

OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION

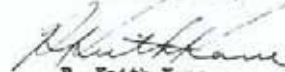
WASHINGTON

August 5, 1942

My dear Miss Tully:

I am enclosing a copy of a supplemental
Intelligence Report "White Attitudes Toward Negroes"
prepared for the Director of the Office of War
Information.

Sincerely yours,



R. Keith Kane
Chief, Bureau of Intelligence

Miss Grace Tully
Secretary
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Some of the historical documents contained in this curriculum guide reflect deep-seated and disturbing racial prejudices regarding African-Americans that were common among many white Americans in the early and middle years of the twentieth century. It is important to remember that these documents must be viewed in the context of their own time. While offensive to modern readers, they help us understand the intense opposition the Roosevelts and the Tuskegee Army faced over the issue of allowing black men to pilot military aircraft. FDR Presidential Library and Museum



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INTELLIGENCE REPORT

WHITE
ATTITUDES
TOWARD
NEGROES

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OFFICE OF
WAR INFORMATION

BUREAU OF
INTELLIGENCE

COPY No. 1

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SUMMARY

White people are largely unaware of the fact that dissatisfaction is so widespread among Negroes that large numbers of them have no heart for the war. Six whites in ten, out of a national cross-section recently interviewed, felt that Negroes were pretty well satisfied with conditions. Almost as many felt that Negroes are now better off than they were before the war.

More than half of those interviewed with an opinion on the question believed that Negroes have as good a chance as whites to get jobs in war plants. Three out of four respondents in the South and nine out of ten in the rest of the country felt that a Negro should draw the same pay as a white person when he does the same work.

Fifty-five per cent of the sample believed that a Negro makes as good a soldier as a white man. Forty-nine per cent felt that he makes as good an airplane pilot. Respondents were about equally divided on the question of whether Negroes have as good a chance as whites to get ahead in the armed forces.

Whites showed a fairly good knowledge of the hopes and demands of Negroes. They recognized, for example, that what Negroes are most concerned about is improvement in their economic situation. But relatively few whites were willing to make concessions in this area. They were willing, however, to provide better housing facilities for Negroes.

On all of these issues pronounced regional differences were evident. Southerners were more inclined than people in the rest of the country to feel that Negroes are being treated fairly or are themselves to blame for any differentiation in the treatment accorded them. And they were less willing than people in other regions to make concessions to Negroes.

In all parts of the country, however, large numbers of people were unsympathetic to Negroes. Not only were they cold to their aspirations; many evidently felt that rights long since granted to Negroes should be revoked. For example, more than half of all respondents in the Northeast and West believed that there should be separate schools for white and Negro children.

Educational status also affected people's answers. On most questions the better educated were somewhat more realistic and more liberal than the less well educated.

Finally, it was found that people's views on the Negro's role in the war effort were closely linked to their prejudices on segregation and their desire to maintain present caste distinctions.

"I note with satisfaction that the theme of your significant gathering reads 'Victory is Vital to Minorities.' This theme might well be reversed and given to the Nation as a slogan. For today, as never before in our history, 'Minorities Are Vital to Victory.'"

"We are, in a sense, a Nation of minorities. By race, by religion, by color, by ancestry, each constituent group is a minority when viewed in relation to our total population. But it is the essence of our democracy that our very differences have welded us into a Nation. And the democratic way of life within that Nation can be defended successfully only with the help and support of all groups within its borders."

