

# CHARACTERS UNITE

## NATIONAL TOWN HALL

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### **VAST MAJORITY BELIEVES AMERICA TODAY IS DEEPLY DIVIDED ACCORDING TO USA NETWORK'S NEW "UNITED OR DIVIDED" POLL**

**Lack of Unity Among Americans Seen as Worsening Over Last Decade,  
and Nation's Increasing Diversity Viewed as Mixed Blessing**

**Majority Says Democrats and Republicans in Congress Doing More to Divide the Country,  
and Lack of Civility in the Political Arena Goes Beyond Media Hype**

**Americans Believe Gays, Lesbians and Muslims Now Experience the Most Prejudice of Any Groups**

WASHINGTON, DC – December 1, 2009 – In conjunction with the first-ever Characters Unite National Town Hall, USA Network today released the results from a new, nationally representative opinion poll – “United or Divided” -- conducted by Hart Research Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R). The poll shows a deeply divided America, with a majority believing that the country’s divisions and lack of unity are getting worse rather than better.

The election of President Obama is a signal to some that the United States is beginning to move past the old divisions along racial and ethnic lines, but while those schisms may be narrowing, political and economic rifts are becoming a greater concern.

With the country on the verge of becoming a minority majority population by 2050, the survey shows Americans have mixed feelings about the population’s increasing diversity. Only 25% see America’s diversity as a clear-cut strength and advantage. Merely five percent say that race relations are no longer a problem in the USA. Overall, Americans, across party lines, think that gays and lesbians and Muslims experience prejudice most frequently; followed by immigrants.

According to the poll, there is plenty of blame to go around for the lack of unity in the country. Americans blame both Republicans and Democrats in Congress for doing more to divide the country than unite it, and four in ten people say that elected officials spend too little time addressing prejudice and intolerance. A majority of Americans (55%) see President Obama as a figure of unity rather than divisiveness. Parents are clearly viewed as the people best able to reduce prejudice, discrimination and intolerance, but they are also seen as falling down on the job.

"If a majority of Americans have mixed or negative feelings about diversity, it's clear that something's wrong," said Bonnie Hammer, president, NBC Universal Cable Entertainment and Universal Cable Productions. "Until we respect and embrace what makes each of us different, we're squandering one of our country's greatest assets."

The poll was commissioned as part of USA Network’s Characters Unite community affairs campaign dedicated to overcoming social injustices and bridging cultural divides. The results come on the heels of the first-ever Characters Unite National Town Hall, which will be moderated by NBC News Special Correspondent Tom Brokaw

on Wednesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the Newseum, in Washington, DC, and bring together a panel of distinguished leaders to discuss how to heal America's divisions and find common ground on today's complex social issues.

#### Summary of the key findings:

#### **Majority of Americans Believe That Lack of Unity, Prejudice, Discrimination and Intolerance Are Serious Problems; Very Few Say that Race Relations Are No Longer an Issue**

- Fifty-one percent believe that the amount of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance in the country is a very or somewhat serious problem.
- A majority (55%) say that the amount of division and lack of unity among Americans has gotten worse over the past 10 years.
- Only 5% of Americans believe that race relations are no longer a problem in the United States. Two-thirds (65%) believe that race relations are still a problem in the USA, but that we have come a long way, while half (30%) that many say that race relations are still a problem and we have a long way to go. African Americans see things quite differently than Whites and Hispanics do on this question. African Americans are divided evenly as to whether we have come a long way (46%) or still have a long way to go (47%), while two-thirds of Whites (69%) and Hispanics (64%) focus on the progress that has been made.

#### **Political and Economic Divisions Seen as More Profound Than Religious, Racial and Ethnic Divisions:**

- More than seven in 10 Americans say that people in the USA are too divided along political lines (75%) or economic lines (73%), compared with smaller majorities who feel that we are too divided along racial and ethnic lines (53%) or religious lines (52%).
- Eighty-two percent of African Americans say that people are too divided along economic lines (versus 65% who believe that people are too divided along racial and ethnic lines).

#### **Racial and Ethnic Minorities No Longer Seen as Groups Who Experience Most Problems with Prejudice; Gays and Lesbians and Muslims Perceived to Be Most Frequent Victims**

- Overall, Americans believe that gays and lesbians, and Muslims experience prejudice most frequently (note that the survey was conducted prior to the shootings at Fort Hood). Sixty-two percent said that gays and lesbians experience problems with prejudice because of their sexual orientation very or fairly often, followed by Muslims because of their religion (60%), and immigrants because they were not born in the U.S. (52%).
- In general, 74% say that they have heard someone they've known make a prejudice or discriminatory remark and 69% said that it happened several or a few times in the past few years.

