



3! . Columbus Smalley, *The Black 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential African-Americans, Past and Present*, revised and updated (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1999 [1993]), p. 137.

4! . Leonard Harris & Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 1.

5! . William C. Bolivar, "Alain LeRoy Locke." *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review* 24, no. 1 (July 1907): 19.  
Alain Locke's Philosophy of Democracy  
2! 5

sought to achieve "Civil Rights by Copyright."<sup>6</sup> In 1925, Locke edited *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, the historical significance of which Eric King Watts notes: "Only a few claims regarding the Harlem Renaissance are uncontested: that *The New Negro* stands as the 'keystone,' the 'revolutionary' advertisement, and the 'first national book'

of African America is one of them."<sup>7</sup>

There is also synergy between the social objectives of the Harlem Renaissance and Alain Locke's philosophy of democracy. As to the purpose behind the Harlem Renaissance, Locke is crystal clear: "The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American 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."<sup>8</sup> The Harlem Renaissance achieved a major objective of the New Negro movement, which was to instill a race pride in Blacks and a corresponding respect for Blacks by mainstream America. This race pride created the group consciousness that was a necessary precondition for the mass mobilization of African Americans led by Dr. King during the Civil Rights movement. As the acknowledged "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance, Locke sought to ennoble the perception (and self-perception) of African Americans through an "ameliorative use of stereotypes" and by "advocacy aesthetics"<sup>9</sup> whereby art served as a cultural ambassador in promoting ideal race relations.

As historically important as his pivotal role in Harlem Renaissance surely was, Locke's legacy as philosopher may just as profound, as Leonard Harris points out: "Alain Locke, I believe, is the sentinel historical figure in the history of African American professional philosophers because he conjoins an interest in the historically important issues of social well-being crucial to the African American intellectual

6! . David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin, 1998), p. xxviii.

7! . Eric King Watts, "African American Ethos and Hermeneutical Rhetoric: An Exploration of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*

88, no. 1

(Feb. 2002): 19–32, citing Houston Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 85.

8! . Alain Locke, “Enter the New Negro.” *Survey Graphic*. Special Issue: Harlem,

Mecca of the New Negro (March 1925): 631–634 (633).

9! . Leonard Harris, “Alain L. Locke,” in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. John R.

Shook and Joseph Margolis (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), ch. 7, pp. 87–93 (91).

! 26

Studies in Bahá’í

Philosophy

agenda with central issues in the modern history of philosophy.”<sup>10</sup> Locke

has been called “the father of multiculturalism.”<sup>11</sup>

Alain Locke was a pragmatist philosopher. Of the pragmatists, John

Dewey most influenced democratic theory from the pragmatist

perspective. But the pragmatist whom Locke admired most was likely

Franz Boas, whom Locke called a “major prophet of democracy.”<sup>12</sup>

Locke is credited with having first coined the term, “critical pragmatism.”

“The actual phrase, ‘critical pragmatism,’” writes Alison Kadlec,

“appears at least as early as 1935 in Alain Locke’s pragmatic theory of

valuation. In the context of Locke’s work, the idea of a critical

pragmatism was supposed to undergird the development of cultural

pluralism.”<sup>13</sup> Leonard Harris, arguably the foremost scholar on Alain

Locke, notes:

Critical pragmatism was created by Locke and has its religious sensibilities in a place other than Cornel West’s prophetic pragmatism and Dewey and James’ American forms of Christianity. Locke was affiliated with the B’hai faith [sic: Bahá’í Faith] and thereby a radical cultural pluralist and influenced by the B’hai [sic: Bahá’í] demand, as a tenet of religious faith, that racism is a sin.<sup>14</sup>

! . Leonard Harris, “The Horror of Tradition or How to Burn Babylon and Build Benin While Reading A Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note.” *Philosophical Forum* 24, nos. 1–3 (Fall–Spring 1992–93): 94–119. Reprinted in

*African-American*

*Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman and Marx W.

Wartofsky (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 94–119 [112].

! . Charles Molesworth, “Alain Locke and Walt Whitman: Manifestos and National Identity,” in *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value*

*Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education*, ed. Leonard Harris

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 176.

! . Alain Locke, “Major Prophet of Democracy” (Review of *Race and Democratic*

*Society* by Franz Boas), *Journal of Negro Education* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1946):

191–92.

! . Alain Locke, “Major Prophet of Democracy” (Review of *Race and Democratic*

*Society* by Franz Boas),

*Journal of Negro Education* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1946):

191–92.

See also Mark Helbling, "Feeling Universality and Thinking Particularistically: Alain Locke, Franz Boas, Melville Herkskovits, and the Harlem Renaissance," *Prospects* 19 (1994): 289–314.

! . Alison Kadlec, "Reconstructing Dewey: The Philosophy of Critical Pragmatism," *Polity* 38, no. 4 (Oct. 2006): 519–42 (520, n. 3).

! . Leonard Harris, Review of Pragmatism and the Problem of Race, Bill E. Lawson and Donald F. Koch, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004),

*Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 41, no. 2 (Spring, 2005): 440–43 [442].

