



individual agency and collective social ac- una agencia individual y una  
cción social  
tion, has the power to transform society as colectiva, tiene el poder de  
transformar la  
small-scale efforts snowball into commu- sociedad, de los esfuerzos  
pequeños a los  
nity-level movements. movimientos de nivel  
comunitario

## Resumé

Dans cet article, l'auteur examine le  
racialisme à travers un prisme qui intègre  
the life  
à la fois la sociologie et la pensée bahá'íe.  
tempting to focus on

Il brosse un tableau de l'évolution du  
racial con-  
concept de la race et offre une analyse  
media  
contemporaine de ce que l'histoire a  
news

engendré aux niveaux macro et micro de  
outlets or social media. The level of  
la société. Voyant dans le racialisme un  
urgency that currently appears to be  
aspect sombre et assujettissant de la vie  
en société, l'auteur présente le concept  
building up with respect to race<sup>2</sup> is  
de l'unité de l'humanité comme une

<sup>2</sup> The word race has been used through-  
1 I dedicate this article to the memo-  
given its

ry of Heather Heyer. I would also like to  
its original

thank Jeremy Lambshead for his inval-  
usage has been

able assistance in helping me improve this  
usefulness for  
article.

58

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

largely a result of the level of media  
attention. However, I would argue  
that the situation has been urgent for  
patterns,

a long while. Before the recent epi-  
fundamental

sodes of teens and even preteens be-

## INTRODUCTION

At this critical juncture in

of society, it is

the most visible signs of

flict being featured on various

platforms, whether mainstream

out this article with some regret

insignificance with respect to

biologistic intention. Its

employed due to its general

social discourse.

While I acknowledge that there are  
numerous examples of positive inter-  
racial interactions and social

this article is focused on

questions such as why "race"

seems

ing murdered with impunity, names like Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, and Nicole Brown Simpson became familiar to us. Albeit often under the social

radar of the news media, patterns of racial inequality have persisted in the mainly

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 beneficial

sociohistorical perspective. This “big terms

picture” approach, I would argue, is “whiteness,”

more effective in uncovering the social significance of race as opposed to focusing on highly visible incidents that are, in the end, symptoms such.

or flare-ups of a deeper problem. the

Presented for your consideration is the

a painstakingly forged reconciliation racial

of sociological, spiritual, and experiential knowledge concerning race. social

In other words, this article reflects a standpoint based on what I have thus focuses

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 this

and limitations, I believe that speak-

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

world from the dark scourge of race.

As a result, this article tackles

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

for the reader to be mindful that

such as “White,” “Black,”

and several others are mostly employed as general terms that do not imply a sweeping categorization of every individual characterized as

The scope of this article is, for

most part, purposefully limited to

United States, given its unique

history and the sociological sense

race looks different in different

contexts. Our exploration begins with a sociological perspective that

on the nature of race and how it has expressed itself throughout US history up to the present day at both

structural and interpersonal levels

society. It is established within

discussion that race has evolved from

ing 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.

authentic

Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race”

59

interracial bonds. We then explore a

insights from the Bahá'í Writings that systemic

offer an enriching social vision regarding

ing human diversity and the means to racial-

establish community life conducive to United States

interracial brotherhood. Finally, I offer

some thoughts on how attaining felt

and sustaining an authentic form of capitalistic ma-

identity, and deepening this transcendent

sense of identity in the company of sociohistorical

of like-minded collaborators, is the way

key building block to constructing social

transformative communities that embody

the principle of the oneness of those

humanity—the pivotal social burdens

of our time that unites science and religion.

exerts

As a whole, this article runs counter due

to at least two tendencies, one tied to the

Bahá'í-centered discourse on race and this racial-

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

generations to root out racism as

social force that perpetuates

and dehumanizing injustice means

are living under the weight of a

ized social structure in the

(Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking

Birthered by what those in power

were the exigencies of

terialism, this racialized social

ture is animated by

forces that place whiteness, as a

of being, at the very center of

life, producing a system of social

tions that bestows privileges to

regarded as White and social

upon those regarded as non-White.

The racialized social structure

a subjugating influence on society

to its historical embeddedness and

fact that we are born into

the other tied to the social sciences in profoundly  
 general. Focused mainly on the current and  
 moment and the racialized social environment,  
 As a re- shaped by it during our lifetime,  
 condition of the United States as a most likely to be outlived by it.  
 widely sult, deep racial inequalities are  
 whole, there will be scant mention of regarded as “the way it is,”  
 something that we are powerless to change  
 the race amity initiatives spearheaded rather  
 by the US Bahá’í community at var- than an outcome of systemic  
 injustice. This means that efforts at  
 ous points in its history. This omis- ing the forces released and  
 counter- sustained  
 sion is a result of both its peripheral by the racialized social structure  
 relationship to my central thesis and a will  
 will purposeful choice to avoid any trium- need to be revolutionary in  
 character, phalist tone when speaking on a del- focused on the principle of  
 universal justice, and animated by forces  
 eterious aspect of society that has so that  
 far proven to be intractable. With re- transcend material reality.  
 spect to the social sciences, this article The animating principle that  
 is con- ducive to fueling such countering  
 counters their inherent materialism ef-  
 and the concomitant tendency to avoid forts is the spirit of oneness.  
 Seeing it as the conscious expression of the  
 metaphysical phenomena and their po-  
 one- ness of humanity at the individual  
 tential to effect social outcomes. and  
 The primary assertion of this ar- collective levels, those inspired by  
 the spirit of oneness will work for  
 article is that the inability of previous social

change and transform communities in granted as “the way things  
 are” (Berg- er and Luckmann). If subscribing  
 direct accordance to the strength of to

the collaborations forged, and these available transformed communities will effect ideas,” maybe the institutional and cultural changes realization that that will ultimately lead to the de-racialization of society. on.

