

41 of despair. Nor is it an equivocation or a suggestion that the requirements of divine
42 justice ought to be deferred. Nor is it to say that Bahá'ís have no critical role to play. On
43 the contrary, the concern is with Bahá'í fundamentals, with looking deeply into
44 underlying causes and identifying strategic lines of action which make the wisest use of
45 our limited resources at this point in the development of the Bahá'í community.
46

47 If we are to avoid becoming entrapped in the enervating coils of cynicism
48 which are a characteristic of this age of transition, we must, as the “custodians of... the
49 forces of love”, ground our efforts in indomitable faith. In the future the Cause of God
50 will spread throughout America; millions will be enlisted under its banner and race
51 prejudice will finally be exorcised from the body politic. Of this have no doubt. It is
52 inexorable, because it is the Will of Almighty God. However, as the House of Justice has
53 been trying to get the friends to understand for some time, the necessary precondition to
54 translation of our community’s social vision into reality is a massive expansion in the
55 number of committed, deepened believers who are well-grounded in the essentials of the
56 Cause. Those who fail to comprehend the urgency assigned to the objective of achieving a
57 large expansion have obviously failed to appreciate the moral imperative behind this
58 aim.
59

60 Parallel to the process of large-scale enrollment, the institutions of the Faith,
61 including those at the grassroots of the community, will gradually come to function with
62 greater efficiency and increasing harmony, thereby enhancing their potential in
63 stimulating the processes of social development.

64 (From a letter dated 1 April 1996) [2]
65

66
67 The Universal House of Justice has received your email message of 24 March 1998
68 in which you raise a number of questions concerning race unity in the United States, and
69 we have been instructed to reply as follows.
70

71 The continuing problem of racism remains, as the President of your country has
72 himself indicated in recent months, an issue of fundamental importance for the American
73 people. Given that the problem has been created and reinforced over a period of several
74 hundred years, it is reasonable to suppose that its remediation will occupy the Bahá'í
75 community and the nation of which it is a part for some generations to come.
76

77 Many of your questions relate to the relative seriousness of the race issue as
78 compared to other issues. You ask, for example, whether the building of harmony
79 between the races is still “‘the most vital and challenging issue’ facing the American
80 Bahá'í community”. What is more important to understand is that the achievement of
81 race unity is far from complete. There is little to be gained by trying to invent a precise
82 way of ranking various complex problems such as racism or by attempting to resolve
83 these problems on a piecemeal basis. The piecemeal efforts of those outside of the Bahá'í

84 community who are concerned with the many grievous ills facing humanity have had
85 little lasting success. Their well-meaning endeavors have suffered from a lack of
86 appreciation of the spiritual origin of these illnesses and a lack of understanding that the
87 only lasting solution lies in acceptance of the remedies of the Divine Physician.

88 (From a message dated 20 July 1998) [3]

89
90
91 Your letter touches upon a subject of critical importance to the ultimate success of
92 the Faith and the future of civilization, since it has a direct relevance to the fundamental
93 principle of our Faith: the oneness of humankind. As you know, our beloved Guardian
94 wrote extensively about the need to overcome racial prejudice, which he described as
95 “the most vital and challenging issue” in *The Advent of Divine Justice*. The answers to the
96 questions you have raised can be found in this very book. However, the frustration that
97 you feel over the painfully slow progress of efforts in this regard can be allayed only if
98 you are convinced that adherence to the teachings of our Faith, though only gradually
99 taking effect at first, will ultimately bring about the change you wish for, and if from that
100 conviction you will exercise patience as you continue in your own efforts to assist in
101 remedying the situation. Patience is as important as persistence in the pursuit of these
102 efforts.

103
104 This is not a matter in which any amount of institutional action, however
105 appropriate, can alone produce the desired outcome. Success depends primarily and
106 ultimately on the private and public attitude of individuals, and change in attitude,
107 unfortunately, is often painfully slow. As you are no doubt aware, the National Spiritual
108 Assembly of the United States has, for a number of years, been promoting activities to
109 eliminate racial prejudice both within and without the Bahá’í community, but it will
110 require the genuine response of individuals over time to guarantee the attainment of this
111 goal.

112 (From a letter dated 2 September 2001) [4]

113
114
115 Your moderate and reasoned comments on the social defects posed by racial
116 discrimination in urban United States and their baleful effects on the Bahá’í community
117 set a good tone for discussion of an important subject that is almost always highly
118 charged emotionally. Racial prejudice has been so intractable a problem in your country
119 that achieving the ultimate solution prescribed so clearly in the literature of our Faith is
120 hardly possible in the short run. The principle of the oneness of humankind, which
121 Bahá’u’lláh pronounced as the major theme of His Faith, leaves no doubt that the
122 responsibility devolving on the friends to eliminate this blight from their midst is
123 inescapable and necessary, too, for setting an example that society as a whole can follow.

124
125 During His epic visit to America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá openly expressed His views on the
126 need to eradicate racial prejudice and took bold actions to demonstrate the importance of

166 The Universal House of Justice appreciates your thoughtful inquiry concerning
167 the relationship between eliminating racial prejudice and participating in activities of the
168 Five Year Plan....

