

DAVID KELLUM: Marching for Unity

David Kellum understood the importance of race unity. Around 1917, when he was about 14, a group of white kids attacked him in his hometown in Mississippi. That very night, David's grandmother put him on a train to Chicago, so he could live with an aunt in the north.

While in high school, David joined the ROTC* and became the first African-American Cadet Major in the program. In 1921, he married Annie Mae Stewart. David went on to study journalism at Northwestern University, near Chicago. In 1923, he put his skills to work for the *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper that promoted racial equality during a time when segregation was commonplace. David worked his way up to city editor.

Sadly, Annie died in 1924, after giving birth to their only son, James.

Connecting Kids

David devoted much of his energy to educating kids about unity. At the *Defender*, he promoted a club for kids called the Bud Billiken Club. David often portrayed Bud Billiken, a fictional character who encouraged kids to be honest, listen to their parents, serve their communities, and treat all people with respect.



David Kellum promoted unity and justice for all people through his work as a journalist for the *Chicago Defender*.

David wrote that Bud's purpose was "to bring the children of the world closer together and show that all the world is kin." He said that the club was "the only organization of its kind in the world."

By 1930, more than 65,000 kids had joined. The club connected kids with pen pals around the world. When his son received letters from friends in other countries, David told him, "This is the way it's supposed to be."

The *Defender* organized a variety of events for the Bud Billiken Club. David was a director and grand marshal of the Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic, which grew to become

the second largest parade in the U.S. It's still held in August every year and is attended by more than a million people. Celebrities involved in the parade have included President Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, and many others.

In His Honor

In 1955, David married a Bahá'í named Kathelynea Ford. She taught David about the Faith, and he became a Bahá'í in 1963. David gave public talks at the Bahá'í House of Worship and Race Unity Day events, and he served as chairman of the Chicago Spiritual Assembly, the governing council for the city's Bahá'í community. He also received many awards for community service over the years.

David passed away in 1981. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S. praised David's "OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS AS A JOURNALIST AND HUMANITARIAN . . ."

The Assembly created the David Kellum Awards. They were given annually for more than 20 years to individuals or organizations who, like David, were "positive role models for youth of all races" and who contributed "outstanding lasting service to the community."