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Essay

The Bahá'í Faith in the Intellectual History of the Harlem Renaissance

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Abstract

Alain Leroy Locke (1885–1954) was the intellectual architect of the Harlem Renaissance, and editor of the landmark anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, acclaimed by Houston A. Baker, Jr., as "perhaps our first *national* book" [i.e. first national African American book]. In keeping with his progressive cosmopolitan outlook and evolving perspectives on race relations and international relations generally, Alain Locke's contributions to the intellectual history of the Harlem Renaissance are well known, particularly in his role as the guiding genius and grandmaster of "The New Negro" movement. Less known is the Bahá'í dimension of Locke's thought and its influence within the intellectual history of the Harlem Renaissance, and certainly concurrent with it, as expressed in Alain Locke's public speech, "America's Part in World Peace," given on Sunday, 5 July 1925, in the first public session of the Seventeenth Annual Convention and Congress of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, at Green Acre, Eliot, Maine, as prefigured by Locke's previously unpublished essay, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" (c. 1924), which reflects his philosophical and faith-inspired thinking, contemporary and coincident with the Harlem Renaissance. The evidence presented in this article, as it applies to the Bahá'í Faith in the intellectual history of the Harlem Renaissance, demonstrates Cornel West's statement that "there's no doubt that when the history is written, the true history is written, the history of this country, the Bahá'í Faith will be one of the leaven in the American loaf that allowed the democratic loaf to expand because of the anti-racist witness of those of [the] Bahá'í faith."

Alain Locke: The Intellectual Architect of the Harlem Renaissance

In this invited contribution to the *Bahá'í Studies Review*'s 2026 Special Issue, "The Bahá'í Faith in Intellectual History," the present writer has been asked to show how the Bahá'í Faith interacted with the Harlem Renaissance, through figures such as Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others, exploring how the Bahá'í Faith has both resonated with and contributed to wider currents of thought by focusing on influential thinkers who, in various ways, engaged with the Bahá'í Faith, in order to situate the Bahá'í Faith within broader intellectual and historical conversations. Alain Leroy Locke (1885–1954) was acknowledged as the intellectual architect of the Harlem Renaissance. In *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (2009), co-authors Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth categorically stated that Alain Locke was "the most influential African American intellectual born between W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King Jr."[1]

As the name indicates, the "Harlem Renaissance" (1917–1935, although dates vary among historians) was a cultural efflorescence of African American arts, music, and performances that

[1] Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 1.

attracted interracial, national and international attention, as part and parcel of the "New Negro Movement."[2] Such public and scholarly interest was sparked, in large part, by the publication of the landmark Harlem Renaissance anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, edited by Alain Leroy Locke (1885–1954), which was first published in December 1925.[3] This was a cultural milestone and a major literary event. According to Houston A. Baker, Jr., *The New Negro* "is perhaps our first national book [i.e. first national African American book], offering not only a description of streams of tendency in our collective lives but also an actual construction within its pages of the sounds, songs, images, and signs of a nation."[4]

A classic in American literature, *The New Negro* was an expanded version of Locke's previous anthology, "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro", published in the *Survey Graphic* on March 1, 1925[5] which Locke guest-edited. The front cover of the Yale University Library Digital Collections copy has a small bookplate that reads, "From the Collection of Carl Van Vechten" (1880–1964), a well-known American photographer and writer,[6] whose photographs of Alain Locke are notable.[7] Among other essays, this highly successful issue features articles, "Enter the New Negro" by Alain Locke,[8] and "The Black Man Brings His Gifts" (a.k.a. "Worlds of Color") by W. E. B. Du Bois.[9] Celebrated poet, Langston Hughes, wrote a handwritten note (undated) at the top of the page: "This was, I think, the first full page of my work to appear in any magazine. Langston Hughes[.]"[10]

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2 Christopher Buck, 'New Negro Movement', *Encyclopedia of African American History*. ed. by Leslie M. Alexander and Walter C. Rucker. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO [now Bloomsbury], 2010), pp. 925–927 (Vol. 3), www.academia.edu/4332837/_New_Negro_Movement_Encyclopedia_of_African_American_History_2010_ [accessed 11 September 2026]. See also Buck, 'Harlem Renaissance', *Encyclopedia of African American History*, 2010, pp. 795–799 (Vol. 3), www.academia.edu/36223979/_Harlem_Renaissance_Encyclopedia_of_African_American_History_2010_ [accessed 11 September 2026]. And: Buck, 'Locke, Alain', *Encyclopedia of African American History*, 2010, pp. 224–227 (Vol. 1), www.academia.edu/36223420/_Locke_Alain_Encyclopedia_of_African_American_History_2010_ [accessed 11 September 2026].

3 Alain Locke (ed.), *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925). babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000005027994&seq=11 [accessed 11 September 2026] (Hathi Trust). See also second printing, March 1927, dn721904.ca.archive.org/0/items/newnegrointerpre00unse/newnegrointerpre00unse.pdf [accessed 11 September 2026]. Digital text (partial): scalar.lehigh.edu/african-american-poetry-a-digital-anthology/the-new-negro-an-interpretation-edited-by-alain-locke-1925 [accessed 11 September 2026].

4 Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 85. [Emphasis in original.]

5 Alain Locke (ed.), 'Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro', *Survey Graphic*, Vol. VI, No. 6 (New York: Survey Associates, 1 March 1925). Digital copy (Yale University Library Digital Collections), collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/17368696 [accessed 11 September 2026].

6 Library of Congress, 'Van Vechten Collection'. www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/van/biography.html [accessed 11 September 2026].

7 See: 'Portrait of Alain Locke' (colour photograph). Carl Van Vechten Papers Relating to African American Arts and Letters. James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature. Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, www.facebook.com/MellonFoundation/photos/-portrait-of-alain-locke-carl-van-vechten-papers-relating-to-african-american-ar/1131573342524324 [accessed 11 September 2026].

8 Locke, 'Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro', pp. 631–634.

9 Ibid., pp. 655–658.

10 Langston Hughes, p. 664 (handwritten note), in Locke, ed., 'Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro'. Digital image: collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/17368696 [accessed 11 September 2026].

On p. 683, Langston Hughes's poem, "I, Too" ["Sing America"] was sent to Alain Locke on a postcard.

The Civic Club "Dinner Party that Started the Harlem Renaissance"

Plans for the special issue of the *Survey Graphic* commenced on the day after a famous dinner party that took place almost a year earlier on March 21, 1924 at the Civic Club in downtown Manhattan, which, during the Jim Crow era, was one of the few public places that allowed high-society, upper-crust Blacks and whites to dine and socialize together. Years later, on Carl Van Vechten's copy of "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro," Alain Locke wrote, by hand, the following note recounting that historic occasion:

> Paul Kellogg[11] attended The Literary Guild dinner given by Opportunity and the Guild, at which I presided. In the minds of many of the Guild members, it was a testimonial to Jesie (sic: Jessie) Fauset, in honor of the publication of "There Is Confusion."
>
> I had consented to preside only on the basis that the occasion be more broadly construed to introduce the whole Harlem group, – especially my younger friends, – [Rudolph] Fisher, [Countee] Cullen, [Langston] Hughes, Zora [Neale] Hurston, whom I felt more representative and talented than Miss Fauset (in spite of her being an old family friend and fellow-Philadelphian)[.]
>
> In fact I had to call Dr. DuBois (sic: Du Bois) to task after his too personal and laudatory speech to prevent the occasion being misconstrued, as it was originally intended – a personal testimony to Miss F.
>
> Kellogg sensing the significance of this group emphasis asked me after the dinner to come down to *The Survey* to discuss a special issue on the Harlem Negro, similar to the then famous Mexican issue of *Survey Graphic*. This Harlem issue was planned in conferences the day after the Guild dinner.
>
> Alain Locke
>
> July 23, 1941[12]

This handwritten note is dated on the very same day that famed photographer, Carl Van Vechten, took three colour studio portraits of Alain Locke,[13] and five in black-and-white.[14] For further information on this Civic Club dinner event that commenced plans for the special issue of the

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11 Paul Kellogg, editor of the *Survey Graphic* magazine (from 1912 to 1952).

12 Locke (ed.), 'Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro', p. 634 (handwritten note). Digital image (Yale University Library Digital Collections): collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/17368696 [accessed 11 September 2026].

