

## Alain Locke: Bahá'í philosopher

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### Abstract

*African American philosopher Alain Locke is arguably the most profound and important western Bahá'í philosopher to date. Except for Ernest Mason's 1979 World Order article, scholarship on Locke has neither seriously taken into account his Bahá'í identity nor its influence on his work. The present study, based largely on archival sources, will contribute to research on this "missing" dimension of Locke's complex life and thought. This study examines Locke's worldview as a Bahá'í, his secular perspective as a philosopher, and the synergy between his confessional and professional essays. This study also argues that Locke had a fluid hierarchy of values—of loyalty, tolerance, reciprocity, cultural relativism and pluralism (the philosophical equivalent of "unity in diversity")—and that this hierarchy represents a progression and application of quintessentially Bahá'í ideals. Locke's distinction as a "Bahá'í philosopher" may therefore be justified on ideological as well as historical grounds. Locke "translated" Bahá'í ideals "into more secular terms" so that "a greater practical range will be opened up for the application and final vindication of the Bahá'í principles" in order to achieve "a positive multiplication of spiritual power."<sup>1</sup>*

One can appreciate the deep-seated desire and the ever-recurrent but Utopian dream of the idealist that somehow a single faith, a common culture, an all-embracing institutional life and its confraternity should some day unite man by merging all his loyalties and culture values. But even with almost complete intercommunication within practical grasp, that day seems distant, especially since we have as great need for cultural pluralism in a single unit of society as in a nation as large and as composite as our own. [...] The pluralist way to unity

<sup>1</sup> Alain Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume IV, April 1930-April 1932*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1933; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 372-74. Reprint in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 133-38 [above quote from 137]. Harris' reference (133 n.) should be emended to read, Volume IV, 1930-1932 (not "V, 1932-1934").

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seems by far the most practicable.

– Alain Locke, “Pluralism and Ideological Peace” (1947).<sup>2</sup>

## Background

Recent scholarship on the African American philosopher and aesthete, Alain LeRoy Locke (d. 1954), has brought his work “back to influential life.”<sup>3</sup> Locke is arguably the most profound and important western Bahá'í philosopher to date. Gayle Morrison rightly calls him “the outstanding black intellectual”<sup>4</sup> among the early Bahá'ís. He embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1918, the very year he received his PhD in philosophy from Harvard. In what sense, therefore, is Locke a “Bahá'í philosopher”? After all, there is no formal discipline of Bahá'í philosophy as such. However, while the term “Bahá'í philosophy” may appear to be an oxymoron, Bahá'í philosophy is expected to evolve over time. A close comparison of Locke's Bahá'í essays with his philosophical essays discloses some striking resonances between the two, from shared vocabulary to parallel concepts. The present study will fill a lacuna in the literature on Locke, in which his worldview as a Bahá'í is given passing mention at best, or, at worst, is altogether ignored. By further developing Ernest Mason's initial work on Locke's Bahá'í identity and its presumed interaction with his thinking as a philosopher,<sup>5</sup> this study hopes fill in this “missing” dimension of Locke that has all-too-often been glossed over in the literature. While we will never know if Locke himself would have been comfortable with that label, certainly he would have acknowledged the impact of his Bahá'í experience on his life in general and probably on his philosophy in particular. As will be shown, the converse holds true as well, in that much of Locke's formal philosophical thinking informed his Bahá'í perspective.

In a popular publication, *The Black 100*, Alain Locke ranks as the 36th most influential African American ever, past or present.<sup>6</sup> Distinguished as the first African American Rhodes Scholar, Locke was the philosophical architect—indeed, the “Dean”<sup>7</sup>—of the Harlem Renaissance, a period of cultural efflorescence connected with the “New Negro” movement of the mid-1920s to mid-1930s (not to be confused with the “American Renaissance” just preceding the Civil War). This was a watershed period in African American history for psychological revalorisation and race vindication.

<sup>2</sup> Alain Locke, “Pluralism and Ideological Peace,” in Sidney Hook and Milton R. Konvitz, eds. *Freedom and Experience: Essays presented to Horace M. Kallen* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947) 67.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Green, “Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity: Alain Locke's Vision of Deeply Democratic Transformation,” in *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 132.

<sup>4</sup> Gayle Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 4, note.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Mason, “Alain Locke's Social Philosophy,” *World Order* 13.2 (1979): 25-34. See also idem, “Alain Locke on Race and Race Relations,” *Phylon* 40.4 (1979): 342-50. Cf. Yvonne Ochillo, “The Race-Consciousness of Alain Locke,” *Phylon* 47.3 (1986): 173-81.

<sup>6</sup> Columbus Salley, *The Black 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential African-Americans, Past and Present. Revised and Updated* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1999 [1993]) 137.

<sup>7</sup> George Hutchison, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995) 390.

“Arguably Locke was the first black American,” writes Winston Napier, “seeking to challenge European cultural imperialism through the formal articulation of a black aesthetics.”<sup>8</sup> Among his other roles, Locke was the first African American president of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), a predominantly white, national education association.<sup>9</sup> He helped found the prestigious Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, which he chaired in 1945. Locke served on the editorial board of the *American Scholar* and was a regular contributor to national journals and magazines.<sup>10</sup> By universal acclamation, Locke has achieved immortality as a great African American. Yet his identity and contributions as a Bahá’í remain relatively obscure by comparison.

Augmented by his fame and prestige in wider American society, his role as a contributor to the first five volumes of the *Bahá’í World* invites a closer examination of Locke’s significance as a Bahá’í writer during the early years of the American Bahá’í community. Except for Ernest Mason’s article,<sup>11</sup> which exists in splendid isolation, there is a dearth of literature on the topic. As interest in Locke intensifies and new documents come to light, this essay will complement prior scholarship by taking a closer look at the Bahá’í dimension of Locke’s life and thought, and exploring how the synergy between Locke’s Bahá’í essays and philosophical essays permit one to speak of an inchoate “Bahá’í philosophy” in embryonic form.

The present study is based, in part, on Locke’s autobiographical note that prefaced his first formal philosophical essay, “Values and Imperatives,”<sup>12</sup> published when he was fifty years old (1935). Locke refers to this self-narrative as his “psychograph.” In it, Locke does not directly mention the fact that he was a Bahá’í. But he does allude to it, calling himself a “universalist in religion.”<sup>13</sup> As a methodological control and anchor of authenticity, periodic references to Locke’s psychograph will be made throughout this essay.

Locke begins his psychograph so: “I should like to claim as life-motto the good Greek principle,—‘*Nothing in excess*,’ but I have probably worn instead as the badge of

<sup>8</sup> Winston Napier, “Affirming Critical Conceptualism: Harlem Renaissance Aesthetics and the Formation of Alain Locke’s Social Philosophy,” *The Massachusetts Review* 39.1 (Spring).

<sup>9</sup> Rudolph A. Cain, “Alain Leroy Locke: Crusader and Advocate for the Education of African American Adults,” *Journal of Negro Education* 64.1 (1995): 87; Michael R. Winston, “Locke, Alain LeRoy,” in Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds. *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1982) 403. See also Tommy Lee Lott, “Alain LeRoy Locke,” in Michael P. Kelly (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 160-65; and Sandra L. Quinn-Musgrove, “Lost in Blackness: Alain LeRoy Locke,” *Ethnic Forum* 12.2 (1992): 48-68. The present writer has not yet accessed Jeffrey Stewart, *A Biography of Alain Locke, Philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, 1886-1930* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1979). Abstracted in *Dissertation Abstracts International* 1981 42.4: 1696-1697-A.

<sup>10</sup> Winston, op. cit., 403.

<sup>11</sup> Mason, “Alain Locke’s Social Philosophy.”

<sup>12</sup> Alain Locke, “Values and Imperatives” in Sidney Hook and Horace M. Kallen, eds. *American Philosophy, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Lee Furman, 1935) 313-33.

<sup>13</sup> Locke, *ibid.*

circumstance,—‘*All things with a reservation.*’”<sup>14</sup> While a Bahá'í for most of his adult life, Locke had some reservations about ways in which the Bahá'í Faith was understood and applied by some of his fellow Bahá'ís. His reservations may contribute to a richer understanding of Bahá'í principles as he interpreted them through his unique perspective as both a race leader (“perforce an advocate of cultural racialism”) as well as a “cultural cosmopolitan” steeped in the “philosophy of value,” allied with “cultural pluralism and value relativism.”<sup>15</sup> This study will thus situate Locke within the context of those intellectual formations—value theory, pragmatism, Boasian anthropology, and cultural pluralism, as well as Bahá'í principles—that deeply influenced him.

### Early life

An African American (“Negro”) child of Northern Reconstruction with an enlightened upbringing, Locke was the only son of Pliny Locke and Mary (Hawkins) Locke, who had been engaged for sixteen years before they married.<sup>16</sup> Alain LeRoy Locke was born on 13 September 1885 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, not in 1886, as commonly thought.<sup>17</sup> For reasons that have eluded historians, Locke always represented his year of birth as 1886—not 1885.<sup>18</sup> At birth, although his name was recorded as “Arthur,” his parents may have actually named him “Alan.” From the age of sixteen, Locke later adopted the French spelling, “Alain” (close to the American pronunciation of “Allen”) and added the middle name “LeRoy” (probably because he was called “Roy” as a child).<sup>19</sup>

In his psychograph, Locke reflects on his childhood: “Philadelphia, with her birthright of provincialism flavoured by urbanity and her petty bourgeois psyche with the Tory slant, at the start set the key of paradox; circumstance compounded it by decreeing me as a Negro a dubious and doubting sort of American and by reason of racial inheritance making me more of a pagan than a Puritan, more of a humanist than a pragmatist.”<sup>20</sup> While Locke himself did not explicate what he meant by the “key of paradox,” further in his psychograph, “paradox” appears to be a reference to twists of fate and to tensions as well as harmonics between his cultural nationalism and

<sup>14</sup> Cited by Horace M. Kallen, “Alain Locke and Cultural Pluralism.” *Journal of Philosophy* 54.5 (28 February 1957): 121.

<sup>15</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>16</sup> Winston, *op. cit.*, 398.

<sup>17</sup> For verification of Locke’s birthdate, I obtained a document issued by the “Department of Public Health and Charities, Bureau of Health” (City Hall, Philadelphia), Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-1, Folder 1, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. See note by Leonard Harris, “Rendering the Text,” in *idem* (ed.) *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989)

<sup>18</sup> As was the case when Locke filled out his “Bahá'í Historical Record” card. Under “Birthdate,” Locke had entered “September 13, 1886.” Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA.

<sup>19</sup> Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-1, Folder 2 (Autobiographical statements). Although his middle name was formally spelled “LeRoy,” in full signature he would write “Leroy,” as evident on his “Bahá'í Historical Record” card signature. Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA.

<sup>20</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

integrationist universalism—perhaps never fully resolving the ideological paradox. In Philadelphia, Locke led a privileged (relative to the lives of the vast majority of other black Americans at the turn of the last century) and somewhat sheltered life.<sup>21</sup> A biographer notes that Locke was a “child of privilege in a black household whose ancestors on both sides had been free before 1865.”<sup>22</sup>

Locke’s family background shows how nature and nurture combined to provide him with rare educational advantages. Locke’s paternal grandfather, Ishmael Locke (1820-1852), attended Cambridge University with support from the Society of Friends. Ishmael was employed as a teacher in Salem, New Jersey, and, over four years, established schools in Liberia, where he met and married Alain Locke’s paternal grandmother, Sarah Shorter Hawkins, who was from Kentucky. Ishmael Locke later served as principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, following his tenure as headmaster of a school in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>23</sup>

Locke’s father, Pliny Locke, graduated from the Institute in 1867, and taught mathematics there for two years, after which he taught freedmen in North Carolina during the early years of Reconstruction. He also held a position as an accountant in the Freedman’s Bureau and the Freedman’s Bank, and was private secretary to General O. O. Howard. He was accepted to the Howard University Law Department (later called the School of Law), and graduated in 1874. That year, Pliny returned to Philadelphia as a clerk in the US Post Office. He died in 1891.<sup>24</sup>

Locke’s mother, Mary (Hawkins) Locke, was from a family of free blacks, among whom were soldiers who had fought with valour during the Civil War and missionaries to Africa under the Society of Friends. Mary Hawkins was a descendant of Charles Shorter, a free Negro who had fought in the War of 1812.<sup>25</sup> She was educated at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. Mary Locke supported herself and her family as a teacher in Camden and Camden County. She was a disciple of the humanist and rabbi, Felix Adler (d. 1933), who believed that all religions had a common ethical basis, and who proposed the First Universal Races Congress held in 1911, to the American section of which he and W. E. B. Du Bois were elected co-secretaries.<sup>26</sup> She joined the Society for Ethical Culture, which Adler founded in 1876. It was liberal on racial matters. Adler invited Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois to lecture at the Society, and encouraged black students to enrol in his own school.<sup>27</sup> His mother’s role as both a teacher and a humanist likely left its imprint on Locke, who, in his

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<sup>21</sup> Late in life, Locke reminisced about some of his childhood experiences. See Douglas K. Stafford, “Alain Locke: The Child, the Man, and the People,” *Journal of Negro Education* 30.1 (Winter 1961): 25-34.

<sup>22</sup> M. Anthony Fitchue, “Locke and Du Bois: Two Major Black Voices Muzzled by Philanthropic Organizations,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Issue 14 (Winter 1996-1997): 111. Online. JSTOR. Accessed 5 Mar 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Winston, *op. cit.*, 398.

<sup>24</sup> Winston, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Winston, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 39-40.

psychograph, described himself as “more of a humanist than a pragmatist.”<sup>28</sup>

Locke had an Episcopal upbringing, and during his youth, he was enamoured of Greek philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Later he found, as Leonard Harris puts it, a “spiritual home” in the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>30</sup> Mary Locke died on 23 April 1922.<sup>31</sup> In a letter dated 28 June 1922 to Agnes Parsons, Locke disclosed that his mother had been favourably disposed to the Bahá'í Faith: “Mother’s feeling toward the cause [the Bahá'í Faith], and the friends [Bahá'ís] who exemplify it, was unusually receptive and cordial for one who had reached conservative years,—it was her wish that I identify myself more closely with it.” At the end of the letter, Locke speaks of the Bahá'í Faith as “this movement for human brotherhood.”<sup>32</sup> To the best of his ability—given the extraordinary demands placed upon him as an academic, lecturer, cultural critic, and educator—Locke lived up to his mother’s wish over the next two decades.

### University education

Locke had a black middle class upbringing, but with an unusual education. In his infancy, Locke was stricken with rheumatic fever, which permanently damaged his heart (an inhibitive factor in Locke’s later activities as a Bahá'í). After the episode of rheumatic fever, Locke dealt with his “rheumatic heart” by seeking “compensatory satisfactions” in books, piano, and violin.<sup>33</sup> Only six years old when his father died, Locke was sent by his mother to one of the Ethical Culture schools, which was a pioneer, experimental program of Froebelian pedagogy (after Friedrich Froebel [d. 1852], who opened the first kindergarten). By the time he enrolled in Central High School of Philadelphia (1898-1902), Locke was already an accomplished pianist and violinist. From 1902 to 1904, Locke attended the Philadelphia School of Pedagogy.<sup>34</sup> Locke graduated second in his class in 1904. That year, Locke entered Harvard College as an honour student, where he was one of only a few African American undergraduates.

