

## **The Power of Unity : Beyond Prejudice and Racism**

Selections from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, Abdu'l-Bahá,  
Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice

Compiled by Bonnie J. Taylor  
Compiled by National Race Unity Committee  
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So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.

—BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

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## FOREWORD

From its earliest years the American Bahá'í community has been singled out for a special mission as the “cradle” and the “stronghold” of the new world order of Bahá'u'lláh. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá foretold its destiny when He observed that “the continent of America is, in the eyes of the one true God, the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled. ...” Shoghi Effendi carefully nurtured the American Bahá'ís toward this goal, pointing out in *The Advent of Divine Justice* that it was by virtue of certain “patent evils” engendered in America by an “excessive and binding materialism” that they had been singled out for such a great honor:

It is by such means as this that Bahá'u'lláh can best demonstrate to a heedless generation His almighty power to raise up from the very midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards, men and women who, as time goes by, will increasingly exemplify those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight that will fit them for the preponderating share they will have in calling into being that World Order and that World Civilization of which their country, no less than the entire human race, stands in desperate need. (pp. 19-20)

*The Power of Unity* has been created to assist the American Bahá'ís in their efforts to emancipate themselves from prejudice and racism and to achieve the dynamic unity in diversity that it is the purpose of our Faith to engender. The new compilation is a response to a 1980 decision of the National Spiritual Assembly asking the Bahá'í Publishing Trust to consider bringing out a new edition of *Race*

*and Man* (published in 1943 and long out of print) and to solicit the help of the Universal House of Justice in finding additional quotations from the Bahá'í writings on the question of race. After it was ascertained that *Race and Man* was not suitable for reprinting, the National Race Unity Committee assumed the responsibility for preparing an entirely new work. It turned to an existing compilation prepared by Mrs. Bonnie J. Taylor for a Most Challenging Issue Seminar sponsored by the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Wilmette, Illinois, in 1982. The Wilmette compilation became the starting point for our efforts to create—with Bonnie Taylor's invaluable assistance, with many new extracts and translations provided by the Universal House of Justice, and with the help of the Bahá'í Publishing Trust—a more comprehensive compilation that would address not only the serious matter of racial prejudice but also the broader issue of unity itself.

No new materials on the subject of race unity have been published in the United States Bahá'í community since the national focus on race relations in the 1960s. In the meantime the American Bahá'í community has become a truly multiethnic community, with fully one-third of its membership black and rural, and a significant percentage from the Native American, Hispanic, Iranian, and Southeast Asian populations. Inevitably, such a growing and evolving community faces new challenges. The National Race Unity Committee has found that the most creative and successful efforts to integrate racial and cultural diversity have come from Bahá'ís who are the most deepened in their understanding of the process of unity and the most aware that achieving unity is above all a spiritual rather than a cultural issue.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that growth (or evolution) is always the product of the interaction of matter and spirit. Matter alone is lifeless, inert. Only when it is energized by spirit, or energy, does it move into new patterns, or change and grow. 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests that there are certain patterns that serve as magnets for a higher measure of spirit. Thus a pattern appropriate to a certain stage of growth must become part of a more complex pattern at a subsequent stage of growth. For example, children must crawl before they walk, and they must walk before they run. Growth in the arena of race and culture is likewise a process. There are certain patterns of belief, patterns of intention, and patterns of action that are magnets for spirit and hence for growth. When we initially begin the process of unifying mankind, the patterns are rudimentary: We believe in the oneness of mankind according to our own limitations; we wish to be free of prejudice; we take the tentative steps toward trying to make contact with and be respectful to those different from ourselves. These are worthy patterns, and they attract confirmations of the spirit. Were we to halt the

process of unity there, however, we would retard our growth. As the process continues, we become confirmed in our belief, excited by the new spirit of unity in diversity, and bold in our actions in support of such unity. Ultimately, we seek as individuals to follow the pattern of the Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Whose indiscriminating fellowship and capacity for heart-and-soul communication were not only exemplary but dynamic, possessing great spiritual power.

As we become transformed as individuals, we are gradually becoming transformed also as a collective entity. Our American Bahá’í community may soon possess a majority of members who are from minority populations in the United States. Inevitably, our culture as a Bahá’í community must also change. Such a change will manifest itself initially through an increasing appreciation for the cultural offerings—music, food, festivities, manners of speech and dress—of blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Persians, Southeast Asians, and others in the Bahá’í community. But ultimately we must become multicultural so that our community life acquires a character that is flexible, versatile, creative, and blessed with a wide repertoire of cultural responses to daily Bahá’í life. These patterns of our collective life also deserve our attention because they serve to become magnets for the spiritual energy that quickens our community life. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá guides us: “It is impossible to unite unless united.”

