THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

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Many articles published in the Journal of Bahá'í Studies allude to the institutions and central figures of the Bahá'í Faith; as an aid for those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, we include here a succinct summary excerpted from http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant/. The reader may also find it helpful to visit the official web site for the worldwide Bahá'í community (www.bahai.org) available in several languages. For article submission guidelines, please visit http://bahai-studies.ca/the-journal-of-bahai-studies-submission-guidelines/.

About the Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith, its followers believe, is "divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men." The mission of the Bahá'í Faith is "to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith" (Shoghi Effendi).

The Bahá'í Faith began with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith They founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá'u'lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. A Bahá'í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and of these appointed successors.

The Báb (1819-1850) is the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith. In the middle of the 19th century, He announced that He was the bearer of a message destined to transform humanity's spiritual life. His mission was to prepare the way for the coming of a second Messenger from God, greater than Himself, who would usher in an age of peace and justice.

Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)—the "Glory of God"—is the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past. Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. Thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilization which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured 40 years of imprisonment, torture and exile.

In His will, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His oldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), as the authorized interpreter of His teachings and Head of the Faith. Throughout the East and West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became known as an ambassador of peace, an exemplary human being, and the leading exponent of a new Faith.

Appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), spent 36 years systematically nurturing the development, deepening the understanding, and strengthening the unity of the Bahá'í community, as it increasingly grew to reflect the diversity of the entire human race.

The development of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide is today guided by the Universal House of Justice (established in 1963). In His book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh instructed the Universal House of Justice to exert a positive influence on the welfare of humankind, promote education, peace and global prosperity, and safeguard human honor and the position of religion.

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Contents

From the Editor's Desk

JOHN S. HATCHER

THE NATURE OF HUMAN NATURE
If racial violence and tensions over the past several years—especially in the United States—have taught us anything, it is that any of us who might have imagined that the rampant racism that permeated American society prior to the civil rights movement is now ancient history were dead wrong. True, America had two administrations under a black American president. Surely, we might have thought, such a milestone in American history would signal that racism and racial tensions within the American community finally had been "overcome."

But with the seemingly ceaseless onslaught of violent encounters between local police and black men in neighborhoods throughout the country, we can no longer pretend that racial prejudice and its offspring of unwarranted and gruesome injustice do not still characterize the American landscape. No longer can we hope that if we never talk about it, racism and the violence it propagates will disappear forever from our public discourse and, collaterally, from our neighborhoods and streets.

But it seems, alas, that hearts and minds cannot so easily be placated by silence alone. Without public discourse, the plea for justice and unity devolves into mantras, like "Black lives matter!" Injustice and violence once again begin to characterize too much of our public sphere, and all that we thought had vanished from our beautiful American landscape had merely been waiting for the signal to give voice to the rage roiling just beneath the surface, unrecognized by all—except those people who never really were allowed to be oblivious to the "taint" of their skin.

"The New Jim Crow," Michele Alexander terms this resurgence in her analysis of the present tenor of American society (Michele Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* New Press, 2012). And just as soon as we tried to put behind us the injustice of Trayvon Martin's shooting death, another such injustice would occur, and another, and another, so that very soon none of us could remain blind to the all-too-verified fact that being black or brown or red—anything but white—is one hard row to hoe in America.

How long ago was it that John Howard Griffin, a white American, wrote the international best-selling account of his experiment of pretending to be a black man in America? His *Black Like Me* begins its first entry on 28 October 1959, when I was a sophomore at Vanderbilt University, the highly regarded institution of higher learning in Nashville, Tennessee. I became a Bahá'í at the very end of that year—my brother William Hatcher, one of the founders of this journal, had been a Bahá'í for

about two years in Nashville. And in that Nashville Bahá'í community were stalwart and historically prominent black Bahá'ís like Robert E. Hayden, who would later become poet laureate (the first African American poet to be so honored), and his wife Erma, a teacher and concert pianist, who would eventually be appointed to the National Teaching Committee. There was Dr. Sarah Pereira—a most erudite African American professor at Tennessee State University—later to become a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States.

We were all quite close, all dear friends, and yet we never thought to marvel at the fact that only one black student was enrolled at Vanderbilt—Joseph A. Johnson Jr., who famously went on to acquire his PhD in the Vanderbilt Divinity School in 1958 and later became a bishop. For while *Brown v. Board of Education* had been decided six years earlier (1954), in the South, no significant differentiation in the color of student bodies had yet taken place, and it would not be until 1962 that James Meredith would cause great consternation by daring to attend the University of Mississippi.

There were no African Americans on football teams—among the first was Dr. William H. Smith, a Bahá'í and founder of the National Center for Race Amity who has remained involved in civil rights initiatives all his life.

But if you thumb through the pages of my now-brittle paperback copy of Griffin's work, you will quickly realize that the same things that this white man had to learn quickly to survive as a black are hardly any less pertinent today than they were fifty-eight years ago. More than half a century, and the struggle goes on.

So this year the Bahá'ís of the United States, under the guidance of their National Spiritual Assembly, are launching a number of initiatives that will culminate in a national conference in Washington, DC. The American Bahá'í community has determined that merely articulating noble principles is an insufficient response to Shoghi Effendi's admonition in *The Advent of Divine Justice* that until Americans conquer racism—both among the general population and within the Bahá'í community itself—all other efforts at unity and progress will be forestalled:

> As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution. The ceaseless exertions which this issue of paramount importance calls for, the sacrifices it must impose, the care and vigilance it demands, the moral courage and fortitude it requires, the tact and sympathy it necessitates, invest this problem, which the American believers are still far from having satisfactorily

resolved, with an urgency and importance that cannot be overestimated. (33)

And so it is with this issue that the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* begins a discourse that we plan to extend over a long period rather than confine to a single themed publication. We begin with articles that reexamine the beginning of the concept of race itself, which—as the Bahá'í Writings affirm and as most contemporary scholarship concurs—is not a reality but a particularly misguided social construct. An antithesis to the fundamental verity that mankind is one and has been created in the image of its God, it is thus a fiction that drives this animus and divides peoples from one another.

The first of these articles is Matthew Hughey's "Race and Racism: Perspectives from Bahá'í Theology and Critical Sociology," a discussion that, among other things, gives an extremely helpful review of how the concept of race emerged. He also provides a most useful historical analysis of the evolving discourse on racism in the scientific community and compares its findings with the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, noting how He "makes it clear that the concept of 'races' is based on subjective and artificial categories rather than objectively extant types."

The second article, by Jamar Wheeler, offers a similarly apt beginning for our discourse on race and racism. Titled "Seeking Light in the Darkness of 'Race,'" this discussion also provides insight into the evolution of racial concepts, though, as Wheeler notes in his abstract, the principal objective of his analysis is to demonstrate that the realization of the oneness of mankind is "an enlightening force," the actualization of which has the power to transform society.

The third article is by longtime Bahá'í scholar June Manning Thomas, Centennial Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, as well as the Mary Frances Berry Distinguished University Professor. It focuses more on the contemporary challenges of race as related to "division by place" and how that division "affects the possibilities for racial unity, especially in severely fragmented US metropolitan areas." After analyzing the Detroit community as a prime example of this relationship, Manning Thomas examines the salutary effects of the plans instituted by the Universal House of Justice during the sequence of five-year plans that began in 2001. In particular, she studies the outcome of the division of the Detroit community into "clusters" and the subsequent implementation of activities designed to bring about racial unity. For while the Bahá'ís of metropolitan Detroit have always promoted racial unity through race unity picnics, conferences, radio broadcasts, and other public programs, the new framework for action envisioned by the Universal House of Justice focuses explicitly on community building and

thus has inspired various strategies not tried heretofore, such as selecting neighborhoods with some presence of certain minority populations and subsequently employing various practices of the institute process, programs that have been successfully employed by Bahá'ís throughout the world.

The final, brief, article, by Diane Coin, was originally conceived as a lengthier and more in-depth book review than those we usually publish. Coin presents us with a timely and sensitive examination of Jennifer Harvey's *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (William B. Eerdmans, 2014). Both the book itself and the keen analysis of its merits by Coin are a fitting conclusion to this issue, even though the subject of race will continue to be a motive force in the journal for the indefinite future. For as Coin observes, "Justice and racial identity are squarely at the center of Harvey's revealing conclusion that as long as the racial divide is addressed through the lens of reconciliation (or the 'reconciliation paradigm' as she names it), both healing and true unity will continue to elude not only Christians, but all of us who care."

Finally, we include two very touching poems. The first, "The Mind-Body Divide," is by longtime ABS member and supporter Sheila Banani, who was inspired to share this poem as a response to her reading of Ian Kluge's well-received article in our previous issue (volume 27, no. 1–2) titled "The Bahá'í Philosophy of Human Nature."

The second poem is "Flight" by Tami Haaland, whose work we have published before. It is a brief lyric capturing a moment of delight as only a poem can, and it demonstrates well Robert Hayden's axiom that a poem is a means by which one can convey what is otherwise unsayable.

Finally, the cover painting is "The Colors at Sunset" by renowned landscape artist Roger Bansemer calls to mind a line in the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. The speaker in the poem observes that when he came upon a fork in the road, he chose the path "less traveled by" and concludes that this choice "has made all the difference." Certainly, the choices we make and how we make them as we respond to contemporary social challenges—especially regarding race and racism—will make all the difference in our lives and possibly in the lives of others.

Race and Racism: Perspectives from Bahá'í Theology and Critical Sociology

MATTHEW HUGHEY

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will . . . be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

— Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 August 1933.

Abstract

What is race? What is racism? How do they relate, especially as they pertain to Bahá'í teachings on both racial accord and prejudice? There have been nearly eighty years of social scientific advancement on, and illumination of, these issues since Shoghi Effendi wrote in *The Advent of Divine Justice* that "racial prejudice" is the "most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution" (33–34). Accordingly, I review the concepts of race and racism based on the latest social sci-entific understanding of them in order to better understand their definition and operation and to delineate their relation to one another. I then consider how these concepts are used in the Writings of the Central Figures and Institution of the Bahá'í Faith and attempt to correlate them with modern social scientific knowledge in order to provide a more nuanced and accu-rate understanding of them, which in turn may assist with better applications of the Bahá'í teachings to contemporary public discourse.

Resumé

Qu'est-ce que la race? Qu'est-ce que le racisme? Quel est le lien entre ces deux concepts, en particulier dans les enseignements bahá'ís sur l'harmonie raciale et les préjugés? Près de quatre vingts ans de progrès socioscientifiques sont venus éclairer ces questions depuis que Shoghi Effendi a déclaré dans *L'Avènement de la justice divine* que le « préjugé racial » est « le problème le plus vital et le plus brûlant que la communauté bahá'íe doit affronter au stade actuel de son évolution. » (p. 47). Je passe donc en revue les concepts de race et de racisme à la lumière des plus récentes perspectives socioscientifiques à l'égard de ces deux concepts, afin de mieux en comprendre la nature et le fonctionnement et d'en définir l'interrelation. J'examine ensuite comment ces concepts sont utilisés dans les écrits des figures centrales et de l'institution suprême de la foi bahá'íe, et je tente de les mettre en corrélation avec les connaissances socioscientifiques modernes. J'espère ainsi apporter une compréhension plus nuancée et plus exacte de ces concepts, ce qui pourrait aider à mieux appliquer les enseignements bahá'ís au discours public contemporain.

Resumen

¿Qué es la raza? ¿Qué es el racismo? ¿Cómo se relacionan, especialmente en lo que respecta a las enseñanzas bahá'ís sobre la unidad racial y los prejuicios? Han pasado casi 80 años de adelanto de la ciencia social y la iluminación de estos temas desde que Shoghi Effendi escribió en el Advenimiento de la Justicia Divina que el "prejuicio racial" es el "tema más vital y desafiante que confronta a la comunidad bahá'ís en la etapa actual de su evolución" (33–34). En consecuencia, repaso los conceptos de raza y racismo basados en la más reciente comprensión de la teoría de la ciencia social para comprender mejor su definición y operación y para delinear su relación entre sí mismos. Entonces considero cómo estos conceptos se utilizan en los Escritos de las Figuras Centrales y de la Institución de la Fe Bahá'í e intento correlacionarlos con el conocimiento de la ciencia social moderna con el fin de proporcionar una comprensión más matizada y precisa de ellos, que a su vez puede ayudar con mejores aplicaciones de las enseñanzas bahá'ís al discurso público contemporáneo.

Introduction

Largely recognized as one of the core principles of the Bahá'í Faith, the "condemnation of all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class, and national" stands paramount, particularly within North American Bahá'í communities (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 281). In the speeches and Writings of the Central Figures and Institution of the Bahá'í Faith, there are varied references to "race," "racial," and "racial prejudice."[1] Moreover, a number of statements by various Bahá'í bodies and individuals emphasize racialized issues, as can be seen in J. E. Esslemont's *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (1937), Glenford E. Mitchell's "The Most Challenging Issue: Teaching Negroes" (1967), the statement by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States titled "The Vision of Race Unity: America's Most Challenging Issue" (1991), the Bahá'í International Community's publication of *Bahá'u'lláh* (1992), a statement by the Bahá'í International Community titled *Turning Point for All Nations* (1995), and the Universal House of Justice's publication of *Century of Light* (2001).

The animating thread woven throughout these statements is the absolute rejection of racial prejudices, for they stand as a supreme hindrance to the achievement of peace, civilization, and equitable material values and spiritual virtues. For instance, while in Paris, France, in 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave a talk in which He stated:

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1   For example, the search feature in the *Bahá'í Reference Library* reveals frequent mentions of these terms. For "race," Bahá'u'lláh, N=29; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, N=128; Shoghi Effendi, N=12; and the Universal House of Justice, N=115. For "racial," 'Abdu'l-Bahá, N=60; Shoghi Effendi, N=32; and the Universal House of Justice, N=24. For "racialism," Shoghi Effendi, N=6. And for "racism," the Universal House of Justice, N=7.

All prejudices, whether of religion, race, politics or nation, must be renounced, for these prejudices have caused the world's sickness. It is a grave malady which, unless arrested, is capable of causing the destruction of the whole human race. Every ruinous war, with its terrible bloodshed and misery, has been caused by one or other of these prejudices. (*Paris Talks* 146)

While the principle evoked is precise (the universal abolition of prejudice), the very terms under discussion (i.e., "race" or "racial prejudice") are rarely defined and are relatively fresh on the historical scene, given that the English terms "racism" and "race" first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1902 and 1910, respectively.[2]

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2   The English word *race* (from the Old French word *rasse* [1512] and tracing further back to the Latin word *gens*, meaning "clan, stock, or people") was first introduced in a 1508 poem by William Dunbar in which he refers to a series of kings descended from one another. The term developed over the next four hundred years and did not possess the denotative consensus of today (as divisions of humankind) until the 1910 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). Furthermore, these words were (and still are) connotatively complicated given the social and political exigencies. For example, the OED attributes the first recorded utterance of the word *racism* to a 1902 statement by Richard Henry Pratt (best known as the founder and superintendent of the Carlisle Indian

Moreover, both the connotations (the various social overtones, cultural implications, and affective meanings) as well as the denotations (the explicit or referential meanings of the terms) require that the reader rely on inference and personal interpretation.

These issues gesture toward important questions. When reading these Bahá'í texts, what is meant by "race" or by characterizing something as "racial"? What do "racial prejudice," "racial discrimination," and/or "racism" mean? And how do they relate? There have been nearly eighty years of social scientific advancement on, and illumination of, these concepts since Shoghi Effendi wrote in *The Advent of Divine Justice* that "racial prejudice" is the "most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution" (33–34). Accordingly, in Section I, I review the historical development of "race" concept. In Section

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Industrial School): "Segregating any class or race of people apart from the rest of the people kills the progress of the segregated people or makes their growth very slow. Association of races and classes is necessary to destroy racism and classism" (qtd. in Barrows 134). Yet he advocated for what many consider a "racist" policy toward North American Indigenous people, stating that "[a] great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one.... I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Pratt 260).

II, I provide an overview of and attempt to correlate the Bahá'í theological[3] and sociological views on "race."[4] In Sections III and IV (which mirror Sections I and II), I first survey the concept of racism and then compare the Bahá'í theological and sociological understandings of it. In Section V, I offer a sociological understanding of how the concepts of race and racism are inextricably intertwined in five key dimensions: ideologies, institutions, interests, identities, and interactions, what I have elsewhere called the "Five I's" (Hughey, "The Five I's" 857–71).

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3 Note the message from the Universal House of Justice dated 22 October 1996 that contains a memorandum from the Research Department regarding the authenticity of certain texts and documents, such as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* and *Paris Talks*, whereby it is made clear that portions of these texts have not yet been authenticated.

4 "Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be *au courant* with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply" (Letter dated 5 July 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, qtd. in *A Compilation on Scholarship* 18).

Section I
What Is "Race"?

The Absence of "Race" in Antiquity

The modern concept of race did not exist in the ancient world. For example, although Egyptian societies in the 1300s BCE recognized the diverse appearances of people from the Mediterranean regions, they made no claims to a "racial" definition of superiority or inferiority (Gossett 334; McCoskey 4; Snowden 63). This is not to say that ancient Egyptians were blind to difference; they linked various physical characteristics (such as height and hair color) with personal and moral qualities. These understandings, however, morphed over time depending on who was in power. For example, when lighter-skinned Egyptians were in power, most Egyptians referred to darker-skinned people as "evil." But when darker ancient Egyptians were in power, most came to call people of lighter complexion "pale" and "degraded" (Gossett 4). Similarly, ancient Greeks and Romans drew distinctions among groups such as Gauls, Celts, and Germanic tribes. Nevertheless, the defining characteristics of language, religion, and philosophy were key to how boundaries were drawn between groups and how these groups were understood relative to one another. None of these features provided a foundation for a fixed categorical system we would today call "race" (McCoskey 2).

While ancient societies did not hold ideas comparable to modern notions of

"race," important seeds were planted that would later spout into racialized concepts. For instance, some ancient Greek philosophers discussed the possible benefits that society might derive from certain forms of eugenics—systematic breeding, sterilization, or killing to decrease the occurrence of undesirable characteristics. In *The Republic*, Plato writes that:

> the best men must have sex with the best women as frequently as possible, while the opposite is true of the most inferior men and women . . . if our herd is to be of the highest possible quality, the former's offspring must be reared but not the latter's. And this must all be brought about without being noticed by anyone except the rulers. (459)

Additionally, the kingdom of Sparta engaged in a form of state-sponsored eugenics in which a committee would examine each newborn child. If the newborn was found unhealthy or deformed, it was thrown into a ravine, having been judged as nonessential to the nation-state. These atrocities were rationalized through a belief that the people conquered and raised under a particular nation-state, regardless of skin color, hair texture, etc., were superior to others. As the historian Frank M. Snowden Jr. notes in *Before Color Prejudice*, "ancient society was one that for all its faults and failures never made color the basis for judging a man" (63).

What did emerge from this time were hierarchies that had to be increasingly rationalized across ever-diversifying and globally conscious peoples. Philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus ranked humans against one another in a hierarchy that became known as the "Great Chain of Being." All of creation was understood as a top-down system with a Higher Power at the top; angels, demons, and various types of humans (such as kings, nobles, and then "common" folks) in the middle; and then wild animals, domesticated animals, trees, smaller plants, and finally, minerals at the bottom. It was this stratification system that would be seized upon and manipulated to rationalize and legitimate the concept of "race."

For example, during the European medieval period (roughly the fifth to the fifteenth century CE), classical ideas about differences among humans met with new philosophical and religious traditions (in particular, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Some Judeo-Christian interpretations of the Old Testament indicate that humanity is descended from the three sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—who in turn produced three distinct races: Semitic (Asiatic people), Hamitic (African people), and Japhetic (Indo-European people) (Swift and Mammoser 3). Moreover, some people, like Leo Africanus, the great traveler and protégé of Pope Leo X, wrote that "Negro Africans" were descended from Ham and were wrongdoers who should be enslaved (qtd. in Pory xcii–xciv).

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan [son of Ham]; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." And he said, "Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." (Genesis 9:24–27 KJV)

Early Torah and biblical texts never mention Ham's color. Yet over time, Ham was increasingly thought of as having dark skin. In fact, the explanation that black Africans, as the "sons of Ham," were cursed or possibly "blackened" by their sins was advanced only occasionally during the Middle Ages. By the period of colonialism, however, the notion that Africans were descendants of the cursed Ham served as a rather common excuse to justify the African slave trade and the European colonialism of Africa (Sanders 525–29).

THE SEEDS OF "RACE"

As the Middle Ages gave way to early European colonialization, the modern concept of "race" began to take shape. Race-based thinking came about during the process of European exploration, conquest, and colonization of nearly the entire globe, as groups from different continents interacted and the developing scientific community sought to classify these human differences as naturally derived. A series of key military victories by European Christians in the 1300s and 1400s coincided with the "discovery" and colonization of the Americas. As various European powers began to colonize new lands and use them for profit generation, models of labor and forced servitude began to be mapped onto arbitrarily selected phenotypical differences of people.

For instance, in 1441 Prince Henry the Navigator traveled to West Africa and traded for gold and ten Africans, which marked one of the first documented instances of Europeans trading in African slavery over the seas. Prince Henry then recruited Gomes Eanes de Zurara to write a book to glorify slave-trading as a Christian civilizing mission. By 1453, de Zurara published *Chronica do Descobrimento e Conquista da Guiné* (later published in an abridged English version as *Conquests and Discoveries of Henry the Navigator*), which was a hagiography of Prince Henry that depicted African ethnicities as a monolithic group that was "bestial" and "barbaric" (qtd. in Sweet 5). The book was well received among the Portuguese elite, and its ideas about African or "Negro" bestiality, as naturally befitting conditions of enslavement, were translated and exported. Thus, the beginnings of racialization itself spread, such as within Spain's system of "encomienda," by which the Spanish Crown granted colonists in the Americas the right to demand tribute and forced labor from

Native inhabitants. Equivalent to the feudal system in Medieval Europe, which was based on status and power inequities between Europeans, the encomienda system was attached to arbitrarily selected physical differences between Europeans and America's Indigenous people. Just after Columbus's fourth and final voyage in 1503, the Spanish and Portuguese were already bringing African slaves to the Caribbean and Central American nations to replace American Indians in the gold mines and in the planting fields.

Racial discrimination—a system denoting one's place in the labor-economic system as well as the overall social order—was quickly solidifying around slavery. The legal historian Cheryl Harris writes:

Although the early colonists were cognizant of race, racial lines were neither consistently nor sharply delineated among or within all social groups. Captured Africans sold in the Americas were distinguished from the population of indentured or bond servants—"unfree" white labor—but it was not an irrefutable presumption that all Africans were "slaves" or that slavery was the only appropriate status for them. The distinction between African and white indentured labor grew, however, as decreasing terms of service were introduced for white bond servants. Simultaneously, the demand for labor intensified, resulting in a greater reliance on African labor and a rapid increase in the number of Africans imported into the colonies. (1716–17)

For example, slavery in the Americas was increasingly understood as exclusively comprising Africans or "Negroes." Slowly, African-based slavery was legally, economically, and socially recognized as both normal and natural. By the 1630s, personal wills, inventories, deeds, and other documents show that it was customary to hold Africans and African Americans in a form of life service. In 1639, the British colonies passed a law that "all persons except Negroes are to be with Arms and Ammunition" (qtd. in Hening 226). Importantly, one year later, in 1640, three indentured servants ran away, and their differential treatment shows the beginning of a race system based on differing standards and privileges. The *Executive Journal of the Council of Colonial Virginia* from 9 July 1640 states:

the court doth therefore order that the three servants shall receive the punishment of whipping and to have thirty stripes apiece. One called Victor, a dutchman, the other a Scotchman called James Gregory, shall first serve out their times with their master according to their indentures and one whole year apiece after the time of their service is Expired . . . the third being *a Negro named John Punch shall serve his said master and his assigns for the time of his natural Life here or elsewhere.* (11; emphasis added)

John Punch is the first documented African who was enslaved in the Americas for life.[5] The differential treatment of the "Dutchman," the "Scotchman," and the "Negro" demonstrate how slavery reified the "race" concept in legal and social practices. By 1662, slavery was recognized in the statutory law of the British colonies as a biologically conferred status: the legal principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* meant that any child born to a slave mother would also be a slave. By 1670, the British colonies racialized slavery, recognizing "racial" categories of people and passing a law that neither "Negroes" nor "Indians" could have "white" indentured servants.

In 1684 (just twenty-two years after slavery was officially recognized by the British as a system connected to biology), the French physician François Bernier published *Nouvelle division de la terre par les différents espèces ou races qui l'habitent* (*New division of Earth by the different species or races which inhabit it*), which contains what is possibly the first grouping of various peoples into "races." Bernier categorized people into four groups: Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Lapps. He developed these four categories based on his interpretation of differences in features such as skin color, lip size and shape, hair texture, skull angle, smell, and intellect.

As race-based slavery took hold in the late 1600s and early 1700s, the terms "peoples," "nations," "types," "varieties," and "species" were slowly replaced by the term "race." And "race" began to take on a legal status that was reflected in the development of labor relations, economics, and slavery in the European colonies. Namely, the racialization of differing peoples depended on the subordination of Africans for labor, the expulsion of Natives for land, and the creation of social, political, and economic privileges for Europeans, who slowly became recognized as "white"[6] (Allen 1994 6–7).

"RACE" TAKES ROOT

In the eighteenth century, the

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5   Ironically, John Punch's eleventh-generation grandson is Barack Obama, descended not through his Kenyan and "black" father but through his American and "white" mother, Stanley Ann Dunham (Stolberg A9).

6   Historian Theodore Allen tracks the emergence of the racial category of "white" vis-à-vis African slavery. He gives one example of an English ship captain named Richard Jobson. Jobson made a trading voyage to Africa in 1620–1621 but refused to engage in human trafficking because the English "were a people who did not deal in any such commodities, neither did we buy or sell one another or any that had our own shapes" (Jobson 112). When a local slave trader insisted that it was the custom to sell Africans "to white men," Jobson replied "they [i.e., "white men"] were another kinde of people from us" (Jobson 112). The example illumines how in the 1620s there was not yet a hegemonic conflation of "English" people with "white" people.

burgeoning concept of "race," being legally bound up with labor and freedom, depended on the two dominant cultural logics and ways of "common-sense" thinking: religion and science. Before the European Enlightenment period, most moral, legal, and social problems were answered through the authority of the clergy. As scientific thinking rose in prominence and could correctly predict and explain variation in phenomena, the dominance of the clergy was threatened. The concept of "race" was further refined in this battle between religious and scientific dominance.

At first, the chief European paradigm for explaining human difference was couched in Old Testament theology. As Carl Degler (71–73) makes known in *In Search of Human Nature*, some biblical interpretations led to the benign conclusion that human variation was the result of environmental factors over time (climate or diet, for example) and that all people shared a common ancestor in Adam and Eve, a theory known as "monogenesis." Other views encompassed the belief that there were separate points of human origin for different racial groups, known as "polygenesis," or that select non-European groups were divinely designated as inferior. Polygenesis was also expressed as "co-Adamism"—a belief that there was more than one Adam and that God created different races of humanity at different places across the earth. For example, the Italian theologian Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) argued that no one could

rationally accept that European Jews and Ethiopians had the same ancestry. And Scottish philosopher Henry Home (1696–1782), who did not believe that the environment, climate, or state of society could account for physical differences, argued in *Sketches on the History of Man* that God had created different races in separate regions.