As a philosophy major, Locke studied under George Herbert Palmer, Josiah Royce, Hugo Münsterberg, and Ralph Barton Perry.<sup>35</sup> Remarkably, Locke completed his four-year program in only three years. During this time, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. In 1907, Locke won the Bowdoin Prize—Harvard’s most prestigious academic award—for an essay he wrote. Locke also passed a qualifying examination in Latin, Greek, and mathematics for the Rhodes Scholarship, which had just been established in 1904.<sup>36</sup> Locke made history and headlines in May 1907 as America’s first—and last, until 1960—African American Rhodes Scholar. He graduated *magna cum laude* with his

<sup>28</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>29</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 3-5.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4 and 293.

<sup>32</sup> Locke to Parsons, 28 June 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

<sup>33</sup> Winston, *op. cit.*, 398.

<sup>34</sup> Mason, *Locke’s Social Philosophy*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Winston, *op. cit.*, 398.

bachelor's degree in philosophy that same year.<sup>37</sup> On his Rhodes Scholarship, Locke studied at Oxford from 1907 to 1910. "At Oxford," Locke found himself "once more intrigued by the twilight of aestheticism."<sup>38</sup> An account of Locke's experiences at Oxford is given by Jeffrey Stewart.<sup>39</sup> Rejected by five Oxford colleges, Locke was finally admitted to Hertford College.

As a Harvard senior in 1905, Locke had met Horace Kallen, a German-born Jew who was a graduate teaching assistant in a course on Greek philosophy—taught by George Santayana—in which Locke had enrolled.<sup>40</sup> This was the beginning of an association that lasted for many years. Kallen recorded some personal observations about Locke as a young man. Locke was "very sensitive, very easily hurt." Recalling a conversation at Harvard, Kallen writes that Locke would strenuously insist that, "I am a human being," that, "We are all alike Americans," and that his "color ought not to make any difference."<sup>41</sup> This is corroborated by a letter Locke wrote to his mother, Mary Locke, shortly after having been awarded his Rhodes scholarship, in which he insists: "I am not a race problem. I am Alain LeRoy Locke."<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, in that era, colour made all the difference. The prevailing social reality was that Locke's self-image was really a wish-image. Two years later, on a Sheldon travelling fellowship, Kallen ended up at Oxford at the same time as Locke.

At Oxford, recommencing their earlier conversation at Harvard, Locke asked Kallen, "[W]hat difference does the difference [of race] make?" "In arguing out those questions," Kallen recounts, "the phrase 'cultural pluralism' was born."<sup>43</sup> While the term itself was thus coined by Kallen in this historic conversation with Locke,<sup>44</sup> it was really Locke who developed the concept into a full-blown philosophical framework for the melioration of African Americans. Although distancing himself from Kallen's purist and separatist conception of it, Locke was part of the cultural pluralist movement that flourished between the 1920s and the 1940s.

Kallen describes a racial incident over a Thanksgiving Day dinner hosted at the American Club at Oxford. Locke was not invited, because of "gentlemen from Dixie who could not possibly associate with Negroes."<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere, Kallen is more blunt: "[W]e had a race problem because the Rhodes scholars from the South were bastards. So they had a Thanksgiving dinner which I refused to attend because they refused to have

<sup>37</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical 'Race' Theory, and the Politics of Culture," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 6.

<sup>38</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey C. Stewart, "A Black Aesthete at Oxford." *Massachusetts Review* 34.3 (1993): 411-28.

<sup>40</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 85. See also Ross Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) 191.

<sup>42</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 391.

<sup>43</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 192.

<sup>44</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

Locke.<sup>46</sup> In fact, even before they left for Oxford, these Southern Rhodes Scholars had “formally appealed to the Rhodes trustees to overturn Locke’s award<sup>47</sup>—but to no avail. “What got Kallen particularly upset, however,” according to Louis Menand, “was the insult to Harvard.”<sup>48</sup>

In support of this, Menand cites a letter to Harvard English professor Barrett Wendell, in which Kallen speaks of overcoming his admitted aversion to blacks through his loyalty to Harvard and by virtue of his personal respect for Locke as well. After having invited Locke, as his guest, to tea in lieu of the Thanksgiving dinner, Kallen writes that, “tho’ it is personally repugnant to me to eat with him [...] but then, Locke is a Harvard man and as such he has a definite claim on me.”<sup>49</sup> The irony is that Kallen harboured some of the very same prejudices as the Southern Rhodes Scholars who shunned Locke, but not to the same degree. “As you know, I have neither respect nor liking for his race,” Kallen writes, “—but individually they have to be taken, each on his own merits and value, and if ever a Negro was worthy, this boy is.”<sup>50</sup> Locke was deeply wounded: “Now, the impact of that kind of experience left scars,” remarks Kallen.<sup>51</sup> And it wasn’t just the prejudice of his fellow American peers that so disaffected Locke, for he was almost as critical of British condescension as he was of American racism. In 1909, Locke published a critique of Oxford (“Oxford Contrasts”),<sup>52</sup> particularly of its aristocratic pretensions.<sup>53</sup>

He found social acceptance elsewhere. He belonged to the “Oxford Cosmopolitan Club,” which attracted a number of international students (“colonials”). According to Posnock, “This group soon became Locke’s intimate circle.”<sup>54</sup> For years to come, Locke nurtured these contacts through extensive correspondence. While “socially Anglophile” as he says in his psychograph, Locke found himself increasingly drawn to his sense of “race loyalty.”<sup>55</sup> As evidence of this, Locke helped establish the African Union Society, and served as its secretary. Its constitution stated the society’s purpose was to cultivate “thought and social intercourse between its members as prospective leaders of the African Race.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it was at Oxford that a crucial transformation took place: At entrance, Locke saw himself as a cultural cosmopolitan; on exit, Locke resolved to be

<sup>46</sup> Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) 390.

<sup>48</sup> Menand, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 391.

<sup>50</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 391.

<sup>51</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Alain Locke, “Oxford Contrasts,” *Independent* 67 (July 1909): 139-42. See also *idem*, “The American Temperament,” *North American Review* 194 (August 1911): 262-70.

<sup>53</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 294.

<sup>54</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 194.

<sup>55</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>56</sup> Winston, *op. cit.*, 399.



a race leader.<sup>57</sup> Hence, in his psychograph, Locke describes himself as “a cultural cosmopolitan, but perform an advocate of cultural racialism as a defensive countermove for the American Negro.”<sup>58</sup> In a letter to his mother while he was at Oxford, Locke reflected: “Oxford is a training-school for the governing classes, and has taught your son its lesson.”<sup>59</sup> The Oxford experience steered Locke’s sense of destiny as a non-chauvinistic “advocate of cultural racialism”<sup>60</sup> and as a race leader.

So acutely did the Thanksgiving Day dinner incident traumatize Locke that he left Oxford without taking a degree, and spent the next two years studying Kant at the University of Berlin and touring Eastern Europe as well.<sup>61</sup> Locke mentions in his psychograph that, while at Oxford, he became “but dimly aware of the new realism of the Austrian philosophy of value.”<sup>62</sup> During his study at the University of Berlin in 1910-1911, where he earned a B.Litt., Locke became conversant with the “Austrian school” of anthropology, known as philosophical anthropology, under the tutelage of Franz Brentano, Alexius von Meinong, Christian Freiherr von Ehrenfels, Natorp and others. In Paris, he studied under Bergson and others. Locke preferred Europe to America. There were moments when Locke resolved never to return to the United States. Reluctantly, he did so in 1911. In 1912, with the help of Booker T. Washington, Locke joined the faculty of Howard University as a professor of English.<sup>63</sup>

In 1916-1917, Locke took a sabbatical as an Austin Teaching Fellow for one year at Harvard. During his graduate year there, Locke explored the ideas of such great thinkers as Hugo Münsterberg and von Ehrenfels, as well as Kant and Hegel.<sup>64</sup> In his psychograph, Locke writes: “Verily paradox has followed me the rest of my days: at Harvard [as an undergraduate], clinging to the genteel tradition of Palmer, Royce and Münsterberg, yet attracted by the disillusion of Santayana and the radical protest of James: again I returned [as a graduate student] to work under Royce but was destined to take my doctorate in value theory under Perry.”<sup>65</sup> Here, Locke discloses important links in his intellectual pedigree, which included the value theorists of Europe and the pragmatists of America.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>59</sup> M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys, eds. *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. VII. *Nineteenth-Century Oxford*, Part 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 804, citing Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians* (1998) 154.

<sup>60</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>61</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 390.

<sup>62</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 121-22.

<sup>63</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 390.

<sup>64</sup> William B. Harvey, “The Philosophical Anthropology of Alain Locke,” in Russell J. Linnemann (ed.) *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University, 1982) 18.

<sup>65</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122. For an analysis of Locke’s dissertation on value theory, see Ernest Mason, “Alain Locke’s Philosophy of Value,” in Russell J. Linnemann (ed.) *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982) 1-16. Locke had originally intended to study under Royce as his PhD supervisor, but Royce had died by the time Locke returned to Harvard.

<sup>66</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 10.

Locke's dissertation, "The Problem of Classification in Theory of Value," was an extension of a lengthy essay he had written at Oxford. It was Harvard mentor Josiah Royce who inspired Locke's interest in the philosophy of value.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the underlying basis for Locke's philosophy was values theory. Value theory constituted the "pivot of Locke's thinking," which was "his belief that human values are central in determining the course of social life."<sup>68</sup> For Locke, there are five value-types, each with corresponding "feeling-modes" which are, respectively:

MODAL QUALITY	VALUE TYPE	VALUE PREDICATES	VALUE POLARITY	VALUE POLARITY
			<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
EXALTATION (Awe–Worship)	<b>Religious</b>	Holy–Unholy Good–Evil	Holiness Salvation	Sin Damnation
TENSION (Conflict–Choice)	<b>Ethical/ Moral</b>	Good–Bad Right–Wrong	Conscience Right	Temptation Crime
ACCEPTANCE	<b>Logical</b>	Correct–Incorrect	Consistency	Contradiction
AGREEMENT	<b>Scientific</b>	True–False	Certainty	Error
REPOSE/ EQUILIBRIUM	<b>Aesthetic/ Artistic</b>	Beautiful–Ugly Fine– Unsatisfactory	Satisfaction Joy	Disgust Distress <sup>69</sup>

These value genres constitute Locke's typology of values. The five "value provinces"<sup>70</sup> are the battlefields of cultural conflicts and the common ground of mutual respect through value transposition. Values are "rooted in attitudes, not in reality and pertain to ourselves, not to the world."<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Locke favoured a "historical-comparative approach" as "the only proper [...] way of understanding values, including particularly those of one's own culture and way of life."<sup>72</sup>

In 1918, Locke was awarded his PhD in philosophy from Harvard. That same year, Locke became a Bahá'í. In fine, Locke was "perhaps the most deeply and exquisitely educated African American of his generation."<sup>73</sup> This assessment is brought into even sharper relief in the sobering knowledge that, as late as 1935—a full generation after Locke—three-fourths of all blacks had not gone beyond a fourth-grade education.<sup>74</sup> His "exquisite" education had prepared Locke for his greatest historical role, which was—to cite his psychograph—to become "a philosophical mid-wife to a generation of younger

<sup>67</sup> Molesworth, op. cit., 176.

<sup>68</sup> Mason, "Alain Locke's Social Philosophy," 28.

<sup>69</sup> Locke, "Values and Imperatives," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Locke, op. cit., 45.

<sup>71</sup> Locke, op. cit., 36.

<sup>72</sup> Locke, "The Need for a New Organon in Education," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 272.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Molesworth, "Alain Locke and Walt Whitman: Manifestos and National Identity," in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 175.

<sup>74</sup> Fitchue, op. cit., 113.

Negro poets, writers, artists.”<sup>75</sup>

### Academic career

As previously mentioned, in 1912 Locke joined the faculty of the Teachers College at Howard University as Assistant Professor of the Teaching of English and Instructor in Philosophy and Education. There Locke taught literature, English, education, and ethics and, following president Lewis B. Moore’s retirement in 1912, ethics and logic at Howard University itself. In the spring of 1915, Locke proposed a course on the scientific study of race and race relations. But the white ministers on Howard University’s Board of Trustees rejected his petition. They opposed him because they felt that controversial subjects such as race had no place at a school whose mission was to educate black professionals. However, the Howard chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Social Science Club sponsored a two-year extension course of public lectures, which Locke called, “Race Contacts and Inter-Racial Relations: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Race.”<sup>76</sup> As the focus of his lectures, Locke’s social conception of race represented a further development of the thought of cultural anthropologist Franz Boas. Locke viewed Boas as a “major prophet of democracy.”<sup>77</sup>

Boas, who had significant contacts with Bahá’ís, effectively deconstructed the so-called “scientific racism” so prevalent at that time. He was widely regarded by intellectual historians as one who “did more to combat race prejudice than any other person in history.”<sup>78</sup> Boas convincingly exploded the myth that race had any real basis in scientific fact. Racism was biological nonsense. Cultural anthropology sought to establish “culture”—as opposed to pseudo-scientific fictions of race—as a “central social science paradigm.”<sup>79</sup> Locke began his lectures by asserting Boas’s distinction between racial difference and racial inequality. Racial difference is biological; racial inequality is social.<sup>80</sup>

Locke himself had a three-tiered conception of race: (1) theoretical; (2) practical; (3) social.<sup>81</sup> Like Boas, Locke held that race has no biological significance. At best, it is a social construct that can serve to enhance group identity. At worst, race can be used as a tool of oppression. Indeed, Locke foresaw the “ultimate biological destiny of the

<sup>75</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 396 and Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 205. These lectures were later edited and published: Alain Locke, *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations*, edited by Jeffery C. Stewart (Washington: Howard University Press, 1992).

<sup>77</sup> See Alain Locke, “Major Prophet of Democracy.” Review of *Race and Democratic Society* by Franz Boas. *Journal of Negro Education* 15.2 (Spring 1946): 191-92. See also Mark Helbling, “Feeling Universality and Thinking Particularistically: Alain Locke, Franz Boas, Melville Herkskovits, and the Harlem Renaissance,” *Prospects* 19 (1994): 289-314.

<sup>78</sup> Cited by Peggy Pascoe, “Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth-Century America,” *Journal of American History* 83.1 (June 1996): 53, n. 23.

<sup>79</sup> Pascoe, *op. cit.*, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 396-97.