One other pattern deserves mention. Though the process of achieving racial harmony involves all the races in the human family, it is to the unity of black and white that American Bahá’ís are asked to give special attention. The legacy of distrust between these two races casts a shadow that only the light of unity can dispel. Consequently, the power of unity between black and white serves to draw all the other racial and cultural minorities into its embrace. We cannot afford to ignore the special blessings that come from fostering the unity of black and white. The National Race Unity Committee is eager for the friends to meditate on the question of unity, to develop a longing to see it manifest in all its beauty in their lives and in their communities, and to use this new compilation to assist them in determining courses of action that will exhilarate their hearts and attract a powerful spirit of growth. As to the blessings of setting out in quest of unity, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us:

In every century a particular and central theme is, in accordance with the requirements of that century, confirmed by God. In this illumined age that which is confirmed is the oneness of the world of humanity. Every soul who serveth this oneness will undoubtedly be assisted and confirmed.

## 1 FUNDAMENTALS OF UNITY

### One Human Species

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#### The Divine Criterion for the Measurement of Humanity

17. In the Kingdom of God no distinction is made as to the color of the skin, whether it be black or white; nay, rather the heart and soul are considered. If the spirit is pure, the face is illumined, although it be black. If the heart is stained, the face is dull and despondent, although it may be of the utmost beauty. The color of the pupils of the eye is black, yet they are the fountains of light.

Although white is conspicuous, yet seven colors are hidden and concealed therein. Therefore whiteness and blackness have no importance; nay, rather true judgment is based upon the soul and heart.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

### Humanity's Common Bonds

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#### Prerequisites to Unity

*Love—The Source of Unity*

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*Religion—The Perfect Means for Engendering Unity*

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## 2 PREJUDICE

### Bases of Prejudice

11. Man must independently investigate the reality; for the disagreements and dissensions which afflict and affect humanity, primarily proceed from imitations of

ancestral beliefs and adherences to hereditary forms of worship. These imitations are accidental and without sanction in the holy books. They are the outcomes of human interpretations and teachings which have arisen, gradually obscuring the real light of divine meaning and causing men to differ and dissent. The reality proclaimed in the heavenly books and divine teachings is ever conducive to love, unity and fellowship.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada 39

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20. Both sides [whites and blacks] have prejudices to overcome; one, the prejudice which is built up in the minds of a people who have conquered and imposed their will, and the other the reactionary prejudice of those who have been conquered and sorely put upon.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter date 5/27/57 to Bahá'í Inter-racial Teaching Committee, in *To Move the World* 294

### Defining Racial Prejudice

26. To bring the white and the black together is considered impossible and unfeasible, but the breaths of the Holy Spirit will bring about this union.

. . . the enmity and hatred which exist between the white and the black races is very dangerous and there is no doubt that it will end in bloodshed unless the influence of the Word of God, the breaths of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are diffused amongst them and harmony is established between the two races.

They must destroy the foundation of enmity and rancor and lay the basis of love and affinity. The power of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh will remove this danger from America.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

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36. Your interracial work, and the response it has awakened in some of the friends in your community, have particularly rejoiced his heart, and confirmed his hopes for the future role which the believers will be called upon to play in the establishment of racial unity and peace in America. The obstacles blocking their activities in this field are by no means easy to overcome, specially in these days when racialism is making such a headway in the West. But we Bahá'ís are sure of the eventual outcome of the forces which are now so seriously counteracting our efforts for the spread and establishment of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on world unity and peace.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 6/2/34 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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37. The oneness of mankind is the fundamental basis upon which the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is built. Therefore the Bahá'ís must carry into their lives and into their activities the ideals which Bahá'u'lláh has taught of the unity of the human race.

At such a time as this the believers must take a very firm and strong stand on the racial issue so that there may be no misunderstanding on anyone's part as to just how the Bahá'ís view this all-important subject.

This does not mean that the Bahá'ís should enter into specific controversies which may rage; but it does mean that we should take our stand in behalf of the unity of the human family and the oneness of mankind; and there is no reason why we should not let the people know. This of course requires great consideration and consultation amongst the believers and particularly the local Assemblies in the areas involved.

The Guardian is praying that this serious problem may find solution in the hearts of the people because its ultimate solution rests with the individual who has become imbued with the ideal of unity and in that field there is no place for segregation.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 10/27/57 to Lydia Martin, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 324 (Feb. 1958) 4

### The Consequences of Prejudice and Disunity

47. The most important teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is to leave behind racial, religious, national and patriotic prejudices. Until these prejudices are entirely removed mankind will not find rest. Nay, rather, discord and bloodshed will increase day by day, and the foundation of the prosperity of the world of man will be destroyed.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 2/4/9S on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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51. He hopes that especially in the Amity work you will be guided to do the very best, for that is the outstanding social problem of that country. If that issue remains and drags and the existing distrust among the colored and white be left to wax stronger, as the Master said, the streets will actually run with blood. From our point of view, this problem can only be tackled from a spiritual angle, for only by a spiritual awakening can this misunderstanding and prejudice vanish. We are often apt to follow the modern attitude of mind and consider economic issues the common denominator of all our problems. With their spiritual approach, the Bahá'ís could

achieve more than any other movement.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/7/30 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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### 3 DIVERSITY

