

Racism - 1991

God formed Adam out of dust from all over the world: yellow clay, white sand, black loam, and red soil. Therefore, no one can declare to any race or color of people that they do not belong here since the soil is not their home.

(Yalkut Shimoni 1:13)

Issue

Increasing racial and ethnic tensions and the inability of the groups and communities involved to deal with the issues or communicate effectively across cultural differences.

Background

Throughout its history, the United States has been a multicultural society. Nevertheless, until recently, based on the background of the founders of our nation and the large immigrant waves from Europe during the 19th century through the 1940s, Western culture predominated. These immigrants were strongly motivated to learn English and become acculturated to American society. Now, however, this country is becoming less European in background, less white and more diversified in language, culture and religion than at any previous time.

Multiculturalism in the United States is largely due to increased immigration of peoples from virtually all continents worldwide. It is also the result of heightened ethnic and racial identities and pride among people born in and with long histories in this land, some of whom now reject the mainstream culture and seek a multicultural society.

The cultural differences are intensified because wide economic gaps often exist between these groups. Generally living in close proximity in urban centers, these groups compete for rapidly diminishing inadequate social services, jobs and political control of schools and communities. Tensions have also arisen in the relationships between community institutions (such as hospitals and police) and ethnic populations. Many communities are tinder-boxes; in some communities ethnic tensions have erupted in violence. Similar problems exist in other parts of the world.

Some Jews also are burdened by prejudices which undermine their ability to be truly inclusive in seeking justice. At the same time, Jews have been long-time champions of civil rights and support for minority populations; Jim Sleeper wrote in a September 9, 1991 article in *The Nation*, "no other white group has given more, individually and collectively, in dollars, votes or moral witness, to black struggles for justice." But over the past several years, Jews have felt increasing alienation because of conflicts over affirmative action, which stimulates the irritant memory of quotas; erosion of cooperation with Black civil rights groups; and increased expressions of anti-Semitism as well as acts of vandalism. Crown Heights (New York City) is a tragic example of tensions caused by misunderstanding, misperceptions and lack of communication.

Resolution

As a religious Jewish women's organization, sensitive to the problems of exclusion and discrimination, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods acknowledges its commitments to the commandments of our Torah, "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue" (Deut. 16:20) and "You should love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:33-34). Understanding and respecting cultural differences helps reduce and may even ultimately eliminate prejudice and racism.

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Therefore, NFTS calls upon member sisterhoods worldwide, to:

- 1) Implement educational programs, such as prejudice reduction workshops, and encourage congregations and religious schools to learn about the diverse cultures represented within our congregations, our communities and our respective nations.
- 2) Participate in local coalitions of diverse groups to work together to help solve critical problems in the community.
- 3) Seek legislation at all governmental levels, as well as funding and participation from within the private sector, for support of community projects and programs directed at reducing diversity-based tensions through building multicultural understanding, communication and coalitions.

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