13 Van Vechten, Carl, 1880–1964. Locke, Alain. Box 223. 1941 July 23. (Digitized images of three colour studio portraits.) Carl Van Vechten Papers Relating to African American Arts and Letters. James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2018910 [accessed 11 September 2026].

14 Van Vechten, Carl, 1880–1964. Locke, Alain. Box 96, Folder 1717. 1941 July 23. (Digitized images of five black-and-white studio portraits.) Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Call Number: JWJ MSS 1050, collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2019432 [accessed 11 September 2026].

Survey Graphic, "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro" (March 1925), see the series of centenary articles published by the *New York Times*.[15]

Elements of "Cultural Nationalism" and "Cosmopolitanism" in The New Negro

December 2025 marked the centenary of the publication of *The New Negro*. This literary and artistic anthology was an interracial collaboration, as first indicated on the title page, "The New Negro: An Interpretation. Book Decoration and Portraits by Winold Reiss".[16] The Harlem Renaissance has been described as an interplay between elements of "cultural nationalism" and "cosmopolitanism."[17] Now, with over 100 years of historical hindsight (far from 20/20 vision, of course) and the interval in between, this is a good time to reflect on the intersection, intellectual dynamics, and the intellects themselves, who were key figures in the Harlem Renaissance, and on how they have influenced, individually and collectively, that celebrated artistic movement.

In an article commemorating the centenary of *The New Negro*, published on September 13, 2025, on the occasion of the 140th anniversary of Alain Locke's birth (September 13, 1885), Howard University writers, Juanita McLeod and Cedric Mobley, note that the book is still "widely considered the spark that ignited the Harlem Renaissance, a bold explosion of Black culture in all forms, including literature, poetry, acting, dancing, singing, the fine arts, and others."[18] Locke contributed five essays to the landmark 1925 edition of *The New Negro*[19]: (1) "Foreword";[20] (2)

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15 See the following three *New York Times* articles: (1) Veronica Chambers, and Michelle May-Curry, 'The Dinner Party that Started the Harlem Renaissance: An Interracial Soiree that Included Intellectual and Artistic Luminaries Set in Motion One of the most Influential Cultural Movements of the 20th Century', *New York Times* (29 March 2024), Section C, Page 8 (with excellent photographs of the notables who attended), www.nytimes.com/2024/03/21/arts/harlem-renaissance-dinner-1924-anniversary.html [accessed 11 September 2026]. (2) Veronica Chambers, 'Harlem Was No Longer the Same After This Dinner Party' [printed headline, "Harlem, Forever Changed by a Dinner Party", *New York Times* (9 April 2024), Section A, p. 2, www.nytimes.com/2024/04/05/us/harlem-renaissance-anniversary.html [accessed 11 September 2026]. (3) Veronica Chambers, 'Revisiting the Harlem Renaissance: Why the era still resonates a century later' [printed headline, "The Harlem Renaissance, 100 Years Later"], *New York Times* (15 November 2024), www.nytimes.com/2024/11/10/briefing/revisiting-the-harlem-renaissance.html [accessed 11 September 2026].

16 On German artist Winold Reiss, see Will Heinrich, 'An Immigrant Modernist Way Ahead of His Time', *New York Times* (25 August 2022) Section C, p.9, www.nytimes.com/2022/08/25/arts/design/winold-reiss-new-york-historical-society.html [accessed 11 September 2026].

17 See discussion in Daniel G. Williams, 'Cultural Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism and the Harlem Renaissance', in *A History of the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Rachel Farebrother and Miriam Thaggert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 21–37.

18 Juanita McLeod and Cedric Mobley, 'Reimagining 'The New Negro' One Hundred Years Later: Alain Locke's Seminal Anthology Still Influences Black Culture in America', *The Dig*, 13 September 2025, thedig.howard.edu/all-stories/reimagining-new-negro-one-hundred-years-later-alain-lockes-seminal-anthology-still-influences-black [accessed 11 September 2026]. (Howard University, Office of University Communications.)

19 Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Digital text (partial): scalar.lehigh.edu/african-american-poetry-a-digital-anthology/the-new-negro-an-interpretation-edited-by-alain-locke-1925 [accessed 11 September 2026].

20 Ibid., pp. ix–xi.

"The New Negro";[21] (3) "Negro Youth Speaks";[22] (4) "The Negro Spirituals";[23] and (5) "The Legacy of Ancestral Arts"[24].

Alain Locke wrote his "Foreword" in November 1925, which opens: "This volume aims to document the New Negro culturally and socially",[25] indicating cultural nationalism, and implying a wider sociological significance. In the very next paragraph, Locke's cosmopolitanism comes into view: "Yet the New Negro must be seen in the perspective of a New World, and especially of a New America".[26] "America seeking a new spiritual expansion and artistic maturity, trying to found an American literature, a national art, and national music," Locke goes on to say, "implies a Negro-American culture seeking the same satisfactions and objectives".[27] Locke takes special note of "the special channels of 'race literature' and 'race journalism'".[28] After mentioning "The *Survey Graphic*, whose Harlem Number of March, 1925, has been taken by kind permission as the nucleus of this book," Locke puts the cultural nationalism of the New Negro Movement in a wider, even grand cosmopolitan perspective: "Enlarging this stage we are now presenting *The New Negro* in a national and even international scope",[29] the significance of which is that of "a racial awakening on a national and perhaps even a world scale".[30] Locke ends his "Foreword" on this high note: "There is a renewed race-spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justifiably then, we speak of the offerings of this book embodying these ripening forces as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance".[31]

Alain Locke and the Bahá'í Faith

As a representative, albeit not an authoritative statement, of ways in which the Bahá'í Faith intersected, interacted, and indirectly engaged with outstanding intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, thereby exerting some kind of influence, Guy Emerson Mount has noted the following:

> Through Locke, the religion contributed significantly to the development of the Harlem Renaissance. As one of the few theologies to situate religion as part of a changing, evolving social process rather than a timeless set of dogmatic injunctions, Bahá'í pragmatism, flexibility, and relativism fed directly into Locke's philosophical development. Rather than think of an absolute standard by which to judge a people or a culture, Locke followed Bahá'í principles in arguing for cultural pluralism in America. 'Abdu'l-Bahá told his followers, "The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord" ('Abdu'l-Bahá,

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21 Ibid., pp. 3–16.

22 Ibid., pp. 47–53.

23 Ibid., pp. 199–213.

24 Ibid., pp. 254–267.

25 Alain Locke, 'Foreword' in Locke, *The New Negro*, p. ix, scalar.lehigh.edu/african-american-poetry-a-digital-anthology/alain-locke-the-new-negro-introduction-1925 [accessed 11 September 2026].

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. x.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. xi.

31 Ibid., p. xi.

> *Paris Talks* 53). This was a critical demand that Locke articulated as part of the New Negro aesthetic. Harlem Renaissance writers followed suit and began demanding that Black voices be valued as distinctly Black voices while at the same time being equally recognized as critical contributors to humanity at large. Locke articulated these ideas through the Bahá'í notions of "unity through diversity", "world democracy", and a global citizenship that valued Black people as both uniquely gifted and fully equal members. Locke would also write extensively for Bahá'í publications, bringing a distinctly Black voice to an early worldwide Bahá'í audience.[32]

A review of the relevant literature shows that scholars have had widely differing, yet often overlapping, views of Alain Locke's relationship to the Bahá'í Faith—and the impact, if any, of that religious affiliation on the intellectual tradition of the Harlem Renaissance. Each view must be considered. Moreover, the present writer's thesis—of a dynamic, reciprocal, and intensifying synergy between Locke's Bahá'í principles and pragmatist theory of values, as set forth in *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*—should be considered as well,[33] which may well serve as a point of departure, in order to provide a context and an explanation as to how Alain Locke's perspective as a Bahá'í philosopher, as Guy Emerson Mount claims, "contributed significantly to the development of the Harlem Renaissance."