But as science began to displace religion as the central authority for knowledge acquisition and truth verification, scientists would use evidence and reason to argue for both monogenesis and polygenesis. These scientific debates took off after 1735 when the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus published *Systemae Naturae*. Differing from François Bernier's groups of Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Lapps, Linnaeus proposed four subcategories and behaviors of humans: *Europæus albus* (ruled by law and custom), *Americanus rubescens* (ruled by habit), *Asiaticus fuscus* (ruled by belief), and *Africanus niger* (ruled by impulse). Even though Linnaeus saw Africans as primitive and Europeans as civilized, he was a proponent of monogenesis. In fact, Linnaeus saw humans and animals (especially monkeys) as being under the same category of "anthropomorpha," meaning "manlike." This upset many religious thinkers, who saw humans as divine creations who were always biologically distinct from the animal realm. Nevertheless, Linnaeus's ideas shaped the future of research in natural history, particularly his classification system of the "three kingdoms": *Regnum Animale, Regnum Vegetabile,*

and *Regnum Lapideum* (the Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral Kingdoms).

Other scientists such as Christoph Meiners (1747–1810), Johann Georg Adam Forster (1754–1794), and Julien-Joseph Virey (1775–1846), as well as a new school of Enlightenment philosophers such a Voltaire (1694–1778), advocated polygenesis. Voltaire was a harsh critic of monogenesis, writing most sarcastically in 1769 that:

> It is a serious question among them whether the Africans are descended from monkeys or whether the monkeys come from them. Our wise men have said that man was created in the image of God. Now here is a lovely image of the Divine Maker: a flat and black nose with little or hardly any intelligence. A time will doubtless come when these animals will know how to cultivate the land well, beautify their houses and gardens, and know the paths of the stars: one needs time for everything. (183)

Regardless of whether one believed in monogenesis or polygenesis, the categorization and ranking of racial groups—which was then seen as an important scientific enterprise—laid the foundation for racial essentialism and biological determinism. For instance, Petrus Camper (1722–1789), a Dutch physician and zoologist, believed that the various races held essentially different qualities of beauty due to their "facial angles" (Camper

argued that Europeans had angles of 80°; "Orientals," 70°; and blacks, 60°). These debates over exactly what was meant by "race" raged into the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths emerged. And both Bahá'í theological and sociological proclamations regarding "race" would move forward, sometimes in tandem, even as some strands of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sociological theory were still mired in racial essentialism and biological determinism.

SECTION II
BAHÁ'Í THEOLOGICAL AND
SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS
OF "RACE"

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE

The now accepted sociological paradigm of "social constructionism,"[7]

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7 A buzzword in and of itself, the term "social construction" is often used but rarely defined. In short, it refers to how people come to form and agree upon understandings about how the world works, which then provides a basis for shared assumptions about reality. For those looking for a more detailed explanation, "social constructionism" emerged from the paradigms of both "symbolic interactionism" and "phenomenology," which was first (and arguably best) articulated in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*. In it the authors argue against a

especially as applied to race, finds agreement in the Bahá'í Writings. For instance, during His 1911 visit to the Theosophical Society in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá outlined eleven principles of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and highlighted the fifth principle as the "Abolition of Prejudices," stating:

> The whole world must be looked upon as one single country, all the nations as one nation, all men as belonging to one race. *Religions, races, and nations are all divisions of man's making only, and are necessary only in his thought*, before God there are neither Persians, Arabs, French nor English; God is God for all, and to Him all creation is one. We must obey God, and strive to follow Him by leaving all our prejudices and bringing about peace on earth. (*Paris Talks* 127; emphasis added)

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that the concept of "races" is based on subjective and artificial categories rather than objectively extant types. Moreover, He emphasizes that the race concept has become necessary only within humanity's "thought," that is, in the intersubjectively shared ways that people agree to split and lump the world's people into socially meaningful groups.[8]

'Abdu'l-Bahá later expounded on this point during His visit to the United States the next year. Fittingly, His elucidation of the conceptual division of "races" was delivered on 20 April 1912 at Hull House, a settlement home for immigrants (often "othered" by ethnic differences) on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. Importantly, Hull House was co-founded by Ellen Gates Starr and Jane Addams, the latter of whom is considered an important figure of the Chicago school of sociology and the only formal sociologist to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.[9] While

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positivist view in which concepts such as "race" exist outside of perception. Rather, they contend that concepts and language do not mirror reality but are constitutive of it. Berger and Luckmann write: "A sign [has the] explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective meanings . . . . Language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations. . . . Language also typifies experiences, allowing me to subsume them under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning not only to myself but also to my fellowmen" (35–39).

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8   This point dovetails with Berger and Luckmann's thesis that everyday "reality" is made up of intersubjective shared understandings about the world, whereby people have varied experiences but always come back to an agreed-upon understanding of what the "real" is: "Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience" (25).

9   Addams taught courses through the Extension Division of the University of

visiting Hull House, 'Abdu'l-Bahá
stated:

> In the human kingdom itself
> there are points of contact, prop-
> erties common to all mankind;
> likewise, there are points of dis-
> tinction which separate race from
> race, individual from individual.
> If the points of contact, which
> are the common properties of
> humanity, overcome the peculiar
> points of distinction, unity is as-
> sured. On the other hand, if the
> points of differentiation overcome
> the points of agreement, disunion
> and weakness result. One of the
> important questions which affect
> the unity and the solidarity of
> mankind is the fellowship and
> equality of the white and colored
> races. Between these two races
> certain points of agreement and
> points of distinction exist which
> warrant just and mutual consid-
> eration. The points of contact are
> many; for in the material or phys-
> ical plane of being, both are con-
> stituted alike and exist under the
> same law of growth and bodily

development. Furthermore, both
live and move in the plane of the
senses and are endowed with hu-
man intelligence. (*Promulgation*
67–68)

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear that there are
"points of distinction which separate
race from race," yet in recalling His
earlier point that "[r]eligions, races,
and nations are all divisions of man's
making only, and are necessary only
in his thought," we must understand
these distinctions as arbitrary—and as
sociologists put it, "socially construct-
ed"—especially given His emphasis on
the "common properties of humanity"
which can assure "unity" (*Promulgation*
67; *Paris Talks* 127). Additionally, He
signals a distinction based on socially
derived racial inequality in the United
States by drawing attention to "white"
and "colored races," similarly noted
by the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois
just nine years earlier in *The Souls of
Black Folk*: "The problem of the twen-
tieth century is the problem of the
color-line—the relation of the darker
to the lighter races of men in Asia
and Africa, in America and the islands
of the sea" (4). Across that social dis-
tinction, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes that
in the "material or physical plane of
being," the "races" are "constituted
alike" and exist under the same law
of growth and bodily development
(*Promulgation* 68). He concludes the
point by stating:

> In fact numerous points of part-
> nership and agreement exist

Chicago and was offered a graduate fac-
ulty position by Albion Small, then chair
of the Department of Sociology. Addams
declined the offer in order to maintain her
work with Hull House and the Extension
Division, through which she felt she could
better teach adults who did not have the
money or credentials to otherwise attend
prestigious institutions such as the Uni-
versity of Chicago (Deegan 9–11).

between the two races; whereas the one point of distinction is that of color. Shall this, the least of all distinctions, be allowed to separate you as races and individuals? In physical bodies, in the law of growth, in sense endowment, intelligence, patriotism, language, citizenship, civilization and religion you are one and the same. A single point of distinction exists—that of racial color. God is not pleased with—neither should any reasonable or intelligent man be willing to recognize—inequality in the races because of this distinction. (*Promulgation* 68)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's point is threefold: first, "race" is a socially created categorical system; second, racial social order has no basis in the common properties of humanity; and third, any use of the socially created racial order to create or legitimate inequality is not only unreasonable and logically untenable—it is displeasing to the Divine.

Weeks later, this time at a meeting of the International Peace Forum at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church on West 104th Street in New York City, 'Abdu'l-Bahá once again interrogated the fallacious and illusory concept of "race," this time focusing on the dangers of the concept and positing racial thinking as a causal variable in dissention and war:

Other wars are caused by purely imaginary racial differences; for humanity is one kind, one race and progeny, inhabiting the same globe. In the creative plan there is no racial distinction and separation such as Frenchman, Englishman, American, German, Italian or Spaniard; all belong to one household. These boundaries and distinctions are human and artificial, not natural and original. (*Promulgation* 118)

Again, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reiterates that "race" is "purely imaginary" and emphasizes both the biological and divine unity of humankind in stating that "humanity is one kind, one race and progeny . . . [i]n the creative plan there is no racial distinction" (*Promulgation* 118). Speaking to the current race-based logic and conventions of the time, in which "whiteness" was constructed in a narrow fashion and excluded even many groups now encompassed within it today, 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to different "races" by way of national distinctions, mentioning "Frenchman, Englishman, American, German, Italian or Spaniard" (*Promulgation* 118).[10] That is, in the early twentieth century, only certain members of the "English"—those who laid claim to "Anglo-Saxon" descent—were

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10 Consider that in the 1910 US census, there were only seven racial categories: "White," "Black," "Mulatto," "Other," "Indian," "Chinese," and "Japanese." By 1920, the racial choices available on the US census increased to ten with the addition of "Filipino," "Korean," and "Hindu" (U.S. Census Bureau).

considered truly "white." It was not until World War I, a mere few years after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the United States, that "Americanness" began to take on a racialized conflation with whiteness. This was largely due to Nativist xenophobia on the part of American political leaders (which led to the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924)[11] as well as the popularity of best-selling racist tracts such as Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which stoked fears of the "extinction" of native-born Americans via immigration, racial intermixing, and lack of "race-consciousness" due to the failure to base new racial classifications on genetics rather than religion, language, or nationality.

'Abdu'l-Bahá continued, employing metaphors of the biological similarities of humanity, which in hindsight were deeply prophetic of how the "race" concept would unfold in the following years:

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11   The Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, which included the National Origins Act and Asian Exclusion Act) was a law that limited the annual number of immigrants to 2 percent of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States as of the 1890 census. This was a reduction from the already low bar established by the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, which set the cap at 3 percent based on the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States as of the 1910 census.

All mankind are the fruits of one tree, flowers of the same garden, waves of one sea. In the animal kingdom no such distinction and separation are observed. The sheep of the East and the sheep of the West would associate peacefully. The Oriental flock would not look surprised as if saying, "These are sheep of the Occident; they do not belong to our country." All would gather in harmony and enjoy the same pasture without evidence of local or racial distinction. The birds of different countries mingle in friendliness. We find these virtues in the animal kingdom. Shall man deprive himself of these virtues? Man is endowed with superior reasoning power and the faculty of perception; he is the manifestation of divine bestowals. Shall racial ideas prevail and obscure the creative purpose of unity in his kingdom? Shall he say, "I am a German," "I am a Frenchman" or an "Englishman" and declare war because of this imaginary and human distinction? God forbid! This earth is one household and the native land of all humanity; therefore, the human race should ignore distinctions and boundaries which are artificial and conducive to disagreement and hostility. (*Promulgation* 118)

Humanity did not ignore these "artificial" distinctions but rather doubled down. But before going forward, it is

necessary to investigate backward. For in the half century preceding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, the foundation for the academic and scientific racism of the twentieth century was laid.

Inspired in part from Darwin's notion of natural selection proposed in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau's *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853)—a book that argued that "Aryans" were superior to other races and that Europe represented the best of what was left from the ancient world—sociologist Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Biology* (1864) advanced the notion of "survival of the fittest." Spencer argued that global society was naturally arranged with Africans at the lowest end and Europeans at the highest and that Africans would either have to evolve or become extinct, an approach that became known as "Social Darwinism." Drawing on the ideas of Social Darwinism, Francis Galton (a relative of Charles Darwin) argued that the same techniques for animal breeding should be applied to humans, eventually calling this new science "eugenics" in 1883. Galton believed that scientists should categorize the world by race and guide the selective breeding of "superior" races so that the inferior races would die out. Key to eugenic science, and the policies that supported it, was concern over racial "miscegenation" (reproduction between people of different races). Proponents of eugenics feared that racial mixing would dilute the purity and superiority of whites and thus

result in the decline of civilization. Hence, measuring the racial purity of people, or how much one was "mixed" from different races—known as "hypodescent" or the "one-drop rule"—became important scientific and political questions of the day.

For instance, in 1904 the Carnegie Institution established the Station for Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Commonly known as Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, it housed the Eugenics Records Office (ERO) and was directed by Charles B. Davenport and Harry H. Laughlin. Davenport and Laughlin were prominent scientists who argued that Nordic immigrants from England and Germany were the most biologically superior people on the planet and that inferior races should not reproduce. Together, Davenport and Laughlin advocated sterilization and helped put Galton's ideas about eugenics into practice.

Between 1910 and 1939, the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory served as both an academic and a policy think tank that would influence racist scholarship and legislation. In 1913, Laughlin published a paper used by various states to justify the legal sterilization of the "socially inadequate" (5). A decade later, numerous American states had forcibly sterilized over three thousand people—mostly the overwhelmingly poor or nonwhite. For instance, Laughlin's paper was used to write Virginia's Eugenical Sterilization Act of 1924 (which was upheld by the US Supreme Court case of *Buck v. Bell* in

1927). The Virginia law stated that "heredity plays an important part in the transmission of insanity, idiocy, imbecility, epilepsy and crime" and thus the reproduction of "defective persons" was "a menace to society" (qtd. in Smith and Nelson 15). Moreover, ERO research helped state legislators create the Oregon Board of Eugenics in 1917, which resulted in the forced sterilization of more than 2,600 Oregon residents between 1917 to 1981 (Paul 80–90).

Moreover, the race-based research from the ERO helped inform German scientists, who would use those ideas for developing *Rassenhygiene* ("racial hygiene basics") against anyone not "Aryan" during the Nazi regime and World War II. While the ERO helped usher in a particularly violent era of scientific racism, by 1935 its work was reviewed and found to rely on erroneous methods and assumptions. In late 1939, funding from the Carnegie Institution was withdrawn and the ERO closed. However, the logic employed—based on incomplete and ideological misinterpretations of Mendelian inheritance, Darwinian winnowing, and, in later years, genetic and genomic research—did not disappear with the ERO.

Bahá'í teachings at the time stood in opposition to both the erroneous scientific logic of racial eugenics and the extension of that logic to law and policy. In 1909 (the year before the ERO would begin eugenics research) 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to the first African American Bahá'í, Louis George Gregory, and invited him to visit Egypt, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was residing at the time, and then to visit with Him in the Bahá'í holy places in Ottoman Palestine (what is now Israel). The letter reads, in part:

> I hope that thou mayest become . . . the means whereby the white and colored people shall close their eyes to racial differences and behold the reality of humanity, that is the universal truth which is the oneness of the kingdom of the human race. . . . Rely as much as thou canst on the True One, and be thou resigned to the Will of God, so that like unto a candle thou mayest be enkindled in the world of humanity and like unto a star thou mayest shine and gleam from the Horizon of Reality and become the cause of the guidance of both races. (qtd. in Venters 32)

And in a 1910 letter to another Bahá'í, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "If it be possible, gather together these two races, black and white, into one Assembly, and put such love into their hearts that they shall not only unite but even intermarry. Be sure that the result of this will abolish differences and disputes between black and white. Moreover, by the Will of God, may it be so. This is a great service to humanity" (*Bahá'í World Faith* 359). Bahá'í teachings emphasize the fundamental unity of the human species.

While in Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Bahá raised the topic of interracial marriage with

Gregory, telling him, "If you have any influence to get the races to intermarry, it will be very valuable. Such unions will beget very strong and beautiful children. If you wish, I will reveal a Tablet in regard to the wiping out of racial difference" (Gregory 15). Two years later, when ʻAbdu'l-Bahá visited the United States, Gregory arranged two speaking engagements for Him in Washington, DC, on 23 April 2012: a noon talk at Rankin Chapel at Howard University and an evening talk to the Bethel Literary and Historical Association at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. During the former, ʻAbdu'l-Bahá stated:

Today I am most happy, for I see here a gathering of the servants of God. I see white and black sitting together. There are no whites and blacks before God. All colors are one, and that is the color of servitude to God . . . . The world of humanity, too, is like a garden, and humankind are like the many-colored flowers. Therefore, different colors constitute an adornment. In the same way, there are many colors in the realm of animals. Doves are of many colors; nevertheless, they live in utmost harmony. They never look at color; instead, they look at the species. How often white doves fly with black ones. In the same way, other birds and varicolored animals never look at color; they look at the species. (*Promulgation* 44)

ʻAbdu'l-Bahá distinguishes between race as "color" and race as species, making clear that there was no species differentiation in humanity, a statement that flew in the face of the burgeoning scientific ideas concerning race in the early 1900s. In the talk at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, ʻAbdu'l-Bahá reiterated His argument about the oneness of humanity and the absence of racial difference by outlining the importance of intellectual investigation and research whose goal is the recognition and promulgation of that truth:

All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight. Man is ever partaking of these fruits. All other blessings are temporary; this is an everlasting possession . . . . We must use these powers in establishing the oneness of the world of humanity, appreciate these virtues by accomplishing the unity of whites and blacks, devote this divine intelligence to the perfecting of amity and accord among all branches of the human family so that under the protection and providence of God the East and West may hold each other's hands and become as lovers. Then will mankind be as one nation, one race and kind—as waves of one ocean. Although these waves may differ in form and shape, they are waves of the same sea. (*Promulgation* 51)

These words were further emphasized that day at a luncheon in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's honor. Two Bahá'ís (Ali Kuli Khan, who was *chargé d'affaires* of the Persian Legation, and his wife, Florence Breed Khan) hosted approximately fifteen socially prominent guests at their home, on which occasion 'Abdu'l-Bahá defied the convention of racial segregation, which, at the time, was practiced by many Bahá'ís. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá took His place at the head of the table, He looked at the white and Persian faces in the room and then stood up to ask, "Where is Mr. [Louis] Gregory? Bring Mr. Gregory" (Parsons 33). The Khans hastily retrieved Mr. Gregory, who had escorted 'Abdu'l-Bahá to their home and was about to leave. Mr. Gregory entered the room and upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's request was seated to His immediate right, the seat of honor (Parsons 33).

During His 1912 visit to the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was adamant that His talks be open to people of all races, a demand that often ran against the Jim Crow laws and practices of racial segregation in public venues. For instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was scheduled to speak at the Great Northern Hotel (now Le Parker Meridien) in New York City, but the manager vehemently refused to allow African Americans on the property (Zarqání 404–06). In response, 'Abdu'l-Bahá hosted a different banquet and talk the following day at the home of the Kinneys in which many of the whites served the African Americans, causing 'Abdu'l-Bahá to note, "Today you have shown the

Commandments of the Blessed Beauty in your actions and have acted according to the teaching of the Supreme Pen" (Zarqání 407).

In addition to opposition to segregation and the conceptual frameworks of racial essentialism and biological determinism, Bahá'í teachings directly confronted the miscegenation laws. On His trip to America in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought along a Bahá'í Londoner, Louisa Mathew, who had become acquainted with Gregory in 1910 when they were both visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt. It appears that 'Abdu'l-Bahá played the role of matchmaker for the two, and while visiting Dublin, New Hampshire, in August 1912, He announced their engagement. They were married later that year. The promotion of inter-racial marriage was reiterated by Shoghi Effendi in subsequent years:

> Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them. (qtd. in *Compilation of Compilations* 39–40)

Bahá'í promotion of interracial marriage ran contrary to much of the current thinking concerning "race

mixing" as well as many state laws against interracial marriage that were not invalidated until the US Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967).

The Bahá'í teachings on the biological poverty of the race concept have been proven valid by modern scientific advances, especially the mapping of the human genome in 2000. Still, modern scientific racism continues to link race, genes, and life outcomes and relies on the twin pillars of racial essentialism and biological determinism, even as current biological and sociological thought have rejected these two tenants.[12] Biological determinism and racial essentialism posit the biological reality of race along with the contention that different racial groups possess different traits and characteristics that, in turn, result in racially varied social outcomes. These logics continue to guide interpretations of genetics and genomics to support erroneous notions of race (Byrd and Hughey 8–11).

The current era has witnessed a resurgent discussion of how similar or different certain groupings of human populations are to one another, how our supposed "racial" histories are either connected or separated, and the likelihood of whether a certain racial group is to inherit disease or hold certain levels of intelligence (Bliss 16, 190–99; Lynch and Condit 128–32;

Wailoo, Nelson, and Lee 49, 86, 259). Assumptions about racial difference allow people to reduce the vast diversity of genetic differences into four, five, or even forty-five racial groups.

For example, some contend that there are genetic clusters that can be correlated with certain racial groups and, thus, "race" is a marker of genetic variants in the polymorphic versions of a gene, better known as alleles (Gabriel 43–46). However, *Homo sapiens* share nearly all of their DNA in common, and the vast majority of genetic variation occurs within, not across, human populations that we might socially call a "race" (Duster 4–5). As W. Carson Byrd and I write:

> Put more simply, there is on average more genetic variation within a socially constructed racial category (such as "white") than between two people from two socially constructed racial categories (such as "white" and "black"). Although it is quite possible to classify geographically defined populations on the basis of clusters of various genetic material, those clusters do not align with many of the social racial categories that we possess; nor do they take into account that there is no consensus on the definition of "race," or the count of how many "races" supposedly exist, or that these definitions and arguments have changed over time, or that these categories vary by national and cultural context. (11)

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12 See Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man*, Joseph Graves Jr.'s *The Emperor's New Clothes*, Ann Morning's *The Nature of Race*, and Tukufu Zuberi's *Thicker than Blood*.

Moreover, it is not possible to use race as a proxy for a supposed ancestral or continental origin to either test for individual diagnoses of disease or responses to drugs. As Michael J. Fine, Said A. Ibrahim, and Stephen B. Thomas write:

> Race is not useful for distinguishing polygenic phenotypes such as height, let alone complex diseases where there is little evidence that specific susceptibility-gene variants occur more frequently in different populations. Evidence that genes, not to mention relevant combinations of gene variants, substantially influence susceptibility to complex disease is very limited, making it impossible to predict the risk or outcomes of common disease on the basis of genotype. Opponents of the use of a biological definition of race believe that the immediate benefits of genomics are greatly overstated because it is impossible for race to provide the sensitivity and specificity needed to characterize DNA sequence variation for the purpose of guiding preventive or therapeutic medicine. (2125)

This is not to cast out the baby with the bathwater. Both sociologists and biologists alike do not deny that clusters of human populations may be more likely to carry particular genetic information. But human genetic clusters hold an infinitesimal, if not zero, correlation with race. What we call "race" is an arbitrary constellation of phenotypic traits; racial categories are more like astrological classifications than objective and self-identifiable classes.

As I and Devon R. Goss write, "The search for these genetic clusters—in the age of genomic research—is more an artifact of scientists' beliefs than an objective finding through unbiased research methodology" (150). Take, for instance, a recent article in *Sociological Theory* by Shiao et al. that asserts "the existence of genetic clusters consistent with certain racial classifications as well as the validity of the genomic research that has identified the clusters" (67). The problem with the analysis is that the findings can be consistent with any racial classification scheme one wishes to "discover." As Morning writes in her response to this piece:

> First, although it is true that geneticists have sought to infer clusters within the global population, the statistical groupings that result are not so much "natural," objective subpopulations that scientists simply "discover" as they are collectives that analysts construct. As their makers readily admit, the number and content of such clusters depend on a variety of assumptions, including those that contribute to the shaping of the genetic data sets used. Second, few participants in the scientific debate about population structure seem to find "race" a useful analytical tool,

let alone equate it with statistically derived, DNA-based clusters. ("Does Genomics" 203)

That is, if we believe in five racial groups, we can "find" five clusters of genetic material to match, just like if we believe there to be fifty racial groups, we can likewise "find" fifty clusters of genetic patterns (Hughey and Goss 190–93).

As sociologists Karen E. Fields and Barbara Fields put it, "Anyone who continues to believe in race as a physical attribute of individuals, despite the now commonplace disclaimers of biologists and geneticists, might as well also believe that Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy are real, and that the earth stands still while the sun moves" (113). Even Craig Venter, one of the first scientists to map the human genome, has stated that "the concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis" (qtd. in Wiess and Gillis A1). The creation of "racial" groups depends on arbitrarily selected and defined phenotypes and genetic clusters, as well as behaviors, beliefs, customs, and many other random criteria we use as evidence for a particular "race" (Bliss 113–20; Morning 2011 148–49). Put more succinctly, race is a biological fiction with a social function.

The "Social Fact" of Race

Even though race is not biologically real, it remains an agreed-upon social construction—a "social fact"—because it is treated real socially it holds materially real consequences.[13] While some think of race as a biological essence and others think of race as merely a deception, the truth is somewhere in the middle. "Race" is simply a concept that signifies the division of the human species according to physical characteristics we believe are inherited, such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture, but which also can include other abstract traits, such as intelligence or morality. This association between characteristics and traits is not valid. Nevertheless, people believe it is real—it thus has a social reality. Because we believe in the reality of race, it produces real effects on people who are thought of as "black," "white," "Latino," "Asian," etc.

Because race is constantly being made and remade, it is important to think of it not as a noun (a static and unchanging thing), but as a verb (an action or occurrence) (see the section below on the five dimensions of "race"). If we take the approach that race is a verb, we will keep in mind that race is always in the process of being assigned. In this sense, when we see "race," what we actually are witnessing is a snapshot of racialization. Racialization is the process of ascribing racial meanings to a relationship, social practice, or group; it

13 This idea is also expressed by what sociologists call the Thomas theorem, which was formulated by Dorothy and William Thomas in 1928: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (572).

often occurs when one group wishes to dominate another (Omi and Winant 36–42). Some believe certain racial groups are more intelligent, more hardworking, or possess better values than other racial groups. Accordingly, race shapes the way that some people relate to each other and gestures toward the notion of "racism."

Bahá'í teachings align with the sociological thesis that race is a social fact born from both agentic quests to rationalize oppression and domination as well as human habits (individually unconscious or group-level activities) that unintentionally promote human division and inequality. Consider 'Abdu'l-Bahá's historical rendering of the Jewish people as a "race" constituted by "slavery" that He offered in a speech delivered on 25 September 1912 in Denver, Colorado:

When He [Moses] appeared, all the contemporaneous nations rejected Him. Notwithstanding this, single and alone He promulgated the divine teachings and liberated a nation from the lowest condition of degradation and bondage. The people of Israel were ignorant, lowly, debased in morals—a race of slaves under burdensome oppression. Moses led them out of captivity and brought them to the Holy Land. (*Promulgation* 340)

In this same vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advances what could be read as a controversial statement if not understood in the context of His larger point.

Speaking again of the Jewish people, He attributes divine education and social uplift as the factors that constitute a "racial supremacy" among Jews:

From this review of the history of the Jewish people we learn that the foundation of the religion of God laid by Moses was the cause of their eternal honor and national prestige, the animating impulse of their advancement and racial supremacy and the source of that excellence which will always command the respect and reverence of those who understand their peculiar destiny and outcome. (*Promulgation* 364)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's point was not that there were either biological or cultural factors inherent in the Jewish people. Rather, He stipulated that the combination of the Divine effulgence of Moses's teachings and obedience to those teachings allowed for their social advancement to, at the time, outpace other social groups not bound together by oppression and faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant.

