

## 239 DAYS ...

Is a series of essays which in daily segments chronicle 'Abdu'l-Baha's historic visit to North America from April 11 to December 5, 1912. This inspired documentary was written and compiled by Robert Sockett, Jonathan Menon, Morella Menon, Caitlin Shayda Jones, Tony Michel and Corey Tamas to mark the Centenary of these blessed days in human history.

Rarely has there been a more vivid and detailed reporting of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Mission to the West. Supported by countless eye-witness accounts, newspaper articles and many rare photographs, the reader is invited into 'Abdu'l-Baha's audience and relives some of the most memorable days of Baha'i history. What we are reading is not some abstract philosophical narrative, but a down-to-earth response by 'Abdu'l-Baha to America's and the world's many pressing problems.

The Master's clear and forthright approach should guide our own teaching efforts a century later. From the initial fake news which wrongly announced that all aboard the "Titanic" had been rescued, to the struggle of Suffragettes and the emancipation of the black man; from conversations with government officials, churchmen and educators to those with scientists and eminent benefactors, every single contact, every public address by 'Abdu'l-Baha, planted a seed for greater harmony and peace among all men.

'Abdu'l-Baha focused His remaining energies on North America to proclaim His Father's Message. Before the advent of air travel and instant global communications, 'Abdu'l-Baha perhaps recognized in America a microcosm, a pattern for a future humanity, where people of every race and creed attempt to build a universal society. The Message of 1912 with all its pleas and warnings is repeated here clearly written and makes us part of His audience. 100 years later, He waits for our response to His insistent summons. Originally published on web site [www.239days.com](http://www.239days.com) this documentary was in daily installments. Here the study is presented as a single document in PDF format. Its search feature allows us to find reports and quotations on any topic, person or place and also makes it easy to re-visit certain sections. The file can be loaded into any computer, tablet, smart phone or E-reader and font size.

Harry Liedtke, 2022

APRIL 11, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Arrives in America

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 11, 2012



A postcard of the SS *Cedric* with a steam cutter pulling alongside. (Raphael Tuck & Sons)

THE LADDER THEY DROPPED was made of thick rope with hard wooden slats for rungs. Wendell Phillips Dodge clung to it for dear life, twenty-five feet above the frigid waters of the bay. Beneath him a small steamship, a revenue cutter of the United States Treasury, rose and fell with the waves. Above him the sky surrendered to the black iron hull of a 21,000-ton oceangoing passenger liner, the *Cedric* of the White Star Line, which lay at anchor off Staten Island after steaming for sixteen days from Alexandria, Egypt. Its cargo: thousands of men, women, and children bound for New York.

Years from now he would be the press agent for David Belasco, America’s leading theatrical producer. But today Dodge was just a reporter, twenty-eight years old last August. He had hopped an early cutter at the ship news office in the Battery on this sparkling morning — April 11, 1912 — so he could get to the quarantine station on Staten Island before the *Cedric* passed the Narrows about 8 a.m. But typhoid fever and smallpox in the steerage had delayed the ship for

three-and-a-half hours, while health inspectors offloaded 200 third-class passengers to the hospital on Hoffman Island and fumigated the ship. Now, just before noon, as he climbed the forty-seven feet to the *Cedric*'s main deck, Dodge could see dozens of tugs, barges, and ferries plying the harbor's expanse. The great skyscrapers — some of them more than twenty storeys high — had been reduced to a shadow rising half an inch above the northern horizon. He scrambled aboard, made his way through the passengers milling on deck, and set off to find his subject.



'Abdu'l-Bahá aboard the *Cedric* on the crossing from Alexandria. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Dodge found the visitor standing on the deep forward balcony of the *Cedric*'s upper deck behind the pilothouse, surveying the panorama of the bay. He wore a long black cloak covering a robe of light tan: the colors identical to the *Cedric*'s massive twin funnels that towered above the ship behind him. His iron-grey head, capped with a white turban, was thrown back atop his shoulders like the rising steam. A cool wind came off the water and whipped around 'Abdu'l-Bahá. To one side stood a short Persian man wearing intense dark eyes, a thick handlebar moustache and a black fez, waiting for him to speak. He was Dr. Ameen Fareed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's translator. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was already a well-known voice in the international peace movement. One reason he had crossed the ocean was to speak at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in May. He greeted the reporters and then invited them to join him in his stateroom. They crammed in, then peppered him with questions. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá finished each sentence he waited for Fareed to interpret before moving on to the next one.

*“Is it not possible that peace can become the means of trouble and war the means of progress?”* one of the reporters asked.

“No,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied. “It is war which is today the cause of all trouble. If all would lay down their arms, they would be freed from all difficulties and every misery would be changed into relief.” “What the people earn through hard labor is extorted from them by the governments and spent for purposes of war.”

The reporters in dark coats and derby hats jostled for space in the small first-class suite: it was a tiny space for a press conference. White wood paneling covered the upper walls of the sitting room, contrasting with dark wainscoting below. Through the door, in the sleeping cabin, a painted chrome bed frame occupied a quarter of the space, supporting a long narrow mattress. A small writing desk and chair stood next to it along the back wall, beside a tall, skinny armoire topped with a rectangular mirror. Along the opposite wall a long low sofa tucked itself under the window. An oriental rug covered the few remaining square feet of floor.



The quarantine station on Staten Island, from a postcard mailed in 1907. (Collection of Maggie Blanck, [www.maggieblanck.com](http://www.maggieblanck.com))

*“What is your attitude toward woman suffrage?”* another reporter asked. Emmeline Pankhurst’s hunger strike in London was all over the news.

“The modern suffragette is fighting for what must be,” Abdu’l-Bahá answered. “If women were given the same advantages as men, their capacity being the same, the result would be the same.”

Only the sound of scratching pencils interrupted the stream of words.

“The chief cause of the mental and physical inequalities of the sexes is due to custom and training, which for ages past have molded woman into the ideal of the weaker vessel.”

The *Cedric* started her engines for the final cruise up the bay. As she steamed north the city rose to meet her.



Back out on deck ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reached out toward the gigantic statue that now stood off to port, robed in green weathered copper, clutching a torch, and wearing a pointed crown. “Here is the new world’s symbol of liberty and freedom,” he said.

“After being forty years a prisoner I can tell you that freedom is not a matter of place. It is a condition. . . . When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed a release.”



The skyline of lower Manhattan in 1910. (Library of Congress)

As the ship steamed up the Hudson, the journalists watched ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turn to starboard. He directed their attention to the cluster of towers in lower Manhattan ruled by the Singer Sewing Machine Building, the second-tallest building in the world. “These are the minarets of Western World commerce and industry,” he said. “The bricks make the house, and if the bricks are bad the house will not stand, as these do.”

Wendell Dodge scribbled away, taking down ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s concluding words for his story: “It is necessary for individuals to become as good bricks, to eradicate from themselves race and religious hatred, greed and a limited patriotism, so that, whether they find themselves guiding the government or founding a home, the result of their efforts may be peace and prosperity, love and happiness.”

After a trip of twenty-five minutes or so, the *Cedric* reached Pier 59 at the end of West 18th Street on the north edge of Greenwich Village, where several hundred people awaited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Wendell Dodge left to file his story. It was syndicated by the Associated Press and wired, in shortened form, to news outlets across the country. When readers the next day picked up the *New York Times* or *Tribune*, the *Detroit Herald*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Chicago Post*, the *Los Angeles Herald*, or any one of dozens of other newspapers, they became among the first Americans to learn that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was here.

DAY 2  
APRIL 12, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: New Yorker

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 12, 2012

THE CITY WAS ON THE MOVE. Thousands of people streamed across the East River, over the Williamsburg Bridge toward Brooklyn. It was rush hour, and they were walking home after a long workday in the factories and workshops, the laundries, shops, and offices of Manhattan.



Manhattan from the Brooklyn tower of the Williamsburg Bridge, about 1903. (Library of Congress)

New York is a “beehive,” a reporter heard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá say. He watched the marching masses through the left, backseat window of his car as it sped back across the bridge to Manhattan. To the southeast, beneath the afternoon sun, he could see the new battleship, the USS *New York*, in

dry dock at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. They had laid her keel last September. Her shiny hull flashed in glimpses through the trusses of the bridge like a motion picture film.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had just addressed a private audience of 300 people at the home of Howard and Mary MacNutt at 935 Eastern Parkway, a major east-west artery in Brooklyn. He had spoken from the bright stairway beneath a stained-glass window – the only redeeming feature in a reputedly ugly house. He had talked of war.

Peace, after all, was one of the reasons ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had come to America.



The USS *New York* under construction at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in early 1912. The Williamsburg Bridge is in the distance. (Library of Congress)

“Consider the sad picture of Italy carrying war into Tripoli,” he had said. “If you should announce that Italy was a barbarous nation and not Christian, this would be vehemently denied. But would Christ sanction what they are doing in Tripoli?”

It was a friendly crowd: some of them were Bahá’ís.

“No less bitter is the conflict between sects and denominations,” he continued. “To be a Christian is not merely to bear the name of Christ and say, ‘I belong to a Christian government.’ To be a real Christian is . . . to go forth under his banner of peace and love toward all mankind, to be self-sacrificing.”

To illustrate, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá drew an analogy between human society and the structure of matter. “If the atoms which compose the kingdom of the minerals were without affinity for each other,” he said, “the universe could not have been created. When this attraction or atomic affinity is destroyed, the power of life ceases to manifest; death and nonexistence result.”

“The purpose of man’s creation is, therefore, unity and harmony, not discord and separateness.”



The Cooper Union on Third Avenue, next to the El train tracks.  
This postcard was sent in 1912.  
(ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com)

The Manhattan end of the Williamsburg Bridge empties onto Delancey Street in the East Village, and here the car now stopped. Dozens of children approached to find out who this man was with the grey beard and the strange clothes. Then they turned north on Bowery, rode through the late afternoon shadows beneath the rumble and clack of the 3rd Avenue El trains, visited the Cooper Union's ornate brownstone, and, after a few more stops, motored back up Broadway to the Hotel Ansonia at 73rd Street, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá resided. The drive had made him happy; he told the reporter that he was "beautifully tired."

The story of the USS *New York*, however, did not end happily. She died from friendly fire at the age of thirty-six. After escorting President Wilson to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, attending King George VI's coronation in 1937, and firing more shells at Iwo Jima than any other ship, she was put out to pasture in 1946 as a target ship for the nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll. She survived two blasts, was hauled to Pearl Harbor, was poked and prodded for two years while they studied her reactions. Then, in 1948, they towed her forty miles southwest of Pearl to be used for target practice by American navy aircraft and artillery.

She sank under bombardment at 2:30 p.m. on July 8, 1948, and there she still rests, at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, still consumed in the afterglow of atomic radiation.

DAY 3

APRIL 13, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## A Modern Man from the Middle East?

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 13, 2012

IF YOU FIRST SAW ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Hotel Ansonia, on Broadway at 73rd Street, you could be forgiven if you left with a superficial first impression.



The Hotel Ansonia, Upper West Side (1910).  
(nyc-architecture.com)

The Ansonia was the most opulent hotel in New York. Its owner, W. E. D. Stokes, declined to let anything like good taste restrain the glitz he built into it. They changed the towels, napkins, table linen, soap, and stationery three times a day. Live seals inhabited a massive fountain in the main lobby. Pneumatic tubes whisked messages between suites. During the summer, freezing brine flowed in steel pipes through the Ansonia’s three-foot thick masonry walls, making her the first air-conditioned building in the city. The world’s largest indoor swimming pool occupied the basement.