"Alain Locke: Bahá'í Philosopher"

The present writer's first published paper on the intellectual architect and godfather of the Harlem Renaissance was titled, "Alain Locke: Bahá'í Philosopher".[34] That first article was later expanded into a book entitled *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, which opens, in part, as follows:

> Harvard, Harlem, Haifa—philosophy, art, and religion—these are keys to unlocking the paradoxes of the life and thought of Alain Leroy Locke. Harvard prepared Locke for distinction as the first black Rhodes Scholar in 1907, and in 1918, awarded Locke his Ph.D. in Philosophy, thereby insuring his position as chair of the Department of Philosophy at Howard University from 1927 until his retirement in 1953. Harlem became the Mecca for the Harlem Renaissance (1919–1934), or the "New Negro Movement," of which Locke was orchestrator and ideological genius, and which established him as an elder statesman of African American art in later life. Haifa is the world center of the Bahá'í Faith, the religion to which Locke converted in 1918, the same year he received his doctorate from Harvard. Colleagues and students thought him saintly, but not particularly religious. Outside of his professional life, however, Locke was actively involved in Bahá'í efforts to promote ideal race relations, which Bahá'ís termed "race amity." Whereas Harlem immortalized Locke as a "race man" through the diplomacy of art, and whereas Harvard shaped Locke as a race leader through the philosophy of cultural pluralism, Haifa—the Bahá'í Faith—deeply

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[32] Guy Emerson Mount, 'Unity in Diversity: African Americans and the Bahá'í Faith' (Chapter 20) in *The World of the Bahá'í Faith,* edited by Robert H. Stockman (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 240–246 [243].

[33] Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy.* Series: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, vol. 18. (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2005), www.academia.edu/4333260/Alain_Locke_Faith_and_Philosophy_2005_ (by publisher's permission) [accessed 11 September 2026].

[34] Christopher Buck, 'Alain Locke: Bahá'í Philosopher', *Bahá'í Studies Review,* 10 (2001/2002), pp. 7–49, www.academia.edu/4332731/_Alain_Locke_Baha_i_Philosopher_2002_ [accessed 11 September 2026].

> influenced Locke as a champion of race unity. These three dimensions—race interests, race relations, and race unity—for which Harvard, Harlem, and Haifa are symbols, are facets of Locke's mind. Of these three approaches to understanding and appreciating Locke, the least understood is Locke's Bahá'í experience. This is the last major piece of the puzzle needed to complete our picture of him.[35]

As the book's title, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, implies, the author's primary thesis was that there was a reciprocal, intensifying relationship between Locke's (Bahá'í) "Faith" and (pragmatist) "Philosophy." In other words, "a synergy of consciousness between the secular (philosophical) and sacred (spiritual) dimensions of Locke's genius posits a dynamic relationship between Locke's religious values as a Bahá'í and his secular (and perhaps no less sacred) philosophical commitment as a pragmatist."[36] "Synergy," according to the present writer, "may be defined as a reciprocal intensification of intellectual or spiritual energies, where the combined effect is greater than the sum of the two forces working separately."[37] This "synergy is best demonstrated through a comparison of Locke's confessional (Bahá'í) essays and his professional (academic) essays."[38] "Indeed, the presence of key philosophical concepts in Locke's Bahá'í essays accentuates the religio-philosophical (Bahá'í/cultural-relativist) synergy."[39] Simply summarized: "Cultural pluralism and Bahá'í principles are two primary energies that combined in Locke to produce an intensification of his thought."[40] And further: "With synthetic power and crystal clarity, Locke has synergized faith and philosophy to generate a message that universalizes the Bahá'í perspective."[41] With this context in mind, a brief literature review representing major perspectives on the relationship and relevance of Alain Locke's Bahá'í outlook, and his philosophical perspective is presented below.

David Winfield: "Alain Locke, Baha'i Secularist" and the Harlem Renaissance

In 2018, David Winfield contributed a significant chapter to the book, *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, in which Winfield offered this new perspective on Alain Locke's affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith and its impact on the Harlem Renaissance, as follows:

> Ironically the key to understanding Locke's secularism is examining it alongside his Baha'i faith. He undergirded his universalist secular humanism with a spiritual foundation. His conversion to Baha'i was not a break but a continuation. It provided a religious framework for his overarching belief in the unity of humankind while explicitly sanctioning his pluralistic commitment to diversity in the realm of secular culture, a commitment he best expressed through the Harlem Renaissance. While historians of the black experience privilege the roles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, particularly the black Protestant churches, this analysis of Locke's Baha'i faith enriches our understanding of twentieth-

35 Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, p. 2.

36 Ibid., pp. 1–2.

37 Ibid., p. 1.

38 Ibid., p. 195.

39 Ibid., p. 197.

40 Ibid., p. 2.

41 Ibid., p. 93.

> century black intellectual history by showing how an oft-ignored religion from nineteenth-century Persia provides a window into black secularism in the United States.[42]

Winfield's point that Alain Locke's "conversion to Baha'i was not a break but a continuation" finds broader reinforcement in a 2023 study, entitled, ""This Is a Progression, Not Conversion': Narratives of First-Generation Bahá'ís."[43] Winfield's methodology is similar to that of the present writer:

> One of the keys to Locke's thought and role as a cultural pluralist is that he did not write or act from within a parochial perspective. Yet the more one studies him, the more one is struck by the resonance that reverberates between Locke's secular and religious speeches and essays—the synergy between his philosophical and faith commitments."[44]

Although characterizing Alain Locke as a "Baha'i Secularist" (which sounds like an oxymoron), Winfield's article is well argued, in which he represents Locke's Bahá'í religious perspective as predominantly "secularist" in nature.[45] Of significance here is Winfield's position that Locke's "conversion to Baha'i […] provided a religious framework for his overarching belief in the unity of humankind while explicitly sanctioning his pluralistic commitment to diversity in the realm of secular culture, a commitment he best expressed through the Harlem Renaissance." Winfield, however, does not refer to, or comment on, the present writer's "synergy" thesis. That said, Winfield, in discussing Alain Locke's essays, mentions Locke's "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" (c. 1924) rediscovered by the present writer (see section 3.1, below).[46]

Leonard Harris on Alain Locke as both Bahá'í and a critical pragmatist: Reflections on Locke's "Impressions of Haifa" (April 1924)

Leonard Harris, professor emeritus at Purdue University, is a leading authority on Alain Locke, and contributed the "Foreword" to Buck's book, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*.[47] There has been a long-standing question and debate as to the extent to which Locke could be both a Bahá'í and a "critical pragmatist"[48] philosopher, without contradiction, and how this perspective informs our understanding of Locke's contributions to the Harlem Renaissance. The present writer intends to

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42 David Winfield, 'Isolated Believer: Alain Locke, Baha'i Secularist', in *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, ed. by Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer (Northwestern University Press, 2018), pp. 83–98 [p. 84], www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv7tq4rv [accessed 11 September 2026]. (Courtesy of Guy Emerson Mount.) See also: David Winfield, *An American Friendship: Horace Kallen, Alain Locke, and the Development of Cultural Pluralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

43 Tova Makhani-Belkin, "This Is a Progression, Not Conversion': Narratives of First-Generation Bahá'ís', *Religions* 14 (2023), no. 3: 300. doi.org/10.3390/rel14030300

44 Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, p. 187.

45 Winfield, 'Isolated Believer: Alain Locke, Baha'i Secularist', in the title of the essay itself, and passim.

46 Ibid., pp. 91–92.

47 Leonard Harris, 'Foreword', in Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, pp. vii–viii.

48 Leonard Harris, 'Requiem for a Garden: Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb or Revisiting Alain Locke's 'Impressions of Haifa' 1923 (Palestine) in 2023 (Israel)', *The Pluralist*, vol. 19, no. 2, Summer 2024, pp. 97–105 (p. 100). See: muse.jhu.edu/pub/34/article/929762 [accessed 11 September 2026].

show that Alain Locke's faith and philosophy finds harmony with Harris's professed belief in a "pluriverse sense of universality (no uniformitarian universalism)."[49]

Prior to his work as guest-editor of the *Survey Graphic*'s special "Harlem" issue (beginning March 21, 1924, at the historic gathering of eminent white publishers and elite Black writers and artists at the Civic Club in Manhattan), Alain Locke experienced his first pilgrimage to the Bahá'í shrines and gardens on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Palestine (now Israel), in late November or early December 1923, or perhaps both, depending on how long the pilgrimage lasted. Originally, Locke had planned to spend a month or so in Haifa in order to do some writing. Although that arrangement did not work out as hoped, Locke did write "Impressions of Haifa," published in April 1924. This became his first Bahá'í publication. It was reprinted three times, in 1926, 1928, and 1930.[50] "Impressions of Haifa" is a descriptive masterpiece, and is one of the most significant records ever written by a Bahá'í pilgrim. In a letter, dated 12 March 1926, written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi wrote: "The article by Prof. Locke is very good and sufficient."[51] "Impressions of Haifa" was Locke's first public testimony of faith as a Bahá'í. For a full account, see the present writer's "Chapter Six: Pilgrimage."[52] Thus, during the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke was beginning to emerge as a public Bahá'í figure.