169
170 In your letter, you observe that the many activities carried out in the past by the
171 American Bahá'í community to address racial concerns, despite their obvious merit and
172 the results achieved to date, have been limited in their effect and have not been
173 systematic in nature. Your review of such efforts suggests a cyclical pattern, with fits and
174 starts, in which a certain course of action is presented with fanfare by the institutions,
175 many believers take part although others remain on the sidelines, activities reach a peak,
176 and then, after months or perhaps years, attention wanes, and the community is drawn to
177 other areas until some incident occurs or a new heartfelt appeal is uttered, thus beginning
178 the cycle anew. Simply to repeat the approaches implemented in the past, then, will
179 surely not produce a satisfactory result. The House of Justice notes that the pattern you
180 describe was a characteristic common to many facets of community life, leading it, in
181 1996, to set the Bahá'í world on a new course. During the Four Year Plan, it wrote:

182
183 Our hopes, our goals, our possibilities of moving forward can all be
184 realized through concentrating our endeavors on the major aim of the
185 Divine Plan at its current stage—that is, to effect a significant advance in
186 the process of entry by troops. This challenge can be met through
187 persistent effort patiently pursuedBut also of vital importance to
188 bringing about entry by troops is a realistic approach, systematic action.
189 There are no shortcuts. Systematization ensures consistency of lines of
190 action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an
191 orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service, whether in
192 teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavor. While
193 allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to
194 be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious.
195 Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the
196 urgency to act.

197
198 After a decade and a half of systematic effort, a coherent pattern of activity that
199 advances the growth and development of the Bahá'í community and its greater
200 involvement in the life of society has emerged. The current stage of progress and the
201 challenges that lie immediately ahead are summarized in the Ridván 2010 and 28
202 December 2010 messages. From this perspective, it is possible to see how the challenge of
203 addressing racial prejudice is an integral part of three broad areas of activity in which the
204 Bahá'í world is currently engaged: expansion and consolidation, social action, and
205 participation in the discourses of society.

206
207 The pattern of spiritual and social life taking shape in clusters that involves study
208 circles, children's classes, junior youth groups, devotional meetings, home visits, teaching

209 efforts, and reflection meetings, as well as Holy Day observances, Nineteen Day Feasts,
210 and other gatherings, provides abundant opportunities for engagement, experience,
211 consultation, and learning that will lead to change in personal and collective
212 understanding and action. Issues of prejudice of race, class, and color will inevitably arise
213 as the friends reach out to diverse populations, especially in the closely knit context of
214 neighborhoods. There, every activity can take a form most suited to the culture and
215 interests of the population, so that new believers can be quickened and confirmed in a
216 nurturing and familiar environment, until they are able to offer their share to the
217 resolution of the challenges faced by a growing Bahá'í community. For this is not a
218 process that some carry out on behalf of others who are passive recipients—the mere
219 extension of a congregation and invitation to paternalism—but one in which an ever-
220 increasing number of souls recognize and take responsibility for the transformation of
221 humanity set in motion by Bahá'u'lláh. In an environment of love and trust born of
222 common belief, practice, and mission, individuals of different races will have the intimate
223 connection of heart and mind upon which mutual understanding and change depend. As
224 a result of their training and deepening, a growing number of believers will draw
225 insights from the Writings to sensitively and effectively address issues of racial prejudice
226 that arise within their personal lives and families, among community members, and in
227 social settings and the workplace. As programs of growth advance and the scope and
228 intensity of activities grow, the friends will be drawn into participation in conversations
229 and, in time, initiatives for social action at the grassroots where issues pertaining to
230 freedom from prejudice naturally emerge, whether directly or indirectly. And, at the
231 national level, the National Assembly will guide, through its Office of External Affairs,
232 the engagement of the Faith with other agencies and individuals in the discourse
233 pertaining to race unity.

234
235 You indicate that some friends wonder whether the Guardian's statement
236 characterizing racial prejudice as "the most vital and challenging issue confronting the
237 Bahá'í community at the present stage of its evolution" still applies to the racial situation
238 in the United States, since it was written so long ago. The House of Justice has
239 determined that it is not productive to approach the issue in this manner, as it gives rise
240 to an implicit and false dichotomy that, either what the Guardian said is no longer
241 important, or it is so important that it must be addressed before or apart from all other
242 concerns. Yet, the situation is infinitely more complex. The American nation is much
243 more diverse than in 1938, and the friends cannot be concerned only with relations
244 between black and white, essential as they are. The expressions of racial prejudice have
245 transmuted into forms that are multifaceted, less blatant and more intricate, and thus
246 more intractable. So too, the American Bahá'í community has evolved significantly and is
247 no longer at the same stage of its development; it faces a wider range of challenges but
248 also possesses greater capabilities. The House of Justice stated that the principles Shoghi
249 Effendi brought to the attention of the American believers more than seventy years ago
250 are relevant today, and they will continue to be relevant to future generations. It is
251 obvious, however, that the "long and thorny road, beset with pitfalls" upon which the

252 friends must tread, will take them through an ever-changing landscape that requires that
253 they adapt their approaches to varying circumstances.