#### The Variegated Beauty of the Human Family

4. Indeed, the world of humanity is like one kindred and one family. Because of the climatic differences of the zones, through the passing of ages colors have become different. In the torrid zone, on account of the intensity of the effect of the sun throughout the ages the black race appeared. In the frigid zone, on account of the severity of the cold and the ineffectiveness of the heat of the sun throughout the ages the white race appeared. In the temperate zone, the yellow, brown and red races came into existence. But in reality mankind is one race. Because it is of one race unquestionably there must be unity and harmony and no separation or discord.

Gracious God! The animal, notwithstanding that it is a captive of nature and nature completely dominateth it, attacheth no importance to color. For instance, thou dost behold that the black, white, yellow, blue and other colored pigeons are in utmost harmony with one another. They never give importance to color. Likewise sheep and the beasts, despite differences in color, are in utmost love and unity. It is strange that man hath made color a means of strife. Between the white and the black there is the utmost estrangement and discord. When we enter a rose garden we behold how beautiful is the display of variegated flowers. The difference of color is the adornment of the rose garden. Were it of one color it would not have such splendor.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly translated tablet attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

#### Unity in Diversity

14. When a person becomes a Bahá'í, he gives up the past only in the sense that he is a part of this new and living Faith of God, and must seek to pattern himself, in act and thought, along the lines laid down by Bahá'u'lláh. The fact that he is by origin a Jew or a Christian, a black man or a white man, is not important any more, but, as you say, lends color and charm to the Bahá'í community in that it demonstrates unity in diversity.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 3/12/49 to George B. Galinkin, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 251 (Jan. 1952) 2

## Interracial Marriage

17. Thou must endeavor that they intermarry. There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God. Likewise marriage between these two races will wholly destroy and eradicate the root of enmity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly translated tablet attached to letter dated 9/30/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

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18. O ye two who have believed in Him!

... I pray God that ye may at all times be in the utmost love and harmony, and be a cause for the spirituality of the human world. This union will unquestionably promote love and affection between the black and the white, and will affect and encourage others. These two races will unite and merge together, and there will appear and take root a new generation sound in health and beautiful in countenance.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly translated tablet attached to letter dated 4/15/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

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19. In marriage the more distant the blood-relationship the better, for such distance in family ties between husband and wife provides the basis for the well-being of humanity and is conducive to fellowship among mankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly translated tablet attached to letter dated 4/15/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

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20. Your statement to the effect that the principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá'í from regarding race itself as a bar to union is in complete accord with the Teachings of the Faith on this point. For both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of interracial marriage, nor discouraged it. The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race, and as such can and should never be identified with any particular school of racial philosophy.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 1/27/35 to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 90 (Mar. 1935) 1

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21. The Bahá'ís should welcome the Negroes to their homes, make every effort to teach

them, associate with them, even marry them if they want to. We must remember that Abdu'l-Bahá Himself united in Bahá'í marriage a colored and a white believer. He could not do more.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/27/57 to Bahá'í Inter-racial Teaching Committee, in *To Move the World* 294

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## 4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BELIEVERS

### Avoiding Strife and Estrangement

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#### Creating Love and Unity

21. It is God's purpose that in the West union and harmony may day by day increase among the friends of God and the handmaids of the Merciful. Not until this is realized can any advance be achieved. And the greatest means for the union and harmony of all is the gathering of the friends in spiritual meetings. This matter is very important and is a magnet which will attract divine confirmations.

'Abdu'l-Bahá newly authorized translation attached to a letter dated 9/30/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

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25. I hope that thou mayest become a herald of the Kingdom and a means whereby the white and colored people shall close their eyes to racial differences and behold the reality of humanity, which is the universal unity. In other words, it is the oneness and wholeness of the human race, and the manifestation of the bounty of the Almighty. Look not upon thy frailty and thy limited capacity; look thou upon the Bounties and Providence of the Lord of the Kingdom, for His Confirmation is great, and His Power unparalleled and incomparable. Rely as much as thou canst upon 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.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, tablet to Louis G. Gregory (received 11/09), in newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 9/30/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

28. Thou hast written that there were several joyful and happy meetings—some for the white and some for the black. However, both races, praise be to God, are under the protection of the All-Knowing God; therefore, the lamps of unity must be lighted in these meetings in such a manner that no distinction may be perceived between the white and the black. Colors are non-essential characteristics, but the realities of men are essential. When there is unity of the essence, what power hath the ephemeral? When the light of reality is shining, what power hath the darkness of the unreal? If it be possible, gather together these two races—black and white—into one Assembly, and create such a love in the hearts that they shall not only unite, but blend into one reality. Know thou of a certainty that as a result differences and disputes between black and white will be totally abolished. By the Will of God, may it be so! This is a most great service to humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 4/15/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