--Franklin D. Roosevelt,
Message to the National
Association for the Advance-
ment of Colored People Con-
ference, July 14, 1942

WHITE ATTITUDES TOWARD NEGROES

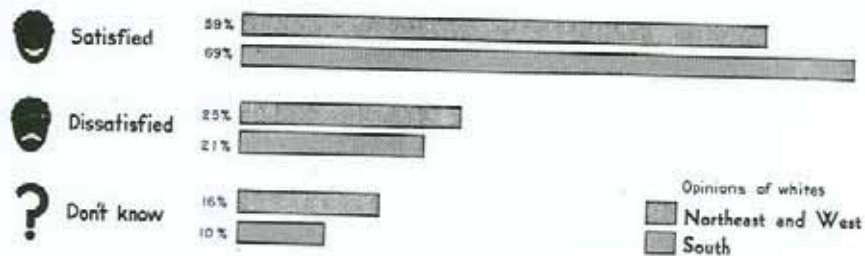
The amount of support Negroes give the war effort--and their very desire to support it--depends to a very large extent upon the attitudes of white people toward them. Negroes cannot put their shoulders to the wheel in the war effort if they are not permitted to do so. And their morale is inevitably affected by the kind of treatment they experience.

It is important, therefore, to see to what extent white Americans share the view of their President that the support of the nation's Negroes is vital to the war effort. To supplement its previous investigations of Negro morale, the Bureau of Intelligence conducted a survey of white attitudes toward Negroes. Interviews were conducted with a representative cross section of white people in all parts of the country between June 22 and July 7.

I. Basic Attitudes Toward Negroes

Perhaps the most surprising finding of the entire investigation was that a majority of white Americans are unaware that there is anything that might be called a "Negro problem." The illustration below shows the range of responses to the question, "Do you think most Negroes are pretty well satisfied with things in this country or do you think most of them are dissatisfied?"

ARE NEGROES GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH CONDITIONS?



Previous investigations of Negro morale in Memphis and New York indicate that, in fact, Negroes are far from satisfied. Many of them have grievances. Some of them feel so badly about their present situation, and so discouraged about the future, that they do not think that they would be any worse off if Japan won the war. A few feel they would be no worse off under German domination. Views of Negroes in these two cities cannot be taken as indices of national sentiment, but studies in four other cities suggest that they are not unrepresentative.

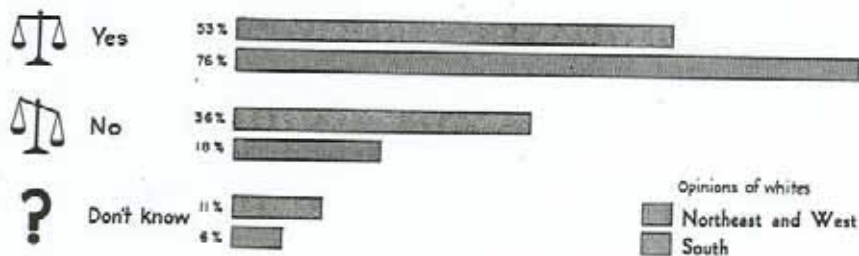
The opinion of six white people in ten that Negroes are reasonably well satisfied with their situation must, therefore, be attributed in very large measure to ignorance. But many factors contribute to this ignorance--including the

callous belief that Negroes do not need much to satisfy them. It is in the South, where discrimination is most marked and Negroes constitute a relatively large proportion of the population, that the comforting opinion that Negroes are satisfied is most prevalent.

Opportunities Open to Negroes

The beliefs whites have about Negroes tend to bolster one another. Some light is shed on the opinion that Negroes are relatively well satisfied with conditions by the response of white people to the question, "Do you think Negroes are getting all the opportunities they deserve in this country, or do you think in general they are not being treated fairly?"

ARE NEGROES GETTING ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY DESERVE?



The belief that Negroes are getting all the opportunities they deserve is itself a product of ignorance and a disparaging attitude toward Negroes. As the chart shows, the belief is more widespread in the South than in other parts

of the country; it is more frequently expressed by those who did not complete high school than it is by the relatively well educated. But the belief is prevalent in all parts of the country, among the well educated and the poorly educated. Eighty-four per cent of the poorly educated respondents in the South subscribe to it, but so do more than one half of the well-educated respondents in the North who have an opinion on the question.