Instead, race was codified into law and **RACIALISM THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS** (38). An idea is fairly easy to discard, While it is rare for contemporary social scientists to agree on a lot, there effects are is general agreement regarding the Under-subject of race. There is a consensus construct that although existing phenotypical more differences are real—exemplified in which diversity of skin color, facial features, as and other physical characteristics—carrying significant 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 racial race to be a social construction. and

The social construction of race concept is based on the premise that while sphere “race” is not real in a scientific sense, it constantly

race had been just one option

in the “free market of

the eventual collective

it was a misguided idea would be

we need to get over it and move

structured into the very life of society through culture and custom (Zinn

but the institutionalization of

and the resulting structural

much harder to do away with.

standing that race is a social

provides us with a gateway to a

nuanced understanding of it,

involves seeing the phenomenon

rooted in false ideas yet

nificant social consequences.

#### **RACIALISM: IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

One of the most prominent sociological theories built upon the

construction of race concept is

formation. Scholars Michael Omi

Howard Winant argue that race is an unstable construct within the

of social meanings that is

is real in a social sense. Speaking very po-  
concisely, racialism began as a set of racial for-  
ideas, and people then enacted these racial  
ideas through their behaviors, crystal-  
“histor-  
lizing the ideas into a structure of be-  
which hu-  
liefs, and this structure of beliefs over  
are  
time became encoded into the life of  
(Omi and  
society. In other words, race evolved  
“simultaneously  
from false ideation in its genesis to an  
representation, or  
aspect of social reality that we take for  
and

Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race”

61

an effort to reorganize and redistrib-  
ute resources along particular racial  
for-  
lines” (117). At a macro level, the way  
concept  
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 lin-  
gering effects, such an interpretation  
would tend to support policies aimed  
at ameliorating past discrimination.  
achieved,  
Conversely, if race is viewed as insign-  
practices  
nificant, as something to be ignored  
laying  
regardless of what has taken place in  
the past, such an interpretation would  
lend credence to a more “hands off ”  
does  
approach (Omi and Winant 118–19).  
mean-

being contested in the arena of  
litical struggle (116). The  
mation process is animated by  
projects, which are said to be  
ically situated projects in  
man bodies and social structures  
represented and organized”  
Winant 117). Each is  
an interpretation,  
explanation of racial dynamics,

to social meaning, we will see that  
each era is profoundly shaped by  
es tied to social power. The  
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 nec-  
essary component to sustaining pop-  
ular consent to their authority. Once  
popular consent is generally  
societal notions and related  
emerge as a “common sense,”  
the foundation for the establishment  
of a hegemonic order. Although the  
existence of a hegemonic order  
not negate the fact that social

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

lost cultural lines.

the 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 oppression—contestation highlighted in racial formation theory. Despite race being a contested terrain with respect

62

ing 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

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

and discrimination that was characteristic of a history of

questions with pecuniary implications in a “zero-sum”

sociopolitical framework.

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROCESS

OF RACIALIZATION

merchant conquerors, the monarchs,

At the beginning of the conquest (Omi

era, we find that the early European hegemon-

explorers were faced with a bit of a estab-

conundrum when they encountered justify

populations in the New World that newly

were very different from them. Differentiation

domination ent in skin, in language and culture,

along these lines facilitated a

ideological coherence between the

and the ecclesiastical authorities

and Winant 122). While the

ic order of the day was well

lished—an order that served to

the material appropriation of

entered lands and the total

of the people residing there—a

few  
 and in myriad other ways, questions  
 conscience  
 arose regarding where these “natives”  
 sense”  
 stood in the “family of man.” Surely  
 and Span-  
 these people could not be equal to the  
 Casas  
 Europeans, but to what extent could  
 they be exploited or enslaved? Over  
 hu-  
 time it became clear that this contact  
 Catholic  
 with native populations throughout  
 Native  
 the Americas consolidated a world-  
 or  
 view that placed European Christian  
 Church  
 civilization at the center while periph-  
 but the  
 eralizing Native American and Afri-  
 can populations that were regarded  
 that  
 as heathens to be exploited. It is this  
 dynamic of in-group and out-group  
 distinctiveness that released the seeds  
 colonial-  
 of modern racial awareness.  
 de-  
 Although racial considerations are  
 of  
 in their infancy at this point, it is ar-  
 defined  
 gued that the conquest era is one de-  
 fined by the religious civilization stand-  
 in  
 point. Despite the existing competitive  
 eventu-  
 struggles and the internal turmoil  
 institutions. As  
 that they produced, European powers  
 expand-  
 were united by the sense that their  
 revolu-  
 civilization was locked in a battle with

brave souls consulted their  
 and challenged the “common  
 of the time Dominican friar  
 ish historian Bartolomé de las  
 may be the most prominent example  
 of one who, having witnessed the  
 man atrocities, implored the  
 Church to respect the rights of  
 Americans, at least in some form  
 fashion. Las Casas’s plea to the  
 was heard, at least for a time,  
 cosmic weight of the conquest era  
 greatly diminished the impact of  
 counterhegemonic attempt (Dussel).  
 What began as European conquest  
 eventually became European  
 ism. While conquest was largely  
 fined by the material appropriation  
 foreign lands, colonialism was  
 by emerging European nation-states  
 maintaining a sustained presence  
 these lands, exemplified by the  
 al presence of formal  
 Europe’s colonial enterprise  
 ed, a burgeoning intellectual  
 tion was developing that would

have 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 as Seeking Light in the Darkness of "Race" 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

63

with the reality that much of the project 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

The most successful racial project to transform a historical instance of racial "common sense" was the core of the civil rights movement, which is widely regarded as coming into form in 1955 with the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Partially by Cold War global politics, the 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 with racial justice. The passage of

the Migration to the North, the social Rights meaning of race was still rooted in laws biologically essentialist notions. Such were a racialized conception was reflected in the strict segregationist structure of the South and the pattern of wide-brief, spread job and housing discrimination for- in the North. Regardless of where the Black persons found themselves, at the had to institutional and interpersonal levels so- of society they were most likely to be action. regarded as inferior beings whose civil rights and pursuit of happiness need revolution- not be respected or even considered.