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30. Endeavor that the black and the white may gather in one meeting place, and with the utmost love, fraternally associate with each other, so that quarrels and strife may vanish from among the white and the black.... There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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31. Verily the faces of these [the members of the black race] are as the pupil of the eye; although the pupil is created black, yet it is the source of light. I hope God will make these black ones the glory of the white ones and as the wellspring of the light of love of God. And I ask God to assist them under all circumstances, that they may be encompassed with the favors of their Loving Lord throughout centuries and ages.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 9/30/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois

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33. Turn to your Bahá'í brothers and sisters, who are living with you in the Kingdom. Indeed, the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to duly draw these mighty forces of love and strength and

harmony generated by the Faith.

Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/8/42 to Roan Orloff, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 217 (Mar. 1949) 4

### Promoting Justice

44. If man were to care for himself only he would be nothing but an animal for only the animals are thus egoistic. If you bring a thousand sheep to a well to kill nine hundred and ninety-nine the one remaining sheep would go on grazing, not thinking of the others and worrying not at all about the lost, never bothering that its own kind had passed away, or had perished or been killed. To look after one's self only is therefore an animal propensity. It is the animal propensity to live solitary and alone. It is the animal proclivity to look after one's own comfort. But man was created to be a man—to be fair, to be just, to be merciful, to be kind to all his species, never to be willing that he himself be well off while others are in misery and distress—this is an attribute of the animal and not of man. Nay, rather, man should be willing to accept hardships for himself in order that others may enjoy wealth; he should enjoy trouble for himself that others may enjoy happiness and well-being. This is the attribute of man. This is becoming of man. Otherwise man is not man—he is less than the animal.

The man who thinks only of himself and is thoughtless of others is undoubtedly inferior to the animal because the animal is not possessed of the reasoning faculty. The animal is excused; but in man there is reason, the faculty of justice, the faculty of mercifulness. Possessing all these faculties he must not leave them unused. He who is so hard-hearted as to think only of his own comfort, such an one will not be called man.

Man is he who forgets his own interests for the sake of others. His own comfort he forfeits for the well-being of all. Nay, rather, his own life must he be willing to forfeit for the life of mankind. Such a man is the honor of the world of humanity. Such a man is the glory of the world of mankind. Such a man is the one who wins eternal bliss. Such a man is near to the threshold of God. Such a man is the very manifestation of eternal happiness. Otherwise, men are like animals, exhibiting the same proclivities and propensities as the world of animals. What distinction is there? What prerogatives, what perfection? None whatever! Animals are better even—thinking only of themselves and negligent of the needs of others.

Consider how the greatest men in the world—whether among prophets or philosophers—all have forfeited their own comfort, have sacrificed their own pleasure for the well-being of humanity. They have sacrificed their own lives for the body politic. They have sacrificed their own wealth for that of the general welfare. They

have forfeited their own honor for the honor of mankind. Therefore it becomes evident that this is the highest attainment for the world of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada* 35-36

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48. We ask God to endow human souls with justice so that they may be fair, and may strive to provide for the comfort of all, that each member of humanity may pass his life in the utmost comfort and welfare. Then this material world will become the very paradise of the Kingdom, this elemental earth will be in a heavenly state and all the servants of God will live in the utmost joy, happiness and gladness. We must all strive and concentrate all our thoughts in order that such happiness may accrue to the world of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada* 36

### Abolishing Racial Prejudice within the Bahá'í Community

52. Redouble your efforts in connection with the promotion of interracial amity and understanding. Urge the believers to show more affection, confidence, fellowship and loving kindness to the colored believers. No trace of mistrust, no sense of superiority, no mark of discord and aloofness should characterize the relations of the white and colored believers. They should openly, bravely and sincerely follow the example of our Beloved and banish prejudice from their hearts. May He reinforce and bless your efforts in such an important field of work.

Shoghi Effendi, letter to Zíá Baghdádi, in *Bahá'í News Letter*, no. 18 (June 1927) 5

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54. White American Bahá'ís, he feels, although they have very much less prejudice than the American people, are nevertheless tainted to some extent with this national evil, perhaps wholly unconsciously so. Therefore, it behooves every believer of white extraction to carefully study his own attitude, and to see whether he is condescending in his relations with his fellow-Bahá'ís of Negro extraction....

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/27/57 to Inter-racial Teaching Committee, in *To Move the World* 293

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55. Nothing will so deeply affect the hearts of people who have been hurt and offended by the attitude of white supremacy as to consort with them as full equals—as indeed they are....