<sup>81</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, 7.

human stock” as mulatto, or mixed, “like rum in the punch.”<sup>82</sup> Sadly, Locke’s lectures had no influence on his philosophical contemporaries.<sup>83</sup>

In June 1925, Locke was fired. He did not return to Howard University until 1928, under its first black president, Mordecai Johnson.<sup>84</sup> Locke was subsequently promoted to chair of the philosophy department. He is credited with having first introduced the study of anthropology, along with philosophy and aesthetics, into the curriculum at Howard.<sup>85</sup>

In 1943, Locke was on leave as Inter-American exchange Professor to Haiti under the joint auspices of the American Committee for Inter-American Artistic and Intellectual Relations and the Haitian Ministry of Education. Towards the end of his stay there, Haitian President Lescot personally decorated Locke with the National Order of Honor and Merit, grade of Commandeur.<sup>86</sup> During the 1945-1946 academic year, Locke was Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin and in 1947 as Visiting Professor at the New School for Social Research. One of Locke’s former students at Wisconsin, Beth Singer, described her professor as follows: “Locke was a quiet, extremely scholarly, and well organized lecturer; I do not recall his speaking from notes.”<sup>87</sup> After mentioning the fact that Locke was a Bahá’í, Singer recalls that “Dr. Locke seemed somehow aloof, and my friends and I were pretty much in awe of him.”<sup>88</sup>

On 28 May 1946, Locke gave a commencement address at University of Wisconsin High School. Beth Singer notes the subsequent newspaper story, “Dr. Locke Pleads for World Culture,” having quoted Locke as saying: “[W]e are fast approaching a stage in which culture will have to be international. This culture must have courtesy and reciprocity and must be aided by religious tolerance. [...] And in order to have tolerance, we must have every person intelligently aware of the common denominators of basic ideas and basic moral issues. That is necessary for basic unity.”<sup>89</sup> Interpreted through a journalist’s ear, this report of Locke’s lecture is a way to understand Locke in more practical, mundane terms. The text of that speech is extant, to which the newspaper

<sup>82</sup> “The Negro’s Contribution to American Culture,” *Journal of Negro Education* 8 (July 1939): 521-39, reprinted in Jeffrey C. Stewart (ed.), *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture* (New York: Garland, 1983) and quoted in Tommy Lee Lott, “Nationalism and Pluralism in Alain Locke’s Social Philosophy,” in Lawrence Foster and Patricia Herzog (eds.) *Defending Diversity: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives on Pluralism and Multiculturalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994): 106.

<sup>83</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 296-97.

<sup>85</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Alain Locke, “The Negro in the Three Americas,” *Journal of Negro Education* 14 (Winter 1944): 7 (editorial note).

<sup>87</sup> Beth J. Singer 1999. “Alain Locke Remembered,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 328.

<sup>88</sup> Singer, *op. cit.*, 329.

<sup>89</sup> Singer, *op. cit.*, 329-30.

account may be compared.<sup>90</sup>

From 1948-1952, Locke taught at City College of New York as well as continuing to teach at Howard University. In June 1953, Locke retired, and was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. He moved to New York in July.

### The Harlem Renaissance

As “philosophical mid-wife to a generation of younger Negro poets, writers, [and] artists,”<sup>91</sup> Alain Locke was the ideological mastermind behind the Harlem Renaissance, “an artistic explosion in the decade following World War I.”<sup>92</sup> In its mythic and utopian sense, Harlem was the “race capital” and the largest “Negro American” community in the world. The Harlem Renaissance, consequently, presented itself as a microcosm or “self-portraiture” of black culture to America and to the world. The movement was an effusion of art borne of the experience of “even ordinary living” that has “epic depth and lyric intensity.”<sup>93</sup> As editor of the anthology known as *The New Negro*, published in December 1925,<sup>94</sup> Locke contributed the title essay, which served as a manifesto.

For Locke, art ought to contribute to the improvement of life—a pragmatist aesthetic principle Richard Shusterman calls “meliorism.”<sup>95</sup> The Harlem Renaissance—known also as the “New Negro Movement”—sought to advance freedom and equality for blacks through art. It was “not just a great creative outburst in the stimulating atmosphere of the 1920s,” it was “actually a highly self-conscious modern artistic movement.”<sup>96</sup> Locke himself spoke of a “race pride,” “race genius” and the “race-gift.”<sup>97</sup> This “race pride” was to be cultivated through developing a distinctive culture, a hybrid of African and African American elements.<sup>98</sup> Locke had hoped the Harlem Renaissance would provide “an emancipating vision to America” and would advance “a new democracy in American culture.”<sup>99</sup> But the Harlem Renaissance was more of an “aristocratic” than democratic

<sup>90</sup> The present writer has requested—but not yet received—the text of this speech, archived in the Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-123, Folder 8 (“On Becoming World Citizens.” Commencement Address at University of Wisconsin High School, 28 May 1946. [typescript]).

<sup>91</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>92</sup> See Verner D. Mitchell, “Alain Locke: Philosophical ‘Midwife’ of the Harlem Renaissance,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 192.

<sup>93</sup> Locke, *The New Negro*, 6 and 47, quoted in Franke, *op. cit.*, 23 and 26.

<sup>94</sup> Alain Locke (ed.), *The New Negro* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1925). Reprinted, with a new preface by Robert Hayden (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

<sup>95</sup> Shusterman, *op. cit.*, 102 and 109, n. 8.

<sup>96</sup> Astrid Franke, “Struggling with Stereotypes: The Problems of Representing a Collective Identity,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 22.

<sup>97</sup> Locke, *The New Negro* 11, 47, 99, quoted in Shusterman, *op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>98</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, 15-17.

<sup>99</sup> Alain Locke, *The New Negro*, 52-3 and 9, quoted in Richard J. Shusterman, “Pragmatist Aesthetics: Roots and Radicalism,” in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 102 and 104.

approach to culture.<sup>100</sup> In principle, Locke was an avowed supporter of W. E. B. Du Bois' idea of a cultural elite (the "Talented Tenth"<sup>101</sup>), but differed from Du Bois's insistence that art serve as propaganda.<sup>102</sup>

Much criticized by other African Americans, Locke himself came to regret the Harlem Renaissance's excesses of exhibitionism, after it had dissolved just a few years later.<sup>103</sup> While the dazzling success of the movement was short-lived, it is said to have had a more subtle, yet enduring influence. According to Johnny Washington, the civil rights movement actually had its roots, in a subterranean way, in the Harlem Renaissance: "Locke was to the Harlem Renaissance what Martin Luther King, Jr., was to the civil rights movement of the 1960s."<sup>104</sup> In the end, however, the efflorescence of Black culture failed to lead to civil and political rights for African Americans. It would take a Martin Luther King, Jr. to spearhead a movement that would achieve that goal.<sup>105</sup>

Eventually, as Posnock points out, "Locke enunciated his theory of cosmopolitanism *post facto*, after the Harlem Renaissance, his principal site of engagement, had largely run its course."<sup>106</sup> As Locke matured in his philosophical thinking, he favoured open identities over closed social identities.

### Locke as a Bahá'í

Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, Locke had become a Bahá'í. As stated earlier, Locke embraced the Bahá'í Faith in 1918, the very same year that he received his doctorate from Harvard. There is thus a certain synchronicity between Locke's religion and his philosophy and, as I shall argue, a synergy between the two acted as a dynamic intensifier. Indeed, around the same time as he had launched the Harlem Renaissance, Locke had both made a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í world centre in Haifa, Israel (then Palestine), and travelled throughout the American South on a Bahá'í-sponsored lecture tour.

In his psychograph, Locke had described himself as a "universalist in religion."<sup>107</sup> In a private communication, one leading authority on Locke recently expressed doubts as to his formal affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith. So, the question has to be asked: What direct proof, beyond circumstantial evidence, establishes Locke's actual status as a

<sup>100</sup> Molesworth, *op. cit.*, 185.

<sup>101</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 6. Locke expressed his enthusiastic support for Du Bois's concept in an essay, "The Talented Tenth," *Howard University Record* 12.7 (December 1918): 15-18, but locked antlers with Du Bois over the latter's insistence that art be propaganda, in a later essay, "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12-13. See discussion in Richard Keaveny, "Aesthetics and the Issue of Identity," in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 127-40.

<sup>102</sup> See Alain Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12-13.

<sup>103</sup> Molesworth, *op. cit.*, 176.

<sup>104</sup> Johnny Washington, *Alain Locke and Philosophy: A Quest for Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) xxv.

<sup>105</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 198.

<sup>107</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 121.

Bahá'í? While he certainly associated with Bahá'ís and participated in Bahá'í events—over a number of years, in fact—was Locke ever formally on record as a declared Bahá'í? Moreover, did Locke's involvement in the Bahá'í Faith influence his vocation as a philosopher? To address these questions, I will discuss Locke's involvement in the Bahá'í Faith on the basis of archival as well as published documents.

Since formal enrollment procedures did not exist at that time, no archival record of the exact date of Locke's conversion has yet been found. The academic and religious literature on Locke could, at best, speculate as to the date of his conversion, which had, in itself, been the source of some doubt (outside of Bahá'í circles). In the course of my research and at my request, archivist Roger Dahl, searching the National Bahá'í Archives for documents relating to Locke, discovered the evidence scholars had been looking for: Dahl found a "Bahá'í Historical Record"<sup>108</sup> card that Locke had filled out in 1935, at the request of the National spiritual assembly, which, in conducting its Bahá'í census, had mailed the forms in triplicate to all Bahá'ís through their local spiritual assemblies and other channels.<sup>109</sup> Locke was one of seven black respondents from the Washington, DC, Bahá'í community to complete the card.<sup>110</sup> In "Place of acceptance of Bahá'í Faith" is entered "Washington, DC." Locke personally completed and signed the card, "Alain Leroy Locke" (in the space designated, "19. Signature"). Under item #13, "Date of acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith," Locke entered the year "1918."<sup>111</sup> This date is significant in that it predates previous estimates that placed Locke's conversion in the early 1920s.<sup>112</sup>

The discovery of Locke's Bahá'í Historical Record card confirms what was already evident from a host of other sources. (Those sources, however, failed to pinpoint the date of Locke's conversion.) The card does not, however, shed any light on the precise circumstances surrounding his conversion. It is quite possible that Locke came into contact with the Faith through W. E. B. Du Bois, who had personally met 'Abdu'l-Bahá and had lectured at Green Acre (a Bahá'í school in southern Maine) as well. It is just as likely that Locke encountered the Faith through Louis Gregory, or through one of the other Bahá'ís or friends of the Faith from among the circle of educated African Americans in Washington, DC. After all, 1918 was just six years after 'Abdu'l-Bahá had

<sup>108</sup> A facsimile of Louis Gregory's "Bahá'í Historical Record" card is reproduced in Morrison, *op. cit.*, between pp. 208 and 209.

<sup>109</sup> On the Bahá'í Historical Record cards, see Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) 412; and "Bahá'í Historical Record," *Bahá'í News*, No. 94 (August 1935): 2. The Historical Record Cards have been available to researchers for some time, but they gave no clues about Locke because his card has only recently been discovered.

<sup>110</sup> Gayle Morrison, *op. cit.*, "Table. Information about 99 black respondents among 1,181 Bahá'ís surveyed, 1935-c. 1937, from Bahá'í Historical Record Cards in the National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois," 204.

<sup>111</sup> Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA. The date, "1918," given in the table compiled by Morrison (*ibid.*) is certainly based on the personal data Locke provided.

<sup>112</sup> See Charlotte Linfoot, "Alain LeRoy Locke, 1886-1954," in *The Bahá'í World: An International Record*, Volume XIII, 1954-1963 (Haifa: Universal House of Justice, [1970] 1980) 894-5. In this obituary, Linfoot states: "In the early 1920's Dr. Locke came into contact with the Bahá'í Faith in Washington, DC" (895).

lectured at Howard University and at the NAACP convention in Chicago. In short, the Faith was widely known among the black intelligentsia, and Locke could have been introduced to it by any number of people.<sup>113</sup>

Curiously, Locke's name does not appear on an October 1920 list of the Washington, DC, Bahá'ís. But his name does appear in at least twenty subsequent lists,<sup>114</sup> from March 1922 to 1951, showing a Bahá'í affiliation of at least thirty consecutive years, or thirty-four years dating back to 1918, and probably thirty-seven years, assuming Locke maintained his affiliation until his death in 1954. But the nature of his relationship to the Bahá'í Faith at the end of his life is also unknown, since in July 1953 Locke moved to New York, where there is no record of his contact with the Bahá'í community there. Locke died on 9 June 1954, in Washington, DC. On June 11th at Benta's Chapel, Brooklyn, Locke's memorial was presided over by Dr. Channing Tobias, with cremation following at Fresh Pond Crematory in Little Village, Long Island.<sup>115</sup> The brief notice that appeared in the *Baha'i News* in 1954 (No. 282, p. 11) states that: "Quotations from the Baha'i Writings and Baha'i Prayers were read at Dr. Locke's funeral." This shows that Locke remained a committed Bahá'í to the end of his life.

To date, no systematic effort has been undertaken to reconstruct Locke's life as a Bahá'í. A provisional chronology of Alain Locke's Bahá'í activities may be outlined as follows:

**1915** Locke attends his first Bahá'í fireside (Washington, DC).<sup>116</sup>

**1918** Locke accepts the Bahá'í Faith (Washington, DC).<sup>117</sup>

<sup>113</sup> My thanks to Gayle Morrison for suggesting these possibilities.

<sup>114</sup> Office of the Secretary Records, Bahá'í Membership Lists Files, Bahá'í National Center. These lists include: March 1922; September 1925; 1928-1929 (appears to be updated by hand and written over the typewritten 1927-1928 list); 14 January 1934; 22 January 1936; 1937; January 1938; 11 January 1939; 1940; 1941; 1942; 15 January 1943; 1944; 1945; 1946; 1947; 1948; 1949; 1950; 1951. Courtesy of Roger M. Dahl, Archivist, National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>115</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 300. Locke instructed that his remains be cremated. See Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-1, Folder 6 (Will and instructions in case of death); and Folder 7 (Last will and testament, 1943). Along with many other Bahá'ís at that time, Locke was probably unaware of the Bahá'í proscription against cremation.

<sup>116</sup> This may be deduced from a letter written by Mariam Haney to "My dear Mr. Locke," in which she urges Locke to attend his first Bahá'í fireside (evidently, at the home of the Obers) for not only his sake, but for her sake and for the sake of other Bahá'ís as well: "My friends write me that you have never been to see them. I really was quite surprised, for my first thought about it all was that you would be rendering them a service. If you ever go once, I know you will want to go again, even if this first time I should ask you to go just to please me! I have your interests at heart and theirs as well, so you can gather why I should be anxious for a meeting between you. Through Mr. and Mrs. Ober, you would meet— (if you cared to) some very lovely people, and I should feel proud to have them know you." Haney to Locke, February 1915, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 49 (Haney, Mariam).

<sup>117</sup> Bahá'í Historical Record Cards Collection, and Biographical Information Collection, NBA. Locke received three copies of this form from Joseph F. Harley, III, secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Washington, DC. Harley to Locke, 27 August 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).



