

SURVEY DATA ON DIVERSITY AND RACE

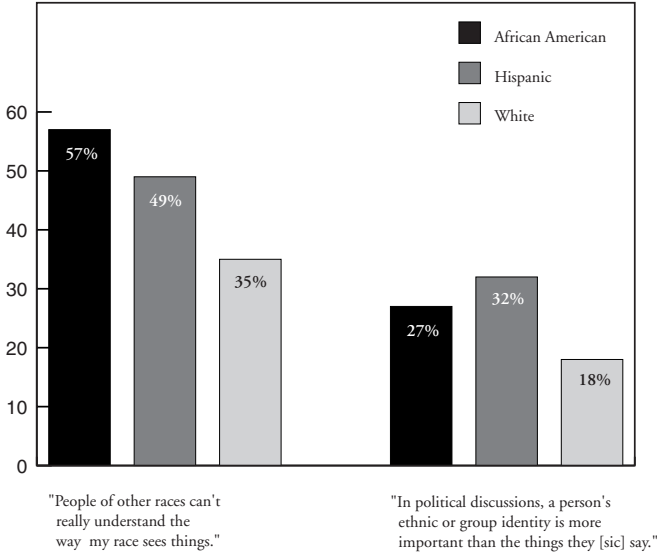
In 1996 the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (named The Post-Modernity Project, at the time) joined forces with the Gallup Organization of Princeton, New Jersey, to conduct one of the most comprehensive surveys ever undertaken of American political culture. Based on 2,000 face-to-face interviews, each of which lasted over an hour, the Survey of American Political Culture provides a fascinating, empirically rich portrait of American public opinion. What follows are excerpts from the Executive Summary of the survey that focus on findings related to diversity and race.

Diversity and Race

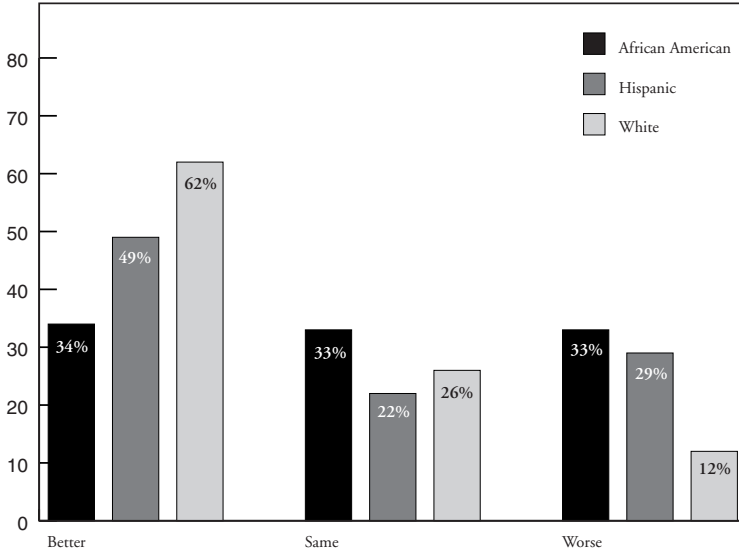
Race in America, it is often observed, is a powder keg of incendiary difference. No one would deny that deep tensions exist. Surprisingly, however, the *Survey of American Political Culture* shows how much African Americans and whites, for example, agree with each other, at least on matters of political culture. On the whole, African Americans and whites are equally civic-minded and committed to both the American dream and the political system. They embrace middle-class morality at roughly the same levels, and almost the same level of religious commitment and traditional piety. Neither group is more or less pessimistic about America or American institutions, and neither group is more or less disaffected from the government or its leaders.

There are critically important differences, however, with regard to how Americans understand the relations among people of different races. For example, African Americans and Hispanics are significantly more likely than whites to say that “people of other races can’t really understand the way my race sees things.” Over half of the African-American respondents (57 percent) and about half of the Hispanic respondents (49 percent) agree with this statement, whereas one third of the white respondents agree.

Race and the Politics of Difference
 Mostly or Completely Agree with Statements



These differences between whites, on the one hand, and African Americans and Hispanics, on the other, are important to keep in mind when looking at views about how much progress has been made towards the goal of equality and respect for all persons. When asked, for example, to look back over the last ten years and consider whether the quality of life of African Americans in the U.S. has improved, stayed the same, or worsened, nearly two thirds (62 percent) of whites think it has improved, whereas only one third (34 percent) of African Americans agree. Accordingly, only 12 percent of whites think that the quality of life for African Americans has worsened, but *nearly three times* that number of African Americans (33 percent) hold this view. Given this dramatic disparity in perception, it is no wonder that African Americans are more likely to think that people of other races can't really understand the way they see things. Added to this is the fact that Hispanics and African Americans are more likely than the overall population to report being victims of racial discrimination.

Perceived Quality of Life of African Americans Over the Last Ten Years

Despite some of these marked differences in perception, Americans are not hiding from the race dilemma. Eight out of ten survey respondents (80 percent of African Americans and 82 percent of whites) believe that greater cultural and ethnic diversity is good, and three fourths of all respondents (75 percent of African Americans and 78 percent of whites) believe that greater attention to equality for racial and ethnic minorities is good. Two thirds (65 percent) of all respondents (African Americans and whites by the same margin) have positive feelings about the words “multicultural” and “ethnic diversity.” By the same token, nine out of ten respondents (the same for whites and African Americans) believe that “treating all people equally regardless of race or ethnic background” is an “absolutely essential” or “very important” obligation. So while the perception of where we are in our efforts to achieve equality and a good standard of living for all people may differ radically, we all agree that the goal is an important one.