

# Baha'i Doctrine Attracts Non-whites

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Baha'i doctrine attracts non-white:

I  
By James S. Tinney House of Justice. Mitchell, a Jamaican-born American citizen who know who they are, and they realize  
In many ways, Baha'is (pronounced bah-hi) seem to be ahead of that Black is a wonderful thing to be, taught at Howard University prior to but never in opposition to any other  
the times. They preach a radical equality between men and women serving 14 years of the National Spiri- color."  
Unlike some Eastern religions that has earned them persecution in international headquarters in Haifa, Israel, which seem to negate individuality  
Third World countries unwilling to and all race consciousness (and the give women full rights. And they not was tortured and died a prisoner of that it at only proclaim racial equality and the  
end of prejudice as a lofty goal, they He was preceded by Amos Gibson, a work to make it so.

religions), the Baha'i faith does not Washington, D.C.-born educator who spent most of his adult life on American Indian reservations, an unusual of heritage and racial pride in some kind of colorless integration.

I

expect Black followers to lose a sense of

sight for many to behold - a Black

man devoted to full time im-

diversity.

provement of the status of First

ex-

Americans. But that is as typical of

non-Black

Baha'i followers as anything. They

have a vision larger than concrete

"We believe in unity with

We do not believe in uniformity,"

explains Brady. "If I have

Baha'is in my home, I don't serve

them a Caesar salad. I serve

smothspaces and they regard the entire world as their home, not just a parish. They live out their lives as members of an international order that envi- Similarly, Brady believes that Basions the coming of one world govern- ha'is are best equipped to deal with While many Christians just talk ment. white people in truly mutual, self-reabout it, Baha'is do it. Consequently, Baha'is may not number very many specting fashion. She says : "I didn't this world faith which began in the heads, as far as counting goes, but have to learn how to deal with white 19th century in what is now Iran, has they are not newcomers to the reli- people, because growing up in a Bagreat appeal for those Black Ameri- gious scene. Take Dr. 'Wilma Brady, ha'i home, I had been around white cans who seek a truly international for example. A member of the faith people, and people from every counapproach to religion that is perhaps who lives in Atlanta, Brady prides try, all of my life. " the most racially integrated of any herself on the fact that she belongs to This national Baha'i figure sums up faith on American soil. The Baha'i faith boasts that more than 30 percent of.4 its members in the a four-generation family of Baha 'is. Not only were her mother and father converts to the faith (they joined her sense of racial pride by saying, "I teach my little babies spirituals. I love the blues. I love being who I am. I in the '30s) , but her son and grandchil- And it's all all right." U.S . are Afro-Am hican. Only one or dren are also. Brady is one of the People join this religion for many ' two other denominations can make three Black members of the National reasons. And all kinds and sorts of I similar claims - among them, most Spiritual Assembly ; her son, Dr. Rob- people join. Even among Black Ba- ' notably, the Seventh Day Adventists. ert Henderson of Atlanta, is another. ha'is, there is no one kind of back- But the Baha'is additionally can In fact, this marks the first time that ground that seems more attracted to claim that the remaining 70 percent is a mother-son combination has ever the faith. not mostly-white either. It is, instead. served together on that panel.

Barbara Eaton Bond, a member of  
mostly composed of people of color " In the beginning, it was a  
struggle the Local Spiritual Assembly in Washand of Third World origin.  
to live up to the faith ," she says. " But ington, D.C ., was  
a single parent, di-  
Take the chief governing body of after a brief period of rebellion as a  
vorded, with four little children, when  
the 100,000 adherents here in the U.S. youth, I came back to the Baha'i  
faith she decided to become a follower. For  
This top-level administration, known at the age of 15. I couldn 't stay  
away . I her, it was the writings of Baha'u'llah  
as the National Spiritual Assembly, missed the freedom and liberty that  
that attracted her, especially the two  
has nine members, all of whom jointly comes from knowing who you are as a  
chief books by the founder: the Book  
share equal rank. Their nationalities? Black person. The Baha 'i faith  
tea- of Laws and the Book of Certitude. " I  
They include an American Indian, an ches you that - but never defines  
stayed up half the night reading those  
Asian-American, an Iranian - or Blackness simply in reaction to  
some books, even though I had to get up ear-  
Persian, as Baha'is are still wont to other racial or ethnic group.' '  
ly the next morning to go to work."  
say - three white Americans and For Brady, who has reared seven  
Someone might get the impression  
three Blacks. children, all of whom are also now  
that most Blacks who join represent a  
Until last year, the entire work in practicing this religion, the Baha'i  
well-heeled middle-class with the  
this country was directed by another faith is especially important for  
Black built-in advantages of a good educa-  
Black Baha 'i member, Glenford children defining their own sense  
of tion. Not so, say Baha' is. On the other  
Mitchell. who has since been elevated identity, and for all Black people  
who hand, there is something about the rehy popular vote to become a  
spiritual seek to love themselves at the same ligion's emphasis  
on universal com-  
-servant " nn the worldwide govern- time they love everyone else. "  
Little pulsory education - meaning  
a nce unit known as the Internationai Black children in Baha' i families  
everybody at all times must be a  
~- .J,

