Locke’s Significance

- First African American Rhodes Scholar (1907).
- Co-organizer of first “Race Amity” conference (1921).
- “Father of Multiculturalism” (1999).
- “Martin Luther King of African American culture” (2004).

1885–1954
Alain Locke
Tribute by U.S. Census Bureau

U.S. Census Bureau,
Profile America.


Play audio.

2005
Alain Locke Residence: African American Heritage Trail

For Black History Month 2006, Mayor Anthony Williams, Cultural Tourism DC, & the DC Historic Preservation Office have designated the Alain Locke Residence in Logan Circle (1326 R Street, NW) as a future African-American Heritage Trail marker.

Credit: E. Renee Ingram, 2 April 2006
Locke's Home in Logan Circle

Credit: E. Renee Ingram, 2 April 2006
I found this house befitting of such an accomplished African American scholar. Imagine that our first African American Rhodes Scholar resided here. I reflected upon the achievements of Dr. Locke as a Harvard educated man, graduating magna cum laude in the early 1900s. How was this incredible intellectual able to accomplish what he did in such a segregated era of our American history?

E. Renee Ingram
President & Founder
African American Heritage Preservation Foundation, Inc.
Early Education

- Central High School of Philadelphia (1898–1902).
- Accomplished pianist & violinist.
- Philadelphia School of Pedagogy (1902–1904).
- Graduated 2nd in class.
Harvard University

1904 • 1907

- Won Bowdoin Prize—Harvard’s most prestigious academic award—for his essay, “The Literary Heritage of Tennyson.”
- In three years, graduated magna cum laude in Philosophy (1907).
Rhodes Scholar

First African American Rhodes Scholar (1907).
Rejected by five Oxford colleges.
Enrolled in Hertford College, Oxford.
“In what he has achieved, a race has been uplifted.” — William C. Bolivar (1907)

Bridge of Sighs, Hertford College
“Father of Multiculturalism”

Birth of Cultural Pluralism

- Thanksgiving Dinner episode.
- Locke rejected by Southern American Rhodes Scholars. Horace Kallen invites to tea.
- Locke asks: “What difference does the difference [of race] make?” Term “cultural pluralism” coined.
- Kallen credited with “cultural pluralism.”
- But Locke called “father of multiculturalism.”

1907
Oxford Cosmopolitan Club 1907 • 1910
'Abdu'l-Bahá, leader of the Bahá'í Faith, when Dr. Alain Locke joined in 1918.
Interracial Unity Meeting

“You are cordially invited to an interracial unity meeting.”

All are welcome, regardless of race, color or creed.

1907
“Revolution in Religious Worship”

The Washington Bee

25 April 1912

1912
“Strive earnestly, and put forth your greatest endeavor toward the accomplishment of this fellowship and the cementing of this bond of brotherhood between you.”

“Each one should endeavor to develop and assist the other toward mutual advancement. ... Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind.”

“For the accomplishment of unity between the colored and white will be an assurance of the world’s peace.”

— Rankin Chapel, 23 April 1912
A meeting such as this seems like a beautiful cluster of precious jewels—pearls, rubies, diamonds, sapphires. It is a source of joy and delight.

In the clustered jewels of the races may the blacks be as sapphires and rubies and the whites as diamonds and pearls.

How glorious the spectacle of real unity among mankind!

This is the sign of the Most Great Peace; this is the star of the oneness of the human world.

— 24 April 1912, Talk at Home of Andrew J. Dyer; 1937 Thirteenth Street, NW, Washington, D.C.
Race Contacts: Howard Lectures

Howard University rejects Locke’s proposed lectures: “Race Contacts & Interracial Relations: A Study of the Theory & Practice of Race.”

NAACP Social Science Club sponsors.

Influence of Franz Boas, whom Locke later calls “A Major Prophet of Democracy.”
“Locke argued against social Darwinism, which held that distinct races exist and are biologically determined to express peculiar cultural traits. Locke believed that races were socially constructed and that cultures are the manifestation of stressed values, values always subject to transvaluation and revaluation. Locke introduced a new way of thinking about social entities by conceiving of race as a socially formed category, which, despite its foundation in social history, substantively affected material reality.”