Alain Locke's Philosophy of Democracy

2! 7

Cornel West's "prophetic pragmatism" is said to have been inspired by "his trinity of Christ, Marx, and Dewey."<sup>15</sup> As the Cornel West of the Jim Crow era, Locke's own "critical pragmatism" drew its inspiration from the trinity of Baha'u'llah, Royce, and Boas. One can say that Locke has synergized faith (Baha'u'llah) and philosophy (Royce), reinforced by scientific anthropology (Boas). While all but Josiah Royce among the first white pragmatists had turned a blind eye to race, Locke would agree with Cornel West in characterizing American pragmatism as "unique as a philosophical tradition in the modern world in its preoccupation or near obsession with the meaning and value of democracy."<sup>16</sup> (Here, pragmatism is Cornel West's synecdoche for philosopher John Dewey.) Although West, in *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989), had excluded him, Locke has finally entered the canon of American philosophy and taken his rightful place in the philosophical pantheon with the appearance of John Stuhr's *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy* (2000).<sup>17</sup>

Locke anchored philosophy in human values and formulated his own theory of relativity by way of a naturalized epistemology of human values. One of Locke's lectures captures the essence of his philosophy by its very title: "Cultural Pluralism: A New Americanism."<sup>18</sup> Locke's integrationism was not assimilationism. Locke held to the Bahá'í

! . Charles W. Mills, "Prophetic Pragmatism as a Political Philosophy," in Cornel

West: *A Critical Reader*, ed. by George Yancy (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 196, quoting Lewis R. Gordon, "Black Intellectuals and Academic Activism: Cornel West's 'Dilemmas of the Black Intellectual'," in *idem*, *Her*

*Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), p. 195.

! . Qtd. in Mills, "Prophetic Pragmatism," p. 197.

! . John J. Stuhr, ed., *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press,

2002).

! . Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center (hereafter, “MSRC”), Howard University, Box 164-167, Folder 4: 1950-1953 (Programs on which Locke’s Name Appears). Sponsored by the Department of Philosophy, Locke’s lecture, presented on November 8, 1950, was held in the faculty lounge, Douglass Hall, Howard University.

! 28

Studies in Bahá’í

Philosophy

principle of “unity in diversity,”<sup>19</sup> which he reformulated as “unity through diversity.”<sup>20</sup>

Seeing America as “a unique social experiment,” Locke’s larger goal was to “Americanize Americans,”<sup>21</sup> with the simple yet profound message that equality benefits everyone, and that democracy itself is at stake. Locke’s cosmopolitan paradigm of unity is a “theoretical and praxical transformation of classical American pragmatism.”<sup>22</sup> According to Judith Green, Locke had precociously conceptualized “deep democracy” as “cosmopolitan unity amidst valued diversity.”<sup>23</sup> In raising democracy to a new level of consciousness, Locke internationalized the race issue, making the crucial connection between American race relations and international relations. Racial justice, he predicted, would serve as a social catalyst of world peace.

Locke was trained as a philosopher at Harvard University. The primary branch of philosophy that Locke studied was the theory of values.

Locke’s dissertation was *The Problem of Classification in Theory of Value: or an Outline of a Genetic System of Values*.<sup>24</sup> Harvard University conferred Locke’s Ph.D. on 25 February 1918, after he had successfully defended his dissertation. <sup>25</sup> That same year, he adopted the Bahá’í Faith,

! . The Bahá’í Faith’s “watchword is unity in diversity.” Shoghi Effendi, *The*

*World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 42.

! . Alain Locke, “Unity through Diversity: A Bahá’í Principle,” in *The Bahá’í*

*World: A Biennial International Record, Volume IV, 1930–1932* (Wilmette: Bahá’í

Publishing Trust, 1933) pp. 372–74. Reprint (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust,

1980). Reprinted again in Locke, *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*, ed. Leonard Harris (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

1989), pp. 133–38 [above quote from p. 137]. Harris’ reference on p. 133 n. should be

emended to read, “Volume IV, 1930–1932” (not “V, 1932–1934”).

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 (“The Preservation of

the

Democratic Ideal”), p. 5.

! . Segun Gbadegesin, “Values, Imperatives, and the Imperative of Democratic Values,” in Leonard Harris, ed., *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on*

*Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 288.

! . Judith Green, “Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity: Alain Locke’s

*Vision of Deeply Democratic Transformation*,” in *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 96.

! . Alain Leroy Locke, *The Problem of Classification in the Theory of Value: or an*

*Outline of a Genetic System of Values* (Ph.D. dissertation: Harvard University, 1918).

! . *Alain Locke Papers*, MSRC, Box 164-228, P Oversize (Diploma awarded by Harvard University 25 Feb. 1918).

*Alain Locke’s Philosophy of Democracy*

2! 9

as documented and discussed in *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*.<sup>26</sup>

Locke, moreover, established the study of philosophy at Howard University – an institution of higher learning aptly characterized as the equivalent to Harvard University among traditionally black universities. Leonard Harris credits Alain Locke for having contributed a “unique version of pragmatism,” which “promotes a deep-seated commitment to transforming a world” through “intellectual engagement” and “aesthetic pluralism whereby beauty-making properties are considered subject to transvaluation.”<sup>27</sup> And further:

Locke’s theory of valuation, his advocacy aesthetics, his insistence on moral imperatives as a necessary condition for the possibility of a moral community, his pedagogy of discipline and cultural integration, and his views of community as an evolving democratic experiment, all form a unique chapter of American pragmatism.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond his philosophy of values, Locke also developed a comprehensive theory of democracy. By devoting “Chapter Ten” to “Theorizing Democracy” in their definitive biography of Locke, Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth identify Locke’s philosophy of democracy as his greatest contribution as a philosopher, which has yet to be fully understood and appreciated: “Locke’s views on democracy deserve fuller study than they have received.”<sup>29</sup>

In the fall of 1947, Locke taught a course on the “Philosophy of Democracy”<sup>30</sup> at Howard University, where he was a distinguished professor for over forty years. While the notes that have survived are fragmentary at best, it is now possible to reconstruct Locke’s philosophy of democracy in its broad conceptual outlines. In an unpublished



of democracy is not only typological, but evolutionary as well. In a survey of his writings, one may begin to typologize or systematize Locke's thinking on democracy. These are some of the various dimensions of democracy that Locke spoke and wrote about:

- (1) Local Democracy;
- (2) Moral Democracy;
- (3) Political Democracy;
- (4) Economic Democracy;
- (5) Cultural Democracy;
- (6) Racial Democracy;
- (7) Social Democracy;
- (8) Spiritual Democracy;

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-141, Folder 14 ([Notes] Democracy – political, economic, cultural).

! . Alain Locke, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," in idem, "Alain Locke in His Own Words: Three Essays." *World Order* 36, no. 3 (2005): 39–42 [39–40].

(Previously unpublished essays, introduced by Christopher Buck and co-edited with Betty Fisher.)

! . Alain Locke, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," p. 42.

Alain Locke's Philosophy of Democracy

3! 1

- (9) World Democracy.

Locke's philosophy of democracy was both historical and phenomenological. It may aptly be characterized as a "grand theory" of democracy – anchored in history, grounded in philosophy, and validated by personal experience. Locke's philosophy of democracy harks back to Athens, arcs through history, and telescopes into the future. His point of departure was, of course, the historical development or evolution of democracy. The first five dimensions may be roughly characterized as "Historical Democracy," as they are sequenced in Locke's paradigm of social evolution. In his farewell address at Talladega College (1941), Locke spoke of local, moral, political, economic, and cultural stages of democracy. The present writer published the speech in 2005. 34 Locke begins his speech by saying:

And now, I should like to talk about something that we all take for granted – these are things we know least about. The words most frequently used are words understood least[.] – Democracy is one of those words. Thinking Negroes, of course, know much about what democracy is not, and have a more workable conception of what democracy truly means than those who have just enough to be content with or those to whom it is just a commonplace concept and

way of life. Democracy, of course, is one of the basic human ideals, but as an ideal of human association it is something quite superior to any outward institution or any particular society; therefore, not only is government too narrow to express democracy, but government from time to time must grow to realize democracy.<sup>35</sup>

Not only is government too narrow a concept of democracy, but democracy started out historically as a narrow concept as well.

Local Democracy: The historical origins of democracy hark back to Athens, as one would expect. And while it is a breakthrough concept of the profoundest historical moment, Locke emphasizes its limitations:

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

! . Alain Locke, “Five Phases of Democracy: Farewell Address at Talladega College,” in idem, “Alain Locke in His Own Words: Three Essays.” World Order 36, no. 3 (2005): 45–48.

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), p. 1.

! 32  
Studies in Bahá’í  
Philosophy

citizenship. Our nearest approach to it is the kind of fellowship we find in college fraternities and sororities in which the bonds are of “like-mindedness” excluding others. The rim of the Greek concept of democracy was the barbarian: it was then merely the principle of fraternity within a narrow, limited circle. There was a dignity accorded to each member on the basis of membership in the group. It excluded foreigners, slaves and women. This concept carried over into the Roman empire.<sup>36</sup>

In staging the evolution of democracy, the next developmental phase in the evolution of democracy, accordingly, was Christianity.

Moral Democracy: Christianity, in Locke’s estimate of it, provided the ideal basis for a moral democracy. Ideally universal, and socially so in its pristine beginnings, over time Christianity became circumscribed, as Locke, true to his critical temper, points out:

Christianity was responsible for the introduction of the next great revision in the concept of democracy. We owe to Christianity one of the great basic ideals of democracy – the ideal of the moral equality of human beings. The Christian ideal of democracy was in its initial stages more democratic than it subsequently became. It always held on to the essential ideal of moral equality of man within the limits of organized Christianity – anybody else was a potential member only

as he became converted. Christianity was thus a crusading ideal in bringing humanity into wider association. But the Christian church was a political institution and in making compromises often failed in bringing about real human equality.<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding its contribution to the evolution of democracy by promoting “the ideal of the moral equality of human beings,” Christianity later failed to live up to its own ideals.

Political Democracy: Locke explains the profound influence of the French Revolution on the establishment of American democracy by the Founding Fathers. In one speech, Locke states:

Then later came that political and secular strand of colonial experience, which out of the fight against tyranny and taxation grew into the issue of political freedom and the liberty of self-government. But even then, when these developments had been fought for and won, and were being institutionalized, it took another strain of radical thinking imported from Revolutionary France to consolidate this into a formally democratic doctrine, the fundamental historical creed of

<sup>36</sup>. Ibid., pp. 1–2.

<sup>37</sup>. Ibid., p. 2.