The early accounts of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in New York’s newspapers show reporters struggling — and failing — to fit this visitor into the efficient and colorful stereotypes they had crafted during almost twenty years of portraying Easterners to American audiences. At first glance it was tempting to cast ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as yet another venerable “Wise Man Out of the East,” as Wendell Dodge had. “Of course nobody could be named Baha without having a beard,” joked Nixola Greeley-Smith, a columnist for the *New York World*, “and the eternal fitness of things has seen to it that this seventy-year-old head of a new religion had the regulation prophet’s whiskers.”



But by Saturday, April 13, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s third day in America, the city’s newsrooms had already started to detect the surprising awareness that this particular Eastern “prophet” displayed concerning the ways and means of modern Western society.

“His first words,” Dodge wrote, “were about the press.” Greeley-Smith’s editors pasted an incongruent headline above her full-page article: “ABDUL BAHÁ ABBAS, HEAD OF NEW RELIGION, BELIEVES IN WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND DIVORCE.” “He says he isn’t a prophet, by the way,” she wrote.



A wintery Columbus Circle, Broadway, and Central Park West, at the park’s southwest corner. Photo by Irving Underhill, 1912. (Library of Congress)

“It would be a pity,” the *Chicago Post* chimed in, “if this habitual discounting of Eastern faiths should mean that . . . the real worth of the venerable leader of that faith should be unappreciated. Nothing could be more inept, more discreditable to our own intelligence.” His movement, they wrote, “affords a splendid scale upon which to measure Western achievements.”

“A side idea of Abdul’s is that things modern are just as good as things ancient,” piped *The Evening Mail*’s editorial page. “This makes the white-bearded and snowy-turbaned leader exactly as much at home on Broadway, in New York, as he was in the lonely cell at Acre . . . .” He is, they wrote, “the strange anomaly of an oriental mystic who believes in woman suffrage and modern development.”

“He is worth his picture in the papers.”

DAY 4  
APRIL 14, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Delivers First Public Address in America

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 14, 2012

Share<sup>89</sup>

THIRTEEN NEW YORK CHURCHES had vied to host ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first public address in America. But the Reverend Dr. Percy Stickney Grant, Rector of the Church of the Ascension at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street in Greenwich Village, wasn’t in the habit of losing.



The Church of the Ascension, Fifth Avenue and 10th Street, restored by Leo Blackman Architects. Photograph by Tom Ligamari. Used with Permission. ([www.ligamari.com](http://www.ligamari.com))\*

He was fifty-two. A mass of grey flames swept above his forehead, leaving white trails at the temples. Fervor peered out beneath a confident brow; resolve rode his ardent jawline. It was almost 11:30 a.m. on this Sunday, April 14, 1912, and Grant, engulfed in the singing voices of the choir and the thunder of the pipe organ, waited for the perfect moment in front of his congregation of 2000 people.

*“Jesus lives! for us He died;  
Then alone to Jesus living!”*

His best side was his left side, not just in the pose he struck for cameras, but also when it came to his politics. The Social Gospel movement was alive and flourishing in America. Activist churchmen led social welfare campaigns for the poor, for the equalization of wealth, for the rights of exploited workers and minorities. This was tangible Christianity writ in modern terms; Grant and his church occupied its radical center.

*“Pure in heart may we abide,  
Glory to our Savior giving.”  
“Hallelujah!”*

Grant turned away from the congregation, walked back toward the altar, and disappeared into a doorway on the right side of the sanctuary. He returned a few moments later, hand-in-hand with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Last year, Grant had stood here one Sunday and denounced ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a heathen and a threat to Christians. But today he had decked the chancel with calla lilies, and, to the right of the altar behind the railing, he had crowned the Bishop’s chair with a victor’s wreath of laurel leaves. He walked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá over to it, and, breaking the Nineteenth Canon of the Episcopal Church, invited him to be seated. Rules never stopped Percy Stickney Grant from making a point. When the organ fell silent he returned to the steps of the chancel.



The Church of the Ascension in the foreground during the late nineteenth century. (nyc-architecture.com)

“I have the honor and pleasure to welcome to this place of worship a messenger from the East,” he began. “He comes with a plan of construction and of reconstruction, and has brought to these shores a touchstone of love and of peace.”

“But, some will ask,” as indeed they already had, “‘What has he done to prove his sincerity?’ An exile from his native land from the age of nine; a prisoner for forty years, are the badges of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sincerity.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá rose, stepped forward, and replaced Grant on the chancel steps. He gazed out over the pews, packed to the aisles with parishioners, and began to speak.

“In his scriptural lesson this morning,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “the reverend doctor read a verse from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.’”

After each sentence he paused, listening carefully as his translator, Dr. Fareed, rendered his words into English. “The light of truth has heretofore been seen dimly through variegated glasses, but now the splendors of divinity shall be visible through the translucent mirrors of pure hearts and spirits.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wore a cream-colored robe and a white turban. He stood on one side of the wide chancel table with Fareed on the other. Behind them a great canvas mural by John La Farge covered the upper half of the back wall, dominating the nave. Mary Magdalene and the eleven true Disciples, dressed in red, green, and gold, watched the risen Christ soar upward into heaven among a host of angels.





"The Ascension of Our Lord," by John La Farge, 1888, oil on canvas. (ascensionnyc.com)

“

Since my arrival in this country,” he said, “I find that material civilization has progressed greatly, that commerce has attained the utmost degree of expansion; arts, agriculture and all details of material civilization have reached the highest stage of perfection, but spiritual civilization has been left behind. Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp.”

Percy Stickney Grant considered the delicate argument ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made, which resonated with his congregation. The imperative of the modern age, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared, is to establish international peace and reconciliation. Yet political power would never be equal to this task, for “the political interests of nations . . . are divergent and conflicting.” Faith in cultural and national identities would similarly fail, because “The very nature of racial differences and patriotic prejudices prevents . . . unity and agreement.” Only a new morality, rooted not in material concepts but in a holistic view of human nature, like that which Jesus taught, could establish the foundations needed for a just and unified world.

When he had finished speaking, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offered a prayer for the congregation, returned to his seat, left a bill in the collection plate, and, at Grant’s request, delivered the final benediction.

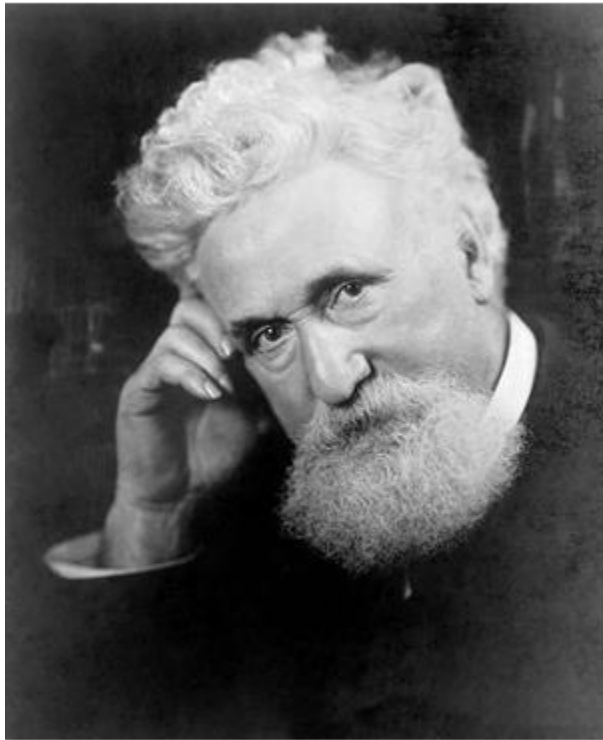
*\* We wish to offer our deepest thanks to Tom Ligamari, photographer for [Leo Blackman Architects](#), for permission to use his beautiful photograph of the restored Church of the Ascension. You can see more of [Tom's work for Leo Blackman here](#). Many thanks also to Sheryl Woodruff at the [Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation](#), for connecting us.*

DAY 5  
APRIL 15, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## An Arms Dealer Tries to Sell War to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 15, 2012

HUDSON MAXIM AWOKE with a swollen cheek and bags under his eyes. A toothache had kept him up for most of the night. He should have gone to the dentist, but there was a puzzle to solve so he went to his lab instead. With his right hand he lifted a pair of tongs to place a grey crystal of mercury fulminate in the fire. He held the next piece ready in his bare left hand: in his unpredictable line of work — explosives — Maxim knew better, but this was a sleepy morning and his painful mouth distracted him. The instant the irons in his right hand touched the flame, his left hand exploded, torn off at the wrist in a crack of pain and a flash of light.



Hudson Maxim, American chemist and inventor of smokeless explosives, about 1916. (Library of Congress)

That was eighteen years ago. Today, on April 15, 1912, the one-handed Hudson Maxim stood in the fifth-floor reception room of Suite 111 at the Hotel Ansonia, awaiting a word with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He had a bone to pick with the “prophet of peace.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá greeted him in English (“Welcome! Welcome! Very welcome!”), they exchanged pleasantries, then Maxim got down to business.

“I understand you are a messenger of peace to this country,” he began. “What is your opinion of modern war?”

“Everything that prevents war is good,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied.

War was the Maxim family business. Hiram, his elder brother, had invented the machine gun in 1883, conquering Africa for the British. At the Battle of Shangani River in Rhodesia, Maxim guns mowed down 1,500 Matabele warriors while just four Englishmen died. The younger Hudson’s claim to fame was smokeless gunpowder. Generals could now blow up the enemy without choking their own men — a major leap forward. “He has made enough high explosives to blow all the navies in the world out of water and start them well on toward the moon,” Allen Benson wrote in the *New York Times*.



“The Battle of the Shangani (25 October 1893)” by Richard Caton Woodville. (LIFE Photo Archive)

“Do you consider the next great national war necessary?” Maxim asked.

“Why not try peace for awhile?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered. “If we find war is better it will not be difficult to fight again; but if we find that peace is the glorification of humanity, the impulse of

true civilization, the stimulus to inventive genius and the means of attainment to the good-pleasure of God, we must agree to adhere to it and establish it permanently.”

Maxim tried a different tack: “Fewer are killed in modern engagements than in the battles of ancient times; the range is longer and the action less deadly.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá invited Maxim to consider the world beyond the narrow confines of the battlefield. “The possibilities are incalculable, inconceivable,” he said, “the after effects even more dreadful than the initial shock. . . . The country suffers beyond all power of estimation; agriculture is crippled, abandoned; sustenance fails, poverty and suffering continue long afterward.”



Hiram Maxim with his machine gun. It could fire more than 600 bullets per minute. (Bettman/Corbis via TheDaily.com)

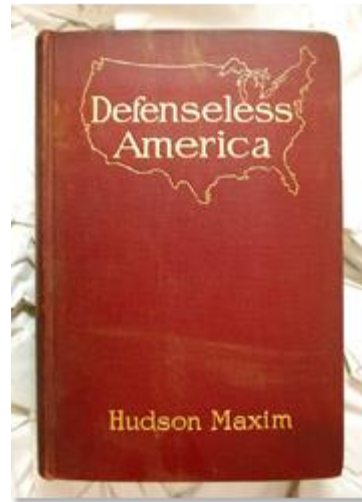
Perhaps ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would respond better to a picture. Maxim took out a pen — with the hand he hadn’t blown off — and started to draw. “The effect of a bomb,” he explained, “is not so great as expected. Most of its force is expended upward into the air. It is impossible to mass men close enough to it for a full utilization of its energy.”

