

From the Editor's Desk

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From the Editor's Desk residential schools, which in some places remained active well into the 1990s. These schools were devised expressly to break up Indigenous families and communities, separate children from their culture and identity, and destroy languages and cultures.

LINDA S. COVEY AND ROSHAN DANESH
As has become fully apparent to the broader Canadian public only in In 1916 'Abdu'l-Bahá instructed the recent nascent Bahá'í communities of the years, although justified as advancing United States and Canada to "attach civilization, the residential schools great importance to the indigenous were, in fact, utterly pernicious vehipopulation of America" because of cles for systematically imposing physithe unique potential of those peoples cal, psychological, cultural, social, and to "enlighten the whole world" (qtd. spiritual harm. This same realization in Shoghi Effendi, Citadel 16). 'Abdu'l-Bahá penned these words as part of caused the United Stated to pass the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978 and His blueprint for the unfoldment of to gradually cease allotting federal funds to these residential schools. the Divine Plan, which would assist For the small Bahá'í communities in the dissemination of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and the advancement of the of Canada and the United States, fugoal of creating patterns of justice, eled by the core Bahá'í teaching of equality, and peace among all the unity in diversity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's empeoples of the world. phasis on the importance of Indig- enous peoples presented a challenge At the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's mes- to establish a pattern of thought sage, there were no Indigenous Bahá'ís and course of action distinct from that in North America, and Indigenous of the broader society, a plan that had to peoples in Canada and the United States were enduring exceptionally include recognition of the value of egregious treatment. In both coun- diversity and the importance of cultries, colonial oppression, racist laws, ture, love, and inclusion in community

and policies fueled by Social Darwinism, missionary zeal, and disease had Bahá'ís

decimated Indigenous populations and communities and disconnected them from their traditional lands, family share

and community systems, and governmental structures. Far from recognizing the "great importance" of Indigenous peoples to the "whole world,"

expanded both Canada and the United States leadership

continued to establish a network of

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and non-Indigenous Bahá'ís, including Bahá'í leaders such as Amat'ul-Bahá state

Rúhíyyih Khánúm, who traveled to materialism,

meet Indigenous peoples across the Americas on their lands and in their homes. Through these efforts, the unifying message of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation was shared, and the Bahá'ís' greatest

commitment to a new pattern of just have

relations between diverse peoples was of

visibly demonstrated.

Over the past number of decades, in addition to ongoing and strenuous efforts of individual Indigenous and non-Indigenous Bahá'ís, there have been a wide range of institutional 440)

initiatives to create new structures, campaigns, and gatherings aimed at transcouraging and deepening the presence of, respect for, and recognition of radi-

building. This challenge led to an increasing intersection between

and Indigenous peoples in the 1920s and 1930s, including more systematic efforts by Bahá'ís to reach out,

Bahá'u'lláh's message of

and unity, and create a diverse community.

In the 1960s these efforts

massively, sustained by the

and dedication of both Indigenous

It would be impossible to find a nation or people not in a

of crisis today. The

the lack of true religion and the consequent baser forces in human nature which are being released, have brought the whole world to the brink of probably the

crisis it has ever faced or will

to face. The Bahá'ís are a part

the world. They too feel the great

pressures which are brought to bear upon all people today, whoever and wherever they may be. (Letter dated 19 July 1956, qtd. in Lights of Guidance no.

Reflecting on the complexity of forming entrenched patterns,

Effendi further emphasized that

Indigenous peoples within the Bahá'í community. To be clear, in the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith, there is no naïve or simplistic utopian perspective about the challenge faced by society to extricate itself from patterns of oppression and injustice and replace them with relationships based on unity and peace. Such work is slow, arduous, and multi-generational. It requires recognition that while this important work progresses, individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í communities will inevitably be influenced by the broader dynamics and forces in society, even while striving to be guided by and to become compliant with the ideals, standards, and goals set forth in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. As Shoghi Effendi emphasized in 1956:

For these reasons, in their efforts the condition that the world is in, is bringing many issues to a head. From the Editor's Desk

catering racial injustice requires "complete freedom from prejudice," but also demands that society address the reality that racism is pernicious that it can infect "the whole social structure" (Advent 22, 33). Accomplishing this change requires the hard work of transforming mindsets and behaviors. It also necessitates that humankind discover and implement methods for reordering detrimental social and structural patterns and collaborative relationships upheld by a collective vision of justice and ship at the levels of the neighborhood and community life. But this journey toward justice and unity is one of learning, trial and error, and pain.

