negroes Have EQUAL Economic Opportunities

An anti-Negro feeling, ranging from mild to high intensity, is discernible in many of the reasons given by persons who answered: "Yes, Negroes do have the same chance as whites to make a living in the United States."

A considerable number believe that Negroes as a group fail to take advantage of the opportunities available to them:

"Negroes have the same chance, but they don't take advantage of it."	Farmer, Cary, North Carolina
"They have if they apply themselves."	Carpenter, Little Hocking, Ohio
"Anyone that wants to work hard can get what he wants."	Auditor, Akron
"But they won't take care of it. Our men out here have been getting \$5.00 a day and none of them ever have any money."	Farmer's wife, Orange, Texas
"They have the privilege of working."	Farmer's wife, Auburn, Indiana
"Negroes ought to go ahead and work, then they'd have as good a chance. They're <u>lazy</u> ."	Negro farmer, Chester, South Carolina

Some think that Negroes have as good chance as they deserve:

"Yes, but they should be kept in their place."	Wife of shipping clerk, Trenton, New Jersey
"The same as their intelligence permits."	Realtor, Atlanta
"Negroes can attend school and get an education as well as white folks."	Farmer's wife, Goshen, Indiana

Others believe that Negroes have a better chance than they should:

"They have a <u>better</u> chance 'cause they can live on <u>less</u> than we do."	Electrician's wife, Austin
"Some of them at the shop make more money than I do."	Shipping clerk, Milwaukee
"Lots of 'em can go to work where I can't. They get a fair break."	Lumberjack, Stockton, California

Many persons believe that during the war labor shortage Negroes can do all right:

"Only during war when labor is at a premium."	Salesman's wife, Brooklyn
"I don't think they ought to have, but they do now they's so much work."	Welder's wife, Mauriceville, Texas
"They have now, but they didn't before the war."	Army wife, Houston

Some who answer "Yes" mention sectional differences:

"In the Northern states, but not in the South."	Tool crib worker, Waterloo, Indiana
"Not outside of New York City."	Electric welder, the Bronx
"Yes, in North Carolina."	Woman Red Cross worker, Louisburg, North Carolina

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This report is based on a nation-wide survey by the National Opinion Research Center. The cross-section consisted of a typical miniature of the population with the proper proportion, in each geographical section, of young and old, men and women, rich and poor, farm, town, and city dwellers, whites and Negroes. This survey included 2,560 personal interviews. Statistically these are sufficient to be within 3 per cent correct 997 times in 1,000.