

YES, INDEED

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When the Germanic tribes left their heartland to begin their conquest of Europe about the turn of the millenium, their word for YES was ja. Most Germanic languages have retained that form. However, the Anglo-Saxons changed the Old Teutonic ja to gia which became YEA when Anglo-Saxon became English. Anglo-Saxon, a highly inflected language, had another affirmative word, gise, a combination of gia + si (the third person singular present subjective of beon, "to be"), meaning "Yes, it is so." Gia + si or YEA + si was originally used as an answer to that class of questions which were intrinsically not improbable.

YEA and YES continued to be used as parallel affirmatives as late as 1550. YEA was used to answer simple questions as "Will he come?" whereas YES was the emphatic form and was used when the question was framed with a negative, as "Will he not come?" or "He won't come, will he?" Today, the use of YEA is confined to parliamentarians and cheer leaders.

Web II, Random House, and American Heritage all agree that YES should be pronounced with a short e. But few words in the English language have as many pronunciation variants as does YES. The Irish dialect YIS was current in polite speech as late as 1775 according to John Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary of that date. In a collegiate production of Shaw's *Candida*, YAS was pronounced with a long a, presumably to show how cultured British spoke during the latter part of the nineteenth century. YAY-US becomes a two-syllable word with a long a in what might be called Southern Alabama Genteel. And you can hear a Minnesotan of Norwegian descent pronounce it YAH -- broad a. In the pre-1960 black dialect it came out YASS-SUH, with a short a. This was sometimes burlesqued as YOW-ZUH. YUS, YUP, YEP and YEAH are all slang terms for YES. The latter sometimes becomes YO, particularly in Southern military schools.

AYE seemingly appeared from nowhere about 1575 and was in common use by 1600. It is still in parliamentary and nautical use. And you can still here the Down Eastern two-syllable AYE-YA. It was written I in the early editions of Shakespeare.

OYEZ or OYES, a court expression, has no connection with YES. It comes from the Anglo-Norman oir, "to hear".

Now, all that is needed is to find the etymology of UH-HUH.