

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bahá'ís of Washington, D.C., commemorate 1912 race unity speech at Howard University

Washington D.C., April 1, 2018 — On April 23, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá – son of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh – visited Howard University's Rankin Chapel to address a diverse audience on the need for racial unity. More than a century later, the Bahá'í community of Washington, D.C., will commemorate this historic occasion on April 22 with an event honoring 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call to eliminate prejudice and establish harmony among all peoples.

The program will take place from **3 to 4:30 p.m. in the Main Gymnasium of the Thurgood Marshall Center for Service and Heritage, 1816 12th Street, NW**. A reception will follow the program. The event will feature keynote speaker [Anthony Vance](#), director of the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs. It will also include musical performances, writings on race unity and dramatic monologues by actors portraying Pocahontas Pope, the first African-American Bahá'í in Washington, D.C., and Alaine Locke, “the dean” of the Harlem Renaissance. The public is invited to attend.

This annual commemoration usually takes place in Howard University's Rankin Chapel, but due to ongoing repairs to the chapel, it is fitting that the event will be held at a community center honoring Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall, a champion of justice who graduated from the Howard University School of Law.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Bahá'í Faith's leading exponent and an ambassador for international peace, told the audience gathered at Rankin Chapel: “I am very happy to see you and thank God that this meeting is composed of people of both races and that both are gathered in perfect love and harmony. I hope this becomes the example of universal harmony and love until no title remains except that of humanity.”

On May 4, 1912, The Chicago Defender ran a story on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Washington, D.C., entitled “To Break the Color Line: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Great Persian Philosopher and Teacher, Aims to Unite the Peoples of All Races and Creeds in One Great Bond of Brotherhood.” This speech was one of hundreds 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave during his extensive travels throughout North America and Europe before returning to his residence in what is now Haifa, Israel.

Today, Bahá'ís and others in Washington and around the world meet regularly in homes and public places to have spiritual conversations, meetings and classes – breaking barriers of social status, race and culture. Through these gatherings, Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the oneness of humanity is proving an antidote to the racial prejudice and materialism corroding American society.

“Racism is the most vital and challenging issue facing America,” said Dr. Jennifer Chapman, chairperson of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Washington, D.C. “Ignoring it has only exposed our country to physical, moral and spiritual danger. In order to secure peace and well-being in our country and in the world, we must come together and recognize each other as spiritual brothers and sisters, no matter our skin color or background.”

To learn more, visit <https://www.dcbahai.org>, <https://www.bahai.us> and <http://www.bahai.org/es>.

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About the Bahá'í Community of Washington, D.C.

The [Bahá'í community of Washington, D.C.](#) strives to put the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith into practice through active community building. Throughout Washington, D.C., nearly 1,000 people from all belief backgrounds participate in more than 100 activities organized by the local Bahá'í community. The community welcomes all to Sunday morning programs, devotional gatherings, children's classes, study groups and junior youth empowerment programs. Through these local endeavors, the D.C. Bahá'í community creates environments where diversity is celebrated and young people are inspired to practice virtues and render service to others.

The Bahá'ís of D.C. have a strong legacy of working to build racial unity. In 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, spoke about interracial harmony at Howard University's Rankin Chapel, marking one of the earliest racially integrated gatherings in the city. Prominent African-American Bahá'ís spent formative years in D.C., including Alain Locke, “the dean” of the Harlem Renaissance; Louis Gregory, a Howard-educated attorney; Robert Turner, the first African-American Bahá'í; and Helen Elsie Austin, a U.S. foreign service officer and the first African-American woman to serve as assistant attorney general in Ohio.

About the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'u'lláh, (1817-1892), whose name means “The Glory of God,” is considered by millions around the world as the divine educator for this age, whose coming was foretold by all of the divine messengers of the past. In his writings, Bahá'u'lláh outlines a framework for the development of a global civilization centered around the recognition of the oneness of humanity, offering a compelling vision of a future world defined by justice, peace and prosperity.

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the successive founders of the world's religions – among them Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ and Muhammad – are manifestations of God, who each brought a message suited to the age and place in which it was revealed. In essence, the religion of God is one and is progressively unfolding. The international Bahá'í community, numbering more than 5 million, is quite possibly the most diverse organized body of people on the planet. In fewer than 200 years, it has become a global faith present in every country in the world with adherents from virtually every national and religious background, including about 2,100 indigenous tribes, races and ethnic groups.