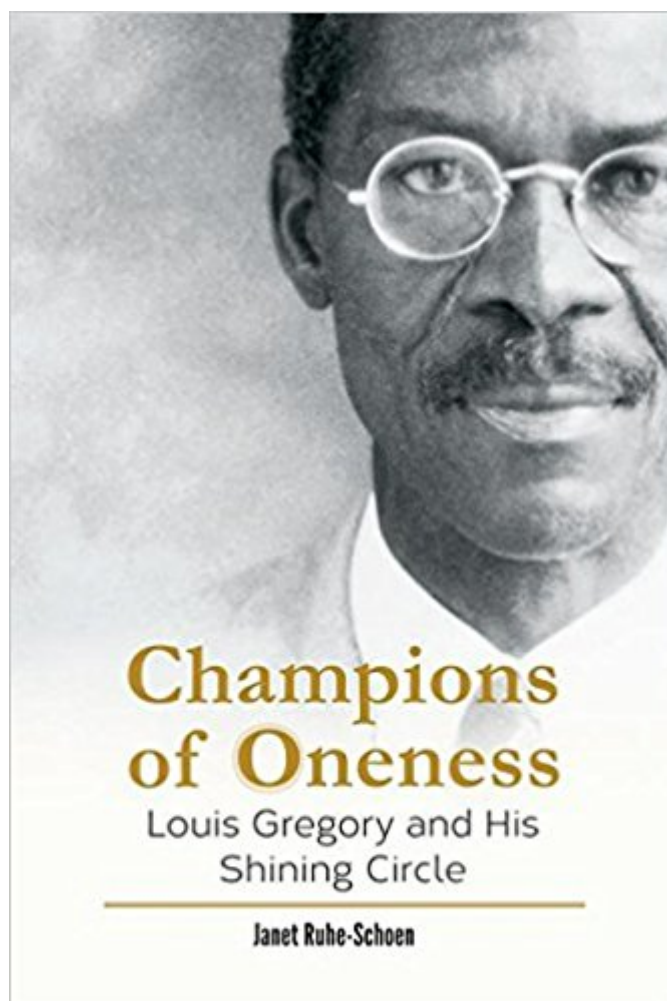


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Champions Of Oneness: Louis Gregory And His Shining Circle



Synopsis

Champions of Oneness tells the story of outstanding Bahai teachers during the early years of the twentieth century 1898-1911. Nearly all of them had the fortune of meeting, at one time or another, Abdul-Baha, the son of Bahauallah. Their meetings with Abdul-Baha would inspire them to teach the Faith of Bahauallah in the United States. This act of service often led them to encounter great suffering at the hands of those who resisted change and wanted the old way of doing things to remain the same. Racism, sexism, and economic inequality were only a few of the hardships these brave men and women had to suffer. Prominent among them was Louis Gregory, who embodied the suffering and triumphs that African Americans experienced during this time, and a group of outstanding Bahai's his shining circle who accompanied him in righting the wrongs of this period. This book is their story a story of suffering as well as triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. As racial prejudice, gender prejudice, and economic hardship continue to plague the United States, it is hoped that the biographies of these brave men and women will inspire Americans today to champion justice and equality in their daily lives.

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Customer Reviews

Janet Ruhe-Schoen has written an incredible biography about Louis Gregory, an early Baha'i, a distinguished man, whose early roots were from the Deep South, a part of the United States which from the 1600s into the 1860s thrived economically due to slave labor. Louis Gregory's grandmother was stolen from Africa; she survived the brutality of the slave ship. Louis was one generation

removed from slavery; he had always been free, and he was influenced by his grandmother's "It's better to be lighthearted than brokenhearted.." He was born in 1874 in Charleston, South Carolina, and the family was poor, but his parents were literate. He was the son and grandson of slaves, and a grandson of George Washington Dargan, a descendant of Irish immigrants. Dargan was a lawyer, judge, and state senator. When Louis was nine, the Supreme court threw out the Civil rights Act, allowing the southern states to legislate segregation. Louis later studied law at Howard University. As he entered his thirties, he felt traumatized by white terror, and had dismissed searching for truth. At the time of his greatest despair and anger, Louis began working in the U. S. Treasury Department. One of his co-workers became a Baha'i, and Louis was not interested. One cold and stormy night he went to a meeting, and met a petite young white person, and she shared the message of the Teachings of Baha'u'llah (Glory of God) and the teachings of a Faith whose goal was unity and the oneness of mankind. A lot of his friends thought he had become mentally unbalanced when he began calling himself a Baha'i. He was a prominent member of the black community in Washington D.C.. W. E. B. DuBois considered Louis an ally and colleague. People warned him he was damaging his chances of a good career, The Washington Bee printed two full columns bashing his choice of Faith. He met insults and opposition with tremendous patience and a few people became curious about the Baha'i Faith. The story continues, as to how the early Baha'i community in Washington, D.C. matured and learned to have interracial gatherings; a key part of this wonderful biography is Louis' trip to the Holy Land to visit with Abdu'l-Baha, son of Baha'u'llah. (Baha'i.org a good reference point) He would be recreated in a spiritual sense from his time with "the Master" as Abdu'l-Baha was lovingly called, and he would meet a young woman Louisa Matthews and they formed a strong friendship. Louisa also embraced the Faith. She was English and grew up in England, a more cosmopolitan world. Louisa attended Cambridge and taught English as a second language. They both were visiting the Holy Land at the same time. Then she and Louis corresponded. They met again in America. Abdu'l Baha (a title which means Servant of God) nudged Louis about marrying Louisa. Louis was shaken by this suggestion, as in some part of the United States, interracial marriage was a felony and could result in imprisonment. Not only imprisonment was a danger, but also mob violence, major insults, and owning property and living together. Louis was receptive to the principle of oneness and proud of being a black American. Louisa was sure of her strong feelings, and they became engaged. They married quietly in New York City. This marriage was a momentous event. As a Baha'i, I read this book avidly; certainly racism exists in its pernicious ways today, but racial unity, racial amity and just a general horror and weariness at hatred and prejudice calls upon Baha'is to consider racial prejudice as "the most vital