- 1921** Session Chair on Friday evening, 20 May 1921 (Washington, DC).  
Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races.<sup>118</sup>
- 1922** Visits Bahá'is of England.<sup>119</sup>
- 1923** Service to youth (Washington, DC).<sup>120</sup>
- 1923 or 1924 (?)** Pilgrimage to Haifa (Israel).<sup>121</sup>
- 1924** Speaker at Third Racial Amity Convention, 28-30 March 1924 (New York),  
along with Franz Boas, James Weldon Johnson, and Jane Addams, among  
others.<sup>122</sup> Appointment by NSA to Interracial Amity Committee, 19 May 1924.<sup>123</sup>  
Speaker at Fourth Racial Amity Convention, 22-23 October 1924. Second  
session, Locke presented, "Negro Art and Culture" (Philadelphia).<sup>124</sup>
- 1925** Reappointment by NSA to Interracial Amity Committee.<sup>125</sup>  
Speaker, "Universal Peace," 5 July 1925, Bahá'í Congress, Green Acre (New  
York).<sup>126</sup>
- 1925-1926** Lecture tour throughout the American South.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Louis Gregory, "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races." In *Star of the West* 12.6 (24 June 1921): 117-18. Reprinted as vol. 7 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978). See also idem, "Inter-Racial Amity," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume Two, 1926-1928*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1929; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 281; and idem, "Racial Amity in America." In *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume VII, 1936-1938* (National spiritual assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada, 1939; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 655; Mariam Haney (secretary, The Teaching Committee of Nineteen), "A Compilation of the Story of the Convention for Amity," 31 May 1921, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

<sup>119</sup> Of that meeting, Locke writes: "Through a miscarriage of plans, due to necessity of taking some [heart] treatment, I could not manage to meet the group of friends in Stuttgart. I did, however, have some very appreciated hours with the friends in England, especially Miss Rosenberg." Locke to Parsons, 21 October 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA. See also Remy to Locke, 10 February 1923, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-80, Folder 1 (Remy, Charles Mason).

<sup>120</sup> "It is certain that the youth for whom you are now doing so much will[,] to a greater and greater degree, as the years pass, appreciate your service." Gregory to Locke, 12 March 1923, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-32, Folder 50 (Gregory, Louis G.)

<sup>121</sup> On his passport issued 26 June 1922, Locke, while in Berlin, was granted a visa, dated 25 August 1923, to "Egypt, Palestine & United Kingdom." Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-2, Folder 2 (Passports 1922, 1924).

<sup>122</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 146; Gregory, "Inter-Racial Amity," 283; idem, "Racial Amity in America," 657; Locke to Parsons, 21 October 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA. Members of the committee included Agnes Parsons, Elizabeth Greenleaf, Mariam Haney, Alain Locke, Mabel Ives, Louise Waite, Louise Boyle, Roy Williams, Philip R. Seville, and Mrs. Atwater.

<sup>123</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 147. Locke's response to his appointment was enthusiastic: "I received word today of the appointment on the Inter-Amity Committee, and am especially anxious to be able to contribute my share to its conferences and findings." Locke to Parsons, 22 May 1924, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

<sup>124</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 149; Gregory, "Racial Amity in America," 658.

<sup>125</sup> This committee had "essentially the same membership for the period 1925-26." Morrison, *op. cit.*, 155.

<sup>126</sup> "The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Bahá'í Congress," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 6 (1925): 3. Holley to Locke, 1 June 1925; Holley to Locke, undated ("Sunday P.M." [sic]); Holley to Locke, 23 June 1925, western Union Cablegram, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

<sup>127</sup> "News of the Cause," *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 10 (Feb. 1926): 6.

- “Impressions of Haifa” published in the *Bahá'í Year Book*.<sup>128</sup>  
 Special consultation with NSA on race relations (November, Chicago).<sup>129</sup>  
**1927** Speaker, “Cultural Reciprocity,” World Unity Conference, 27 March 1927 (New Haven).<sup>130</sup>  
 Lends name as contributing editor, *World Unity: A Monthly Magazine Interpreting the Spirit of the New Age* (New York).<sup>131</sup>  
 Appointed to first National Inter-Racial Amity Committee (8 January 1927).<sup>132</sup>  
 Progress report on interracial work (December).<sup>133</sup>  
**1927-1928** Appointed to second National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.<sup>134</sup>  
**1928-1929** Appointed to third National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.  
**1929** “Impressions of Haifa” reprinted in the *Bahá'í World 1926-1928*.<sup>135</sup>  
**1929-1930** Appointed to fourth National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Elaine [sic] Locke, “Impressions of Haifa,” in *Bahá'í Year Book, Volume One, April 1925-April 1926*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1926) 81, 83. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 151 and 343, n. 18. Holley to Locke, 29 December 1925; Holley to Locke, 28 January 1926, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace). “Impressions of Haifa” was first published in *Star of the West* 15, 13-14. In probable reference to this article, Shoghi Effendi wrote: “The article by Prof. Locke is very good and sufficient.” (From a letter dated 12 March 1996 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada Publishing Committee). Courtesy of The Universal House of Justice, enclosure to letter dated 16 July 2001 to the present writer.

<sup>129</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 164.

<sup>130</sup> Holley to Locke, 17 March 1927; Holley to Locke, 20 March 1927; Holley to Locke, 30 March 1927, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace); and Box 164-112, Folder 21 (“Cultural Reciprocity”).

<sup>131</sup> Holley to Locke, 20 April 1927; Holley to Locke, 16 June 1927; Holley to Locke, 13 February 1930, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

<sup>132</sup> “National Committee on Race Amity Appointed,” *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 16 (March 1927): 5. Committee members: Agnes Parsons (“Chairman”), Louis Gregory (Executive Secretary), Louise Boyle, Mariam Haney, Coralie Cook, Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr. Alain Locke. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 166 and 344, n. 4.

<sup>133</sup> Louis Gregory, National Committee on Inter-Racial Unity, Gregory to National spiritual assembly and all Local Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada, 23 February 1927, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith). This report was praised by Shoghi Effendi as a “splendid document [...] so admirable in its conception, so sound and sober in its language” and which “has struck a responsive chord in my heart” (Morrison, *op. cit.*, 173 and 347, n. 20). Excerpts published in “Inter-Racial Amity Conferences,” *Bahá'í News Letter*, no. 22 (March 1928).

<sup>134</sup> “Committees of the National spiritual assembly 1927-1928,” *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 19 (August 1927): 4. Members of this new committee: Agnes Parsons, Louis Gregory, Coralie Cook, Miss Elizabeth Hopper, Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr. Alain Locke, Miss Isabel Rives.

<sup>135</sup> Elaine [sic] Locke, “Impressions of Haifa,” in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume II, April 1926-April 1928*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1928; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 125, 127. Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-115, Folder 29 (“Impressions of Haifa” [typescript]).

<sup>136</sup> “Committees of the national spiritual assembly 1929-1930,” *Bahá'í News Letter*, No. 32 (May 1929): 4. Members: Louis Gregory (Chairman), Shelley Parker (Secretary), Agnes Parsons, Louise Boyle, Mariam Haney, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, Dr. Alain Locke, Loulie Mathews, Miss Alice Higginbotham.

- 1930** “Impressions of Haifa” reprinted in the *Bahá’í World 1928-1930*.<sup>137</sup>  
 Annual progress report on interracial work, 1929-1930.<sup>138</sup>  
 Invited by Shoghi Effendi to comment on working translation of Kitáb-i-Íqán.<sup>139</sup>
- 1931-1932** Accepts appointment by NSA to fifth National Inter-Racial Amity Committee.<sup>140</sup>
- 1932** Speaker, Racial Amity Convention, 10 December 1932 (New York).  
 Planned in cooperation with the National Urban League.<sup>141</sup>
- 1933** “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle” published in *Bahá’í World 1930-1932*.<sup>142</sup>
- 1935** Appointed to Teaching Committee (Washington, DC).<sup>143</sup>  
 Reports on “stagnation” in the racial amity work (18 April 1935).<sup>144</sup>  
 Speaker, “Abdul-Baha on World Peace,” 26 November 1935 (Washington, DC).<sup>145</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Alain Locke, “Impressions of Haifa,” in *The Bahá’í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume III, April 1928-April 1930*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá’is of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980) 280, 282.

<sup>138</sup> Louis Gregory, “Interracial Amity Committee” [1929-1930 Annual Report], *Bahá’í News Letter*, no. 40 (April 1930) 10-12. The committee members were: Louis G. Gregory (chairman), Shelley N. Parker (secretary), Agnes Parsons, Mariam Haney, Louise D. Boyle, Zia M. Bagdadi, Alain Locke, Alice Higgenbotham, Loulie A. Matthews. In reference to a draft letter (requested by the NSA) to Mrs. Herbert Hoover, who held a reception for black Congressman Oscar DePriest, the committee “pointed out that interracial amity is the basis of universal peace” (*ibid.*, 12).

<sup>139</sup> Ruhi Afnan (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi) to Locke, 15 February 1930; Afnan (on behalf of Shoghi Effendi) to Locke, 5 July 1930; Shoghi Effendi to Locke, 5 July 1930, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-10, Folder 2 (Afnan, Ruhi). See appendix.

<sup>140</sup> “National Bahá’í Committees 1931-1932,” *Bahá’í News Letter*, No. 53 (July 1931): 2. Members: Loulie Mathews (chairman), Louis G. Gregory (secretary), Dr. Zia M. Bagdadi, Mabelle L. Davis, Frances Fales, Sara L. Witt, Alain L. Locke, Shelley N. Parker, Annie K. Lewis. Of his acceptance, Locke writes: “Your letter about the Interracial committee was welcome and enheartening. I have written Mr. Lunt my acceptance, and hope next year to participate more actively in the Amity conferences and consultations.” Locke to Gregory, 6 June 1931, Louis Gregory Papers, NBA. Louis Gregory, “The Annual Convention,” *Bahá’í News*, no. 52 (May 1931): 3. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 349, n. 29.

<sup>141</sup> Locke spoke at the second session. Louis Gregory (on behalf of the National Bahá’í Committee for Racial Amity), “Inter-Racial Amity Activities,” *Bahá’í News*, No. 72 (April 1933): 6. See also Morrison, *op. cit.*, 194, citing “Committee Reports: Committee on Inter-Racial Amity,” *Bahá’í News*, No. 74 (May 1933): 13 as well.

<sup>142</sup> See note 1 *supra*.

<sup>143</sup> Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of Washington, DC, untitled report, 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá’í Faith). Members of the Teaching Committee: Stanwood Cobb (chairman), Charles Mason Remey (vice-chairman), Mrs. John Stewart (secretary), Clarence Baker, Louise Boyle, William Gibson, Alain Locke, George Miller, Ethel Murray.

<sup>144</sup> Locke to Holley, 18 April 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

<sup>145</sup> Held at the Tea House of the Dodge Hotel. Official program, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá’í Faith). In a note to Locke written on an announcement of this event sent out by the local spiritual assembly of the Bahá’is of Washington, DC, Joseph Harley III wrote: “Your Bahá’í record cards have not been received— Bring them Monday, please.” (From the Washington, DC Bahá’í Archives.)

- Resigns from Teaching Committee, 10 December 1935 (Washington, DC).<sup>146</sup>
- 1936** "The Orientation of Hope" published in *Bahá'í World 1932-1934*.<sup>147</sup>
- 1943** Speaker, 24 October 1943, Bahá'í Center/Youth Rally (Washington, DC).<sup>148</sup>
- 1944** Speaker, Thirty-Sixth Racial Amity Convention (New York).<sup>149</sup>  
Sends message to 20th anniversary of the passing of Woodrow Wilson (New York).<sup>150</sup>
- 1945** "Lessons in World Crisis" published in *Bahá'í World 1940-1944*.<sup>151</sup>
- 1946** Speaker, "Democracy in Human Relations," Rhode Island School of Design. (Jointly sponsored by Negro College Club and Providence, Rhode Island Bahá'ís.)<sup>152</sup>
- 1949** Name appears on list of Bahá'í eligible voters, 6 April 1949.<sup>153</sup>
- 1949** Louis Gregory appeals to Locke to identify more fully with Faith.<sup>154</sup>
- 1951** Louis Gregory again appeals to Locke to identify more fully with Faith.<sup>155</sup>
- 1952** Locke invited to submit ideas for the "Centenary of Universal Religion."<sup>156</sup>  
Picture appears in article on Faith in October 1952 issue of *Ebony*.

<sup>146</sup> Locke to Cobb, 10 December 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-21, Folder 16 (Stanwood Cobb).

<sup>147</sup> Alain Locke, "The Orientation of Hope," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume V, April 1932-April 1934*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1936; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 527-28. Reprint in Leonard Harris (ed.), *The Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 129-132. Leonard Harris' reference (129 n.) should be emended to read, "Volume V, 1932-1934" (not "Volume IV, 1930-1932"). Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-123, Folder 11 ("The Orientation of Hope." 1934 [typescript]).

<sup>148</sup> "I understand from Miss Juliet Thompson that you are going to speak at the Bahá'í center on the afternoon of October 24th." Gulick to Locke, 11 October 1943, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 17 (Gulick, Robert L. Jr.).

<sup>149</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 285.

<sup>150</sup> Gulick to Locke, 28 January 1944; Gulick to Locke, "25" [February 1944], Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 17 (Gulick, Robert L. Jr.).

<sup>151</sup> Alain Locke, "Lessons in World Crisis," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume IX, April 1940-April 1944*, comp. national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1945; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 745-47.

<sup>152</sup> "Local Communities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 182 (April 1946): 6.

<sup>153</sup> "Voting Members of the Washington, DC Bahá'í Community, 6 April 1949, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

<sup>154</sup> Gregory to Locke, 6 April 1949, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-32, Folder 50 (Gregory, Louis G.): "Although your Bahá'í spirit has been admirably shown by so many traits and activities, yet I have the deepest longing that you will see the wisdom of wholly identifying yourself with the Faith, thereby increasing your joys and usefulness, perhaps twenty-fold."

<sup>155</sup> Gregory to Locke, 21 January 1951, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-32, Folder 50 (Gregory, Louis G.): "... my longing is, that you identify yourself fully with it' [the Bahá'í Faith] ... My most earnest hope is that you will see clearly the way to unite with the Bahá'ís in either Washington or New York, in the latter of which, I am told, you maintain a residence."

<sup>156</sup> Nina Matthisen to Locke, 5 September 1952; and press release (1953), Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith).