64

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

wave of social sentiment that crystal- as a lized into an ideology that character- opposi- ized social policies designed to redress policies” based historical wrongs as problematic. One op- of the key ingredients of this ideol- ogy was addressing racial issues in a admis- race-neutral manner, and this discour- argu- sive strategy is at the core of what is served known as the colorblind racial ideology opportuni- (Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists ty to be employed in a “race-neutral”

3). Over time, in the battle for the so- fashion. Despite obvious racial

inequities and their potential causes,

any efforts to expand opportunities to

reached a position of hegemony and a

dis-advantaged groups are thus

new version of racial “common sense”

labeled as “preferential treatment” or

was consolidated. While various racial

examples of “reverse discrimination.”

projects continue to wage, it seems

Addition- ally, from such a viewpoint,

that colorblindness is today’s watchword

programs like affirmative action are attacked

for the hegemonic order of today.

as “group-based” preferential programs

COLORBLINDNESS AS that disregard individual talents and

THE RACIAL HEGEMONY OF TODAY capacities, which penalizes more qual-

ified (i.e. White) individuals (Bonilla-

The ideological components of col- la-Silva, Racism without Racists

78).

orblindness combine classical liberal The second frame,

naturalization,

sentiments, such as liberty and equal- largely consists of sentiments that

ex-

ity before the law, with some of the plain visibly racial phenomena as

the

discursive elements employed by civil “way it is,” as natural

occurrences that

rights activists, such as judging peo- are the result of human nature. Fea-

ple by the content of their character tures of the social landscape such

as

rather than by the color of their skin. segregated neighborhoods, schools,

According to Bonilla-Silva, this racial and religious communities are viewed

ideology is composed of four central as products of the tendency of dif-

frames: abstract liberalism, naturaliza- ferent racial groups to “stick to

their

tion, cultural racism, and minimization own.” It should be noted that

Whites

of racism. Leveraging his analysis of who make this claim are careful to

hundreds of interviews, Bonilla-Silva attribute this behavior to all

racial

is quick to point out that these frames groups to ensure that it is known

that

are mutually reinforcing and often “all groups do it”

(Bonilla-Silva, Rac-

employed in various combinations in ism without Racists 84).

particular lines of discourse (Racism without Racists 74). Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race”

One of the more potent frames of the colorblind racial ideology is 65

“bad apples out there.”

cultural racism. The success of the civil rights movement meant that overt attributing 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 factors resulting from a deficient cultural attitudinal 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

Another key element of this frame is certain social outcomes that are in character to non-racial example, the widely stated claim Blacks (and social scientists) discrimination still exists is with skepticism, while other such as qualifications and characteristics are used as tions. More general claims of encing racial discrimination out one’s life are regarded as excuses and “finding what ing for” (Bonilla-Silva, Racism Racists 91). A great example of the created by the hegemonic order of colorblindness are readily in the Black Lives Matter (BLM). Founded in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of Zimmerman in the death of Tray-

Racists 87). von Martin, the movement received national attention in the wake of the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri (Day). 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 stances of racially motivated violence, for example, yet still hang on to the mean-belief that “we’re moving past race” as a society since there are always some

According to its website, “#BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to violent anti-Black racism that permeates our society” (“About”). The hegemonic 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 produced in public spaces, whether by the police or the general public. From the BLM viewpoint, transforming the meaning of race will help minimize Racism” 475). In

stage in its development has allowed this social malignancy to structure of social relations renders everyday interactions and tices as both racist and la-Silva, “Rethinking

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

other words, the racialization has evolved to such a degree that actions that could accurately be read as racist could also be read as choices given the social example, if a young White person has been priced out of a residential area but finds that there is an on-the-rise neighborhood within their price range, their moving into that neighborhood is logically preferable to them, despite the fact that they are contributing to a large-scale pattern of Black displacement that is characteristic of gentrification. In many of the contemporary housing dynamics are shaped by the economic vulnerability of Blacks, which leads to limited choices with housing in conjunction with the expansive options available to Whites in accordance with their tastes. This housing dynamic becomes more compelling when

considering  
is a pure reflection of the hegemonic  
other  
order of colorblindness, positing that  
been ac-  
in the absence of clear, explicit racism,  
respect in the  
the “real racists” are those who inject  
of socio-  
race into the conversation.  
Emer-  
son, and Klineberg).

RACIALIZED SOCIAL STRUCTURE  
racialized  
AS A PRODUCT OF HISTORY  
historical forces detailed earlier  
The inability of the US social collec-  
ra-  
tive to root out racialism at an earlier  
reflective

Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race”

of rational self-interests, given the  
added.).  
perception that the material gains of  
an out-group will have an adverse  
life, and  
effect on the in-group . This attitude  
creates a social dynamic in which the  
activities  
socioeconomic gains of racialized  
they  
groups are regarded as offensive in-  
cursions into the field of social status  
choosing  
and prestige, while the consolidation  
Our  
of socioeconomic gains on the part  
thoroughly  
of the dominant group is viewed as  
reproduction  
the continuance of white supremacy.  
as a  
According to Herbert Blumer, these  
dynamics are undergirded by the “col-  
for  
lective process of characterization,”

that the tastes of Blacks and  
racial minorities have rarely  
corded a similar level of  
housing market, regardless  
economic background (Lewis,  
son, and Klineberg).

Overall, the reality of a  
social structure as the outcome of the  
mately means that contemporary  
cial antagonisms are often

67

dated 10 April 2011; emphasis  
Racialism has become a fixed feature  
of the US social structure, its  
its culture. Evidence suggests that  
even the most innocent daily  
can have racial connotations, be  
shopping, eating out, watching tele-  
vision, going to the park, or  
to live in a certain neighborhood.  
social ecology has been so  
polluted by race that the  
of deep racial inequalities is seen  
natural features of contemporary so-  
ciety. Upholding social privileges  
those regarded as White, while

racial

which perceives distinctive racial denial,

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 racialization

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 Bois,

sociocultural and sociopolitical life of the United States. This condition “the

brings to mind a statement from the consciousness” as

Universal House of Justice: “The concepts. In

expressions of racial prejudice have Folk,

transmuted into forms that are multifaceted, less blatant and more intricate, and thus more intractable” (Letter

68

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

After the Egyptian and Indian, racialization

the Greek and Roman, the Teuton that

and Mongolian, the Negro is a consciousness”—the

sort of seventh son, born with a the

veil, and gifted with second-sight

minorities bear the burden of

is a sociocultural phenomenon that appears to be fundamental to the

temporary American way of life.