Shoghi Effendi further elucidated 'Abdu'l-Bahá's argument in 1938. He reasoned that the divisions of race would be erased as members of humankind became "interwoven" in adherence to the most recent Faith proclaimed by the Manifestation of God for that day. In quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi drew attention to the relationship of equality and unity:

This crusade, which embraces all the races, all the republics, classes and denominations of the entire Western Hemisphere, arise, and, circumstances permitting, direct in particular the attention, and win eventually the unqualified adherence, of the Negro, the Indian, the Eskimo, and Jewish races to his Faith . . . . A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity . . . . "I hope," is the wish expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "that ye may cause that downtrodden race [Negro] to become glorious, and to be joined with the white race to serve the world of man with the utmost sincerity, faithfulness, love and purity." "One of the important questions," He also has written, "which affect the unity and the solidarity of mankind is the fellowship and equality of the white and colored races." (*Advent* 54–55)

Shoghi Effendi appeared to contend that religious unity would serve as a catalyst for the elimination of racial hierarchy, given that separation and inequality constitute both the dominant meanings of, and locations for, white and nonwhite (or "colored") racial groups in the social order.

In "A Warning about the Shortcomings of North Americans" in *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1938)—itself a manifesto cautioning that the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada must acquire three spiritual prerequisites: "moral rectitude," "absolute chastity," and "complete freedom from prejudice"—Shoghi Effendi again emphasized the "social factness" of race instead of taking a racially essentialist or biological determinist stance:

To contend that the innate worthiness, the high moral standard, the political aptitude, and social attainments of any race or nation is the reason for the appearance in its midst of any of these Divine Luminaries would be an absolute perversion of historical facts, and would amount to a complete repudiation of the undoubted interpretation placed upon them, so clearly and emphatically, by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (16)

He contextualized his argument about the social factness of race by referencing how the supposedly high social status of any people or "race" (even those from which Messengers of God appear) is neither natural nor divine in origin. Moreover, the assumed high status of "racial superiority, political capacity, or spiritual virtue" attributed to a group or race is betrayed by the fact that the specific unfoldment of progressive revelation take place among people who are marked by "abasement" and "misery." He continues:

How great, then, must be the challenge to those who, belonging

to such races and nations, and having responded to the call which these Prophets have raised, to unreservedly recognize and courageously testify to this indubitable truth, that not by reason of any racial superiority, political capacity, or spiritual virtue which a race or nation might possess, but rather as a direct consequence of its crying needs, its lamentable degeneracy, and irremediable perversity, has the Prophet of God chosen to appear in its midst, and with it as a lever has lifted the entire human race to a higher and nobler plane of life and conduct. For it is precisely under such circumstances, and by such means that the Prophets have, from time immemorial, chosen and were able to demonstrate their redemptive power to raise from the depths of abasement and of misery, the people of their own race and nation, empowering them to transmit in turn to other races and nations the saving grace and the energizing influence of their Revelation. (*Advent* 17–18)

Undoubtedly, both the sociological and Bahá'í theological stance on race, in general, or the "racial superiority, political capacity, or spiritual virtue" of a race in specific, is that neither can be understood to be culturally or biologically essential nor divinely innate. Rather, the two paradigms indicate that "race" exists as a social reality ("social fact") because varied peoples exercise social forms of domination, ability, and morality and use race to rationalize their activities. The realization that "race" is recognized and treated as a real form of human variation and marker of natural inequality is a clear indication of the necessity to understand the hot-button concept of racism.

SECTION III
WHAT IS RACISM?

PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION,
AND RACISM

Many people mistakenly use the words *prejudice*, *discrimination*, and *racism* interchangeably. I will differentiate these terms as follows. Prejudice is an opinion about a person or group before interacting with them. Literally, we "pre-judge." Gordon Allport, the famous sociologist of prejudice and race relations, once wrote that prejudice could be defined as a "feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience" (6). Regardless of racial group, anyone can hold such an attitude, and most people demonstrate some form of racial prejudice every day (Essed 11–26).

When social scientists first began to study prejudice, many assumed it was "human nature" and claimed there was a biological basis for prejudice. By the 1930s, scientists began to examine prejudice not as a foregone conclusion, but as a disorder that could be cured. For instance, Allport claimed that

when different racial groups had (1) equal status, (2) common goals, (3) cooperation, (4) support of law and customs, and (5) frequent personal interactions, prejudice would lessen or even disappear. By the 1970s, research began to focus on the processes by which people become prejudiced. One finding was that many people develop prejudice based on both positive feelings for their own racial group and negative feelings for another racial group (Sidanius, Pratto, and Bobo 476–78). By the 2010s, scholars found that many still possess "negative racial feelings and beliefs . . . of which they are unaware or which they try to dissociate from their nonprejudiced self-images" (Dovidio and Gaertner 3).

Prejudice is an individual attitude or opinion. By contrast, discrimination is an action that denies equal treatment, full social participation, or civil or human rights to certain racial groups or individuals. Many cognitive scientists assert that discrimination often occurs because of prejudice, whereas social scientists often emphasize the external factors that produce discriminatory patterns. Hence, racial discrimination includes direct or indirect, overt or subtle, and either internally or externally derived actions that limit the opportunities or resources available to a person or group. Racial discrimination actively treats people differently on the basis of either real or perceived racial differences. For example, Jim Crow laws and policies in the United States, which were enacted between the end of the Reconstruction period

in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, maintained racial segregation in all public facilities. In South Africa, the apartheid system (literally "the state of being apart") mandated racial segregation from 1948 to 1994. In India, the caste system of social stratification continues to separate communities of people into groups that have varying levels of status and resources. And in Malaysia, ethnic Indians and Chinese experience race-based discrimination. Because discrimination can also occur without a specific or purposeful intention or prejudice, many efforts for racial justice focus on the inequality of outcomes as a form of discrimination.

Racism is a systemic and patterned set of mass beliefs and practices whereby resources and power are unequally distributed to different groups. It is a "highly organized system of 'race'-based group privilege that operates at every level of society" (Cazenave and Maddern 42). The word itself derives from the combination of the word *race* with *ism*, a suffix that denotes a practice, state, doctrine, condition, or what we can otherwise understand as a *system*. Hence, racism is a systemic, rather than an individual-level, phenomenon.

RACISM AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

If we recall the earlier discussion about how race as an illusory "social fact" produces real racial effects, the sociologist (and president of the American Sociological Association in

2017-18) Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, in *Racism without Racists*, states:

> When race emerged in human history, it formed a social structure (a racialized social system) that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became "white") over non-Europeans (the peoples who became "nonwhite"). Racialized social systems, or white supremacy, for short, became global and affected all societies where Europeans extended their reach. I therefore conceive a society's racial structure as the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege. Accordingly, the task of analysts interested in studying racial structures is to uncover the particular social, economic, political, social control, and ideological mechanisms responsible for the reproduction of racial privilege in a society. (9)

Without an understanding of racism as operating beyond the scope of either good or bad intentions or "antiracist" or "racist" people,[14] we will blind ourselves to racial inequality or how we can have, in the words of Bonilla-Silva, "racism without racists." After all, Western societies often possess a fetish for binaries. And when it comes to the hot-button topic of race, these opposites seem all the more

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14 For more on this, see Matthew W. Hughey's *White Bound.*

useful. We often make sense of racial conflict by searching for the quintessentially "good" and "bad" thoughts, intentions, or people involved.

Such lumping and splitting is nothing new. Scholars have long noted the framing of absolute rights and wrongs when it comes to racial identity and racism. Sociologist Jack Niemonen remarked that we often "paint a picture of social reality in which battle lines are drawn, the enemy identified, and the victims sympathetically portrayed . . . [distinguishing] between 'good' whites and 'bad' whites" (166). Again, Bonilla-Silva makes the point that scholars can impose their worldview in their evaluation of data: "Hunting for 'racists' is the sport of choice of those who practice the 'clinical approach' to race relations—the careful separation of good and bad, tolerant and intolerant Americans" (15). And in the aftermath of the 2008 election of Barack Obama, journalist Tim Wise wrote: "While it may be tempting . . . to seek to create a dichotomy whereby the 'bad whites' are the ones who voted against the black guy, while the 'good whites' are the ones who voted for him, such a dualism is more than a little simplistic" (84).

The racist/antiracist duality is partially the result of the dissemination of simplistic explanations of racism. For example, in "Discrimination and National Welfare," the famous Columbia University sociologist Robert K. Merton advanced a theory of racial prejudice and discrimination. Merton argued that prejudice and discrimination

were two separate forms of racial animus and were themselves dichotomous variables. This theory permitted four "types" of people: (1) the "All-Weather Liberal" (the unprejudiced non-discriminator), (2) the "Fair-Weather Liberal" (the unprejudiced discriminator), (3) the "Fair-Weather Illiberal" (the prejudiced non-discriminator), and (4) the "All-Weather Illiberal" (the prejudiced discriminator). For example, one could be prejudiced without discriminating (for instance, a white manager who *believes* African Americans are inferior employees but who still treats people equally). And one could discriminate without a prejudicial belief in racial inferiority (say, the white manager who *believes* in racial equality but refuses to hire African Americans for fear of white reprisal by harming his business or refusing to patronize it) (Hughey 65–80).

Such parsing out of the good people (the "All-Weather Liberal") and the bad people (the "All-Weather Illiberal") has saturated our culture and has turned many a layperson into self-professed experts of racism and race. In this model, racism belongs to the realm of either behavior (discrimination) or thoughts (prejudice) and manifests as little more than a person choosing racism or being coerced into it. With this understanding in play, we proceed to divide the world into those who are "sick" with this disease and those who are the "healthy," i.e., anti- or non-racist.

This explanation simply will not do. It fails to acknowledge or explain how

people believe that understandings of the natural or cultural dysfunctions among people of color are widespread and even accepted as "common sense" (Bonilla-Silva 10–11). It does not account for how the average white person lives in a 78 percent white neighborhood (Glaeser and Vigdor, 5–7). This model does not address why the median wealth of white households is twenty times that of black households and eighteen times that of Hispanic households (Kochar, Fry, and Taylor). This paradigm cannot tell us why whites are much less likely to be racially profiled and arrested than people of color (Center for Constitutional Rights). And this paradigm certainly fails to explain why whites *with* criminal records receive more favorable treatment in their search for employment than blacks *without* criminal records (Pager, 957–60).

Simply put, this approach fails to get us beyond the individual "racist" and individual bad thoughts or "attitudes." It cannot account for white supremacy within our discourses, neighborhoods, patterns of wealth accumulation, criminal justice system, and labor markets. By throwing the label of "racist" at one individual or group at the expense of another ("They are racists, but we are not."), we treat racism as atypical, instead of centering our attention on the normal, benign, and banal social relations that reproduce racial inequities, most often in the form of white dominance. The dominant ways we make meaning of human difference ("race") and

structural inequalities ("racism") are intertwined and co-constitutive.

Albert Memmi's now classic *Racism* draws attention to this paradox: "There is a strange kind of enigma associated with the problem of racism. No one, almost no one, wishes to see themselves as racist; still, racism persists, real and tenacious" (3). "Racism" has become such an ugly word that even dyed-in-the-wool racist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, now shun the term "racist" in order to market their ideology as more palatable.[15] A 2002 statement to the world's religious leaders, the Universal House of Justice emphasizes the now universal stigma of the word *racism*:

Racial and ethnic prejudices have been subjected to equally summary treatment by historical processes that have little patience left for such pretensions. Here, rejection of the past has been especially decisive. Racism is now tainted by its association with the horrors of the twentieth century

to the degree that it has taken on something of the character of a spiritual disease.

More recently, writer and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates has emphasized that the idea that:

America has lots of racism but few actual racists is not a new one. Philip Dray titled his seminal history of lynching *At the Hands of Persons Unknown* because most "investigations" of lynchings in the South turned up no actual lynchers. Both David Duke and George Wallace insisted that they weren't racists. That's because in the popular vocabulary, the racist is not so much an actual person but a monster, an outcast thug who leads the lynch mob and keeps *Mein Kampf* in his back pocket. (n.p.)

How does this understanding of "racism," as a larger social system rather than an individual attitude, fit into both current Bahá'í theological and critical sociological paradigms?

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SECTION IV
BAHÁ'Í THEOLOGICAL AND
SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS
OF "RACISM"

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There appears to be a joint focus on the causes of racial inequality in the Bahá'í Writings. On the one hand, there is a focus on people to fight their own racial prejudices individually. In a

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15   For example, a December 2016 story in the *Chicago Tribune* recounted statements by Don Black, Klansman and operator of a popular white supremacist website (Stormfront.org): "White supremacy is a legitimate term, though not usually applicable as used by the media. I think it's popular as a term of derision because of the implied unfairness, and, like 'racism,' it's got that 'hiss' (and, like 'hate' and 'racism,' frequently 'spewed' in headlines)" ("KKK Disavows White Supremacist Label").

speech given on 13 November 1911 in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarked that "[a]ll prejudices, whether of religion, race, politics or nation, must be renounced, for these prejudices have caused the world's sickness. It is a grave malady which, unless arrested, is capable of causing the destruction of the whole human race. Every ruinous war, with its terrible bloodshed and misery, has been caused by one or other of these prejudices" (*Paris Talks* 146). This important point was underscored by 'Abdu'l-Bahá just moments later:

> The deplorable wars going on in these days are caused by the fanatical religious hatred of one people for another, or the prejudices of race or color. Until all these barriers erected by prejudice are swept away, it is not possible for humanity to be at peace. For this reason Bahá'u'lláh has said, "These Prejudices are destructive to mankind." (*Paris Talks* 147–48)

And in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, individual-level prejudices are framed as the "breeding ground" of larger tragedies, while the "root cause of prejudice" is understood as the "blind imitation of the past" (247). Moreover, as mentioned above, Shoghi Effendi expounded upon the key role of individual-level racial prejudice in causing dysfunction at the societal level by stating: "As to racial prejudice, the corrosion of which, for well-nigh a century, has bitten into the fiber, and attacked the whole social structure of American society, it should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution" (*Advent* 33).

In terms of racial discrimination, there may seem to be relatively few explicit references in the Bahá'í authoritative texts. However, implicit—and in many instances explicit—in all discussions about the unity of humankind is the abolition of racial prejudices and distinctions together with prejudices of any other sort. Shoghi Effendi makes clear that not even the "slightest discrimination" should be employed, even if that should result in hostility or obstruction from "any individual, class or institution":

> In the matter of teaching, as repeatedly and emphatically stated, particularly in his "Advent of Divine Justice," the Guardian does not wish the believers to make the slightest discrimination, even though this may result in provoking opposition or criticism from any individual, class or institution. The Call of Bahá'u'lláh, being universal, should be addressed with equal force to all the peoples, classes and nations of the world, irrespective of any religious, racial, political or class distinction or difference. (*Directives* 73)

And on the other hand, questions of racial inequality are framed as meso- and macro-level phenomena that stem from, and reproduce because of, social factors

external to the individual. For instance, the concept of racial discrimination, as briefly referenced in the Bahá'í Writings, is not used in an abstract fashion to denote individual-level prejudicial actions. Rather, it is directly connected to historically entrenched inequalities, asymmetrical demographics, and representational democratic praxis. In that vein, Bahá'í elections use a form of "affirmative action"[16] to protect the "minority"[17] from discrimination. Hence,

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16 The term "affirmative action" was first used in the United States in a March 1961 executive order from John F. Kennedy (#10925). The order stated that all government contractors must "take *affirmative action* to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin" (emphasis added). The rationale for affirmative action is to promote future opportunities, address existing discrimination, and help compensate from past discrimination in order to ensure equal opportunities and representation. Many other countries use similar forms of affirmative action, such as the 1988 Employment Equality Act, No. 55, in South Africa; the policy of "reservation" of seats in legislatures, government jobs, and higher educational institutions for marginalized castes and classes in India; and the rule in Norway that public stock company boards must be represented by 40 percent of either gender in order to mitigate against gender discrimination.

17 "The House of Justice has asked us to explain that it is not always possible for

"discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority" is not *ipso facto* "discrimination," but a remedy as contextualized by the past, present, and future of social, demographic, and power inequities:

> To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh . . . . If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise. (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives* 35)

Shoghi Effendi continues by delineating the principle behind such "discrimination . . . in favor of the minority," empathizing the "first and inescapable obligation" of Bahá'ís is to cultivate, embolden, and protect "minorities":

> Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist,

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a National Spiritual Assembly to define exactly what constitutes a minority for its area of jurisdiction as a whole. This principle is one which needs to be applied by the friends in each separate situation in light of the conditions there and, in applying it, the believers should recall the reason behind the principle" (qtd. in Universal House of Justice, "Compilations").

whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it. (*Directives* 35)

The brief, albeit powerful, references to the past, present, and future likelihood of patterned discrimination against racial "minorities" indicates a Bahá'í theological recognition of the systemic operation of race and racial inequality—what we have previously defined as "racism."

An October 1985 message from the Universal House of Justice explicitly calls "racism" an "evil." The supreme Bahá'í administrative body emphasizes the maliciousness of racism and underscores that racism functions as more than a mere prejudicial attitude; it is also a social "practice" that holds varied deleterious effects:

Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome.

Moreover, the Universal House of Justice's emphasis on the "appropriate legal measures" further solidifies the point that "racism" is a socially systemic problem that must be addressed via local, district, national, and international governmental policy and law. This stance reflects a profoundly sociological understanding of "racism," whereby human behavior is largely influenced by external social forces, such as law. Take, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. (trained in both sociology and theology), who stated in 1962: "It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can stop him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important." Hence, to stifle the "practice" of racism, one must enact laws that both collectively incentivize and moralize the practice of the "oneness of mankind" rather than merely assume that either ignorance or cognitive prejudices drive "racism" (which itself is a non-empirically verifiable assumption) and that education or antiracist ideas will either automatically, or through concerted effort, dislodge the operation of racism. Simply put, human behavior follows external structures (albeit, not determinately). If those structures address and delimit the practice of racism, then over time, human behavior will begin to

refrain from those practices.

Consider the message from the Universal House of Justice, sent in 1992 to the Bahá'ís of the world. In emphasizing the progression of Bahá'í initiatives and even the "near approach of the Lesser Peace,"[18] the Universal House of Justice outlines the "simultaneous recrudescence of countervailing forces" and notes that "[t]he concomitant rise of racism in many regions has become a matter of serious global concern." In this vein, "racism" is a multiregional social force that varies in style and magnitude, rather than an individual occurrence of a prejudicial attitude. This point is further accentuated in the aforementioned April 2002 Universal House of Justice letter addressed to the world's religious leaders. The message emphasizes how "racism"—due in part to the tragedies of the Holocaust and the historical uncovering of prior genocides and enslavements around the world—has become a stigma with which few wish to associate. Still, the Universal House of Justice argues that "racism" exists as both an "social" attitude (rather than individual attitude) and as a "blight on the lives of a significant segment of humankind":

> While surviving as a social attitude in many parts of the world—and as a blight on the lives of a significant segment of humankind—racial prejudice has become so universally condemned in principle that no body of people can any longer safely allow themselves to be identified with it.

The social attitude, what we might call an "ideology," alongside the multivariate ways that racism manifests in different locales and functions in distinctive registers, necessitates a more robust understanding of the intertwined systemic relationship between "race" and "racism."

Bahá'í teachings signal that without profound focus on the varied aspects of social life, racial equality cannot be attained. As the Bahá'í International Community's statement "The Spiritual Basis of Equality" suggests, "Equality is facilitated by a social environment that encourages and actively supports this principle as a necessary ingredient of life." While some steps toward racial equality have been made over the past two centuries, there have been both major retreats from, and stubborn resistance to, achieving racial equality, which sociologist Orlando Patterson has called the "homeostatic principle of the entire system of racial domination" (480). Inequality is squelched in one place, only to arise with renewed vigor in another area. Hence, notions of "progress" can be illusory without attention to racism. The Universal House of Justice's 1996 letter emphasized that social action must occur simultaneously among micro-, meso-,

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18 The "Lesser Peace" is a term that describes a political peace established by the nations of the world. See Babak Bahador and Nazila Ghanea's *Processes of the Lesser Peace.*

and macro-levels of society:

> The individual alone exercises those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and to society . . . . The institutions must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes . . . . A community is, of course, more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress.[19]

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19 The Universal House of Justice makes the profoundly sociological point that societies (in their words, "communities") are "more than the sum of [their] membership," or as Émile Durkheim would put it, "society as *sui generis*" (a thing of its own kind), or more plainly put, "society

From this excerpt, we recognize the necessity to ground the pursuit of justice in a comprehensive framework of micro ("individual"), meso ("institutional"), and macro ("community") domains in which each is integral but also interdependent.

Section V
The Intertwined Dimensions of Race and Racism: "The Five I's"

The discipline of sociology attempts to answer the problem of action and order, or why people do things (action) and why they do those things in a specific, observed form (order). When we consider how concepts like race and racism enter into analyzing action and order, analyses can quickly become muddled. To clarify the relationship between race and racism, it is necessary to outline a new approach.

First, consider the "effect of race." We can easily observe vast disparities between racial groups—from educational levels and wealth attainment to morality and fertility rates. And if we recall that race is not so much a noun but a verb (see prior section, "The 'Social Fact' of Race"), then we can understand that "race" does not possess essential qualities that cause these disparities (what we call "racial essentialism"). Rather, when we view varying outcomes and inequality across

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is greater than the sum of its parts, for it has a unique reality" (Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1996 Message; Durkheim 1; Tucker 124).

racial groups, we do not observe an effect of race but a process of social domination *through* race (which we can call "racism"), which leads to the next point.

Second, some scholars view racism as driven by robust and dominant ideologies. Other view racism as the product of macro-institutional dynamics. And still many others understand racism as the result of particular forms of interactions. None of these perspectives is entirely wrong or right; each of these dynamics concurrently operates to create racial inequality. When we observe a particular racial outcome, we witness the unfoldment of a multidimensional process of domination in which some groups are afforded systematic advantages alongside others that are systematically disadvantaged.

Third, we must understand that the multidimensional activity of domination (racism) produces both the dominant *meanings* and structural *locations* of "race" *qua* racial groups and vice versa (Bonilla-Silva 9–11; Omi and Winant 56–58). That is, the relationship between "race" and "racism" is a feedback loop that operates across five key dimensions: ideologies, institutions, interests, identities, and interactions—what I call "The Five I's" (Hughey, "The Five I's" 857). This point calls for an extended example. Consider my favorite sport: basketball.

Invented in 1891 by Dr. James Naismith, the game quickly became popular. Public basketball courts were first established in dense urban cities in the northeastern United States. Basketball courts are small and cheap to build, and the sport is cheap to play: all you need is a ball and a hoop. Hence, the kids growing up in these areas—mainly Jews who had landed in Jewish immigrant ghettos (and who were largely pushed out of their homelands by economic, social, and political exclusion and forced into these areas due to anti-Semitism and nativism)—were the primary players of basketball because of *location*. Soon, almost all Jewish neighborhoods in New York and Philadelphia (cities with the largest Jewish populations) had their own teams. And many Jews played basketball in the hopes of winning collegiate scholarships (Wade 19–21).

But also, the racial *meanings* of Jews were soon attached to basketball itself. Racist ideologies conveyed the notion that Jews were part of a separate race of intelligent, yet sneaky and devious people. Institutional and interactional segregation facilitated the proliferation of racial myths about Jews. Perceptions that Jews were in economic and political competition with whites pitted racial group interests against one another. By the 1930s, the *New York Daily News* wrote that basketball "places a premium on an alert, scheming mind, flashy trickiness, artful dodging" and that Jews were naturally better players because they had "God-given better balance and speed" (qtd. in Shapiro 88). In 1946, the first basket scored in professional basketball was by a Jewish player—Ozzie Schectman of the New York Knicks.

But by the 1950s, there was a mass migration of Jews to the suburbs, while the Great Migration brought southern African Americans to the same urban areas of Philadelphia and New York. Moreover, many Jews assimilated into whiteness thanks to the softening of the social boundaries of whiteness, which also drew in other groups previously deemed nonwhite like the Italians and the Irish (Brodkin 16, 35; Guglielmo 32, 79; Ignatiev 1–8). Slowly, basketball became perceived as less "Jewish" and more "black." Since the *location* of race with basketball changed, so did the *meanings*. The racial stereotypes of African Americans were applied to basketball. Many began to say that blacks had superior athletic abilities. For instance, an article in a 1971 issue of *Sports Illustrated* suggests that blacks were "the offspring of those who [were] physically and mentally tough enough to survive . . . simply bred for physical qualities" (Kane, 79).[20]

While the players involved in the sporting institution of basketball are racialized, varied ideologies, interactions, interests, and identities also racializes the players. For instance, years ago, successful players were assumed to be Jewish, whereas today success at basketball can "blacken" players and prompt racist terms like "wigger" ("white" plus "nigger") or "wannabe" (as if the player "wants-to-be" black). For example, when white player Jason Williams joined the NBA and became a star for the Sacramento Kings, he was nicknamed "white chocolate" by Stephanie Shepard (the Kings media relations assistant), who said, "I came up with that name because of his style . . . . The way he does things with the ball is incredible to me. It reminds me of, like, schoolyard street ball when I go to Chicago" (qtd. in M. Wise).

If we observe any social domain over time, the people occupying that space racialize the institution, the dominant ideologies, their own and others' identities, etc., while the institution, the ideologies, and their identities labor to re-racialize the people in that space.

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20   This argument is well-rehearsed and has experienced a revival over recent years. Some assert that blacks possess a biological predisposition due to Darwinian winnowing during the Trans-Atlantic crossing and chattel slavery's harsh conditions. However, considering all demographic categories, young adult black slaves experienced the highest mortality rates, and slave men died at about twice the rate of slave women (Klein; Graves). The evidence suggests that the social behavior of both slaves and slaveholders, rather than the supposed naturally selected genetic physiology of black slaves, is a much better explanation for mortality rates. Despite biological and sociological evidence to the contrary, recent mainstream discussions collectively advance the proposition that black athletic success is the product of little more than genetic traits, which often reifies a "black brawn vs. white brains" dichotomy (see Hughey and Goss's article for more information).

This feedback loop operates through five dimensions: first, race functions as an *ideology* (a shared belief system that contains dominant messages about different groups and that rationalizes and legitimates racial inequality); second, race has material roots as an *institution* (race structures one's position in a particular society and constrains and enables one's success in organizations and structures in society); third, race is an *interest* (racial categories shape the way people behave toward, and think along, individual and group lines to pursue, protect, and engage in conflict or cooperation over resources); fourth, race is an *identity* (a category in which one feels membership and social expectations to conform, with penalties/rewards for meeting those accountability obligations); and fifth, race is an *interaction* (the habitual practices, scripts, and shared expectations that afford people a blueprint that guides both intra- and interracial modes of interactional behavior between strangers, friends, and even in digital and virtual settings within an ever-media saturated world). While the "Five I's" cannot be entirely separated in empirical reality, I parse them out as a pedagogical heuristic. Once individually grasped, they can be synthesized to show how different dimensions of race are all related and are often simultaneously at play. In these five types, we again witness a unity of sociological and Bahá'í theological knowledge: "race" is a product of "racism" and the refusal to acknowledge a fundamental unity of humankind.