The extent to which ignorance of the facts contributes to the viewpoint is perhaps suggested by peoples' opinions on a more specific question, "Do Negroes have as good a chance as white people to get a good education?" In the Northeast and in the West eight out of ten respondents felt that Negroes in their own regions have as good a chance as whites to get a good education. And the majority of white Southerners maintained that Negroes enjoy equality of educational opportunity in their region.

Whatever the facts may be about the Northeast and the West, the opinion that Negroes have equal educational opportunities in the South is demonstrably mistaken. Because there are separate schools for the two races, it is possible to make direct statistical comparisons. In a recent year, in ten Southern states where Negroes constituted 28 per cent of the total school enrollment, only 12 per cent of the total expenditures went for Negro schools. The average expenditure per white pupil was \$37.87; per colored pupil, \$13.09. Only 19 per cent of the Negro children of high school age, as contrasted with 55 per cent of the white children, were enrolled in school.

Respondents in the Northeast and in the West, especially the better educated ones, showed some awareness of these inequalities in the southern part of the United States. When asked, "Are there any other parts of the country where

you feel Negroes do not have the same chances as white people do to get a good education?", six respondents in ten in the Northeast and West said, "Yes." It is interesting psychologically that those who acknowledged the existence of inequalities in their own areas were most prone to recognize the failure of other sections of the country to treat Negroes equitably.

Views on Negroes' Ability

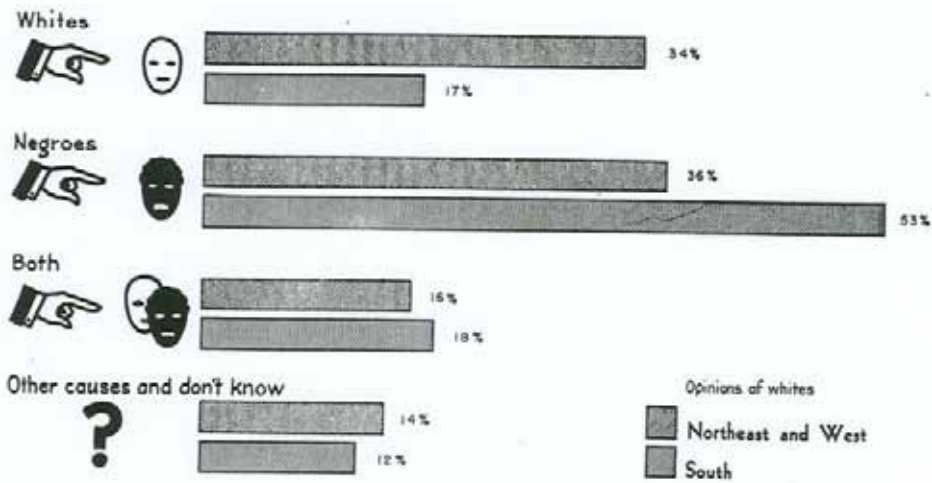
A low opinion of Negroes' capabilities also probably contributes to the feeling that they are getting all the opportunities they deserve. As the chart on the following page shows, more than a half of all white people in the South and more than a third of all white people in the rest of the country feel that Negroes are primarily responsible for their inferior status in our society. The bottom half of the chart shows the shortcomings attributed to Negroes by those who hold this viewpoint.

Better educated respondents were more inclined than the less well educated to blame white people, or both whites and Negroes, for the fact that Negroes do not have equality of opportunity. Even in the South 43 per cent of the better educated respondents were willing to put all or part of the blame for the plight of Negroes on the shoulders of the white population.