## RACIALISM: SOCIAL INTERACTION AND IDENTITY

It could be said that a natural outgrowth of the process of

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

a preeminent Black sociologist and activist, introduced to the world

veil” and “double

interrelated sociological

his well-known *The Souls of Black*

Du Bois discusses both concepts in

following way:

go hand in hand with the

process. It is this very process

yields “double

sense of twoness that stems from

inherent struggle to enjoy the

fruits  
in this American world,—a world  
regard-  
which yields him no true self-con-  
sciousness, but only lets him see  
aspects  
himself through the revelation of  
pre-  
the other world. It is a peculiar  
sensation, this double-conscious-  
phenom-  
ness, this sense of always looking  
“the  
at one’s self by the tape of the  
communication  
world that looks on in amused  
contempt and pity. One ever feels  
and  
his twoness,—an American, a  
Bois  
Negro; two souls, two thoughts,  
the  
two unreconciled strivings; two  
warring ideals in one dark body,  
whose dogged strength alone  
keeps it from being torn asunder.  
(45)

world passing and speaks to it;  
In post-Reconstruction America, Du  
Bois believed that the ascriptive na-  
ture of the racialization process and  
its resulting reification<sup>3</sup> prevents the  
racializing group (Whites) from rec-  
ognizing the full humanity of the  
would  
racialized because the process itself  
is one of “othering” segments of the  
them,  
population and portraying them as de-  
. . . It  
viations from the norm of whiteness  
of  
(Itzigsohn and Brown 237). Racialized  
pass-  
subjects, therefore, are forced to recon-  
thick  
cile their own sense of humanity while

of US citizenship while being  
ed as undeserving.  
One of the more troubling  
of the veil is the way in which it  
vents mutual recognition across the  
color line. As an ever-present  
enon, the obscuring quality of  
veil” prevents true  
from happening between racializing  
and racialized groups (Itzigsohn  
Brown 237). In a later work, Du  
thus elaborated on the nature of  
veil:  
It is as though one, looking out  
from a dark cave in a side of an  
impending mountain, sees the  
speaks courteously and persua-  
sively, showing them how these  
entombed souls are hindered in  
their natural movement, expres-  
sion, and development; and how  
their loosening from prison  
be a matter not simply of cour-  
tesy, sympathy, and help to  
but (an) aid to all the world .  
gradually penetrates the minds  
the prisoners that the people  
ing do not hear; that some  
sheet of invisible but horribly

tan-

battling the dehumanizing forces that gible plate glass is between them

and the world. They get excited;

3 The treatment of socially construct- they talk louder; they gesticulate.

ed concepts as concrete aspects of the real Some of the passing world stop world. in curiosity; these

gesticulations

Seeking Light in the Darkness of "Race" 69

seem so pointless; they laugh relative social blindness—its inability

and pass on. They still either do to recognize the humanity of the ra- not hear at all, or hear but dimly, cialized as well as their "own

position as oppressor within the system of

and even that they hear, they do ra- cialization" (Itzigsohn and Brown

not understand. Then the people 243).

within may become hysterical. Because of their position of dominance

They may scream and hurl them- within the system of racialization, the

selves against the barriers, hardly social vision of Whites is limited to

realizing in their bewilderment their own world of privilege. The veil

that they are screaming in a vac- does not allow them to fully see, under-

uum unheard and that their antics stand, or empathize with the communi-

may actually seem funny to those ty in its entirety. Even the most well-in-

outside looking in. (Dusk 66) tioned White persons are said to be

ill equipped to accurately interpret the Black experience, which leads them This eloquently descriptive allegory il-

to misdiagnose the remedy for

illustrates how difficult it is to communi- race-based inequalities (Du Bois, Dusk 67).

cate across the veil and achieve mutual The inability to walk in the recognition. It matters not how articu- shoes of

lately or forcefully one speaks; the voice racialized groups blinds Whites to the

of the racialized either goes unheard or oppressive nature of the system of

ra-  
 is misunderstood by the racializing col- cialization and fosters a sense of  
 social  
 lective. This dynamic creates troubling delusion. This delusion has two  
 rein-  
 outcomes for the racialized group, forcing components, the first  
 being the  
 but the racializing group does not go sense that the existing social  
 order, de-  
 unaffected. spite the presence of racial  
 inequalities,  
 As a consequence of the incongru- is essentially just, and the second  
 being  
 ous relationship between its continual that Whites are, therefore,  
 ontological-  
 defense and assertion of its common ly superior to racialized  
 minorities. The  
 humanity and the actual amount of presence of the veil as a powerful  
 so-  
 progress made, the racialized group cial barrier produces two separate  
 life-  
 struggles to appreciate the humanity worlds—one Black, one White.  
 While  
 of the racializing group. Along with the White world can be discerned  
 the exhausting efforts to reaffirm the through the limitations it imposes  
 on  
 humanity of their group comes a con- the racialized world in contrast  
 to its  
 gealed sense of resentment and a cor- position of privilege, the world  
 of  
 responding lack of faith that those on Blacks and other racialized  
 minorities  
 the other side of the veil can exhibit is invisible to Whites because of  
 their  
 fairness and show a degree of reason inability to see through the eyes  
 of the  
 when it comes to racial matters (Du “othered” while they  
 themselves are  
 Bois, *Dusk* 67). The effects on the ra- enmeshed in privilege (Itzigsohn  
 and  
 cializing group, instead, center on its Brown 243).  
 70 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 27.3 2017