IDEOLOGIES

An ideology is a shared, comprehensive system of beliefs, ideas, and ideals. Ideologies generally rationalize or legitimate some arrangement. We can think of race as having an ideological component because it is a set of beliefs that are collectively shared and are often understood as little more than common-sense descriptions of the world. These beliefs rationalize who belongs in what racial group, what traits or characteristics that racial group supposedly has naturally, and where in the social order and hierarchy that racial group supposedly belongs. Consider the remarks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá given in New York City in 1912 in which He questions the superfluous ideological component of race:

> Man is endowed with superior reasoning power and the faculty of perception; he is the manifestation of divine bestowals. Shall racial ideas prevail and obscure the creative purpose of unity in his kingdom? Shall he say, "I am a German," "I am a Frenchman" or an "Englishman" and declare war because of this imaginary and human distinction? God forbid! This earth is one household and the native land of all humanity; therefore, the human race should ignore distinctions and boundaries which are artificial and conducive to disagreement and hostility. (*Promulgation* 114)

'Abdu'l-Bahá frequently highlighted the ideological dimension of race as "artificial" or illusory. For instance, in Paris in 1911, He employed a monogenesis argument in asserting that the "prejudice of race" was "an illusion, a superstition pure and simple! For God created us all of one race. There were no differences in the beginning, for we are all descendants of Adam . . . . In the sight of God there is no difference between the various races" (*Paris Talks* 148).

INSTITUTIONS

An institution is any persistent structure or social order that governs the behavior of a set of individuals in a specific community. Institutions have a distinct social purpose that mediates the expected rules of behavior; examples include law, the economy, education, employment, family, religion, sports, politics, mass media, the military and police, and health care. Access to and upward mobility within these institutions can significantly affect life chances and well-being— and that access and mobility varies by racial group. Many institutions can themselves become racialized or take on a racial reputation. Per the example above, many people associate sporting success with African Americans and likewise may come to associate educational success with whites or certain ethnic groups within the larger "Asian" race. However, such associations may be little more than stereotypes or assumptions that become important social facts: because

people treat that association as real, they come to expect it, which will influence the outcome, thereby engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In this vein, the 28 December 2010 letter from the Universal House of Justice, in citing Shoghi Effendi, delineates between the ideological and the institutional existence of race and racism:

He [Shoghi Effendi] went on to discuss at length the specific question of racial prejudice, "the corrosion of which," he indicated, had "bitten into the fibre, and attacked *the whole social structure of American society* [my emphasis]" and which, he asserted at the time, "should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution."... While it is true that, at the level of public discourse, great strides have been taken in refuting the falsehoods that give rise to prejudice in whatever form, *it still permeates the structures of society and is systematically impressed on the individual consciousness.* (emphasis added)

The message makes the clear the point that discourse, on the one hand, and material inequality and practices of discrimination, on the other hand, should not be conflated.

INTERESTS

Another important dimension of race is the concept of interests, or resources and goals. When groups organize, they may come to see certain interests as necessary, and they may perceive other groups as threats. They may consider themselves entitled while viewing others as undeserving. Some racial and ethnic groups pursue, protect, and engage in conflict or cooperation over interests. They may organize and lobby to influence legal or policy considerations directly or indirectly.

For example, recent research shows that white Americans are increasingly likely to believe that society is no longer biased against people of color, but that it has in fact become anti-white (Norton and Sommers 215). Moreover, current findings reveal that over time it is increasingly likely for whites to believe that decreases in perceived bias against blacks mean increases in bias against whites. Because of this belief, many whites strive to protect resources that they feel people of color are trying to take from them. Accordingly, while many whites support racial equality in the abstract, they oppose policies that implement racial equality (what some call the "principle-policy gap") and actively oppose policies and laws they believe will hurt their chances as members of their particular racial group.

Race functions through the pitting of groups against one another. 'Abdu'l-Bahá made it clear that:

[e]very imperfect soul is self-centered and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection. (*Selections* 68)

The point is again reiterated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His "Commentary on the Eleventh Chapter of Isaiah": "Religious and sectarian antagonism, the hostility of races and peoples, and differences among nations will be eliminated. All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race and become a single people" (*Some Answered Questions* 12:7). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's point is that "race" is an artificial category that divides and pits people, otherwise of one purpose, against one another in the pursuit of specific ends.

IDENTITIES

We can define identity as the distinctive characteristic belonging to

any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. Racial identity, then, has to do with the membership one feels in a particular racial group, the sense of belonging one has, and how others feel about their fit in a racial group. We may ascribe a particular identity to ourselves, others may assign it to us, and/or we may think of our own racial identity by imagining how others might see us—what the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley called the "looking-glass self." When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we: (1) imagine how we appear to others, (2) imagine what their judgment of that appearance will be, and (3) develop our identity through the imagined or actual judgments of others (Cooley, 183–4).

The sociological dimension of "race" as a salient identity is affirmed in an April 2002 letter from the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders: "Despite the continuing conflict and violence that darken the horizon, prejudices that once seemed inherent in the nature of the human species are everywhere giving way. Down with them come barriers that long divided the family of man into a Babel of incoherent identities of cultural, ethnic or national origin." The Universal House of Justice affirms the notion that both prejudices and ethnic identities are neither essential or inherent parts of the self nor that they will continue to dominate the human landscape. Both the "conflict and violence" that helps

create, and stems from, racial and ethnic identity will one day give way.

However, racial and ethnic identities are emphasized as important social categories to be respected when they represent important cultural values and become the basis for attaining basic human and civil rights in the face of discrimination. For example, years prior, a letter from the Universal House of Justice responded to a query from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada regarding Indigenous people, stating, in part:

> You have also raised a number of questions concerning the rights of indigenous people such as the Natives of Canada. It is quite clear that Native persons are fully entitled to all the human rights accorded to the majority population; for example, they should be guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, and all acts of discrimination against them, which may have developed over the years, should be eliminated. However, the freedom for indigenous people to exercise their rights carries with it the corollary need to recognize the rights of all others to the same expression. The implications for indigenous people also include: realization of the virtues of cross-cultural influences; appreciation of the values of other cultures as accruing to the wealth of human experience and the freedom of all to share in such values without necessarily

giving up their respective identities; avoidance of parochial attitudes which degenerate into ethnic and cultural prejudices; and, above all, appreciation of the necessity to maintain a global perspective within which the particulars of indigenous expression can find an enduring context.

The import of identity as a vehicle for the protection of unique cultural worldviews and values that would otherwise be assimilated or assumed under discrimination or oppression is always balanced against a perspective that would valorize racial and ethnic identity as a decontextualized ontological presence. In the Bahá'í Writings, the import of racial identity is always emphasized as an expression of the quest for justice and equality. For instance, in the introduction to the 1992 English publication of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Universal House of Justice writes:

Our world has entered the dark heart of an age of fundamental change beyond anything in all of its tumultuous history. Its peoples, of whatever race, nation, or religion, are being challenged to subordinate all lesser loyalties and limiting identities to their oneness as citizens of a single planetary homeland. In Bahá'u'lláh's words: "the well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." (11)

In this sense, racial identities are "lesser loyalties" and are necessarily "limiting" in the scope of the full social recognition of human unity and, as such, are more an expression of the means to an end, rather than the end in itself.

INTERACTIONS

Social interactions regularly occur between two or more individuals. These interactions are often habitual, patterned, scripted, governed by formal or informal rules, and become shared expectations or maps that help us navigate everyday encounters. In these interactions, people develop and then come to rely on shared meanings imposed on objects, events, and behaviors. The subjective meanings that we all give to things we encounter are important because they are not solitary meanings but must be shared and agreed on to a certain extent. We interpret one another's behavior in various interactions, and these interpretations form social bonds or conflict. These interpretations are what sociologists William and Dorothy Thomas called "the definition of the situation" (571–72). That is, we come to agree on what a particular behavior, idea, or thing is, what its value is, and what, where, when, why, and how that particular thing should act or be.

In terms of race, we often have very specific racialized interpretations about how we believe certain racial groups should behave, where they should live, how they should speak to one another, who they can date

or marry, what kind of clothes they should wear or music they should listen to, and so on. When someone deviates from that expected form of interaction, that person might be evaluated negatively or positively depending on the situation. For instance, sometimes people are thought of as being racially inauthentic, as when African Americans have been accused of "acting white." In other instances, white people have been accused of being "wannabes" for dressing, talking, or acting in ways they believe other racial groups should interact.

The Bahá'í Writings on interracial interactions emphasize the import of prior power imbalances, historically entrenched injustices, and the weight of trust, invariable effort, and purity of motive in creating just and equitable interracial interactions. Take into consideration 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition that simple intraracial interactions, even if predicated on the best of intentions and altruism, fail to provide a common ground for unity:

> it is evident that fraternity, love and kindness based upon family, native land, race or an attitude of altruism are neither sufficient nor permanent since all of them are limited, restricted and liable to change and disruption. For in the family there is discord and alienation; among sons of the same fatherland, strife and internecine warfare are witnessed; between those of a given race, hostility and hatred are frequent; and even among the altruists, varying aspects of opinion and lack of unselfish devotion give little promise of permanent and indestructible unity among mankind. (*Promulgation* 391)

Hence, racial solidary cannot serve as an unerring or adequate basis for just interactions. Rather, Bahá'ís are called upon to act with trust and kindness across the color line. 'Abdu'l-Bahá again states that "[t]he diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of different race and color from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness" (*Paris Talks* 53).

Yet, consideration and conviction are not enough, as the weight of racialized interactional scripts guide and structure how we relate to one another. In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi is not vague on this point:

> Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous

and informal association with them the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds. (40)

These tendencies are born out of historical conditions. The "white race" is neither naturally predisposed or destined to hold these attitudes, while at the same time, a "subconscious sense of superiority" is, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "usually inherent" due to ideological doctrines of racial superiority and structural barriers that divide and segregate the races. In the face of ideological and material hegemony that both creates and maintains white domination, it is no wonder that the beneficiaries of that social system (the "white race") would hold a "usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority" (*Advent* 40). Shoghi Effendi continues by addressing the other side of the color line: "Let the Negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds" (*Advent* 40). Hence, kind-heartedness, forgiveness, and reliant trust are necessary on the part of a people who, at the time of Shoghi Effendi's writing, were only beginning

to emerge from the social system of *de jure* segregation and inequality known as Jim Crow.[21] Shoghi Effendi closes by stating:

> Let neither [either "white" or "Negro"] think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved. Let neither think that they can wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favorable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith. Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country. (*Advent* 40–41)[22]

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21 The publication of *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1938) occurred in the same year in which the first major US Supreme Court ruled against Jim Crow on the principle of equality. *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938) held that states that provided a school to white students had to provide in-state education to blacks as well.

22 Shoghi Effendi also emphasizes that "an interracial fellowship completely purged from the curse of racial prejudice which stigmatizes the vast majority of its people" is the "weapon" that Bahá'ís "can

While forgiveness and humility are emphasized in the Bahá'í Writings, similar (if not greater) attention is directed toward justice, equality, and the elimination of racism. Importantly, interactions across the color line should not be interpreted outside the context of the other "I's"—particularly that of the institutional contexts which provide unequal meeting grounds of those interactions.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

I have reviewed the historical development of race and racism; provided an overview of, and attempt to correlate, both the Bahá'í theological and sociological views on race and racism, and offered a robust sociological understanding of how these concepts are inextricably intertwined in five key dimensions. It should now be apparent that a scholarly understanding of race and racism cannot be obtained without giving attention to larger "structural" social forces external to the individual. The concept of "race" is a dynamic and ongoing multidimensional *social process* that often rationalizes and legitimates the (re)production of systemic inequality.

Furthermore, Bahá'í theology points us toward examining racial antipathy and racism as neither the providence of ignorance nor individuals, but of social patterns of human interaction based in quests for power, resources, and/or status. Once these imperatives take hold in the aforementioned five dimensions, racial inequality, racism, and the mechanisms that sustain them can persist even with color-blind or good intentions. Moreover, Bahá'í theology emphasizes that the remedies to these patterns of racism, as a "pernicious and persistent evil," must therefore consist in the recognition of humanity's oneness via external social forces (BIC, "Combating Racism"). Such implementation must take place through "appropriate and universally upheld legal measures" that make the attainment of relatively equal *outcomes*, not liberally vague notions of equal *opportunities*, the principle goal and animating spirit (BIC, "Combating Racism"). Without relatively equal social domains, the potential to attain true unity and oneness will remain both fleeting and frustrating, resulting in continued chilling and frigid relations (from attitudes about white victimization to actual instances of "microaggressions")[23] and

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and must wield" to "first to regenerate the inward life of their own community, and next to assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their nation" (*Advent* 41).

23 Despite evidence to the contrary, feelings of "white victimization" have risen in recent years. A 2014 study by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 52 percent of whites agreed with the following statement: "Today discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities" (Piacenza). And a 2011 study found that whites view racism "as

the repetition of more and more "long, hot summers"[24] (from Ferguson, Missouri, to Baltimore, Maryland).

a zero-sum game, such that decreases in perceived bias against Blacks over the past six decades are associated with increases in perceived bias against Whites . . . . This emerging perspective is particularly notable because by nearly any metric—from employment to police treatment, loan rates to education—statistics continue to indicate drastically poorer outcomes for Black than White Americans" (Norton and Sommers 215). Additionally, research on "microaggressions" has been increasingly taken up by sociologists (see, for example, *Sociological Inquiry*'s "Special Issue on Racial Microaggressions"), demonstrating the near omnipresence of "racialized subtle jibes, insults, and put-downs" suffered by people of color (Hughey et al. 307).

24   The term "long, hot summer" was first used as a reference to the 159 race riots across the United States during the summer of 1967, in which over 76 people died and over 2,100 were injured (McLaughlin). The riots of 1967 led to the formation of the Lyndon B. Johnson's "Kerner Commision" to investigate the causes of the riots. During this, the fiftieth anniversary of the riots (1967–2017), I dedicate this article to the lives lost in those rebellions.

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Seeking Light in the Darkness of "Race"[1]

JAMAR M. WHEELER

Abstract

In this article, the author explores racialism through a lens that integrates a sociological and Bahá'í-informed perspective. A historical sketch of how the race concept evolved is offered, along with a contemporary analysis of what history has wrought at the macro and micro levels of society. Viewing racialism as a dark, subjugating aspect of social life, the author presents the oneness of mankind as an enlightening force that, when actualized through individual agency and collective social action, has the power to transform society as small-scale efforts snowball into community-level movements.

Resumé

Dans cet article, l'auteur examine le racialisme à travers un prisme qui intègre à la fois la sociologie et la pensée bahá'íe. Il brosse un tableau de l'évolution du concept de la race et offre une analyse contemporaine de ce que l'histoire a engendré aux niveaux macro et micro de la société. Voyant dans le racialisme un aspect sombre et assujetissant de la vie en société, l'auteur présente le concept de l'unité de l'humanité comme une force éclairante qui, lorsqu'elle se traduit par des actions sociales individuelles et collectives, a le pouvoir de transformer la société à mesure que des actions à petite échelle se combinent et entraînent des mouvements d'envergure communautaire.

Resumen

En este artículo, el autor explora el racismo a través de una lente que integra una perspectiva sociológica e informada por la Fe Bahá'í. Se ofrece un bosquejo histórico de cómo el concepto de la raza evolucionó, junto con un análisis contemporáneo de lo que la historia ha formado en los niveles macro y micro de la sociedad. Viendo el racismo como un aspecto oscuro y subyugante en la vida social, el autor presenta la unidad de la humanidad como una fuerza iluminadora. Esa fuerza cuando se actualiza a través de una agencia individual y una acción social colectiva, tiene el poder de transformar la sociedad, de los esfuerzos pequeños a los movimientos de nivel comunitario

INTRODUCTION

At this critical juncture in the life of society, it is tempting to focus on the most visible signs of racial conflict being featured on various media platforms, whether mainstream news outlets or social media. The level of urgency that currently appears to be building up with respect to race[2] is

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1   I dedicate this article to the memory of Heather Heyer. I would also like to thank Jeremy Lambshead for his invaluable assistance in helping me improve this article.

2   The word *race* has been used throughout this article with some regret given its insignificance with respect to its original biologistic intention. Its usage has been employed due to its general usefulness for social discourse.

largely a result of the level of media attention. However, I would argue that the situation has been urgent for a long while. Before the recent episodes of teens and even preteens being murdered with impunity, names like Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, and Nicole Brown Simpson became familiar to us. Albeit often under the radar of the news media, patterns of racial inequality have persisted in the criminal justice system, at various socioeconomic metrics, and in the sense of social esteem granted to those of a particular racial background.

With this in mind, this article seeks to analyze race primarily from a sociohistorical perspective. This "big picture" approach, I would argue, is more effective in uncovering the social significance of race as opposed to focusing on highly visible incidents that are, in the end, symptoms or flare-ups of a deeper problem. Presented for your consideration is a painstakingly forged reconciliation of sociological, spiritual, and experiential knowledge concerning race. In other words, this article reflects a standpoint based on what I have thus far gathered from sociological scholarship and my study of the spiritual teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, all filtered through my personal experience. Despite the inherent challenges and limitations, I believe that speaking about what I know to be true at this point in my holistic journey as a Bahá'í and an aspiring scholar is the most effective way for me to contribute to the discourse.

While I acknowledge that there are numerous examples of positive interracial interactions and social patterns, this article is focused on fundamental questions such as why "race" seems to be a permanent feature of society, how we got to the present situation with respect to race, and what might be some factors in liberating our social world from the dark scourge of race. As a result, this article tackles mainly large-scale sociohistorical dynamics that involve individuals, but mostly transcend them, especially those who stand out as exceptions to the rule. Given the sensitive nature of race as a subject matter, it could prove beneficial for the reader to be mindful that terms such as "White," "Black," "whiteness," and several others are mostly employed as general terms that do not imply a sweeping categorization of every individual characterized as such.

The scope of this article is, for the most part, purposefully limited to the United States, given its unique racial history and the sociological sense that race looks different in different social contexts. Our exploration begins with a sociological perspective that focuses on the nature of race and how it has expressed itself throughout US history up to the present day at both the structural and interpersonal levels of society. It is established within this discussion that race has evolved from misguided ideas on human diversity to become a cancerous element of our contemporary social structure that subjugates the populace and constrains our ability to forge authentic

interracial bonds. We then explore insights from the Bahá'í Writings that offer an enriching social vision regarding human diversity and the means to establish community life conducive to interracial brotherhood. Finally, I offer some thoughts on how attaining and sustaining an authentic form of identity, and deepening this transcendent sense of identity in the company of like-minded collaborators, is the key building block to constructing transformative communities that embody the principle of the oneness of humanity—the pivotal social verity of our time that unites science and religion.

As a whole, this article runs counter to at least two tendencies, one tied to Bahá'í-centered discourse on race and the other tied to the social sciences in general. Focused mainly on the current moment and the racialized social condition of the United States as a whole, there will be scant mention of the race amity initiatives spearheaded by the US Bahá'í community at various points in its history. This omission is a result of both its peripheral relationship to my central thesis and a purposeful choice to avoid any triumphalist tone when speaking on a deleterious aspect of society that has so far proven to be intractable. With respect to the social sciences, this article counters their inherent materialism and the concomitant tendency to avoid metaphysical phenomena and their potential to effect social outcomes.

The primary assertion of this article is that the inability of previous generations to root out racism as a social force that perpetuates systemic and dehumanizing injustice means we are living under the weight of a *racialized social structure* in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism"). Birthed by what those in power felt were the exigencies of *capitalistic materialism*, this racialized social structure is animated by sociohistorical forces that place whiteness, as a way of being, at the very center of social life, producing a system of social relations that bestows privileges to those regarded as White and social burdens upon those regarded as non-White. The racialized social structure exerts a subjugating influence on society due to its historical embeddedness and the fact that we are born into this racialized social environment, profoundly shaped by it during our lifetime, and most likely to be outlived by it. As a result, deep racial inequalities are widely regarded as "the way it is," something that we are powerless to change rather than an outcome of systemic injustice. This means that efforts at countering the forces released and sustained by the racialized social structure will need to be revolutionary in character, focused on the principle of universal justice, and animated by forces that transcend material reality.

The animating principle that is conducive to fueling such countering efforts is the *spirit of oneness*. Seeing it as the conscious expression of the oneness of humanity at the individual and collective levels, those inspired by the spirit of oneness will work for social

change and transform communities in direct accordance to the strength of the collaborations forged, and these transformed communities will effect the institutional and cultural changes that will ultimately lead to the de-racialization of society.

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RACIALISM THROUGH A
SOCIOLOGICAL LENS

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While it is rare for contemporary social scientists to agree on a lot, there is general agreement regarding the subject of race. There is a consensus that although existing phenotypical differences are real—exemplified in diversity of skin color, facial features, and other physical characteristics— such differences are in no way rooted in mutually exclusive biological categories. In short, racial categories are not a scientifically valid means of subdividing the human race. Given this fact and the visible inequalities largely founded on a history of racialized discrimination, social scientists consider race to be a social construction.

The *social construction of race* concept is based on the premise that while "race" is not real in a scientific sense, it is real in a *social* sense. Speaking very concisely, *racialism* began as a set of ideas, and people then enacted these ideas through their behaviors, crystallizing the ideas into a structure of beliefs, and this structure of beliefs over time became encoded into the life of society. In other words, race evolved from false ideation in its genesis to an aspect of social reality that we take for granted as "the way things are" (Berger and Luckmann). If subscribing to race had been just one option available in the "free market of ideas," maybe the eventual collective realization that it was a misguided idea would be all we need to get over it and move on. Instead, race was codified into law and structured into the very life of society through culture and custom (Zinn 38). An idea is fairly easy to discard, but the institutionalization of an idea and the resulting structural effects are much harder to do away with. Understanding that race is a social construct provides us with a gateway to a more nuanced understanding of it, which involves seeing the phenomenon as rooted in false ideas yet carrying significant social consequences.

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RACIALISM: IDEOLOGY
AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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One of the most prominent sociological theories built upon the social construction of race concept is *racial formation*. Scholars Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that race is an unstable construct within the sphere of social meanings that is constantly being contested in the arena of political struggle (116). The racial formation process is animated by *racial projects*, which are said to be "historically situated *projects* in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized" (Omi and Winant 117). Each is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and

an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (117). At a macro level, the way in which race is interpreted directly connects with social policy and how interventions either seek to uphold or attack the existing social structure. For example, if race is regarded as a historical phenomenon that has lingering effects, such an interpretation would tend to support policies aimed at ameliorating past discrimination. Conversely, if race is viewed as insignificant, as something to be ignored regardless of what has taken place in the past, such an interpretation would lend credence to a more "hands off" approach (Omi and Winant 118–19). In short, the existence of numerous racial projects operating in the field of social action strongly suggests that the meaning of race is consistently contested along political and cultural lines.

If racialism is a body of ideas, racialization is the institutionalization of these ideas through dominant racial projects and the internalization of the beliefs and practices concomitant with a particular instance of *race-making*. I would argue that the evolution of the process of racialization can be segmented into three eras: 1) the conquest era (1419-1619), 2) the nation-building era (1620-1945), and 3) the post-war era (1946-present). Each historical period of modernity exemplifies the dynamic of contestation highlighted in racial formation theory. Despite race being a contested terrain with respect

to social meaning, we will see that each era is profoundly shaped by forces tied to social power. The concept of *hegemony* becomes central to this conversation. For the purposes of this article, hegemony represents a system of ideas and social practices that are promoted and maintained by a dominant group in society as a necessary component to sustaining popular consent to their authority. Once popular consent is generally achieved, societal notions and related practices emerge as a "common sense," laying the foundation for the establishment of a *hegemonic order*. Although the existence of a hegemonic order does not negate the fact that social meaning is a contested terrain, it does mean that it takes a concerted effort to deconstruct and dislodge it (Omi and Winant 127).

Additionally, it should not be lost that during each of these periods, the creed of material accumulation is the primary driver. While the conquest era can be defined by the rawness of its capital accumulation process, during the nation-building period we find that the process of accumulation is much more complex, involving a web of trade patterns that evolved into an industrialized, transnational economy. Lastly, in the post-war era, questions emerge with respect to how to redress the racialized exploitation and discrimination that was characteristic of a history of oppression— questions with pecuniary implications in a "zero-sum" socioeconomic/sociopolitical framework.

A Brief History of the Process of Racialization

At the beginning of the conquest era, we find that the early European explorers were faced with a bit of a conundrum when they encountered populations in the New World that were very different from them. Different in skin, in language and culture, and in myriad other ways, questions arose regarding where these "natives" stood in the "family of man." Surely these people could not be equal to the Europeans, but to what extent could they be exploited or enslaved? Over time it became clear that this contact with native populations throughout the Americas consolidated a worldview that placed European Christian civilization at the center while peripheralizing Native American and African populations that were regarded as heathens to be exploited. It is this dynamic of in-group and out-group distinctiveness that released the seeds of modern racial awareness.

Although racial considerations are in their infancy at this point, it is argued that the conquest era is one defined by the *religious civilization* standpoint. Despite the existing competitive struggles and the internal turmoil that they produced, European powers were united by the sense that their civilization was locked in a battle with barbarism; therefore, the subjugation of such peoples was not only conducive to riches, but could be seen as a Christianized campaign for social betterment. Interpreting human diversity

along these lines facilitated a sense of ideological coherence between the merchant conquerors, the monarchs, and the ecclesiastical authorities (Omi and Winant 122). While the hegemonic order of the day was well established—an order that served to justify the material appropriation of newly entered lands and the total domination of the people residing there—a few brave souls consulted their conscience and challenged the "common sense" of the time Dominican friar and Spanish historian Bartolomé de las Casas may be the most prominent example of one who, having witnessed the human atrocities, implored the Catholic Church to respect the rights of Native Americans, at least in some form or fashion. Las Casas's plea to the Church was heard, at least for a time, but the cosmic weight of the conquest era greatly diminished the impact of that counterhegemonic attempt (Dussel).

What began as European conquest eventually became European colonialism. While conquest was largely defined by the material appropriation of foreign lands, colonialism was defined by emerging European nation-states maintaining a sustained presence in these lands, exemplified by the eventual presence of formal institutions. As Europe's colonial enterprise expanded, a burgeoning intellectual revolution was developing that would have a lasting impact on the North American colonies as well as on Europe as a whole. The Enlightenment ideas promoted and embraced by a growing contingent of Europeans conflicted

with the reality that much of the economic life of Europe depended on slave labor and the material appropriation of foreign lands. In an attempt to achieve logical coherence between Enlightenment ideas and European domination, a set of notions regarding human diversity were advanced that would accrete to *scientific racism.*

I contend that it was the consolidation of this racialized logic that has permanently shaped American culture when it comes to race. The political machinations aimed at separating Whites and Blacks, the racial logic being promoted by highly esteemed philosophers and the religious and political leaders of the time, and the compelling vulnerability of enslaved Africans and Native Americans, fused together in a socially toxic mix to produce a highly racialized society that lingers with us to this day. Despite the sociopolitical changes that resulted from the emancipation of the slave population, Reconstruction, the emergence of Jim Crow, and the Great Migration to the North, the social meaning of race was still rooted in biologically essentialist notions. Such a racialized conception was reflected in the strict segregationist structure of the South and the pattern of widespread job and housing discrimination in the North. Regardless of where Black persons found themselves, at the institutional and interpersonal levels of society they were most likely to be regarded as inferior beings whose civil rights and pursuit of happiness need not be respected or even considered.

The most successful racial project to transform a historical instance of racial "common sense" was the one at the core of the civil rights movement, which is widely regarded as coming into form in 1955 with the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Partially facilitated by Cold War global politics, the civil rights movement successfully transformed the social meaning of race through an organized and concerted effort that included non-violent protests, appeals to the federal government, the legal advocacy of the NAACP, and voter registration drives (Carson). Each of these efforts had one thing in common, which effected a lasting transformation of the social meaning of race—the unequivocal affirmation of the humanity of Americans of African descent. The hegemonic order regarding race was dismantled by the protagonists of the civil rights movement and members of the general public that were inspired to embrace a new social reality imbued with racial justice. The passage of the Civil Rights (1964) and Voting Rights Acts (1965), like the ignominious laws passed during the days of slavery, were the institutional expressions of the transformed meaning of race. It was understood for a time, however brief, that for American society to move forward the injustices of the past and the inequalities produced as a result had to be rectified through ameliorative social policies such as affirmative action.