Maxim’s arguments about war that morning at the Ansonia ran the gamut of nineteenth-century myth. War is human nature; conflict is an ingredient of healthy social evolution; economic interests will trump national hostility; the deadlier the weapon the less likely it will be used: deterrence equals peace. “War is no more dangerous now than automobiling,” he said.

It was still only 1912.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá could mount a compelling argument, but he never pressed a point. Instead, he



In his book, published in 1915, Maxim argued for increasing America's military strength.

turned the conversation toward the subject of Maxim himself. “You are a celebrated inventor and scientific expert whose energies and faculties are employed in the production of means for human destruction . . . . Now you have the opportunity of becoming doubly famous. You must practice the science of peace. . . . You must discover the means of peace; invent guns of love which will shake the foundations of humanity.”

“Then will it be said by the people of the world, this is Mr. Maxim, inventor of the guns of war, discoverer of high explosives, military scientist, who has also discovered and invented means for increasing the life and love of man; who has put an end to the strife of nations and uprooted the tree of war. . . . Then will your life become pregnant and productive with really great results. . . . God will be pleased with you and from every standpoint of estimation you will be a perfect man.”

DAY 6  
APRIL 16, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Aftermath of the Titanic Disaster

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 16, 2012

WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES a swarm of 4,000 faces had taken possession of the streets north and east of the *New York Times* building at West 43rd Street. They stared at three of the building's windows along Broadway, which displayed three sheets of scrolling paper, thirty-three inches wide by seventy inches high. Three synchronized printers pressed letters onto the surface large enough to be read from the street, typed on a special device that enabled the newsroom to deliver updates to the waiting public in real time.



The New York Times newsroom in the midst of the Titanic story, April 15, 1912. (New York Times archive)

It was 7:30 p.m. yesterday – April 15, 1912 – and many of the watchers were coming home from work after a busy Monday. They carried the evening editions of the newspapers home with them, which reported what, until that moment, had been the latest news: the Allen liner *Virginian* had

taken the *Titanic* in tow and the two ships were *en route* to Halifax. Now they stopped and gaped in disbelief as the *Times*'s news ticker brought home to them for the first time the true scale of the catastrophe.

“How dare you,” one distraught man asked the typist, “how dare you say they’re all lost now when they were saying all day they were all saved?”



The front page of the *New York American* on April 16, 1912, announcing that John Jacob Astor had gone down with the *Titanic*. The picture is an artist's inaccurate impression of what it might have looked like out on the open sea. ([titanicuniverse.com](http://titanicuniverse.com))

The tragic news had streamed out of Times Square on the tongues of pedestrians, glided up Broadway along streetcar rails, piloted automobiles around the statue of Columbus at the southwest corner of Central Park, and spread through the neighborhoods of the Upper West Side, where the Hotel Ansonia stood at Broadway and 73rd Street.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had made friends with passengers on the *Titanic*. Col. John Jacob Astor IV and his young wife, Madeleine, had traveled with him on the *Cedric* from Alexandria, but they had disembarked at Naples to catch the train to Cherbourg, where they planned to board the doomed liner. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, himself, had been offered tickets on the ship, but had chosen to take the *Cedric* direct from Naples instead. Now his friends gave thanks to God that he had declined their offer and took another boat.

One night a few days later he spoke of the ship to an audience in Washington, DC, where the Senate hearings into the disaster had just begun. “Within the last few days a terrible event has happened in the world,” he said, “an event saddening to every heart and grieving every spirit.” “A number of beautiful souls passed beyond this earthly life.”



People awaiting news in front of the White Star Line offices at 9 Broadway, across from Bowling Green. (galeria.index.hu)

“When I think of them,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued, “I am very sad indeed. But when I consider this calamity in another aspect I am consoled by the realization that the worlds of God are infinite; that though they were deprived of this existence, they have other opportunities in the life beyond, even as Christ has said, ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions.’”

“They were called away from the temporary and transferred to the eternal; they abandoned this material existence and entered the portals of the spiritual world. Foregoing the pleasures and comforts of the earthly, they now partake of a joy and happiness far more abiding and real, for they have hastened to the Kingdom of God.”

DAY 7  
APRIL 17, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## “Deceiving the American People”

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 17, 2012

PRESIDENT WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT was beside himself.

His close friend and military aide, Major Archibald Butt, was returning on the *Titanic* from a special state visit to the Pope. But like everyone else, the President had believed the afternoon papers on April 15, stating that *Titanic* was being towed to Halifax and there was no loss of life. So he had gone to Poll’s Theatre that evening to see *Nobody’s Widow*. “He was nearly frantic when he learned the truth about 11 o’clock,” the *New York Times* reported, “and went at once to the telegraph room at the White House to read the *Associated Press* bulletins and the bulletins from *The New York Times* Washington office.”





Down at the White Star Line's Broadway offices at Bowling Green, anxious New Yorkers line the streets waiting for news about the sunken vessel, April 16, 1912. (theboweryboys.blogspot.ca)

A White House attaché arrived early the next morning at the White Star Line offices at 9 Broadway. Throngs of people lined the sidewalks in front of the building's ornamental white terra cotta facade and crammed the Bowling Green on the other side of the street. Many were in tears. But the White House man heard the same response that most of the others had received when they submitted the names of their loved ones who were passengers on the ship: "There is no mention of the name, in the list of the rescued so far received from the Carpathia."

Then Taft met with his Cabinet. "The deception of the American people yesterday in the use of wireless telegrams that now are known to have had no foundation of fact for their statements was taken up and discussed," the *Times* reported. Across the ocean the *Times of London* wrote, "These must have been pure inventions, and inventions of a cruel and heartless kind."



President Taft (seated at left) with his friend Major Archibald Butt, in 1908. (Library of Congress)

Aboard the *Cedric* six days earlier in New York Harbor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken to the reporters about the responsibilities of the modern mass media before he had said anything else. He had emphasized to the reporters who surrounded him that their papers did more than simply report news: they had the power to construct the public’s perception of what was true. “Newspapers are a mirror which is endowed with hearing, sight and speech,” he said. “Those who play for their own little selfish ends give no true light to the world and perish of their own futility.” He later told his American friends to be careful about trusting anything they read about him, and only to invest their certainty in written words bearing his own signature.

It turned out that many of the fake dispatches about the *Titanic* had come from the vicinity of Boston. In this new era of modern media, any amateur with the right kind of gadget could get the strange and dangerous idea that they had the right to amuse themselves at public expense by breaking the news.

Taft instructed the Department of Justice to collar the perpetrators, but the problem was that, unlike in Britain and Canada, the United States had no laws to regulate the use of the wireless telegraph. “It seems likely, therefore,” the *Times* opined, “that if the detectives succeed in running down the senders no proceedings will lie against them.”

DAY 8  
APRIL 18, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, aka “The Master”

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 18, 2012

MYRON H. PHELPS was one of the first Americans to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was a wealthy New York lawyer, who had converted to Buddhism in India. Religion fascinated him, so when he heard that a new one had sprung up in Persia, and its leader lived in ‘Akká, Palestine, he made plans to visit him. After spending a month in ‘Akká, Phelps wrote the first book ever published in English about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*.



The walled city of ‘Akká, the penal colony of the Ottoman Empire. Photograph taken about 1878, ten years after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in the prison. (New York Public Library)

The year was 1902. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been confined in ‘Akká, the desolate penal colony of the Ottoman Empire, for the past thirty-four years. The whole city was a prison, cut off by desert on one side and the sea on the other. Nothing grew within the city’s walls, and it smelled so foul that they used to say that any bird flying over ‘Akká would drop dead from the stench. The empire’s worst criminals fended for themselves in the hard streets, carrying on as best they could as peddlers, shopkeepers, laborers, beggars. Thanks to economic breakdown and the mortality rate, the city’s governor never had to worry about population control.

One Friday afternoon in December, Myron Phelps looked out over the sunbaked boxes of coarse Jerusalem stone that lined ‘Akká’s streets. They had flat cement roofs, and sheets of stucco clung

to their walls in varying stages of decay. To his right, the blue waters of the Mediterranean came to the foot of the stone sea wall, and, across the bay, the silhouette of a long low mountain covered the horizon. Thirty feet below his window, a group of men and women wearing patched and tattered garments gathered in the narrow street.

“It is a noteworthy gathering,” Phelps wrote. “Many of these men are blind; many more are pale, emaciated, or aged. Some are on crutches; some are so feeble that they can barely walk. Most of the women are closely veiled, but enough are uncovered to cause us well to believe that, if the veils were lifted, more pain and misery would be seen.”



The rooftops of 'Akká.  
(Cities in Conflict – A Visual Archive; [www.ronasela.com](http://www.ronasela.com))

“A door opens and a man comes out. He is of middle stature, strongly built. He wears flowing light-coloured robes. On his head is a light buff fez with a white cloth wound about it. He is perhaps sixty years of age. . . . He passes through the crowd, and as he goes utters words of salutation.”

“He stations himself at a narrow angle of the street and motions to the people to come towards him. They crowd up a little too insistently. He pushes them gently back and lets them pass him one by one. As they come they hold their hands extended. In each open palm he places some small coins. He knows them all. He caresses them with his hand on the face, on the shoulders, on the head. Some he stops and questions. An aged negro who hobbles up, he greets with some kindly inquiry; the old man’s broad face breaks into a sunny smile, his white teeth glistening against his ebony skin as he replies. . . . To all he says, ‘Marhabbah, marhabbah.’” (Welcome, welcome!)

“When they address him they call him ‘Master.’”

“This scene you may see almost any day of the year in the streets of ‘Akká. . . . “In the cold weather which is approaching, the poor will suffer, for, as in all cities, they are thinly clad. Some day at this season . . . you may see the poor of ‘Akká gathered at one of the shops where clothes

are sold, receiving cloaks from the Master. Upon many, especially the most infirm or crippled, he himself places the garment, adjusts it with his own hands, and strokes it approvingly, as if to say, 'There! Now you will do well.' There are five or six hundred poor in 'Akká, to all of whom he gives a warm garment each year."

"Nor is it the beggars only that he remembers. Those respectable poor who cannot beg, but must suffer in silence – those whose daily labor will not support their families – to these he sends bread secretly."



Aerial view of the Old City of Acre ('Akká/Akko) in 2007, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. (Flickr image by israeltourism)

"If he hears of any one sick in the city – Moslem or Christian, or of any other sect, it matters not – he is each day at their bedside, or sends a trusty messenger. If a physician is needed, and the patient poor, he brings or sends one, and also the necessary medicine. If he finds a leaking roof or a broken window menacing health, he summons a workman, and waits himself to see the breach repaired. If any one is in trouble – if a son or a brother is thrown into prison, or he is threatened at law, or falls into any difficulty too heavy for him – it is to the Master that he straightway makes appeal for counsel or for aid. Indeed, for counsel all come to him, rich as well as poor."