THE PROBLEM OF WHITENESS be consistent among Whites, regard-  
 less of their political affiliations (e.g., white nationalist, anti-racist).  
 I would argue, in alignment with nu-  
 Hughey

merous scholars, that much of the story of American-style racialism is defined by the creation, maintenance, framing 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 differen-

asserts that hegemonic whiteness is composed of two comingled elements: first, the conceptual of whiteness as both different and superior to forms of whiteness; and second, the negation of any alternative forms of whiteness that do not conform to the ideal (16). In essence, whiteness operates as an aspirational form of identity, separating good Whites from bad Whites, while non-Whites are socially barred because of how they are inferiorized. Revisiting earlier concepts, whiteness as a combination of a worldview and collective social practices that worldview is a logical expression of agency on the part of a 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 privilege—white privilege. In addition, the obscuring quality of the

veil, conjoined with the social  
 tiated from this standard of transpar- blindness  
 blindness that regularly affects any  
 ency. In essence, non-Whites become privileged  
 “raced,” and this differentiation from group—whether on the basis  
 of race, gender, or class—results in  
 the standard is regarded as ontologi- renders  
 cally inferior. Therefore, whiteness is any attempts of racially  
 subordinat- ed groups to transform the  
 not simply the opposite of non-white- existing  
 existing social order as hostile,  
 ness; it is perceived as the superior op- misguided, or  
 misguided, or premature. Consistently perceived  
 posite (López 20). as  
 as Matthew Hughey elaborates on the “social aliens,” racialized  
 minorities encounter a barrage of messages  
 nature of whiteness in *White Bound*. In that,  
 that, for all intents and purposes,  
 this book, he identifies “dimensions of commu-  
 commu- nicate to them the need to  
 hegemonic whiteness” that appear to accept a  
 accept a Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race” 71

lower status because, according to the American toward his Negro fellow  
 rules of whiteness, they will never be citizen” would be necessary to  
 avoid bloodshed (Citadel 126). All signs  
 accepted as social equals. in-  
 in- It should be made abundantly clear  
 that individual Whites can refuse diccate that such a transformation in  
 as the consciousness is still necessary,  
 to participate in whiteness or even mainstream discourse on race  
 appears to be paralyzed by ideological  
 choose to dedicate time and energy to ing, while blood is literally being  
 postur- ing, while blood is literally being  
 disrupting whiteness as a social force shed  
 shed as a result of cross-racial  
 that ultimately seeks to defend social conflict.  
 conflict.

boundaries in the face of “intruders.”  
 By the same token, the compelling THE GUIDING LIGHT OF ONENESS  
 weight of the racialized social struc-  
 ture suggests that it takes high levels If we can use our social

imagination

of personal resolve and social percep-  
a

tiveness to navigate such a path. The  
objective here is not to cast aspersions  
judged

on White people but to identify how  
the perpetuation of whiteness as a  
con-

social force concretizes the social rela-  
of

tions that act as the brick and mortar  
of the racialized social structure. The  
beauty.

collective failure to disrupt a system  
hap-

of social relations that effectively  
places whiteness at the center of each  
lamenting

social space of significance is tanta-  
would be

mount to deliberately perpetuating the  
entrenchment of racialism as a dimen-  
in the

sion of social life.

individual

The socially toxic mix of whiteness,  
a racialized social structure, and the  
we've

related inability to recognize the com-  
what

mon humanity of "the other" across  
that

racial lines are powerful social forces  
as the

that greatly constrain our collective  
soil?

vision as well as our collective will to  
build toward a social reality imbued  
with the oneness of humanity. Shoghi

Unit-

Effendi, as part of a larger statement,  
100-year

exhorted in a cautionary tone that a  
Inde-

"revolutionary change in the concept  
lead-

and perceive US society as being in

state of organic growth much like a  
garden and as being ultimately

by the health of the garden in its  
entirety, we would be anxiously

cerned with the health and growth

each plant, hopeful that each would  
bloom and display its latent

If a friend were invited over and

pened to see our garden and observe  
the health of the lilies while

the state of the violets, what

the appropriate reaction? Would we  
blame the significant differences

state of the flowers on their

traits, or would we take responsibili-  
ty as gardeners and admit that

neglected the violets? Better yet,

actions would we take to ensure

the violets grew just as healthily

lilies? How would we treat the

How would we go about extracting  
the strangling weeds?

In the 240-year history of the

ed States, plus the more than

period before the Declaration of

pendence, those in positions of

and attitude of the average white garden

72

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

of humanity existing on this soil in a way that leads to the organic growth social

and health of all. To the contrary, the tendency has been to direct resources to those deemed "worthy" through pe- relations are

ridic social interventions and to deny the same benefits to those deemed un- social

worthy by the dint of race. Whether private,

it was the extension of land to for- de-

mer White indentured servants while a

slave codes were being enforced, the consequences

New Deal policies (1933-1939) during the Jim Crow era, or the extension of GI Bill benefits (1944-1968) at a time say

when redlining policies and housing discrimination were the de facto laws interactions,

of the land, the process of racializa- tion has expressed itself through a social system that has exhibited recep- racial

tivity to the social plight of Whites while largely ignoring the plight of racial minorities.

their

Much of the racial story in the US has hinged on the issue of justice. such

Historically, those deifying whiteness the

have sought to defend the racial sta- tus quo of various eras regardless of the

the injuries inflicted upon humankind as a whole, while those asserting the

ership have failed to tend the

conflict will continue to fester and erode ties between citizens and

institutions.

As of today, evidence suggests that interracial social

encumbered by the specter of white- ness, meaning that large-scale

institutions, whether public or

legal or commercial, exhibit a high

gree of responsiveness to Whites as

social group, despite the

to non-Whites. The various examples of this dynamic could fill scores of pages; therefore, it is prudent to

that for Blacks, there are many sto- ries of unmerited police

whether precipitated by the phone calls of neighbors or through police officers' insidious practice of

profiling. Similarly, the history of Native Americans is replete with ex- amples of White incursions into

sovereign territory in the guise of justified legal action, when in fact

annexations are more reflective of

dominant group doing as it pleases.

If we envision social progress as

garden of humanity on full display and not as lilies standing out while

need for equal justice envisioned a society that bonded all its citizens to legislate 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 major

the other flowers wither and wilt, imperative that justice, both and enforced, be evenly applied to citizen regardless of the accidents of birth.

### HUMANITY REDEFINED

The Bahá'í teachings offer a formative vision of the human race,

paving the way for reformative justice that is inclusive of three

Seeking Light in the Darkness of "Race" 73

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 creation; dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created" Therefore,

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 the presence of God are equal; they are of one race and God did not make these divisions. These distinctions have had their origin in man himself.