This wave of social change, while powerful, meaningful, and revolutionary, was soon countered by another

wave of social sentiment that crystallized into an ideology that characterized social policies designed to redress historical wrongs as problematic. One of the key ingredients of this ideology was addressing racial issues in a race-neutral manner, and this discursive strategy is at the core of what is known as the *colorblind racial ideology* (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* 3). Over time, in the battle for the social meaning of race, colorblindness reached a position of hegemony and a new version of racial "common sense" was consolidated. While various racial projects continue to wage, it seems that *colorblindness* is today's watchword for the hegemonic order of today.

COLORBLINDNESS AS THE RACIAL HEGEMONY OF TODAY

The ideological components of colorblindness combine classical liberal sentiments, such as liberty and equality before the law, with some of the discursive elements employed by civil rights activists, such as judging people by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin. According to Bonilla-Silva, this racial ideology is composed of four central frames: *abstract liberalism*, *naturalization*, *cultural racism*, and *minimization of racism*. Leveraging his analysis of hundreds of interviews, Bonilla-Silva is quick to point out that these frames are mutually reinforcing and often employed in various combinations in particular lines of discourse (*Racism without Racists* 74).

Abstract Liberalism is described as a frame that seeks to rationalize opposition to "racial fairness policies" based on principles such as equality of opportunity, individualism, and basing decisions related to hiring or admissions on merit alone. Briefly, the argument posits that society is best served when it allows equality of opportunity to be employed in a "race-neutral" fashion. Despite obvious racial inequities and their potential causes, any efforts to expand opportunities to disadvantaged groups are thus labeled as "preferential treatment" or examples of "reverse discrimination." Additionally, from such a viewpoint, programs like affirmative action are attacked as "group-based" preferential programs that disregard individual talents and capacities, which penalizes more qualified (i.e. White) individuals (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* 78).

The second frame, *naturalization*, largely consists of sentiments that explain visibly racial phenomena as the "way it is," as natural occurrences that are the result of human nature. Features of the social landscape such as segregated neighborhoods, schools, and religious communities are viewed as products of the tendency of different racial groups to "stick to their own." It should be noted that Whites who make this claim are careful to attribute this behavior to all racial groups to ensure that it is known that "all groups do it" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* 84).

One of the more potent frames of the colorblind racial ideology is

cultural racism. The success of the civil rights movement meant that overt claims regarding the racial inferiority of Blacks and other racialized minorities have been rendered immoral. As a consequence, inequalities are rarely conceptualized as a result of biological limitations; they are now conceived as resulting from a deficient culture that promotes certain undesirable traits and behaviors. For example, the status of Blacks in this country is viewed as resulting from laziness and the lack of motivation to upraise themselves through education and hard work. Often this phenomenon, in an attempt to be "gentle and kind," is attributed to the family life of Blacks and other minorities, the implication being that, "while it is true that they are lazy and unmotivated, it is not 100% their fault because they were never taught any better" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* 87).

The final frame, and the one that seems to tie everything together, is the *minimization of racism.* This perspective portrays racial discrimination as a phenomenon that is no longer a significant factor in limiting the social mobility of racialized minorities. The elasticity of this particular frame is the source of its potency because it allows for the recognition of discrimination at the level of individual action while denying its structural impact. This dynamic enables proponents to decry instances of racially motivated violence, for example, yet still hang on to the belief that "we're moving past race" as a society since there are always some

"bad apples out there." Another key element of this frame is attributing certain social outcomes that are racial in character to non-racial factors. For example, the widely stated claim from Blacks (and social scientists) that job discrimination still exists is regarded with skepticism, while other factors such as qualifications and attitudinal characteristics are used as explanations. More general claims of experiencing racial discrimination throughout one's life are regarded as making excuses and "finding what you're looking for" (Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* 91).

A great example of the tensions created by the hegemonic order of colorblindness are readily apparent in the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). Founded in 2013 as a spirited response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin, the movement received national attention in the wake of the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (Day). According to its website, "#BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society" ("About"). The counterhegemonic response being mounted by BLM seems to be especially directed toward opposing the criminalization of Black youth, especially with respect to policing as a matter of public policy. The goal of the movement in reference to the racial formation framework is to transform the meaning of race surrounding Black people. Success in this regard would equate

to measurable changes both in how Blacks are perceived and how they are treated in public spaces, whether by the police or the general public. From the BLM viewpoint, transforming the meaning of race will help minimize the instances of state violence against Blacks and uphold their common humanity and dignity.

Conversely, the spirited reaction against the Black Lives Matter movement can be summarized in the phrase "All Lives Matter." Those who sympathize with the logic underlying this counter-response are, for all intents and purposes, aligned with colorblindness. Just as colorblind proponents infer that the cardinal racial sin is to inject race into public policy as a means of addressing inequalities and injustices of a racial character, the advocates of "All Lives Matter" reject the mention of "Black lives" for similar reasons. The core critique of BLM from these proponents is centered on the rationale that the incidents highlighted by BLM are race-neutral incidents or at most are isolated incidents that do not merit the level of protest and angst raised. The "All Lives Matter" stance is a pure reflection of the hegemonic order of colorblindness, positing that in the absence of clear, explicit racism, the "real racists" are those who inject race into the conversation.

RACIALIZED SOCIAL STRUCTURE AS A PRODUCT OF HISTORY

The inability of the US social collective to root out racialism at an earlier stage in its development has allowed this social malignancy to produce a structure of social relations that renders everyday interactions and practices as both *racist* and *rational* (Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism" 475). In other words, the racialization process has evolved to such a degree that actions that could accurately be read as racist could also be read as logical choices given the social context. For example, if a young White couple has been priced out of a certain residential area but finds that there is a hip, on-the-rise neighborhood within their price range, their moving into that neighborhood is logically beneficial to them, despite the fact that they are contributing to a large-scale pattern of Black displacement that is characteristic of gentrification. In essence, many of the contemporary racial dynamics are shaped by the socioeconomic vulnerability of Blacks, which leads to limited choices with respect to housing in conjunction with the more expansive options available to Whites in accordance with their particular tastes. This housing dynamic becomes more compelling when considering that the tastes of Blacks and other racial minorities have rarely been accorded a similar level of respect in the housing market, regardless of socioeconomic background (Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg).

Overall, the reality of a *racialized social structure* as the outcome of the historical forces detailed earlier ultimately means that contemporary racial antagonisms are often reflective

of rational self-interests, given the perception that the material gains of an out-group will have an adverse effect on the in-group . This attitude creates a social dynamic in which the socioeconomic gains of racialized groups are regarded as offensive incursions into the field of social status and prestige, while the consolidation of socioeconomic gains on the part of the dominant group is viewed as the continuance of white supremacy. According to Herbert Blumer, these dynamics are undergirded by the "collective process of characterization," which perceives distinctive racial groups as alien and their desires for social mobility as indicative of harboring "designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race" (4). At the same time, the dominant racial group has a feeling of "proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage," which may explain the sense of ambivalence with respect to the social implications of gentrification and similar matters (Blumer 4).

The dynamic of mundane self-interested actions producing racialized outcomes and the manner in which socioeconomic gains are perceived across the color line testify to the degree that racialism permeates the sociocultural and sociopolitical life of the United States. This condition brings to mind a statement from the Universal House of Justice: "The expressions of racial prejudice have transmuted into forms that are multifaceted, less blatant and more intricate, and thus *more intractable*" (Letter dated 10 April 2011; emphasis added.). Racialism has become a fixed feature of the US social structure, its life, and its culture. Evidence suggests that even the most innocent daily activities can have racial connotations, be they shopping, eating out, watching television, going to the park, or choosing to live in a certain neighborhood. Our social ecology has been so thoroughly polluted by race that the reproduction of deep racial inequalities is seen as a natural features of contemporary society. Upholding social privileges for those regarded as White, while racial minorities bear the burden of denial, is a sociocultural phenomenon that appears to be fundamental to the contemporary American way of life.

RACIALISM: SOCIAL INTERACTION AND IDENTITY

It could be said that a natural outgrowth of the process of racialization was the erection of social barriers separating the White population from non-White populations, with Blacks being the primary example of a group from which to be socially distanced. During the post-Reconstruction period of US history, W. E. B. Du Bois, a preeminent Black sociologist and activist, introduced to the world "the veil" and "double consciousness" as interrelated sociological concepts. In his well-known *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois discusses both concepts in the following way:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (45)

In post-Reconstruction America, Du Bois believed that the ascriptive nature of the racialization process and its resulting reification[3] prevents the racializing group (Whites) from recognizing the full humanity of the racialized because the process itself is one of "othering" segments of the population and portraying them as deviations from the norm of whiteness (Itzigsohn and Brown 237). Racialized subjects, therefore, are forced to reconcile their own sense of humanity while battling the dehumanizing forces that

go hand in hand with the racialization process. It is this very process that yields "double consciousness"—the sense of twoness that stems from the inherent struggle to enjoy the fruits of US citizenship while being regarded as undeserving.

One of the more troubling aspects of the veil is the way in which it prevents mutual recognition across the color line. As an ever-present phenomenon, the obscuring quality of "the veil" prevents true communication from happening between racializing and racialized groups (Itzigsohn and Brown 237). In a later work, Du Bois thus elaborated on the nature of the veil:

It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it; speaks courteously and persuasively, showing them how these entombed souls are hindered in their natural movement, expression, and development; and how their loosening from prison would be a matter not simply of courtesy, sympathy, and help to them, but (an) aid to all the world . . . . It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. They get excited; they talk louder; they gesticulate. Some of the passing world stop in curiosity; these gesticulations

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3 The treatment of socially constructed concepts as concrete aspects of the real world.

seem so pointless; they laugh and pass on. They still either do not hear at all, or hear but dimly, and even that they hear, they do not understand. Then the people within may become hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers, hardly realizing in their bewilderment that they are screaming in a vacuum unheard and that their antics may actually seem funny to those outside looking in. (*Dusk* 66)

This eloquently descriptive allegory illustrates how difficult it is to communicate across the veil and achieve mutual recognition. It matters not how articulately or forcefully one speaks; the voice of the racialized either goes unheard or is misunderstood by the racializing collective. This dynamic creates troubling outcomes for the racialized group, but the racializing group does not go unaffected.

As a consequence of the incongruous relationship between its continual defense and assertion of its common humanity and the actual amount of progress made, the racialized group struggles to appreciate the humanity of the racializing group. Along with the exhausting efforts to reaffirm the humanity of their group comes a congealed sense of resentment and a corresponding lack of faith that those on the other side of the veil can exhibit fairness and show a degree of reason when it comes to racial matters (Du Bois, *Dusk* 67). The effects on the racializing group, instead, center on its

relative social blindness—its inability to recognize the humanity of the racialized as well as their "own position as oppressor within the system of racialization" (Itzigsohn and Brown 243). Because of their position of dominance within the system of racialization, the social vision of Whites is limited to their own world of privilege. The veil does not allow them to fully see, understand, or empathize with the community in its entirety. Even the most well-intentioned White persons are said to be ill equipped to accurately interpret the Black experience, which leads them to misdiagnose the remedy for race-based inequalities (Du Bois, *Dusk* 67).

The inability to walk in the shoes of racialized groups blinds Whites to the oppressive nature of the system of racialization and fosters a sense of social delusion. This delusion has two reinforcing components, the first being the sense that the existing social order, despite the presence of racial inequalities, is essentially just, and the second being that Whites are, therefore, ontologically superior to racialized minorities. The presence of the veil as a powerful social barrier produces two separate lifeworlds—one Black, one White. While the White world can be discerned through the limitations it imposes on the racialized world in contrast to its position of privilege, the world of Blacks and other racialized minorities is invisible to Whites because of their inability to see through the eyes of the "othered" while they themselves are enmeshed in privilege (Itzigsohn and Brown 243).

The Problem of Whiteness

I would argue, in alignment with numerous scholars, that much of the story of American-style racialism is defined by the creation, maintenance, and perpetuation of *whiteness*. Generally speaking, *whiteness* refers to a particular worldview and a concomitant dimension of behaviors and practices that reflect an internalization of white racial identity. According to Ian Haney López, white racial identity is ultimately defined by the double negative of being "not non-White." In short, López finds that there is a significant relationship between contemporary white racial identity and the judicial rulings of various US courts regarding immigration at a time when immigration was limited to those regarded as White. Finding that the courts focused more attention on the non-White plaintiffs, rather than defining what constitutes whiteness, he asserts that white racial identity is primarily animated by a sense of normative transparency, which renders the existence of non-Whites as differentiated from this standard of transparency. In essence, non-Whites become "raced," and this differentiation from the standard is regarded as ontologically inferior. Therefore, whiteness is not simply the opposite of non-whiteness; it is perceived as the *superior opposite* (López 20).

Matthew Hughey elaborates on the nature of whiteness in *White Bound*. In this book, he identifies "dimensions of hegemonic whiteness" that appear to be consistent among Whites, regardless of their political affiliations (e.g., white nationalist, anti-racist). Hughey asserts that hegemonic whiteness is composed of two comingled elements: first, the conceptual framing of whiteness as both different from and superior to forms of non-whiteness; and second, the marginalization of any alternative forms of whiteness that do not conform to the formulated ideal (16). In essence, whiteness operates as an aspirational form of identity, separating good Whites from bad Whites, while non-Whites are essentially barred because of how they are inferiorized.

Revisiting earlier concepts, whiteness as a combination of a worldview and collective social practices tied to that worldview is a logical expression of agency on the part of a socially privileged group. Due to the racialized nature of the social structure, Whites mobilize their resources in ways that are rational but that have the effect of perpetuating their social privilege—*white privilege*. In addition, the obscuring quality of the veil, conjoined with the social blindness that regularly affects any privileged group—whether on the basis of race, gender, or class—results in renders any attempts of racially subordinated groups to transform the existing social order as hostile, misguided, or premature. Consistently perceived as "social aliens," racialized minorities encounter a barrage of messages that, for all intents and purposes, communicate to them the need to accept a

lower status because, according to the rules of whiteness, they will never be accepted as social equals.

It should be made abundantly clear that individual Whites can refuse to participate in whiteness or even choose to dedicate time and energy to disrupting whiteness as a social force that ultimately seeks to defend social boundaries in the face of "intruders." By the same token, the compelling weight of the racialized social structure suggests that it takes high levels of personal resolve and social perceptiveness to navigate such a path. The objective here is not to cast aspersions on White people but to identify how the perpetuation of whiteness as a social force concretizes the social relations that act as the brick and mortar of the racialized social structure. The collective failure to disrupt a system of social relations that effectively places whiteness at the center of each social space of significance is tantamount to deliberately perpetuating the entrenchment of racialism as a dimension of social life.

The socially toxic mix of whiteness, a racialized social structure, and the related inability to recognize the common humanity of "the other" across racial lines are powerful social forces that greatly constrain our collective vision as well as our collective will to build toward a social reality imbued with the oneness of humanity. Shoghi Effendi, as part of a larger statement, exhorted in a cautionary tone that a "revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen" would be necessary to avoid bloodshed (*Citadel* 126). All signs indicate that such a transformation in consciousness is still necessary, as the mainstream discourse on race appears to be paralyzed by ideological posturing, while blood is literally being shed as a result of cross-racial conflict.

The Guiding Light of Oneness

If we can use our social imagination and perceive US society as being in a state of organic growth much like a garden and as being ultimately judged by the health of the garden in its entirety, we would be anxiously concerned with the health and growth of each plant, hopeful that each would bloom and display its latent beauty. If a friend were invited over and happened to see our garden and observe the health of the lilies while lamenting the state of the violets, what would be the appropriate reaction? Would we blame the significant differences in the state of the flowers on their individual traits, or would we take responsibility as gardeners and admit that we've neglected the violets? Better yet, what actions would we take to ensure that the violets grew just as healthily as the lilies? How would we treat the soil? How would we go about extracting the strangling weeds?

In the 240-year history of the United States, plus the more than 100-year period before the Declaration of Independence, those in positions of leadership have failed to tend the garden

of humanity existing on this soil in a way that leads to the organic growth and health of all. To the contrary, the tendency has been to direct resources to those deemed "worthy" through periodic social interventions and to deny the same benefits to those deemed unworthy by the dint of race. Whether it was the extension of land to former White indentured servants while slave codes were being enforced, the New Deal policies (1933-1939) during the Jim Crow era, or the extension of GI Bill benefits (1944-1968) at a time when redlining policies and housing discrimination were the de facto laws of the land, the process of racialization has expressed itself through a social system that has exhibited receptivity to the social plight of Whites while largely ignoring the plight of racial minorities.

Much of the racial story in the US has hinged on the issue of justice. Historically, those deifying whiteness have sought to defend the racial status quo of various eras regardless of the injuries inflicted upon humankind as a whole, while those asserting the need for equal justice envisioned a society that bonded all its citizens to the rule of law with no glint of racial preference. Speaking on the issue of justice, Bahá'u'lláh said, "The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men" (*Tablets* 66–67). In the context of this article the implication is clear: until the standard of justice is met, interracial conflict will continue to fester and erode ties between citizens and social institutions.

As of today, evidence suggests that interracial social relations are encumbered by the specter of whiteness, meaning that large-scale social institutions, whether public or private, legal or commercial, exhibit a high degree of responsiveness to Whites as a social group, despite the consequences to non-Whites. The various examples of this dynamic could fill scores of pages; therefore, it is prudent to say that for Blacks, there are many stories of unmerited police interactions, whether precipitated by the phone calls of neighbors or through police officers' insidious practice of racial profiling. Similarly, the history of Native Americans is replete with examples of White incursions into their sovereign territory in the guise of justified legal action, when in fact such annexations are more reflective of the dominant group doing as it pleases. If we envision social progress as the garden of humanity on full display and not as lilies standing out while the other flowers wither and wilt, it is imperative that justice, both legislated and enforced, be evenly applied to each citizen regardless of the accidents of birth.

HUMANITY REDEFINED

The Bahá'í teachings offer a transformative vision of the human race, paving the way for reformative justice that is inclusive of three major

themes: 1) the nature of human creation, 2) the socio-spiritual realness of the oneness of humanity, and 3) unity in diversity as a social way of being. In a collection of verses titled The Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh writes, "O Children of Men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created" (Arabic no. 68). Bahá'u'lláh not only signifies that humanity was "created from the same dust"; He also exhorts us to ponder and reflect on the *implications* of how we were created. In the current social context, this mode of active reflection and internalization of the social meaning has the potential to free us from snap judgments that employ racial stereotypes as social templates that characterize certain groups of people as "safe" or "dangerous," "trustworthy" or "criminal." Understanding that skin color, style of dress, and other outward characteristics say little about one's inner character and potential is surely a progressive step, although counterintuitive in a highly racialized environment.

If we accept that humanity is of a single origin, questions regarding the social significance of it all naturally emerge. On this subject, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

All humanity are the children of God; they belong to the same family, to the same original race. There can be no multiplicity of races, since all are the descendants of Adam. This signifies that racial assumption and distinction are nothing but superstition. In the estimate of God there are no English, French, Germans, Turkish or Persians. All these in the presence of God are equal; they are of one race and creation; God did not make these divisions. These distinctions have had their origin in man himself. Therefore, as they are against the plan and purpose of reality, they are false and imaginary. (299)

Considering the themes outlined in this article, what emerges as especially significant is the statement that racial divisions and distinctions "are against the plan and purpose of reality" (299). What does this mean with respect to our common ability as US urbanites to identify in what part of town Blacks and Latinos live? What is the implication when there are clear patterns showing that a racialized group has been overpenalized and, at the same time, underserved by the criminal justice system? If we are encompassed by a social environment that is inimical to a social reality more congruent with human nature, what is the scope of our responsibilities to ensure a more complementary environment? The dictates of colorblindness would have us simply accept the society we've inherited and chalk up numerous indications of racial inequality to "natural" human processes.

Accepting the ontological realness of the oneness of humanity and its

rootedness in the image of our creation offered by Bahá'u'lláh, it would be fair to ask how humanity should address racial diversity. Further deepening the garden metaphor I borrowed from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I share the following passage in its purer form:

Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed the oneness of the world of humanity. He has caused various nations and divergent creeds to unite. He has declared that difference of race and color is like the variegated beauty of flowers in a garden. If you enter a garden, you will see yellow, white, blue, red flowers in profusion and beauty—each radiant within itself and although different from the others, lending its own charm to them. Racial difference in the human kingdom is similar. If all the flowers in a garden were of the same color, the effect would be monotonous and wearying to the eye.

Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh hath said that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them. (68–69)

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, human diversity, specifically that of a so-called racial character, should be regarded as a virtue, a delightful element that is indicative of the inherent beauty of the whole of humanity. Additionally, He offers a vision of society in which people of distinct ethno-racial backgrounds freely associate with one another "without discord or disagreement between them" (69). But given the racialized character of existing social relations, how can this condition be realized?

It seems that a major first step would be the institutionalization of interracial justice in terms of both the "laws on the books" and their enforcement. Holding people accountable for their actions regardless of their role within the criminal justice system and the non-politicization of agencies responsible for ensuring equality under the law would be key ingredients to justice being wielded in ways that lead to a greater sense of interracial unity. It could well be argued that mass incarceration and the differential treatment of Whites and racial minorities when confronted by police emboldens those tantalized by the notion of white supremacy while exasperating those who envision a social world more in keeping with our metaphysical realities as children of the same God, equally valued and equally beloved.

OVERCOMING "THE VEIL"

The principle of the oneness of humanity—animated by universal equality with respect to human station and an unrestrained appreciation of human diversity—offers a corrective social vision for which to aspire, but

what are the implications at the level of identity and social interaction? The concept of "the veil" posits that a racialized social barrier is not only in place, but is so embedded in the field of social relations as to obscure the ability of a racial group to see the common humanity of another group. With a penetrating sense of social perceptiveness, especially for one who never set foot in the United States, Shoghi Effendi, shortly before the start of the Second World War, counseled both White and Black Bahá'ís in the following way:

> Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds.
>
> Let the Negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget

the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds. (*Advent* 40)

In these two paragraphs, the leader of the worldwide Bahá'í community implicitly acknowledges the weightiness of the racialized social structure and its potential to have a deleterious effect on the ability of a religious community to live out its socially transformative principles, especially those tied to the oneness of humanity. Speaking primarily to the US Bahá'ís, Shoghi Effendi, I believe, is exhorting both Black and White Bahá'ís not to content themselves with a surface-level sense of brotherhood. Most significantly, a religious community still slight in membership was encouraged by its leader to fight an uphill battle in defense of its core beliefs against the social forces that surrounded it.

We established earlier that the veil has a negative effect on the ability of both racially dominant and racially subordinate groups to fully see the humanity of the other. Those in the dominant group are prone to assume their inherent superiority when engaging with racialized minorities, while racialized minorities tend to assume that members of the dominant group will somehow reveal racist tendencies, however unintended, that may cause offense. In this context, wouldn't it be easier to avoid contact altogether? It may be so in the short term, but Shoghi Effendi, cognizant of the true nature of humanity and

its ultimate purpose, in clear language encourages both groups to muster the heart and soul to fully engage in an intimate manner until any walls separating them are destroyed through the power of their mutual affection.

It is rather remarkable how well Shoghi Effendi was able to read the reality of the racial situation in the United States. Clearly, he was able to determine that both Blacks and Whites have challenges to overcome in order to meet the standard of being free from racial prejudice. It seems the primary challenge for Whites is to detach themselves from feelings of superiority and the related tendency to be condescending toward racial minorities. Similarly, the primary challenge for Blacks seems to be showing a willing receptivity to Whites that is free of the tendency to presuppose someone's intentions as a consequence of the influence of an oppressive history. Both are encouraged to cleanse their eyes, hearts, and minds of their societal miseducation and to see one another anew. In this context, Shoghi Effendi goes on to say:

> Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved. Let neither think that they can wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favorable circumstances created, by

agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith. Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in common country. Let them rather believe, and be firmly convinced, that on their mutual understanding, their amity, and sustained cooperation, must depend, more than on any other force or organization operating outside the circle of their Faith, the deflection of that dangerous course so greatly feared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the materialization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to the fulfillment of that country's glorious destiny. (*Advent* 40–41)

Although speaking primarily to what was then a small religious community struggling to live up to its Founder's spiritual teachings, Shoghi Effendi clearly intended for these words to have deep implications for the United States as a whole. The racialized social barriers that exist must be overcome by the force of interracial engagement. This engagement must go beyond civility and politeness and lead to genuine, systematic, and heartfelt interactions that have the effect of slowly melting away the iciness that tends to characterize cross-racial social relations. This social imperative implies a burgeoning community of mavericks that can serve as an effective model to

help fellow citizens see what can be, instead of limiting our collective social imagination to what is.

The Quest for Authentic Identity and Social Transformation

> *O Man of two visions!*
> *Close one eye and open the other.*
> *Close one to the world and all that is therein,*
> *and open the other to the hallowed beauty*
> *of the Beloved.*
> —Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words
> (Persian no. 12)

While a forceful engagement across the color line is necessary in order to overcome "the Veil," something deeper is necessary to animate and sustain our efforts. The subjugating weight of the racialized social structure requires the means of fortifying ourselves against the dark forces of racialism and also a way to strike back and build new patterns of interaction that will accrete to a new social order imbued with the spirit of oneness, expressed in the implementation of the principle of "unity in diversity." As human beings, we are organically linked with the social environment that surrounds us. Shoghi Effendi emphasized that there is a dynamic of mutual reactions when it comes to the inner life of the individual and the social environment in which he or she is embedded: "Man is organic with the world. His inner life molds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these

mutual reactions" (qtd. in Universal House of Justice, letter dated 26 November 2012). Keeping in mind the racialized character of the US social environment, we are challenged to vie for transformational outcomes that effectively cleanse society of this scourge by resisting the influence of racial ideologies and their concurrent social practices, while harnessing their agency, or individual initiative, to effect change. The way in which we view ourselves as human beings becomes critical at this stage.

As we have established, "race" as a social construction has its beginnings in the colonial period, deployed as a means of justifying the systemic exploitation of those who were phenotypically and culturally different. This dark social experiment has always been rooted in capitalistic materialism, or the set of values and practices that regard the accumulation of wealth, goods, and power as chief priorities. Despite historical class differences existing between those regarded as White, the force of racialization created conditions that allowed Whites on the lowest economic rungs to hold themselves in higher esteem than members of other racial groups. While whiteness appears to be a significant cultural reality for those of a middle-class background or higher, for those in the low-income group whiteness has become a critical fulcrum in their lifeworld. Whenever racial minorities seem to be gaining a socioeconomic foothold, it is typically lower-income Whites that bluster the most.

In my own preliminary research, I have observed that in this day, Blacks often bear the brunt of the policing of social boundaries associated with whiteness. In seemingly race-neutral social spaces, whiteness exerts its presence in both subtle and overt ways through microaggressions and hyper-surveillance, respectively. An example of a typical microaggression is a social slight in a public place such as a restaurant, where the service received by someone of color is clearly of lesser quality when compared to the attention rendered to someone of a lighter hue. Hyper-surveillance is often witnessed in retail establishments, where racial minorities, especially Blacks and Latinos, are regularly followed or watched.