"This man who gives so freely must be rich, you think? No, far otherwise. Once his family was the wealthiest in all Persia. But this friend of the lowly, like the Galilean, has been oppressed by the great. *For fifty years he and his family have been exiles and prisoners.* Their property has been confiscated and wasted, and but little has been left to him. Now that he has not much he must spend little for himself that he may give more to the poor. His garments are usually of cotton, and the cheapest that can be bought. Often his friends in Persia – for this man is indeed rich in friends . . . send him costly garments. These he wears once, out of respect for the sender; then he gives them away." "Such is Abbas Effendi, the Master of 'Akká."

DAY 9

APRIL 19, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## **“Isn’t that the Woman of It?”**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 19, 2012

KATE CAREW, AS SHE WAS CALLED, stepped through the main entrance, minded the seals barking in the lobby fountain, and made her way to the front desk. “Well, of all the places to find the Master,” she said to herself. Then she noticed how soft and squashy the carpets were. “Of course it’s the carpets. They must seem awfully nice to feet that have trod prison stones. I don’t blame him.”



Kate Carew, as she saw herself, in one of her frequent self-portraits. (katecarew.com)

“Fifth floor, room 111,” the clerk told her, and she repeated it to the elevator man. He pulled the gates closed and they began to rise through the floors of the Hotel Ansonia. “On my way to the more rarefied atmosphere of the upper floors,” she wrote, “I found myself hoping the Baha would tell me I had a lovely soul. They say he finds out the strangest things about you.”

Kate Carew — that was her pen name — was a special kind of journalist, a caricaturist in fact, who used to sketch celebrities while she interviewed them. Every week the *New-York Tribune* printed her latest interview with the rich and famous, complete with sketches and suffused throughout with her pithy observations and trademark wit. She was Barbara Walters with a sketchbook. Now, at about 6 p.m. on April 19, 1912, she had tucked her sketchbook under her arm and was flitting down the hotel corridor to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

“I felt all sorts of mystic possibilities awaited me the other side of the door,” she wrote. “I stripped my mind of all its worldly debris . . . I closed my eyes. I attained the holy calm.”



“At my finger’s pressure on the bell the door flew open with a most unholy speed. No fumes of incense, no tinkling of bells, no prostrate figures and whispered benedictions . . . I had been criticizing the lack of simplicity and when I saw it I wasn’t satisfied.”

“Isn’t that the woman of it?”

She took a seat in the large reception room. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was out, so she turned her colorful eye to the curious bunch of people waiting with her, and described some of them in her article: “An enthusiastic, plump, middle-aged little person, gowned in a very worldly manner, haloed with a new spring hat, whose artificial aigrettes had the real optimistic slant.” A pretty girl on a narrow seat: “You felt that she must have lots of oversoul. She wore a sad, withdrawn look as of one who lives on the heights.”

Finally a new pattern of notes joined the room’s chatter, including a “nasal monotone unlike any sound I had ever heard.” The room went silent. “I blinked my eyes. Everybody in the room was standing, breathlessly expectant. I rose mechanically.”



Kate Carew's sketch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking with a group of visitors at the Hotel Ansonia. As she often did, Carew places herself in her own sketch. (*New York Tribune*)

'Abdu'l-Bahá entered. "He is scarcely above medium height," Carew wrote, "but so extraordinary is the dignity of his majestic carriage that he seemed more than the average stature." Within a few minutes her private interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá began in an adjoining room.

"Do you think our luxury degenerate," she asked, "as in this great hotel?"

“Luxury has a limit,” he replied. “Beyond that limit it is not commendable. There is such a thing as moderation.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it turned out, hadn’t picked the opulent Ansonia as his place of residence; it had been booked by friends in New York before he arrived.

“Does the attention paid at present in this country to material things sadden you? Does it argue to you a lack of progress?”

“Your material civilization is very wonderful,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered. “If only you will allow divine idealism to keep pace with it there is great hope for general progress.”



Kate Carew's article on 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the New York Tribune, May 5, 1912. (*New York Tribune*)

Carew had heard that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had brought up his four daughters in a liberal household, with Western standards of education: “Do you believe in woman’s desire for freedom?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá raised his hand to his forehead and touched his turban, adjusting it slightly. “The soul has no sex,” he said.

Carew called to mind last Monday’s news: “In a supreme moment,” she asked, “as in that of the Titanic disaster, should both sexes share the danger equally?”

“Women are more delicate than men,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied. “This delicacy men should take into consideration. . . .” “If the time ever comes when the average woman is a man’s equal in physical strength there will be no need for this consideration; but not until then.”

After a few more questions, she noted that the exhausting day had started to weigh upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. His eyelids trembled and he began to adjust his turban and stroke his beard more often. “Shall I go now?” she asked. Fareed, the interpreter, answered: “He has been giving of

himself since 7 o'clock this morning. I am a perfect physical wreck, but he is willing to go on indefinitely."

'Abdu'l-Bahá opened his eyes again: "I am going to the poor in the Bowery now," he told her. "I love them." He invited Kate Carew to come along.

"Can you picture your Aunt Kate and Abdul Baha going to it, hand in hand, through the Ansonia corridors? Perhaps the guests didn't gurgle and gasp! Perhaps!" "I did feel rather conspicuous," she writes, "but I braced myself with the thought of the universal brotherhood and really got along fairly well."



A group of men in a bread line outside the Bowery Mission in New York City, February 7, 1910. (Library of Congress)

"There was another gasp of surprise at the Bowery Mission as, still hand in hand—he just wouldn't let me go—the Baha and I trotted through a lane composed of several score of the society's members. A few of the young ladies had their arms filled with flowers, which afterward filled the automobile. Some four hundred men were present, belonging to the mission."

'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to the homeless men for about twenty minutes. Jesus Christ was also homeless, he told them. "You are His comrades, for He outwardly was poor, not rich. Even this earth's happiness does not depend upon wealth."

"You will find many of the wealthy exposed to dangers and troubled by difficulties, and in their last moments upon the bed of death there remains the regret that they must be separated from that to which their hearts are so attached."

"Therefore," he said, "we will thank God that we have been so blessed with real riches. In conclusion, I ask you to accept 'Abdu'l-Bahá as your servant."

Then Aunt Kate saw something she didn't expect.

“Just before the services were concluded I saw the courier stealthily approach the platform and hand the Baha a green baize bag. Of course, I wasn’t going to let that go on without finding out all about it, and to my whispered inquiry the Baha said, smilingly:

“Some little lucky bits I am going to distribute to the men.”

“What you don’t expect! I had the surprise of my life! For what do you suppose those lucky bits were?”

“Silver quarters, two hundred dollars’ worth of them!”

“There! Guess you didn’t expect it either.”

“Think of it! Some one actually coming to America and distributing money. Not here with the avowed or unavowed intention of taking it away. It seems incredible.”



Carew's impression of 'Abdu'l-Bahá from behind.  
(*New York Tribune*)

“Possibly I may be a bit tired of mere words, dealing in them the way I do, but that demonstration of Abdul Baha’s creed did more to convince me of the absolute sincerity of the man than anything else that had happened.”

“The Master stood, his eyes always turned away from the man facing him, far down the line, four or five beyond his vis-à-vis, so that when a particularly desperate looking specimen came along he was all ready for him, and, instead of one quarter, two were quickly pressed into the calloused palm.”

“I had said good night on the platform, so my last view of Abdul Baha was as he stood at the head of the Bowery Mission line, a dozen or more derelicts before him, giving to each a bit of silver and a word of advice.”

“And as I went out into the starlight night I murmured the phrase of an Oriental admirer who had described him as

The *Breeze of God.*”



The Bowery Mission has served homeless and hungry New Yorkers since 1879. If you're interested in helping them out:

<http://www.bowery.org/donations/>



DAY 10  
APRIL 20, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Comes to Washington

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 20, 2012

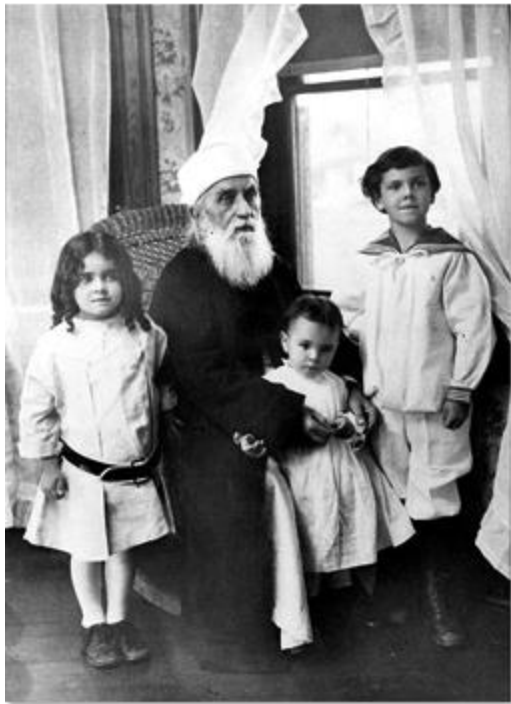
LITTLE MARZIEH KHAN scampered across the pavement, dashed under the tall marble arches, and scurried through the glass doors of Washington’s Union Station, looking for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Above her a massive barrel vault, graced with octagonal coffers, crowned the cavernous Great Hall. Hundreds of little black squares dotted the marble tiled floor that unfurled at her feet. She could examine them closely because her eyes were so close to the ground. Marzieh was only four years old.



The Great Hall at Union Station, Washington, DC. (Library of Congress)

This morning — Saturday, April 20, 1912 — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had boarded the 8 a.m. train to Washington, DC, from New York’s Pennsylvania Station. But in order to avoid the kind of brouhaha that had greeted the *Cedric*, he had kept his arrival time a secret. That’s why Marzieh’s parents — Florence Breed of Boston and Ali-Kuli Khan of Iran — had received a panicked telephone call at lunchtime: “Hurry! The Master is arriving at the station in half an hour!” They dropped their knives and forks, picked up the children, and ran into the street to catch a public victoria.

The Khans arrived at Union Station with five minutes to spare: the train pulled in at 1:33 p.m. Mother rushed into the flower shop and bought two bouquets. Rahim, Marzieh’s elder brother, received violets; she got red roses. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá loved flowers.



Marzieh, Hamideh, and Rahim with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

Marzieh caught her first glimpse of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he walked toward them along the train platform, trailed by three Persian members of his party. At the gate he stopped to greet the children, taking Rahim by the hand. “Pass along – don’t block the passage,” a guard said.

She looked up at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he paced along the walk beside the tracks. Atop his left shoulder, lying almost fully open, Marzieh spied a silver curl. She had curls, too. They were black and made with a curling stick. They fell to her shoulders on either side of her face, framing her olive complexion and big dark eyes.

That was the only visual image she would ever recall of that day with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. But she would always remember the electricity that permeated the air all around him, a “feeling of something always going on.”

In front of the station two cars and a carriage awaited the party, and, as they walked back out under the arches with the others, they could see the silhouette of the Capitol building beneath the sun.



**Marzieh's parents, Ali-Kuli and Florence Breed Khan, with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Washington.**  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Marzieh sat on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s lap all the way up Massachusetts Avenue. They drove around the big white library where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was going to talk that evening. It was in a grassy park right in the middle of the road. They turned right at Dupont Circle, which was near where the President lived, and arrived a few minutes later at Mr. and Mrs. Parsons’s big house at the corner of 18th and R Streets. That’s where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was going to stay.

We don’t know what Marzieh did for the rest of that exciting day. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rested, then took a carriage ride through the Mall in the late afternoon, before his speech to 600 people at the Carnegie Library. He walked along the terrace on the western side of the Capitol, and gazed out

over the city as the sun slowly dropped to the horizon, shedding yellow, purple, and orange across the sky.