254

255 In the 28 December message, the House of Justice explained that “A small
256 community, whose members are united by their shared beliefs, characterized by
257 their high ideals, proficient in managing their affairs and tending to their needs, and
258 perhaps engaged in several humanitarian projects—a community such as this, prospering
259 but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity, can
260 never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society.” Even if such a
261 community were to focus the entirety of its resources on the problem of racial prejudice,
262 even if it were able to heal itself to some extent of that cancerous affliction, in the face of
263 such a monumental social challenge the impact would be inconsequential. Therefore, the
264 friends must effectively assess the forces at work in their society and, beginning in
265 neighborhoods and clusters, contribute their share to the process of learning and
266 systematization which, as their numbers, knowledge, and influence grow, will transform
267 their lives, families, and communities. Only if the efforts to eradicate the bane of
268 prejudice are coherent with the full range of the community’s affairs, only if they arise
269 naturally within the systematic pattern of expansion, community building, and
270 involvement with society, will the American believers expand their capacity, year after
271 year and decade after decade, to make their mark on their community and society and
272 contribute to the high aim set for the Bahá’ís by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to eliminate racial prejudice
273 from the face of the earth.

274

275 It is the ardent hope of the Universal House of Justice that the believers will
276 appreciate the potentialities that exist within the current pattern of their organic activities
277 for the realization of Bahá’u’lláh’s highest aims for humanity and that they will seize
278 their chance and commit their time, their resources, their energies—indeed their very
279 lives—to these critical efforts for the betterment of the world.

280 (From a letter dated 10 April 2011)

[7]

281

282

283 Surely, racial prejudice has for too long stained the fabric of life in the United
284 States, and although the Bahá’í community has made enormous strides in the past
285 century, like in so many other aspects of the Teachings, the response of the believers to
286 this challenge has not yet reached the expectations ‘Abdu’l-Bahá held for them. While
287 Shoghi Effendi clearly expressed that the solution to this problem rests with both races, it
288 cannot be denied that any failure or lessening of effort in redressing the problem within
289 the framework for the social and administrative affairs of the community has its most
290 immediate and negative consequences on the minority, as the majority can lapse into the
291 unconscious state the Guardian warned them against. The House of Justice well
292 appreciates that, for a Bahá’í, the injuries arising from one’s interactions with a fellow
293 believer can be especially painful.

294 The guidance provided to the friends by the beloved Guardian and the Universal
295 House of Justice offers a clear way forward. As you know, Shoghi Effendi, in his
296 masterful discourse in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, gives African American and
297 white Bahá'ís detailed instructions as to their respective responsibilities in combating
298 racial prejudice. “A tremendous effort”, he emphasized, “is required by both races if their
299 outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and
300 teachings of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.” “Let neither think”, he added, “that such a problem
301 can either easily or immediately be resolved.” Each person, of whatever race or
302 background, was called upon to take the initiative and not allow what he perceives to be
303 the shortcomings of his fellow believers to be the cause of his becoming apathetic or
304 vindictive. By responding to the situation within the spiritual framework the Guardian
305 has devised, one's actions may be imbued with the spirit of the Faith, thus making them
306 potent instruments for effecting a change in the hearts of those who have inherited
307 attitudes tainted by racial prejudice.

308
309 Beyond this spiritual orientation to combatting racial prejudice with which the
310 friends in the United States are well familiar, the House of Justice has in recent years
311 attempted to bring to the attention of those who long to eradicate the blight of racism—
312 and especially the African American believers—the potentialities for transformation
313 inherent in the systematic implementation of the instruments and methods of the current
314 series of Plans.... As the friends pursue their efforts to promote growth and community
315 building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society, they will over time
316 work increasingly with other well-meaning people to eliminate these and other problems
317 that have so bedeviled the world. A profound illustration of the possibilities this
318 approach holds is found in the video *Frontiers of Learning*, commissioned by the House of
319 Justice and available on the website www.bahai.org/frontiers. It describes how the
320 translation of the teachings into processes of community building in some of the most
321 advanced clusters is beginning to address deep-seated social ills. An example cited is the
322 Bihar Sharif cluster of India, where the centuries-old oppressive caste system is gradually
323 being dismantled at the grassroots. As the video shows, communities are learning to mix
324 without regard to caste, and a mother states with profound conviction that she will never
325 tell her child into which caste he was born so that he will feel neither inferior nor superior
326 to another soul. The House of Justice longs to hear of bold action being taken by the
327 friends in the United States, who, by implementing the essential activities of the Five Year
328 Plan and utilizing the spiritually transformative power of the training institute, begin to
329 uproot racial prejudice in their neighborhoods.