What a transformative social outcome with respect to race requires is a social imagination that rejects the racialized social structure, regarding it as a manifestation of evil, and promotes the revolutionary recovery of one's authentic self-identity. This revolutionary form of identity can then be leveraged in collaboration with others to effect social change. While it should ever be kept in mind that society requires transformation on gender, class, and other social fronts , speaking to race specifically, it is imperative that each individual take a stance of active resistance against the forces of racialization in accordance with their social position within the racialized social structure.

For American Blacks and other racial minorities, this response might take the form of active defiance in the face of racial stigmatization. Regardless of social perception, the determination to be oneself, to recognize one's equal worth, and to realize one's inherent potential as a "mine rich in gems" is paramount (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 162). Succumbing to internalized racism and becoming a shell of one's self in relation to one's potential as a human being is not only a personal failure; it is equivalent to a candle's flame being snuffed out by the winds of human negation, thereby leaving more darkness in its wake. Once an individual has established a solid footing on the path of racial defiance, it is critical that he or she initiate togetherness by joining hands and hearts with a group of collaborators, and in this way, walk a path of service that, while difficult and arduous, is nevertheless a path that will ultimately lead to a social reality in which the inherent nobility and the exquisite talents of racialized minorities will not only be recognized, but, more importantly, will also contribute vitally to the prosperity of humankind.

For American Whites, actively resisting the racialized social structure will come in the form of rejecting whiteness as a way of being. It will demand a heartfelt struggle to recognize the ways in which whiteness requires the marginalization of non-Whites and how colorblindness at its core implies the cultural erasure of racialized minorities as people with unique capacities, histories, and social needs. Most of all, overcoming the

racialized social structure requires tearing down the social walls that have been erected over time as a means to maintain a "pure community" from the incursion of "racial otherness." The fundamental recognition that human authenticity means "to be with" instead of "to be better than" or "to be in control of" becomes paramount for individuals socially positioned among the dominant group in the racialized social structure.

The Bahá'í Writings offer a metaphysical definition of human existence that allows those interested to transcend identities tethered to the existing social structure. As an elaboration on the Abrahamic verity that man is "made in the image of God," human beings are regarded as fundamentally noble spiritual beings capable of reflecting all of God's attributes. This capability to mirror the Ultimate Spiritual Reality within the inherent limitations of human nature or ontology is what is said to separate human beings from all other earthly life forms. A corollary aspect of human reality is free will, including the capacity to subdue our material nature, which is informed by the struggle for existence, for the sake of our essential reality— our soul—which the Bahá'í teachings affirm emanates from the Creator.

In this sense, human existence is defined by the journey of the individual, even as human history is defined by the collective journey of "an ever-advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 109:2). And yet, both journeys are susceptible to one of two conditions—duality or oneness. Living in a state of duality refers to a state of being in which one is cognizant of their metaphysical self but fails to fully nourish that aspect of themselves, leading to a condition of spiritual alienation. A condition of oneness, on the other hand, can be defined as living in a spiritual state in which one nourishes and sustains a spiritualized self-image, which has the effect of forging a deep connection with the spiritual reality of the Creator, oneself, and all of humanity (Saiedi 166). The metaphysical sense of connection that results from living in a state of oneness is an expansive embracing of human reality that frees one's identity from any particularity, which means that one can perceive more keenly his or her interconnection with all other human beings (166).

While living in a state of oneness is ultimately liberating to one's consciousness, it can lead to much pain when one witnesses daily occurrences associated with a dehumanizing social existence and has to navigate a social world that is struggling to manifest the latent socio-spiritual truth of the oneness of humanity. The inner transformation that results from abiding in a state of oneness necessitates entering the field of social action to engage in a path of service that has the effect of both contributing to the betterment of society and deepening one's authentic sense of identity. As individuals changed in this way collaborate to transform communities, and as these communities work to transform social

institutions, the matrix of social relations that are the bones and sinew of the racialized social structure will be transformed as well, with the ultimate result being the realization of social justice and the concurrent emergence of social relations that are emblematic of unity in diversity. It is in this context that 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments on the implications of interracial unity:

Strive earnestly and put forth your greatest endeavor toward the accomplishment of this fellowship and the cementing of this bond of brotherhood between you. Such an attainment is not possible without will and effort on the part of each . . . . Each one should endeavor to develop and assist the other toward mutual advancement . . . . Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind. For the accomplishment of unity between the colored and white will be an assurance of the world's peace. (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 39)

CONCLUSION: SEEKING LIGHT
IN THE DARKNESS OF RACE

Racialism, as a set of beliefs that conveniently sought to bridge the gap between Enlightenment ideals and the hyper-exploitation of non-Europeans, evolved to take on a structural character through formal legislation and informal practices that soon became customary. The cyclical history of American-style racialization is one defined by the erection of a hegemonic order to preserve white racial dominance, the incursion of social movements to disrupt and dismantle the structure of dominance, and an orchestrated backlash to reestablish dominance in a new form.

The large-scale social trends that gave birth to and nurtured the racialized social structure have also profoundly affected individuals and communities at the interpersonal level of society. As human beings born into and navigating this society, we encounter the social barriers that have been constructed to separate Whites and non-Whites, walls that act as a subjugating force that disempowers those who have the propensity to forge social bonds across racial lines. Relatively mundane aspects of social life— such as living in neighborhoods, shopping, dining out, and driving—take on a significant racialized character precisely as the result of how thoroughly racialism has imbued social relations.

The divergent social experiences of Whites and non-Whites and the inability to walk in the shoes of "the other" makes mutual recognition across racial lines difficult. While there are always exceptions, the general trend is for Whites to regard their social position as being the result of their hard work, ingenuity, and values, while the position of Blacks is seen as due to their deficiency in being and doing the same. Blacks, on the other hand, tend to view their social position as resulting from a history of

racialized oppression and the continuance of discrimination even in today's time, which, in turn, characterizes the social position of Whites as ill gotten. Regardless of the materialistic roots of these sentiments, the most problematic aspect of this dynamic is the failure of both groups to recognize the common humanity of the other. For Whites, this translates to a failure to see fully that Blacks are fully capable of accomplishing anything intellectually, physically, and spiritually that Whites can accomplish, while Blacks fail to see that Whites have the capacity to be loving, fair-minded, and socially just.

Shoghi Effendi, shepherding a religious community seeking to realize the oneness of humanity, counseled both Black and White Bahá'ís to battle with the dark forces of racialism in order to build a unified community imbued with an authentic sense of interracial brotherhood that would serve as a beacon of hope for their countrymen. Cognizant that both groups are organically linked with their social environments, he implored them to engage in an interracial fellowship that was spiritually authentic and would lead to the recognition of the inherent nobility of "the other." Along with this encouragement, Shoghi Effendi shared the following regarding Blacks and Native Americans, respectively:

> The qualities of heart so richly possessed by the Negro are much needed in the world today—their great capacity for faith, their loyalty and devotion to their religion when once they believe, their purity of heart, God has richly endowed them, and their contribution to the Cause is much needed. (qtd. in Hornby 533)

> The Guardian attaches the utmost importance, as you know, to the teaching of the natives of America. In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Master pays the utmost attention to this most important matter. He states that if the Power of the Holy Spirit today properly enters into the minds and hearts of the natives of the great American continents that they will become great standard bearers of the Faith, similar to the Nomads (Arabians) who became the most cultured and enlightened people under the Muhammadan civilization. (qtd. in Hornby 524)

In the context of our current society, it is important to acknowledge the subjugating effects of the racialized social structure, the social imperative of realizing and institutionalizing the principle of the oneness of humanity, and the need to transcend racial identities for a sense of identity that is more congruent with modern science and religious scripture. In texts ranging from the Book of Genesis to the tablets penned by Bahá'u'lláh as the nineteenth century came to a close, human beings have been characterized as being made in the image of God. As genomic sciences have validated

the physical unity of humanity as one species, we must bind again with the metaphysical verity that the human essence is universally noble, which means that every human being is deserving of honor, rights, privileges, and the ability to realize his or her inherent potential—regardless of the accidents of birth, whether related to skin color, gender, or nationality.

As a cadre of individuals come to recognize their human essence as reflecting the metaphysical unity of individuality, godliness, and interconnectedness with all of humanity, they will naturally seek to collaborate with the like-minded and channel their agency to effect social change. While they are surrounded and impacted by the racialized social structure, their efforts to create change are corollary to their ability to sustain their authentic sense of identity and to reinforce it in the field of social action in collaboration with others. Efforts of this kind taken on by individuals, and then by collaborative groups, will eventually compound and secure the participation of the larger community, as the hope of interracial unity and reconciliation dawns through the power of example. Surely, such efforts are already taking place. Surely, it will be a tremendous struggle to undertake a project of social transformation that aims to *de-racialize* society for the sake of securing a future for generations to come that is more congruent with the "plan and purpose of reality" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 299).

The light to be sought within social environments that have been darkened by the specter of "race" is the light of oneness. The source of this light lies in the metaphysical plane of existence, meaning it is both transcendental to our sociopolitical reality and requires some form of spiritual education to effectively tap into its transformative power. The fact that the reality of oneness transcends our sociopolitical reality makes it an especially potent and creative force for attracting human hearts and building community from a renewed foundation, free of racialized assumptions and sensibilities. As individuals abide in the reality of oneness—that inner sense that their human reality cannot be divorced from the Source of all reality, nor from the reality of all of humankind—they will be liberated from the subjugating influence of the racialized social structure to the point of actively struggling against it and thereby forge bonds with like-minded collaborators to de-racialize society for the sake of both reformative justice and experiencing a social reality that is much more humane. The road will be long, painful, intense, and arduous, but for the sake of our very humanity and the humanity of those who will come after us, "we shall overcome."

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The Mind–Body Divide

SHEILA BANANI

"What goes into making meatloaf?" you ask
Just when I'm trying to think of soul
Hoping to erase my awareness of the dividedness of being,
My sense of mortality, and how much I take on faith.
Whatever I am, my body craves a life of its own,
Free and immortal, since I cannot satisfy my sensual self.
When my mind hungers to know what happens as we die,
No answer fills me, but whenever that day comes,
Which will come I know,
Just leave my body and take my soul.

Race, Place, and Clusters: Current Vision and Possible Strategies

JUNE MANNING THOMAS

Abstract

This paper considers how division by place affects the possibilities for racial unity, especially in severely fragmented US metropolitan areas. It reviews how the Universal House of Justice has promoted use of the institute process as a way of framing action in places such as neighborhoods and villages. We also consider the challenges that place-based action poses for racial unity and suggest how the "institute process" as a strategy could possibly overcome these, especially in places—such as metropolitan Detroit—that are severely segregated by race.

Resumé

L'auteure examine comment la division selon le lieu influe sur les possibilités de réaliser l'unité raciale, en particulier dans les régions métropolitaines hyper fragmentées aux États Unis. Elle examine comment la Maison universelle de justice a promu le recours au processus de l'institut comme une façon d'encadrer des actions dans des lieux comme des voisinages et des villages. L'auteure se penche également sur les défis que l'intervention fondée sur le lieu présente pour l'unité raciale et laisse entrevoir comment la stratégie du processus de l'institut pourrait éventuel-lement permettre de surmonter ces défis, en particulier dans des lieux (comme la région métropolitaine de Détroit) à forte ségrégation géographique fondée sur la race.

Resumen

Este documento considera cómo la división de lugar afecta las posibilidades de la unidad racial, especialmente en las áreas metropolitanas gravemente fragmentadas de los Estados Unidos. Revisa cómo la Casa Universal de Justicia ha promovido el uso del proceso del instituto como una forma de enmarcar la acción en lugares como en los barrios y pueblos. También consideramos los desafíos que la acción basada en el lugar plantea para la unidad racial y sugerimos cómo el "proceso del instituto" como estrategia podría potencialmente superar estos desafíos, especialmente en lugares en donde hay mayor segregación de raza—como en el Detroit metropolitano.

Division of people of various races, ethnicities, and classes, coupled with estrangement and oppression in many forms, continue to be problematic aspects of human society. In North America, the cause of division related to race is partially the result of persistent prejudice and discrimination, but also of structural inequalities that reduce the potential of human life and threaten the stability of society. Therefore, continuing to think about racial unity in terms of individual relationships or personal prejudice, while important, is not a sufficient response to the need for cultural unity. Structural issues of inequality are essential as well, but these are complex and not easily resolved.

Since its birth in Iran in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bahá'í Faith has emerged as a religious community with significant capacity to unite people across traditional barriers of race, class, nationality, gender, and creed. The cardinal teaching of the Bahá'í Faith, in fact, is the oneness of all humanity. Bahá'í institutions have paid special attention to the issue of racial disunity in North America ever since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the American shores in 1912, when, through both word and deed, He pointedly encouraged interracial fellowship and the disavowal of traditional norms of racial segregation and discrimination. He urged people to overcome all racial barriers through means such as intermarriage, and to worship together as one; these were remarkable exhortations for a time when even casual social mixture of the races was uncommon and when racially segregated religious congregations were the norm.[1]

More than a century after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to North America and a half century after the civil rights era yielded major legislative accomplishments that lessened overt racial discrimination, substantial differences of access and opportunity still linger. This suggests that it is timely to re-examine how to overcome problems of racial disunity, prejudice, and unequal opportunity in the present day. Of the many ways we could look at this—spiritually, psychologically, legally, socially, spatially, etc.—this paper focuses on the interaction between "place" (meaning spatial geographic location) and the institute process (meaning the system of education, expansion, and consolidation currently guiding worldwide plans of the Bahá'í community). Place is important to consider because many social and economic attributes are spatially arranged: lack of access to opportunity is highly associated with place of residence, such as in high-poverty neighborhoods. The institute process is important because of its great potential to address this problem and because at present it is the major tool for the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í community, which has a solid record of positive work in building unity among diverse peoples. Indeed, the current Bahá'í planning agenda is but the latest stage in a long line of multi-year expansion plans dating back to the 1930s and, conceptually, dating back even further to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letters written from 1916 to 1917 and collected in the volume, *Tablets of the Divine Plan.*[2]

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1　Racial segregation of religious congregations has lessened, but recent surveys show that it still exists. In a 1998 survey, 72 percent of non-Hispanic whites belonged to congregations that were at least 80 percent white. When the survey was repeated in 2012, this racial isolation had dropped to 57 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Yet as of 2012, the majority of congregations in America, 86 percent, were composed mostly (at least 80 percent) of one race or another (Chaves and Eagle 21).

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2　For a discussion of the role of

Tablets of the Divine Plan and subsequent plan-related documents focused on expanding the global reach of the Bahá'í Faith. With the latest planning phase, particularly since 2001, the Bahá'í community's planning process entered a new era. The global community, building on previous experience, began to deepen its presence in (and service to) villages and neighborhoods throughout the world. Such deepened presence was possible only because of the evolution of particular tools and strategies related to expansion, consolidation, and social action.

This paper will look at how the Bahá'í vision concerning matters related to racial prejudice and unequal opportunity is proposed to operate in an era of geographic clusters, with a focus on neighborhoods and villages. Clusters are the spatial configuration framing the current expansion and consolidation work of the Bahá'í Faith, and both neighborhoods and villages are the places, or levels of action, in which much current Bahá'í expansion and consolidation takes place. To begin, we will describe the place-based strategies that the Universal House of Justice has advised Bahá'ís around the world to use as they build communities and human resources in a wide range of places, whether rural or urban. We will explore briefly as well how any place-based strategy in certain urban

areas of the United States has the potential to encounter the lingering effects of racial disunity, structural oppression, and prejudice that have existed for generations and have abated only somewhat since the legislative civil rights victories in the 1960s. We will then return to a closer examination of how the Universal House of Justice sees the current Bahá'í global plans as eventually leading to the ability of societies to overcome the effects of ills such as entrenched racial prejudice. To do this, we will draw in particular on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice from 2010 to 2016, a period of time that covers the launching of two consecutive five-year plans (2011 to 2016 and 2016 to 2021). We will end by suggesting potential strategies for addressing the issue of place-based racial disunity, building on those that have been advanced by the Universal House of Justice, which counsels at a broad level with full expectation of adaptation to specific circumstances. Specifically, we will describe how those strategies might work in challenging urban settings, such as metropolitan Detroit, which, by several creditable metrics, is one of the most racially segregated areas in the United States and is plagued with high rates of central-city poverty. Of particular importance will be our discussion of how these strategies could help overcome its social and economic divisions. For this last part of the paper, the strategies indicated will be merely a visionary exercise. What actually evolves in the future will be

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planning in the Bahá'í Faith, see 'Abdu'l-Bahá tablets, referenced in text, but also others in works cited (Smith and Lample; Thomas, *Planning Progress*).

determined by the actions of people living in this area, forces of social integration and disintegration, and the passage of time.

PLACE-BASED PLANNING STRATEGIES

The matter of place has always been important in the expansion plans of the Bahá'í Faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letters written to the North American believers, compiled in *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, mention specific states, countries, and other places in North America, South America, and the world at large to which Bahá'ís should travel in order to spread the teachings of the Faith. His instructions were couched in spiritual exhortations and practical advice, but they were very place specific. The series of plans initiated and led by His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, were also unambiguous, often naming the countries, regions, and territories to which Bahá'ís should travel in order to expand the reach and influence of the Bahá'í Faith; it was Shoghi Effendi who began the practice of naming specific multi-year timeframes for national or global plans, but he built these upon exhortations given in *Tablets of the Divine Plan.*

Many subsequent plans generated by the Faith's worldwide governing body, the Universal House of Justice, and by various National Spiritual Assemblies, have asked for Bahá'ís to travel to specific places in order either to assist local Bahá'í communities or to establish them. In a new series of global plans initiated in 1996 with the call for the creation of a worldwide "network of training institutes," however, the concept of place became important in the expansion plans of this global religion in a different way—as an organizational construct allowing communities to shape their teaching and consolidation efforts (Riḍván 1996, par. 29). The most important aspect of this effort was the continued evolution of training institutes, which are Bahá'í-sponsored "centers of learning" (Riḍván 1996, par. 28) designed to build human resources and improve communities through training for such purposes as enhancing devotional meetings and conversational skills on meaningful topics as well as facilitating the spiritual education of children and junior youth. Out of several potential curricula, the Universal House of Justice chose those developed by the Ruhi Institute in Colombia as the most effective ones available for use throughout the world.

In 2001, after a short period of experimentation in a few countries, the Universal House of Justice announced that the primary locus of planning and action—the venue for plan-related activities employing Ruhi Institute materials—would move from the national level to that of the "cluster." Clusters were defined by the Universal House of Justice as "smaller geographic areas" composed of "a cluster of villages and towns, but, sometimes, a large city and its suburbs" or other similar groupings (letter dated 9 January 2001, par. 10). Boundaries were not to be set with regard to the presence of

Bahá'í communities or jurisdictions, but rather the cluster would derive from existing secular social constructs as determined by "culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the social and economic life of the inhabitants" (par. 10).

In North America, the division of American and Canadian geographic terrain into clusters was placed largely in the hands of Regional Bahá'í Councils—subnational bodies that the Universal House of Justice had brought into existence in 1997 to advance the work of expansion and consolidation, and to decentralize certain administrative functions previously handled at the national level (letter dated 30 May 1997, par. 3, 4). These councils, in consultation with various parties, carved North America into geographic clusters. In southeast Michigan and the Midwest, these clusters were often single counties or nearby groups of counties. The 2001–2002 decision of that particular Regional Bahá'í Council to use existing counties met the criteria set forth and also enabled the use of available census information.[3]

Throughout the world, because of the aforementioned criteria, some clusters actually had no resident Bahá'ís at the time of the clustering process but became possible places for future communities of believers, as they were "virgin areas" (Universal House of Justice, letter dated 9 January 2001, par. 11).

As the Universal House of Justice and its agencies learned more about the process of increasing Bahá'í membership and consolidating new believers through the institute process and as the Ruhi Institute materials gained a strong footing, the Universal House of Justice began to place great emphasis on urging Bahá'ís to focus their efforts at the level of neighborhoods or villages within their own or nearby clusters. Messages sent between 2010 and 2016 repeatedly mention the value of working within receptive neighborhoods and villages because it was in such settings that positive results emerged in response to efforts to expand the scope of the Bahá'í Faith's influence. In 2010, Bahá'ís were advised

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3 The "Midwest" was actually labeled the "Central States" during this period of boundary setting for the Regional Council. The twelve Central States had been named over eighty years before by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a framework for action: Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. I participated in the creation of such cluster configurations in the Central States

during this 2001–02 period. Two years are listed because this and other Councils began to make decisions about cluster boundaries after receiving the Universal House of Justice's 9 January 2001 letter, and after considering input from Auxiliary Board members, but needed to make a few adjustments in the months just after receiving definitional clarification about cluster boundaries from the Department of the Secretariat, the Universal House of Justice, 12 December 2001 letter.

to continue focusing on conversations with everyday coworkers and acquaintances, meaning existing social networks, but also to look for "smaller pockets of the population" that could become the center of a variety of efforts utilizing the institute process beyond Bahá'ís' existing social networks. The Universal House of Justice defined where these pockets might be: "in an urban cluster, such a centre of activity might best be defined by the boundaries of a neighbourhood; in a cluster that is primarily rural in character, a small village would offer a suitable social space for this purpose" (Riḍván Message 2010, par. 5).

In such places, the task would be to nurture children and youth and to advance spiritually based discussions, but also to "enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives" (Universal House of Justice, Riḍván Message 2010, par. 5). Later, in the same letter, the power of increasing numbers of children enrolled in Bahá'í children's classes was referred to as "a requisite of the community building process gathering momentum in neighbourhoods and villages" (par. 14). The Universal House of Justice expanded on this theme in 2013 as well, noting that its hopes had been exceeded concerning the power of "community building by developing centers of intense activity in neighbourhoods and villages," and they assured the worldwide community that "where this approach has

advanced for some years in a neighbourhood or village and the friends have sustained their focus, remarkable results are becoming gradually but unmistakably evident" (Riḍván Message 2013, par. 6). The same theme emerged in 2015 and 2016, when the Universal House of Justice continued to refer to "neighbourhoods and villages that show promise," stating that "a pattern of action that is able to embrace large numbers comes chiefly from working to bring more neighbourhoods and villages . . . to the point where they can sustain intense activity" and counseling that because of such strategies the Faith was being shared in many different venues, including "crowded urban quarters and villages along rivers and jungle paths" (letter dated 29 December 2015, par. 17; letter dated 26 March 2016, par. 5).

All of this was in service to a specific vision pursued by the Universal House of Justice as part of its efforts to set in place an alternative to a faltering world order. What this body was beginning to see in locations where its advice about the institute process was taking hold was a salutary transformation in the lives and fortunes of the people being influenced by that process. In several of its messages, the Universal House of Justice describes this transformation:

A broader cross section of the population is being engaged in conversations, and activities are being opened up to whole groups at once—bands of friends and

neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society around them can be refashioned. The practice of gathering for collective worship, sometimes for dawn prayers, nurtures within all a much deeper connection with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Prevailing habits, customs, and modes of expression all become susceptible to change—outward manifestations of an even more profound inner transformation, affecting many souls. The ties that bind them together grow more affectionate. Qualities of mutual support, reciprocity, and service to one another begin to stand out as features of an emerging, vibrant culture among those involved in activities. (letter dated 29 December 2015, par. 24)

In some parts of the world, such activities transformed the life of entire communities, including members of diverse faiths and creeds, as whole villages began to benefit from and turn toward new ways of educating children and youth and both individuals and local institutions rectified their conduct in response to moral teachings about human virtues. The effects of the Bahá'ís' activities in the future, therefore, would not be limited to the Bahá'í community. As the Universal House of Justice promised in a letter to the believers in the United States and Canada, "the movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of

learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi . . . when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society" (letter 26 March 2016, par. 3). This was in direct reference to Shoghi Effendi's 1938 book-length letter, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, which urged North American believers to wield a "double crusade" by regenerating first their own community and then attacking the "evils" of the larger society such as corruption, moral laxity, and racial prejudice (41). The Universal House of Justice's 2016 letter thus harkened back to historical roots well-known to its Baha'i audience, as it promised that results from their contemporary efforts would extend beyond the obvious, affecting even the problem of "ingrained prejudice" in the larger community. We will discuss this subject further, but first let us consider the reality of racial division and severely uneven opportunity in some geographic places, such as in many US metropolitan areas.

PLACE, RACE, AND DIVISION

The abovementioned benefits associated with the systematic promulgation of the institute process potentially apply, as we have noted, to a wide variety of places, both rural and urban, and to a variety of peoples around the world. Such a process, however, may confront conditions in society at large that are

shaped by social, economic, and political forces beyond the control of the Bahá'ís. This is the case with contemporary metropolitan areas, such as those in the postindustrial Midwest.

Each metropolitan area has its own story that includes facets such as which indigenous populations originally lived there, which transportation systems became firmly established, how industrialization and post-industrialization affected the local economy, what determined the nature of political boundaries, which races and ethnic populations and nationalities arrived and when, and many more. We can, however, summarize some of the factors that have influenced patterns of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in many older, postindustrial US cities and then go on to describe the results in at least one specific metropolitan area, Detroit.

The social division in many metropolitan areas in the United States is so long-standing that people may mistakenly see it as the natural order of things, or they may hold to simplistic notions about the cause of such phenomena as what some have called "chocolate cities" and "white suburbs." This too is a simplistic characterization, of course, because suburbanization has become more integrated racially over the last decade and because central cities and their metropolitan areas are often composed of several major groupings of people, including Latino/Latina, Asian, Indigenous, African-American (black), white, and many other configurations.

Biologically and spiritually, all races are one, but socially and politically the concept of race has a distinct reality, and the federal government's census measures it for various geographic settings.

The reasons the main issue of concern is often one of race, and specifically one of black-white relations, are manifold. One is that for some time now, statistical measurements of US metropolitan areas have recorded much higher levels of segregation between blacks and whites than between whites and other groups of people or between other groups of people as categorized by race. One particularly popular tool among scholars who measure segregation is known as the index of dissimilarity. This metric shows that the level of spatial segregation between blacks and whites has declined over the decades between 1970 and 2010 in some metropolitan areas, such as in Boulder and Fort Collins, Colorado, but remained high in others, such as Detroit, Gary, Chicago, Newark, and New York City (Rugh and Massey 221).

In Detroit, the unusually high index of dissimilarity score of 86.7 means that in 2010, close to 86.7 percent of blacks would have had to move in order to disperse the black population throughout the metropolitan area (Rugh and Massey, Social Science Data Analysis Network). Surveys in several key cities including Detroit have shown that such segregation is not due to voluntary action on the part of blacks, who actually

prefer mixed-race neighborhoods and generally see no advantage to living close together in enclaves.[4] Whites in the same surveys, on the other hand, reported being mostly comfortable with one or a few black neighbors but became increasingly uncomfortable moving into or remaining in a neighborhood if a rising percentage of blacks lived there. However, in many circumstances, a rising percentage of blacks was almost inevitable since those whites least comfortable with racial integration continued to avoid the neighborhood or leave, thereby increasing the proportion of the black population and making other whites increasingly uncomfortable. Because of this predictable cycle, some mixed-race situations were inherently imbalanced, as blacks sought racial integration while some whites sought to avoid it, or, at least, too much of it (Charles; Farley, Danziger, and Holzer).[5] Rath-

er than a benign characterization of place, high levels of racial segregation may mean possible neighborhood instability (at least temporarily, during periods of racial change) as well as markedly different access to transportation, high-quality schools, jobs, and other social benefits, especially if the area has become mostly black and is also poor.