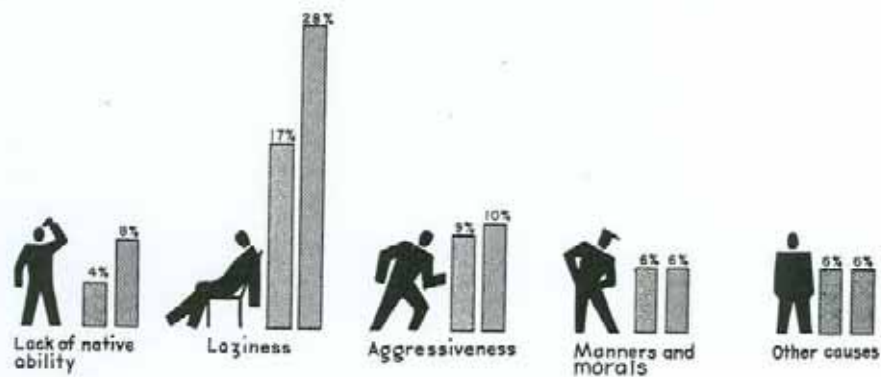
The sample was asked: "In general, do you think Negroes are as intelligent as white people -- that is, can they learn things just as well if they are given the same education and training?" Forty-eight per cent -- a majority of those who expressed an opinion -- replied that Negroes are not as intelligent as whites. As one would expect, this view was far more generally held in the South than in other regions. Surprisingly, it was voiced somewhat more frequently by the well educated than it was by the less well educated.

Whites put a somewhat more favorable appraisal on the potential ability

WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE FACT THAT NEGROES DON'T HAVE THE SAME CHANCES AS WHITES?



IF NEGROES, WHY ARE THEY TO BLAME?



of Negroes as workers. When asked, "If a Negro has the same training as a white person, do you think he can do a particular job just as well?", seven respondents in ten in the Northeast and in the West said, "Yes". But less than 40 per cent of the Southerners interviewed shared this view.

In every region those who had worked with Negroes had more faith in their capabilities than those who had not.

Segregation

The views of whites on the segregation issues are summed up in the table below:

	Northeast		South		West		Total
	Edu- cated*	Unedu- cated	Edu- cated*	Unedu- cated	Edu- cated*	Unedu- cated	
<u>There should be</u>							
Separate residen- tial sections	75%	80%	96%	99%	80%	84%	84%
Separate restau- rants	53	60	96	99	59	67	69
Separate schools	47	55	95	99	54	71	66
Separate sections in street cars and busses	29	37	91	97	41	47	51

The most marked differences of opinion are clearly on a regional basis. But it will be observed that large numbers of people in both the Northeast and the West expressed a preference for arrangements which would keep Negroes and whites separated. The sentiment for separate schools in these regions is especially surprising. Even though children of the two races customarily attend the same schools in the Northeast and West, except as they may be accidentally separated as a result of living in different areas, majority sentiment endorsed segregation.

* Completed high school or better.

Similarly, large numbers of people in these regions maintained that separate sections should be provided for whites and Negroes in public conveyances, even though this would involve a change in existing arrangements. Rural people were particularly prone to favor separate sections for whites and Negroes.

It would be clearly inaccurate to say that on the issue of segregation a tolerant North and West are arrayed against an intolerant South. Yet on each of the questions the proportion of those who plumped for a policy of segregation was markedly larger in the South. It is probable, too, that Southerners feel more intensely about the issue than people in the rest of the country. The sample was asked, "If a Negro with just as much education and income as you have moved into your block, would it make any difference to you?" Eighty-six per cent of those interviewed in the South, as compared with 54 per cent in the rest of the country, said that it would. The proportion of those who indicated that they would either actively oppose the encroachment of Negroes or else move away was also larger in the South.

