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*THE  
VISION  
OF  
RACE UNITY  
AMERICA'S  
MOST  
CHALLENGING  
ISSUE*

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A STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL  
SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES,

# The Vision Of Race Unity

## America's Most Challenging Issue

### A Statement by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Racism is the *most* challenging issue confronting America. A nation whose ancestry includes every people on earth, whose motto is *E pluribus unum*, whose ideals of freedom under law have inspired millions throughout the world, cannot continue to harbor prejudice against any racial or ethnic group without betraying itself.

Racism is

- an *affront* to human dignity,
- a *cause* of hatred and division,
- a *disease* that devastates society.

Notwithstanding the efforts already expended for its elimination, racism continues to work its evil upon this nation. Progress toward tolerance, mutual respect, and unity has been painfully slow and marked with repeated setbacks.

- The *recent resurgence* of divisive racial attitudes,
- the *increased number* of racial incidents, and
- the *deepening despair* of minorities and the poor

make the need for solutions ever more pressing and urgent. To ignore the problem is to expose the country to physical, moral and spiritual danger.

Aware of the magnitude and the urgency of the issue, we, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, speaking for the entire U.S. Bahá'í community, appeal to all people of goodwill to arise without further delay to resolve the fundamental social problem of this country. We do so

- because of *our feeling of shared responsibility*,
- because of *the global experience of the Bahá'í community* in effecting racial harmony within itself, and
- because of *the vision that the sacred scriptures of our Faith* convey of the destiny of America.

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# I

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*The oneness of humanity is the pivot round which revolve all the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. It is at once a statement of principle and an assertion of the ultimate goal of human experience on the planet.*

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More than a century ago Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote:

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*"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."*

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It is a principle that issues naturally from the genesis and purpose of human existence. The Word of God as presented in the Bahá'í writings offers compelling insights as in the following examples:

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*Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.*

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*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. Since We have created you all from the same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.*

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*All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are*

58                    *forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the*  
59                    *peoples and kindreds of the earth.*

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60    Having gone through the stages of infancy and turbulent adolescence, humanity is now  
61    approaching maturity, a stage that will witness "*the reconstruction and demilitarization*  
62    *of the whole civilized world--a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its*  
63    *life.*" In no other country is the promise of organic unity more immediately demonstrable  
64    than in the United States because this country is a microcosm of the diverse populations  
65    of the earth. *Yet this promise remains largely unrealized even here because of the*  
66    *endemic racism that, like a cancer, is corroding the vitals of the nation.*

67    For too much of its history and in so many places the human race has squandered its  
68    energy and resources in futile efforts to prove the unprovable: that one portion of itself,  
69    because of separation by

- 70            • *geography,*
- 71            • a difference in *skin color,* or
- 72            • the *diversity of cultural expression,*

73    is intrinsically distinct from another portion. The ignorance and prejudice on which such  
74    efforts are founded have led to endless conflicts in the name of the sanctity of tribe, race,  
75    class, nation, religion. Paradoxical as it may seem, in the consistency of these negative  
76    efforts across the spectrum of the race, humanity has proved the exact opposite: it has  
77    affirmed its oneness. *The proof is in the fact that, given the same circumstances, all*  
78    *people, regardless of ethnic or cultural variety, behave essentially the same way.* In the  
79    futility of its efforts to classify and separate its diverse elements, humanity has become  
80    disoriented and confused. Unaided by the divine influence of religion, people are  
81    incapable of achieving a proper orientation to their innermost reality and purpose and are  
82    thus unable to achieve a coherent vision of their destiny. It is in this respect that the  
83    Bahá'ís find relevancy, direction, and fulfillment in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the  
84    Founder of their Faith.