Among the factors that led to such residential segregation by race were federal housing policy, federal urban policy, the history of race riots, the process of suburbanization itself, and a host of other formal and informal agents. The roots of residential segregation of blacks date back to the nineteenth century and before, but it was with successive waves of black migrants from the South during the two world wars that patterns of residential segregation in northern (Midwest and Northeast) states began to be calcified.

These patterns were first held in place by custom and by the resistance of some members of the white working class, which in the industrial North sometimes perpetrated violent reigns of terror that included some of the bloodiest race riots in American

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4   This is in contrast to some communities of foreign language-speaking immigrants, who may seek to live together in ethnic enclaves in order to facilitate shared housing, job-seeking, and other forms of mutual support.

5   The article by Charles is a multi-faceted study of this "racial preference hierarchy," complete with quantitative data taken from surveys conducted in four metropolitan areas and analyzed in several tables; her study clearly establishes white preference concerning race and residence but also notes changes over time and many variations concerning different racial and ethnic groups. For those who wish a short

summary of this work, please see her discussion/ conclusion on pages 401–03. For Farley et al., refer especially to chapters 6 and 7; these provide fuller context and report on surveys conducted earlier than those by Charles, but using a similar methodology. These authors also found considerable complexity and variation over time.

history, such as the East St. Louis race riot in 1917 and the Detroit race riot of 1943. Both of those events saw white mobs indiscriminately attacking black residents because of perceived intrusion into employment venues or white residential neighborhoods.[6]

Even more effective, if much tamer, tools of residential segregation were federal policies that essentially codified racially segregated neighborhoods; these included loans supported by the federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation, established during the New Deal in 1933; the subsequent Federal Housing Administration, or FHA (1934); and the Veterans Administration, or VA (1944). These federal mortgage insurance programs initially made it easy for white working-class and middle-class families to obtain mortgages in order to buy new houses, but their provisions classified any neighborhoods with black residents as inherently inferior, and they actively discouraged whites from moving to neighborhoods into which intrusion by blacks had already taken place or could take place. Blacks were therefore barred from obtaining such loans, except in certain carefully isolated sites

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6　Later, the term "race riot" became associated with the black community, when, after years of oppression, some of its members arose in several cities (particularly in the 1960s) to protest heavy-handed or violent police tactics and segregated/overcrowded housing, turning at times to looting and setting fires as attention-getting but ineffective approaches.

located in various pockets of the metropolitan area (Thomas and Ritzdorf, pp. 282–24; Thomas, *Redevelopment*, pp. 84–86).

Long after the FHA and VA stopped actively discriminating against people and families of color, and long after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 outlawed such outright discriminatory practices in housing sales and rentals, other actors (such as financial institutions and real estate agents, as well as political leaders in some cities and suburbs) sought to skirt the spirit and letter of the law by maintaining segregated racial lines. Lax federal enforcement of civil rights laws further weakened the legislative gains of the 1960s.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development systematically documented active discrimination in housing over many years, extending well into the 2000s, and nonprofit fair housing centers were established in several metropolitan areas to document and litigate against such informal means of exclusion. However, such documentation and litigation did not actually solve the problem, for testing showed continued racial prejudice and discrimination in housing well after 2012 (Oh and Yinger, pp. 30–36). Meanwhile, because of the private real estate market and federally supported public housing, many opportunities were lost for children from low-income families to grow up in less distressed, more racially and economically integrated settings, which, studies showed, could have greatly

enhanced their life chances (Massey et al.pp. 186–96).

The federal urban renewal program, initiated in 1949 and nicknamed "negro removal," destroyed many black (as well as other racial minority and white ethnic) central-city neighborhoods and small-business commercial areas over the next two decades without fair compensation or humane relocation, sometimes leaving racially segregated neighborhoods more crowded or marginalized than they were before and severely dampening both community life and the spirit of black entrepreneurship (Thomas, *Redevelopment*, chapters 3, 5). Federal income tax and transportation policies facilitated decentralization, but that process was, for reasons described above, racially discriminatory and left marginalized people farther behind in the race for livable environments, at least until select areas in many central cities became popular again (though unaffordable for some) due to a process of gentrification. The end results were staunch barriers of exclusion and encircling strands of oppression that created a moral dilemma: an interlocking web of social, economic, and political constraints severely limited life opportunities for some, even as society at large refused to take social responsibility for this situation but rather blamed oppressed individuals for their personal circumstances (Young, 393–98).

All of the above characteristics existed in metropolitan Detroit, as elsewhere, with variations in the strength with which various trends manifested themselves. Racially selective suburbanization was a strong factor, as well as selective clearance of black neighborhoods, unwillingness of whites to live in increasingly black neighborhoods, prejudice against black residents, growing poverty in an abandoned central city, and lessening entrepreneurship, particularly among blacks. On the other hand, a process of gentrification—wherein well-to-do professionals, often white, move back into the central city—has taken place since 2012 only to a limited extent (and in a very limited area) in Detroit, and that process is still minimal compared to experiences in other major cities in the North.[7]

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7 In 2010, Dan Gilbert moved his company, Quicken Loans, to downtown Detroit, and a year later he began to buy dozens of office and retail buildings and rehabilitate them. His initial 2010 staff of 1,700 downtown workers expanded over the next seven years to over 14,000, and the number of buildings purchased may have approached 80. By 2012, the pattern of employee and building expansion was clear, and lack of housing opportunities for new professional employees had become evident. In that year, Rock Ventures, the umbrella company that includes Quicken Loans, launched a program called Opportunity Detroit that was designed to systematize the promotion and corporate-driven redevelopment of Detroit's central business district, complete with attraction of new residents.

Although definitions of metropolitan Detroit differ, the core of the region includes the three counties of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb. Among these, the most economically distressed is Wayne County, which includes the city of Detroit and just over forty other municipalities. The wealthiest is Oakland County, which includes some of the richest census tracts in the United States. For recent regional transportation and planning purposes, one could expand the parameters of the region by adding Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor) and possibly several other counties as well.

Even if we talk just about the core three-county area—Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb—we can see fairly well the problematic trends that we've described. Some of the cities in these counties in which the population dropped between 2000 and 2010 include Highland Park (down by 29.7 percent) and Detroit (down by 25 percent), both in Wayne County, and Pontiac (down by 10.3 percent) in Oakland County. At the same time, however, several suburban municipalities grew, fueled by new subdivisions and commercial growth (Thomas, "Redesigning" 195).

Not surprisingly, levels of poverty also vary greatly among these municipalities, as does the presence of blacks, foreign-born populations, and Latinos/Latinas. Detroit, Wayne County's largest city, had 35.5 percent of its families—a solid one-third—living below the poverty line in the Census Bureau's 2011–2015 estimates; Troy, Oakland County's largest city, had only 5.4 percent of its families living below the poverty line for that same span of years. The population of Macomb County was estimated to be 10.3 percent black in 2011–2015 (up slightly from 8.5 percent in 2010), but the neighboring Wayne County was 40.5 percent black and Oakland County was 13.9 percent black. Blacks comprised 83 percent of the city of Detroit's population in both the 2010 census and in 2011–2015 estimates (*American FactFinder II*).[8]

Michigan's political situation has led to an unusual degree of municipal fragmentation in the Detroit metropolitan region, creating winners and losers. In this state it is very easy to incorporate as a municipality and very difficult for one municipality to annex another (Jacobs, "Embedded" 161–63). This has allowed collections of subdivisions and subsets of counties to incorporate and protect their boundaries, leading to increasing numbers of municipalities and establishing a process of exclusion, sometimes by encircling geographic territory and then setting up land use regulations designed to favor commercial development and large lots or houses. This fragmenting phenomenon aggravates racial and socioeconomic divisions and deviates markedly from the policies in Canada, where several consolidations

8   Except when otherwise cited, all census data for this paper is available through *American FactFinder II*, an online tool provided by the Census Bureau.

have reduced the number of municipalities in any one metropolitan area. The comparison is all the more stark because Canada is located directly across the Detroit River, in plain sight of Detroit's central business district, and because metropolitan Toronto, with a less fragmented, more consolidated governance system, yet with a population size comparable to metropolitan Detroit, is a mere four hours' drive away. More efficient metropolitan governance and less fragmentation has helped bring many benefits to Toronto, including strong, diverse economic development (Jacobs, "Embedded" 147–48; Jacobs, "Impact" 353–54).

Detroit's transportation system has relied upon private automobiles and an unusually extensive interstate highway system within the city boundaries, a situation that has also affected racial and class segregation. Unlike other major American cities, Detroit has no light rail or commuter rail system of any substantial length; extensive streetcar lines were taken out in the 1950s, a three-mile loop of monorail surrounds the central business district, and a new three-mile-long light rail extends only from the central business to New Center, an office/commercial hub northward.

Confirming trends that have been in place since Henry Ford's invention of the automobile assembly line in a factory located in metropolitan Detroit's city of Highland Park, a series of proposals for some form of regional mass transit died over the years, either because of legislative opposition, the failure of ballot proposals, or, in one case, a governor's veto. Instead, two separate bus systems, one for the suburbs and one for the central city, were poorly connected so that inner-city residents, predominately black, could not get to major job centers in the suburbs and suburbanites, predominately white, had no reason to continue to live in the central city. As is the case in other cities such as Chicago, wealthy suburbanites who still had jobs in the central city (which they increasingly did not) could commute easily by car. As recently as fall 2016, voters in the core three-county region, plus Washtenaw County, failed yet again to approve funding for an integrated regional transit system.

Other problematic circumstances that are specific to metropolitan Detroit include a historically heavy reliance on the automobile industry, which made the metropolitan area particularly vulnerable when deindustrialization took jobs away; the fiscal distress of Detroit's city government—the largest US city to ever declare bankruptcy—accompanied by a major plummet in the quality of public services; and a high rate of housing vacancy, abandonment, and ultimately demolition.[9] Aggravating

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9   Detroit's economy was unusually dependent on one industry, automobile manufacturing, in the mid-twentieth century. Even then, however, firms were beginning to move to suburban locations in metropolitan Detroit, and this exodus

the housing crisis was the Great Recession, which began in 2007; this led to a rash of mortgage foreclosures and then, a few years later, increased property tax foreclosures, which hit southeastern Michigan cities such as Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park particularly hard. These predominately minority-race cities had been especially vulnerable to foreclosure because of a history of subprime mortgages and predatory lending targeted at minority-race neighborhoods; in addition, their housing prices failed to rebound nearly as much as did markets in other cities (e.g., Deng et al.). Each of these three circumstances—economic downturn, municipal fiscal distress, and decline in the housing market—has had major implications.

Deindustrialization means that the foundations of the area's working class have been severely undermined, as tens of thousands of blue-collar

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escalated as years passed because, contemporary surveys showed, manufacturers sought large, contiguous plots of land and escape from city taxes. Between 1947 and 1955, the Big Three—Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors—built twenty new plants in metropolitan Detroit, but not a single one was located in the central city (Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race*, 72–74). In the late twentieth century, automobile manufacturing moved to other regions of the country, and global competition escalated, especially from Japanese firms; such factors led to major declines in automobile employment in the city of Detroit and in metropolitan Detroit.

jobs have simply vanished, leaving in their wake men and women ill-equipped to earn a livelihood in an increasingly sophisticated world economy and neighborhoods and subareas of distressed central cities with high levels of unemployment and poverty.

The fiscal collapse and the decline in public services in Detroit and in other distressed cities have affected certain neighborhoods, rendering them undesirable to young families, who might not move there because of poor public services and troubled school systems. The foreclosure crisis has been particularly devastating because it has led to a high number of vacant structures, which have brought down surrounding property values even more and chased away families and individuals (except those with significantly fewer choices), and waves of both mortgage and tax foreclosures in Wayne County, which have further jeopardized the social viability of many neighborhoods. This combination of circumstances has had serious social repercussions and may make sole reliance on a neighborhood-based strategy, for any purpose, challenging.

SEARCHING FOR GUIDANCE

After the above discussion, it will be especially salutary to think about how actors in this stage of development of the Bahá'í Faith, a worldwide community involved in a visionary global plan, might operate in such settings. Revisiting the messages of the Universal House of Justice, we now note

that this body has made very specific suggestions that are relevant to this discussion of race and place. Likewise, it is useful in this context to review several relevant Bahá'í principles: the importance of teaching minority races and ethnic populations, the imperative of overcoming prejudice; the necessary strategies for allowing focus neighborhoods or villages to develop capacity and local leadership, and the crucial roles of both social action and discourse in accomplishing such tasks.

As the Universal House of Justice itself has noted, the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were very clear that Bahá'u'lláh's message should be brought to all the world's peoples. While 'Abdu'l-Bahá particularly mentioned the importance of teaching people indigenous to the Americas, He also strove to show how people of all races, including blacks, should become a part of the Bahá'í community. In a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, the Universal House of Justice underscores "the importance of giving due attention to historically significant populations in the United States" (par. 9). This is a clear reference to Bahá'í documents talking about the significance of teaching blacks as well as whites. The letter also calls American Bahá'ís' attention to the growing relevance of immigrants of all races:

> Today, the remarkable phenomenon of immigration that has accelerated in recent decades must also claim a major share of your attention. After all, immigrants— whether from the Latin regions of your own continent, across the Pacific from Asia or the Atlantic from Africa—constitute a sizeable proportion of the American population. Their sons and daughters now apparently number almost one in four of the children in your country. Among these families whose origins lie beyond your borders a vibrant sense of community is often more pronounced. Raising capacity within these populations to conduct classes for their children, and particularly to implement the program for the spiritual empowerment of their junior youth, will enhance the vitality of community-building endeavors in many clusters. (letter dated 9 August 2012, par. 9)

Similarly, in a letter dated 29 December 2015, the Universal House of Justice refers yet again to the importance of including all populations in community-building efforts in places around the world:

> In the course of their endeavours, the believers encounter receptivity within distinct populations who represent a particular ethnic, tribal, or other group and who may be concentrated in a small setting or present throughout the cluster and well beyond it. There is much to be learned about the dynamics involved when a population of this kind embraces the Faith and

is galvanized through its edifying influence. We stress the importance of this work for advancing the Cause of God: every people has a share in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and all must be gathered together under the banner of the oneness of humanity. (par. 25)

Prejudice enters the picture for several reasons. The Universal House of Justice recalled Shoghi Effendi's counsel concerning the importance of "freedom from prejudice" and pointed out that prejudice "still permeates the structures of society," even though negative preconceptions about race, class, ethnicity, gender, and/or religious belief cannot be defended or tolerated (letter dated 28 December 2010, par. 34). Like Shoghi Effendi, who wrote extensively about prejudice concerning blacks and whites in his book *The Advent of Divine Justice*, the Universal House of Justice noted that it was important for anyone who hoped to attract people of different backgrounds, or "distinct populations," to display absolute love and no prejudice against them; otherwise those contacts would not be attracted to the Faith. Furthermore, any division in the Bahá'í Faith would threaten to rend it asunder, and this too is not to be tolerated. Prejudicial behavior or attitudes toward race would be a sure way to build deep division (par. 34).

As noted in a letter to an individual believer, however, the nature of racial prejudice has changed in the years since the publication of *The Advent of Divine Justice*, and members of the Bahá'í Faith need to rethink their approach to racial issues. One aspect of that change is the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of America, meaning that it is no longer possible to talk about race relations just between blacks and whites. Another difference is that racial prejudice has become "less blatant," meaning that it is more ingrained and difficult to confront (Universal House of Justice, letter dated 10 April 2011, par. 5). Therefore, strategies that Bahá'ís have been using for many years to address racial concerns are no longer effective.[10] The Universal House of Justice observes that the individual believer to whose letter it is responding has said much the same thing:

> In your letter, you observe that the many activities carried out in the past by the American Bahá'í community to address racial concerns, despite their obvious merit and the results achieved to date, have been limited in their effect and have not been systematic in nature. Your review of such efforts suggests a cyclical pattern, with fits and starts, in which a certain course of action is presented with fanfare by the institutions, many believers take part

10   Those strategies are not mentioned in the letter but probably include race unity picnics, conferences, training or outreach programs, etc. See Richard Thomas's *Racial Unity: An Imperative for Social Progress*.

although others remain on the sidelines, activities reach a peak, and then, after months or perhaps years, attention wanes, and the community is drawn to other areas until some incident occurs or a new heartfelt appeal is uttered, thus beginning the cycle anew. Simply to repeat the approaches implemented in the past, then, will surely not produce a satisfactory result. (par. 2)

As an alternative to this approach and a new framework for action, the Universal House of Justice offered the institute process. It suggested that issues of prejudice of various kinds would certainly arise as Bahá'ís reach out in "the closely knit context of neighborhoods," but that at the same time, activities would adjust to the needs of that particular population and new believers would be "confirmed in a nurturing and familiar environment" (par. 4). It also pointed out that the institute process suitably raises the human resources needed to address the problem of prejudice and marginalization. This is likely true because those who study the institute materials gain grounding in the essentially spiritual nature of human existence, thus helping to overcome prejudices based on artificial barriers such as race.

As for marginalization, institute process participants are expected to create paths of service and, after perhaps receiving short-term outside support from local or visiting tutors, arise to tutor others themselves, becoming in essence indigenous teachers and community leaders. Therefore the institute process is "not a process that some carry out on behalf of others who are passive recipients—the mere extension of the congregation and invitation to paternalism—but one in which an ever-increasing number of souls recognize and take responsibility for the transformation of humanity" (Universal House of Justice, letter dated 10 April 2011, par. 4). Thus fortified, the letter goes on to note, a growing number of new and veteran believers would be more able through practice and spiritual upliftment to address effectively issues of racial prejudice in a wide variety of settings, in their neighborhoods but also in their workplaces and other social venues (par. 4). Other letters offered similar comments, noting that the destiny of people living in a particular place would have to be in their own hands, a requirement fulfilled by deep engagement in, and ownership of, the institute process (Riḍván Message 2010, par. 5; letter dated 29 December 2015, par. 5).

A particularly compelling example of the Universal House of Justice's faith in the institute process is its interaction with the Black Men's Gathering. Nicknamed the BMG, this national group was composed of black men, largely based in the United States, who had, under the leadership of Dr. William Roberts, formed a mutual support community that met at least once a year as a whole (and sometimes in smaller regional meetings), studied

guidance, and offered coordinated service projects, existing in that way for over twenty-five years. Although it's highly unusual for any group purposefully homogeneous by race or gender to exist in the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice supported the BMG in response to a distinct pattern of disengagement or estrangement that had emerged for a number of black male Bahá'ís. In 2007, the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice said that this group was inspired to help "overcome the crippling effects of a long history of oppression" and that "what the Gathering does so well is to instill in its participants the desire to strive to realize the potentialities they possess" for contributing to the effort to "accomplish the Master's scheme for world redemption" (letter dated 3 June 2007, par. 10).

The many services carried out by members of the BMG during its existence included teaching trips to the continent of Africa, where they were able to interact with numerous indigenous communities. BMG members also encouraged each other to participate in community-building activities at the local level in the United States and engaged in deep reflection about spiritual guidance when they gathered together. But in part, this was a self-healing group that provided social and emotional support for black male Bahá'ís, "creating an environment in which injuries could be tended" (Universal House of Justice, letter dated 28 August 2011, par. 2; see for history of BMG Landry, McMurray, and

Thomas).[11] This quote came from a remarkable letter dated 28 August 2011 and addressed to the participants of the Black Men's Gathering, in care of Dr. William Roberts. In it, the Universal House of Justice gave a much fuller description of several purposes for the BMG; it had served "as a bulwark against the forces of racial prejudice afflicting your nation, and, indeed, attacking the Bahá'í community itself, creating an environment in which injuries could be tended, bonds of unity strengthened, sparks of spirituality fanned into flames, and the capacity for assuming the responsibility for the work of the Cause gradually developed through the experience in the field of action" (par. 2). It then explained the importance of fuller engagement in the institute process and went on to suggest that it was time to end the BMG. It cited the fact that several clusters in Africa, using the institute process, had not only expanded the membership of their Bahá'í communities to a remarkable degree, but also transformed the fortunes and spirits of countless children and junior youth and thrown off "the burdensome yoke of social ills such as tribalism" (par. 3). The letter mentions in particular a

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11 A new edition of Landry, McMurray, and Thomas's book is in preparation. This will include information from surveys taken of BMG members and their families. According to direct information from the authors, survey results have confirmed both the service and the social support functions of BMG.

certain cluster in Kenya, Tiriki West, an area lacking in urban or rural centers, implying that it contains at most villages (Simwa 71), and yet that cluster was using the institute process to facilitate community development for thousands of people, only a tenth of whom were Bahá'ís. This was a particularly remarkable reference because during previous periods of time, American believers of African descent would have been expected to travel abroad and help "teach" Africans; now African villages were being held up as examples for African American men. The Universal House of Justice followed that letter with another dated 4 December 2011, also addressed to the BMG, praising past accomplishments but noting that "new possibilities and new spaces for thought and action have been created" and that members' attention should focus on those (par. 2). The letter encouraged the holding of a series of final regional meetings in which BMG members could reflect upon this development and rise to new challenges.

What, then, is so special about the institute process that it can be presented as solution for so many different kinds of problems and situations? Inherent in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, we should note, is the assumption that its message has the power to solve many social problems. Specifically concerning problems associated with the legacy of American slavery and oppression of blacks, for example, the Universal House of Justice pointed out that Bahá'u'lláh "has given us the

prescription for a new World Order, declaring that 'mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System'" (letter dated 3 June 2007, par. 4). We've already mentioned the very specific benefits that would come from full engagement in the institute process, including the expansion of the Bahá'í community, the elevation of the spiritual dialogue taking place in a locality, the education of children, the nurturing of junior youth, the raising up of natural leaders, and the promotion of moral conduct, but it's also important to note that all of this leads to various forms of social action. Built into the institute process is the idea that groups of people, such as junior youth, will actually develop service projects that can address any kind of community problem, ranging from health and welfare to water safety, provision of food, or neighborhood beautification.

The study circles that are at the basis of the institute process, therefore, are only the first step in what the Universal House of Justice sees as a serious process of community development starting with spiritual empowerment and moral education, extending to social action at a small scale, and ultimately expanding to include progressively complex community-building projects. Eventually, it would also be possible to see greater influence by the Bahá'í community in matters of public discourse, such as race relations—a topic to which the Universal House of Justice has given

considerable thought, as evidenced in its missives to individual believers and elsewhere—and other important areas of discussion. In this way, Bahá'u'lláh's vision, furthered by His descendants and by the institutions of His Faith, would be realized.[12] The following is one such passage, which addresses how the current Bahá'í strategy challenges prejudice and oppression:

> While it is true that, at the level of public discourse, great strides have been taken in refuting the falsehoods that give rise to prejudice in whatever form, it still permeates the structures of society and is systematically impressed on the individual consciousness. It should be apparent to all that the process set in motion by the current series of global Plans seeks, in the approaches it takes and the methods it employs, to build capacity in every human group, with no regard for class or religious background, with no concern for ethnicity or race, irrespective of gender or social status, to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization. We pray that, as it steadily unfolds, its potential to disable every instrument devised by humanity over the long period of its childhood for one group to oppress another

may be realized. (letter dated 28 December 2010, par. 34)

The Universal House of Justice focuses in large part on expanding human resources because in its opinion, the size of the Bahá'í Faith is currently too small to make a difference in the world at large. It stated this clearly in its 28 December 2010 letter when it proposed that the numbers of Bahá'ís worldwide would need to rise significantly in order for the faith of Bahá'u'lláh to have any effect on the general population. As it notes there, a small community "can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society" (par. 14). Therefore, in addition to its many other benefits, the institute process serves to help make the impact of the Baha'i Faith larger.

We should note here that in its communications, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States clearly reflects the guidance of the Universal House of Justice concerning strategies necessary to address such dilemmas as racial disunity. In a letter dated 25 February 2017, written after its representatives met with several members of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa in late fall 2016, the National Spiritual Assembly writes at some length about America's challenges of materialism, moral decay, and "a deeply ingrained racial prejudice" (par. 3).[13] It assures

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12   See, for example, letters to individuals dated 3 June 2007; 10 April 2011; 28 December 2010, par. 24–25; 29 December 2015, par. 2, 30.

13   This pivotal meeting is clearly described, at some length, in the verbal

its members that current Bahá'í institute-related activities would help undo the negative effects of America's racial prejudice and injustice through a process of working in neighborhoods to increase salutary activities involving inclusive interracial fellowship, but also through promotion of community-directed social action and associated discourse in the greater society.

Thinking About Detroit

Now we return to the question of how this overall scheme might operate for areas with major place- and race-related problems, such as metropolitan Detroit. We have outlined several difficulties concerning race for this severely fragmented region, and of course segmentation by socioeconomic status, present although not described in comparable detail, is a part of that dilemma as well.[14] At the same time,

we have reviewed a remarkable vision and tool for the implementation of strategies that, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been assured, could help resolve some deeply entrenched problems—not just prejudice, but also the need for the education of young people and other social action. How might this set of strategies potentially work in a place like metropolitan Detroit? Could distressed central cities indeed function as healthy venues for the institute process?

Although we can only speculate as to possibilities and constraints, let us undertake a somewhat visionary approach to these questions, but one grounded in the realities of this area. First, a matter of context: there are people living in even the most distressed municipalities in the metropolitan area, and many of those people are in desperate need of a better life. Although Detroit's population dropped markedly in the period after World War II, the Census Bureau estimated in 2016 that 673,000 people lived there. In 2011–2015, an estimated 80.1 percent of city residents identified themselves as African American only, and 7.7 percent identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino/Latina of any race. Yet the existing active Bahá'í community is extremely small in numbers.

The Bahá'í-generated clusters are organized by county in this metropolitan area, and so Bahá'ís live in the three

report given by Ken Bowers, the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, available in a videotape of remarks he gave during his Secretary's Report to the 109th Bahá'í National Convention held in April 2017. This video, along with an audio version, are both accessible online to US members of the Bahá'í Faith through a password-protected site.

14 In Detroit, as in America as a whole, black and brown people are a minority of the poor; however, the rate of poverty among black and brown people is disproportionately high compared to whites for the perfectly intelligible historical reasons

I have discussed in the section "Place, Race, and Division."

clusters of Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties, as well as in Washtenaw County, which is located just to the west of Wayne County. Communities with various numbers of Bahá'ís exist in each of these counties, but those who are actively involved in the institute process are largely concentrated in Oakland and Washtenaw counties, with other counties and communities having initiated activities as well. As we have noted, metropolitan Detroit mirrors the pattern of the "chocolate city" and "white suburbs," although the Bahá'í communities surrounding the city of Detroit are somewhat racially diverse. In their home localities, these Bahá'ís are carrying out the charge of attempting to build up the institute process by creating, within their own clusters and selected neighborhoods, a more outward orientation to involve more and more people who are not declared Bahá'ís in a spiritually-based community-building process.

In past decades, the Bahá'ís of metropolitan Detroit promoted racial unity through many of the devices used throughout the twentieth century by the American Bahá'í community, including race unity picnics, conferences, radio broadcasts, and other public programs. Their maintenance of interracial communities in different parts of these counties is a testament to their tenacity and belief in the vision of racial unity. Holy Day celebrations commonly bring together different communities, and people in Bahá'í communities throughout the region interact on various occasions.

But given this new era that focuses on community building as described above, strategies would have to change to maintain and build racial diversity. As this area's neighborhoods and localities are some of the most segregated in the country, purposeful action is needed in order to build communities free of racial boundaries. The neighborhood level in these places, that is, could be a segregation trap.