330
331 ‘Abdu'l-Bahá made it clear that those who steadfastly strive to promote the
332 oneness of humanity will endure hardship and injustice, and He taught that to be
333 wronged and oppressed in the path of God is a divine gift, for it is a characteristic of the
334 Manifestations of God. “And since the Ancient Beauty was exposed by day and night on
335 the field of martyrdom,” He counseled, “let us in our turn labor hard, and hear and
336 ponder the counsels of God; let us fling away our lives, and renounce our brief and

337 numbered days. Let us turn our eyes away from empty fantasies of this world’s divergent
338 forms, and serve instead this preeminent purpose, this grand design.” You are
339 encouraged to take heart from the Master’s assurance that racial prejudice will one day be
340 eliminated from the face of the earth, although as the Guardian explained, the road to be
341 travelled will be “long and thorny” and “beset with pitfalls”. In summoning us to the
342 great work of creating anew the world, Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us to adhere to a standard of
343 conduct which He, Himself, so nobly exemplified:

344
345 Adorn thyself with My virtues, in such wise that should anyone
346 stretch forth the hand of oppression against thee, thou wouldst neither
347 take notice nor contend with him. Leave him to the judgment of thy Lord,
348 the All-Powerful, the Almighty, the Self-Subsisting, and be thou long-
349 suffering under all conditions. By God! This is one of Mine attributes,
350 though none but the sincere are apprised of it. Know thou then that the
351 patient sighs of the oppressed are dearer to God than all deeds, could ye
352 but comprehend it. Be patient in whatsoever may befall thee, and put thy
353 trust in God, thy Lord, in all thine affairs. He, verily, doth suffice thee
354 against the harm inflicted by all that have been and shall be, and doth
355 protect thee within the shelter of His Cause and the stronghold of His
356 custody.

357 (From a letter dated 27 March 2014)

[8]

358
359

360 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 2 October
361 2017 in which you share your experiences and concerns regarding the American Bahá’í
362 community and the issue of racism....

363

364 The House of Justice appreciates your thoughtful comments and admires your
365 unflagging efforts over many years to address the challenge of racism in your nation,
366 particularly at a time of its overt resurgence in a manner that would justifiably give rise
367 to despair even in the stoutest heart. However discouraging the present events, however
368 outrageous the injustices laid bare, however intractable the problem appears, such fresh
369 evidences of this pernicious blight on American society can come as no surprise to those
370 friends well informed of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s dire warnings as well as Shoghi Effendi’s
371 trenchant analysis anticipating the ultimate eradication of this evil tendency from the
372 lives and the hearts of their fellow citizens. How much more must people endure in the
373 years ahead? The current polarization in American society makes constructive dialogue
374 and action ever more elusive. Even those fair-minded individuals who long to free
375 themselves and their society from this problem—surely a vast portion of the nation—are
376 paralyzed and divided by their divergent views, unable to create the unity necessary to
377 advance along the path of constructive change.

378 It is in this context that the friends must understand their sacred obligation and
379 the possibilities that lie before them. As you have observed, since the time of ‘Abdu’l-
380 Bahá’s visit to the United States Bahá’ís have, whether individually or collectively, by
381 themselves or in collaboration with others, been continually involved in diverse efforts to
382 address prejudice and racism and build bonds and practices of racial accord. Such efforts,
383 though sincere and even sacrificial, have yet to be raised to a level of systematic
384 endeavor necessary for profound and lasting social change....

385
386 Among the important lessons garnered over the past two decades is that, by
387 focusing on insights derived from the most advanced and successful activities rather than
388 by focusing on shortcomings and weaknesses, the community can come to understand
389 what constitutes effective action and learn to disseminate the knowledge gained. Another
390 lesson is how to approach the development of human resources in a manner that can
391 efficiently multiply efforts and empower those who were previously left on the margins,
392 or were otherwise unengaged, to become protagonists of a process of community
393 building and social change. Therefore, it is not necessary at this time to propagate in
394 the community a separate program centered on addressing racial prejudice before
395 progress is possible, nor is there a need to remove one by one all the obstacles you
396 describe before dynamic efforts can be established in a single community or
397 neighborhood that can, once proven to be effective, be widely replicated. Consider, for
398 example, the development of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Years
399 ago, it was a mere concept; today it reaches hundreds of thousands and is having a
400 profound impact on the villages, neighborhoods, islands, and schools where it is being
401 vigorously implemented. This capacity for social transformation, increasingly being
402 realized in the most advanced clusters, encompasses not just the work of community
403 building but also the engagement of the believers, both in the discourses of society in all
404 accessible social spaces as well as in projects of social and economic development.

405
406 The 25 February 2017 letter of your National Assembly written following
407 consultations held at the Bahá’í World Centre is not intended simply to express a
408 renewed concern with the challenges of race in your society and certainly not to
409 introduce a new set of activities. It is a commitment to a path of systematic action and
410 learning, involving community building, social action, and participation in the discourses
411 of society, from which the community will never withdraw until the problems of race are
412 completely resolved, no matter how long and difficult the path may be. Already your
413 National Assembly is aware of the strivings of thousands of friends who, like yourself,
414 are engaged in initiatives of varying scope and effectiveness along these lines; through
415 systematization and learning there is every confidence that, as each year goes by, we will
416 understand the issues involved more deeply, act more effectively, and enlarge the circle
417 of those with whom we are engaged.

