

Considering the Actions of `Abdu'l-Bahá as a Means of Advancing Race Unity

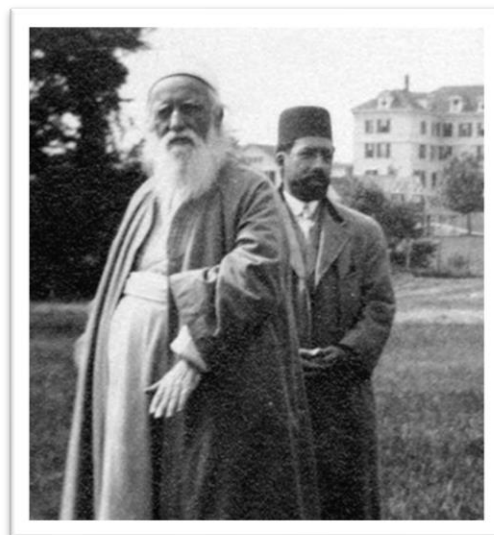
Dear Friends,

You are warmly invited to join us for an online discussion on ***Considering the Actions of `Abdu'l-Bahá as a Means of Advancing Race Unity***, facilitated by Mr. Kiser Barnes and Dr. Jen Chingwe.

This online event will take place on:

Saturday, 25 July 2020 from 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon

We look forward to welcoming you to the online presentation of inspiring examples of `Abdu'l-Bahá's activities for racial unity and to your sharing comments on the unique stories.



Meeting Information

Zoom link: <https://mahernet.zoom.us/j/97282760278?pwd=WWFFcUFsb3g3QXdiRTF3Q1JZeERGUT09>

Password: Bahai-123 **Meeting ID:** 972 8276 0278

Dial by your location: +1 646 876 9923

“He alone had been accorded the privilege of being called ‘the Master,’ an honor from which His Father had strictly excluded all His other sons. Upon Him that loving and unerring Father had chosen to confer the unique title of ‘Sirru'llah’ (the Mystery of God), a designation so appropriate to One Who, though essentially human and holding a station radically and fundamentally different from that occupied by Bahá'u'lláh and His Forerunner, could still claim to be the perfect Exemplar of His Faith, to be endowed with super-human knowledge, and to be regarded as the stainless mirror reflecting His light. To Him, whilst in Adrianople, that same Father had, in the Suriy-i-Ghusn (Tablet of the Branch), referred as ‘this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness,’ as ‘the Limb of the Law of God,’ as His ‘most great favor’ unto men, as His ‘most perfect bounty’ conferred upon them, . . .” -- *Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 242*

References to `Abdu'l-Bahá's Actions in Achieving Race Unity in Compilations from the Universal House of Justice and National Spiritual Assembly--forwarded by the NSA to the American Community

1. “During His epic visit to America, `Abdu'l-Bahá openly expressed His views on the need to eradicate racial prejudice and took bold actions to demonstrate the importance of achieving race unity.” -- *Compilation on Race Relations, Universal House of Justice, Extract 5*
2. “We take as inspiration for our service the example of `Abdu'l-Bahá during His visit to America. . . . In clear and uncompromising terms, in private meetings and public assemblies, He raised the call of the oneness of humanity. He demonstrated fully, courageously, and consistently, whether openly in large gatherings or in the smallest personal acts, the implications of that spiritual truth . . . and challenged others to do the same . . . especially in the relations between black and white.” -- *Compilation of Letter from National Spiritual Assembly, February 25, 2017, Paragraph 13*
3. “`Abdu'l-Bahá made it clear that those who steadfastly strive to promote the oneness of humanity will endure hardship and injustice, and He taught that to be wronged and oppressed in the path of God is a divine gift, . . . You are encouraged to take heart from the Master's assurance that racial prejudice will one day be eliminated from the face of the earth, although as the Guardian explained, the road to be travelled will be ‘long and thorny’ and ‘beset with pitfalls.’ In summoning us to the great work of creating anew the world, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to adhere to a standard of conduct which He, Himself, so nobly exemplified.” *Compilation on Race Relations, Universal House of Justice, Extract 8*

Additional References

4. "Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings." -- *Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 51*
5. "Let them call to mind, fearlessly and determinedly, the example and conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá while in their midst. Let them remember His courage, His genuine love, His informal and indiscriminating fellowship, His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom. Let them revive and perpetuate the memory of those unforgettable and historic episodes and occasions on which He so strikingly demonstrated His keen sense of justice, His spontaneous sympathy for the downtrodden, His ever-abiding sense of the oneness of the human race, His overflowing love for its members, and His displeasure with those who dared to flout His wishes, to deride His methods, to challenge His principles, or to nullify His acts." -- *Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 34*