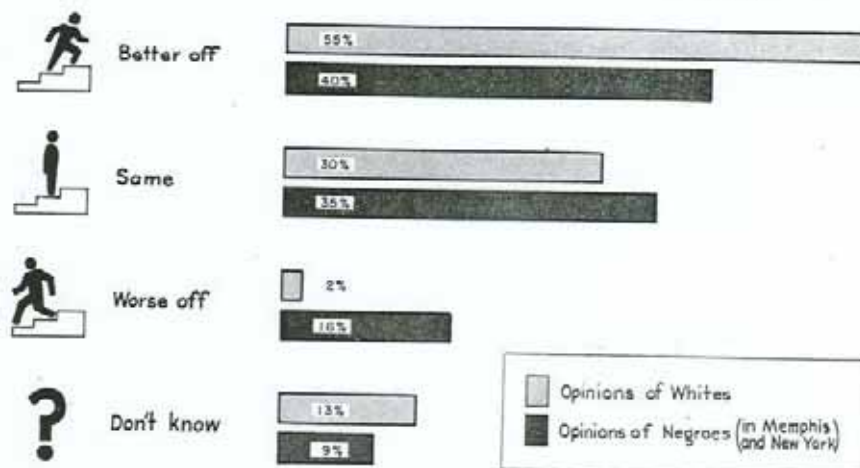
On most issues it will be noted that well-educated respondents were somewhat more liberal than the less well educated. But the better educated respondents expressed more concern than those with less education about living in the same block with Negroes. In all probability, however, this difference was due to their superior economic status--to such considerations as fear of a decline in real estate values following Negro infiltration into their neighborhoods.

II. Negroes in the War Effort

The various attitudes which have been discussed inevitably find reflection in white people's views on the role of Negroes in the war effort and the impact of the war upon them.

Whites' ignorance of conditions among Negroes and their reluctance to see that there is any Negro problem may have something to do with the fact that 55 per cent of all those interviewed believed that Negroes have shared in the war-stimulated economic boom, and are better off than they were before December 7. In any case, as the chart below indicates, whites were significantly more inclined to hold this view than the Negroes in Memphis and New York.

ARE NEGROES BETTER OFF SINCE THE WAR BEGAN?



Whites are less optimistic than Negroes about the effect of an American victory upon the status of Negroes, but the fact that they believe that Negroes have already improved their position may account for this. If, however, the view of seven white respondents in ten that the war will not change the status of the Negro in American society is based on a reluctance to make concessions, it may point to trouble ahead. For, if the New York and Memphis samples are typical, a sizeable minority of American Negroes believe that victory should and will mean some improvement in their lot.

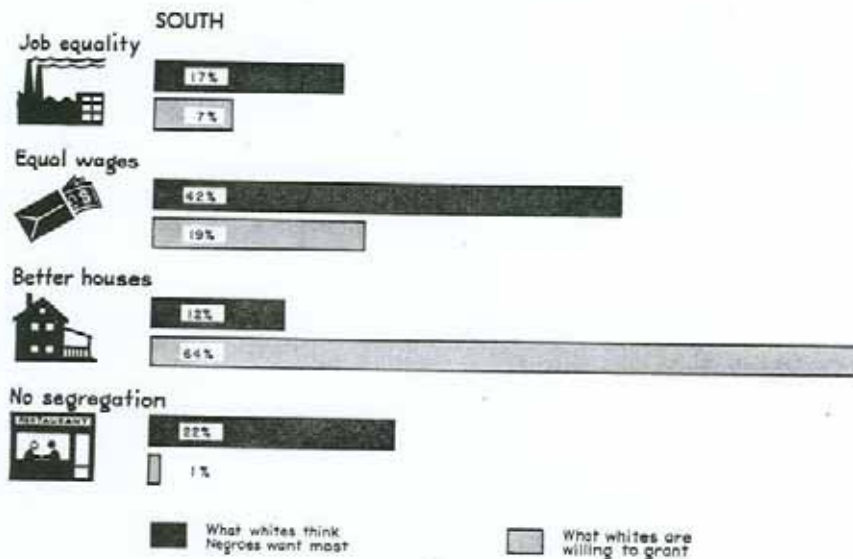
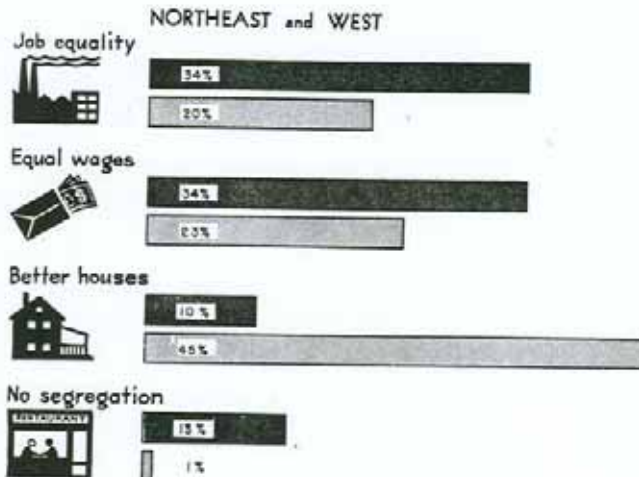
Willingness to Make Concessions