418
419 The House of Justice hopes that those friends in the United States who resolve to
420 renew their commitment to uprooting racism and laying the basis for a society that

421 reflects interracial harmony can draw insight and inspiration from the unwavering
422 resolve of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The messages written to the friends there in recent years,
423 most of which have been translated into English and are publicly available, are
424 instructive in this regard. For almost two centuries, and particularly the last four decades
425 of relentless oppression, the Bahá'ís in Iran have remained forward-looking, dynamic,
426 vibrant, and committed to serving Iranian society. They have refused to allow
427 apprehension and anxiety to take hold or let any calamity perturb their hearts. They have
428 drawn on the highest reservoirs of solidarity and collaboration and responded to
429 oppression with constructive resilience, eschewing despair, surrender, resentment, and
430 hate and transcending mere survival, to transform conditions of ignorance and prejudice
431 and win the respect and collaboration of their fair-minded countrymen. Those believers
432 in the United States who have labored so persistently to promote race unity, especially
433 the African American friends, should appreciate in their own efforts over the years the
434 same expression of constructive resilience, born of their great love for Bahá'u'lláh, and
435 see in the recent turmoil opportunity rather than obstacle. They cannot, as you know,
436 respond to the current reality in the manner consuming most of their fellow citizens; they
437 must, by word and by deed, elevate the existing conversation and set in motion
438 constructive approaches that will prove ever more effective over time. Shoghi Effendi has
439 explained that such problems as are now being witnessed are inevitable as the process of
440 disintegration advances. "All humanity", a letter written on his behalf observes, "is
441 disturbed and suffering and confused; we cannot expect to not be disturbed and not to
442 suffer—but we don't have to be confused." The way forward has never been clearer,
443 particularly with the new initiative of your National Assembly to organize these matters
444 within the proven framework for action guiding the Bahá'í world's systematic endeavors.

445 (From a letter dated 4 February 2018)

446 [9]

447

448 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of... and its
449 enclosures, as well as amended versions of the letter sent on... and..., wherein you
450 primarily seek guidance on the issues of race unity and advancing the process of entry by
451 troops. We have been asked to convey the following.

452

453 The House of Justice appreciates your deep interest and commitment to these
454 issues, concerning which you have on several prior occasions raised questions and
455 received its guidance--in letters dated..., ..., ..., and... written to you on its behalf. The
456 House of Justice feels, however, that most of the insights you seek may be gleaned from
457 the guidance already provided to you and to other believers in the United States.
458 Enclosed^[1], then, for your careful study and reflection is a compilation entitled
459 "Achieving Race Unity and Advancing the Process of Entry by Troops", which consists of
460 extracts from letters written on behalf of the House of Justice to believers in your country
461 on these issues.

462 As you consider the guidance contained in these extracts, it will be helpful to keep
463 a few fundamental points in mind. The House of Justice feels that the American believers'
464 pursuit of the double crusade "to regenerate the inward life of their own community"
465 and "to assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their
466 nation" is something carried out as the friends execute their responsibilities for the Five
467 Year Plan and is not something pursued apart from the Plan. In the same light, there is no
468 program or special intervention that, if undertaken by the Bahá'í community, will free it
469 from the challenge of racial prejudice as a first step before it can attempt to carry out
470 successful efforts for the progress of the Faith. Rather, the capabilities of the believers to
471 address the issues of racism afflicting themselves, their families, their communities, and
472 the wider society will be cultivated hand in hand with other capabilities needed to
473 advance the process of entry by troops as they learn to systematically pursue their efforts
474 of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society. In the
475 *Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi states:

476
477 Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a
478 time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling
479 a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the
480 entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in
481 whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and
482 habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their
483 activity and life, whether in the Bahá'í community or outside it, in public
484 or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their
485 official capacity as organized groups, committees and Assemblies. It
486 should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday
487 opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves,
488 whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges,
489 their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings,
490 conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies.

491
492 Here, the Guardian is calling for the friends to address the question of race unity
493 as a part of life in all of the social spaces in which they are engaged, and, similarly, the
494 House of Justice is now saying that freedom from racial prejudice must be the watchword
495 of Bahá'ís in the social spaces in which they are engaged for the activities of the Plan. In
496 such intimate settings, people of diverse racial backgrounds encounter the Word of God,
497 and in their efforts to translate the Teachings into practical action, are able to generate
498 bonds of love, affection, and unity, and to learn what it means to establish a true
499 interracial fellowship that is powerful enough to overcome the forces of racism that afflict
500 them and their society. Currently, among the Bahá'ís of the United States, race unity is a
501 dimension of the work of community building in scores of clusters, of social action in
502 hundreds of efforts of various levels of complexity, and of involvement in the discourses
503 of society by thousands of believers in various settings. The House of Justice is confident
504 that these endeavors will become more systematic, more widespread, and more effective

505 as the learning process already set in motion by your National Spiritual Assembly is
506 persistently pursued by the believers in greater numbers. Parallel with this, of course, is
507 the effort of the National Assembly to engage at the national level in the discourse
508 concerning race. In the same way as the other activities of the Plan, every challenge the
509 community faces in the work of race unity will be overcome as capacity is raised among
510 an expanding group of friends in each cluster through learning and systematic action.