Nearly a century after Locke's pilgrimage, Leonard Harris visited Mount Carmel in May 2023. Just as Locke did, Harris wrote about his experience, posing these questions: "Are Locke's philosophic commitments and his commitments to Bahá'í principles or faith incompatible? Buck and I cannot both be right. If Buck is right, what point about his philosophy have I missed?"[53] Leonard Harris's answers to his own questions may surprise the reader, as they did for the present writer: "Locke was a Bahá'í even if Buck's textual evidence fails to confirm that he held doctrinaire beliefs. He was a Bahá'í even if my interpretation fails to defeat the view that his philosophy is incompatible with any doctrinaire faith. It's his spirit that I have not sufficiently appreciated. I missed the point."[54] And further: "My high regard for Buck's pioneering work leads me to believe

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[49] Purdue University, College of Liberal Arts, faculty page, 'Leonard Harris'. www.cla.purdue.edu/directory/profiles/leonard-harris.html [accessed 11 September 2026].

[50] **1924:** Alain Locke, 'Impressions of Haifa', *Star of the West,* Vol. 15, no. 1 (1924) pp. 13–14. Original manuscript in Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-115, Folder 29 ('Impressions of Haifa' [typescript]). **1926:** Reprint: Alaine (sic) Locke, 'Impressions of Haifa', in *Bahá'í Year Book*, vol. 1, 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) pp. 81, 83, bahaiworld.bahai.org/library/impressions-of-haifa/ [accessed 11 September 2026]. **1928:** Reprint: Alaine (sic) Locke, 'Impressions of Haifa', in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 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) pp. 125, 127. **1930:** Reprint: Alain Locke, 'Impressions of Haifa', in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record,* vol. III, April 1928–April 1930, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1930; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) pp. 280, 282.

[51] From a letter dated 12 March 1926 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada Publishing Committee, 'References to Dr. Alain Locke in Letters Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi', Attachment, The Universal House of Justice to Buck, 16 July 2001. Cited by Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, p. 69.

[52] Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, p. 187.

[53] Harris, 'Requiem for a Garden', p. 98.

[54] Ibid., p. 99.

that our disagreement misses something that the disagreement itself could not allow us to see," Harris concludes, namely that Locke "is still both Bahá'í and a critical pragmatist. We missed the point."[55]

Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), "Guardian" of the Bahá'í Faith (1921–1957), whom Alain Locke met during his 1923 pilgrimage to Haifa (then Palestine), and about whom Locke wrote with such admiration and respect in "Impressions of Haifa", has stated clearly, and unequivocally that:

> The Revelation, of which Bahá'u'lláh is the source and center, abrogates none of the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to distort their features or to belittle their value. […] Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind.[56]

Shoghi Effendi's statement supports religious pluralism,[57] and finds harmony with Harris's professed belief in a pluriverse sense of universality (no uniformitarian universalism). At the end of his article, Leonard Harris reflects on his 2023 visit to Bahá'í World Centre on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, following the footsteps of Alain Locke in his 1923 pilgrimage to Haifa 100 years prior, with this profound statement:

> The garden Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb were a spiritually healthy visit for me in May of 2023, although the social environment was deleterious. I have walked in Locke's footsteps, appreciated his description of Mt. Carmel as cosmopolitan, and have come to love the Bahá'í spirit in a way I never thought imaginable. I, too, have been made a mystic.[58]

Jeffrey C. Stewart on Alain Locke as an "Aloof" Bahá'í: Locke's July 5, 1925 Public Bahá'í Speech

In 2018–2019, Alain Locke basked in the public limelight again with the publication of Jeffrey C. Stewart's *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*,[59] which won a National Book Award 2018 for Nonfiction,[60] and also was awarded The 2019 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Biography.[61] Although

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55 Ibid., p. 100.

56 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. www.bahai.org/r/609410782 [accessed 11 September 2026].

57 See Christopher Buck, 'Bahá'í Contributions to Interfaith Relations', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 54.2 (Spring 2019): 260–277 (esp. pp. 274–275). www.academia.edu/40084167/_Bah%25C3%25A1_%25C3%25AD_Contributions_to_Interfaith_Relations_Journal_of_Ecumenical_Studies_2019_ [accessed 11 September 2026].

58 Harris, 'Requiem for a Garden', p. 104.

59 Jeffrey C. Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

60 '*The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*. Winner, National Book Awards 2018 for Nonfiction'. See National Book Foundation, www.nationalbook.org/books/the-new-negro-the-life-of-alain-locke/ [accessed 11 September 2026].

61 For a distinguished biography, autobiography or memoir by an American author, Fifteen thousand dollars ($15,000). *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*, by Jeffrey C. Stewart (Oxford University Press). A panoramic view of the personal trials and artistic triumphs of the father of the Harlem Renaissance

Stewart mentions Locke's association and affiliation with the Bahá'í Faith passim, that aspect of Locke's life is underrepresented, undeveloped, inaccurate in some places, and otherwise given short shrift. This is not surprising, considering that the only reference to Locke's connection with the Bahá'í Faith in Jeffrey Stewart's 1979 Yale dissertation is this: "In the 1920s, Locke joined the Bahai [sic] movement and formalized his separation from orthodox Christianity."[62] In *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*, Stewart writes:

> Almost as a relief, Locke elected to travel to Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine, to attend the Bahá'í Retreat meeting, the Seventeenth Annual Convention and Congress of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. Taking place on a private estate, this large gathering of the faithful buoyed Locke's spirits. He spoke on July 5 on "The Dawn of Peace." Going to the Bahá'í conference reinforced the side of Locke that was committed to universalism, to fostering a common ground among diverse peoples, despite the conflicts that divide them. But Locke's speech also reflected his realism. As he told the multiracial, multicultural, international audience assembled before him, "Today on this earth there are many souls who are the spreaders of peace and reconciliation and are longing for the realization of the oneness and unity of the world of man; but his intention needs a dynamic power so that it may become manifest in the world of being." That statement was almost an autobiographical transcript. Locke had been a harmonizing force in the arts, in the area of race relations, and in campus relations at Howard.[63]

While Locke, of course, did present a speech at this public event, the words that Stewart attributed to Locke are not by him, but rather by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This brief passage, in fact, appears on the printed Program itself, with this fuller citation:

> Today on this earth there are many souls who are the spreaders of peace and reconciliation and are longing for the realization of the oneness and unity of the world of man; but this intention needs a dynamic power, so that it may become manifest in the world of being. Today the divine instructions and lordly exhortations of Baha'u'llah promulgate this most great aim and the confirmations of the Kingdom are the supports and defenders of this eminent intention. For the power of the Word of God is penetrative and the existence of the divine Kingdom is uninterrupted. Therefore, ere long it will become evident and clear that the ensign of the Most Great Peace is the teachings of Baha'u'llah.[64]

A photograph of the convention delegates and attendees (picturing Dr. Alain Locke as well, although the image is hard to discern) appears with the caption: "A group of delegates and friends

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and the movement he inspired". See 'The Pulitzer Prizes', www.pulitzer.org/winners/jeffrey-c-stewart [accessed 11 September 2026].

62 Jeffrey Conrad Stewart, *A Biography of Alain Locke: Philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, 1886–1930,* p. 22, citing, in n. 30, "Locke to Mason, 4/12/36, 7/26/32, Gen. Corr. [General Correspondence], ALP [Alain Locke Papers], MSC [Moorland Spingarn Research Center], HU [Howard University]", Yale University ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 1979. Order No. 8121412, www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/biography-alain-locke-philosopher-harlem/docview/303015910/se-2 [accessed 11 September 2026].