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 2/2/56 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

56. The Negroes, though they themselves may not realize it, have a contribution to make to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. His teachings and the Society He has come to establish are for every race and every nation, and each one of them has his own part to play and the gift of his own qualities and talents to give to the whole.

The Cause of God has room for all. It would, indeed, not be the Cause of God if it did not take in and welcome everyone—poor and rich, educated and ignorant, the unknown, and the prominent—God surely wants them all, as He created them all.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/10/42 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States

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57. He was also very pleased to hear about the new Negro element in the Cause, and he hopes that the Bahá'í Assemblies and Committees will utilize this new talent to the full. Perhaps great suffering for America could be averted if the Cause were not only more widely and quickly spread but the solidarity of races within its ranks more conspicuously demonstrated. He deeply appreciates your services in this important field of Bahá'í activity—racial unity.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 3/13/44 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States

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58. The teaching campaign, now in full swing in the United States and Canada, should, under no circumstances affect the progress, or detract from the importance & urgency of the racial amity work that challenges & confronts the believers in that continent.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11/11/36 to Louis G. Gregory, in *To Move the World* 244

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### Affirming the Administrative Privileges of Minority Groups

60. The two races should ultimately be brought together, and be urged to associate with the utmost unity and fellowship, and be given full and equal opportunity to participate in the conduct of the teachings as well as administrative activities of the Faith. Nothing short of such an ultimate fusion of the two races can ensure the faithful application of that cornerstone principle of the Cause regarding the oneness of mankind.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 3/22/37 to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 108 (June 1937) 1-2

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61. On principle no discrimination whatsoever should be made between the white and the colored believers in any administrative function or duty. The Cause stands above any racial consideration, for the core of its message is the principle of the oneness of mankind. The colored believers are entitled to the very same privileges and opportunities of service which their fellow-believers of the white race enjoy.

This principle is quite clear, and should be always emphasized without any compromise of any kind. Its application, however, to individual cases is the responsibility of the assemblies.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 10/14/37 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

### The Necessity for Courage and Wisdom

64. Regarding the solution of the racial problem; the believers should of course realize that the principle of the oneness of mankind which is the cornerstone of the message of Bahá'u'lláh is wholly incompatible with all forms of racial prejudice. Loyalty to this foundation principle of the Faith is the paramount duty of every believer and should be therefore wholehearted and unqualified. For a Bahá'í, racial prejudice, in all its forms, is simply a negation of faith, an attitude wholly incompatible with the very spirit and actual teachings of the Cause.

But while the friends should faithfully and courageously uphold this Bahá'í principle of the essential unity of all human races, yet in the methods they adopt for its application and further realization on the social plane they should act with tact, wisdom and moderation. These two attitudes are by no means exclusive. Bahá'ís do not believe that the spread of the Cause and its principles and teachings can be effected by means of radical and violent methods. While they are loyal to all those teachings, yet they believe in the necessity of resorting to peaceful and friendly means for the realization of their aims.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter sent to Wilfrid Barton during 1936, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 105 (Feb. 1937) 1

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65. It is ... evident that the principle of the oneness of Mankind—which is the main pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—precludes the possibility of considering race as a bar to any intercourse, be it social or otherwise. The Faith, indeed, by its very nature and purpose, transcends all racial limitations and differences, and proclaims the basic and essential unity of the entire human race. Racial prejudice, of whatever nature and character, is therefore severely condemned, and as such should be wiped out by the friends in all their relations, whether private

or social. Its abolition, however, should be done gradually and with extreme caution and wisdom. To act too precipitately and abruptly in such matters can lead to serious misunderstandings regarding the aims and purposes of the Cause, and the methods adopted by the friends for their promotion and establishment.

The believers, therefore, while firmly adhering to the teachings of the Faith regarding the underlying unity of all human races, should at the same time be careful not to proceed too quickly and unwisely in carrying them out, and even in expounding them to the non-Bahá'ís.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 2/16/35 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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66. Regarding the whole manner of teaching the Faith in the South: the Guardian feels that, although the greatest consideration should be shown the feelings of white people in the South whom we are teaching, under no circumstances should we discriminate in their favor, consider them more valuable to the Cause than their Negro fellow-southerners, or single them out to be taught the Message first. To pursue such a policy, however necessary and even desirable it may superficially seem, would be to compromise the true spirit of our Faith, which permits us to make no such distinctions in offering its tenets to the world. The Negro and white races should be offered, simultaneously, on a basis of equality, the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. Rich or poor, known or unknown, should be permitted to hear of this Holy Faith in this, humanity's greatest hour of need.

This does not mean that we should go against the laws of the state, pursue a radical course which will stir up trouble, and cause misunderstanding. On the contrary, the Guardian feels that, where no other course is open, the two races should be taught separately until they are fully conscious of the implications of being a Bahá'í, and then be confirmed and admitted to voting membership. Once, however, this has happened, they cannot shun each other's company, and feel the Cause to be like other Faiths in the South, with separate white and black compartments...