DAY 11  
APRIL 21, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## Washington High Society Receives ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 21, 2012

IN NEW YORK, local news stories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival had quickly drawn invitations and interview requests from peace advocates, clergymen such as Percy Stickney Grant, and artists like Kahlil Gibran. But when he arrived in Washington, DC, on April 20, 1912, high society and the government circles of the capital reached out to receive him.



The East Front of the Capitol decked out for President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration on May 4, 1913. At this moment the President is taking the Oath of Office on the stage in the middle of the picture. (Harris & Ewing)

The entrée to this elite social milieu — a world of formal dinners, balls, and diplomatic affairs ruled by strict Washington protocol — was provided by a few Washington Bahá’ís who moved in these circles. Laura Dreyfus-Barney came from the artistic Barney family of Dupont Circle. “[T]he Barneys are the best-known people in social Washington,” wrote the *New York Times* in a

1910 magazine profile on the three Barney women, “and that is a unique distinction unappreciated by those who are condemned to a life outside the National capital.”

Agnes Parsons also lived near Dupont Circle, with her husband Arthur, a senior librarian at the Library of Congress, and her younger son, Jeffrey. The Parsons were wealthy and well connected: they had many prominent friends and moved in the upper echelon of Washington society.

Agnes had been a Christian Scientist, but had become a Bahá'í in 1908. Then, in 1910 — after the Young Turks Revolution had freed all political prisoners in the Ottoman Empire — she traveled to Palestine to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Parsons were building their new home, a Georgian mansion at the corner of 18th and R Streets, and Agnes extracted a promise from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that he would stay with them when he came to Washington.



Agnes Parsons with her son, Jeffrey.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Every afternoon at 5 p.m., members of Washington’s elite sought out ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Parsons’s home: members of the House of Representatives, of the Senate, and of the Cabinet; Justices of the Supreme Court; officials of foreign embassies; and men of science such as Alexander Graham Bell and Admiral Robert Peary.

Agnes had built a large, bright ballroom to the left of the front door especially for this purpose. It was twenty-five feet wide by fifty feet long, decorated in white with yellow silk curtains, and it seated 150 people. Carved garlands blanketed the ceiling, the paneled walls, and the high mantel at one end of the room. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke from a platform in front of the mantel, behind a

bank of American Beauty roses that were delivered fresh every day. As the days passed, the crowds grew bigger.

Yet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá didn’t come to Washington simply to meet the nation’s wealthy and powerful. He also intended to assail America’s biggest taboo – the issue of race.



DAY 12

APRIL 22, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## Even Though the World Should Go to Smash

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 22, 2012

ALMOST COMPLETELY SEPARATED from Agnes Parsons's social world – both psychologically and physically – lived the African American citizens of Washington. In 1912, the world's second-largest black community called Washington home, having been overtaken in sheer numbers by New York just before 1900. But whereas in New York the African American community was only a drop in a very large bucket, almost one-third of Washington's inhabitants were black.

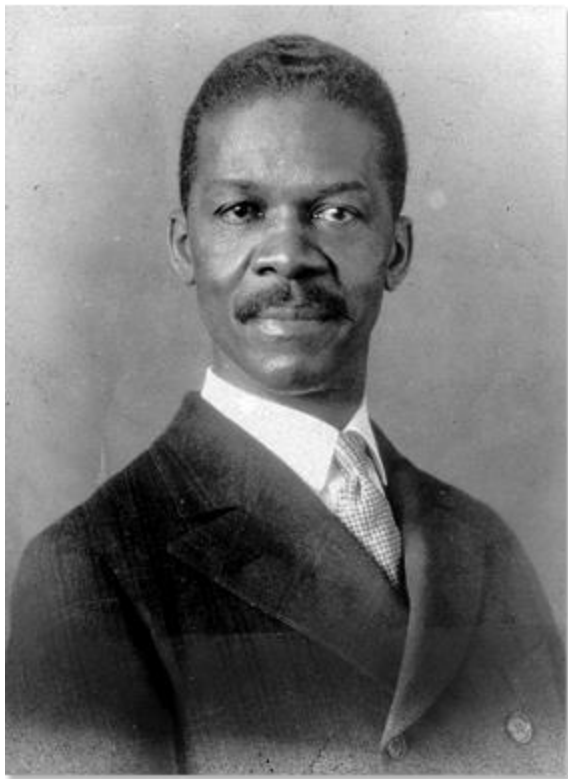


A reunion of former slaves in Washington, DC, in 1917. Reverend S. P. Drew, the man standing on the far right, was born free. (Harris & Ewing)

Washington was a *Southern* city, filled to the brim with Southern attitudes about nation, society, culture, and race, many of which were reflected, one way or another, in the group of Bahá'ís that

had percolated up among the lettered streets since 1898, when the community had been founded, and 1899, when Phoebe Apperson Hearst had begun holding meetings in her Washington home. Nothing resembling a unified opinion on race could be found among the capital's Bahá'ís. By 1912 some of them – the few who were aware of the racial implications of their new religion – were already holding integrated meetings. Thirty years later, one of them reflected on the situation: “Even where all the believers were free from prejudices some felt that it would upset inquirers after the truth if they were confronted too soon with signs of racial equality. . . . On the other hand, others were [insistent] that such principles should be upheld and applied even though the world should go to smash.”

But most Washington Bahá'ís, due to custom, habit, avoidance, or simple lack of knowledge, remained untouched by the issue. Little did they suspect that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was about to disabuse them of their beliefs about race, and confront them with an entirely new perspective on the meaning of social equality.



Louis George Gregory. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Enter Louis George Gregory, a thirty-seven-year-old, Fisk- and Howard-educated African American lawyer from Charleston, South Carolina. As president of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, the oldest African American organization in Washington, he was one of the most prominent members of the capital's African American community. He had eagerly followed the developments of W. E. B. Du Bois's Niagara

Movement, and later characterized his own views on the race issue at that time as “radical and wide-eyed,” a “program of fiery agitation in behalf of a people. . . .”

Louis Gregory first learned of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in late 1907 from a colleague – a cultivated, southern white gentleman who shared his office at the Treasury Department. Gregory attended a discussion with Bahá’ís at the old Corcoran building as a favor to him. He was not interested in religion. Earlier in his life he “had been seeking,” he said, “but not finding truth, had given up.”

Yet as he heard more about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and this new faith, Louis Gregory came to believe he had found the divine reply to the prayer Du Bois had written after the Atlanta Riot, “in the Day of Death, 1906”:

*Bewildered we are, and passion-tost, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the armposts of Thy Throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge Thee, God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the tears of our dead mothers, by the very blood of Thy crucified Christ: What meaneth this? Tell us the Plan; give us the Sign! Keep not thou silence, O God!*

“Heaven and Earth heard that piercing cry,” wrote Louis Gregory in a 1936 review of Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*, “uttered by one, echoed by millions.” “Earth and Heaven answered.” After investigating the new religion for eighteen months, Louis Gregory became a Bahá’í in June, 1909.



African American janitors cleaning the Capitol building in 1914. (Harris & Ewing)

By this time, at least fifteen African Americans had joined the community in the DC area, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá singled Louis Gregory out. “I hope,” he wrote in response to Gregory’s first letter to ‘Akká in 1909, “that thou mayest become . . . the means whereby the white and colored people shall close their eyes to racial differences and behold the reality of humanity, and that is the universal unity which is the oneness of the kingdom of the human race. . . .”

Then, in the spring of 1911, Louis Gregory visited Ramleh, Egypt, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was staying in preparation for his first visit to Europe. During their first conversation ‘Abdu’l-Bahá immediately cut “to the substance of the issue.” “What of the conflict between the white and colored races?” he asked.

“This question made me smile,” Gregory wrote, “for I at once felt that my Inquirer, although He had never in person visited America, yet knew more of conditions than I could ever know. I answered that there was much friction between the races. That those who accepted the Baha’i teachings had hopes of an amicable settlement of racial differences, while others were despondent. Among the friends were earnest souls who wished for a closer unity of races and hoped that He might point out the way to them. He further questioned: ‘Does this refer to the removal of hatreds and antagonisms on the part of one race, or of both races?’ Both races, was my answer, and He said this would be done.”

“Work for unity and harmony between the races,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him. “The colored people must attend all the unity meetings. There must be no distinctions.”

DAY 13

APRIL 23, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## This Shining Colored Man

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 23, 2012

AT NOON ON TUESDAY, April 23, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s fourth day in Washington, he stood next to Louis Gregory before 1,600 students, faculty, and guests of Howard University, crammed into Howard’s Rankin Chapel. Stained timber arches stretched across the space, resting on hammer beams at the walls and supporting a dark wooden roof. The band played as he entered, and the audience rose in applause.



Louis Gregory as a young man  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

By 1912 Howard was the nation’s leading black university, having been founded in 1866 to educate newly-emancipated slaves. The overflowing crowd in Rankin Chapel that afternoon was the first predominantly black audience ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would address in America, and the first of two such meetings that Louis Gregory had arranged for that day.

Reverend Wilbur Patterson Thirkield, Howard’s eighth President, introduced ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “This was a most notable occasion,” wrote Joseph Hannen, who was also in the audience, “and

here, as everywhere when both white and colored people were present, Abdul-Baha seemed happiest. The address was received with breathless attention by the vast audience, and was followed by a positive ovation and a recall.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá began by drawing attention to the diversity in the room. “Today I am happy,” he said, “for I see . . . white and black sitting together.” He then proceeded to reject prevailing black and white views about the essentialism of race — the popular belief that a person’s race was central to his or her humanity:

“There are no whites and blacks before God. All colors are one, and that is the color of servitude to God. Scent and color are not important. The heart is important. If the heart is pure, white or black or any color makes no difference.”

Almost twenty years earlier, journalists who covered the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago had begun to associate the racial term “black” with evil, darkness, and filth. A story in *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly*, for example, commented on a group of West Africans who populated one of the ethnological exhibits: “Sixty-nine of them are here in all their barbaric ugliness,” the reporter wrote, “blacker than buried midnight and as degraded as the animals which prowl the jungles of their dark land.” Just seven years before, in 1905, thousands of New Yorkers had watched Ota Benga, a thirty-seven-year-old Pygmy of the Mbuti tribe of Zaire, displayed in a cage at the Bronx Zoo with an orangutan. “Is it a man or a monkey?” asked the *New York Times*.



Howard University's Founders Library in Washington, DC, now a National Historic Landmark. (Howard University)

But during Louis Gregory's visit to Alexandria in 1910, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had begun to craft a new language of race — a new set of racial images and metaphors — which consciously contradicted these ingrained, popular Social Darwinist associations.

They took Louis Gregory as their subject. "I liken you," 'Abdu'l-Bahá told him, "to the pupil of the eye. You are black and it is black, yet it becomes the focus of light." "When he went to Stuttgart," 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote of him, "although being of black color, yet he shone as a bright light in the meeting of the friends." "He will return to America very soon," he advised an American friend, "and you, the white people, should then honor and welcome this shining colored man in such a way that all the people will be astonished."

At Howard University, at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church that evening, and in his other speeches to mixed-race gatherings in Washington during the next four days, 'Abdu'l-Bahá deepened and extended this racial language in order to recast racial differences as a *source of beauty*.