Alain Locke’s Philosophy of Democracy

3! 3

American democracy that we know so well and rightly treasure so highly.<sup>38</sup>

It was the political philosophy of the French that most impressed Thomas Jefferson, and profoundly influenced the development of democracy in America:

The third great step in democracy came from [P]rotestant lands and people who evolved the ideal of political equality: (1) equality before the law; (2) political citizenship. This political democracy pivoted on individualism, and the freedom of the individual in terms of what we know as the fundamental rights of man. It found its best expression in the historic formula of “Liberty, equality and fraternity.”<sup>39</sup>

Locke appreciated the Bill of Rights and subsequent Amendments as milestones in the evolution of American democracy. But the political system – not to mention the social manifestations of democracy – were still far from perfect:

In terms of this ideology our country’s government was founded. But for generations after many of the fundamentals of our democracy were pious objectives, not fully expressed in practice. In the perspective of democracy’s long evolution, we must regard our country’s history as a progressive process of democratization, not yet fully achieved, but certainly progressing importantly in terms of the [T]hirteenth, [F]ourteenth and [F]ifteenth [A]mendments, and the

amendment extending the right of franchise to women. It is still imperfect.<sup>40</sup>

The perfection of democracy requires a “democratic spirit,” without which democracy, by legislation standing alone, cannot succeed: “[I]f we are going to have effective democracy in America we must have the democratic spirit as well as the democratic tradition, we must have more social democracy and more economic democracy in order to have or keep political democracy.”<sup>41</sup>

This statement reveals the cornerstone of Locke’s philosophy of democracy: that democratic ideals must be complemented by democratic

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-112, Folder 18 (“Creative Democracy”),

p. 2.

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), p. 2.

! . Ibid., pp. 2–3.

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 (“The Preservation of the Democratic Ideal”), p. 5.

! 34

Studies in Bahá’í

Philosophy

attitudes. In other words, the democratic spirit is what really animates a democracy, not simply its institutions and legal safeguards. Consistent with this analysis is Locke’s stage-wise progression from political to economic democracy, in which human values (on which political democracy is ostensibly based) can and must be linked to economic values.

Economic Democracy: Although Locke was no economist, he clearly understood that reality. It was totally obvious in the ghettos. Economic reform was a necessary development of democracy:

The fourth crucial stage in the enlargement of democracy began, I think, with the income tax amendment. Woodrow Wilson tried to put into operation an extension of democracy which may well have been seriously hindered by World War number one. The income tax [A]mendment was an initial step in social [economic] democracy as distinguished from the purely political, – a step toward economic equality through the partial appropriation of surplus wealth for the benefit of the commonwealth.

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

of unemployment, the New Deal has been confronted with the problem of inaugurating some of these beginnings of economic democracy and of constitutionally implementing a larger measure of social justice. The whole program of what is now called [S]ocial [S]ecurity is directed toward such objectives. 42

Locke spoke of “the two basic economic roots of war – unequal access to markets and sources of raw materials and widespread differentials of living standards and economic security.”<sup>43</sup> Locke taught that political freedom ought to lead to economic equality. What Locke means by economic democracy is an “equitable distribution of wealth.”<sup>44</sup> Redistribution of surplus wealth is part and parcel of that process. But

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), pp. 3–4.

! . Alain Locke, “Democracy Faces a World Order,” *Harvard Educational Review* 12, no. 2 (March 1942): 124.

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-112, Folder 6 (“Concept of Democracy”). Outline of lecture for Philosophy of Democracy course. 10 Dec. 1947, p. 1.

Alain Locke’s *Philosophy of Democracy* 5

3!

what about the connection between economic democracy and race? In the conclusion of an unpublished essay, “Peace Between Black and White in the United States,” Locke wrote:

We used to say that Christianity and democracy were both at stake in the equitable solution of the race question. They were; but they were abstract ideals that did not bleed when injured. Now we think with more realistic logic, perhaps, that economic justice cannot stand on one foot; and economic reconstruction is the dominant demand of the present-day American scene.<sup>45</sup>

Cultural Democracy: Locke’s next form of democracy is clear enough, although his name for it (“cultural democracy”) is not so much “cultural” as it is “intercommunal.” Locke sums up the problem he is addressing as follows: “Less acute than race prejudice, but by no means unrelated to it, is the social bias and discrimination underlying the problem of cultural minorities. [ . . . ] Cultural bias, like that directed against the Mexican, Orientals, the Jew, the American Indian, often intensifies into racial prejudice.”<sup>46</sup> As an antidote to this social ill, Locke

advocates cultural pluralism, and rejects “Americanization,” whether forced or coerced by social pressures. Think of “culture” in this context as

analogous to the idea of a “corporate culture.” As Locke explains:

A fifth phase of democracy, even if the preceding four are realized, still remains to be achieved in order to have a fully balanced society. The present crisis forces us to realize that without this also democracy may go into total eclipse. This fifth phase is the struggle for cultural democracy, and rests on the concept of the right of difference, – that is, the guarantee of the rights of minorities. Again in the colonial days, we achieved the basic ideals of this crucial aspect of democracy, but scarcely realized them in fact. Today we have the same problems of the freedom of speech, worship and conscience, but in a complex modern situation these things are even more difficult to work out.

