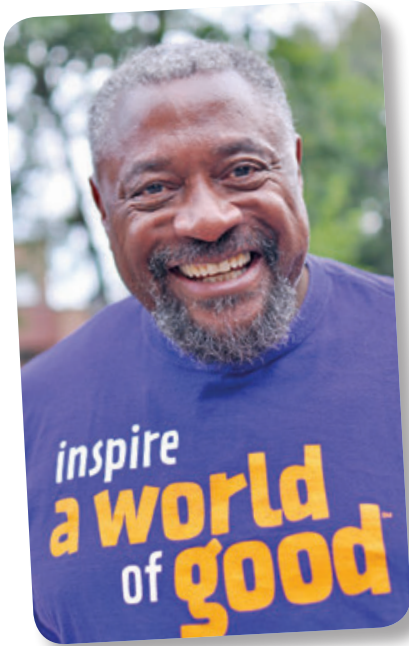


Dr. William "Smitty" Smith



Imagine visiting a neighborhood in your town and being in danger of getting beaten, arrested by police, or worse—just because of your skin color. This was part of life for William "Smitty" Smith as he was growing up in South Carolina, U.S., around the 1950s. He became determined to challenge racism. After earning two Bronze Star medals as a medic during the Vietnam War, he studied education. He saw it as the way to "make the quickest impact on improving society and underserved people." Smitty earned a doctorate degree from the University of Massachusetts and helped schools develop new ways of teaching. Then he created his own media company and used TV and film to educate.

In 2010, Smitty founded the National Center for Race Amity at Wheelock College in Boston. As executive director, he organizes events such as plays, discussions, concerts, and films exploring friendship and cooperation. He lives in Massachusetts with his wife, Marcia.

Q: How did your family encourage you in your career?

A: I came from a very, very loving family. Incredible love. It really just permeated my mother, my grandmother, my grandfather. And that love gave me . . . a certain level of confidence. They were very encouraging. My generation in my family was the first college generation. My grandmother was a pioneer of sorts . . . She graduated from the Chicago School of Nursing . . . And my grandfather was an entrepreneur . . . And so I think I had a sense of people who could do things under extraordinary, difficult circumstances.



Left: Smitty gained much confidence as a kid through his loving family.
Right: In 1965, Smitty entered the U.S. Army and helped save lives in Vietnam as a medic.

Q: What inspired you to form the National Center for Race Amity?

A: When 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to America, among the many things that he emphasized was race amity, creating close racial unity and friendship . . . I was working on projects to deal with . . . bridging the racial divide, and . . . [I wrote a grant proposal] to create the National Center for Race Amity . . . What attracted my heart to the Bahá'í Faith is that the central principle that Bahá'u'lláh announced . . . is the oneness of the human family . . . [These ideas, friendship and unity] . . . that's what galvanized me to do this.

Q: How do you define race amity, and why is it important?

A: Race amity is racial friendship . . . There are two [groups] that we hold near and dear to us: family and friends. We will do most anything to assist our family . . . And after family comes our friends . . . To the extent that we can promote and encourage cross-racial friendships . . . we can create lasting bonds, human bonds, between people.

Questions and
Answers with an
Inspirational Bahá'í



Left: In 2000, Smitty received congratulations from President Bill Clinton and Senator Ted Kennedy at the White House for helping to create a national Day of Honor for minority veterans of World War II.

Q: The U.S. and the world have made a lot of progress in defeating racism. What are the biggest challenges we still face?

A: We face the basic challenge of . . . not knowing one another as human beings on a personal level . . . We don't embrace and see one another as fellow beings . . . across racial divides . . . How do we create friendships, opportunities for people to get to see and know one another and be together?

Q: Do you ever feel discouraged about racism and disunity?

A: No, because I see in my lifetime the quantum . . . leaps that we have made in society. I mean, I experienced, as a kid, total racial segregation. I did not have one white or non-black friend. Period. Until I was at the end of my high school years and became a Bahá'í . . . We've made tremendous, tremendous progress in that regard . . . So I'm optimistic that we're moving forward.



Every June, the National Center for Race Amity hosts "A Festival for the Human Family" at the Rose F. Kennedy Greenway in Boston. New friendships are made through art, music, and food.

Q: You wrote and produced the documentary *The Invisible Soldiers: Unheard Voices*. How did that come to be?

A: My film company . . . won a contract from the [U.S.] Defense Department to do a film . . . on the participation of African Americans in [World War II] . . . The army was totally segregated [then] . . . We interviewed these black soldiers, men and women, and some of the whites who worked with them. They all talked about the incredible prejudice and bigotry under which they served . . . [At] the preview of the film at the Defense Department . . . we almost got fired once [because we included the unedited comments about racism] . . . [So later], we made *The Invisible Soldiers: Unheard Voices* . . . It let [the soldiers] tell their story.

Q: What can kids do to build oneness in their communities?

A: Kids can . . . in their schools, in their play, on their teams . . . reach out and get involved with people who are unlike [them] in terms of racial and cultural background . . . To look around themselves and ask the question, "How can I be more involved with other people who are different from myself racially and ethnically?"

Q: If you had one wish for *Brilliant Star* readers, what would it be?

A: That they all become race amity ambassadors . . . And that they all understand . . . [that] the unity of humanity, the oneness of mankind, is the central principle around which all other Bahá'í principles revolve.