

April 2019

## Book Review: The Baha'i Faith and African American History: Creating Racial and Religious Diversity by Loni Branson

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### Recommended Citation

Johnson, Kofi (2019) "Book Review: The Baha'i Faith and African American History: Creating Racial and Religious Diversity by Loni Branson," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 95 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol95/iss1/5>

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**Branson, Loni, ed. *The Baha'i Faith and African American History: Creating Racial and Religious Diversity*. Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc., 2019. xxv+269 pages, Hardback, \$94.99**

The Baha'i Faith is one of the least understood religions; however, its interracial philosophy has attracted many African Americans. Editor Loni Branson and six contributors tell the story of Baha'i in America well with this collection of essays, *The Baha'i Faith and African American History*.

The Baha'i Faith has inspired many oppressed people of the world as the faith addresses essential themes of the oneness of God and the oneness of humanity. The mantra of the Baha'i discourages prejudices and fosters the fundamentality of equality of races and gender.

The objective of this book is to present the roles of Baha'i Faith in the twentieth century in African American communities. This book is true to its title as it offers an all encompassing historical survey of the various periods since Baha'i's inception in America. The book begins with an introduction by Loni Branson, summarizing and providing readers with comprehensive information of the Baha'i among African Americans. The chapters of the book are organized thematically.

The first chapter, by Christopher Buck, examines the metaphor coined by Baha'u'llah that depicts black people as the pupil of the eye "surrounded by the white." Buck explores how this metaphor helps to promote ideal relationships among the races.

In chapter two, "The Most Vital Challenging Issue," Loni Branson describes efforts by the Bahai Faith to improve race relations from 1922-1936, and efforts of the early Baha'i's converts to understand the Baha'i's faith teaching toward elimination of prejudices and explores the boldness of the newly converted African Americans.

Chapter Three, also by Christopher Buck and titled, “Alain Locke on Race, Religion, and the Baha’i Faith,” focuses on the work of Alan Locke who uses his vocation and intelligence to promote the Baha’i Faith to promote “race amity.”

The fourth chapter, “The Most Challenging Issue Revisited: African American Baha’i Women and the Advancement of Race and Equality, 1899-1943” by Gwen Etter-Lewis, describes how these “women’s religious belief helps to navigate racism and sexism” to foster interracial unity and justice. This chapter leads then to Louis Venter’s chapter, which examines the Baha’i community’s development from 1973-1979. The chapter documents the mass conversion of blacks to the Baha’i community in South Carolina.

In chapter six, Mike McMullen presents readers with persuasive empirical data which proves that through the efforts of the Baha’i Faith that race relationship has borne fruit. Finally, June Manning Thomas’ chapter entitled, “Race, Place, and Cluster: Current Vision and Possible Strategies” looks at how the Baha’i vision concerning racial prejudice and unequal opportunity operate in an era of geographic clusters.

Overall, this book is a well-chronicled history of Baha’i and its impact in the black community to solve racial injustice and social inequality during the twentieth century. The downside of the book is that readers will find it discouraging (and surprising) that the book fails to include the connection between the Baha’i Faith and the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. This omission unfortunately weakens the book. On the plus side, the book is very embracing as it examines the rights of women, describing difficulties encountered in the 1970s after the abolitions of Jim Crow laws.

Overall, the book accomplishes its two objectives. Firstly, it introduces a little-known and fast-growing religion to the American audience. Secondly, it documents the significant roles African Americans play in the development of the Baha'i Faith in America. The book offers significant insights into a little-known religion.

*The Baha'i Faith and African American History: Creating Racial and Religious Diversity* is an interesting book that crosses many disciplines. It is highly recommended to students of African Studies, History, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Political Science. The book would serve as a starting point for scholars and students seeking to understand the Baha'i Faith.

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