One of our greatest problems then today is a real democratic reciprocity for minorities of all sorts, both as over against the so-called majority and among themselves. These contemporary problems of democracy can be vividly sensed if we realize that the race question is at the very heart of this struggle for cultural democracy. Its solution lies beyond even the realization of political

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-123: Folder 19 (“Peace between Black and White in the United States”).

! . Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy: A Study Guide in Human Group Relations* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1943), p. 5.

! 36 Studies in Bahá'í  
Philosophy

and economic democracy, although of course that solution can only be reached when we no longer have extreme political inequality and extreme economic inequality.<sup>47</sup>

This is where the Harlem Renaissance fits in. During its heyday, and throughout the post-Renaissance period, Locke expressed the hope that “our writers and artists” would achieve a “victory” through “a psychological conquest of racism, prejudice and cultural intolerance.”<sup>48</sup> His race loyalty was the gold vein in a rock of solidarity with the rest of humanity. As one scholar observes: “Locke was pro-human rather than pro-negro.”<sup>49</sup> Of course, he was both. Alain Locke was both a “race man” and an integrationist. The role of culture in a “cultural democracy” is that

of enrichment in full representation:

Instead of saying, as was said for so long, that we should recognize the Negro because he has been neglected and needs recognition, recent American literature, – and for that matter, American art generally – has come forward, at least in its more creative talents, with a very new and democratic formula: We will recognize Negro materials because they are intrinsically interesting and because the national culture needs them in the picture to be truly representative. 50

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure

speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), pp. 4–5.

! . Alain Locke, “Reason and Race,” in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain*

Locke, p. 320.

! . Yvonne Ochillo, “The Race-Consciousness of Alain Locke.” *Phylon* 47, no. 3

(1986): 173–81 (176).

! . Alain Locke, “The Negro Minority in American Literature,” in *The Works of*

Alain Locke, edited by Charles Molesworth (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 83–88 [87].

*Alain Locke’s Philosophy of Democracy*

3! 7

Racial Democracy: Alain Locke was a precursor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “[T]he race question,” wrote Locke in 1949, “has become the number one problem of the world.”<sup>51</sup> The next statement follows from the first: “Race,” Locke states, “really is a dominant issue of our thinking about democracy[.]”<sup>52</sup> In his small book, *World View on Race and Democracy: A Study Guide in Human Group Relations*, Locke states this another way: “Of all the barriers limiting democracy, color is the greatest, whether viewed from a standpoint of national or world democracy.”<sup>53</sup> Locke sees this as part of “total democracy.”<sup>54</sup>

Prophetically, Locke forged a linkage between racism as an American problem and racism as a world problem, as he explicitly states: “Race as a symbol of misunderstanding has become fully the great tragedy of our time, both nationally and internationally.”<sup>55</sup> Race is the crux, the litmus test, the hinge on which the entire project of democracy hangs. In a previously unpublished report on racism, Locke writes:

The American race problem may eventually become just a phase and segment of the world relationship of races, and in slight degree it is already in process of becoming so. Historically, and in the general American thought of it, whether among the Negro minority or the white majority, it is thought of as peculiarly and exclusively a national problem. In some respects, its situations are relatively unique. [. . .] So, as between the white and the black peoples, the American situation is the acid test of the whole problem; and will be crucial in its outcome for the rest of the world. This makes America, in the judgment of many, the world’s laboratory for the progressive solution of this great problem of social adjustment.<sup>56</sup>

Locke takes Christianity to task for what today is called self-

! . Alain Locke, “Dawn Patrol: A Review of the Literature of the Negro for 1948,”

*Phylon* 10, nos. 1–2 (1949): 5–14; 167–72. Reprinted in Jeffrey C. Stewart, *The*

*Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture*

(New

York and London: Garland, 1983), pp. 337–49 [337].

! . Alain Locke, “Reason and Race,” in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain*

Locke, p. 325.

! . Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy*, p. 1.

! . *Ibid.*, p. 2, citing Howard H. Brinton (no reference given).

! . Alain Locke, “A Critical Retrospect of the Literature of the Negro for 1947,”

*Phylon* 9, no. 1 (1948): 3–12. Reprinted in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain*

Locke: *A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture*, pp. 329–36 [329].

! . Alain Locke, “[Through Mrs. Ruth Cranston] Report on The Race Problem in the American Area.” *Alain Locke Papers*, MSRC. Box 164-43, Folder 3 (Writings by

Locke – Notes[:] Christianity, spirituality, religion.), p. 1.

! 38 Studies in Bahá’í

Philosophy

segregation: “It is a sad irony,” Alain Locke wrote, “that the social institution most committed and potentially most capable of implementing social democracy should actually be the weakest and most inconsistent, organized religion.”<sup>57</sup> Particularly egregious, in Locke’s view, is what today is termed “self-segregation”: “Of all the segregated bodies, the racially separate church is the saddest and most obviously self-contradicting. The separate Negro church, organized in self-defensive protest, is nonetheless just as anomalous [sic], though perhaps, more pardonably so.”<sup>58</sup> Locke’s remark presaged those of the Rev. Billy Graham and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., both of whom later observed that Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America. Social Democracy: In “Reason and Race” (1947), Locke underscores “the fact that the contemporary world situation clearly indicates that social democracy is the only safe choice for the survival of Western and Christian civilization.”<sup>59</sup> In the Seventeenth Annual Convention and Bahá’í Congress (5 July 1925), Locke was reported to have said, in gist:

Dr. Alain LeRoy Locke of Washington, D.C., delivered a polished address, portraying the great part which America can play in the establishment of world peace, if alive to its opportunity. The working out of social democracy can be accomplished here. To this end we should not think in little arcs of experience, but in the big, comprehensive way. Let our country reform its own heart and life. Needed reforms cannot be worked out by the action of any one group, but a fine sense of cooperation must secure universal fellowship. He praised Green Acre, which he declared to be an oasis in the desert of materiality. He urged all who were favored by this glorious experience to carry forth its glorious message and thus

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-105, Folder 34 (“American Education’s Latest Task: Teaching Democracy.” [incomplete]), p. 8.