511
512 Two additional points are offered for your consideration. As the Ridván 2010
513 message of the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world states:

514
515 ...understanding the implications of the Revelation, both in terms of
516 individual growth and social progress, increases manifold when study and
517 service are joined and carried out concurrently. There, in the field of
518 service, knowledge is tested, questions arise out of practice, and new
519 levels of understanding are achieved.

520
521 The concept of the relationship of study and service clearly has relevance to the issues of
522 promoting race unity and the growth of the Faith. The friends should study the Bahá'í
523 writings on the subject of eliminating racial prejudice and familiarize themselves with the
524 communications of the House of Justice on the current framework of action for growth.
525 But study must be accompanied by action.

526
527 Moreover, obviously, the institutions of the Faith have an important role to play
528 in promoting unity, and the House of Justice is pleased with the initiative your National
529 Assembly has undertaken to assist the friends to understand how the framework for
530 action of the Plan enables individuals, communities, and institutions to address,
531 profoundly, the fragmentation in your nation that has been steadily intensifying in recent
532 years, including on matters of race. However, it is, in the words of the beloved Guardian,
533 “the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire
534 community.” Therefore, the House of Justice encourages you to turn your attention away
535 from what you believe are the inadequacies—real or perceived—of Bahá'í institutions in
536 addressing the issues of concern to you and instead focus your spiritual and intellectual
537 energies on the contribution that you, as an individual believer, can directly offer in
538 service to the people in your immediate surroundings. It is hoped that you will advance
539 in your own efforts with some like-minded friends in your local area to pursue
540 your noble aims and to test and refine your ideas in practical action, raising up in turn
541 others who will recognize Bahá'u'lláh and devote themselves to this vital work....

542 (From a letter dated 6 August 2018) [10]

543
544 ^[1]*The original compilation, titled “Achieving Race Unity and Advancing the Process of*
545 *Entry by Troops,” was distributed to the community on 6 September 2018 for the Feast of*
546 *‘Izzat.*

547 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 8 Sharaf 174 (6
548 January 2018) in which you convey your concern that what Shoghi Effendi termed “the
549 double crusade” is not being addressed by the American Bahá’í community and ask why
550 the House of Justice has not raised this subject. The House of Justice appreciates the
551 sincerity and candor with which you have set forth your views and your request for a
552 frank reply. It has asked us to respond as follows.

553

554 Your desire to be faithful to the beloved Guardian’s guidance to the American
555 Bahá’í community is unquestioned. However, it appears that some of the challenges you
556 have faced in relating that guidance to the present activities of the Bahá’í community may
557 be due to a very particular conception of what the double crusade means, how it relates
558 to the current series of Plans of the Faith, and what should be done to carry it out. As you
559 will recall, in *The Advent of Divine Justice* Shoghi Effendi summons American believers to
560 a double crusade—“first to regenerate the inward life of their own community, and next
561 to assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their
562 nation.” To attain these objectives he considers three weapons necessary: “A rectitude of
563 conduct which, in all its manifestations, offers a striking contrast to the deceitfulness and
564 corruption that characterize the political life of the nation and of the parties and factions
565 that compose it; a holiness and chastity that are diametrically opposed to the moral laxity
566 and licentiousness which defile the character of a not inconsiderable proportion of its
567 citizens; [and] an interracial fellowship completely purged from the curse of racial
568 prejudice which stigmatizes the vast majority of its people ...”

569

570 The above summary in *The Advent of Divine Justice* appears after Shoghi Effendi’s
571 in-depth and trenchant analysis, supported by numerous passages from the Writings of
572 Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, of each of the American Bahá’í community’s three
573 essential prerequisites of success. A careful study of the Guardian’s discussion, including
574 the passages he cites, reveals the fundamentally spiritual nature of the concepts and
575 approaches he wishes American believers to understand and carry out. He refers to the
576 “spiritual prerequisites of success”; “the imponderable, the spiritual, factors, which are
577 bound up with their own individual and inner lives, and with which are associated their
578 human and social relationships”; and “those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of
579 moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of
580 spiritual insight”. A small sampling of the many excerpts Shoghi Effendi quotes in
581 support of his argument further confirms that matters of the spirit are at the core of what
582 he wished Bahá’ís to consider. In relation to rectitude of conduct, the following passage
583 from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh is among many included: “The purpose of the one true
584 God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to
585 piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to
586 forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man
587 with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and

588 goodly deeds.” In the discussion of a chaste and holy life, one finds these words of
589 Bahá’u’lláh: “O ye the beloved of the one true God! Pass beyond the narrow retreats of
590 your evil and corrupt desires, and advance into the vast immensity of the realm of God,
591 and abide ye in the meads of sanctity and of detachment, that the fragrance of your deeds
592 may lead the whole of mankind to the ocean of God’s unfading glory.” And in regard to
593 freedom from racial prejudice, there appears this statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Naught but
594 the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of
595 all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and
596 convictions of the children of men.”