85    *The oneness of humanity is a spiritual truth abundantly confirmed by science.*  
86    *Recognition of this truth compels the abandonment of all prejudices of race, color, creed,*  
87    *nation, and class--of "everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to*  
88    *others."*

89    The principle of the oneness of humankind "is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism  
90    or an expression of vague and pious hope.... It does not constitute merely the enunciation  
91    of an ideal.... It implies and organic change in the structure of present-day society, a  
92    change such as the world has not yet experienced."

## II

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94 The application of the spiritual principle of the oneness of humanity to the life of the  
95 nation would necessitate and make possible vast changes in the economic status of the  
96 non-white segments of the population. Although poverty afflicts members of all races, its  
97 victims tend to be largely people of color. *Prejudice and discrimination have created a*  
98 *disparity in standards of living, providing some with excessive economic advantage*  
99 *while denying others the bare necessities for leading healthy and dignified lives.*

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- 101 • Poor *housing*,
  - 102 • deficient *diet*,
  - 103 • inadequate *health care*,
  - insufficient *education*

104 are consequences of poverty that afflict African Americans, American Indians, and  
105 Hispanic Americans more than they afflict the rest of the population. The cost to society  
106 at large is heavy.

107 Evidence of the negative effect of racial and ethnic conflict on the economy has prompted  
108 a number of businesses and corporations to institute educational programs that teach  
109 conflict resolution and are designed to eliminate racial and ethnic tensions from the  
110 workplace. These are important steps and should be encouraged. If, however, they are  
111 intended primarily to save the economy, no enduring solution will be found to the  
112 disastrous consequences of racism. *For it cannot suffice to offer academic education and*  
113 *jobs to people while at the same time shutting them out because of racial prejudice from*  
114 *normal social intercourse based on brotherly love and mutual respect.*

115 The fundamental solution--the one that will

- 116
- 117 • *reduce* violence,
  - 118 • *regenerate and focus* the intellectual and moral energy of minorities, and
  - *make them partners* in the construction of a progressive society

119 --rests ultimately on the common recognition of the oneness of humankind.

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120 *It is entirely human to fail if that which is most important to people's*  
121 *self-perception is denied them--namely, the dignity they derive from a*  
122 *genuine regard by others for their stature as human beings.*

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123 *No educational, economic, or political plan can take the place of this essential human*  
124 *need*; it is not a need that businesses and schools, or even governments, can provide in  
125 isolation from the supportive attitude of society as a whole. Such an attitude needs to be  
126 grounded in a spiritual and moral truth that all acknowledge and accept as their own and  
127 that, like the oxygen that serves all equally, breathes life into their common effort to live  
128 in unity and peace.

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129 *Absence of the genuine regard for others fostered by such truth*  
130 *causes hopelessness in those discriminated against; and in a state of*  
131 *hopelessness, people lose the coherent moral powers to realize their*  
132 *potential. This vitalizing truth, we are convinced, is summarized in the*  
133 *phrase: the oneness of humankind.*

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134 So essential is the principle of the oneness of humanity to the efficacy of educational  
135 programs that it cannot be overemphasized. Without its broad influence such programs  
136 will not contribute significantly to the development of society. The very fact that  
137 businesses are themselves implementing educational programs is indicative of the glaring  
138 deficiency of the entire educational system. *As we have already said, beyond the*  
139 *mechanisms of education lies the essential prerequisite of a proper attitude on the part of*  
140 *those dispensing curricula and, even more important, on the part of society as a whole.*  
141 On this basis, education is not only the shortest route out of poverty; it is the shortest  
142 route out of prejudice as well. A national program of education, emphasizing the values  
143 of tolerance, brotherhood, appreciation for cultures other than one's own, and respect for  
144 differences would be a most important step toward the elimination of racism and, as a  
145 consequence, the bolstering of the economy.

### 146 III

147 The persistent neglect by the governing bodies and the masses of the American people of  
148 the ravages of racism jeopardizes both the internal order and the national security of the  
149 country.