**1954** Bahá'í writings and prayers read at his funeral.

From various indications in his unpublished correspondence, it seems that Locke's Bahá'í activities were intense but sporadic. This is not to say that Locke's engagement with the Faith was in any way superficial. His most profound experience as a Bahá'í was probably the event of his pilgrimage. It likely took place in 1923 or 1924. Locke travelled to the Holy Land and met Shoghi Effendi in the Bahá'í world centre on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Palestine (now Israel). In his reminiscences of that experience, published as "Impressions of Haifa" (1926, 1929, 1930),<sup>157</sup> Locke stressed the importance of being able to see a religion in its human incarnation, "without the mediation of symbols."<sup>158</sup> In Locke's eyes, Shoghi Effendi was the living embodiment of all Bahá'í virtues: "For after all the only enlightened symbol of a religious or moral principle is the figure of a personality endowed to perfection with its qualities and necessary attributes."<sup>159</sup> Describing Shoghi Effendi as a "gifted personality," Locke was privileged to see the Guardian's "[r]efreshingly human"<sup>160</sup> side as well. The two enjoyed a long walk and conversation in the Bahá'í gardens. For Locke, his "Impressions of Haifa" were deep and lasting.

Locke's universalism included social demonstrations of interracial unity, as exemplified by his participation in a "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races" which took place in Washington, DC, 19-21 May 1921. This gathering was organized by Agnes S. Parsons (a white woman prominent in Washington high society) at the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá who, during her second pilgrimage to Haifa (1920), said to her: "I want you to arrange in Washington a convention for unity between the white and colored people."<sup>161</sup> 'Abdul-Bahá considered this meeting to have had paramount symbolic and social importance.<sup>162</sup>

The conference was a spectacular success. As Leonard Harris notes: "The Bahá'í belief in the unity of humanity was expressed in practical terms by inter-racial meetings (then a fairly unusual situation in Christian America)."<sup>163</sup> Retrospectively, in its 1929-1930 annual report, the nine-member Interracial Amity Committee, of which Locke was an active participant, assessed the significance of the first Amity Convention in 1921, Washington, DC: "The convention of the colored and white was in reality a great work, because if the question of the colored and white should not be resolved[,] it will be

<sup>157</sup> Locke, "Impressions of Haifa" (1926, 1929, 1930).

<sup>158</sup> Locke, "Impressions" (1930) 280.

<sup>159</sup> Locke, *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Locke, *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Gregory, "Inter-racial Amity," 281. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 134-43.

<sup>162</sup> In a message conveyed by Mountfort Mills (an American Bahá'í recently returned from a visit to Palestine), 'Abdu'l-Bahá was reported to have said: "Say to this convention that never since the beginning of time has a convention of more importance been held. This convention stands for the oneness of humanity. It will become the cause of the removal of hostilities between the races. It will become the cause of the enlightenment of America. It will, if wisely managed and continued, check the deadly struggle between these races, which otherwise will inevitably break out" (Gregory, "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races," 115).

<sup>163</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 5.

productive of great dangers in [the] future for America. Therefore the Confirmations [*sic*] of the Kingdom of Abhá shall continually reach any person who strives after the conciliation of the colored and the white."<sup>164</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá subsequently praised Agnes Parsons as "the first person to raise the banner of the unity of the white and the colored."<sup>165</sup>

Locke saw considerable value in these race amity conferences. Despite his delicate heart and the considerable demands on him as a lecturer, the committee work and participation in these gatherings was worth his time and effort. According to archivist Roger Dahl, "Locke was a member of the national Race amity committee for at least five years between 1925 and 1932."<sup>166</sup> In 1931, Locke expressed his "hope next year to be called upon to participate more actively in the Amity conferences and consultations" and registered confidence that "the work is gradually reaching wider and wider circles."<sup>167</sup>

On a sombre note, it appears that Locke became somewhat pessimistic over the future prospects of interracial unity in the Washington, DC, Bahá'í community. In a letter dated 18 April 1935 to Horace Holley, Secretary-General of the national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, Locke wrote:

Since I last saw you, I have had two occasions to meet with the local friends, and have very effectively renewed my contacts with them. This has also given me occasion to make some comparisons between the work as I knew it rather intimately before and as it seems to be going now. I regret to have to call your attention to what seems to me to be something approaching stagnation in the inter-racial work at Washington. This but confirms a feeling that I have had all along for several years that unfortunate personality influences have crept into the situation and decidedly hampered the development of this very important practical phase of the Cause. For a considerable while I thought this was my own personal bias concerning Mrs. Haney and Mrs. Cook who have pioneered so much in this field and have now for a long while exerted a control in it which threatens to become a monopolistic and hampering one.<sup>168</sup>

Mariam Haney (Mary Ida Haney [Parkhurst]) was mother of future Hand of the Cause Paul Haney. She adopted "Mariam" as her name when 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed her so in a tablet. Active for many years in the Washington, DC, Bahá'í community, she served on various national committees and was an editor of *The Bahá'í World*.<sup>169</sup> There

<sup>164</sup> Gregory, "Interracial Amity Committee" (1930) 10. (Note that this text differs from the translation given in another report (Gregory, "Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races," 115), but the gist is the same. In all likelihood, both translations were taken from the same Persian original.)

<sup>165</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Parsons, 26 July 1921 and 27 September 1921. See Morrison, *op. cit.*, 143 and 342, n. 34.

<sup>166</sup> Dahl to Buck, 16 February 2001.

<sup>167</sup> Locke to Gregory, 6 June 1931, Louis Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>168</sup> Locke to Holley, 18 April 1935, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

<sup>169</sup> Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) 189.

are indications that Locke's estimate of Mariam Haney was initially positive. In a letter to Agnes Parsons, Locke writes: "I learned with great satisfaction from Mrs. Haney of the plans for the Amity Conference in New York. I shall most certainly attend, and if I can in any way be of further assistance, please feel free to call upon me."<sup>170</sup> Assuming that Haney was centrally involved in planning the event, Locke's enthusiasm may be construed as an oblique endorsement of her role. Coralie F. Cook was a Washingtonian Bahá'í whose husband was a professor at Howard University.<sup>171</sup> In November 1926, the national spiritual assembly invited a group of black and white Bahá'ís for a special consultation on race. Mariam Haney and Coralie F. Cook and were both in that group, as was Alain Locke himself. How and why Locke became disaffected with these two mainstays of the race amity movement is not clear.

Locke was critical of other leading Washingtonian Bahá'í figures as well. By 1931, Locke had complained of "the deceptive platitudes of some of our friends, including even Dr. Leslie P. Hill."<sup>172</sup> This is a particularly stunning statement, as "Professor" Leslie Pickney Hill, who was the black principal of the Cheyney Institute (a teacher training school) had spoken at the Philadelphia convention of 22-23 October 1924 and was among those invited by the national spiritual assembly in November 1926 to a special consultation on race.<sup>173</sup>

Another dismaying development for Locke may have been the appointment of a predominantly white amity committee for the 1933-1934 Bahá'í year—an appointment that, evidently, excluded Locke himself.<sup>174</sup> It was around this time that the race amity initiatives went into decline, as chronicled by Gayle Morrison.<sup>175</sup> The last race amity committee was appointed in 1935-1936. In July 1936, the committee, in the words of Morrison, "unknowingly wrote its own epitaph" in stating: "The National Assembly has appointed no race amity committee this year. Its view is that race unity activities have sometimes resulted in emphasizing race differences rather than their unity and reconciliation within the Cause."<sup>176</sup> With the demise of the race amity committees, it would seem that Locke's special services were no longer needed. Finally, in 1941, Locke requested that the local spiritual assembly should henceforth regard him as an "isolated believer," explaining:

I naturally am reluctant to sever a spiritual bond with the Bahai [*sic*] community, for I still hold to a firm belief in the truth of the Bahai principles. However, I am not in a position, and haven[']t been for years, to participate

<sup>170</sup> Locke to Parsons, 21 October 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

<sup>171</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 140. See Alain Locke, "Obituary of George Cook," *Star of the West* 18, 254. Mariam Haney had solicited this obituary. Haney to Locke, 25 September 1931, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 49 ("Haney, Mariam").

<sup>172</sup> Locke to Gregory, 6 June 1931, Louis Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>173</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 148-49, 164 and 182.

<sup>174</sup> Agnes Parsons, who once again served as the chair of that committee, was struck by a car and killed in January 1934. She was seventy-three years old at her death. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 198.

<sup>175</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 194-213.

<sup>176</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 213.

very practically or even with the fullest enthusiasm, in the collective activities of the local friends. One of my reservations is, of course, the seeming impossibility of any really crusading attack on the practises of racial prejudice in spite of the good will and fair principles of the local believers. They are not to blame perhaps for their ineffectualness any more than we, who are in more practical movements[,] are for our absorption of time and energy in what we regard as more immediately important.<sup>177</sup>

The brightest moments in Alain Locke's public Bahá'í life were three: (1) the first Race Amity Conference, in which Locke presided as a session chair on 20 May 1921; (2) his presentation at the Racial Amity Convention in Harlem, 10 December 1932; and (3) his lecture, "Democracy in Human Relations" at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1946. In his 1933 report on behalf of the National Bahá'í Committee for Racial Amity, Louis Gregory was delighted with Locke's public declaration of his Bahá'í identity and his open endorsement of its principles:

For a number of years, in fact since the first amity convention in Washington, Dr. Alain Locke has during the years been a contributor to the work of the Cause, without formally identifying himself with it. Perhaps the most significant feature of this conference was his strong, eloquent and beautiful address, in which he took a decided and definite stand within the ranks of the Cause. This attitude we believe will increasingly with the years influence people of capacity to investigate the mines of spiritual wealth to be found in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. It will also make what has long been a grandly useful life more glorious, serviceable and influential than ever before. It is to be hoped that the friends both locally and nationally, will largely make use of the great powers of Dr. Locke both in the teaching and administrative fields of the Cause. He has made the pilgrimage to Haifa. The Master in a Tablet praised him highly and it is known that the Guardian shares his love for our able brother.<sup>178</sup>

Louis Gregory's disclosure that the illustrious philosopher had received a "tablet" (letter) from 'Abdu'l-Bahá—presumably in response to a letter that Locke had sent—is yet another important piece of the puzzle in reconstructing this lesser known dimension of Locke's life. During the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it was customary for new converts to write directly to "the Master" as a testimony of faith. This was more of a precedent than a protocol, yet the practice was widespread enough to warrant the probability that Locke wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1918, the year Locke indicated that he had become a Bahá'í. Another bright moment in Locke's public life as a Bahá'í took place in 1946 during a visit to Rhode Island:

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<sup>177</sup> Locke to Mariam Haney (corresponding secretary of the Washington, DC LSA), 30 March 1941, MSRC, Box 164-33, Folder 49 ("Haney, Mariam").

<sup>178</sup> Louis Gregory (on behalf of the National Bahá'í Committee for Racial Amity), "Inter-Racial Amity Activities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 72 (April 1933): 6.



When Dr. Alain Locke was scheduled as a speaker for the Rhode Island School of Design's exhibition of Negro art, the Negro College Club and the Providence Bahá'ís held a joint meeting for which Dr. Locke talked on "Democracy in Human Relations" and spoke of being a Bahá'í. There were twenty non-Bahá'ís present in spite of bad weather. His talk was reported and the next Sunday's program was announced in both the Urban League Bulletin and the Providence *Chronicle*.<sup>179</sup>

Of Locke's travel teaching tour in the southern USA, we know relatively little. This lecture tour took place at some point between October 1925 and spring 1926. This can be inferred from a statement that appeared in the *Bahá'í News Letter*: "Dr. Alain Locke of Washington, DC, who delivered one of the notable addresses at the 1925 Convention in Green Acre, is now making an extensive teaching journey into the Southern States which will bring him in touch with the most influential audiences and individuals. Reports of this journey will be published from time to time."<sup>180</sup> The description of Locke's address at the seventeenth annual convention and Baha'i Congress deserves notice:

Dr. Alain LeRoy Locke of Washington, DC, delivered a polished address, portraying the great part which America can play in the establishment of world peace, if alive to its opportunity. The working out of social democracy can be accomplished here. To this end we should not think in little arcs of experience, but in the big, comprehensive way. Let our country reform its own heart and life. Needed reforms cannot be worked out by the action of any one group, but a fine sense of cooperation must secure universal fellowship. He praised Green Acre, which he declared to be an oasis in the desert of materiality. He urged all who were favored by this glorious experience to carry forth its glorious message and thus awaken humanity. In final analysis, peace cannot exist anywhere without existing everywhere.<sup>181</sup>

Whether due to Locke's disinclination to have such publicity or for some other reason, only one other report of Locke's trip appear to have been published in the Baha'i News

<sup>179</sup> "Local Communities," *Bahá'í News*, No. 182 (April 1946): 6.

<sup>180</sup> "News of the Cause," *Baha'i News Letter*, No. 10 (Feb. 1926): 6. Cf. Morrison, *op. cit.*, 151, who states that this tour occurred in 1925. However, Horace Holley indicates 1926: "I am delighted that the plans have worked out so well for your southern trip. I hope you will keep in touch with me during this trip and send me little memorandums of your public talks and any other news that might be of interest to the friends in the *Baha'i News Letter*. You understand, of course, that I will present the story of your trip in an impersonal way and not refer to you as the source of the news. Consequently, please do not be so modest that you lean backward, because trips of this kind are most inspiring to all the friends and I feel that they have a right to know the details of what I am sure is going to be a remarkable speaking journey." Holley to Locke, 28 January 1926, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace). In a later letter, it is clear that this trip must have taken place prior to August, as Locke was in Paris at that time. Holley to Locke, 17 August 1926, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace).

<sup>181</sup> "The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Baha'i Congress," *Baha'i News Letter*, No. 6 (1925): 3.

Letter. After referring to the publication of *The New Negro* “by Dr. Alain Locke, our brilliant Baha’i brother of Washington, DC and New York City,” the article simply states: “Altogether inadequate has been the mention in previous issues of the News Letter of the remarkable work carried on throughout the South during the winter by Mr. Louis Gregory, Mr. Howard MacNutt, Dr. Locke and Mrs. Louise Boyle. These teachers, in cooperation with the Spiritual Assembly of Miami and many Baha’i groups and isolated believers, held an astounding number of meetings from autumn to spring, in churches, schools clubs [*sic*] and private homes, with the result that a powerful concentration of spiritual forces was focussed on this great and important territory.”<sup>182</sup> According to Gayle Morrison, this travel teaching trip began in October 1925. There were seven Baha’i groups in Florida at that time. Morrison notes that “successful meetings” were held in Miami, Jacksonville and St. Augustine. Evidently, a new spiritual assembly was formed in Miami as one of the signal outcomes of this teaching trip, through the combined efforts of white Baha’i “homefront pioneers” and the itinerant teachers. One can thus say that Alain Locke was instrumental in helping to establish the Miami Baha’i council, which may well have been the first spiritual assembly in the South.<sup>183</sup> How far into the spring of 1926 the trip lasted is not certain.

One of the most surprising and rewarding outcomes of my archival research was the discovery of yet another contribution Locke had made to the Faith—one that, in fact, had no connection with race relations whatever. Among the Alain Locke Papers, preserved in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, were found two letters to Locke, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi by his secretary at that time, Ruhi Afnan. These letters are dated 15 February and 5 July 1930. The first begins: “Dear Dr. Locke: Shoghi Effendi has been lately spending his leisure hours translating the Book of Iqan for he considers it to be the key to a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and can easily rank as one of the most, if not the most, important thing that Bahá’u’lláh revealed explaining the basic beliefs of the Cause. He who fully grasps the purport of that Book can claim to have understood the Cause.”

