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PRESENTATION FOR A PUBLIC HEARING
JULY 18, 1967 - VILLAGE HALL, SKOKIE, ILLINOIS
by The Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Skokie
Rowell Hoff, Chairman

The village is now at a crucial point in its life. The decision has been made, seriously to address a moral principle that has long been before the whole nation; a principle the denial of which has caused many of the woes of the nation, even to the extent of being a chief cause of a ruinous civil war.

This moral principle is that of the equal rights of persons without regard to race or other accidentals. The village authorities are concerned with a certain aspect of this principle, which is approachable by legislation; namely, the right of equality in access to a commodity offered for sale. Because the commodity is housing, a second aspect is also present: the right of equality in the choice of the location of one's residence.

We advocate these rights, and we speak in favor of such means as will affirm them, and then establish them, and then protect them.

The challenging issue before Skokie is this question: Does anyone, or any group, or any majority have the right to restrict the sale of houses in such a way that persons of a certain parentage or appearance cannot purchase them, even though such persons are well able to use the houses and have sufficient funds to purchase them? No one has a right to effect such restrictions, and an ordinance to abolish such practices is needed.

In our view, the equal rights of all mankind flow from one overriding principle: the essential oneness of mankind. Whatever advances this principle, is praiseworthy and eventually beneficial. Whatever denies it, is eventually productive of evil results. The history of the past century is sufficient evidence of this contention. Indeed, one proof of the existence of a right or of a principle is the consequences of its denial. However, such consequences are outwardly visible only when it is already too late for the deniers to correct their error; such consequences are of value only to those who might later be instructed by them. For example, a culture based on human inequality became eventually stagnant, since most of its energy was wasted in maintaining its central falsehoods.

Beware that this matter of an open housing ordinance is not considered an isolated, local matter, or a frivolous one, or one that can be ignored. It is rather an inextricable part of the severest problem afflicting this country. Because of it, many eyes will observe the issue of this assemblage and the action of the government of this village.

It is certain that there are grave doubts and perplexities in many hearts. Arguments in favor of human rights, of the

equality of all mankind, have been heard endlessly; and yet, many people have never understood them. One more reiteration will not make anyone hear who does not wish to. We will nevertheless voice our position again, in the form of statements of principle and advice:

Mankind is one. All are created by one God. The source of peace and the fountainhead of justice lie in the recognition of the oneness of mankind, the knowledge that all men are one family. The diversity within the human family should be a cause of love and harmony. The most beautiful gardens contain flowers of many colors.

If you meet those of a different race and color from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Prejudice of all kinds is very destructive. However, its elimination requires great effort. All must associate in fellowship and without discord. Endeavor on all sides is required. The separation of black and white is a source of painful difficulty in this country. The continued stability of the nation itself hangs on the question of their union.

It is our wish that the name of humanity should be the only name among us. As it has been written, "...Regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. We cherish the hope that the light of justice may shine upon the world and sanctify it from tyranny."