and challenging issue" in our country, and of course intermarriage has flourished amongst the Baha'is. As I eagerly inhaled every phrase and gulped up insight into the lives of the early Baha'is, loving all of them so deeply, I felt a divine sweetness amongst the pages, and of course, my soul aspired to be like them. We Baha'is are to be anxiously concerned with the exigencies of our days, and we translate our beliefs into service to humanity, and our banner is unity in diversity. We strive to be servants and champions of oneness. I consider this book profound and superbly written. I can't praise it enough, and will begin to shout its praises to my friends. So a giant thank you to its author Janet Ruhe-Schoen. The lives of all those written about nest in my heart. We gain strength from each other and also from those gone on to the other Worlds of God. I highly recommend this book.

Janet Ruhe-Schoen did a wonderful job as a historian and a writer. She dug into the memoirs, letters, books, archives, and official correspondence surrounding Louis Gregory's life and the early development of the Baha'i Faith in America; and she made his story, and the lives of the pioneers he came in contact with, come alive. What came out most clearly was the vast difference we have today in racial acceptance versus the racial intolerance of the early 1900s when Jim Crow laws defined life in the South and a more quiet, but still rampant, racism was dominant in the North. As I read further into *Champions of Oneness*, I increasingly marveled at the dedication and bravery of the small number of Baha'i pioneers who spread the Faith in America. This is a terrific book that anyone interested in the development of the Baha'i Faith should absolutely read.

Inspiring look at early Baha'is and their efforts to reconcile Black and White. Last 15% of the book is about Doris McKay which is unexpected but tied nicely to Louis Gregory's story. Read this book, lots of memorable aphorisms like "absorption is happiness."

This is a companion piece to a book many of us have loved "A Love That Cannot Wait" about nine early American Baha'is--eight of them women!--who performed sacrificial and even heroic services for the refreshing new Faith. This work focuses on Louis Gregory, the second black American Baha'i, who was posthumously appointed to the highest individual station among Baha'is, a Hand of the Cause of God. Associated with him was another handful of transformed people--some overlapping from the first group--all coming to embody the truth that to be a Baha'i was to be free of racial prejudice, "the most challenging issue" in American society. What particularly connects the two books is a theme of immense significance in the context of religious history: the presence in

America of a new Faith's Promoter, as if Joshua, Peter or Ali had come to the States and mingled here for nine months as did 'Abdu'l-Baha, the appointed son of Baha'u'llah. His influence was deeply transformative on those He met, sometimes even when it was a casual encounter. The nature of these two groups of Baha'is testifies to a regenerative Divine energy flowing through a new Revelation. Ruhe-Schoen's sprightly-solemn style is equal to the task, demonstrating in its buoyancy and sparkle the lovable eccentricity of these individuals, raised up as individuals but also as agents of oneness and community. This book is more personal than the first, a fact which gives an added dimension in structure and texture, for the book opens with an account of Janet as a hippy-style seeker in the sixties sitting rapturously at the feet of elderly Baha'is in the northeast, and comes full circle to a moving view of Doris McKay as aging widow striving to establish the Faith on Prince Edward Island and finally, after decades of "friendly indifference," attracting bands of young people fascinated by her vision of a glorious future. Part of the hope Doris represents is that she, nearly alone among the two groups of sterling Baha'is, has not actually met 'Abdu'l-Baha. The others have been able to convey the energies of the Faith, transforming an avowed racist with roots in the south into a true champion of oneness. Ruhe-Schoen's book, too, is a delicious fruit springing from a tree planted long before her birth.

This is a wonderful book! Well written, it brings these early pioneers in the promotion of the oneness of mankind to life. It provides an excellent glimpse into the challenges of racism. Truly inspiring!

This is an important book for us all, and I thank author Janet Ruhe-Schoen over and over for writing it. It is a tribute to all those who've arisen at great sacrifice to promote the oneness of mankind, as well as to those who've struggled to overcome their prejudices and embrace the urgency, the vitality, the mandate, and the essence of the oneness of mankind.

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