The “Book of Iqan” is better known in English as the *Book of Certitude* (*Kitáb-i Íqán*), and has achieved distinction as Bahá’u’lláh’s preeminent doctrinal text.<sup>184</sup> This reference to Shoghi Effendi’s translation work as having been undertaken during “leisure hours” reinforces the magnitude of the Guardian’s work load. In efforts to perfect his working translation of the *Íqán* from Persian to English, the Guardian called upon Locke as the person “best fitted to render him [Shoghi Effendi] an assistance” in giving critical feedback on the translation itself. The Guardian requested that Locke “go over it [the translation] carefully, studying every sentence—its structure as well as choice of words—and giving him your [Locke’s] criticism as well as constructive suggestions that would make it more lucid, English [*sic*] and forceful.” He adds, “Shoghi Effendi is fully aware of the many duties you have and how pressing your time is, and had he known of

<sup>182</sup> “News of the Cause,” *Baha’i News Letter*, No. 10 (Feb. 1926): 6-7.

<sup>183</sup> Morrison, *op. cit.*, 124. See entry in index on 387, which says that Louis Gregory “helps form first Spiritual Assembly in South.”

<sup>184</sup> See Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret: Qur’an Commentary in Bahá’u’lláh’s Kitáb-i Íqán*. Studies in the Babi and Bahá’i Religions, vol. 7 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995). Republished online as an electronic book at: <<http://www.bahai-library.org/books/symbol.secret>>.

an equally fitting person he would surely have saved you the trouble. Yet he finds himself to be compelled.” The first letter accompanied the first half of the translation which Shoghi Effendi decided to send to Locke. The second half was mailed later.

Locke did as the Guardian requested. The second letter (5 July 1930) was sent to Locke to acknowledge his editorial assistance: “Though they were not so many, he [Shoghi Effendi] found the suggestions you gave most helpful.” Moreover, Ruhi Afnan reported that: “Shoghi Effendi has already incorporated your suggestions and sent his manuscript to the national spiritual assembly of the United States and Canada] for publication.” A most interesting comment follows: “It naturally depends upon that body and the reviewing and publishing committees to decide whether it should come out immediately or not.” The potential value of reaching the western intelligentsia was noted as well: “The most important service that can now be rendered to the Cause is to put the writings of Bahá’u’lláh in a form that would be presentable to the intellectual minds of the west. Shoghi Effendi’s hope in this work has been to encourage others along this line.” At the end of the letter, Shoghi Effendi wrote, in his own hand, the following:

My dear co-worker:

I wish to add a few words expressing my deep appreciation of your valued suggestions in connexion with the translation of the Iqan. I wish also to express the hope that you may be able to lend increasing assistance to the work of the Cause, as I have always greatly admired your exceptional abilities and capacity to render distinguished services to the Faith. I grieve to hear of the weakness of your heart which I trust may through treatment be completely restored. I often remember you in my prayers and ever cherish the hope of welcoming you again in the Master’s home.

Your true brother,  
Shoghi.

Locke wrote four essays published in six volumes of *The Bahá’í World*, which was not only a record of the development of the Faith internationally, but was its official international voice as well (prior to the establishment of the Bahá’í International Community). Leonard Harris is currently the world’s leading authority on Alain Locke. In his collection of Locke’s philosophical writings, two of Locke’s *Bahá’í World* essays are anthologized: “The Orientation of Hope” (1936)<sup>185</sup> and “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle” (1933).<sup>186</sup> “The Orientation of Hope,” according to Harris, “is a definitive expression of Locke’s belief in the Bahá’í Faith and its focus on the universal principles definitive of spiritual faiths.”<sup>187</sup> Locke’s other two *Bahá’í World* essays were: “Impressions of Haifa” (1926, 1929, 1930) and “Lessons in World Crisis” (1945). These essays profile Locke’s perspective as a Bahá’í, even though we have such sketchy details about his Bahá’í activities. How he came to write these essays, which evidently were invited, is an important consideration. Although Shoghi Effendi certainly supervised its

<sup>185</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 129-32.

<sup>186</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 133-38.

<sup>187</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 129.

publication and approved its contents, normally the editors of *The Bahá'í World* issued invitations to write articles. However, Shoghi Effendi personally contacted Locke by cable, inviting him to contribute his final *Bahá'í World* essay: "WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE ARTICLE FROM YOUR PEN ON ANY ASPECT FAITH FOR CENTENARY ISSUE BAHÁ'Í WORLD VOLUME NINE LOVING GREETINGS SHOGHI RABBANI."<sup>188</sup>

In his essay, "The Orientation of Hope," Locke gives some fraternal advice to Bahá'ís. This statement serves as eloquent testimony to the strength of his own convictions as a Bahá'í:

Must we not as true Bahá'í believers in these times embrace our principles more positively, more realistically, and point everywhere possible our assertion of the teachings with a direct challenge? [...] Especially does it seem to me to be the opportunity to bring the Bahá'í principles again forcefully to the attention of statesmen and men of practical affairs [...]. Is it not reasonably clear to us that now is the time for a world-wide, confident and determined offensive of peaceful propaganda for the basic principles of the Cause of brotherhood, peace and social justice? [...] And to do that powerfully, effectively, the Bahá'í teaching needs an inspired extension of the potent realism of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by which he crowned and fulfilled the basic idealism of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>189</sup>

A proper understanding of Locke's *Bahá'í World* essays—especially "The Orientation of Hope" and "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle"—requires a background in Locke's philosophical thought, which is outlined briefly in the next section.

### Locke as philosopher

Locke was deeply influenced by pragmatism, a contemporary philosophical movement that countered both idealism and realism. "Pragmatism is an account of the way people think," according to Menand, "the way they come up with ideas, form beliefs, and reach decisions."<sup>190</sup> It correlates truth and experience, self and world. Experience is real. It is no mere mental phenomenon. It is a dynamic interaction between self and world. Knowledge derives from experience. Truth is transformed by experience.

Pragmatism is process. It advocates a method. Ideas are relative to time and place. The truth of a proposition depends on its practical value, not on any intrinsic meaning. Like the scientific method, knowledge can be tested. How? Ideas must be tested by experience. This has profound cultural implications. Truth is judged by its consequences.

<sup>188</sup> Shoghi Effendi to Locke, Western Union cablegram, 17 January 1944; Mabel Paine to Locke, 3 February 1944. See also Holley to Locke, 1 February 1944, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-36, Folder 47 (Holley, Horace), and Paine to Locke, 4 March 1944, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-12, Folder 3 (Bahá'í World). Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-106, Folder 22 ([re: Bahá'í revelation of principles.])

<sup>189</sup> Locke, "The Orientation of Hope," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 130, 132.

<sup>190</sup> Menand, *op. cit.*, 351.

It cannot be divorced from the practical and moral. America, it follows, is accountable to itself.

The originators of pragmatism include the trinity of Charles Sanders Peirce (d. 1914), who claimed to have “invented” pragmatism and expounded its theory of meaning; William James (d. 1910) who developed pragmatism’s theory of truth, and John Dewey (d. 1952), who contributed his notion of “instrumentalism” to the movement.<sup>191</sup> The renown W. E. B. Du Bois had been a student of James.<sup>192</sup> Locke had a passion for William James,<sup>193</sup> although he rejected James’ radical empiricism. Both Du Bois and Locke read James’ Oxford lectures, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), as a philosophical allegory for making a “vital connection between pluralism and democracy.”<sup>194</sup>

Pragmatists put a premium on “experience.” They sought to test the truth of ideas in actual experience as a “pragmatic” indicator. They also felt that their philosophical ideas had ethical and political consequences.<sup>195</sup> Moreover, John Dewey felt that pragmatism provided a philosophical basis for democracy, which he viewed as an ethical principle that extended beyond politics to economics and social interactions as well.<sup>196</sup> Despite his influences, Locke pursued an independent course by deforming a master code of symbols and reforming them by means of what Houston Baker, Jr. called a “*radical marronage*”<sup>197</sup> or independent restructuring.

Pragmatism gave birth to cultural pluralism, which Locke espoused with almost religious zeal. During the 1920s, the question as to what constitutes American identity was “a national preoccupation.”<sup>198</sup> Posnock states that “pragmatism’s answer” was “cultural pluralism,” as opposed to the coercions of assimilation—the pressure to conform—in the American paradigm of the “melting pot.”<sup>199</sup> “American democracy for Locke,” writes Leonard Harris, “was hardly a finished social experiment, especially since it excluded most of the population from participation.”<sup>200</sup> For Locke, cultural pluralism

<sup>191</sup> James T. Kloppenberg, “Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?” *Journal of American History* 83.1 (June 1996): 102, n. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 184.

<sup>193</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4.

<sup>194</sup> Alain Locke, “Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy,” in *Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, Second Symposium* (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, 1942). Reprinted in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 53.

<sup>195</sup> Kloppenberg, *op. cit.*, 101.

<sup>196</sup> Kloppenberg, *op. cit.*, 120.

<sup>197</sup> Houston Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 75, quoted by Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 12. See Ernest Mason, “Deconstruction in the Philosophy of Alain Locke,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 24 (Winter 1988): 85-106.

<sup>198</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>199</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>200</sup> Leonard Harris, “Preface,” in idem (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) xi.

provided *the* social philosophy most needed by democracy,<sup>201</sup> not just in America, but across the world. Cultural pluralism was thus “the philosophic faith that Alain Locke became a notable spokesman for.”<sup>202</sup> As his primary philosophical framework, cultural pluralism would make possible a general theory of “unity in diversity.”<sup>203</sup>

Locke’s philosophy is really a fusion of pluralism and relativism, as seen in the synonyms he uses for it. “Cultural pluralism” is variously referred to in Locke’s writings as “cultural relativism,” “critical relativism” as well as “value relativism.”<sup>204</sup> Locke’s use of technical terms is not, however, always consistent. As Winston Napier points out, Locke’s “semantic inconsistency clouds his argument.”<sup>205</sup> Strictly speaking, pluralism is a distinctive concept, while relativism is a normative one.<sup>206</sup> As Mason observes: “It is precisely the separation between pluralism and relativism that explains much of America’s intolerance. For a plurality of ethnic groups simply cannot exist within a society that refuses to recognize the relative and functional nature of values and institutions. Locke’s critique of democracy centers around democracy’s need to develop a relativistic perspective to fit its pluralistic society.”<sup>207</sup> Cultural pluralism has since evolved into what is now known as “multiculturalism.”<sup>208</sup> Recently, Locke has been acknowledged as “the father of multiculturalism.”<sup>209</sup>

While his formal training in philosophy was followed by a long and distinguished teaching career as an academic, with numerous publications to his credit, Locke did not publish a single article on philosophy until he was fifty years old,<sup>210</sup> seventeen years after he had become a Bahá’í. This significant fact accords with Locke’s psychograph in which he disclaims having ever been “a professional philosopher.”<sup>211</sup> Notwithstanding, his work during this later period articulates his mature thinking as both a professor of philosophy as well as a philosopher by training. Locke’s first formal philosophical essay, “Values and Imperatives,” appeared in 1935. This marked the year that saw his “reentry into the doing of philosophy directly”<sup>212</sup> and thus back into the world of grand theory.

What role did philosophy play in Locke’s life? What was its purpose? What had Locke hoped to accomplish through the vehicle of philosophy? In a retrospective look at his career in Howard University, Locke wrote that his “main objectives” had been “to

<sup>201</sup> Mason, “Social Philosophy of Alain Locke,” 26.

<sup>202</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 127.

<sup>203</sup> Green, “Alain Locke’s Multicultural Philosophy of Value,” 87.

<sup>204</sup> Judith Green, “Alain Locke’s Multicultural Philosophy of Value,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 87.

<sup>205</sup> Napier, *op. cit.*

<sup>206</sup> Mason, “Social Philosophy of Alain Locke,” 34.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 192.

<sup>209</sup> Molesworth, *op. cit.*, 175-76.

<sup>210</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 8, 10.

<sup>211</sup> Kallen, *op. cit.*, 122.

<sup>212</sup> Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 9.

use philosophy as an agent for stimulating critical mindedness in Negro youth, to help transform segregated educational missions into centers of cultural and social leadership, and to organize an advance guard of creative talent for cultural inspiration and prestige.” Moreover, he wanted to link “the discussion of colonial problems with the American race situation, toward the internationalization of American Negro thought and action.”<sup>213</sup> Indeed, as Michael Winston observes: “With the dramatic rise of racial consciousness in the former European colonies, Locke’s influence became internationalized.”<sup>214</sup>

It is clear that Locke wanted to make a contribution to world peace as well. If intellectuals were inspired with the same vision and could agree on a common paradigm, their leadership had the potential to further that aim. In his essay, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,”<sup>215</sup> Locke states: “Cultural relativism may become an important source for ideological peace” and, indeed, may serve “as a possible ideological peacemaker.”<sup>216</sup> “Cultural relativism” Locke believed, “can become a very constructive philosophy by way of integrating values and value systems.”<sup>217</sup> “In looking for cultural agreements on a world scale,” Locke further explained, “we shall probably have to content ourselves with agreement of the common-denominator type and with ‘unity in diversity’ discovered in the search for unities of a functional rather than a content character, and therefore of a pragmatic rather than an ideological sort.”<sup>218</sup> In other words, Locke has proposed a formula for promoting cultural relativism as a “realistic instrument of social reorientation and cultural enlightenment.”<sup>219</sup>

Locke gave specific reasons as to why this program might work. For Locke, cultural relativism had “constructive potentialities”<sup>220</sup> and offered new hope for ideological peace. For relativism to work, it first had to be implemented. Just how would one begin to carry out a program of cultural relativity? Locke had such a plan. Its rationale is developed alongside its strategy. There were three stages in his plan, each of which was intended to have a calculated, cumulative result. The three stages were: (1) cultural equivalence; (2) reciprocity; and (3) limited cultural convertibility. An explanation of these three stages is as follows:

“*Equivalence*”: In his efforts to universalize philosophy, Locke sought to promote intercultural understanding, and thought that scholars (especially “cultural anthropologists”) ought to lead the way—through a systematic process of conceptual translation based on formal comparison:

The principle of *cultural equivalence*, under which we would more widely

<sup>213</sup> Private memorandum, Alain Locke Papers (MSRC), cited by Winston, *op. cit.*, 402.

<sup>214</sup> Winston, *op. cit.*, 404.

<sup>215</sup> Alain Locke, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,” in Lyman Bryson, Louis Finkelstein, and R. M. MacIver (eds.) *Approaches to World Peace* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944) 609-618. Reprinted in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 67-78.

<sup>216</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 70.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 75.

