



The **Heart** of a More Just Nation

February, 2026

Last year the most used emoji *across all countries* was the classic red heart. ❤️¹ In personal communications this emoji likely gets employed as an expression of care, concern, and love -- or the aspiration for such. Yet, our world broadly, and the United States specifically, need more **love**.

For example, the Global Peace Index (GPI) for 2025 shows that "... global peacefulness continues to decline and that many of the leading factors that precede major conflicts are higher than they have been since the end of WWII."² Moreover, the US ranks "Low" on a scale of peacefulness -- at 128 out of 163 nations. The scale tracks 23 indicators about Societal Safety and Security, Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict, and the degree of Militarisation.³ Our world broadly, and the United States specifically, need more **peace**.

A 2019 survey of countries focused on the rate of "deaths of despair" (from drugs, alcohol, and suicide) found that the United States is third highest in these types of deaths, after Slovenia and Guyana.⁴ The chart below shows ongoing increases in such deaths across all racial/ethnic groups in the US in this century.⁵ One presumable underlying contributor to despair is our nation's growing economic inequality.⁶ Our people need more **opportunity to thrive**.

¹ [Top 10 Most Popular Emojis in 2025 - The World of Emoji](#); [World Emoji Day 2025: Here Are the Top 10 Emoji in the U.S. - MacRumors](#)

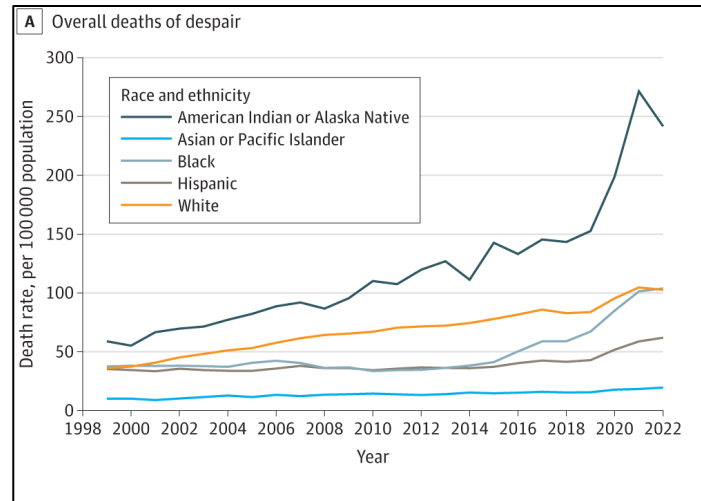
² [GPI-2025-web.pdf](#)

³ [GPI-2025-web.pdf](#), p. 4. Iceland ranks highest and Russia ranks lowest.

⁴ <https://www.worldhappiness.report/ed/2025/supporting-others-how-prosocial-behaviour-reduces-deaths-of-despair/>

⁵ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2817597>

⁶ [Eight graphs that tell the story of U.S. economic inequality - Equitable Growth](#)



Of course, our nation's history is replete with stories of neighbors helping neighbors, religious and social service institutions and philanthropies⁷ filling gaps in everyday needs, and cycles of legislation tackling human needs (albeit historically with racially discriminatory intents and effects). But here we remain, with the need for more love, more peace, more hope, and more opportunity to thrive. At the same time, our nation faces deep divisions. We need to be sure the doors to **belonging** are open to everyone.⁸ Where are the hopeful horizons across the landscape of the nonprofit world??

Horizons of Possibility

Times of contest and conflict provide opportunities for new (or renewed) ways of framing and addressing concerns and then measuring how we're doing toward these new ends. Here are a few examples.

In this moment when various kinds of justice framing are being contested -- and even punished -- some nonprofits are becoming explicit about the frame of **love**.⁹ For example:

- In its recent manifesto, *A Revolution of the Soul*, Policylink describes love as “a means to revolutionizing ourselves and our institutions to optimize human flourishing.”¹⁰

⁷ See [Philanthropy's Love Problem - NCRP](#) about its contested history vis-à-vis its constituents.

⁸ <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/belonging-time-state-violence>

⁹ Indeed, in 2010 the Interaction Institute for Social Change was exploring its own application of the power and love nexus. <https://interactioninstitute.org/power-and-love/>

¹⁰ <https://www.policylink.org/SSIR-review-series-a-revolution-of-the-soul>

- Urban Strategies, Inc, is now “*Framing the Future with Love*” that is grounded in “what matters most in community change—our shared humanity, our connections to one another, and our responsibility to build systems rooted in care, dignity, and possibility.”¹¹
- Given the importance of measuring such change, the effort itself must be undertaken with love and power. Shiree Tang and her LOVE Practitioners Team,¹² call upon us to reimagine “...tell(ing) our own stories, from our own perspectives, with our own words, in our own context and not having someone from the ivory tower ‘studying’ us, making meaning for us, and/or extracting it from us.”
- A significant precursor to, and ongoing foundation for, this emphasis is the work begun in 2012 under the leadership of John Powell within the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at UC Berkeley, now known as the Othering & Belonging Institute. The Institute’s purpose is to “...examine and remediate the processes of exclusion, marginalization, and structural inequality—what we call othering—in order to build a world based on inclusion, fairness, justice, and care for the earth—what we call belonging.”¹³

Of course, we must lift up the legacy from decades before that when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. connected love, power, and justice:

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”¹⁴

In short, just policies are essential pillars for a loving society. We are seeing policy-focused organizations using this seemingly less contestable frame and its attendant actions to guide efforts for change through the currently rough waters. And we are seeing thoughtful analysts recognize that assessment itself must have love as its driver.

Cautious Optimism, Again

The shift within nonprofit framing to results like love and belonging offers wider opportunities for coordinated collective action than do any of the separate actions that

¹¹ [Framing the Future with Love | Urban Strategies, Inc.](#)

¹² <https://shiree-teng.squarespace.com/clients>

¹³ <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/our-story>

¹⁴ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *On Love*.

might aspire to these results. These frames offer the possibility of breaking down silos of action, silos that otherwise can produce fragmentation and fall short of desired outcomes.

Most importantly, it is imperative to consider love and belonging in structural terms. What systems, or features of systems, what policies, or features of policies, contribute to or detract from these desired outcomes? It would be a lost opportunity to use love and belonging frameworks only for individualized outcomes.

A re-energized focus on the creation of a Beloved Community is the goal. The King Center describes that aspiration as follows:

“Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.”¹⁵

In this time of considerable challenges, focusing on the heart of the matter, across the breadth of all that means, is a renewed and promising call to action.

¹⁵ <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>