— Leonard Harris, ANB.
Locke in doctoral gown, Harvard University, with Oxford University hood, ca. 1918.
Bahá’í Historical Record

1. Name: Locke, John
2. Address: 1326 R. St NW, Washington, D.C.
4. Naturalization: Yes
5. National origin: American
6. Race: Negro
7. Color: Negro
8. Religious origin: Protestant Episcopalian
9. Date of acceptance of the Bahá’í Faith: 1918
Bahá’í Historical Record

15. Date of enrollment in present Bahá’í community (No. 2)
   A. By transfer from previous community
   B. By enrollment as Bahá’í for first time
   C. Subsequent transfers (leave blank)

16. General information you would like to have preserved in this historical record
   (about Bahá’í services, connection with the Cause in early days, special talents,
   etc.)

17. Additional information (do not fill in)

18. Photograph
   (If possible, please attach photograph to this record. Write name and date the picture
   was taken on back of photograph.)

19. Signature
   [Signature]
Opposite: Locke in US Army uniform (as ROTC training officer).
Photo enclosed in 1920 letter to the Warden (Wylie) of Rhodes House.
Source: Rhodes Archives.
Courtesy of Mr. George Keys, Esq. (Rhodes Scholar, 1966).
‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Race Amity Initiative

In 1920, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá instructs Agnes Parsons to organize first Race Amity event.
Parsons then seeks Alain Locke’s advice and assistance.
This begins Locke’s role in the Bahá’í Race Amity era (1921–1936).
Birth of Race Amity
“Say to this Convention that never since the beginning of time has one more important been held. This Convention stands for the oneness of humanity; it will become the cause of the removal of hostility between races; it will be 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.” — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, To Move the World, 141

Old First Congregational Church, 10th & G NW (1930)
First Congregational Church
Central High School Auditorium,
Springfield, Massachusetts
5–6 December 1921
Estimated attendance: 1200
Locke’s First Pilgrimage

1923
Locke Meets Shoghi Effendi

- Two Oxford men met.
- Locke was deeply impressed.
- Locke publishes “Impressions of Haifa.”
- Later, in 1930, Shoghi Effendi will ask Locke for feedback on translation of the *Book of Certitude*. 

1923
Letter to Alain Locke, from Langston Hughes, with original poem, "I, Too."
Sept. 25, 1924.
Alain Locke Papers
21 March 1924, party at Civic Club.

Alain Locke was master of ceremonies on that “magic evening.”

Locke asked to edit special issue of Survey Graphic, published on 1 March 1925.

Sold over 42,000 copies!
The New Negro

“Our first national book” (of African Americans).

Important in forming group identity (a healthy “race pride”).

This singular achievement was Locke’s second claim to fame.
Winold Reiss
Alain Leroy Locke
c. 1925
Pastel on artist board,
29 ⅞ x 21 ⅞ inches
National Portrait Gallery
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. Gift of
Lawrence A. Fleischman
& Howard Garfinkle with
a matching grant from
The National Endowment
for the Arts.
Winold Reiss
Alain Leroy Locke
The New Negro: An Interpretation (1925)
Page/Plate Number: facing page 6
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture / Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division
Little-known fact:

In February 1926 (soon after *The New Negro* was published in December 1925),

Locke was travel teaching in the Deep South with Louis Gregory.

1926
Bahá’í Lecture Tour: Midwest & South

- Dunbar Forum at Oberlin College
- Wilberforce University
- Daytona Normal & Industrial Institute for Negro Girls
- Robert Hungerford Normal & Industrial School (Orlando)
- D. A. Dorsey (re Model Negro City near Miami)

1926
Shoghi Effendi called upon Locke as the person “best fitted to render him [Shoghi Effendi] an assistance” in giving critical feedback on the translation itself, requesting that Locke “go over it 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 an equally fitting person he would surely have saved you the trouble. Yet he finds himself to be compelled.” — On behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Locke (15 Feb. 1930).
Harmon Foundation
Art Exhibits

- Locke presented award to Richmond Barthe.
- This is one of two rare films of Alain Locke.

1931
1933

Dr. Alain Locke, Professor of Philosophy at Howard University, visits the Exhibit with Richmond Barthé, the sculptor.
Locke’s Second Pilgrimage

Downtown Haifa

Sahit al-Hamra

View from Carmel

1934
Washington, D.C. Bahá’í Community

1936?
Left-to-Right


Library of Congress: 75th anniversary of the end of slavery.

Commemoration of Thirteenth Amendment.

Library of Congress.

Locke: “The Negro Spiritual.” (Play 1940)
1941?

Judge James S. Watson with Alain Locke, Nnamdi Azikiwe, [K.O.]? Mbadwie, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Clarence Holt.