#### **Country's Diversity Seen as Mixed Blessing; Controversy Over Expanded Use of Languages Other Than English and Decline of Christian Traditions in Public Places**

- Overall, one in four (25%) Americans feels that our diversity is primarily a positive, a similar proportion (28%) believe it is more of a source of problems, while the plurality (46%) believe that diversity is equally a strength and a challenge for the USA.
- Language proves to be a real flashpoint; the increasing use of languages other than English bothers many Americans who otherwise are tolerant on issues of race and diversity. Most White Americans (54% unfavorable) express concern about the expanded use of languages other than English in daily life, while Hispanics (55% favorable) and African Americans (58% favorable) see this as a positive trend.
- The decline of Christian traditions in public places – such as public displays at Christmas – to prevent people of different faiths from feeling excluded is seen as an unwelcome change. Half (49%) of Americans feel that this is an unfavorable trend compared with just 27% who view it positively.

#### **Both Sides of the Aisle in Congress Blamed for Divide; Political Divisions Considered Real and Serious Not Media Hype**

- Americans believe that both Republicans in Congress (63%) and Democrats in Congress (52%) are doing more to divide the country than to unite it.
- In a reversal of the trend to blame the media, 65% say that Congressman Joe Wilson's exclamation of "you lie," Congressman Alan Grayson's claim that Republican's health care plan is for "seniors to die quickly," and angry outbursts at town hall meetings are events that are part of a larger problem in our country today, rather than isolated examples that have been blown out of proportion by the news media (35%).

- People were divided on whether commentators on cable networks, talk radio and blogs who take strong conservative or liberal views promoting differing opinions is positive or negative trend, with 39% saying that it is very or somewhat favorable, 30% saying it is neutral and 40% saying it is somewhat or very unfavorable.

**Most See President Obama as a Figure of Unity; Believe Race Affects Public Impressions of the President, Not Job Performance**

- Fifty-five (55%) percent say Obama is doing more to unite the country, while 39% say he is doing more to divide it. There are predictable partisan differences on this question, with 85% of Democrats and 53% of independents describing Obama as helping to unite the country, while 77% of Republicans say he is doing more to divide it.
- Most voters do *not* believe that President Obama’s race has a significant effect on the way he handles his job as president. Thirty-nine percent of Whites, 40% of Hispanics, and 39% of African Americans say Obama’s race has a big or some effect.
- But they do believe that President Obama’s race has at least some effect on the way black people judge him as president (84% of Whites, 73% of Hispanics, and 80% of African Americans say big or some effect). African Americans (78%) and Hispanics (68%) tend to believe that President Obama’s race has an effect on how White people judge him, while fewer Whites agree (53%).

**Parents Seen as the Problem and the Solution; Individual Responsibility a Key:**

- Parents clearly are seen as the people who are best able to reduce the amount of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination in the USA (80% saying that have the power to help), but they also are seen as falling down on the job with 58% saying that they spend too little time addressing these issues.
- Coming in third behind unemployment and the cost of health care the top issue facing the United States, 74% say that individuals lacking a sense of personal responsibility for dealing with their own problems is a very or fairly serious problem. And nearly half (47%) feel that average citizens spend too little time trying to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Methodology:

Interviewing was conducted from October 30 to November 4, 2009, among a nationally representative sample of 1,614 adults, including 607 interviews conducted by telephone and 1,007 interviews conducted online, including oversampling of African Americans and Hispanics. The margin of error for the survey is +/-2.8%.

**ABOUT USA NETWORK**

USA Network is the #1 network in all of basic cable and is seen in over 98.5 million U.S. homes. A division of NBC Universal, USA is the cable television leader in original series and home to the best in blockbuster theatrical films, acquired television series and entertainment events. The award-winning USA website is located at [www.usanetwork.com](http://www.usanetwork.com). Characters Welcome.

USA Network is a program service of NBC Universal Cable a division of NBC Universal, one of the world's leading media and entertainment companies in the development, production, and marketing of entertainment, news, and information to a global audience.

**ABOUT CHARACTERS UNITE**

Characters Unite, USA Network’s new community affairs program, was created in January 2009 to address the social injustices and cultural divides still prevalent in our society. Created on the simple premise that life is richer when people see beyond stereotypes and appreciate individual differences, Characters Unite kicked off with a national on-air public service campaign and a multimedia pledge drive for unity and understanding.

Inspired by USA Network’s iconic “Characters Welcome” brand and with the support of leading national not-for-profit organizations, the ongoing, multimedia campaign is dedicated to supporting activities and messaging that combat prejudice and intolerance while promoting understanding and acceptance – on-air, online, and in communities across the country.

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