150 From the day it was born the United States embraced a set of contradictory values. *The*  
151 *founding fathers proclaimed their devotion to the highest principles of equality and*  
152 *justice yet enshrined slavery in the Constitution.* Slavery poisoned the mind and heart of  
153 the nation and would not be abolished without a bloody civil war that nearly destroyed  
154 the young republic. The evil consequences of slavery are still visible in this land. They

155 continue to affect the behavior of both Black and White Americans and prevent the  
156 healing of old wounds.

157 Healing the wounds and building a society in which people of diverse backgrounds live  
158 as members of one family are the most pressing issues confronting America today. Her  
159 peace, her prosperity, and even her standing in the international community depend to a  
160 great extent on the resolution of this issue.

161 *That the virulence of the race issue in America attracts the attention of the entire world*  
162 *should spur this country to an unprecedented effort to eliminate every vestige of*  
163 *prejudice and discrimination from her midst.* America's example could not fail to have a  
164 profound influence on world society, nor could it fail to assist the establishment of  
165 universal peace.

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166 *"For the accomplishment of unity between the colored and white," the*  
167 *Bahá'í writings proclaim, "will be a cause of the world's peace."*

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168 The responsibility for the achievement of racial peace and unity in the United States rests  
169 upon both Black and White Americans. To build a society in which the rights of all its  
170 members are respected and guaranteed,

- 171 • *both races must be animated with the spirit of optimism and faith in the eventual*  
172 *realization of their highest aspirations.* Neither White nor Black Americans should  
173 assume that the responsibility for the elimination of prejudice and of its effects  
174 belongs exclusively to the other.
- 175 • *Both must recognize that unity is essential for their common survival.*
- 176 • *Both must recognize that there is only one human species.*
- 177 • *Both must recognize that a harmoniously functioning society that permits the full*  
178 *expression of the potential of all persons can resolve the social and economic*  
179 *problems now confounding a society wracked with disunity.*

180 It is evident that both Black and White Americans in large numbers are feeling deeply  
181 disappointed and frustrated by what each group perceives to be a failure of the efforts in  
182 recent decades at effecting progress in the relations between the races. To rationalize this  
183 failure, both have been reacting by retreating to the more familiar ground of racial  
184 separation. As the problems with crime and drug addiction mount, the tendency is to use  
185 the seeming intractability of these problems as a measure of the failure of years of  
186 struggle on the part of both to overcome the barriers of centuries. Formidable as is the



187 challenge yet to be met, can it fairly be said that no significant progress has taken place  
188 since the days of the sit-ins at lunch counters across the South?

189 Similarly, the victims of a protracted and entrenched racial discrimination seek relief in  
190 the notion that Black Americans, White Americans, American Indians, Hispanic  
191 Americans, Asian Americans are so distinctly different from one another that all of them  
192 must stake out their own cultural and social territories and stay within them.

- 193 **1. Would this be sensible?**  
194 **2. Would it not be a retreat from the reality of our common humanity?**  
195 **3. Would it not be a formula for the total breakdown of civilization?**  
196 **4. Those who raise the call for separation preach a grim doctrine indeed. If the**  
197 **nation is seriously to submit to such a view, where exactly will either the**  
198 **Black or the White Americans divide their cultural heritage, one from the**  
199 **other?**

200 Racism runs deep. It infects the hearts of both White and Black Americans. Since without  
201 conscious, deliberate, and sustained effort, no one can remain unaffected by its corrosive  
202 influence, both groups must realize that such a problem can neither easily nor  
203 immediately be resolved.

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204 *"Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme*  
205 *patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature*  
206 *wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort can succeed in*  
207 *blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name*  
208 *of their common country."*

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209 Both groups must understand that no real change will come about without close  
210 association, fellowship, and friendship among diverse people. Diversity of color,  
211 nationality, and culture enhances the human experience and should never be made a  
212 barrier to harmonious relationships, to friendship, or to marriage.