National Leader Octobe'r 20, 1983 Carolina town to another,  
Deas has al~  
most singlehandedly carved out th  
"BAHA'I DOCTRINE .\TTRACTS NON-WHITES" ( con) territory for her

religion. Her conversion to this religion came after years of searching and trying first the Baptist, then the Presbyterian, and even- tually the Episcopalian denominations. "I've been a searcher for truth and a learner of God's progressive revelation - that brings people to a higher level of educational achievement that they might attain. But now she believes she has found what she not have otherwise been motivated to attain. Of course, this is attractive to both . . . the formally education and the self- dedicated. No wonder, then, that famous Black Baha'i members include Louis Gre- Robert Abbott, the founder of the Chicago American to whom her school is named. convert to the faith in 1922. A Fisk graduate, he earned a Howard law degree and then went to work for the Treasury Department before finally traveling to Egypt to meet the son of the founder of the Baha'i faith. He was also one of the nine original members of the very first National Spiritual Assembly. Today, Black members of the Baha'i religion are very much in the news in South Carolina. Both whites and even some Blacks steeped in tracago Defen\_der newspaper; Alain ditionalism cannot understand why Locke, the first Black Rhodes scholar; the governor of the state has appointar; Robert Hayden, the acclaimed ed a Black Baha'i named Alonzo Nespoet; and Matthew Bullock a Har- mith to the board of trustees of the vard-trained lawyer and the first Citadel College - an elite, private Black coach at any white college. Dizzy Gillespie is also a Baha'i. military school. At 26, he is also the But mariy just-as-important but un- 1 youngest board member ever. But known farmers and sharecroppers Baha'is attract the attention and adand poor people, both rural and ur- miration of nearly everyone who

ban, have also joined. The success of this religion in the state of South Carolina, for instance, is due to the large following among Black rural dwellers. Probably there are more Black Baha'is in South Carolina, followed by Georgii,1, than anywhere in the nation. Much of the credit for the Carolina growth belongs to Alberta Deas, who went away to get an education and church - then returned to "dig out" and "build up" the Baha'i faith in her home area. Deas now heads the Louis Gregory Institute in Hemingway, S.C., an adult-education school that is named after a Black man and operated primarily by Blacks, although persons of all races attend. The Baha'i school was started in 1972. "My grandfather was an AME minister," Deas states, "and my father that atwas a deacon in the church for 58 years. Now he too is a Baha'i." Not coordinationly him, but 35 other members of Deas' family. Operating with a largely volunteer staff, ~nd doing the legwork herself,

comes in contact with them. Everyone may not agree with estimation of Jesus Christ he was one of a line of prophets, !lot the son of God in a unique incarnation. But no one can their modeling of a new world order that puts even the United Nations to shame. This is probably the only perhaps the only group of any that prohibits campaigning for office and relies exclusively on a . vote without nominations. It is the only <?!le, ~s far as is dictates that whenever there is a between two candidates, the always goes to the non-white there is one. It's a good rule. And it works for Baha'is. It's the kind of policy tracted people like Dr. Cai:ney, who had spent the '60s nating desegregation Canton, Mississippi. A few days ago, Carney went to Israel where she is now an "international counselor"

(or  
travehng every day from one small world representative) for the  
religion.

For her, the Baha'i insistence that all  
its members eliminate prejudice of  
all kinds, both in their own lives and in  
..society, forms a line of continuity with  
·h~r former civil rights activities.

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