'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself set the perfect example to the American believers in this matter—as in every other. He was tactful, but the essence of courage, and showed no favoritism to the white people as opposed to their dark-skinned compatriots. No matter how sincere and devoted the white believers in the South may be, there is no reason why they should be the ones to decide when and how the Negro Southerner shall hear of the Cause of God; both must be taught by whoever rises to spread the Message in those parts.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 7/5/42 to Mabel Ives, excerpted in Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1942-1943 11, and in *To Move the World* 291

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67. As regards the interracial meetings held in your home; the Guardian wishes you by all means to maintain them, and to invite those white believers who are willing to assist you in this great work to participate in these gatherings. But, as always, you should take great care not to openly wound the feelings of the noncolored population. The racial problem, whether in America or elsewhere should, indeed, be tackled with the utmost tact and moderation, but also with conscious, firm and absolute loyalty to the spirit as well as to the actual word of the Bahá'í teaching of the Oneness of Mankind.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 1/26/37 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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68. The race problem which is beyond doubt one of the most burning issues of the day cannot be solved at once and by means of violent and precipitate action. The friends must act gradually, and with patience without being, however, in the least disloyal to the basic Bahá'í principle of the oneness of the human race and of humanity as a whole. Great care should be taken not to displease, much less to challenge, the authorities. Too precipitate an action might offend them, and make them suspicious of the motives of the friends.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/16/36 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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69. Concerning the racial problem; the Guardian's considered view is still the same as the one already presented to the believers by him in his letters to the friends, namely that the solution to this problem has to be applied with the utmost caution, tact and wisdom and not through precipitate and violent action. The authorities, in particular, should not be offended and given the impression that the Bahá'í Cause stands for radical and revolutionary action in such matters. The friends should always follow the principle of moderation, and proceed through peaceful means and reject every form of violent action.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/18/36 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

70. In connection with the developments reported in the “*Washington Post*”—copies of which you were kind enough to send the *Guardian*—concerning the concert which was given by the famous colored singer Miss Anderson; these events, which clearly show how deep-rooted and intense is racial prejudice in America, should awaken the friends to a deeper realization of the unique responsibility that is theirs, as the founders of the New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, to combat courageously and relentlessly the false racial doctrines, and inveterate racial hatreds that so sadly poison the hearts and minds of their fellow-countrymen, and of such increasingly growing number of the peoples and nations of the world. More than ever today it is their vital duty to proclaim, boldly and unequivocally, the essential and underlying unity of all human races, and to demonstrate how the unifying Spirit released in this age through Bahá’u’lláh has succeeded in making this ideal a living and working reality.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/14/39 to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States

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71. The believers must realize that the forces of prejudice are, along with so many other evil practices, growing at present stronger in the darkness surrounding humanity. The Bahá’ís must exercise not only tact and judgment, but courage and confidence in the aid of Bahá’u’lláh which He will vouchsafe to those who attempt to live up to His teachings, in their whole approach to this racial question. Too much hesitance, too great timidity in the face of public opinion, can be just as bad as too much disregard of the actual situation and the problems it involves.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/23/41 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States

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## 5 THE VITAL NECESSITY FOR DEEDS

### Translating the Teachings into Actions

6. Dark days seem still ahead of the world, and outside of this Divine Refuge the people will not, we firmly believe, find inner conviction, peace and security. So they have a right to at least hear of the Cause...

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 4/24/49 to Orpha Daugherty, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 226 (Dec. 1949) 1

## The Consequences of Inaction and Misdeeds

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## 6 TEACHING ALL HUMANITY

### Teaching—Bringing Love, Unity, and Peace

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#### Unity—An Essential Foundation for Teaching

12. I have emphatically appealed through a recent letter to the American believers to banish from their hearts and minds every trace of racial prejudice—as an essential prerequisite of an effectual campaign conducted by them on behalf of racial amity. There is much to be accomplished by them as fellow-believers before they face the outside world and claim the attention of their fellowmen, as the exponents of these sublime Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

I trust they will realize their responsibilities and resolve to wage eternal battle with their natural instincts if they desire to ensure the efficacy of their concerted efforts in this field.

Shoghi Effendi, postscript to letter dated 5/9/27 and written on his behalf to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

### Bridging Cultural Barriers

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#### Teaching Minority Groups

33. Although not many pioneers can go out at once to Africa, all Bahá'ís can help ... by working more actively at home to break down racial barriers, and to foster loving association with minority groups. The Bahá'ís should go out amongst such groups and include them in their activities as much as possible.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11/11/51 to believers at the Louhelen School, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

34. The real means of eliminating race prejudice, is to spread and establish the Faith; for in it, there is no prejudice whatsoever, as the Faith itself holds as its cardinal principle, the Oneness of Humanity.