(Arabic no. 68). Bahá'u'lláh not only plan and signifies that humanity was "created false and imaginary. (299)

us to ponder and reflect on the implications of how we were created. In the current social context, this mode of especially

Considering the themes outlined in this article, what emerges as

active reflection and internalization of racial divisions and distinctions "are

against free us from snap judgments that employ racial stereotypes as social templates that characterize certain groups to of people as “safe” or “dangerous,” town Blacks “trustworthy” or “criminal.” Under- the impli- standing that skin color, style of dress, patterns and other outward characteristics say little about one’s inner character and same potential is surely a progressive step, jus- although counterintuitive in a highly by racialized environment. inimical to If we accept that humanity is of a single origin, questions regarding the social significance of it all naturally more emerge. On this subject, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: have us simply accept the society we’ve in- All humanity are the children of God; they belong to the same “natural” family, to the same original race. There can be no multiplicity of races, since all are the descendants of the oneness of humanity and its rootedness in the image of our cre- beauty ation offered by Bahá’u’lláh, it would Addition- be fair to ask how humanity should ad- in dress racial diversity. Further deepen- ethno-racial ing the garden metaphor I borrowed one

the plan and purpose of reality”

What does this mean with respect to our common ability as US urbanites identify in what part of and Latinos live? What is cation when there are clear showing that a racialized group has been overpenalized and, at the time, underserved by the criminal tice system? If we are encompassed a social environment that is a social reality more congruent with human nature, what is the scope of our responsibilities to ensure a complementary environment? The dictates of colorblindness would

inherited and chalk up numerous indica- tions of racial inequality to human processes. Accepting the ontological realness of the oneness of humanity and its

is indicative of the inherent of the whole of humanity. ally, He offers a vision of society which people of distinct backgrounds freely associate with

74 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 27.3 2017

from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I another “without discord or disagree- ment between them” (69). But share the following passage in its pur- ment between them” (69). But given er form: the racialized character of existing social relations, how can this condition Bahá’u’lláh has proclaimed the be realized? oneness of the world of human- It seems that a major first step ity. He has caused various nations would be the institutionalization of and divergent creeds to unite. He interracial justice in terms of both the has declared that difference of “laws on the books” and their enforce- ment. Holding people accountable for race and color is like the variegat- their actions regardless of their ed beauty of flowers in a garden. within the criminal justice system role the non-politicization of agencies If you enter a garden, you will see responsible for ensuring equality and the law would be key ingredients to yellow, white, blue, red flowers in justice being wielded in ways that re- the non-politicization of agencies- sionable for ensuring equality under- the law would be key ingredients to- standant within itself and although- justice being wielded in ways that different from the others, lending lead to a greater sense of interracial unity. Its own charm to them. Racial dif- ference in the human kingdom is similar. If all the flowers in a gar- den were of the same color, the treatment of Whites and racial minorities effect would be monotonous and when confronted by police emboldens wearying to the eye. those tantalized by the notion of white supremacy while exasperating those who envision a social world more in keeping with our metaphysical re- alities as children of the same God, equally valued and equally beloved.

**OVERCOMING “THE VEIL”**

Therefore, Bahá’u’lláh hath said that the various races of human- kind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flow- ers grow and blend together side by side without discord or dis- agreement between them. (68–69) The principle of the oneness of hu- manity—animated by universal equal- ity with respect to human According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, human di- station

versity, specifically that of a so-called racial character, should be regarded as a virtue, a delightful element that corrects and an unrestrained appreciation of human diversity—offers a

as a virtue, a delightful element that social vision for which to aspire, but

Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race” 75

what are the implications at the level of identity and social interaction? the past, and their ability to

The concept of “the veil” posits that hearts and out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their

a racialized social barrier is not only minds. (Advent 40)

in place, but is so embedded in the field of social relations as to obscure the ability of a racial group to see the community

common humanity of another group. In these two paragraphs, the leader of the worldwide Bahá’í implicitly acknowledges the weightiness of the racialized social

With a penetrating sense of social structure and its potential to have a deleterious

perceptiveness, especially for one who never set foot in the United States, Shoghi Effendi, shortly before the effect on the ability of a religious community to live out its socially transformative principles,

especially selected both White and Black Bahá’ís in those tied to the oneness of humanity.

the following way: Speaking primarily to the US

Bahá’ís,

Shoghi Effendi, I believe, is exhorting

Let the white make a supreme effort both Black and White Bahá’ís not to

effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for content themselves with a surface-level sense of brotherhood. Most significantly, a religious community still

all their usually inherent and at slight in membership was encouraged by its leader to fight an uphill

times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency defense of its core beliefs against the

towards revealing a patronizing social forces that surrounded it.

attitude towards the members of We established earlier that the

veil

the other race, to persuade them has a negative effect on the ability of

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, contact

show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget

76

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

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 the

a willing receptivity to Whites that glo-

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

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

altogether? It may be so in the short term, but Shoghi Effendi, cognizant of the true nature of humanity and

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

ization of the hopes He cherished for their joint contribution to

fulfillment of that country's

rious destiny. (Advent 40–41)

Although speaking primarily to what was then a small religious community struggling to live up to its

Founder's

societal miseducation and to see one another anew. In this context, Shoghi Effendi goes on to say: spiritual teachings, Shoghi Effendi clearly intended for these words to have deep implications for the United States as a whole. The racialized social

Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that barriers that exist must be overcome by the force of interracial engagement. This engagement must go beyond civility and politeness and lead to such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved. Let genuine, systematic, and heartfelt interactions that have the effect of slow-ly melting away the iciness that tends to characterize cross-racial social relations. This social imperative implies 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 a burgeoning community of mavericks that can serve as an effective model to

Seeking Light in the Darkness of "Race"