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213 *"O well-beloved ones!" Bahá'u'lláh wrote. "The tabernacle of unity has*  
214 *been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits*  
215 *of one tree and leaves of one branch."*

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## IV

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217 Our appeal is addressed primarily to the individual American because the transformation  
218 of a whole nation ultimately depends on the initiative and change of character of the  
219 individuals who compose it. No great idea or plan of action by the government or other  
220 interested organizations can hope to succeed if the individual neglects to respond in his or  
221 her own way as personal circumstances and opportunities permit. *And so, we respectfully  
222 and urgently call upon our fellow Americans of whatever background to look at the  
223 racial situation with new eyes and with a new determination to lend effective support to  
224 the resolution of a problem that hinders the advance of this great republic toward the full  
225 realization of its glorious destiny.*

226 We mention the experience of the Bahá'í community not from any feeling of pride and  
227 ultimate victory, because that which we have accomplished still falls short of that to  
228 which we aspire; nonetheless, the results to date are most encouraging, and it is as a  
229 means of encouragement that we call attention to them.

230 From its inception in 1863 the Bahá'í community was dedicated to the principle of the  
231 unity of humankind. Bahá'ís rely upon faith in God, daily prayer, meditation, and study of  
232 sacred texts to effect the transformation of character necessary for personal growth and  
233 maturity; however, their aim is to create a world civilization that will in turn react upon  
234 the character of the individual. *Thus the concept of personal salvation is linked to the  
235 salvation, security, and happiness of all the inhabitants of the earth and stems from the  
236 Bahá'í belief that "the world of humanity is a composite body" and that "when one part of  
237 the organism suffers all the rest of the body will feel its consequence."*

238 Guided and inspired by such principles, the Bahá'í community has accumulated more  
239 than a century of experience in creating models of unity that transcend race, culture,  
240 nationality, class, and the differences of sex and religion, providing empirical evidence  
241 that humanity in all its diversity can live as a unified global society. Bahá'ís see unity as  
242 the laws of life; consequently, all prejudices are perceived as diseases that threaten life.

243 Rather than considering that the unity of humankind can be established only after other  
244 problems afflicting it have been solved, Bahá'ís believe that both spiritual and material  
245 development are dependent upon love and unity. Therefore, the Bahá'ís offer the  
246 teachings of their Faith and the example of their community for examination, convinced  
247 that these can make a contribution toward the eradication of racism endemic in American  
248 society. We do so with firm faith in the assistance of our Creator, Who, out of His infinite  
249 love, brought forth all humanity from the same stock and intended that all belong to the  
250 same household.

251 We believe, moreover, that the day of the unification of the entire human race has come  
252 and that "the potentialities inherent in the station of man, the innate excellence of his  
253 reality, must all be manifested in this promised Day of God."

254 [ FORMATTING ADDED FOR FHU VIRTUAL STUDY- NO TEXT WAS ADDED,  
255 ONLY BULLETS, COLORS, LINE NUMBERS, SPACING, ETC.]

## 256 Addendum

257 The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States is the national  
258 administrative body for the Bahá'ís of the United States. The Assembly has nine members  
259 and is elected annually by delegates from the forty-eight contiguous states. It directs,  
260 coordinates, and stimulates the activities of local Bahá'í administrative bodies and of the  
261 110,000 Bahá'ís in the United States.

262 The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion with adherents in virtually every  
263 country. The worldwide Bahá'í community, numbering more than five million, includes  
264 almost all nationalities and classes. More than 2,100 ethnic groups and tribes are  
265 represented. There are 155 National Spiritual Assemblies.

266 Bahá'u'lláh was the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. The central principles of His  
267 religion are the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humanity. His  
268 religion "proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind.... It,  
269 moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth,  
270 condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be  
271 the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and  
272 recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of  
273 human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and  
274 privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of  
275 poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism,  
276 mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes  
277 the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the  
278 spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or the adoption of an  
279 auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must  
280 establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind."

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