! . Ibid.

! . Alain Locke, “Reason and Race,” in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain*

Locke, p. 327.

Alain Locke’s *Philosophy of Democracy*

3! 9

awaken humanity. In final analysis, peace cannot exist anywhere without existing everywhere.<sup>60</sup>

The very integrity of democracy itself is put to test by the state of its race relations.

Spiritual Democracy: Democracy is more than a political system. It is a state of mind, a province of the heart, a radiation of attitudes, from which all actions flow. Spiritual democracy is the democracy of the heart. It’s a place, a state of mind that legislation cannot reach. It is the interiority of democracy that Locke emphasized:

Constitutional guarantees, legal and civil rights, political machinery of democratic action and control are, of course, the skeleton foundation of democracy, but you and I know that attitudes are the flesh and blood of democracy, and that without their vital reinforcement [sic] democracy is really moribund or dead. That is my reason for thinking that in any democracy, ours included, the crucial issue, the test touchstone of democracy is minority status, minority protection, minority rights.<sup>61</sup>

During World War II, Locke wrote of the potential role that religion could play in promoting democracy on a world scale:

The world crisis has led to the reexamination of the traditional doctrines of human equality and brotherhood among the leading thinkers of the Christian churches. As a result, a fresh crusade for aligning organized religion with the constructive forces of world democracy has come to the vanguard of liberal religious thought and action. Both intercultural, intersectarian and interfaith movements have grown out of these considerations.<sup>62</sup>

In attempting to remold the American temperament, Alain Locke led a

! . “The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Baha’i Congress,” *Baha’i News*

Letter, No. 6 (1925): 3. Here, Locke’s reference to “Green Acre” is the Green Acre

Baha’i School, Retreat, and Conference Center in Eliot, Maine, where, in 1925,

Baha’i delegates assembled primarily to elect the “National Spiritual Assembly of the

Baha’is of the United States and Canada” — a council of nine Baha’i

representatives

charged with overseeing the affairs of the American and Canadian Baha'i community

at that time. (The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada was separately elected beginning in 1948, and was legally incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1949, while The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the

United States would be elected annually thereafter.)

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 ("The Preservation of the

Democratic Ideal"), pp. 1–2.

! . Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy*, p. 18.

! 40

Studies in Bahá'í

Philosophy

civil rights movement of the American spirit. Of particular importance are Locke's views on "spiritual democracy" – an aspect of Locke's thought that, so far, has received scant attention. In an evidently unpublished Bahá'í essay (2005), Locke expresses his conviction that "Spiritual Democracy" is the "largest" dimension of democracy as a whole "and most inner meaning." In his essay, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," Locke states:

The gospel for the Twentieth Century rises out of the heart of its greatest problems [ . . . ] Much has been accomplished in the name of Democracy, but Spiritual Democracy, its largest and most inner meaning, is so below our common horizons. [ . . . ] [T]he land that is nearest to material democracy is furthest away from spiritual democracy [ . . . ] The word of God is still insistent, [ . . . ] and we have [ . . . ] Bahá'u'lláh's "one great trumpet-call to humanity": "That all

nations shall become one in faith, and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled [ . . . ] These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and family.["]63

The spirit of democracy is best realized in a spirit of confraternity of the races, as a basis for the social solidarity of society as a whole. In *The Negro in America* (1933), Locke promoted ideal race relations by emphasizing the mutual benefits that true reciprocity would foster:

If they will but see it, because of their complementary qualities, the two racial groups have great spiritual need, one of the other. It would truly be significant in the history of human culture, if two races so diverse should so happily collaborate, and the one return for the gift of a great civilization the reciprocal gift of the spiritual cross-fertilization of a great and distinctive national culture.64

! . Baha'u'llah, quoted in Locke, "Gospel for the Twentieth Century," p. 42, indirectly citing J. E. Esslemont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era: An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, 5th rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980, 1998 printing), pp. 39–40. This oft-quoted statement was first published by Edward Granville Browne, Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University, interview with Baha'u'llah, Acre, Palestine, on Wednesday, April 16, 1890, in 'Abdu'-Baha, *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab*, ed. and trans. Browne, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1891) pp. xxxix–xl.

! . Alain Locke, *The Negro in America* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1933), p. 50.