63 Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* p. 495 (Kindle Edition)

64 'Abdu'l-Bahá ('Abbás), *Tablets of Abdul-Baha* (sic) *Abbas*. 3 vols. (Chicago: Bahai (sic) Publishing Society, 1909–1916), Vol. III, p. 691, reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/tab-759.html [accessed 11 September 2026].

attending the Seventeenth Annual Convention and Congress of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, at Green Acre, Eliot, Maine, July 5 to 8, 1925."[65] The title of Locke's speech was "America's Part in World Peace." Here is the speech itself:

America's Part in World Peace

> 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 democracy is worked out in the vital small scale of practical human relations, it can never, except as an empty formula, prevail on the national or international basis. Until it establishes itself in human hearts, it can never institutionally flourish. Moreover, America's reputation and moral influence in the world depends on the successful achievement of this vital spiritual democracy within the lifetime of the present generation. (Material civilization alone does not safeguard the progress of a nation.) 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.[66]

This report of Alain Locke's "America's Part in World Peace" speech reads like a stenographer's transcript and may be a faithful record of the verbatim words of this excerpt from the actual speech itself.[67]

Alain Locke's 5 July 1925 public speech—contemporaneous with the Harlem Renaissance—is an authentic record of his cosmopolitan worldview in which his Bahá'í perspective, in fact, sacralizes some otherwise secular notions of democracy, world peace, etc., providing thereby insights into the mind of the mastermind and illustrious editor of *The New Negro: An Interpretation.*

The Synergy of Alain Locke's Faith, Philosophy, and the Harlem Renaissance

In September 1923, shortly prior to his November/December 1923 pilgrimage to the Bahá'í shrines and gardens on Mount Carmel in Haifa, as described in section 2.3 above, Alain Locke,

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65 *The Bahá'í Magazine: Star the West,* Vol. 16, No. 5 (August 1925), pp. 525–529 (see p. 506). Text: bahai.works/Star_of_the_West/Volume_16/Issue_5/Text [accessed 11 September 2026]. See Alain Locke's photo more clearly in Christopher Buck*, The Bahá'í Faith and the Black Intelligentsia: Race, Religion, and Nation* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2025), p. 220. See also the enlarged part of the group photograph showing Alain Locke in Buck and Rochester, 'Alain Locke's Advocacy of the Bahá'í Faith'. bahaiteachings.org/alain-lockes-advocacy-of-the-bahai-faith/ [accessed 11 September 2026]. Photograph (taken by Curtis D. Kelsey, Englewood, New Jersey) provided courtesy of Edward Sevcik, Archivist, U.S. National Bahá'í Archives, 4 August 2021, and 18 May 2026. Archival ID: P0000455 (recto and verso). As the archivist notes, the original photograph is not large and the figures in it are tiny.

66 Alain Locke, 'America's Part in World Peace', speech given on Sunday, 5 July 1925 in the first session of the Seventeenth Annual Convention and Congress of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, at Green Acre, Eliot, Maine, July 5 to 8, 1925 (emphasis added), quoted by Harlan F. Ober (1867–1962), 'The Bahá'í Congress at Green Acre', *The Bahá'í Magazine: Star the West*, Vol. 16, No. 5 (August 1925), pp. 525–529 (see p. 525). Text: bahai.works/Star_of_the_West/Volume_16/Issue_5/Text [accessed 11 September 2026].

67 The official Program also notes Alain Locke's membership on the "Racial Amity" committee during the 1924–1925 Bahá'í year: "Racial Amity[:] Mrs. A. S. Parsons, Chairman; Mrs. Mariam Haney; Mrs. Elizabeth Greenleaf; Dr. Alain Locke; Mrs. Howard Ives; Mrs. Louise Waite; Mrs. Louise Boyle; Mr. Roy Williams; Mrs. W. M. Atwater".

who was a specialist in the philosophy of values, became quite interested in the work of an Austrian philosopher who presented a unique and comprehensive philosophical system of values that encompassed philosophy, religion, art, international relations, and other spheres of human interaction and endeavour, and what amounted to a unified field theory of values.

According to Leonard Harris, "in 1909, he [Alain Locke] hired a tutor to learn German so that he could read the texts of untranslated works from the Austrian School of value theory."[68] Years later, in "September of 1923, while away from his duties at Howard University, Locke arrived in Vienna, Austria, which was a part of his touring itinerary of Europe."[69] "In addition to [Roland] Hayes's concerts in Vienna," Harris goes on to say, "Locke attended a winter semester of open academic lectures at the Vienna Internationale Hochschulkurse (language center) on anthropology and psychology."[70] Jeffrey Stewart confirms this:

> Locke also found time to sign up for the winter semester of open academic lectures at the Vienna Internationale Hochschulkurse. Catalogs in the Alain Locke Papers at Howard show that Locke heard lectures on the history of German literature in the nineteenth century, and the development of theories of national character, and purchased recently published books by Sigmund Freud and Leo Frobenius, the German archaeologist.[71]

The present writer believes that must have been the time when Alain Locke learned of Austrian psychologist and philosopher Rudolf Maria Holzapfel's monumental work, *Panideal*, which Locke mentions in "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," as described in section 3.1 below, with a further description of Holzapfel's *Panideal*, in section 3.2, immediately following.

Alain Locke's "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" and Rudolf Maria Holzapfel (1874–1930)

One of the joys and utmost rewards of archival research is discovering a unique and historically significant document previously unnoticed, and therefore unpublished. The rediscovery of an untitled manuscript, which the present writer has named, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" (based on the opening line), appears to be a speech, given that the document was folded such that it could fit into a suit pocket. A digital image of this document may be accessed online.[72] The full text of "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" has been edited and published,[73] and, for the sake of ready access, is provided at the end of this article, as "Appendix 1". This speech concludes by

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68 Leonard Harris, 'Requiem for Faith Unmitigated—Or—Faith in 1923 Palestine and 2023 Israel: Revising Alain Locke's 1923 Pilgrimage (Musing Again)', *The Pluralist* 20, no. 3 (2025), pp. 94–113 [94], muse.jhu.edu/article/971243 [accessed 11 September 2026].

69 Ibid., p. 95.

70 Ibid., p. 96.

71 Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke*, p. 375.

72 Alain Locke, untitled typescript (subsequently entitled, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century", by the present writer, based on the opening line), in Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C., Box 164-143, Folder 3 (Writings by Locke—Notes. Christianity, spirituality, religion). Permission to post this digital scan on Academia granted courtesy of Meaghan Alston, (former) Prints and Photographs Librarian, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, on 25 February 2019, www.academia.edu/167047355/Alain_Locke_The_Gospel_for_the_Twentieth_Century [accessed 11 September 2026].

73 Locke, 'The Gospel for the Twentieth Century', in 'Alain Locke in His Own Words: Three Essays', Edited and annotated by Christopher Buck and Betty J. Fisher, *World Order* 36.3 (2005), 37–48.

referring to "the philosophy of the Austrian Holzapfel" and then by quoting some famous words of Bahá'u'lláh.[74] Here, Locke cites Cambridge scholar Edward Granville Browne's celebrated "pen-portrait" of Bahá'u'lláh,[75] as quoted by John E. Esslemont (1874–1925), in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*—which Shoghi Effendi described as "the textbook of the Faith"—first published September 1923 in London by George Allen & Unwin Ltd.[76] Corroborating the year 1923 as the *terminus a quo*, i.e. the earliest possible date when Locke wrote "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," is Locke's reference to Rudolf Maria Holzapfel's *Panideal*, published in 1923.[77] Alain Locke's mention of Austrian psychologist and philosopher Holzapfel's monumental work, *Panideal*, is highly significant, especially since two of the leading scholars on Locke, Leonard Harris and Jeffrey Stewart, have written nothing on Locke's interest in Holzapfel.[78]

Locke's comparison of Bahá'u'lláh's principles to Holzapfel's theory of the "Pan-Ideal" as a philosophical analog has not been seriously investigated, perhaps due to the fact that it was previously unknown, and subsequently undeveloped by Locke himself.

Nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature six times,[79] Rudolf Holzapfel stated his project and philosophical quest in a nutshell: "It is necessary first to bring these often mysterious phenomena—like a deep living well—of consciousness, creativity, the experiences of art, the ideal, and religion, into the daylight of full awareness, in order to discover the conditions of their perfection, their synthetic fusion into a harmonious creation of the ideal whole."[80] Here, Holzapfel proposes a holistic view of the world, by way of an overarching synthetic philosophy, as further developed in this statement:

> For the extensive and deep rejuvenation of every community can only flow from an ideal that is even remotely close to the universal ideal. However, the real universal ideal can only be a model most closely and uniformly connected with deeply rooted, harmoniously and

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74 Ibid., pp. 41–42.

75 For more details and a fuller account of this historic interview, see Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'Scholar Meets Prophet: Edward Granville Browne and Bahá'u'lláh (Acre, 1890)', *Bahá'í Studies Review,* 20 (cover date, 2014; publication date, 2018): pp. 21–38. (ed. by Steve Cooney.) (Note: Published online: 11 January 2018—not "Published online: 1 Jun 2014" (per the DOI. 10.1386/bsr.20.1.21_1), www.academia.edu/48928466/_Scholar_Meets_Prophet_Edward_Granville_Browne_and_Bahaullah_Acre_1890_2018_ [accessed 11 September 2026].

76 John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923). Robert Weinberg, 'The Creation of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*: 'Textbook' of the Bahá'í Faith', *Religions* 16, no. 10: 1263, p. 1, doi.org/10.3390/rel16101263.

77 Rudolf Maria Holzapfel, *Panideal: das Seelenleben und seine soziale Neugestaltung* [Pan-Ideal: The Life of the Soul and its Social Reorganization] (Gena, Germany: Eugen Diederichs, 1923), 2 vols. (A fully revised and greatly expanded version of the original 1901 edition, *Panidealische: Psychologie der sozialen Gefühle*.) Vol. 1, www.google.com/books/edition/Panideal/VwvLAAAAMAAJ [accessed 11 September 2026].

78 Leonard Harris, for his part, confirmed that he has not written on Alain Locke and Rudolf Maria Holzapfel. (Harris to Buck, email, 13 May 2026.)

79 'Rudolf Maria Holzapfel', (German philosopher) 1925, 1927, 1928', Nomination Archive, The Nobel Prize, www.nobelprize.org/nomination/archive/show_people.php?id=4290 [accessed 12 September 2026].

80 Stanisław Obirek, 'Rudolf Maria Holzapfel and Stanislaw Vincenz, i.e. Crossing Not Only Religious Borders', *Ricerche Slavistiche*. New Series. Vol. 7, No. 67 (2024), 117–139 (Abstract.) Published 6 May 2025. See also p. 129, citing "Holzapfel 1936: 73", referring to the 1936 Polish translation by Izydor Blumenfeld, Stanisław Vincenz, and Towarzstwo Wydawnicze "Rój" of Vol. 1 of Holzapfel's *Panideal*, rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa01/ricerche_slavistiche/article/view/3131/2756 [accessed 11 September 2026].

> completely organically compatible dispositions to the ethical, artistic, and religious assessment of perfection. Under the touch of the wand of the pan-ideal, all fields of life, all relations of individuals and groups would undergo a groundbreaking transformation.[81]
>
> A pan-idealistic creator, transforming humanity, will strive for its comprehensive transformation, for distortion, also including religious life, and therefore he will only create concepts of humanity, the implementation of which may, with the uniformity of the pan-ideal, satisfy, in addition to ethical and artistic needs, also religious longing."[82]

Holzapfel's counterpart to Bahá'u'lláh's doctrine of "progressive revelation" is reflected in this historical observation: "It takes warriors of the spirit already beating on the gates of heaven to awaken something more than a dark sense of their breakthrough forces, to challenge rebellion and resistance. Such were Moses, Christ and Buddha, such were Socrates, Isaiah, Dante."[83] That said, Holzapfel was critical of institutional forms of organized religion. That being the case, it is not clear in what way, apart from its intrinsic ideological appeal, Holzapfel hoped to promote and translate his grand vision of the "Pan-Ideal" into a transformative social movement. For the present study, the importance of Holzapfel's "Pan-Ideal" is the attention that Alain Locke drew to it as a philosophical parallel to Bahá'u'lláh's principles.

This new German philosophy may have attracted the attention of W. E. B. Du Bois as well, as there are several reviews preserved in his archived papers.[84] That said, there is no further evidence of interest on the part of W. E. B. Du Bois in Holzapfel's "Pan-Ideal," despite Du Bois's advocacy of "Pan-Africanism."

As for Locke's high regard for Rudolf Maria Holzapfel, perhaps this was superseded by Locke's later praise of Josiah Royce in Locke's "Unity Through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," by noting: "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."[85]

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81 Ibid., p. 131 (citing "Holzapfel 1936: 455–6").

82 Ibid., p. 131 (citing "Holzapfel 1936: 470").

83 Ibid., p. 131 (citing "Holzapfel 1936: 272").

84 Reviews, all from the Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries:
(1) Eugen Diederichs Verlag. Rudolph (sic) Maria Holzapfel[,] 'Pan-Ideal': The Soul-Life and Its Social Reconstruction, 1925. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Identifier: mums312-b029-i153, credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b029-i153 [accessed 11 September 2026].

(2) Vladimir Astrov, 1885–1944. Holzapfel als gründer der Ideal-psychologie. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Identifier: mums312-b020-i302, credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b020-i302 [accessed 11 September 2026].
(3) Vladimir Astrov, 1885–1944. *Panideal*. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Identifier: mums312-b020-i301, credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b020-i301 [accessed 11 September 2026]. Book review of *Panideal*, c. 1924. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Identifier: mums312-b169-i181, credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b169-i181 [accessed 11 September 2026].

85 Locke, 'Unity Through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle'. First published on Thursday, 21 April 1932, in *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. IV, 1930–1932, bahaiworld.bahai.org/library/unity-through-diversity-a-bahai-principle-2/ [accessed 11 September 2026].

Locke's "The New Negro" and "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" Compared

Alain Locke's essay, "The New Negro"[86] (TNN) is simply brilliant. Compared with "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century"[87] (GTC), one can see that TNN is secular in nature (yet not philosophic, due to the general audience), although spiritually inspirational, due to its optimistic heraldry of a new era of progressive advancement, not only racially, but interracially, and not only regionally, but nationally and internationally as well. Locke has framed the problem of racial prejudice as a worldwide problem, thereby enlarging the scope and widening the horizon of race relations. By contrast, GTC is explicitly philosophical as it is religious in its discourse. Clusters and constellations of key ideas common to each of these two essays may be highlighted as follows:

Key Concepts, Terms, Ideas:

- "New Negro" (TNN passim [7x]), (GTC 41);
- "new spirit" (TNN 3), (GTC 40);
- "prejudice" (TNN passim [8x]), (GTC 40);
- "democracy"/"Democracy" (TNN passim [7x]), (GTC passim [5x]);
- "spiritual"/"spiritually": (TNN passim [6x]), (GTC passim [7x]);
- "inter-racial" (TNN 9), (GTC 41).

Space does not permit a detailed textual, rhetorical, and ideological comparison of these two essays. Suffice it to say that there are notable commensurable comparisons in four major categories, to wit: (1) literary and rhetorical parallels; (2) racial and social parallels; (3) philosophical parallels; and (4) religious and theological parallels. Taken together, the foregoing parallels demonstrate close, thematic, and ideological echoes that resound and reverberate to the intensification of their harmonious ideas and ideals. Synergy is in evidence here. (See Appendix 2, at the end of this article.)

Immediate Aftermath following Publication of The New Negro: An Interpretation (1925–1926)

A little-known fact is that, shortly after *The New Negro: An Interpretation* was published in December, 1925, Locke embarked on an extended lecture tour throughout the Midwest and the deep South (accompanied by Louis Gregory, another Bahá'í notable), giving public lectures on the Bahá'í vision of race unity. Commenting on Locke's imminent departure for these speaking engagements, one Bahá'í described Locke's deep and profound commitment as a Bahá'í:

> In regard to Dr. Locke—he is at present in N.Y. but has written me saying he "will keep his promise (to go South) in spite of many things" …
>
> The lecture opportunities Dr. Locke has must be the nucleus for his work for the Cause and of course he must proceed in perfect freedom. When he looked over the list of educators supplied by Mrs. [Keith Ransom-] Kehler, saying he knew about one-third of them

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[86] Locke, 'The New Negro' scalar.lehigh.edu/african-american-poetry-a-digital-anthology/the-new-negro-essay-by-alain-locke-1925?path=the-new-negro-an-interpretation-edited-by-alain-locke-1925 [accessed 11 September 2026]. Not to be confused with the book, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*.