Carl Van Vechten
Alain LeRoy Locke
Studio Portrait, 1941
hand gravure print
Studio Museum, Harlem
1941

South Side Art Center

- Dedication of South Side Community Art Center, 7 May 1941.
- Broadcast nationally on CBS.
- This was part of “fighting Jim Crow” by radio.
This event clearly illustrates Locke’s national reputation.

It also shows a rare political willingness to value and support the cultural contributions of African Americans.
Town Meeting Show

- 28 May 1942 show, “Is There A Spiritual Basis for World Unity?”
- America’s most popular adult education radio show.
- Guest speakers—Alain Locke, Mordecai Johnson, Doxey Wilkerson, and Leon Ransom.
Exchange Professor to Haiti

1943
Commander:
National Order of Honour & Merit

Elie Lescot
President of Haiti
Smithsonian Portrait

Betsy Graves Reyneau painted “Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin.”

Locke shown in his Oxford jacket.

Captures Locke’s dignity & spirit.

Locke’s portrait in Smithsonian Institution.

1943 • 1944
1950

“Race Men”

Left to right:
James M. Nabrit, Jr. (Law)
Charles Drew (Medicine)
Sterling Brown (English)
E. Franklin Frazier (Sociology)
Rayford W. Logan (History)
Alain LeRoy Locke (Philosophy)

Courtesy Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives
Locke’s Toronto Fireside

On March 22 a party was held for Elizabeth and the visiting speaker, Dr. Alain Locke of Howard University, at the home of Janet Strathdee. Dr. Locke discussed the practical life of a Baha'i in non-Baha'i society, the importance of the introduction of a 'moral dimension' into the American programme of foreign assistance, and the cooperation of Baha'is with the United Nations. In his opinion, the strength of nationalistic feeling in Africa indicated that it would be best for the Baha'i Faith to come from within in that continent.

1952
1952

“Baha’i Faith, Only Church in World That Does Not Discriminate.”

Photo of Alain Locke appears on page 39 alongside Robert S. Abbott, publisher of The Chicago Defender.
1952

1952

Photograph of Alain Leroy Locke published in 1952 Ebony in cropped version.
Alain Locke & Ralph J. Bunche at installation of charter members of Phi Beta Kappa at Howard University
“What Booker T. Washington had been to the Negro and the American idea in the field of material skills and material achievement, Alain Locke was in the field of the spirit.”
—Horace Kallen
Alain Locke
Bahá’í Principles & the Salvation of Democracy
1885–1954
Democracy Defined

Alain Locke • (MSRC, Box 164-141, Folder 14)

In a democracy built out of many peoples by this great historical process of immigration, the only safe principle of democracy is that embodied in this conception of democracy:—A democracy is a system of government and corporate living in which there is no distinction between minority and majority rights; and under which life is safe and equally abundant for all minorities. In historical perspective[,] this is really the distinctive foundational principle of American life. Our task today is to make America truly and consistently American.
Democracy Widened

Locke • Talladega College (1941)

Democracy, of course, is one of the basic human ideals, but as an ideal of human association it is something quite superior to any outward institution or any particular society.

Therefore, not only is government too narrow to express democracy, but government from time to time must grow to realize democracy.
Locke • “Stretching Our Social Mind” (1944, unpub.)

Just as world-mindedness must dominate and remould nation-mindedness, so we must transform eventually race-mindedness into human-mindedness.

The intelligent and effective righting of our racial wrongs and handicaps involves pleading and righting the cause of any and all oppressed minorities.
Local Democracy

Locke • Talladega College (1941)

It may be a little daring in the time we have at our disposal, but let us put on seven-league boots and trace democracy—one of the great social concepts. Both in concept and in practice democracy began in Greece—in the Greek city state. In its day it was a great achievement, but in that day democracy was a concept of local citizenship.

Our nearest approach to it is the kind of fellowship we find in college fraternities and sororities in which the bonds are of “like-mindedness” excluding others. The rim of the Greek concept of democracy was the barbarian: it was then merely the principle of fraternity within a narrow, limited circle. There was a dignity accorded to each member on the basis of membership in the group. It excluded foreigners, slaves and women.
Local Democracy

Bahá’í Principle—“Family and Social Development” (June 1994)

- The family is the first environment to teach the values of democracy, human rights, social responsibility, tolerance and peace, enabling their individual members to contribute to the fight against poverty as advocates for social justice.

