

# SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

## Coralie Franklin Cook (1861–1942)



When Coralie Franklin Cook was born in Virginia in 1861, slavery was still legal in the U.S. Her ancestors had been enslaved by Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president, and her parents were born into slavery. She deeply understood the devastating impact of racism. She became a gifted writer and public speaker and used her incredible talents to work for racial justice.

### Devoted to Learning

Coralie believed strongly in the power of education. She graduated from Storer College in West Virginia in 1880, then taught English and speech there. In 1898, she married George William Cook, a dean and professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Coralie joined the Howard faculty and became the Chair of Oratory. They had one son, George Jr.

Howard was one of only a few universities that welcomed Black students. The Cooks helped make it a place where people of color and their ideas could grow. Coralie focused on empowering female students and providing positive role models.

Coralie's passion for education led to her role as the second Black woman to serve on the Washington, D.C., Board of Education. She also helped found the National Association of Colored Women, where she advocated for women's right to vote and fair opportunities for all African Americans. She gave dynamic speeches about gender and racial equality.

Coralie and George learned about the Bahá'í Faith, and they soon began hosting Bahá'í meetings on campus. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leader of the Faith, spoke at Howard University in 1912, the Cooks helped to organize the event.

Coralie became a Bahá'í the following year, and her husband enthusiastically supported her faith. Her dedication to racial justice continued. She participated in race amity conferences, wrote articles, and spoke publicly, encouraging Bahá'ís to be champions of equality. When she visited Green Acre Bahá'í School in Maine, U.S., she was inspired by the love she witnessed there. She wrote, "The dominant note was spiritual love and unity manifested in real fellowship."

### Champion of Justice

But racial segregation caused tremendous harm throughout the U.S.—even in Bahá'í communities. Despite 'Abdu'l-Bahá's clear guidance and example of unity, some Bahá'ís wanted separate meetings for the different races. Coralie was deeply concerned about this. She firmly believed that the Bahá'í teachings were the answer to healing racism.

In 1914, Coralie wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and described the crisis of racism in America. She wrote, "Race relationship . . . is in a deplorable condition." She noted that many churches had closed their doors to Black people, and she called on her fellow Bahá'ís to support integration and "stand by the teachings though it requires superhuman courage . . ."

Coralie persevered in her work for justice until her passing in 1942 at age 80. She once said, "I *must* in *word* and *deed* teach the Oneness of Humanity." Using her powerful public speaking and leadership skills, she fulfilled her goal. She shared the Bahá'í teachings of unity widely and inspired many to join her in creating lasting change.