[87] Locke, 'The Gospel for the Twentieth Century', pp. 39–42, www.academia.edu/29901524/_Alain_Locke_in_His_Own_Words_Three_Essays_2005_ [accessed 11 September 2026].

> personally, he remarked smilingly[,] "How surprised they will be to know me as a Bahai". His understanding of the way he will be at liberty to work coincided with my own idea of the best way to work—to meet his audiences upon their common ground and afterward convey the Message which has moved his life…
>
> Dr. Locke does not attend Bahai meetings in Washington, but is deeply and truly a Bahai [sic]. It has been only by appealing to him in the most liberal spirit that I have been able to win his consent to do this work, and it is my hope that once under the Divine Protection of those having "arisen" he may go on to greater services.[88]

A detailed itinerary and busy speaking schedule was set up. Between February 6 and sometime in March (or perhaps May) 1926, Locke spoke in Cleveland and Cincinnati and at the Dunbar Forum at Oberlin College and at Wilberforce University, all in Ohio; in Indianapolis, Indiana; and before "the best Negro institutions in the Middle South and Northern Florida," including the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls and the Robert Hungerford Normal and Industrial School near Orlando, Florida.[89] In the immediate wake of the publication of *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, Alain Locke's Bahá'í-sponsored lecture tour would be Locke's lengthiest sustained service to the Bahá'í Faith, which was also a service to the nation at large.

Conclusion

Of Alain Locke 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote on 26 July 1921: "His Honour, Dr. Locke, this distinguished personage deserveth every praise. I implore the Kingdom of God to grant him a special confirmation." *(ḥaḍrat-i Dr. Locke ín shakhṣ-i jalíl fí al-ḥaqíqih sazávár-i har sitáyish ast. taḍarru' bi-malakút-i iláhí mínamáyam kih ta'yídí makhṣúṣ bi-ú farmáyad.)*[90] Years later, Shoghi Effendi said of Locke: "Shoghi Effendi… cherishes in his loving heart great hope for your spiritual success. People

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88 Louise Boyle, undated letter [late 1925] to Mrs. El Fleda Spaulding ("Chairman Teaching Committee"), Office of the Secretary Records, National Teaching Committee Files, National Bahá'í Archives, courtesy Roger Dahl, Archivist, and Gayle Morrison, Coordinating Editor, Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project. See Christopher Buck, 'Alain Locke: Race Leader, Social Philosopher, Bahá'í Pluralist', Special Issue: Alain Locke: Dean of the Harlem Renaissance and Bahá'í Race-Amity Leader, *World Order* 36.3 (2005): pp. 7–36 [p. 19, and n. 71]. For a fuller account, see 'Teaching Tour in the South' in Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, pp. 84–87.

89 In a letter dated 20 January 1926, to National Spiritual Assembly secretary Horace Holley, Mrs. El Fleda Spaulding made a passing reference to a 'letter from Dr. Locke who starts on his trip February 6th' (Office of the Secretary Records, National Teaching Committee Files, National Bahá'í Archives, courtesy Gayle Morrison, e-mail to author, 9 Aug. 2005). Southern Regional Teaching Committee (Louise D. Boyle, Agnes Parsons, Louis Gregory), 'Report of the Southern Regional Teaching Committee' (Apr. 15, 1926) 74, courtesy of Gayle Morrison, e-mail communication, 17 Oct. 2002. See Buck, 'Alain Locke: Race Leader, Social Philosopher, Bahá'í Pluralist', p. 19, and n. 72.

90 Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Agnes Parsons, 26 July 1921. Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami and Steven Phelps. Facsimile of Persian original from 'The Original Tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá Collection', National Bahá'í Archives, United States. Digital copy of Persian original courtesy of Roger M. Dahl, Archivist, National Bahá'í Archives, United States. Leone Barnitz Papers, Box 17: Agnes Parsons correspondence/'Abdu'l-Bahá; and Leone Barnitz Papers, Box 19: Translations of Tablets/Agnes Parsons. Courtesy of Lewis V. Walker, Archivist, National Bahá'í Archives, United States. See Buck, *The Bahá'í Faith and the Black Intelligentsia*, p. 164; p. 180, n. 142; and p. 91, n. 15. See also "AB00583" in Steven Phelps, ed., *Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1921, Part I (Jan–Jul)*, pp. 143–145, Vol. 178, in Steven Phelps, ed., *The Writings and Utterances of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, Provisional Parallel-Text Study Series*, 192 vols., in *Partial Inventory: Writings*.

as you [Locke], Mr. Gregory, Dr. Esslemont and some other dear souls are as rare as diamond… The world, more than ever, is in need of spiritual nourishment. You are the chosen ones to render this service to the lifeless world in this present stage."[91] And further, in gratitude for Locke's "most helpful" suggestions "incorporated" in Shoghi Effendi's English translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* [*The Book of Certitude*] "for publication," Shoghi Effendi, in the postscript penned in his own hand, writes: "I have always greatly admired your exceptional abilities & capacity to render distinguished services to the Faith… Your true brother, Shoghi."[92]

By offering something of a revisionist perspective on the Harlem Renaissance, this essay has examined the "leavening" effect of the Bahá'í Faith in the intellectual history of the Harlem Renaissance and thereby has contributed to the fulfilment of this key, prophetic statement by Cornel West:

> I have come to have a profound admiration for brothers and sisters of the Bahá'í Faith. I've actually met Dizzy Gillespie and he, of course, one of the great artists of the 20th century, was of Bahá'í Faith, and talked over and over again about what it meant to him. Alain Locke, of course, probably one of the greatest philosophic minds of the middle part of the 20th century, was also of Bahá'í Faith, the first Black Rhodes scholar and chairman of the philosophy department at Howard University, for over 42 years. What I've always been taken by is the very genuine universalism of the Bahá'í Faith, one of the first religious groups to really hit racism and white supremacy head on, decades ago. By decades, I mean many decades ago and remain consistent about it.
>
> When you talk about race and the legacy of white supremacy, there's no doubt that when the history is written, the true history is written, the history of this country, the Bahá'í Faith will be one of the leaven in the American loaf that allowed the democratic loaf to expand because of the anti-racist witness of those of [the] Bahá'í faith. So that there is a real sense in which a Christian like myself is profoundly humbled before Bahá'í brothers and sisters and the Dizzy Gillespie's and the Alain Locke's and so forth.[93]

The evidence presented in this article demonstrates Cornel West's statement that the future history of race relations in America will document and recognize the "leavening" influence of the Bahá'í Faith in promoting ideal race relations, as in the case of the Harlem Renaissance, in which its intellectual architect and grandmaster, Alain Locke, played a leading role. This essay also demonstrates that Buck's 2005 thesis still withstands scrutiny: "With synthetic power and crystal clarity, Locke has synergized faith and philosophy to generate a message that universalizes the Bahá'í perspective"[94] in secular and pragmatic philosophical terms.

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91 Bahadur to Locke, 27 February 1924, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164–12, Folder 2 (Bahadur, Azizullah). See also Buck, *The Bahá'í Faith and the Black Intelligentsia*, pp. 164–165; p. 180, n. 144.

92 Shoghi Effendi, postscript to letter written on his behalf by Ruhi Afnan to Locke, 5 July 1930, Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164–10, Folder 2 (Afnan, Ruhi). See also Buck, *The Bahá'í Faith and the Black Intelligentsia,* p. 165; p. 180, n. 145.

93 Cornel West, 'Towards Oneness – Cornel West'. www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbEDC8wAWiI [accessed 11 September 2026].

94 Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, p. 93.