- Social progress implies the constant and dynamic interaction between family structure and functions and the larger social, economic, cultural and physical environment.
Local Democracy

Bahá’í Principle—UHJ to NSA (10 April 2001)

But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which a society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization.
Christianity was responsible for the introduction of the next great revision in the concept of democracy. We owe to Christianity one of the great basic ideals of democracy—the ideal of the moral equality of human beings. The Christian ideal of democracy was in its initial stages more democratic than it subsequently became. ...

Christianity was thus a crusading ideal in bringing humanity into wider association. But the Christian church was a political institution and in making compromises often failed in bringing about real human equality.
Moral Democracy

Bahá’í Principle—BIC, “The Search for Values in an Age of Transition” (October 2005)

- We commend the international community for its commitment to democracy and to a freely elected government as a universal value. ... Beyond the administration of material affairs, governance is a moral exercise.

- A healthy democracy must be founded on the principle of the equality of men and women and equal recognition of their contribution to the establishment of a just society. In its efforts to promote democracy, the Member States of the United Nations must vigilantly work for the inclusion of women in all facets of governance in their respective countries.
Political Democracy

Locke • Talladega College (1941)

The third great step in democracy came from Protestant lands and people who evolved the ideal of political equality: (1) equality before the law; political citizenship.

This political democracy pivoted on individualism, and the freedom of the individual in terms of what we know as the fundamental rights of man. It found its best expression in the historic formula of “Liberty, equality and fraternity.” ...

In the perspective of democracy’s long evolution, we must regard our country’s history as a progressive process of democratization, not yet fully achieved.
Political Democracy


- A widely quoted passage in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet to Queen Victoria expresses emphatic praise of the principle of democratic and constitutional government ...

- In other passages, Bahá’u’lláh spells out some of the practical implications. The governments of the world are called upon to convene an international consultative body as the foundation, in the words of the Guardian, of “a world federal system” empowered to safeguard the autonomy and territory of its state members, resolve national and regional disputes and coordinate programmes of global development for the good of the entire human race.
Political Democracy

We commend the international community for its commitment to democracy and to a freely elected government as a universal value. What is needed is a consultative process -- at all levels of governance ...

Through participation and unity of purpose, consultation becomes the operating expression of justice in human affairs.

Without this principled anchor, democracy falls prey to the excesses of individualism and nationalism, which tear at the fabric of the community — both nationally and globally.
The fourth crucial stage in the enlargement of democracy began, I think, with the income tax amendment. Woodrow Wilson tried to put into operation [as] an extension of democracy ... In this country for many generations we thought we had economic equality.

What we really had was a frontier expansion which developed such surpluses and offered such practical equality of opportunity as to give us the illusion of economic equality. We later learned that we did not have economic democracy, and that in order to have this, we must have guaranteed to all citizens certain minimal standards of living and the right to earn a living.
Economic Democracy


- Economic justice and cooperation. A vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term—an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being of all the planet’s inhabitants—will help galvanize the collective will to overcome such barriers to peace as the inordinate disparity between rich and poor.
Cultural Democracy

Locke • Talladega College (1941)

This fifth phase is the struggle for cultural democracy, and rests on the concept of the right of difference,—that is, the guarantee of the rights of minorities. Again in the colonial days, we achieved the basic ideals of this crucial aspect of democracy, but scarcely realized them in fact. ...

These contemporary problems of democracy can be vividly sensed if we realize that the race question is at the very heart of this struggle for cultural democracy. ...

The fact that a man cannot afford to buy a decent house for his family involves the problem of economic inequality; but ... the man who through social prejudice is refused the purchase of a house though he can afford to buy it confronts us with an example of cultural inequality.
Without economic rights, the exercise of civil or social rights is severely attenuated. Without cultural rights, an individual or community will have the greatest difficulty in exercising political or economic rights to a degree that meets the essential requirements of their respective situations.
Cultural Democracy


Every individual needs the assurance that the exercise of the faculties referred to will enjoy access to whatever benefits, protections, and opportunities can reasonably be provided by the society in which he or she lives.

These benefits include ... not only civil and political rights, but also rights in the area of economic, social, and cultural life.
Racial Democracy

Locke • The Washington Star (7 Nov. 1943)

There must be complete consistency between what democracy professes and what democracy practices.

Public opinion in America has got to be sold on racial democracy. Now is the time for the people to face this question. *Race equality alone can secure world peace.* ...