Alain Locke's Philosophy of Democracy

4! 1

World democracy: Democracy, ideally, is collective self-destiny. On a world scale, democracy is global self-governance. Locke's universalism is most evident in his discussion of world democracy, for which "internationalism" appears to be a synonym. World democracy is really the logical and pragmatic expansion of the democratic principle, from a national to truly international level. "[W]orld democracy," writes Locke, "presupposes the recognition of the essential equality of all peoples and the potential parity of all cultures."<sup>65</sup> On a radio program, "Woman's Page of the Air," with Adelaide Hawley, broadcast 6 August 1944 while World War II was at its height, Locke said: "Just as the foundation of democracy as a national principle made necessary the declaration of the basic equality of persons, so the founding of international democracy must guarantee the basic equality of human groups."<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, Locke noted, "we must find common human denominators of liberty, equality, and fraternity for humanity at large."<sup>67</sup> In the quest to universalize democracy, "color becomes the acid test of our fundamental honesty in putting into practice the democracy we preach."<sup>68</sup>

Exploring the relationship between America and world democracy, Locke postulated that "World leadership [ . . . ] must be moral leadership in democratic concert with humanity at large."<sup>69</sup> In so doing, America must perform "abandon racial and cultural prejudice."<sup>70</sup> "A world democracy," wrote Locke, "cannot possibly tolerate what a national democracy has countenanced too long."<sup>71</sup> This is an unmistakable allusion to America and racism.

Conclusions: Alain Locke's philosophy of democracy is unfinished, for the simple reason that he did not systematize it, much less apply it.

Superficially, if one accepts the multidimensional nature of Locke's theory of democracy, it appears, at best, to be descriptive. Yet there is a prescriptive element as well. This aspect of Locke's thinking has yet to be fully developed. If one reads his writings closely, the prescriptive element falls into focus. To sharpen the focus, let us take the following statement from "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," as a point of departure

!65. Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy*, p. 14.

!66. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-105, Folder 33: [re: America's position in world affairs in relation to race.] Speech over station KMYR, Denver. 6 August 1944, p. 6.

! . Locke, "The Unfinished Business of Democracy," p. 455.

! . Ibid., p. 456.

! . Ibid., p. 459.

! . Ibid.

! . Locke, "Democracy Faces a World Order," p. 128.

! 42 Studies in Bahá'í  
Philosophy

for the formulaic prescriptive application of Locke's theory of democracy on a systematic, yet theoretically practical level:

[T]hree working principles seem to be derivable for a more objective and scientific understanding of human cultures and for the more reasonable control of their interrelationships. They are:

1. The principle of cultural equivalence, under which we would more wisely press the search for functional similarities in our analyses and comparisons of human cultures . . . . Such functional equivalences, which we might term "culture-cognates" or "culture-correlates," discovered underneath deceptive but superficial institutional divergence, would provide objective but soundly neutral common denominators for intercultural understanding and cooperation;
2. The principle of cultural reciprocity, which, by a general recognition of the reciprocal character of all contacts between cultures and of the fact that all modern cultures are highly composite ones, would . . . [provide] scientific, point-by-point comparisons with their correspondingly limited, specific, and objectively verifiable superiorities or inferiorities;
3. The principle of limited cultural convertibility, that, since culture elements, though widely interchangeable, are so separable, the institutional forms from their values and the values from their institutional forms, the organic selectivity and assimilative capacity of a borrowing culture becomes a limiting criterion for cultural exchange.<sup>72</sup>

In simpler terms, Locke's prescriptive paradigm proposes a three-step

process: (1) Correlate (by a method of formal comparison, identify “functional equivalences” as possible “common denominators”); (2) Confirm (by objectively making “point-by-point comparisons,” verify the reciprocal character of such “culture-correlates,” thereby reaching a common understanding); and (3) Convert (by justifying mutual acceptance of comparable values, promote intercultural exchange and collaboration). The result would be as follows:

Through functional [1] comparison a much more constructive phase of cultural relativism seems to be developing, promising the discovery of some less arbitrary and more objective norms. Upon

! . Alain Locke, “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace,” in *The Works of*

Alain Locke, ed. Charles Molesworth (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 548–54 (550–551).

Alain Locke’s *Philosophy of Democracy*

4! 3

them, perhaps we can build sounder intercultural [2] understanding and promote a more equitable [3] collaboration between cultures.<sup>73</sup>

What Locke calls for is “an objective comparative analysis on a world scale of our major culture values.”<sup>74</sup> This can be done dimension-by-dimension – in local, moral, political, economic, cultural, interracial, social, spiritual, global, intellectual, natural, practical, and creative contexts. Locke’s proposed method has never been rigorously tested. This quest for intercultural exchange, recognition and cooperation is part and parcel of what Locke called “reciprocity.” In and of itself, reciprocity is not a method of conflict resolution per se, but is a means of cultural diplomacy that promotes peaceful interchange.

In fine, Locke’s formula for ideal intercommunal relations (with a democracy) intercultural relations (between democracies) is: (1) comparison; (2) understanding; (3) collaboration. In a dynamic mode, Locke advocates that philosophers (and other leaders of thought) compare, understand and collaborate.

Alain Locke’s philosophy of democracy does not end with his dimensional paradigm and comparative method for identifying equivalent cross-cultural values and their concomitant moral imperatives. Locke famously wrote:

All philosophies, it seems to me, are in ultimate derivation philosophies of life and not of abstract, disembodied “objective” reality; products of time, place and situation, and thus systems of timed history rather than timeless eternity. . . . In de-throning our absolutes, we must take care not to exile our imperatives, for after all, we live by them.”<sup>75</sup>

Locke’s Bahá’í-inspired vision incorporates the three “basic corporate ideas” of nation, race and religion, of which Locke speaks in his paper,

“Moral Imperatives for World Order” (1944).<sup>76</sup> Alain Locke’s prophetic words remain true today: “The moral imperatives of a new world order are an internationally limited idea of national sovereignty, a non-monopolistic and culturally tolerant concept of race and religious

<sup>73</sup>. Ibid., p. 552 (bracketed numbers and emphasis added).