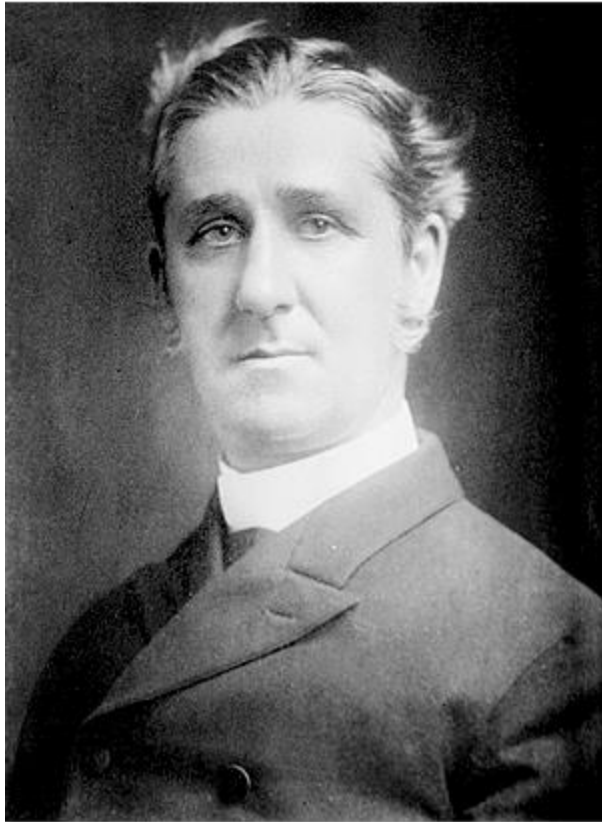


The interior of Rankin Chapel at Howard University, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on April 23, 1912. ([www.howard.edu](http://www.howard.edu))

“As I stand here tonight and look upon this assembly” he told one audience, “I am reminded curiously of a beautiful bouquet of violets gathered together in varying colors, dark and light.” “In the vegetable kingdom the colors of multicolored flowers are not the cause of discord. Rather, colors are the cause of the adornment of the garden because a single color has no appeal; but when you observe many-colored flowers, there is charm and display. The world of humanity, too, is like a garden, and humankind are like the many-colored flowers.” “In the clustered jewels of the races may the blacks be as sapphires and rubies and the whites as diamonds and pearls. The composite beauty of humanity will be witnessed in their unity and blending.”

W. E. B. Du Bois characterized this seemingly innocent approach to the race issue as “the calm sweet universalism of Abdul Baha.” But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá harbored no illusions about the systemic crisis that the race problem posed for America’s social fabric. The problem was urgent, and required immediate, systematic intervention.

“Until these prejudices are entirely removed from the people of the world,” he wrote, “the realm of humanity will not find rest. Nay, rather, discord and bloodshed will be increased day by day, and the foundation of the prosperity of the world of man will be destroyed.” “Now is the time for the Americans to take up this matter and unite both the white and colored races. Otherwise, hasten ye towards destruction! Hasten ye toward devastation!” “Indeed, there is a greater danger than only the shedding of blood. It is the destruction of America.”



Wilbur Patterson Thirkield, President of Howard University in 1912. (Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

On the other hand, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá put little faith in the ability of legal and political equality alone to remove underlying race hatred. “You may bring all the physical powers of the earth,” Kate Carew had heard him say, “and try by their means to make a union where all will love each other, where all will have peace — but it will end in failure.” A year later he wrote to Andrew Carnegie, who had given ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a copy of his book, *The Gospel of Wealth*. “‘Human Solidarity,’” he wrote, “is greater than ‘Equality.’ ‘Equality’ is obtained, more or less, through coercion (or legislation) but ‘Human Solidarity’ is realized through the exercise of free will.”

It was not enough for antagonistic racial groups to be forced together through legislative means: they had to *want* to unite.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s advocacy for social equality, therefore, went beyond the purely economic, political, and moral aspects of the race issue. He neither lined up with any of the popular white positions in the American racial debate, nor accepted the dichotomy between appeasement and political agitation that characterized African American leaders.

Unlike Booker T. Washington and the Social Gospel reformers, who preoccupied themselves with economic development; unlike Du Bois’s focus on political rights and race pride; and unlike other radicals, such as Clarence Darrow, who opposed segregation and social inequality on the

grounds that they violated the American ideals of liberty and equality, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sought to change the *emotional posture* of white and black Americans toward the race issue and toward each other.

DAY 14  
APRIL 24, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## Breaking the Color Line

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 24, 2012

AT ABOUT TWO O’CLOCK on Tuesday, April 23, 1912, Louis Gregory walked up the limestone steps to the front door of the Persian Legation at 1832 16th Street, NW, in Washington, DC. This four-level house, its facade built from green serpentine rock, was the nearest thing to an embassy the Persian government had in the United States. Its Chargé d’Affaires — Ali-Kuli Khan — was the closest thing Persia had to an ambassador.



Louis Gregory in later life.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The Legation stood less than a mile southwest of Howard University. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been driven here immediately after his speech to the student body at Rankin Chapel, in order to attend a formal luncheon that Khan was holding in his honor. But after the talk, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had sent a message to Gregory to meet him at the Legation for a private conversation.

The interview, Gregory later recalled, went on and on. ‘Abdul-Bahá seemed to be prolonging it. When dinner was announced ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood, and everyone followed him into the dining room. Everyone, that is, except Louis Gregory. It was only 1912: Social Washington did not invite colored people to dinner.

Formality had laid out nineteen place settings along the sides of the long, rectangular banquet table according to strict Washington protocol. Good taste had strewn the table with rose petals. Regard had seated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at its head. The guests took their seats.

Suddenly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood up and looked around the table.

“Where is Mr. Gregory?” he asked. “Bring Mr. Gregory!” he told Ali-Kuli Khan.

Khan had no choice but to locate Mr. Gregory, whom he found trying to slip quietly out of the house without being noticed. By the time he re-entered the dining room with Louis Gregory, Social Washington had succumbed.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had pushed aside the utensils, plates, and glasses that held sway over the place of honor to his right. Everyone moved over, sending a ripple of activity down one side of the table. In its place, he had laid out a twentieth place setting and ordered a twentieth chair brought to the table. Here he seated Louis Gregory. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then sat down, explained that he was very happy to have Mr. Gregory here, and, as if nothing out of the ordinary had just occurred, began to speak on racial prejudice.



**A view of the White House executive mansion from over the West Wing, looking east past the Treasury and along Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol, 1914. (Harris & Ewing)**

On Tuesday, April 23, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had begun his attack on the social conventions of the color line. His discourse on race would soon engage the diverse range of public positions on the subject, which had emerged as agents of, or as reactions and accommodations to, a scientific, political, and cultural program that had entrenched itself in American life since the end of Reconstruction.

In taking on the paramount issue of race, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was just getting started.

DAY 15  
APRIL 25, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## What Makes a President

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 25, 2012

FOR THE PAST FIVE DAYS visitors had filled the Parsons's ballroom every afternoon, and local newspapers, such as the *Herald*, the *Post*, and the *Star*, had printed stories on two of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Washington speeches. But America was a big country. More than ninety-two million souls lived in the Land of the Free, and only the tiniest handful had even the dimmest awareness of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.



Front page of London's *The Sphere*, April 27, 1912.  
(Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, N.S.)

Many, perhaps most, Americans, simply didn't have time for the news. Their long working hours and poor wages kept their minds focused on earning a living and feeding their children. As for those who had the leisure, they could hardly glance at a newspaper without reading about the *Titanic*, which still dominated the front page and had picked up steam again when the Senate hearings into the disaster had begun two days ago. But by the end of April things quickly changed. It was a Presidential election year and the media went into overdrive. For the next six-and-a-half months sensational headlines dominated the pages of every newspaper in the country. From the primaries through to the general election, it



was a season marked by shameful grandstanding, vicious party infighting, and venomous personal attacks.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a man who drove to the heart of virtually all of America’s pressing challenges, failed to comment even once on the election – neither about the headlines, nor the candidates, nor even about the winner once it was all over. Yet, like his father Bahá’u’lláh before him, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a good deal to say about the qualities of leadership and of principled governance. He had even written a book on the subject back in 1875, when he was just thirty-one years old, addressed to the rulers and people of Persia. He titled it *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

In America, while avoiding commenting on the election at hand, he did offer his views on the kind of individual who should be President.



Political news takes over the front page of the New York Tribune on April 26, 1912. (Library of Congress)

“The president,” he said, “must be a man who does not insistently seek the presidency. He should be a person free from all thoughts of name and rank; rather, he should say, ‘I am unworthy and incapable of this position and cannot bear this great burden.’ Such persons deserve the presidency. If the object is to promote the public good, then the president must be a well-



wisher of all and not a self-seeking person. If the object, however, is to promote personal interests, then such a position will be injurious to humanity . . . ”

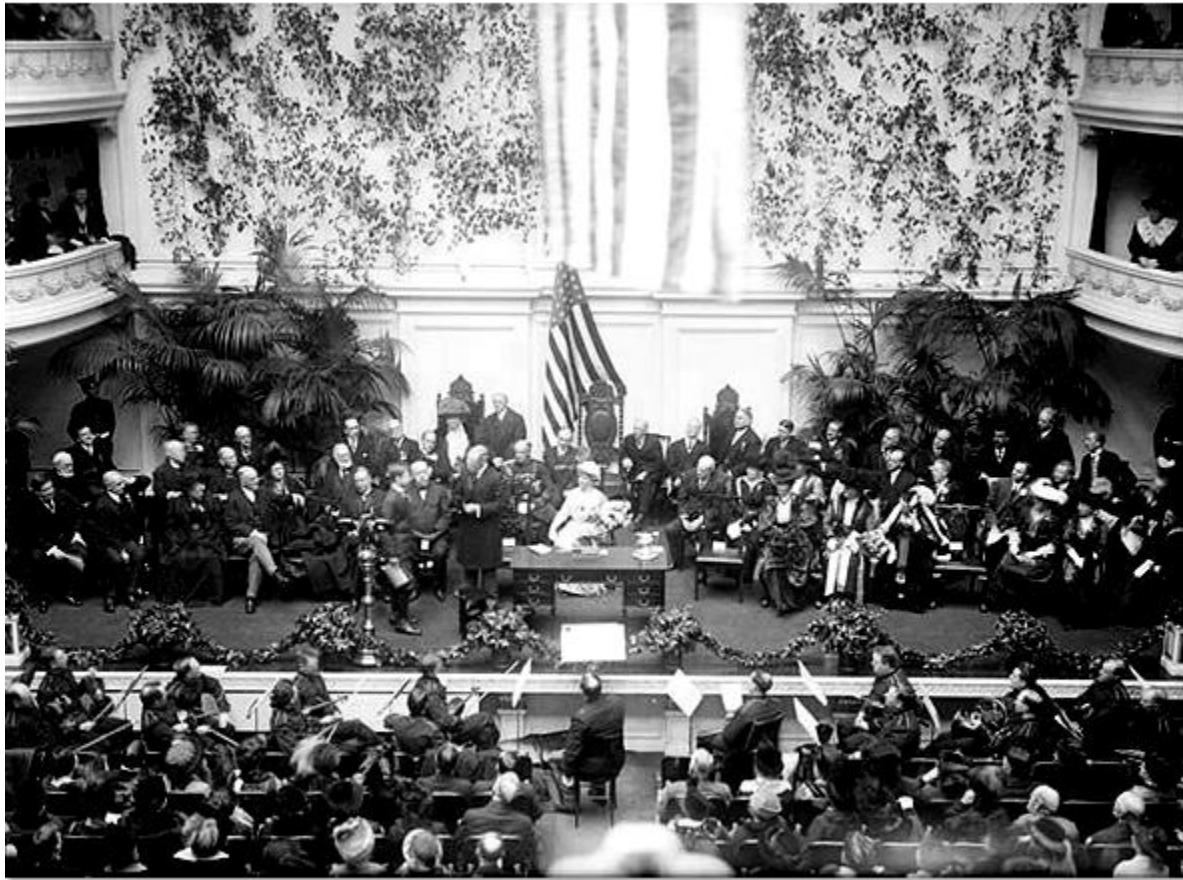
In a hard-fought election year where the headlines screamed self-aggrandizement and entrenched partisanship, ‘Abdul-Bahá simply directed his voice elsewhere.

