

LOUIS GREGORY: Golden-Hearted Promoter of Justice

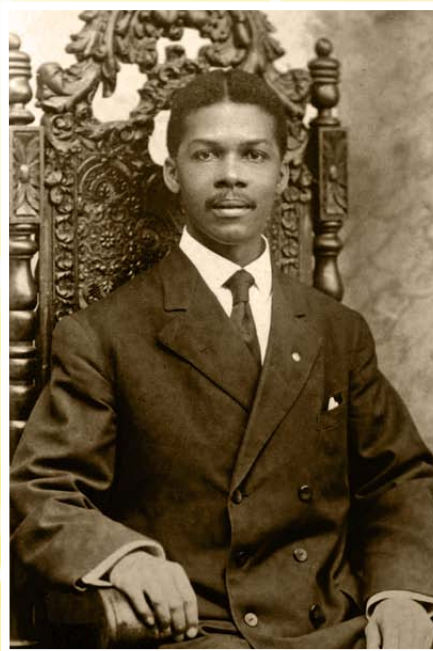
What do you think your life would be like if your parents and grandparents had been slaves? Louis Gregory was born in 1874, just nine years after his mother and grandmother were freed from slavery at the end of the U.S. Civil War. His father died of tuberculosis when Louis was small. His mother worked as a tailor to support Louis and his brother.

Louis's family stayed strong in the face of poverty, suffering, and injustice. His grandfather was killed by the Ku Klux Klan, a white terrorist group. But his grandmother refused to be filled with hatred. She helped teach Louis to face challenges with courage and dignity.

In 1881, his mother married George Gregory, who was supportive and became "a real father" to Louis. He encouraged Louis to get the best education possible.

"Changed for the Better"

After high school, Louis earned a bachelor's degree from Fisk University in Tennessee. He was one of very few African Americans to achieve this goal at the time. He soon decided to be a lawyer. There were few opportunities for African Americans to study law, but Louis was able to earn his law degree from Howard University



Louis Gregory wrote, "Wherever in the world today there is hatred of class for class, nation for nation, race for race, tragedy lurks."

in Washington, D.C., in 1902. He practiced law in Washington and also worked for 10 years in the U.S. Treasury Department.

Like many of his peers, Louis was concerned about the common injustice and violence toward African Americans. He spoke out against racial segregation and promoted equal rights.

Louis had sought religious truth, but had given up hope of finding it. Then he heard about the Bahá'í Faith and felt drawn to its teachings on racial equality. After studying the Faith for more than a year, he became a Bahá'í in 1909 at age 35.

He said that because of the Bahá'í Faith, "my whole nature seems changed for the better."

Working for Race Unity

In 1911, Louis traveled to Egypt to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leader of the Bahá'í Faith at that time. 'Abdu'l-Bahá urged him to work for unity and harmony between the races.

Louis did just that. He traveled throughout the U.S. speaking about the Bahá'í Faith and race unity. He was a powerful speaker. In 1916, Louis gave up his law practice to travel and speak full-time.

Louis married Louisa Matthew, a white English Bahá'í, in 1912. Interracial marriage was uncommon in the U.S. and even against the law in many areas, so they often couldn't travel together safely. They had long, difficult periods of separation.

Louis and Louisa finally retired to Maine in 1946. Louis passed away in 1951. Shoghi Effendi, who led the Bahá'í Faith after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, wrote that he grieved the "loss of dearly beloved, noble-minded, golden-hearted Louis Gregory . . ." He appointed Louis a Hand of the Cause of God.* Today, several schools are named for Louis, including the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute in South Carolina, and his childhood home is now a museum.