Story #1: Question 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked Louis Gregory during his Pilgrimage about racial unity within the Bahá'í Community

"'Are the colored and white believers entirely united?' Referring to the friends, I answered that there was not entire unity, but that there were earnest souls of both races who desired closer unity and hoped that He would point out to them the means of attaining it. He said: 'The best means is to accept the Cause. All differences must fade among believers. In the present antagonism there is great danger to both races. Inter-marriage is a good way to efface racial differences. It produces strong, beautiful offspring, clever and resourceful . . . The colored people must attend all the unity meetings. There must be no discrimination. All are equal.'" -- *Earl Redman, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 15*

Story #2: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Luncheon with Louis Gregory

"Early on that afternoon of 23 April (1912) 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sought to demonstrate His teachings on race by challenging the practice of social segregation. After His speech at Howard University, He had been invited by Ali-Kuli Khan, charge d'affaires of the Persian Legation, and Madame Florence Breed Khan, both of whom were Bahá'ís, to attend a luncheon and a reception in his home. About nineteen guests were present at the luncheon. Some were 'very prominent in the social and political life of Washington,' Mr. Gregory recalled, and others were Bahá'í friends of the Khans, individuals, such as Agnes Parson, a Washington socialite, and Juliette Thompson, a painter from New York, who were comfortable in such circles.

"'About an hour before the luncheon 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent word to Louis Gregory to come to the Khan's for an interview. 'Louis arrived at the appointed time, and the conference went on and on,' a good friend, Harlan Ober, has recounted. "'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed to want to prolong it.' Finally luncheon was announced, and, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá led the invited guest to the dining room, Mr. Gregory waited for the chance to leave the house unobtrusively. Mr. Ober continued, "'Abdu'l-Bahá stood up, looked all around, and then said to Mirza Khan, "Where is Mr. Gregory? Bring Mr. Gregory!" There was nothing for Mirza Khan to do but find Mr. Gregory. . . Finally Mr. Gregory came into the room with Mirza Khan. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who was really the Host (as He was wherever He was), had by this time rearranged the place setting and made room for Mr. Gregory, giving him the seat of honor at His right. He stated He was very pleased to have Mr. Gregory there, and then, in the most natural way as if nothing unusual had happened, proceed to give a talk on the oneness of mankind.'

"Juliet Thompson's account of the luncheon testifies to the ease with which 'Abdu'l-Bahá defied convention, as if it did not in fact exist. She wrote simply that 'a colored man, Lewis [sic] Gregory, was present and the Master gave a wonderful talk on race prejudice.' Mr. Gregory himself, although he undoubtedly told the full story of the luncheon to many friends, stated in his formal reminiscences only, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made everyone feel perfectly at ease by his genial humor, wisdom and outpouring of love . . .'

"Gently, yet unmistakably, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had assaulted the customs of a city . . . Moreover, as a friend who helped Madame Khan with the luncheon recalled, the place setting that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had rearranged so casually had been made according to the strict demands of Washington protocol. Thus, with one stroke 'Abdu'l-Bahá had swept aside both segregation by race and categorization by social rank. . . the luncheon . . . was attended by such luminaries as Admiral Peary, Alexander Graham Bell, and Yusuf Diva Pasha, the Turkish ambassador." -- *Gayle Morrison, To Move the World--Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America, pp. 52-54*

Tributes to Louis Gregory by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

"That pure soul has a heart like unto transparent water. He is like unto pure gold. This is why he is acceptable in any market and is current in every country." -- Gayle Morrison, To Move the World, p. 314

". . . Mr. Gregory . . . is the essence of the love of God and is a symbol of guidance! How luminous is the face of this person! His character is (like unto) a rose garden." -- Gayle Morrison, To Move the World, p. 314

Tributes to Louis Gregory by Shoghi Effendi

"My self-sacrificing brother. . . Your splendid activities, your single-mindedness and devotion to the great work you are doing for the Cause is an inspiration to me in my task and a refreshment in the midst of my arduous duties. . . . What greater reward than the satisfaction and the good-pleasure of our dear Master which I am certain you have fully earned?" -- Shoghi Effendi, Letter to Louis Gregory, 4/4/25, Taylor, The Pupil of the Eye, p. 10

"Profoundly deplore grievous loss of dearly beloved, noble-minded, golden-hearted Louis Gregory, pride and example to the Negro adherents of the Faith. Keenly feel loss of one so loved, admired and trusted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Deserves rank of first Hand of the Cause of his race. Rising Bahá'í generation in African continent will glory in his memory and emulate his example."-- Shoghi Effendi, Cable sent upon the passing of Louis Gregory, 8/6/51, Citadel of Faith, p. 163