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encouraged by the Universal House of Justice to recognize that the believers in the must pursue a "wide latitude for action," must be granted "a large margin for mistakes," should recognize that "human beings are not perfect," and in light of these realizations, seek to foster

after 'Abdu'l-Bahá articulated the importance of Indigenous peoples in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. It is also an opportune moment because of broader societal dynamics. For example, in recent years Canada has awakened to the fact that one of

ter encouragement and not succumb to central social, political, cultural, ecoto criticism at the "slightest provocation" (Letter dated 19 May 1994 to a Indigenous National Spiritual Assembly ¶7). Likewise, For these same reasons, having Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples coming together in new ways the to build a community that actualizes Bahá'u'lláh's teachings about unity in diversity engendered, in the process, the expected trials and sacrifice, as well as progress and achievements. The experience of Indigenous peoples within the Bahá'í community, and the Bahá'í community's experience of engaging with Indigenous peoples, has been at times contiguous with predominant patterns seen in society acat large and, at others, drastically different. While there has been conscious striving to infuse a commitment to the spiritual and social imperative of unity—including valuing the distinctiveness and diversity of Indigenous peoples—in efforts at forming new patterns of community life, there have also been complex challenges, such as the need to confront old world order contribpatterns and attitudes.

Journal offer
This special issue of the Journal Bahá'í Studies is a beginning effort to explore some of the complexities peoples.

central social, political, economic, and spiritual of reconciliation between and non-Indigenous peoples. in an ongoing effort to recognize the American Indians and their cultural presence and distinctive history, United States declared 1992 as the "Year of the American Indian" and designated the month of November as National American Indian Month. There is growing global of how essential it is that the approximately four hundred Indigenous peoples be recognized and that their rights as communities, and nations be fully knowledged and respected. The ed Nations Declaration on the of Indigenous Peoples (2007)—now fully endorsed by many countries around the world, including the ed States and of the necessary foundations for full participation of Indigenous peoples in human affairs. It is in this context that the utors in this issue of the a wide range of voices and perspectives on the intersection between Bahá'í Faith and Indigenous

of the history of the intersection Linda Covey's article, based on a
spebetween Indigenous peoples and the cific case study that identifies
critical

Bahá'í Faith. It comes at a particularly outcomes regarding Bahá'í
teaching

propitious moment—exactly a century work among Indigenous
populations,

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provides valuable insights about those about how the history of the North
skill-sets and sensitivities required for American Bahá'í communities might
this important endeavor. Joyce Bald- inform current social discourses
such

win and Alfred Kahn Jr. share their as that of reconciliation.

personal stories, providing us with a Our attention to the experiences
of

window into their lived experience as Indigenous Bahá'ís does not end
with

Indigenous Bahá'ís and conveying the this issue of the Journal:

wisdom and insights derived from de- is being given as to how to support
furcades of dedication to the Covenant of ther contributions that are
specifically

Bahá'u'lláh. Patricia Verge also shares aimed at informing and
influencing

her life experience working to advance local and global public discourses
rereconciliation, drawing on her vast garding Indigenous peoples.

Articles are already in the works that will
expertise as an author who has chron- share

icled pivotal aspects of the history of more on the experience of
Indigenous

Indigenous Bahá'ís. Chelsea Horton Bahá'ís in Canada. As always,
we value

draws on her doctoral work on the your comments and suggestions, and
history of interaction between Indig- we welcome submissions for possible
enous peoples in North America and publication.

the Bahá'í Community as derived from
personal interviews with Indigenous

WORKS CITED

Bahá'ís. Horton's article provides a Shoghi Effendi. The Advent of
historical perspective on the challeng- Divine

es faced by Bahá'ís in actualizing the Justice. Wilmette, IL:
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principle of unity in diversity—les- Publishing Trust, 1971.
sons that can be helpful as the Bahá'í Print.

process of fashioning unity at the lo- ———. Citadel of Faith:

Messages to

cal level proceeds under the guidance
of the Five Year Plan of the Universal
Trust,

House of Justice.

While each article stands alone as a

In

distinct contribution by its author, tak-
Bahá'í

en together they raise interconnected
themes and questions. As such, the
reader is strongly encouraged to read
all the articles, preferably in the order
in which they are published. By ap-
proaching the subject matter this way,
it is hoped that this special issue will
offer perspectives that can assist ongo-
ing efforts at the community level to
advance critical work such as learning
through the institute process, inform
teaching work, and help generate ideas

Members of the Omaha Nation form the first all-Native American
Local Spiritual Assembly in Macy, Nebraska, in 1948.

(Photo courtesy of National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

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