The Guardian will pray that you will be confirmed in your efforts to teach more Negroes. They have been subject so long to the prejudices of the majority peoples, that he hopes they will find their goal in the Cause of God. . . . The Friends should concentrate on pure hearted people, and continue association and fellowship with them, until they themselves become active workers in the Cause of God.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/20/55 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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35. He urges the friends to concentrate on teaching the Negroes. They should be courageous in their racial stand, particularly as so many non-Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'í organizations are showing marked courage at this time, when the decisions of the Supreme Court are being so hotly contested in the South. The friends must remember that the cardinal principle of their Faith is the Oneness of Mankind. This places an obligation on them far surpassing the obligation which Christian charity and brotherly love places upon the Christians. They should demonstrate this spirit of oneness constantly and courageously....

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi letter dated 9/21/57 to American Bahá'ís. insert in *Bahá'í News*, no. 321 (Nov. 1957)

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37. As to the racial aspects of your work Shoghi Effendi believes that no chances should be lost, for the Master stressed constantly the importance of reconciling the Negro and white people of North America. This field of service not only attracts the attention of innumerable persons to the Cause, but also furthers one of the ideals of the Faith, namely the abolition of racial prejudice.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/18/30 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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38. The Message of this Day is directed to the whole of mankind, not to any particular section of it. The colored as well as the noncolored are both welcomed into the Bahá'í Community, and once they enter its ranks they are recognized as one and the same.

Rather they should cease to look at the racial differences separating them, and should associate with each other in perfect peace, unity and fellowship.

The Bahá'ís should by all means endeavor to attract to the Faith as many members of the colored race as they possibly can, and thus demonstrate in deeds the universality of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. It is only through this intermingling of races within the framework of His World Order that a lasting and just solution can be found to the perplexing racial issues confronting mankind.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 11/19/37 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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39. It is only natural that people should be able to pour out more freely their enthusiasm in the field of services that lies nearest to their heart, and if your departure would in no way affect the Assembly status ... he sees no reason why you should not go and teach among the Negroes, as this is a very important field of Bahá'í activity, especially so in these days when the racial question seems to be coming to a head in the United States. The more Negroes who become Bahá'ís, the greater the leaven will be within their own race, working for harmony and friendship between these two bodies of American citizens: the white and the colored.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/18/43 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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41. The Guardian feels he should urge your Assembly that ... you should always bear in mind that only through strict and loyal adherence to the Bahá'í principle of racial unity and fellowship can you hope to lay down a firm and enduring basis for the acceptance and entry of the colored races into the Community. No racial discrimination whatsoever in teaching, he feels, should be allowed. If the teaching work is to make a sound and steady progress in those Southern regions.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 1/28/39 to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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42. He feels adequate action has not yet been taken in America to properly fulfill the injunctions of the Master in this very vital matter. The Guardian feels that special effort must be made to teach the Negroes and especially in the South, and this should be done without regard to whatever teaching work may or may not be done of the

white people....

If there should be some criticism from the white people the Guardian feels this will not be harmful because they have not responded to the Call in the South and therefore any objection they may raise could have no substantial basis. On the other hand if they learn the Bahá'ís are concentrating on bringing the Message of Unity to the Negroes that may arouse some interest and perhaps stir some special interest on their part.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 6/4/57 to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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43. The attitude toward teaching the Faith in the southern states of the United States should be entirely changed. For years, in the hope of attracting the white people, in order to “go easy” with them and not offend their sensibilities, a compromise has been made in the teaching work throughout the South. The results have been practically nil. The white people have not responded, worth mentioning, to the Faith, and the colored people have been hurt and also have not responded.

He feels it is time that the Bahá'ís stopped worrying entirely about the white element in a community, and that they should concentrate on showing the Negro element that this is a Faith which produces full equality and which loves and wants minorities....

Also . . . the Faith must be representative of the population. In a great many places in the South, the majority of the population is still Negro. This should be reflected in the Bahá'í Community, fearlessly. Both the white Bahá'ís and the colored Bahá'ís must steadily work to attain this objective of bringing the Faith to the colored people, and of confirming many of them in it.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 5/27/57 to Bahá'í Inter-racial Teaching Committee, in *To Move the World* 294

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44. He is well aware that the conditions within the ranks of the believers in respect to race prejudice is [sic] far from being as it should be. However he feels very strongly that it presents a challenge to both white and colored believers.

As we neither feel nor acknowledge any distinction between the duties and privileges of a Bahá'í, whoever he may be, it is incumbent upon the Negro believers to rise above this great test which the attitude of some of their white brethren may present. They must prove their innate equality not by words but by deeds. They must

accept the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh for the sake of the Cause, love it, and cling to it, and teach it, and fight for it as their own Cause, forgetful of the shortcomings of others. Any other attitude is unworthy of their faith.