The divergence between the kind of changes Negroes want made right now and the willingness of whites to make concessions constitute a more immediate source of conflict between the races. The issue about which Negroes feel the keenest resentment today is economic discrimination. They want to have the same opportunities as whites to secure jobs for which they are qualified. And they want to get the same pay as whites when they do the same work. Better economic opportunities are regarded as the key to the improvement of Negro life in all its aspects. About better houses and the abolition of segregation, Negroes show less concern.

As the charts on the opposite page show, on the whole whites assess the grievances of Negroes quite accurately. But despite the fact that they recognize the Negroes' desire for economic equality, there is a pronounced reluctance to make concessions in this area. On the other hand, whites are willing to act to improve Negro housing conditions, although they recognize that this is not the step which Negroes most desire.

The disparity between whites' knowledge of what Negroes want and what they are willing to grant them requires explanation. It may be conjectured that economic concessions are resisted because it is felt that they threaten existing caste barriers. On the other hand, better housing for Negroes fits in with the noblesse oblige tradition, which is particularly strong in the South, of "taking care" of Negroes. It permits the perpetuation of existing segregation. Finally, it is a way of improving the health of Negroes, and many whites have come to realize that the germs of communicable diseases do not obey Jim Crow laws and that Negroes' health is a matter of close personal concern to them.

WHAT WHITES THINK NEGROES WANT MOST NOW AND WHAT THEY ARE WILLING TO GRANT THEM



The Negro in War Production

Almost one-half of the cross section of white people expressed the belief that Negroes have as good a chance as whites to get jobs in war plants. (See chart opposite page 13.) But the relatively well educated were not so likely to hold this opinion as the less well educated.

Those who believed that Negroes do not have as good a chance as whites to get war jobs were asked to tell who they thought was responsible for the situation. Regional differences sharply influenced their answers. Southerners thought that Negroes themselves deserve most of the blame for whatever difficulties they encounter. A plurality in the Northeast blamed the managers of factories; a plurality in the West blamed labor unions.

Nine out of ten respondents in the Northeast and the West, and three out of four in the South, said that a Negro doing the same work as a white person should draw the same pay. But some people, especially in the South, may have expressed this opinion secure in the knowledge that the issue was remote, since in all probability Negroes could not get the same jobs as whites.

Southerners were far more prone than people in other parts of the country to object violently to Negroes working alongside them. In the Northeast and in the West, only three respondents in ten said that it would make any difference to them if Negroes were hired to work with them. But seven Southerners in ten said that it would make a difference. And far more Southerners than Northerners or Westerners carried their opposition to the point of saying that they would quit their jobs if Negroes were hired to work with them.

There are some grounds for encouragement, however, in the fact that in all parts of the country those who had already worked with Negroes were far more willing to work alongside them than were those who had never had the experience.

NEGROES IN THE WAR EFFORT

Opinions of whites
Upper bar: NORTHEAST and WEST
Lower bar: SOUTH

"Do Negroes have as good a chance as whites to get war jobs?"



"Are Negroes as patriotic as whites?"



"Does the Negro make as good a soldier as the white man?"



"Does the Negro make as good an airplane pilot as the white man?"



"Do Negroes have the same chances as whites to get ahead in the armed forces?"



Yes

No

Don't know

The Negro in the Armed Forces

From two-thirds to three-fourths of the people interviewed in the Northeast and in the West believed that Negroes are just as patriotic as whites. But in the South a majority of respondents with an opinion on the subject maintained that they are not as patriotic.