77

help fellow citizens see what can be, mutual reactions" (qtd. in Universal instead of limiting our collective social imagination to what is. House of Justice, letter dated 26 November 2012). Keeping in mind the racialized character of the US social environment, we are challenged to THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTIC IDENTITY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION vie for transformational outcomes that effectively cleanse society of this scourge by resisting the influence of O Man of two visions! Close one eye and open the other. Close one to the world and all that is therein, harnessing their racial ideologies and their concurrent social practices, while and open the other to the hallowed beauty agency, or individual initiative, to effect change. The way in which we view of the Beloved. —Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words ourselves as human beings becomes (Persian no. 12) critical at this stage. As we have established, "race" as a

While a forceful engagement across beginnings the color line is necessary in order to be deployed as a means to overcome “the Veil,” something deeper systemic exploitation is necessary to animate and sustain our phenomena. The subjugating weight of the different. This racialized social structure requires the means that have always been used to fortify ourselves against materialism, or the dark forces of racialism and also a way that regard the way to strike back and build new patterns of goods, terms of interaction that will accrete priorities. Despite the need to a new social order imbued with the existing spirit of oneness, expressed in the im-White, 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

social construction has its means in the colonial period, of justifying the exploitation of those who were typically and culturally different. This dark social experiment has been rooted in capitalistic values and practices of the accumulation of wealth, and power as chief among the historical class differences between those regarded as the force of racialization conditions that allowed Whites to hold the highest economic rungs to hold in higher esteem than members of other racial groups. While whiteness appears to be a significant factor for those of a middle-class or higher, for those in the lower group whiteness has become a fulcrum in their lifeworld. For racial minorities seem to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, it is

typically

other and every abiding change in lower-income Whites that bluster the

the life of man is the result of these most.

78 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

In my own preliminary research, I take the form of active defiance in the

have observed that in this day, Blacks face of racial stigmatization.

Regard-

often bear the brunt of the policing less of social perception, the

deter-

of social boundaries associated with mination to be oneself, to

recognize

whiteness. In seemingly race-neu- one's equal worth, and to

realize one's

tral social spaces, whiteness exerts inherent potential as a "mine

rich in

its presence in both subtle and overt gems" is paramount

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tab-

ways through microaggressions and lets 162). Succumbing to

internalized

hyper-surveillance, respectively. An racism and becoming a shell of

one's

example of a typical microaggression self in relation to one's

potential as

is a social slight in a public place such a human being is not only a

personal

as a restaurant, where the service re- failure; it is equivalent to a

candle's

ceived by someone of color is clearly flame being snuffed out by the

winds

of lesser quality when compared to of human negation, thereby

leaving

the attention rendered to someone of more darkness in its wake. Once

an

a lighter hue. Hyper-surveillance is of- individual has established a

solid foot-

ten witnessed in retail establishments, ing on the path of racial

defiance, it is

where racial minorities, especially critical that he or she initiate

togeth-

Blacks and Latinos, are regularly fol- erness by joining hands and

hearts

lowed or watched. with a group of collaborators,

and in

What a transformative social out- this way, walk a path of service

that, come with respect to race requires is never- a social imagination that rejects the ultimately lead racialized social structure, regarding inher- it as a manifestation of evil, and pro- talents notes the revolutionary recovery of only one’s authentic self-identity. This rev- importantly, olutionary form of identity can then the pros- be leveraged in collaboration with others to effect social change. While it re- should ever be kept in mind that soci- structure ety requires transformation on gender, rejecting class, and other social fronts , speaking will to race specifically, it is imperative that rec- each individual take a stance of active whiteness resistance against the forces of racial- non- ization in accordance with their social its position within the racialized social of structure. racialized minorities as people with For American Blacks and other social racial minorities, this response might the Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race”

while difficult and arduous, is theless a path that will to a social reality in which the ent nobility and the exquisite of racialized minorities will not be recognized, but, more will also contribute vitally to perity of humankind. For American Whites, actively sisting the racialized social will come in the form of whiteness as a way of being. It demand a heartfelt struggle to ognize the ways in which requires the marginalization of Whites and how colorblindness at core implies the cultural erasure

one of two conditions—duality or oneness. Living in a state of refers to a state of being in which

maintain a “pure community” from the metaphysical self incursion of “racial otherness.” The aspect fundamental recognition that human condition authenticity means “to be with” in-condition instead of “to be better than” or “to be hand, can be in control of” becomes paramount for individuals socially positioned among the dominant group in the racialized has social structure. The Bahá’í Writings offer a meta-physical 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 interconnection flexing 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

is cognizant of their but fails to fully nourish that of themselves, leading to a of spiritual alienation. A of oneness, on the other defined as living in a spiritual in which one nourishes and sustains a spiritualized self-image, which the effect of forging a deep tion with the spiritual reality of Creator, oneself, and all of (Saiedi 166). The metaphysical of connection that results from in a state of oneness is an embracing of human reality that one’s identity from any which means that one can perceive more keenly his or her with all other human beings

While living in a state of is ultimately liberating to one’s consciousness, it can lead to much pain when one witnesses daily associated with a dehumanizing existence and has to navigate a

social

free will, including the capacity to sub- world that is struggling to  
manifest  
due our material nature, which is in- the latent socio-spiritual truth of  
the  
formed by the struggle for existence, oneness of humanity. The inner  
trans-  
formation that results from  
for the sake of our essential reality— formation that results from  
abiding in  
our soul—which the Bahá'í teachings a state of oneness  
necessitates enter-  
ing the field of social action to  
affirm emanates from the Creator. engage

In this sense, human existence in a path of service that has the  
effect  
of both contributing to the better-  
is defined by the journey of the in- ment of society and deepening  
dividual, even as human history is one's  
defined by the collective journey authentic sense of identity. As  
individ-  
uals changed in this way  
of “an ever-advancing civilization” uals changed in this way  
collaborate to  
transform communities, and as  
(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings 109:2). And these  
yet, both journeys are susceptible to communities work to transform  
social