Proud and happy in the praises which even Bahá'u'lláh Himself has bestowed upon them, they must feel He revealed Himself for them and every other downtrodden race, loves them, and will help them to attain their destiny.

The whole race question in America is a national one and of great importance. But the Negro friends must not waste their precious opportunity to serve the Faith, in these momentous days, by dwelling on the admitted shortcomings of the white friends. They must arise and serve and teach. Confident of the future they are building, a future in which we know these barriers will have once and for all been overcome!

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 2/9/42 to Sadie Oglesby, in *To Move the World* 296

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50. He feels that as the main object of the Bahá'í interracial work is to abolish prejudice against any and every race and minority group, it is obviously proper for them to include in particular any group that is receiving especially bad treatment—such as the Japanese-Americans are being subjected to. There is also no reason why work should not be done among and in cooperation with the Mexicans, the Chinese and so on.

He has always been very anxious to have the Indians taught and enlisted under the banner of the Faith, in view of the Master's remarkable statements about the possibilities of their future and that they represent the aboriginal American population.

The Negroes, likewise, are, one might say, a key problem and epitomize the feelings of color prejudice so rife in the United States. That is why he has so constantly emphasized the importance of the Bahá'ís actively and continuously demonstrating that in the Faith this cruel and horrible taint of discrimination against, and contempt for, them does not exist but on the contrary is supplanted by a feeling of esteem for their great gifts and a complete lack of prejudice in every field of life.

The work of the Race Unity Committee should include, as far as is possible, contacts with all minority groups, and wherever there is a particularly stout prejudice against a special group—such as the feelings against the Japanese in the Western States and the Negroes in the Southern (states), etc., efforts should be made to counteract it by showing publicly the Bahá'í example of loving tolerance and

brotherly association.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 12/30/45 to Race Unity Committee, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 188 (Oct. 1946) 3-4

### Associating with Humanitarian Organizations

59. It is surely very necessary that the friends should keep in touch with the modern social movements, but their main objective should be to draw more people to the spirit and teachings of the Cause. They should learn from the experience of others and not permit themselves to go (off) at a tangent, and finally be so absorbed in other movements as to forget the Cause of God.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter to Mrs. Harding (received 12/25/31), in *Bahá'í News*, no. 64 (July 1932) 4

61. Our principal duty is undoubtedly to teach the Cause and help in the administration of its affairs. But that is not the only one. The Cause will not attain its aim and order in the great reign of peace unless its principles are put into practice. We have to assist the different movements which have progressive ideas and are striving for an aim similar to ours.

Shoghi Effendi, letter to Regional Committee for Canada, in *Bahá'í News*, no.10 (Feb. 1926) 7

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## 7 BAHÁ'ÍS AND SOCIETY

### Society's Effects upon the Bahá'í Community

6. The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and prejudice of every sort are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must continually be on our guard, whether as individuals or as an Assembly or Community, lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst. In other words, we must beware lest the darkness of society become reflected in our acts and attitudes, perhaps all unconsciously. Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a New World Order, must constantly animate our Bahá'í lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 2/5/47 to Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Atlanta, Georgia, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 210 (Aug. 1948) 2

7. These, indeed, are the days when heroism is needed on the part of the believers. Self-sacrifice, courage, indomitable hope and confidence are the characteristics they should show forth, because these very attributes cannot but fix the attention of the public and lead them to enquire what, in a world so hopelessly chaotic and bewildered, leads these people to be so assured, so confident, so full of devotion? Increasingly, as time goes by, the characteristics of the Bahá'ís will be that which captures the attention of their fellow-citizens. They must show their aloofness from the hatreds and recriminations which are tearing at the heart of humanity, and demonstrate by deed and word their profound belief in the future peaceful unification of the entire human race.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 10/26/41 to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

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8. The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in this maelstrom, the Bahá'í world community, pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflicts its fellowmen throughout the planet. It must also bear particular tribulations.

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated Naw-Rúz 1979 to Bahá'ís of the World, in *Quickeners of Mankind* 61

### The Process of Transformation—From the Individual to Society

17. Bahá'ís . . . know the goal they are working towards and know what they must do, step by step, to attain it. Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils—which are in essence negative—will fade away and be no more. To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely created World Order, and then, as that Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole of human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.

The Universal House of Justice, qtd. in letter dated 7/7/76 and written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to individual believer

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18. Do not for a moment hesitate or slacken in your efforts for such a glorious cause—and encourage the friends to exemplify the harmony and good will that should characterize the relations of races to one another, before attempting to summon the multitude to its urgent call. Let them search their own hearts, purge their own minds before attempting the regeneration of mankind. I will pray that your words may influence and inspire the souls and that the Almighty may guide every step you take.

Shoghi Effendi, postscript to letter dated 9/11/27 and written on his behalf to individual believer, attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States

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## 8 PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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