The same regional differences were apparent in views on the Negro's ability as a soldier. Six out of ten respondents in the Northeast and in the West felt that the average Negro makes just as good a soldier as the average white man. But in the South a majority of respondents held the contrary opinion. Throughout the country even fewer people felt that the Negro makes a good airplane pilot. Most of those who were scornful of Negroes' fighting ability maintained that they are cowardly, have less native ability, or are lazy and lack initiative.

Respondents divided up into three groups of almost equal size on the question of who should lead Negro troops. Three in ten believed that they should be led by white officers, and almost the same number were of the opinion they should be led by Negro officers. Four respondents in ten felt that they should be led by both whites and Negroes.

The usual regional variations were apparent. In the Northeast and in the West the most popular view was that Negroes should be led by officers of both races. In these regions the second largest vote was for Negro officers, except in the rural West, where white officers were in second place. In the South the predominant opinion was that Negro troops should be led by white officers. A sizeable group felt that both white and Negro officers should be employed, but the comments volunteered by some of those who expressed this opinion indicated that they felt that the top officers should be whites and the minor officers, who have close contact with the troops, Negroes.

CONCLUSIONS

The task of making Americans generally see the importance of bringing the nation's Negro minority more fully into the war effort is one of immense difficulty. In part this difficulty stems from the close relationship between views on the Negro's role in the present emergency and deep-seated, stubbornly-held attitudes toward his worth, his ability and his place in society.

The task is national in scope. Although Southerners were more disparaging of Negroes than people in the rest of the country, and more reluctant to make concessions to them, large numbers of people in all regions showed what must be regarded as an illiberal attitude toward Negroes. On some issues, indeed, it appears that rights which have long since been granted to them are still opposed by large numbers of white people.

Despite these difficulties, the situation is by no means hopeless. There are promising possibilities, for example, in the fact that large numbers of white people recognize the need for improving Negro housing conditions.

Many of the attitudes of whites toward Negroes stem in part at least from ignorance. Thus a wide dissemination of information about the accomplishments of Negroes may be expected to do a great deal of good. Perhaps the most fundamental requirement for the solution of the Negro problem is further education of the white population.

Finally, the imperative need of expanding the labor force imposes an obligation on the Federal Government, and provides an opportunity, to encourage the wider employment of Negroes in American industry.

By turning the spotlight on Negro housing conditions and attempting to improve them; by making people aware of the necessity for employing more Negroes and attempting to eliminate employment discrimination; and by publicizing the

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accomplishments of Negroes, the Federal Government can simultaneously make progress towards immediate and long-term objectives. It can secure a fuller participation of Negroes in the war effort and raise Negro morale. And over a period of time it can develop greater good will toward Negroes among the white population.

Sources of the Report

This report is based on the following material:

"White Attitudes Toward Negroes," (tables),
Extensive Surveys Division, Special Report #11
"The Negro Problem," (comment on tables), Ex-
tensive Surveys Division
"Memphis Negroes and the War," (tables based on
interviews with whites in Memphis), Extensive
Surveys Division, Special Report #10
"White Attitudes Toward Negroes," Special Service
Division, Report #19
"Negroes in The War: A Study in Baltimore and
Cincinnati," Division of Surveys, Special
Report #18
"Minority Groups in Baltimore and Cincinnati,"
Special Services Division, Report #18
Report on statements of private thought leaders
and Government spokesmen on Negroes, Sources
Division, July 21, 1942
"Axis Propaganda Intended to Undermine Relations
Between Whites and Negroes," Sources Division,
July 21, 1942
"Negroes in A Democracy At War," Survey of Intel-
ligence Materials #25, May 27, 1942
"Memphis Negroes and The War," Supplement to
Survey #25, July 14, 1942

All of the above reports are available to authorized
individuals through the Bureau of Intelligence of the Office
of War Information.