597
598 In a letter dated 8 December 1935 written on his behalf to an individual believer,
599 Shoghi Effendi stated: “The universal crisis affecting mankind is... essentially spiritual in
600 its causes.” More recently, the House of Justice has observed: “The Bahá’í community
601 encourages and supports the manifold efforts being made by people of goodwill to better
602 the condition of humankind and promote unity and harmony among the peoples and
603 nations of the earth. However, the believers should never, for even one moment, lose
604 sight of the fact that the crisis now engulfing every part of the planet is essentially
605 spiritual.” If the crisis afflicting humanity is spiritual, can there be any question that its
606 solution must also be spiritual? Is it any wonder that Shoghi Effendi referred to the
607 “spiritual” prerequisites for success? Must not that same focus on spiritual truths and
608 principles lie at the heart of the current series of Plans of the Faith? What else but the
609 Word of God can spiritually ennoble, educate, and inspire souls to address the needs of
610 the time? As the House of Justice has explained, the Word of God is at the center of the
611 Bahá’í community’s current endeavors: “Central to the pattern of action evolving in a
612 cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the
613 Word of God.” In study circles, participants are introduced to the study of the Word of
614 God, consider its application and implications, and enter into a lifelong immersion in it,
615 which will shape their knowledge, volition, and action; in children’s classes, children
616 memorize and learn about the Word of God; in the junior youth program, young people
617 explore and are empowered by concepts found in the Word of God; and in devotional
618 meetings, attendees recite and are inspired by the Word of God. Even in the Bahá’í
619 community’s other areas of focus—projects and activities for social action and
620 involvement in the discourses of society—the Word of God offers insights for addressing
621 the issues facing society and contributing to its social and economic betterment.

622
623 Thus, thoughtful consideration of the features of the current series of Plans
624 reveals that their core is fundamentally spiritual—aimed at transforming the individual
625 and society through exposure to the spirit of and concepts in the Word of God. This aim
626 is the essence of the double crusade, as the text of *The Advent of Divine Justice* reveals. In
627 addition, the theme of the three spiritual prerequisites for success identified by Shoghi
628 Effendi was explicitly addressed in the Ridván 2008 message of the House of Justice to
629 the Bahá’ís of the world. More than two full pages of the 28 December 2010 message of
630 the House of Justice that introduced the previous Five Year Plan were devoted to an

631 exploration of the spiritual prerequisites for success. And yet again, the same theme was
632 highlighted in the 26 March 2016 message of the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the
633 United States and of Canada. The suggestion that the House of Justice has not made
634 reference to the issue of the double crusade is incorrect.

635
636 One more point of clarification may be helpful. Your letter appears to imply that
637 the American Bahá'í community has not been doing anything to address the double
638 crusade, as evidenced by your perception that Bahá'ís are not sufficiently involved in
639 movements and activities that seek to bring about social justice. The House of Justice has
640 explained that in situations which do not involve partisan politics Bahá'ís may participate
641 in efforts to change social policy. Bahá'ís do engage with others in the wider society to
642 this end as part of a broad and coherent pattern of action. But as the House of Justice
643 explained many years ago:

644
645 To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils
646 in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life
647 is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the
648 spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely created World
649 Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see
650 the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and
651 progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which
652 have so long bedeviled the world.

653
654 There are many well-meaning people who are striving to improve society by
655 fighting its evils, which usually means contending against individuals, groups, or
656 institutions who are seen as oppressive, unjust, or corrupt. Yet no matter how high-
657 minded a particular cause might be, if it is advanced through contention and
658 confrontation, it merely provokes and intensifies the flame of a countermovement
659 initiated by others who act on what they consider to be their own high-minded beliefs.
660 Real solutions remain elusive. The cycle of contention continues without end, with one
661 group after the other seizing enough power to implement its views before becoming
662 overcome by those in opposition. One need only look to the endless mutations of racist
663 oppression over hundreds of years, adapting so as to undermine every social advance in
664 that area.

665
666 In the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, Bahá'u'lláh states: "Conflict and contention are categorically
667 forbidden in His Book". Therefore, Bahá'ís must not allow themselves to be drawn into
668 the struggles and conflicting interests that divide many factions and groups of humanity.
669 While we should not be idle in addressing social ills as the process of disintegration
670 accelerates, our aim is not to choose sides in contentious social debates simply to
671 proclaim what we believe to be right. Rather the object of our participation is to learn to
672 elevate discourse and improve practice as we work with others in the search for effective
673 solutions. It is through understanding, sharing, and transforming into practical action the

674 distinctly spiritual and social teachings of the Faith that we can offer our greatest
675 contribution to the betterment of society and to the eventual elimination of those evil
676 tendencies decried by the Guardian: the object of the double crusade.
677

678 In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi refers to the arenas, private and
679 public, in which believers are called on to fulfill the spiritual prerequisites of success: “a
680 high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute
681 chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings
682 with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.” Similarly, the House of Justice is
683 now asking the friends to bring such considerations to bear in the countless spaces they
684 have been creating—through their engagement in the Five Year Plan—in the activities for
685 community-building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society. It is this,
686 rather than the introduction of any particular program into the Bahá’í community or its
687 more extensive participation in any specific movement in the wider society, that will
688 ensure the Guardian’s ultimate aims for its destiny and the destiny of the nation of which
689 it is a part. Enclosed^[2] for your consideration is an extract from a letter sent to another
690 believer on this topic.
691