DAY 16  
APRIL 26, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## Building Bonds Between East and West

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 26, 2012

MARTHA WASHINGTON and nine Founding Fathers gazed down from their niches upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he swept through their white, marble-cladded domain at about 7:30 p.m. on Friday, April 26, 1912. Three sheaves of wheat, a plow, a sailing ship, and an eagle had been emblazoned on a shield at his feet, and set into the center of the pink marble floor on a medallion twenty-four inches wide. The words *SEAL OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA* ringed its circumference in bronze.



The stage at Memorial Continental Hall, headquarters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, in 1915.  
(Harris & Ewing)

The Pennsylvania Foyer was the main entrance to Memorial Continental Hall, the brand new national headquarters of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It stood in Classical Revival style on 17th Street, NW, between C and D Streets, in the old neighborhood of Foggy Bottom

just north of the National Mall. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was about to deliver his final public speech in the nation’s capital in Continental Hall’s main auditorium, at 8 p.m., to the single largest audience he had yet addressed in America. The crowd overflowed into the balconies.

White American eagles with outstretched wings perched above the three levels of box seats on either side of the stage. On this night, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would share the podium with Samuel Gompers, the President of the American Federation of Labor. Gompers made a plea for the women of the working classes. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the *Washington Star* reported, drew a parallel between the advancement of women in the West and in the East. He cited the hall they stood in, which had been built by the women of the D. A. R., as an example of the progress of women in the Western hemisphere.



Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, in 1908 (Library of Congress)

The meeting had been organized by the Orient-Occident Unity, a DC organization dedicated to building bonds of friendship between East and West. On his first night in Washington, last Saturday, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had delivered the keynote address at their conference in the Carnegie Library on Massachusetts Avenue. That evening he had called for a “reciprocal alliance” between the United States of America and the nation of Persia, now Iran.

“[F]or the Americans,” he said, “there could be no better industrial outlet and market than the virgin commercial soil of Persia. The mineral wealth of Persia is still latent and untouched. It is my hope that the great American democracy may be instrumental in developing these hidden resources and that a bond of perfect amity and unity may be established between the American republic and the government of Persia.”

“It is, therefore, hoped that the American and Persian nations may be conjoined and united in reciprocal love. May they become one race endowed with the same susceptibilities. May these bonds of amity and accord be firmly established.”

DAY 17  
APRIL 27, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## At 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 27, 2012

THE PARSONS' HORSES clopped along the driveway at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue shortly after noon on Sunday, April 28, 1912. Through the trees 'Abdu'l-Bahá could see the large pediment, supported by eight white ionic columns, that sheltered the western entrance to the executive mansion. The carriage, which carried him, Dr. Fareed, and Mrs. Parsons, rolled forward beneath the mottled shadows in the cool afternoon air.



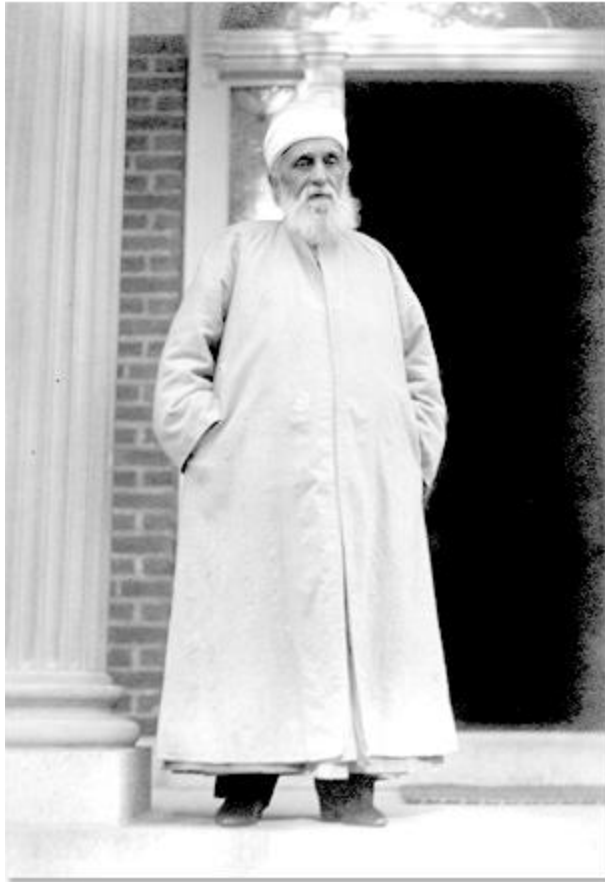
The East Room of the White House, circa 1910. (Harris & Ewing)

President Taft had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to visit him at the White House at 12:30. On Friday morning 'Abdu'l-Bahá had spoken at the President's church, All Souls Unitarian on Harvard

Street. Then, on Saturday, members of the Taft family had attended an evening reception that Mrs. Parsons had held for 300 dignitaries in the capital.

William Sulzer, the Democratic Congressman from New York, had also come to the Parsons' for a private interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He was Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and said later that he felt he had just talked with the prophet Elijah, and Moses. Shortly afterward, another invitation arrived: this one came from Champ Clark (D-Missouri), the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá to address Congress the following week on his vision of world peace.

The horses came to a halt under the main entrance portico of the executive mansion. But before 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a chance to dismount, a White House aide rushed out from the executive offices to make President Taft's apologies. He had been campaigning in Boston this week in advance of the Massachusetts Republican Primary, which was coming up on Tuesday. But he had only arrived back in Washington at 4 a.m. this morning and would have to leave again for New England on the 6:35 p.m. train. Politics was an unpredictable business, and the President had to postpone.



'Abdu'l-Bahá on the front porch of the Parsons's home near Dupont Circle, Washington, DC. (Harris & Ewing)

As for addressing Congress, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the one who had to decline. He had to be in Chicago. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had invited him to give a major address to their Fourth Annual Conference on Tuesday, and he was scheduled to lay the cornerstone for a new Bahá'í temple in the village of Wilmette, Illinois, on Wednesday afternoon. He was leaving Washington by train tonight.

From the White House, the carriage drove south to the Ellipse, an oval-shaped park just beneath the White House's south lawn. Eleven years from now President Coolidge would start a new American tradition here by lighting the first National Christmas Tree. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mrs. Parsons, and Dr. Fareed took a walk through the American elms that ringed the oval roadway, and then drove back to her home at 18th and R Streets for lunch. After several more interviews and a few last minute visits, the horses trotted down Massachusetts Avenue and back to Union Station, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his party departed on the 5:25 p.m. train to Chicago.

DAY 18  
APRIL 28, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Likes Chicago More

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on April 28, 2012

LONG BEFORE ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ set eyes on Chicago, he had decided that this soot-covered city deserved a special place in his heart.

He left Washington from Union Station on Sunday, April 28 at 5:25 p.m., on a twenty-hour train ride along the B&O Railroad to the Windy City. He had spent seventeen days in two of America’s most impressive cities, yet he was heard to say that he “likes Chicago more.” The reason, it turned out, was quite simple. Discovering it requires us to take a trip back two decades into Chicago’s history.



The World’s Columbian Exposition in Jackson Park, Chicago, in 1893. In this view, the Statue of the Republic stands guard over the Great Basin, ringed by monumental buildings made from plaster of Paris. The iconic Administration Building rises in the distance. (Chicago History Museum)

The World’s Columbian Exposition, which opened its doors on May 1, 1893, had one aim: to outdo all previous World’s Fairs. It stretched along Chicago’s South Shore like a dazzling metropolis. Its centerpiece, the “White City,” was a grand cluster of Neoclassical buildings

covered with plaster of Paris and named for big ideas like Agriculture, Transportation, the Liberal Arts, even “Women.”

Thomas Alva Edison displayed a new invention that projected moving images onto a wall. Alexander Graham Bell sent voices over invisible light beams. A giant wheel, built by George Ferris, lifted riders higher than the Statue of Liberty. Then there were the light bulbs — over 90,000 of them. The electric age exploded into being when President Grover Cleveland stepped forward and pressed the button that set everything into motion.



George Ferris's "Observation Wheel" was installed to rival Henri Eiffel's new Parisian tower as a fair attraction. It rose to a height of 264 feet. (New York Times Photo Archive)

By the time the Exposition was over, the world saw America differently. Visitors had beheld American ingenuity, and witnessed a humbling display of its economic, diplomatic, and industrial might.

While the exhibition presented America to the world, it also presented the world to Americans. The raucous Midway Plaisance featured exhibits from a hundred countries, all arranged according to the ethnological stereotypes of the time. Africans populated the remote end of the mile-long boulevard. As the visitor approached the White City, indigenous peoples, then Asians, Middle Easterners, and finally Europeans popped into existence. At the center, near the South Pond, stood the most civilized displays of them all: statues of a Harvard boy and a Radcliffe girl. Julian Hawthorne of *Cosmopolitan* magazine commented at the time: “You have before you the civilized, the half-civilized and the savage worlds to choose from — or rather, to take one after the other.”



Alongside the Exposition were almost 300 conferences on topics such as commerce, medicine, philosophy, and history. One of them, the World's Parliament of Religions, was held offsite at the Art Institute of Chicago. Though many had felt it would be a risky proposition — people could be lured into thinking that Hinduism or Islam might have a modicum of truth — the Parliament forged ahead under a motto taken from the Old Testament: “Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?”



George Westinghouse employed Nikola Tesla's "Alternating Current" to beat out Thomas Edison for the contract to power the White City during the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. (Chicago History Museum)

On September 23, Reverend Henry Jessup, a Presbyterian missionary living in Syria, delivered a paper at the Parliament about his experiences in the Middle East. In it, he quoted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s father — the prophet Bahá’u’lláh. Reverend Jessup said that the words “gave utterance to sentiments so noble, so Christ like” that he would repeat them to conclude his address:

“That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bond of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religions should cease and differences of race be annulled. What harm is there in this? Yet so it shall be. These fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the Most Great Peace shall come . . . . Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”

Reverend Henry Jessup had introduced Americans to Bahá’u’lláh, and it happened in Chicago.

DAY 19  
APRIL 29, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## Next Stop . . . the Windy City

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on April 29, 2012

A COLD DANK TRAIN PLATFORM is a rather inhospitable greeting place for an elderly gentleman who has traveled halfway across the world to share a message of peace and universal brotherhood. The platform is quiet, except for the shuffling of shoes. But then the rumbling suddenly builds and a torrent of sound sweeps over all those who wait.