80 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

institutions, the matrix of social rela- of American-style racialization is  
one  
defined by the erection of a hege-  
tions that are the bones and sinew of monic order to preserve white  
the racialized social structure will be racial  
dominance, the incursion of social  
transformed as well, with the ultimate movements to disrupt and dismantle  
result being the realization of social the structure of dominance, and an  
justice and the concurrent emergence orchestrated backlash to  
of social relations that are emblematic reestablish  
dominance in a new form.  
of unity in diversity. It is in this con- The large-scale social  
text that 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments on  
trends that  
gave birth to and nurtured the ra-  
the implications of interracial unity: cialized social structure have also  
Strive earnestly and put forth  
your greatest endeavor toward  
the accomplishment of this fel-  
lowship and the cementing of  
profoundly affected individuals and  
communities at the interpersonal lev-  
el of society. As human beings born  
into and navigating this society, we

this bond of brotherhood be-  
 have  
 tween you. Such an attainment is  
 not possible without will and ef-  
 fort on the part of each . . . Each  
 one should endeavor to develop  
 forge  
 and assist the other toward mu-  
 Rela-  
 tual advancement . . . Love and  
 life—  
 unity will be fostered between  
 shop-  
 you, thereby bringing about the  
 on  
 oneness of mankind. For the ac-  
 pre-  
 accomplishment of unity between  
 thoroughly  
 the colored and white will be an  
 relations.  
 assurance of the world’s peace.  
 (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, Advent 39)  
 inability to walk in the shoes of “the  
**CONCLUSION: SEEKING LIGHT  
 IN THE DARKNESS OF RACE**  
 there are always exceptions, the gen-  
 Racialism, as a set of beliefs that con-  
 their  
 veniently sought to bridge the gap  
 of  
 between Enlightenment ideals and  
 values,  
 the hyper-exploitation of non-Euro-  
 seen as  
 peans, evolved to take on a structural  
 and  
 character through formal legislation  
 other  
 and informal practices that soon be-  
 posi-  
 came customary. The cyclical history  
**Seeking Light in the Darkness of “Race”**  
 racialized oppression and the continu-  
 reli-  
 ance of discrimination even in today’s

encounter the social barriers that  
 been constructed to separate Whites  
 and non-Whites, walls that act as a  
 subjugating force that disempowers  
 those who have the propensity to  
 social bonds across racial lines.  
 tively mundane aspects of social  
 such as living in neighborhoods,  
 ping, dining out, and driving—take  
 a significant racialized character  
 cisely as the result of how  
 racialism has imbued social  
 The divergent social experiences  
 of Whites and non-Whites and the  
 other” makes mutual recognition  
 across racial lines difficult. While  
 eral trend is for Whites to regard  
 social position as being the result  
 their hard work, ingenuity, and  
 while the position of Blacks is  
 due to their deficiency in being  
 doing the same. Blacks, on the  
 hand, tend to view their social  
 tion as resulting from a history of  
 81  
 loyalty and devotion to their  
 gion when once they believe,

their time, which, in turn, characterizes the social position of Whites as ill gotten. Regardless of the materialistic roots need- 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 Divine capable of accomplishing anything intellectually, physically, and spiritually that Whites can accomplish, while Power Blacks fail to see that Whites have the properly capacity to be loving, fair-minded, and socially just. Amer- Shoghi Effendi, shepherding a religious community seeking to realize the oneness of humanity, counseled both Black and White Bahá'ís to bat- most tle 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 country- society, men. Cognizant that both groups are organically linked with their social en- racialized vironments, he implored them to en- imperative gage in an interracial fellowship that institutionalizing the was spiritually authentic and would humanity, lead to the recognition of the inher- iden- ent nobility of "the other." Along with that is this encouragement, Shoghi Effendi shared the following regarding Blacks

purity of heart, God has richly endowed them, and their contri- bution to the Cause is much

ed. (qtd. in Hornby 533)

The Guardian attaches the utmost importance, as you know, to the teaching of the natives of Amer- ica. In the Tablets of the

Plan, the Master pays the utmost attention to this most important matter. He states that if the

of the Holy Spirit today

enters into the minds and hearts

of the natives of the great

ican continents that they will be- come great standard bearers of the Faith, similar to the Nomads (Arabians) who became the

cultured and enlightened people under the Muhammadan civiliza- tion. (qtd. in Hornby 524)

In the context of our current

it is important to acknowledge the subjugating effects of the

social structure, the social

of realizing and

principle of the oneness of

and the need to transcend racial

tities for a sense of identity

more congruent with modern science and religious scripture. In texts

rang-

and Native Americans, respectively:  
the

tablets penned by Bahá'u'lláh as the

The qualities of heart so richly

possessed by the Negro are much

needed in the world today—their

great capacity for faith, their

82

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.3 2017

the physical unity of humanity as one  
the light of

species, we must bind again with the  
lies

metaphysical verity that the human  
existence,

essence is universally noble, which  
to

means that every human being is de-  
requires

serving of honor, rights, privileges,  
to

and the ability to realize his or her  
transformative

inherent potential—regardless of the  
of

accidents of birth, whether related to  
sociopolitical

skin color, gender, or nationality.  
potent

As a cadre of individuals come to  
recognize their human essence as re-  
flecting the metaphysical unity of  
individuality, godliness, and intercon-  
sensibili-

nectedness with all of humanity, they  
reali-

will naturally seek to collaborate with  
that

the like-minded and channel their  
divorced

agency to effect social change. While  
nor from

they are surrounded and impacted by  
humankind—they

the racialized social structure, their ef-  
subjugating

ing from the Book of Genesis to

nineteenth century came to a close,

human beings have been characterized

as being made in the image of God.

As genomic sciences have validated

by the specter of “race” is

oneness. The source of this light

in the metaphysical plane of

meaning it is both transcendental

our sociopolitical reality and

some form of spiritual education

effectively tap into its

power. The fact that the reality

oneness transcends our

reality makes it an especially

and creative force for attracting hu-

man hearts and building community

from a renewed foundation, free of

racialized assumptions and

ties. As individuals abide in the

ty of oneness—that inner sense

their human reality cannot be

from the Source of all reality,

the reality of all of

will be liberated from the

forts to create change are corollary to influence of the racialized social structure to the point of actively struggling against it and thereby forging bonds with like-minded collaborators to de-racialize society for the sake of both reformatory justice and experiencing a social reality that is more humane. The road will be long, painful, intense, and arduous, but the hope for the sake of our very humanity and the dawn through the power of example. humanity of those who will come after

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 us, “we shall overcome.”

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