692 Far from a retreat from the double crusade into passivity, this approach calls for
693 tireless and sacrificial effort. It is not confined to words but calls for systematic action and
694 for learning to foster greater capabilities. It is not satisfied with an expression of contempt
695 for injustice or for a temporary alleviation that can be swept away in the next generation
696 but demands nothing less than the profound and lasting transformation of the social
697 order.
698

699 The House of Justice suggests that by prayerfully considering the ideas discussed
700 in this letter, by re-examining the Guardian’s words in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, by
701 carefully studying the messages of the House of Justice concerning the current series of
702 Plans, and by wholeheartedly dedicating yourself to acting on their provisions, you can
703 resolve the perceived challenges that have been of concern to you. Rest assured of the
704 supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you may be sustained by
705 the unfailing grace of the Blessed Beauty as you strive to contribute your share to the
706 present stage of the double crusade described by the beloved Guardian.

707 (From a letter dated 10 August 2018)

[11]

708

709 ^[2]*The enclosure referred to is excerpted from the letter dated 6 August 2018, which is*
710 *selection [10] in this compilation.*

711

712

713 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letters dated... and...
714 raising concerns about how the guidance of the House of Justice regarding matters of
715 race in America may be reconciled with statements appearing in the writings. We have
716 been asked to convey the following.

717 The House of Justice regrets that your concerns have not been resolved through
718 its reply to the questions raised in your previous communications. Although it is evident
719 you wish to have an explicit “yes” or “no” answer to your question about the Guardian’s
720 statement regarding “the most vital and challenging issue”, the House of Justice has tried
721 to make it clear that such a simple “yes” or “no” would be misleading and unproductive.
722 What it has asked the friends to do, in their efforts to live a Bahá’í life and contribute to
723 the current stage of the Divine Plan, is to give practical expression to the guidance of
724 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to remove every trace of the evil tendency of racial
725 prejudice from themselves and their society. Obviously, to the extent that the friends
726 apply the Guardian’s guidance concerning the three spiritual prerequisites to their
727 personal behavior and collective endeavors, the more effective they will be. But the
728 concept of “prerequisites” does not mean that the friends cannot take any other action
729 until these three requirements are completely fulfilled.
730

731 Further insight into your question may be gained by considering how Shoghi
732 Effendi himself treated the issue of race in the context of the plans of the Faith following
733 his declarations in *The Advent of Divine Justice*. As you are surely aware, the letter that has
734 come to be known as *The Advent of Divine Justice* was written in 1938 during the first
735 Seven Year Plan. It was in that communication that Shoghi Effendi wrote that racial
736 prejudice “should be regarded as constituting the most vital and challenging issue
737 confronting the Bahá’í community at the present stage of its evolution.” After the
738 conclusion of the first Seven Year Plan, the Guardian called upon the American Bahá’í
739 community to inaugurate the second Seven Year Plan. In turn, the second Seven Year
740 Plan was succeeded by the Ten Year Plan, which was launched in 1953. During the
741 second Seven Year Plan and the Ten Year Plan, the Guardian’s general communications
742 about the community’s teaching plans never reiterated that eliminating racial prejudice
743 was “the most vital and challenging” issue facing American believers. Indeed, the
744 elimination of racial prejudice was never an explicit goal of either of these major plans
745 that followed the first Seven Year Plan. Was this because the American Bahá’í community
746 had already resolved the racial question? Was it because elimination of racial prejudice
747 no longer mattered? Were the goals set forth in the Guardian’s subsequent plans in
748 conflict with the statements he had made during the first Seven Year Plan? The obvious
749 answer to all of these questions is “no”. Believers needed to carry out the goals of the
750 second Seven Year Plan and the Ten Year Crusade while still being mindful of the earlier
751 guidance Shoghi Effendi had provided in 1938.
752

753 Thus, there was no dichotomy between the Guardian’s earlier guidance on race
754 and the focus of the teaching plans that constituted his subsequent stages of the execution
755 of the Divine Plan. The same holds true today. The House of Justice does not wish to
756 detract one iota from the profundity and importance with which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and
757 Shoghi Effendi have invested the issue of the elimination of racial prejudice. At the same
758 time, the Faith has grown in size and capacity, and the circumstances surrounding the

759 issue of race in the United States continue to mutate into new malignant forms. The
760 American Bahá'í community is no longer "incapable... of producing any marked effect on
761 the great mass of their countrymen..." Through their efforts to understand and apply the
762 teachings about race unity and freedom from prejudice in the context of the current series
763 of Plans, will they propel themselves along the path to "the time", anticipated by Shoghi
764 Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, "when they will be called upon to eradicate in their
765 turn such evil tendencies from the lives and the hearts of the entire body of their fellow-
766 citizens."

(From a letter dated 4 March 2020)

[12]