One simple strategy in keeping with the above guidance would be to select neighborhoods with some presence of certain minority populations and begin developing the institute process in the way it is unfolding in other places around the world. This could happen in all counties listed because each contains, even if only to a limited degree, some minority-race or immigrant populations, as census data clearly documents. Much attention could be paid, therefore, to finding such diverse elements and enfolding them into the institute process. But if this process ultimately is to help overcome the social ills associated with disadvantaged places, it would also be necessary to build up functioning neighborhood-based communities within distressed central cities, and much benefit could stem from creating strong linkages among those urban and suburban communities. This approach ties in with the suggestion contained in the Universal House of Justice's 29 December 2015 letter that stronger clusters should serve as reservoirs, or helpers, for nearby clusters that are not as advanced in the institute process (par. 21).

So let us consider the possible implications of this. Wayne County, which contains Detroit and quite a few other post-industrial cities, as well as more prosperous municipalities (but without a critical mass of Bahá'ís), may not yet have abundant Bahá'í human resources for any portion of its cluster, but might draw from human resources (such as visiting tutors) in more suburban clusters, such as Washtenaw, Oakland, or Macomb counties. The tricky part, if enhanced activities were envisioned for the city of Detroit or other possible localities, would be to consider potential receptive neighborhoods, and to help initiate engagement that is both sustainable and not imposed from the outside.

Again focusing on the city of Detroit, outside of the gentrified Greater Downtown— which includes the central business district, portions of the riverfront, and Midtown—broad swaths of formerly healthy neighborhoods are in severe distress, some with only a few houses left standing where many once stood. The series of foreclosures and other economic crises have led to considerable depopulation and quite a number of vacant homes. So it would be necessary to consult carefully with knowledgeable people in order to decide which neighborhoods might be receptive and intact enough to benefit from the community building that the institute process entails. Possible areas within city limits might include majority-black west-side locations that are largely intact physically and socially, such as Minock Park or

North Rosedale Park; largely Hispanic southwest locations, such as the Vernor-Springwells district; or east-side locations, such as the predominantly Muslim immigrant "Banglatown" neighborhood, located just north of the small enclave city of Hamtramck but within Detroit's city limits.[15]

The Universal House of Justice suggests that visiting tutors or homefront pioneers who reach out to a receptive local population, "youth in particular," can help generate initial impetus in an area's community-building process (letter dated 29 December 2015, par. 5). In a city such as Detroit, visiting tutors could help in this manner, but so too could a few pioneer individuals or families moving into specific neighborhoods and committing to community building in collaboration with local residents, particularly youth. Because a major drawback for families considering moving to Detroit is the public school system—although in some cases Detroit neighborhoods still retain access to good public or charter schools—it might be easier for people without school-age (or with home-schooled) children to make such a place-specific commitment, although the Ruhi Institute's children's classes and junior youth curriculum provide an important and salutary supplement

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15 I have led projects for classes or for research in three of these four named communities, and they have potential as outlined here, although of course the actual communities would have to be chosen through some other process.

in such a context, as well as opportuni-
ties for engagement. Deep integration
into the local culture would be neces-
sary to enable people to live safely and
to join in ongoing efforts to uphold
the neighborhood and protect it from
destructive elements. North Rosedale
Park, for example, has strong commu-
nity-based organizations that do just
that.

Who would make such inroads?
Returning to the Universal House
of Justice's explanation of the need
to increase the number of Bahá'ís, at
the present time even stable suburban
localities within the Detroit metropoli-
tan area do not have the critical mass of
Bahá'ís necessary to undertake a major
campaign of settlement or visitation
in a city neighborhood like Detroit's.
Nevertheless, the institute process
has in some places in the world start-
ed successfully with a very few people
and then blossomed. For example, in
one of the aforementioned Detroit
city neighborhoods it would be possi-
ble to recruit youth for initial training
and then expand through junior youth
activities, children's classes, and home
visits to engage whole families, slowly
enabling neighborhood-based people
to lead such activities and then to shape
their own community development in
some way, however modest. Further-
more, helpers such as visiting youth
or adult tutors could carry out service
activities for a summer or a year, on a
sequential basis, until local resources
arise to carry forth the process.

Even without such numbers and
resources, however, it would be useful

for metropolitan-area Bahá'ís to begin
to think about potential neighborhood
centers of activity, to consider how to
approach possibly receptive youth or
households, make friends, and think
seriously about the racial dynamics
inherent in such a context. The main
one is that in a city that is over 80
percent black, certain mixed-race or
predominantly black neighborhoods
would benefit from white or other
ethnic visitors or pioneers as a visible
demonstration of a lack of prejudice
and an openness to others.

Such action would also help break
the back of continuing forms of res-
idential segregation, prejudice, and
distancing. The same areas might also
benefit from black visitors or new resi-
dents as a show of cultural affinity and
affirmation and a means of promoting
trust. Equally careful consideration
would need to be made for predomi-
nately Hispanic, immigrant Muslim,
and other such neighborhoods. All
action would have to be determined
according to local circumstances in
an organic manner free of artifice or
patriarchy, without prejudice, and with
full understanding of the potential for
human advancement.

Motivation for such actions could
be recognition of the isolation and
relative deprivation experienced by
many inner-city residents and the
need to pursue racial unity in a new
way. With the public school system in
turmoil and multiple public and char-
ter school closings a fact of life, many
Detroit city children are in major
danger of growing up without a good

elementary or high school education. This has enormous implications for their future well-being, as well as that of their future families. And so, rather than trying to reform a public school system that is ridden with conflict, controversy, and failure, Bahá'í children's classes and junior youth programs may help provide educational benefits that outweigh those of public schools, as has happened in many African communities, according to the Universal House of Justice. Similarly, with few employment opportunities available for blue-collar workers or for high school students, early engagement in a Ruhi junior youth curriculum—which covers such topics as science and math, character-building, and service—and attachment to a wider community with many majority-race members favored with material means could open many doors in a process sometimes labeled "bridging social capital." This means simply that people in disadvantaged circumstances need to be able to access resources outside of their limited frames of reference or neighborhoods. Family friends in more prosperous or stable neighborhoods would be able to offer many benefits for youth who are not in secure or healthy environments.

As for the suburbs and other small localities or rural areas within these counties, it would also be important to think about how to build a base at the neighborhood level that is not racially exclusionary or homogeneous, particularly not all white. In the local history of this region, it has happened that a white family took in a black inner-city youth in order to have enough Bahá'ís to form a spiritual assembly or otherwise assist that person to advance economically.

Local Bahá'í lore tells of prosperous residents who, starting over fifty years ago, would gather youth together, of all races or specifically blacks, to meet in their homes or to travel to the grounds of the Flint area's Louhelen Bahá'í School for retreats or gatherings.[16] The same spirit of reaching across racial barriers would need to inform this new era of reservoir clusters and neighborhood-based activities because informal association between high-minority city neighborhoods and largely white suburban subdivisions does not always happen and in fact can be actively discouraged, particularly for the poor, because of lack of public transportation and consequent limited access to jobs or affordable housing. Bahá'í communities could consider ways to cross bridges into areas of the region that are normally ignored by residents of more prosperous areas. Assisting in the establishment of the institute process is part of that task, but also simple social association and interaction would also be important in order to build a foundation upon which expansion of human resources

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16 These stories are common among black Bahá'ís in the area who date back to the early 1960s. White or prosperous black families that were involved in reaching out included those of Harold Johnson, Richard and Sharonne Fogel, James and Naomi Oden, and Mary Wolters.

could thrive. Bahá'ís have made such efforts in the past, but now the institutional framework exists that would allow them to make their attempts at outreach and inclusion more focused and effective.

With such support and growth in neighborhood activities, in the future it would not be difficult to envision practical social action that helps provide basic needs for those facing material deprivation, in a way that honors self-determination and avoids paternalism. These actions would have to be modest, at least in the beginning, because social action may not be able to confront some major dilemmas such as lack of affordable public transportation in a city where perhaps one-fourth of the households do not have a car in 2010 (Grengs 103). But social action undertaken in the context of suburban support could indeed begin to improve the life chances for at least the younger members of the community.

Activities that have emerged recently in Detroit neighborhoods on their own, out of simple desperation or persistent unemployment, have included small-scale entrepreneurialism such as barbershops and beauty shops set up in living rooms; gardening that has sometimes grown to approach small-scale urban farming; a food cooperative that has evolved into a market with home delivery systems; home-based social services such as elder care or child care; a community-supported coffee shop that serves as a neighborhood venue for informal and formal gatherings; and other

related efforts. Such activities could be built upon and enhanced with a more consolidated process of social action once a neighborhood was affected by the kind of vision-building possible with deep engagement in the institute process.

The following is just one possible example of social action: Central-city Detroit has a dearth of major grocery stores selling both fresh and affordable vegetables and fruits. Because of the high number of vacant lots and low incomes, and because of the educational efforts of various citywide urban gardening proponents, some city residents have in response created small urban gardens. These can supplement diets (reducing grocery bills) as well as improve the quality of health and well-being. Opportunities for building on such action, however, are limited. Some residential blocks have gardens; others don't. Many people are afraid of gardening because of historic contaminants in the soil or because of the work involved. Others have been trained to overcome such barriers (through soil infill, raised beds, and cooperation) but have no venue in which to share such knowledge and action more widely. Some gardening residents wish to sell their products at small farmer's markets, but those venues are limited (and sometimes exclusionary to amateur gardeners). The list continues in ways both large and small. Conceivably, a neighborhood that was spiritually uplifted by the institute process—and consequently more unified, deliberative, with active

spiritual education for all ages of children and adults, affirmed by character-building and training in ways of serving humanity, connected to the outside world, and with an enhanced sense of empowerment—could choose to make of such efforts a coherent and powerful form of social action.

Furthermore, with enough neighborhoods affected in this and other comparable ways, it would be easy for Bahá'í communities to become involved in a necessary dialogue at the city, state, and national levels about realistic solutions for central cities such as Detroit and for such issues as deeply ingrained racial prejudice and marginalization. The discourse newly emboldened by human resources and activities described above could then tackle the larger public issues, such as economic development, transportation, quality of local schools, and social justice.

This strategy is actually the reverse of previous approaches. In this model, the discourse about race, poverty, and social justice would take place organically, with demonstrated action at the level of the neighborhood, not in the realm of abstraction and dialogue that seems to lead nowhere or moves in fits and starts.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The above thought experiment envisioning possible Detroit-specific strategies, , which is simply one individual's perspective about a hypothetical application of the Universal House of Justice's vision and strategies, would still be demonstrably superior to current trends, programs, and practices. Although some advances have been made in improving the physical aspects of life in Detroit's neighborhoods—e.g., streetlights have been turned back on and a small but important number of the vacant houses have been torn down—significant improvements in neighborhood stability, public safety, child welfare, and economic opportunity are still a long way off. Furthermore, typical approaches to neighborhood development, with few exceptions, are limited. For example, although community-based organizations exist, they are largely dependent on outside funding from vanishing public coffers or from foundations, which typically require them to undertake narrow agendas such as construction or rehabilitation of housing, counseling services for home owners, or job training. Nonprofits that attempt to carry out specific actions such as helping feed the poor, a laudable endeavor to be sure, do so in a way that does not empower the poor to take control of their own destinies.

High-level panels and organizations that purport to consult about improving Detroit or enhancing race relations hardly touch the lives of the households where they reside. Proponents of improving the education of children continue to fight over charter schools versus public schools and seem to offer very few solutions for the failure of both kinds of educational institutions. A grassroots movement

that builds on values-driven education of the young, moral and spiritual training for adults, service-related activities, and transformative social action would take time and patience but would in many ways be superior to the business-as-usual approach to social reform that currently exists.

The difficulty, of course, comes with implementation. What is needed are not theoretical ruminations—these are easily conceived and presented—but real-world actions that actually carry out the proposed process on the ground. Such an endeavor thus requires not only vision, but also tenacity, organization, leadership, systematization, perseverance, creativity,

and any number of additional attributes. However, the potential for applying key principles is enormous, and the need, gargantuan. The promise of bringing about human society's positive evolution must in some way be fulfilled while time remains for the utilization of underlying strengths of a community that may appear—especially to those without an optimistic vision and salutary tools for reformation—as a hopelessly dysfunctional environment. The Universal House of Justice assures us that the people in every neighborhood have the inherent talents and capacities needed to transform society.

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Book Review

Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation, by Jennifer Harvey. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014. 262 pages.

DIANNE COIN

Adherents to the Bahá'í Faith are familiar with this verse from Bahá'u'lláh's writings: "In this Day whatsoever serveth to reduce blindness and to increase vision is worthy of consideration. This vision acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge. Indeed in the estimation of men of wisdom keenness of understanding is due to keenness of vision" (*Tablets* 35).

There is "keenness of vision" in *Dear White Christians* for those of any faith, or none, who long to heal the schism between the races and achieve true justice for our dark-skinned brothers and sisters. Author Jennifer Harvey, associate professor of religion at Drake University and an ordained pastor in the American Baptist Churches, has produced a work that rigorously combines key notes from African American history with the responses from mainline Protestant and prophetic evangelical denominations to produce a detailed analysis of what has gone wrong. She answers with conviction, documentation, and insight the following question: Why, after so many decades of well-intentioned efforts, does eleven o'clock on Sunday morning remain the most segregated hour for Christian America? And further, she identifies an alternate path toward achieving Dr. Martin Luther King's vision of the beloved community.

Justice and racial identity are squarely at the center of Harvey's revealing conclusion that as long as the racial divide is addressed through the lens of reconciliation (or the "reconciliation paradigm" as she names it), both healing and true unity will continue to elude not only Christians, but all of us who care. Healing can begin only after we light-skinned people look unflinchingly at our "white" racial identity and own it. As we do so, we are compelled to recognize not only the brutal past, but also the continued systemic injustices that trap our dark-skinned siblings. And if we truly seek justice for them, Harvey explains, the path forward should be focused on repairing the damage done. This calls for a new paradigm—that of reparations.

Harvey identifies the stunning omission in most efforts to achieve racial harmony as the failure to acknowledge the effects of racism on light-skinned people. Just as racism defines what it means to be dark skinned in America, it also reciprocally defines "whiteness." In a racially divided society, whiteness, like blackness, is a racial identity. To demonstrate, Harvey poses a question to her college students: Is it OK to say that "white is beautiful"? Of course it's not. White, in racial terms, denotes the dominant class that subjugates blacks and other

racialized minorities through systems of violence and oppression. Unlike the sympathetic statement "black is beautiful," calling white "beautiful" can imply "an endorsement of white supremacy or a rallying cry for the Ku Klux Klan" (45).

According to Harvey, failure to embrace the history of white racial identity has allowed light-skinned people to ignore their complicity and violence (52). And because we have often not recognized our racial identity or attempted to deal with its implications, whiteness today describes a state of "profound moral crisis" and "conceptual chaos" (56, 45). She further explains that light-skinned Americans have consistently failed to "resist and refuse white supremacy" even though it permeates our history, our system of justice, our social institutions, and our habits (55).

We can thus conclude that, until the twin evils of preference and prejudice are purged from the fabric of our society—which justice demands—light-skinned people will continue unjustly to benefit materially from the legacy of white supremacy. Our whiteness, its privilege and supremacy, remain at the heart of racial alienation, and the moral work that has been ignored for too long must entail, at a minimum, transforming our unjust laws and institutions (62).

It's because whiteness is at the core of what's wrong between us that Harvey is able to show why, to date, the reconciliation paradigm guiding most Christian and secular efforts hasn't worked. Constructing through reconciliation a community in which justice prevails would require that each party bring their whole authentic selves to the process (45). Because light-skinned people, Christian or otherwise, can't do this without first acknowledging the white supremacist moral crisis that defines our racial identity, our attempts at reconciliation have missed the mark. Healing between the races has stalled, if not regressed. To make progress, we must find an alternative to reconciliation that is appropriate for the current state of race relations.

That the dominant class is culturally blind to white racial identity has been proclaimed by black thinkers and organizations for decades, but the message has fallen upon mostly deaf white ears. Harvey shows that we have only to harken back to the demands of the Black Manifesto, first presented to white Christians in 1969, to understand that repair and repentance are considered essential steps, and always have been (108). In that document, black leaders advocated various measures for advancing their crusade for dignity and healing. Among these was the partial repayment, in the sum of 500 million dollars (15 dollars per person), of the vast wealth that had been extracted through the unpaid labor of dark-skinned people over the centuries (108). The manifesto was a clear call for making reparations on many fronts to those who were being victimized. Harvey implies that had these modest demands been heeded with humility and determination when first

presented, we might find our collective racialized selves in a very different place today.

So here we arrive at Harvey's conclusion and her prescription. She argues convincingly that to reconcile is not meaningful in the absence of repentance and reparation and that to aim for reconciliation in their absence is, at the very least, premature (243). However, under the alternative "reparations paradigm" that she advances, the steps going forward become clear. It is for communities of color to describe and name racial injustice wherever it exists (166). It is for whites to own their shameful history while actively working to eradicate systemic white supremacy (190).

In other words, the moral logic of reparations is justice. A debt has been incurred, it remains owed, and repayment of that debt is (morally) due. The moral logic of reparations is *decidedly not* charity or compassion. A reparations paradigm acknowledges that unjust material conditions structure the relationship between perpetrators and victims. It calls for bi-party participation in a process seeking justice. It insists that healing the relationship requires restructuring the material conditions through which the parties relate to one another…. Such healing work is particularly incumbent upon the harm-creators. (144–45)

Thus, she writes: "Accepting the legitimacy of a reparations paradigm, therefore, means fundamentally recognizing that the offending party has no grounds on which to dictate or influence how the victimized party uses the redress" (145). Only a reparations paradigm brings the possibility of transformation for whites, and thus healing for them as well (235).

Harvey's analysis is based on adherence to divine law. It appeals to our allegiance to God and our love of our fellow man and not to practical, material, or social self-interest, nor to shaming or guilt. It appeals to our love of truth and justice. Similar to the Baháʼí concept of community building is Harvey's assertion that underlying any attempt at fashioning a society founded on spiritual principles must be a focus on the reformation of the individual:

Yet to the extent that reconciliation models see racial relationships as constituted primarily by a universal shared humanity, the embrace of which is needed to overcome division, they fail. The reconciliation paradigm holds out a beautiful vision but it too easily ignores the actual reality of racial relationships (154).

Like reconciliation, all parties have a stake in a reparations process. This is work that belongs to all of us. But rather than learning how to embrace our oneness, we need to describe with unrelenting clarity—and with all particularity and specificity—the moral realities that constitute our relations. The focus required is on the harm done (and continuing to be done) to the victim and unequivocally ceasing that harm and violence (154–55).

Realizing that Harvey rightly highlights the cause of the racial divide as one of criminal proportions, her impatience with a seeming feel-good placebo is understandable. Reconciliation, no matter how sincere or earnest on the part of whites, seems to call for their victims to adopt a state of amnesia or denial with regard to past and continuing violations and to then move on to forgiveness. In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is quoted on this issue:

Just as forgiveness is one of the attributes of God's mercy, so is justice one of the attributes of His lordship. The canopy of existence rests upon the pole of justice and not of forgiveness. Thus, if a decree of amnesty were to be enacted henceforth in all countries, the whole world would soon be thrown into disarray and the foundation of human life would be shattered. Likewise, if the powers of Europe had not resisted the notorious Attila, he would not have left a single soul alive. (77:8)

He further writes: "In sum, the proper functioning of the body politic depends upon justice and not forgiveness" (77:9).

In light of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assessment, should not white Bahá'ís also consider that various forms of reparation—both material and spiritual—are needed if we are all to truly experience one another as brothers and sisters?

But perhaps that love cannot be an expectation or precondition in order for our repair work to begin. Nor can forgiveness. Both love and forgiveness must be freely given and freely accepted. It would seem that genuine respect, compassion, and moral outrage—rather than guilt or a sense of duty—must be present in some measure in order for whites to carry out an enduring and effective program of reparations.

In her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander writes, "It is this failure to care, really care across color lines, that lies at the core of this system of control and every racial caste system that has existed in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world" (234). In the foreword to *The New Jim Crow*, Cornel West expands on Alexander's assertion: "Martin Luther King Jr. called for us to be lovestruck with each other, not colorblind toward each other. To be lovestruck is to care, to have deep compassion, and to be concerned for each and every individual, including the poor and vulnerable" (x). Finally, speaking at Howard University to a mixed race audience, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered the following thoughts:

I pray that you attain to such a degree of good character and behavior that the names of black and white shall vanish…. I hope that you attain to such a high degree—and this is impossible except through love. You must try to create love between yourselves;

and this love does not come about unless you are grateful to the whites, and the whites are loving toward you, and endeavor to promote your advancement and enhance your honor. This will be the cause of love. Differences between black and white will be completely obliterated; indeed, ethnic and national differences will all disappear. (*Promulgation* 46)

As a Bahá'í living in metropolitan Detroit, I've consciously looked for ways to make a difference—ways that are not petty, demeaning to others, intrusive, or presumptuous. I'm most grateful for the outstanding investigative work found in Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* and for that of Michelle Alexander, mentioned above. These and so many other gifted authors are vividly documenting the history and present-day consequences of the systematic cruelty and oppression perpetrated against dark-skinned people. They help me empathize with my black Bahá'í brothers and sisters who, against all odds, seem to find the way to love. These books help me feel their torment and admire their strength, courage, and deep faith. For me this is the vision that "acteth as the agent and guide for true knowledge" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 35).

Likewise, I'm so grateful for this work by Jennifer Harvey. With integrity and insight, she opens our eyes to what has failed, and why, and offers us a better way forward—a way that comports with the lofty Bahá'í ideals, as evidenced in this statement from the Bahá'í International Community, addressed to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in 2001:

In considering the themes of the World Conference against Racism, a proper understanding of the reality of the oneness of humanity holds a number of implications.

It implies that any law, tradition or mental construct that grants superior rights or privileges to one grouping of humanity over another is not only morally wrong but fundamentally at odds with the best interests of even those who consider themselves to be in some way superior. It implies that nation-states, as the building blocks of a global civilization, must hold to common standards of rights and take active steps to purge from their laws, traditions and practices any form of discrimination based on race, nationality or ethnic origin.

It implies that justice must be the ruling principle of social organization, a corollary principle that calls for widespread measures on the part of governments, their agencies, and civil society to address economic injustice at all levels. The Bahá'í writings call for both voluntary giving and government measures, such as

the "equalization and apportion-
ment" of excess wealth, so that
the great disparities between the
rich and the poor are eliminated.
The Bahá'í writings also pre-
scribe specific measures, such as
profit-sharing and the equation
of work with worship, that pro-
mote general economic prosperity
across all classes. . .

Bahá'ís believe that their own
success at building a unified
community stems solely from its
inspiration by the spiritual teach-
ings of Bahá'u'lláh, who wrote
extensively about the importance
of unity, the reality of oneness,
and the imperative need for creat-
ing a peaceful world civilization.

So, in the larger context, while
seeking an antidote for racism and all
the other forms of prejudice, discrim-
ination, and dominance, we have at
some point to question the legitimacy
of social structures that are primari-
ly sustained through the power-over
dynamic. In his discussion of this dy-
namic as it applies to the equality of
women with men, Bahá'í scholar Moo-
jan Momen explains how power is a
subversive value:

If there are two groups, A and
B, the first of which holds pow-
er as its supreme value and the
second of which does not, then
Group B loses whatever it does.
If it sticks to its values and re-
fuses to compete for power with
Group A, it is subjugated and A's

values are imposed upon it. If B
does compete with A, then this
can only be through striving for
power. In this case, B also adopts
power as a value and, therefore,
loses its own values. Either way,
A succeeds in asserting its values
upon B. (38)

To eliminate racism, and for so
many other reasons, we have to find
ways to break out of the power-over
cycle. Enter the transformative pow-
er of the Word of God, which can
change the hearts of men. We can
witness the efficacy of those values
that unite us, which are embodied in
the Bahá'í Faith—converting compe-
tition into collaboration, corruption
into integrity, elitism into service, and
resentment into love—so that those in
power (Group A) are actually able to
adopt concern for the welfare of oth-
ers as their supreme value. And those
in Group B can, eventually, trust and
forgive. Of this Bahá'u'lláh assures us:

The corrosion of ungodliness
is eating into the vitals of human
society; what else but the Elix-
ir of His potent Revelation can
cleanse and revive it? Is it within
human power, O Hakím, to effect
in the constituent elements of
any of the minute and indivisible
particles of matter so complete a
transformation as to transmute it
into purest gold? Perplexing and
difficult as this may appear, the
still greater task of converting
satanic strength into heavenly

power is one that We have been
empowered to accomplish. The
Force capable of such a transfor-
mation transcendeth the potency
of the Elixir itself. The Word of
God, alone, can claim the distinc-
tion of being endowed with the
capacity required for so great and
far-reaching a change. (*Gleanings*
99:1)

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Flight

TAMI HAALAND

The monarch flew parallel when you
rode your bike to the cove. Remember
you thought she would flit and disappear, but
she kept up—you pedaling at butterfly speed
and she, catching currents beside you.
A car came and you said look out and
she veered upward, not because of your
warning but because she knew what to do.
And you were still together, beside
each other until she disappeared,
as you knew she would, into the forest
or the dunes, you couldn't tell, and you
continued, holding to this story.

Biographical Notes

SHEILA BANANI, author of "Life's Rainbow"—which first appeared in the best-selling anthology *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple* (1987)—shares in this issue a more recent piece from her book of poems, *Taking Chances: Windward in a Time of Butterflies* (2016) which can be found at http://www.blurb.com/b/7401700-taking-chances. She is a widely published author. Her career has spanned Bahá'í pioneering (opening the country of Greece at the beginning of the Ten Year Plan), working in urban planning, and teaching sociology at Santa Monica Community College. She makes her home in Southern California.

ROGER BANSEMER's career as an artist ranges from earlier abstract works to the present-day representational paintings of landscapes, shorebirds, wildlife, beachscapes, and nautical themes. He has eight published books featuring his paintings with forewords by author James A. Michener, artist James Rosenquist, and film maker James Cameron. His PBS show "Painting and Travel with Roger and Sarah Bansemer" is now in its sixth season on 176 stations. Demonstrating plein air painting, Roger has traveled to memorable sites throughout the U.S. Roger has also been the guest on two expeditions to the Titanic wreck site where he made paintings while in a three-person submersible hovering over the bow.

DIANNE COIN holds master's degrees in philosophy (Michigan State University) and public administration (Columbia Pacific University). Her career in public service spanned twenty-six years with the county of Ventura, California, and included experience with quality control systems, program analysis and management, and advocacy. She retired from the Human Services Agency holding the position of Director, Information Technology Systems. Her abiding interests include social justice, race relations, and the Bahá'í Faith.

TAMI HAALAND is the author of two books of poetry: *When We Wake in the Night*, and *Breath in Every Room*. Her third volume, *What Does Not Return*, will be published in spring 2018. Her poems have appeared in many periodicals and anthologies and have been featured on *The Writer's Almanac*, *Verse Daily*, and *American Life in Poetry*. She served as Montana's fifth poet laureate and teaches at Montana State University Billings, where she currently chairs the Department of English, Philosophy and Modern Languages. She has been teaching poetry at the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education for over ten years.

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JAMAR M. WHEELER is currently a PhD student in sociology whose research interests span race, urban development, and public policy. He received his Master's in sociology in 2006 and spent seven years serving at the Bahá'í National Center in Evanston, Illinois, before beginning his second stint in graduate school. His passions include research, social betterment, and writing.