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Appendix 1

THE GOSPEL FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Alain Locke

The gospel for the Twentieth Century rises out of the heart of its greatest problems [sic], and few who are spiritually enlightened doubt the nature of that problem. The clashing ominous [n?]est of issues of the practical world of today, the issues of race, sect, class and nationality, all have one basic spiritual origin, and for that reason, we hope and believe one basic cure. Too long have we tried to patch these issues up and balm them over; [sic] instead of going to the heart and seat of the trouble in the limited and limiting conceptions of humanity which are alone, like a poisonous virus circulating through our whole social system, responsible for them. A change of condition will not remedy or more than temporarily ameliorate our chronic social antagonisms; only a widespread almost universal change of social heart, a new spirit of human attitudes, can achieve the social redemption that must eventually come. The finest and most practical idea of Christianity, the idea of the millenium [sic], of peace on earth, has been allowed to lapse as an illusion of the primitive Christian mind, as a mystic's mirage of another world. And as a consequence the Brotherhood of Man, taken as a negligible corollary of the fatherhood of God, has if anything in practical effect put the truth of its own basic proposition to doubtful uncertainty. The redemption of society, social salvation, should have been sought after first, the pragmatic test and proof of the fatherhood of God is afterall [sic] whether belief in it can realize the unity of mankind; and so the brotherhood of man, as it has been inspirationally expressed, the "oneness of humanity," must be in our day realized or religion die out gradually into ever-increasing materiality. The salvation we have sought after as individuals in an after-life and another sphere must be striven for as the practical peace and unity of the human family here in this [world]. In some very vital respects God will be rediscovered to our age if we succeed in discovering the common denominator of humanity and living in terms of it and valuing all things in accordance with it.

The world has not yet sounded the depths and realized the profundities of its most moving contemporary ideal, or sensed the challenge of its most popular slogan. Much has been accomplished in the name of Democracy, but Spiritual Democracy, its largest and most inner meaning, is so below our common horizons. Only a few from the elevation of some jutting human problem see it, and they too often as through a tragic rift through which it appears more the solution of their particular issue, the light for their particular valley than as the sun of a new universal day for humanity at large. America, that has in an economic and material way labored through to the most promising material elements of democracy, is spiritually very far from the realization of her own organic [i]deal. One would despair except for the knowledge from history that the solutions come out of the crater pots of the deepest and most seething problems.

The fundamental problems of current America are materiality and prejudice.

They seem to rise out of separate positions, but their common base is selfishness. They rest primarily not upon the economic and historical conditions in terms of which they are so often explained and discussed, but upon false human values, a blind ness [sic] of heart, an obstruction of social vision. And so we must say with the acute actualities of America's race problem and the acute potentialities of her economic problem, the land that is nearest to material democracy is furthest away from spiritual democracy, unless, as we have said, the heart of the solution is to come out of the crux of the problem.

Perhaps this is so. Practical philanthropy is welling up in rapidly increasing volume out of the heart of the capitalist system; and even before the class issues have begun perceptably [sic] to ameliorate, we witness at last a favorable trend to the most crucial of all the American issues, the strained relations of the race question. New and promising efforts of race cooperation and help have sprung up within the last decade from the very section where the issues are most acute; of course the Old South still lingers both as an unfortunate social condition and state of mind. But essentially a New South is breaking through; and it is interesting to note not in terms of the old notion of help but of the new discovery of common interests, in other words in terms of cooperation. The inter-racial commissions spreading their work of common council through the better and more representative elements of the two races in the South, the new movement for the equalisation [sic] of public school expenditures, health and public welfare measures and activities that has significantly but only recently begun, the challenge of the great industrial migration of the Negro away from the South, which has led to ameliorative measures to retain this economically valuable but hitherto socially mis-valued group, and the increasing self-esteem and direction of the New Negro himself which though it has, like the assertive rise of suppressed minorities the world over today, the potentialities of clash and rivalry and increasing sectarianism, holds nevertheless with the right social attitude toward it the possibilities of finer mutual respect and reciprocity; all these are hopeful signs out of a spiritually dark and threatening situation.

I have often thought that one of the great obstacles that has prevented the world from realizing unity was the notion, especially characteristic of the West, that to be one effectively we must all be alike, and that to be at peace we must all have the same interests. But the increasing breaking-up of Western society may not be the debacle of civilization which the Occidental materialistic uniformitarians have imagined it to be, but rather the preparatory step that will force us to abandon this false idea and adopt the true one, not of uniformity, but reciprocity, not of an outward union of bodies and cultures, but of social heart and feeling. Once we rid ourselves of the proprietary notion of civilization, we enter upon an era of spiritual reciprocity.

This, I take it, is from the intellectual point of view the one great new idea and ideal to be added in our day to our science and wrought into our practice of education. Segments of it come from many quarters; none more promising, to mention one significant light, it seems that the philosophy of the Austrian Holzapfel, with its professed basic principle of the "Pan-Ideal", where universal values, the point of view of all mankind is to be substituted for the narrowing and hopelessly conflicting scales of value that race, class, nation and sect have made almost chronic defects in our thinking.

We must begin working out the new era courageously, but it must be a revolution within the soul. How many external wars and revolutions it will make unnecessary, if it is only possible! 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. If the world had believingly understood the full significance of Him 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 millenial [sic] 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 be as one kindred and family.["]

Appendix 2

PARALLELS

Alain Locke "The New Negro" (TNN) and "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" (GTC) Compared

(1) Literary and Rhetorical Parallels:

- *"***New" as regenerative keyword:** "new spirit of human attitudes" (GTC 40); "as the sun of a new universal day for humanity at large" (GTC 40); "New and promising efforts of race cooperation" (GTC 41); "essentially a New South is breaking through" (GTC 41); "new discovery of common interests" (GTC 41); "new movement for the equalisation [sic]" (GTC 41); "the increasing self-esteem and direction of the New Negro himself" (GTC 41); "the one great new idea and ideal to be added in our day to our science and wrought into our practice of education" (GTC 41); "We must begin working out the new era courageously, but it must be a revolution within the soul." (GTC 42); "The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him." (TNN 3); "For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses" (TNN 3); "the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase" (TNN 4); "the same thing happens spiritually in the life-attitudes and self-expression of the Young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook" (TNN 4–5); "a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom" (TNN 7); "To all of this the New Negro is keenly responsive as an augury of a new democracy in American culture." (TNN 9). (There are many more examples of "new" rhetoric in TNN, passim.)
- **Disease/Cure Metaphor:** "limited and limiting conceptions of humanity which are alone, like a poisonous virus circulating through our whole social system" (GTC 39); "He resents … being regarded a chronic patient for the sociological clinic, the sick man of American Democracy. For the same reasons, he himself is through with those social nostrums and panaceas, the so-called "solutions" of his "problem," with which he and the country have been so liberally dosed in the past." (TNN 11)

(2) Racial and Social Parallels:

- **The New Negro's self-esteem and world esteem: "**the increasing self-esteem and direction of the New Negro himself" (GTC 41); "the sense of a mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible." (TNN 14)
- **Cooperation:** "New and promising efforts of race cooperation and help have sprung up within the last decade from the very section where the issues are most acute; of course the Old South still lingers both as an unfortunate social condition and state of mind. But essentially a New South is breaking through" (GTC 41); "It does not follow that if the Negro were better known, he would be better liked or better treated. But mutual understanding is basic for any subsequent cooperation and adjustment." (TNN 8–9)

(3) Philosophical Parallels:

- **Universal values:** "it seems that the philosophy of the Austrian Holzapfel, with its professed basic principle of the "Pan-Ideal", where universal values, the point of view of all mankind is to be substituted for the narrowing and hopelessly conflicting scales of value that race, class, nation and sect have made almost chronic defects in our thinking." (GTC 41); "The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American [p. 12] wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions." (TNN 11–12)

(4) Religious and Theological Parallels:

- **Social salvation/redemption:** "The redemption of society, social salvation, should have been sought after first, the pragmatic test and proof of the fatherhood of God is afterall [sic] whether belief in it can realize the unity of mankind; and so the brotherhood of man, as it has been inspirationally expressed, the "oneness of humanity," must be in our day realized or religion die out gradually into ever-increasing materiality. The salvation we have sought after as individuals in an after-life and another sphere must be striven for as the practical peace and unity of the human family here in this [world]. In some very vital respects God will be rediscovered to our age if we succeed in discovering the common denominator of humanity and living in terms of it and valuing all things in accordance with it." (GTC 40); "By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation." (TNN 4)
- **Spiritual Coming of Age:** "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." (GTC 42); "And certainly, if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least, on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age." (TNN 16)