To save the United States from moral bankruptcy we must solve the color problem.
Racial Democracy

Bahá’í Principle—BIC, “One Same Substance” (2001)

- Racism originates not in the skin but in the human mind.
- Further, the principle of the oneness of humanity exposes any attempt to distinguish separate “races” or “peoples” in the contemporary world as artificial and misleading. While racial, national and/or ethnic heritage can be considered as sources of pride and even a backdrop for positive social development, such distinctions should not become a basis for new forms of separation or superiority, however subtle.
Racial Democracy

Bahá’í Principle—BIC, “The Search for Values in an Age of Transition” (October 2005)

- The meaningful integration of minority groups in democratic processes is of critical importance — both to shield minorities from the abuses of the past and to encourage their participation and responsibility for the well-being of society.

- We urge Member States, in their work to promote democracy, to strive for the full inclusion of minorities — belonging to any faith, race, or class — in the processes of goal-setting and deliberation.
It is a sad irony that the social institution most committed and potentially most capable of implementing social democracy should actually be the weakest and most inconsistent, organized religion.

Of all the segregated bodies, the racially separate church is the saddest and most obviously self-contradicting. The separate Negro church, organized in self-defensive protest, is nonetheless just as anaomolous [sic], though perhaps, more pardonably so.
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. ...

In final analysis, peace cannot exist anywhere without existing everywhere.
Democratic decision-making has fundamentally altered the relationship of the individual to authority.

The Bahá’í community today comprises several million people representative of virtually every ethnic, cultural, social and religious background on earth, administering their collective affairs without the intervention of a clergy, through democratically elected institutions.
The gospel for the Twentieth Century rises out of the heart of its greatest problems. ... Much has been accomplished in the name of Democracy, but Spiritual Democracy, its largest and most inner meaning, is so below our common horizons.

And we must begin heroically with the great 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 in this world cannot be.
Spiritual Democracy

Locke • “The Gospel of the Twentieth Century”

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 Bahá’u’lláh’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 be as one kindred and family.”
Throughout history, the primary agents of spiritual development have been the great religions. ...

At the social level, the resulting moral principles have repeatedly translated themselves into universal codes of law, regulating and elevating human relationships.

Viewed in perspective, the major religions emerge as the primary driving forces of the civilizing process.
The fact is, the idealistic exponents of world unity and human brotherhood have throughout the ages and even today expected their figs to grow from thistles.

We cannot expect to get international bread from sociological stone—whether it be the granite of national self-sufficiency, the flint of racial antagonisms, or the adamant of religious partisanship. . . .

The question pivots, therefore, not on the desirability of world unity, but upon the more realistic issue of its practicability.
Just as the foundation of democracy as a national principle made necessary the declaration of the basic equality of persons, so the founding of *international* democracy must guarantee the basic equality of human *groups*.
World Democracy

Bahá’í Principle—Century of Light (2001)

- The process leading to the election of the Universal House of Justice [1963]—made possible by the successful completion of the three initial stages of the Master’s Divine Plan under the leadership of Shoghi Effendi—very likely constituted history’s first global democratic election. (92)

- ... the specific provisions requiring the free and democratic election by the mass of the faithful of the Body that constitutes the sole legislative organ in the world-wide Baha’i community -- these are among the features which combine to set apart the Order identified with the Revelation of Baha’u’llah from any of the existing systems of human government.” (GPB 326)
The rise of democracy and democratic processes worldwide is a positive trend. ...

There are currently some 180 National Spiritual Assemblies around the world, and in some countries they represent one of the few truly democratic institutions in existence. ...

Nevertheless, the world at large can learn much from a thorough study of Bahá’í election procedures and practices.
Salvation of Democracy

Locke • “America’s Part in World Peace” (1925)

America’s democracy must begin at home with a spiritual fusion of all her constituent peoples in brotherhood, and in an actual mutuality of life. ...

Until it establishes itself in human hearts, it can never institutionally flourish. ...

Bahá’í Principles and the leavening of our national life— with their power, is to be regarded as the salvation of democracy. In this way only can the fine professions of American ideals be realized.
Salvation of Democracy


The institutions of society will succeed in eliciting and directing the potentialities latent in the consciousness of the world’s peoples to the extent that the exercise of authority is governed by principles that are in harmony with the evolving interests of a rapidly maturing human race.

Clearly, such principles can operate only within a culture that is essentially democratic in spirit and method.
“Find your larger self in some group project and realize the philosophy of a fine African proverb that says, ‘Through others I am somebody.’”

“The highest education is the education that has the greatest social coefficient; the lowest that has the largest personal coefficient, certainly if that be purchased at the sacrifice of the former.”

— Alain Locke, “The Command of the Spirit”