Story 3: 'Abdu'l- Bahá Finds Racial Differences a Thing of Beauty

"The following delightful story about an incident during 'Abdu'l- Bahá's stay in New York illustrates the fact that He was not 'colour-blind,' but rather He found racial differences a thing of beauty. When the Master was on His way to speak to several hundred men at the Bowery Mission He was accompanied by a group of Persian and American friends. Not unnaturally a group of boys was intrigued by the sight of this group of Orientals with their flowing robes and turbans and started to follow them. They soon became noisy and obstreperous. A lady in the Master's party was highly embarrassed at the rude behavior of the boys. Dropping behind she stopped to talk with them a little about who 'Abdu'l- Bahá was, Not entirely expecting them to take her up on the invitation, she nevertheless gave them her home address and said that if they liked to come the following Sunday she would arrange for them to see Him.

"Thus, on Sunday, some twenty or thirty of them appeared on the doorstep, rather scruff and noisy, but with signs they had tidied up for the occasion, nonetheless. Upstairs in 'Abdu'l- Bahá's room the Master was seen at the door greeting each boy with a handclasp or an arm around the shoulder, with warm smiles and boyish laughter. His happiness seemed to be directed to the thirteen-year- old boy near the end of the line. He was quite dark-skinned and didn't seem too sure he would be welcome. The Master face lighted up and in a loud voice that all could hear exclaimed with delight that 'here was a black rose.' The boy's face shone with happiness and love. Silence fell across the room as the boys looked at their companion with a new awareness.

"The Master did not stop at that, however. On their arrival He had asked that a big five-pound box of delicious chocolate be fetched. With this He walked around the room, ladling out chocolate by the handful to each boy. Finally, with only a few left in the box, He picked out one of the darkest chocolates, walked across the room and held it to the cheek of the black boy. The Master was radiant as He lovingly put His arm around the boy's shoulder and looked with a humorously piercing glance around the group without making any further comment." -- Annamarie Honnold, *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 100

Story 4: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Unity Feast in Washington D.C.

"At the time of His visit in 1912, Washington D.C. was the most racially and socially mixed Bahá'í community in America, but it had deep racial unity problems. The upper class, including people like Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, still upheld the long standing social conventions of racial segregation that were not easily overcome. Many whites were afraid to host multiracial gatherings in their homes for fear of what others would say. Many blacks were also reluctant to attend meetings because of their fear of insults and discriminatory treatment. An example: once 'Abdu'l-Bahá said He wanted to host a unity Feast. A committee organized for the event selected one of the city's most exclusive hotels—one that was known for its refusal to admit black people. The black Bahá'ís thought it might be better if they did not attend and so avoid the problem of the colour line. 'Abdu'l-Bahá however insisted that they attend and in the end all the Bahá'ís, both black and white, sat side by side in the previously segregated hotel." -- Earl Redman, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Midst*, p. 98

Story 5: Gathering hosted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Kinney’s

“Racial segregation in the United States and particularly among the Bahá’ís was a frequent subject for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He constantly urged the friends to associate with each other in the utmost joy and happiness. On Wednesday 17 April, He hosted such a gathering at the home of Saffa and Vaffa Kinney. Bahá’ís and their friends, both black and white, attended and He prepared and served the meal Himself. The Master told the friends that ‘although we are different individualities, different to ideas and of various fragrances, let us strive like flowers of the same divine garden to live together in harmony. . . . I am joyful, if I perceive the evidence of great love among you.’” -- *Earl Redman, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 90*

Story #6

“Arthur Parsons once commented to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that he wished all the blacks would return to Africa, to which the Master wryly replied that such an exodus would have to begin with Wilber, the trusted butler of the Parsons household. . . . It is remarkable then that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá subsequently chose Agnes Parsons to spearhead the Racial Amity campaign initiated by the Bahá’í community and just as remarkable that she transcended her social milieu in order to carry out this mandate.” -- *Earl Redman, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 98*

Story #7

“Joseph and Pauline Hannen (who introduced the Faith to Mr. Gregory) were . . . the prime movers of racial integration in Washington in the early years of the Faith there. Initially, Pauline feared black people, but her study of the Bahá’u’lláh’s writings forced her to change her attitude. Pauline taught the Faith to her black washerwoman then she and Joseph began inviting blacks to meetings in their home . . . a rather daring thing to do at the time. Pauline also initiated a children’s Sunday school in Washington . . . Gregory said of them . . . ‘self-sacrificing, ceaselessly active, freedom from prejudice, warmth of heart and knowledge of the Word of God, admirably fitted them for the stupendous and glorious task of harmonizing the races assigned them by the Master.’” -- *Earl Redman, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Their Midst, p. 92*

Prepared by Mr. Kiser Barnes and Jen Chingwe