<sup>219</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

press the search for functional similarities in our analyses and comparisons of human cultures; thus offsetting our traditional and excessive emphasis upon cultural difference. Such functional equivalences, which we might term ‘*culture-cognates*’ or ‘*culture-correlates*,’ discovered underneath deceptive but superficial institutional divergence, would provide objective but soundly neutral common denominators for intercultural understanding and cooperation.<sup>221</sup>

The search for cultural counterparts is, for Locke, a sound way of trying to make sense of the bewildering diversity of societal norms and mores that, upon investigation, reveal a recognizable logic. “Functional equivalence” for Locke, seems to be synonymous with “real basic similarity” in values.<sup>222</sup> Similarities are seen in function rather than form.

“*Reciprocity*”: Beyond tolerance, but assuming notions of equivalence based on “loyalty to loyalty,” is a second concept: reciprocity. Reciprocity approaches cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation. “Social reciprocity for value loyalties,” writes Locke, “is but a new name for the old virtue of tolerance, yet it does bring the question of tolerance down from the lofty thin air of idealism and chivalry to the plane of enlightened self-interest and the practical possibilities of value-sharing.”<sup>223</sup> This is an understatement, for reciprocity is something much more than mere toleration for the purpose of reducing intercommunal conflict:

The principle of *cultural reciprocity*, which, by a general recognition of the reciprocal character of all contacts between cultures and the fact that all modern cultures are highly composite ones, would invalidate the lump estimating of cultures in terms of generalized, *en bloc* assumptions of superiority and inferiority, substituting scientific, point-by-point comparisons with their correspondingly limited, specific, and objectively verifiable superiorities or inferiorities.<sup>224</sup>

This is both a historical as well as procedural statement. Cultures are syncretistic. A simple realization of this fact should suffice to dispel pretensions of cultural superiority. This new virtue—reciprocity—is tolerance transformed into a real exchange of values. As Moses observes: “Locke’s principle of reciprocity first emerges as a historical law that may be discerned through careful consideration of what has contributed to civilized progress in many an age.”<sup>225</sup> Locke translates this historical law into a present-day ethic. In this part of Locke’s plan, comparisons would become very specific. The “culture-correlates” would then be weighed, and even judged as to their relative superiority or inferiority. There would be particular cultural values that could be

<sup>221</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 73.

<sup>222</sup> Locke, “Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy,” 60.

<sup>223</sup> Locke, “Values and Imperatives,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 48.

<sup>224</sup> Locke, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 73.

<sup>225</sup> Moses, *op. cit.*, 166.



exported and taken up within other modern cultures, which are themselves composite anyway.

“*Cultural convertibility*”: As a student of history, Locke foresaw the strong possibility that culture might selectively adopt a foreign cultural value. In assimilating that value to itself, the transplanted value would take root and become part of the new cultural landscape. An example of this might be seen in the import, popularization and eventual westernization of the eastern practice of meditation. Locke sees a third concept coming into play:

The principle of *limited cultural convertibility*, that, since culture elements, though widely interchangeable, are so separable, the institutional forms from their values and the values from their institutional forms, the organic selectivity and assimilative capacity of a borrowing culture becomes a limiting criterion for cultural exchange. Conversely, pressure acculturation and the mass transplanting of culture, the stock procedure of groups with traditions of culture “superiority” and dominance, are counterindicated as against both the interests of cultural efficiency and the natural trends of cultural selectivity.<sup>226</sup>

Locke claims that these “three objectively grounded principles of culture relations” might, if properly implemented, “correct some of our basic culture dogmatism and progressively cure many of our most intolerant and prejudicial cultural attitudes and practices.”<sup>227</sup> How? Discovery of cultural equivalences was supposed to result in an agenda for intercultural understanding, which would, in turn, provide a common foundation for intercultural cooperation.

Whom did Locke expect or hope to carry out this plan? Quite possibly his peers. He states: “There has never been a new age without a new scholarship or, to put it more accurately, without a profound realignment of scholarship.”<sup>228</sup> “It is for this reason that one can so heartily concur in the suggestions of Professor Northrop’s paper that a value analysis of our basic cultures in broadscale comparison is the philosophical, or rather the scholarly, task of the hour.”<sup>229</sup>

### Locke as Bahá’í thinker

In general terms, Locke regarded the Bahá’í Faith as a “movement for human brotherhood.”<sup>230</sup> This is not to say that he reduced the religion to an amorphous universalism, for, in “The Orientation of Hope,” Locke calls the Bahá’í Faith “a virile and truly prophetic spiritual revelation.”<sup>231</sup>

What relationship, if any, exists between Locke’s religion and his philosophy?

<sup>226</sup> Locke, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 73.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 70.

<sup>229</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 75.

<sup>230</sup> Locke to Parsons, 28 June 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

<sup>231</sup> Locke, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 130.

Philosophy has traditionally served as the great systematiser of religious thinking. Locke's religious works (his *Bahá'í World* essays) were certainly informed by his philosophy, which served—as philosophy was supposed to in medieval times—as the “handmaid of theology.” Indeed, the presence of key philosophical concepts in Locke's *Bahá'í World* essays accentuates the religio-philosophical (Bahá'í-cultural relativist) synergy. “What we need to learn most,” writes Locke, “is how to discover unity and spiritual *equivalence* underneath the differences which at present so disunite and sunder us, and how to establish some basic spiritual *reciprocity* on the principle of unity in diversity.”<sup>232</sup> “The purity of Bahá'í principles,” Locke argues, “must be gauged by their universality on this practical plane.”<sup>233</sup> Locke then poses a challenge in the form of a test of authenticity: “Do they [Bahá'í principles] fraternize and fuse with all their kindred expressions? Are they happy in their collaborations that advocate other sanctions but advance toward the same spiritual goal? Can they reduce themselves to the vital *common denominators* necessary to mediate between other partisan *loyalties*?” (emphasis added).<sup>234</sup> This is classic Lockean philosophy, transposed within a Bahá'í value system.

The reverse also held true, in that religion served as Locke's handmaid of philosophy. Bahá'í values suffuse Locke's philosophical thought. Judith Green observes that “Locke's work shows the influence of serious engagements with Marxism, with diverse religious and spiritual traditions including, among others, Christianity, Buddhism, and Bahá'í.”<sup>235</sup> This appears to underestimate the relative importance of the Bahá'í influence on Locke. As Johnny Washington notes: “During the latter part of his career, he accepted the Bahá'í faith and attempted to integrate it into his own philosophy of values.”<sup>236</sup> This statement suggests that Locke himself transposed Bahá'í principles of unity into his philosophy.

Locke stressed Bahá'í universality as its primary mission for the present: “But it is not the time for insisting on this side of the claim; the intelligent, loyal Bahá'í should stress not the source, but the importance of the idea, and rejoice not in the originality and uniqueness of the principle but rather in its prevalence and practicality.”<sup>237</sup> Locke continues: “The idea has to be translated into every important province of modern life and thought, and in many of these must seem to be independently derived and justified.”<sup>238</sup> Assuming that he practised what he preached, this statement signals Locke's intention and method: namely, that he would apply Bahá'í principles to his own “province of modern life and thought”—philosophy.

A closer comparison of Locke's essays reveals a synergy between the two. “For Locke, cultural pluralism and cultural relativism,” Ernest Mason claims, “both have their

<sup>232</sup> Locke, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 135.

<sup>233</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 136.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Green, *Deep Democracy*, 97.

<sup>236</sup> Washington, *Alain Locke and Philosophy*, xxv.

<sup>237</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 135.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

foundation in the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity.<sup>239</sup> In demonstrating a thematic simultaneity in Locke's religious and philosophical writings, Mason declares: "In the following examination of Locke's social philosophy I hope to demonstrate fully that Locke was, theoretically and practically, concerned with the very social issues stressed in the Bahá'í Faith: justice, equality, nonviolence, tolerance, and racial and ideological peace."<sup>240</sup> Mason was not alone in making this assertion. Kenneth Stickers observes:

The Bahá'í religion provided Locke the concrete experience of unity in diversity, for a central teaching of that faith is that the Word of God is essentially one but is spoken differently through the prophets of the various religions of the world, in ways relative to unique sociohistorical conditions. Locke expressed the Bahá'í principle with this metaphor: "think of reality as a central fact and a white light broken up by the prism of human nature into a spectrum of values."<sup>241</sup>

This has implications for future Lockean studies in particular, and for African American and for mainstream American philosophy in general.

Unity in diversity is a Bahá'í principle that Locke transposed into his philosophy: "It is just at this juncture that the idea of unity in diversity seems to me to become relevant, and to offer a spiritual common denominator of both ideal and practical efficacy."<sup>242</sup> Locke wanted to replace absolutes with universalisms: "Even though it is not yet accepted as a general principle, as a general desire and an ideal goal, the demand for universality is beyond doubt the most characteristic modern thing in the realm of spiritual values, and in the world of the mind that reflects this realm."<sup>243</sup> Through the vehicle of philosophy, Locke replaced "identity" with "equivalence" and "difference" with "unity in diversity."<sup>244</sup> In so doing, Locke offered "a solution reconciling nationalism with internationalism, racialism with universalism."<sup>245</sup>

Both as a philosopher and as a Bahá'í, Locke, as a matter of principle, envisioned a series of "progressive integrations" that would take place "in due course" and "step by step, from an initial stage of cultural tolerance, mutual respect, reciprocal exchange, some specific communities of agreement and, finally, commonality of purpose and action." But since he was not a thoroughly systematic thinker, we cannot read this statement with full confidence in its sequence. Green calls this a "peacemaking democratic transformation [...] by stage-wise progression."<sup>246</sup>

In my own reading, there is a progression in Locke's social philosophy in which

<sup>239</sup> Mason, "Locke's Social Philosophy," 26.

<sup>240</sup> Mason, "Locke's Social Philosophy," 28.

<sup>241</sup> Stickers, *op. cit.*, 214-15.

<sup>242</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 135.

<sup>243</sup> Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 134.

<sup>244</sup> Posnock, *op. cit.*, 202.

<sup>245</sup> Locke, "The Contribution of Race to Culture," in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 203.

<sup>246</sup> Green, *op. cit.*, 124.

tolerance leads to reciprocity which, in turn, culminates in “unity in diversity.” Locke describes his own universalism as a “fluid and functional unity that begins in a basic progression of value pluralism, converts itself to value relativism, and then passes over into a ready and willing admission of both cultural relativism and pluralism.”<sup>247</sup> Locke’s hierarchy of loyalty, tolerance, reciprocity, and cultural relativism and pluralism (the philosophical equivalent of “unity in diversity”) was a pragmatic application of quintessentially Bahá’í values. In its practical application, this hierarchy is formulaic:

“Loyalty” expresses group solidarity. Loyalty is related to the idea of tolerance. Loyalty is love of one’s own race, ethnicity, culture. The concept of loyalty is connected with the notion of community. “Indeed,” as Stickers corroborates, “it was Royce’s theories of loyalty and community and Locke’s experience in the Bahá’í faith [...] that provided the main intellectual influences on Locke’s pluralism.”<sup>248</sup> As mentioned, Josiah Royce was one of Locke’s professors in Harvard’s philosophy department.<sup>249</sup> Locke’s attraction to Royce’s ideas owes a great deal to the fact that Royce was “the only major American philosopher during the early 1900s to publish a book condemning racism.”<sup>250</sup> Locke’s cultural relativism was grounded in Royce’s social ethic of “loyalty to loyalty,” which values a people’s loyalty to their own particular culture and value system, so long as respect is maintained for broadly humane values as well.<sup>251</sup>

“Tolerance” has both individual and social dimensions. Locke’s concept of “tolerance” has its roots in the philosophy of John Locke (individualism), but goes far beyond. In his essay, “Two Lockes, Two Keys, Tolerance and Reciprocity in a Culture of Democracy,” Greg Moses compares the philosophies of Alain Locke and John Locke. If not in theory then in practice, John Locke’s ethic of toleration has been “poorly applied by liberal civilizations.”<sup>252</sup> While John Locke stressed mutual tolerance in an exchange of ideas between individuals, Alain Locke advocated such tolerance between groups.<sup>253</sup> All too often, however, tolerance has proven to be little more than a thin veneer of acceptance, with an air of condescension and paternalism by the dominant group.

“Reciprocity”—as mentioned in the previous section—is really an extension of democracy in that it constrains group dominance through promoting the equality of groups, each having a place at the table, so to speak. Moses sums this up eloquently when he concludes his essay by saying: “Reciprocity—to shift figures in function and

<sup>247</sup> Alain Locke, “Pluralism and Ideological Peace,” 65, cited by Harvey, *op. cit.*, 26.

<sup>248</sup> Kenneth W. Stickers, “Instrumental Relativism and Cultivated Pluralism: Alain Locke and Philosophy’s Quest for a Common World,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 214.

<sup>249</sup> See Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. Republished with an introduction by John J. McDermott (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995 [1908]).

<sup>250</sup> Leonard Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 4. See Josiah Royce, *Race Questions, Provincialism, and Other American Problems* (1908; reprint, Freeport: Books of Libraries Press 1967).

<sup>251</sup> Green, “Alain Locke’s Multicultural Philosophy of Value,” 88. See also Royce, *Race Questions*.

<sup>252</sup> Moses, *op. cit.*, 168.

<sup>253</sup> Greg Moses, “Two Lockes, Two Keys: Tolerance and Reciprocity in a Culture of Democracy,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 165.

form—would be key to the new Locke [Alain Locke], as tolerance had been key to the old [the philosopher John Locke].”<sup>254</sup>

“Cultural relativism and pluralism” are Locke’s philosophical equivalents of the Bahá’í principle of “unity in diversity.” The most recent and sophisticated treatment of Locke’s philosophy of unity in diversity is that of Judith M. Green. In her book, *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (1999), Green devotes an entire chapter to Locke.<sup>255</sup> Green observes that a great deal of Locke’s work remains unpublished, and that his contribution has been largely forgotten until recently. Due to the sudden and vigorous explosion of scholarly interest in Locke, his philosophical thought will no longer suffer a death by silence.

Green identifies two streams of thought and experience in Locke’s life and work. One stream is an African American historical, cultural, and intellectual tradition—the specific loyalty that “links Locke with forebears in struggle like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, with older contemporaries like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois (who assisted his early career), with younger contemporaries like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm (X) Shabazz, and with our living generations of African American public intellectuals.”<sup>256</sup> Speaking of America, Locke stated that “this ominous rainbow [...] shows a wide diffusion of bias and prejudice in our social atmosphere and, unfortunately, presages not the passing, but the coming of a storm [...] and unless America solves these minority issues constructively and achieves minority peace or minority tolerance, in less than half a generation she will be in the flaming predicament of Europe.”<sup>257</sup>

The other stream is his cosmopolitan outlook, particularly his commitment to “cultural pluralism” (now known as multiculturalism). Locke’s pluralism compensated for some of the deficiencies of liberalism. As Segun Gbadegesin rhetorically asks: “How, if at all, does liberalism differ from pluralism? Liberalism’s emphasis is freedom: freedom is its battle cry. But there are other values, including justice [...] and community.”<sup>258</sup> Locke’s cosmopolitan paradigm of unity is a “theoretical and praxical transformation of classical American pragmatism.”<sup>259</sup> According to Green, Locke had precociously conceptualized “deep democracy” as “cosmopolitan unity amidst valued diversity.”<sup>260</sup>

Education would play a transformative role in helping to bring about this world

<sup>254</sup> Moses, *op. cit.*, 173.