<sup>74</sup>. Ibid., p. 553.

<sup>75</sup>. Alain Locke, “Values and Imperatives,” in *The Works of Alain Locke*, pp. 451–64 (451, 452).

<sup>76</sup>. Alain Locke, “The Moral Imperatives for World Order,” Summary of Proceedings, Institute of International Relations, Mills College, Oakland, CA, June 18–28, 1944, pp. 19–20. Reprinted in Leonard Harris, ed., *The Philosophy of Alain*

*Locke* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 143, 151–52.

<sup>77</sup> 44 Studies in Bahá’í

Philosophy

loyalties freed of sectarian bigotry.” In “Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy” (1942), Locke wrote that: “The intellectual core of the problems of the peace... will be the discovery of the necessary common denominators and the basic equivalences involved in a democratic world order or democracy on a world scale.”<sup>77</sup> A world democracy is a world order established on both legal and social foundations that command universal assent.

Locke inwardly felt that what America really needed was to embrace Bahá’í principles (and not necessarily the Bahá’í Faith itself). “Dr. Alain

Locke of Washington, D.C., speaking on the subject, ‘America’s Part in World Peace’,” according to a news report, “pointed out the priceless value and the great necessity of a good example if America is to perform a real service to the world.” Locke proclaimed:

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.<sup>78</sup>

Here, Locke says that Baha’i principles can contribute to the full

realization of the American ideals of democracy, which Locke characterizes as the “salvation of democracy.”

Locke’s philosophy of democracy, in essence, was to “Americanize Americans” – to realize America’s ideals in all its dimensions – locally, morally, politically, economically, culturally, interracially, socially, spiritually, globally, intellectually, naturally, practically, and creatively –

in order to further democratize democracy. “[B]ut now, it seems to me,” Locke told an audience of social workers in 1938, “the soundest, wisest

! . Alain Locke. “Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy.” Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, Second Symposium (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, 1942), p. 196–212. Reprinted in *The Philosophy of Alain Locke*, pp. 51–66 (62).

! . Harlan Ober, “The Baha’i Congress at Green Acre,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 1 (April 1925): 525, on the occasion of the “The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Baha’i Congress,” where Alain Locke delivered an invited presentation. *Alain Locke’s Philosophy of Democracy*

4! 5

and most appropriate slogan, – if we must have a slogan [–] is to [A]mericanize Americans in their social attitudes and behavior, to establish democracy in the heart of our social relations.”<sup>79</sup> Once that happens, America could have the requisite moral authority to adopt its “world role.”<sup>80</sup>

Locke’s philosophy of democracy was his signal contribution to the “salvation of democracy,” from race relations to international relations, in connecting economic values with human values, and in predicating all other dimensions of democracy on the health and vitality of “spiritual democracy,” which Baha’i teachings enrich with its wealth of principles of unity, <sup>81</sup> from family relations to international relations, and from local democracy to world democracy.

Locke’s philosophy of democracy is no mere taxonomy, for it implicates a corresponding teleology. In fine, Locke’s teleology is his moral imperative calling on philosophers (and other leaders of thought) prove worthy of their philosophical salt by endeavoring to (1) find “common denominators” (2) to reach common ground (3) to achieve a common purpose, i.e. for the commonweal, or greater good, of humanity. Grounded in values, Locke’s philosophy expands notions of democracy as a predicate for cosmopolitan social principles. Simply put, Locke’s call to compare, concur, and collaborate is another of Locke’s “Moral Imperatives for World Order” (to borrow the title of the essay cited in

Note 76, supra). This process dynamically links “Values and Imperatives” (to invoke the title of the essay cited in Note 75, supra), for “for after all, we live by them.”

Independent Scholar (formerly, Michigan State University)

! . Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 (“The Preservation of the Democratic Ideal”), p. 5.

! . Alain Locke, “Democracy Faces a World Order,” p. 126.

! . See Christopher Buck, “Fifty Baha’i Principles of Unity: A Paradigm of Social

Salvation.” *Baha’i Studies Review* 18 (2012): 3–44 (published June 2015).

<http://>

[dx.doi.org/10.1386/bsr.18.3/1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/bsr.18.3/1).

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/intellect/bsr/>

2012/00000018/00000001/art00001. See also <http://bahai-library.com/>

buck\_unity\_social\_salvation. Accessed 2 August 2015. For a different

configuration,

see idem, “50 Baha’i Principles of Unity: From Individual to International Relations,”

[BahaiTeachings.org](http://BahaiTeachings.org) (June 10, 2014), at

<http://bahaiteachings.org/50-bahai-principles->

[of-unity-from-individual-to-international-relations](http://bahaiteachings.org/50-bahai-principles-of-unity-from-individual-to-international-relations) (accessed 12 Sept. 2015).

— Alain Locke's Philosophy of Democracy (Used by permission of the curator)