<sup>255</sup> Green, “Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity,” 132.

<sup>256</sup> Green, *op. cit.*, 97.

<sup>257</sup> Alain Locke, “Minorities and the Social Mind,” *Progressive Education* 12 (March 1935): 142.

<sup>258</sup> Segun Gbadegesin, “Values, Imperatives, and the Imperative of Democratic Values,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 288.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Green, *Deep Democracy*, 96.

culture—one characterized by a “race-transcending”<sup>261</sup> consciousness. Locke also spoke of the role of education in cultivating “international-mindedness.”<sup>262</sup> Art, education, as well as philosophy were venues through which Locke sought to move the world.

### Conclusions

If interracial unity, beyond racial justice, was Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “dream” for America, it was Alain LeRoy Locke’s vision for the world. Locke prized unity. He had a disdain for black “self-segregation”<sup>263</sup> as well as for Jim Crow segregation. In an unpublished essay that Johnny Washington titled, “The Paradox of Race,” Locke not only advocated racial integration but encouraged interracial marriage as well.<sup>264</sup> It is quite clear that Locke’s vision of interracial unity was inspired by his experience as a member of the early American Bahá’í community. Interracial unity, in Bahá’í parlance, is often described as “unity in diversity”—a term that encompasses the entire range of human differences.<sup>265</sup> This term appears in both Locke’s philosophical as well as religious essays.

One can tentatively say that the Bahá’í principle of “unity in diversity” has indirectly influenced African American philosophy by way of Locke. This study has also suggested that Locke’s religious works were informed by his philosophy, which served as the “handmaid of theology” while the Bahá’í Faith served as Locke’s handmaid of philosophy. Not only was there a synergy between the two, but there was also a creative connection between Locke’s Bahá’í values and philosophical commitments. For instance, in his essay, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle,” Locke praises Royce: “Josiah Royce, one of the greatest American philosophers[,] saw this problem more clearly than any other western thinker, which is nothing more or less than a vindication of the principle of unity and diversity carried out to a practical degree of spiritual reciprocity.” Here, Locke directly correlates religious and philosophical principles. Locke’s philosophy may be seen as an unique synthesis of the following thinkers:

<sup>261</sup> Rudolph V. Vanterpool, “Open-Textured Aesthetic Boundaries: Matters of Art, Race, and Culture,” in Leonard Harris (ed.) *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader in Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 141.

<sup>262</sup> Alain Locke, “Lessons in World Crisis,” 746.

<sup>263</sup> Hutchison, *op. cit.*, 86.

<sup>264</sup> Johnny Washington, *A Journey into the Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994) 103.

<sup>265</sup> It should be noted that Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, 2nd rev. edn. (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974 [1938]), used this term to refer to differences of ethnic origins, climate, history, language, tradition, thought and habit (41)—generally, in the sense of a lack of conformity except in essentials—as the bedrock of the Bahá’í administrative order. It is therefore misleading to represent “unity in diversity” as applying only to race. (I am indebted to Gayle Morrison for this important observation.)

<b>VALUE THEORY</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
Christian Freiherr von Ehrenfel	values as intrinsic to cognition
Alexius Meinong	values as feelings
Wilbur Urban	value types/qualities
<b>PRAGMATISM</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
Charles Sanders Peirce	theory of meaning
William James	theory of truth
John Dewey	pluralism and democracy
<b>PHILOSOPHY OF LOYALTY</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
Josiah Royce	philosophy of loyalty
<b>CULTURAL PLURALISM</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
Franz Boas	race and culture
Melville J. Herskovits	race and culture
<b>CULTURAL NATIONALISM</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
W. E. B. Du Bois	the Talented Tenth
<b>NATURALISM</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
George Santayana	pragmatist aesthetics <sup>266</sup>
<b>BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>IDEAS</b>
Bahá'u'lláh	world unity
'Abdu'l-Bahá	interracial unity
Shoghi Effendi	unity in diversity

This list is by no means exhaustive. It should also be borne in mind that, despite his intense commitment to Bahá'í principles, Locke does not directly cite Bahá'í writings. Although he acknowledged that “there is no escaping the historical evidences of its [unity through diversity’s] early advocacy and its uncompromising adoption by the Bahá'í prophets and teachers,” Locke followed his own advice to Bahá'ís in that “the intelligent, loyal Bahá'í should stress not the source, but the importance of the idea, and rejoice not in the originality and uniqueness of the principle but rather in its prevalence and practicality.”<sup>267</sup>

The salience of race remains a social fact. Synergized by Bahá'í values, Locke adroitly linked race progress with world peace. In one of his Bahá'í essays, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle,” Locke states: “Each period of a faith imposes a special new problem.”<sup>268</sup> In a philosophical essay, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,” Locke expresses a similar conviction, hinting at what would today be called a paradigm shift: “There has never been a new age without a new scholarship, or, to put it more accurately, without a profound realignment of scholarship.”<sup>269</sup> Locke’s realignment of scholarship was to detoxify “race” of its biologism, to transform “race” into culture, to “convert parochial thinking into global thinking”<sup>270</sup> and to promote

<sup>266</sup> See Jonathan Levin, “The Esthetics of Pragmatism,” *American Literary History* 6 (1994): 658-83.

<sup>267</sup> Locke, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 135.

<sup>268</sup> Locke, *op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>269</sup> Locke, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 72.

<sup>270</sup> Locke, “The Need for a New Organon in Education,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 268.

“progressive vistas of the new intercultural internationalism” with “passports of world citizenship good for safe ideological conduct anywhere.”<sup>271</sup> “The intellectual core of the problems of peace,” Locke maintains, “[...] will be the discovery of the necessary common denominators and the basic equivalences involved in a democratic world order or democracy on a world scale.”<sup>272</sup>

As a religious personality, throughout his adult life, Locke vacillated and oscillated between Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith. Locke was always listed in biographies as an Episcopalian, the denomination in which he was raised. While his mother at first urged him to become a Methodist,<sup>273</sup> she later encouraged him to become a more fully committed Bahá'í.<sup>274</sup> In an unpublished autobiographical statement, Locke wrote: “I am really a Xtian [*sic*] without believing any of its dogma, because I am incapable of feeling hatred, revenge or jealousy [...] I have always hoped to be big enough to have to justify myself not to my contemporaries but to posterity. Small men apologize to their neighbors, big men to posterity.”<sup>275</sup> In an untitled manuscript in the Alain Locke papers, Locke expresses his appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith in these words:

The gospel for the Twentieth Century rises out of the heart of its greatest problems—and few who are spiritually enlightened doubt the nature of that problem. [...] The redemption of society—social salvation, should have been sought after first [...] The fundamental problems of current America are materiality and prejudice. [...] And so we must say[,] with the acute actualities of America's race problem and the acute potentialities of her economic problem, [that] the land that is nearest to material democracy is furthest away from spiritual democracy [...] And we must begin heroically with the greatest apparent irreconcilables: the East and the west, the black man and the self-arrogating Anglo-Saxon, for unless these are reconciled, the salvation of society cannot be. If the world had believingly understood the full significance of Him [Jesus Christ] who taught it to pray and hope[,] “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven[,]” who also said[,] “In my Father's house are many mansions,” already we should be further toward the realization of this great millen[n]ial vision. The word of God is still insistent, and more emphatic as the human redemption delays and becomes more crucial, and we have what Dr. Elsemont [Esslemont] rightly calls Baha'u'llah's “one great trumpet-call to humanity”: “That all nations shall become one in faith, and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men

<sup>271</sup> Locke, “Pluralism and Ideological Peace,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 99.

<sup>272</sup> Locke, “Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 62.

<sup>273</sup> “You had better make up your mind to become a Methodist—They are certainly loyal to you—I heard your praises sung by several of them.” Mary Locke to Alain Locke, 14 May 1916), Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-65, Folder 21 (page 5).

<sup>274</sup> Locke to Parsons, 28 June 1922, Agnes Parsons Papers, NBA.

<sup>275</sup> Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-1, Folder 2 (Autobiographical statements).



be as one kindred and family.[?]"<sup>276</sup>

In that same essay, Locke speaks of the “Old South” as well as the “New Negro,” of “a New South” in a “new era.” Locke’s vision was world-embracing, as he was equally as concerned for “suppressed minorities the world over today.” Moreover, he believed that any real solution to these problems would have to come about through “a revolution within the soul.” Indeed, there were moments when, for various personal reasons,<sup>277</sup> Locke later withdrew from active involvement in the Washington, DC, Bahá’í community. But there were moments of courage and grandeur, when Locke publicly identified himself as a Bahá’í. As late in his life as 1952, it must have been with Locke’s permission that his photograph appeared (alongside a picture of a fellow Bahá’í, Robert S. Abbott, founder of the *Chicago Defender*) in an *Ebony* magazine article entitled, “Baha’i Faith: Only church in world that does not discriminate.”<sup>278</sup> Of Locke, Shoghi Effendi reportedly said that: “People as you, Mr Gregory, Dr Esslemont and some other dear souls are as rare as diamond.”<sup>279</sup>

Just as one cannot understand Locke without reference to his intellectual pedigree, the Bahá’í Faith was part and parcel of his spiritual pedigree. It was the dominant spiritual influence on Locke. In his application of Bahá’í principles and values, Locke’s life and work is a testament to William James’s dictum: “Beliefs, in short, are really rules for action; and the whole function of thinking is but one step in the production of habits of action.”<sup>280</sup> As in his advice to his fellow Bahá’ís, Locke imposed upon himself the “task of transposing the traditional Bahá’í reciprocity between religions into the social and cultural denominationalisms of nation, race and class, and vindicating anew upon this plane the precious legacy of the inspired teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Bahá’u’lláh[.]”<sup>281</sup> Although a formal discipline of Bahá’í philosophy has not yet evolved, whenever and in whatever form a distinctive Bahá’í philosophy emerges, it will look back, as one of its forebears, on Alain Locke, Bahá’í philosopher.

<sup>276</sup> Untitled essay, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-143, Folder 3 (Writings by Locke—Notes. Christianity, spirituality, religion).

<sup>277</sup> Locke’s probable homosexual orientation may be relevant to this. See, e.g., Leonard Harris, “‘Outing’ Alain Locke: Empowering the Silenced,” in *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics*, ed. Mark Blasius (Princeton University Press, 2001) 321-41. In my own research of the Alain Locke Papers at Howard University, I discovered an unpublished autobiographical statement in which Locke referred to his “Achilles heel of homosexuality” which he “kept in an armoured shell [?] of reserve & haughty caution” (Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-143, Folder 5 [Autobiographical writings]).

<sup>278</sup> *Ebony* (October 1952) 39. Locke kept a copy of this article. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-147, Folder 12 (Articles, advertisements that mention Locke).

<sup>279</sup> Bahadur to Locke, 27 February 1924, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-12, Folder 2 (Bahadur, Azizullah).

<sup>280</sup> From his 1908 Berkeley lecture, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” quoted in Menand, *op. cit.*, 354.

<sup>281</sup> Locke, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle,” in Harris, *Philosophy of Alain Locke*, 138.

## APPENDIX

## SHOGHI EFFENDI'S LETTERS TO ALAIN LOCKE

These letters are dated 15 February 1930 and 5 July 1930. The first begins:

Persian Colony, Haifa  
15-II-30 [*sic*]

Dear Dr. Locke:

Shoghi Effendi has been lately spending his leisure hours translating the Book of Iqan for he considers it to be the key to a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures, & [*sic*] can easily rank as one of the most, if not the most, important thing that Baha'u'llah revealed explaining the basic beliefs of the Cause. He who fully grasps the purport of that Book can claim to have understood the Cause.

Yet, Shoghi Effendi believes that mere translation into English phrases is not sufficient. It is essential to make the idioms & expressions lively English, a thing which he alone cannot possibly achieve. Thinking, therefore, that you will be the best fitted to render him an assistance along that line, he is sending you the part that he has already completed. He would be most appreciative if you go over it carefully, studying every sentence—its structure as well as choice of words—& giving him your criticism as well as constructive suggestions that would make it more lucid, English [*sic*] & forceful. As it is a Holy Scripture, Shoghi Effendi has tried to put it in the English of the Bible, preferring its ways of expression better than any other.

What he sends you now is half of the book, the rest he will mail as it is translated. The form that it is in at present is far from being the last one. Yet he wishes to have all the possible suggestions before he puts it in its final form.

Shoghi Effendi is fully aware of the many duties you have & how pressing your time is, & had he known of an equally fitting person he would surely have saved you the trouble. Yet he finds himself to be compelled. He hopes, therefore, that you will give this work your close attention.

If the book is completed & rendered into a lucid & forceful language, the service it will render to the Cause will surely repay all your endeavours. In many places you will see the same idea expressed in other words & inserted in parenthesis [*sic*]. You can chose [*sic*] any of the two. In case you have any suggestions just mention in what page & line it is. You need not send him back the copy after going over it, for he may desire to refer to them later. He has enough copies here. Though he wishes you to give it all your attention he will be much obliged if you take it up immediately.

With deepest appreciation

Yours ever sincerely

Ruhi Afnan

The second letter (5 July 1930) was sent to Locke to acknowledge his editorial assistance:

Persian Colony  
Haifa, Palestine  
5-7-30

Dear Prof. Locke:

Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter as well as the mss. of the Iqan which you had so kindly gone over. Though they were not so many, he found the suggestions you gave most helpful. In translation work the greatest difficulty is to give the thought a lively English expression. This is most difficult for the person who gets absorbed into the original form & is charmed with its beauty. Shoghi Effendi has already incorporated your suggestions & sent his manuscript to the National Assembly for publication. It naturally depends upon that body & the reviewing & publishing committees to decide whether it should come out immediately or not.

The most important service that can now be rendered to the Cause is to put the writings of Baha'u'llah in a form that would be presentable to the intellectual minds of the west. Shoghi Effendi's hope in this work has been to encourage others along this line.

In closing may I express Shoghi Effendi's best wishes for your health as well as for the services you are rendering to the Cause.

Yours ever sincerely  
Ruhi Afnan.

[Postscript in the Guardian's own hand:]

My dear co-worker:

I wish to add a few words expressing my deep appreciation of your valued suggestions in connexion with the translation of the Iqan. I wish also to express the hope that you may be able to lend increasing assistance to the work of the Cause, as I have always greatly admired your exceptional abilities & capacity to render distinguished services to the Faith. I grieve to hear of the weakness of your heart which I trust may through treatment be completely restored. I often remember you in my prayers and ever cherish the hope of welcoming you again in the Master's home.

Your true brother,  
Shoghi