The waiting room at Chicago's Grand Central Station, July 1963. (Historic American Buildings Survey)

The waiting room at Chicago's Grand Central Station would be more comfortable, with its roaring fireplace and soaring columns, but no one seems to care. They want to see the train arrive. The mood is buoyant, not only among the fervent believers, but also among reporters assigned to sort out who this man is and what he hopes to achieve.

'Abdu'l-Bahá left the nation's capital yesterday afternoon on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the main artery linking Chicago to Washington. The train reaches across the Potomac River before chopping through the lush countryside of Virginia and Pennsylvania. After a short wait in Pittsburgh, it stops in Youngstown; Akron, Ohio; and Nappanee, Indiana, before pulling in along the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan.

The railroad built Chicago. It came here in 1848, the same year the canal opened to connect the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River. The rods of iron bequeathed to the city a commanding position in the nation's economy, and Chicago quickly became the largest rail hub in the world.

It also got dirty. Really dirty. Chicago's filth is famous among residents and visitors alike. Before entering the city's center, rail passengers traverse an expanse of smoldering factories, slaughterhouses, and endless mountains of coal.



The switch yards at Washington's Union Station, circa 1908-1910. (Detroit Publishing Company)

Yet something progressive sits at Chicago's heart. Abraham Lincoln was nominated here and went on to win the Presidency. The Great Fire of 1871 left 300,000 people homeless. But the city rebuilt at a spectacular rate, raising the world's first skyscraper, the Home Insurance Building, on the northeast corner of LaSalle and Adams Streets. Half a mile to the southwest, Jane Addams founded Hull House, a pioneering model for the emerging field of social work. At the turn of the century, as reformers began to change America politically and socially, Chicago took the lead.



Inside the train shed at Grand Central Station, Chicago.  
(Historic American Buildings Survey)

The clock at Grand Central Station reaches the noon hour. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who was expected at a quarter to ten this morning, still hasn’t arrived. The watchers remain on the platform, easing forward in anticipation each time a train thunders in, only to step back and resume their peering right and left along the endless lines of tracks that crisscross Chicago.

Like clockwork, their routine goes on all day.

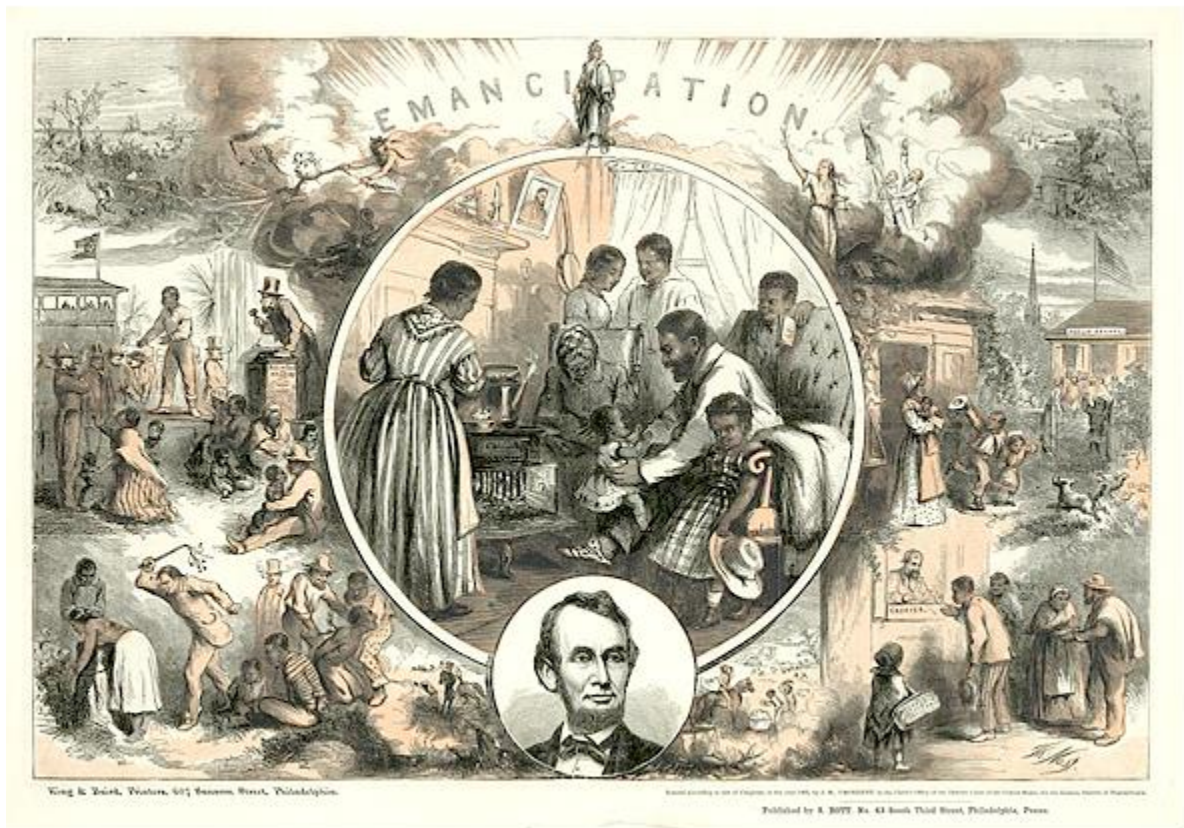
Then evening creeps in. The sun has set and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is nowhere to be found. A few remain on the platform, but the reporters have all gone home, or perhaps back to the office to face their editors without having gotten the story. One of them would find a clever solution to the conundrum by filing an article under the simple headline: “BAHAIST CHIEF MISSING!”

DAY 20  
APRIL 30, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## The Fallout from a City in Flames

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on April 30, 2012

THE RACE RIOT in Springfield, Illinois, on August 14, 1908, changed forever the public agenda for colored people in the United States of America. Beginning early in the evening, a mob of several thousand white Springfield citizens “proceeded hour after hour and on two days in succession to make deadly assaults on every Negro they could lay their hands on, to sack and plunder their houses and stores, and to burn and murder on favorable occasion.”



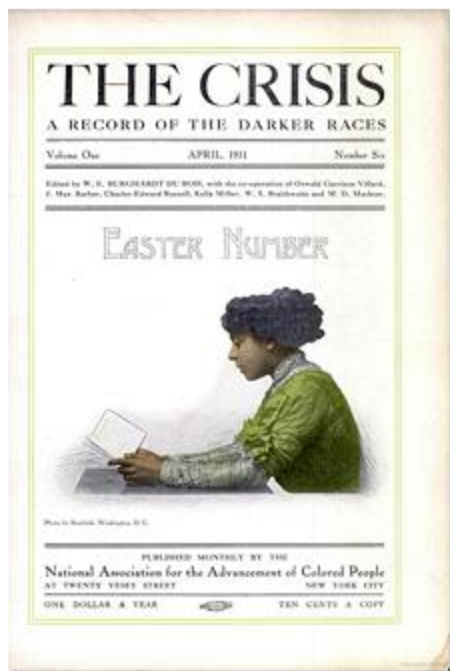
“Emancipation.” A wood engraving by illustrator Thomas Nast from 1865, celebrating the emancipation of Southern slaves at the end of the Civil War. (Library of Congress)

William English Walling, who wrote the account, and his wife arrived in Springfield the next morning. He registered his shock in an article in *The Independent* on September 3. “We at once discovered, to our amazement,” he wrote, “that Springfield had no shame. She stood for the action of the mob. . . . I talked to many of them the day after the massacre and found no



difference of opinion in the question, ‘Why, the niggers came to think they were as good as we are!’ was the final justification offered, not once, but a dozen times.”

Before the Springfield Race Riot, most Americans had believed that large-scale race violence was a purely Southern phenomenon, confined to backwaters like Atlanta, or Wilmington, North Carolina. In fact, there had been several anti-black confrontations in the North, but the Springfield Riot shocked and disgraced the nation because it had occurred just four city blocks from Abraham Lincoln’s home. Springfield galvanized — at last — the national movement for Negro rights.



**The Crisis, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, was the official publication of the NAACP. This is the cover of the April 1911 issue. (Google Books)**

Soon Walling, who was a Socialist, and several white friends founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a nationwide, biracial organization that would fight to achieve African American civil rights for the next fifty years. Many years later, Walling shared his own version of this history: “I always date the real launching of the organization,” he wrote, “from the day we secured Dr. Du Bois.” W. E. B. Du Bois resigned his teaching position at Atlanta University to become the NAACP’s publicity director and editor of *The Crisis*, the organization’s official publication.

Three and a half years later, the NAACP invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to address their Fourth Annual Conference in Chicago. He spoke at the conference twice on Tuesday, April 30, 1912, once early in the afternoon at Hull House in South Chicago and then to the evening session at Handel Hall, at 40 East Randolph Street in the Loop neighborhood. Du Bois had named ‘Abdu’l-Bahá one of *The Crisis*’s “Men of the Month” for May.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá began his address at Handel Hall by quoting the Old Testament: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” “Let us find out,” he proposed, “just where and how he is the image and likeness of the Lord, and what is the standard or criterion whereby he can be measured.”

Then he asked a series of rhetorical questions: “If a man should possess wealth, can we call him an image and likeness of God? Or is human honor the criterion whereby he can be called the image of God? Or can we apply a color test as a criterion, and say such and such an one is colored a certain hue and he is therefore, in the image of God? Can we say, for example, that a man who is green in hue is an image of God?”



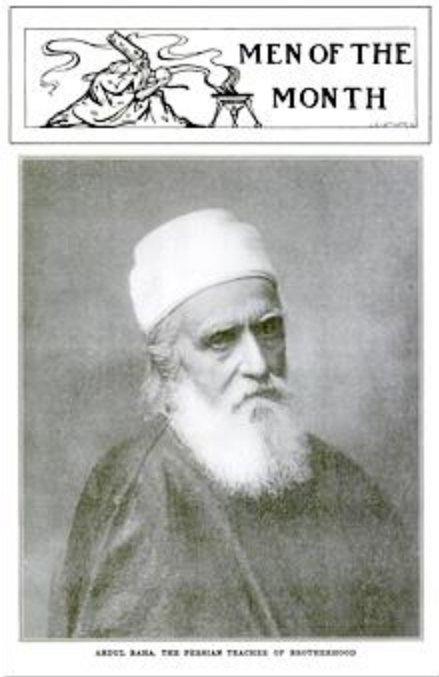
William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, Editor of *The Crisis*, 1918. (Library of Congress)

“Hence we come to the conclusion that colors are of no importance. Colors are accidental in nature. . . . Let him be blue in color, or white, or green, or brown, that matters not! Man is not to be pronounced man simply because of bodily attributes. Man is to be judged according to his intelligence and spirit. . . . That is the image of God.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded by once again conflating and neutralizing common uses of the imagery of black and white, [as he had done in Washington](#): “If man’s temperament be white, if his heart be white, let his outer skin be black; if his heart be black and his temperament be black, let him be blond, it is of no importance.” Color, in other words, had no effect on the content of a person’s character.

Almost immediately across the road from Handel Hall, at the Masonic Temple at 29 East Randolph Street, another convention was underway that evening. Fifty-eight delegates from

forty-three cities were about to elect nine members to the governing board of the Bahá'í Temple Unity, a national body formed to coordinate the largest project ever undertaken by the Bahá'ís in North America: the construction of an enormous house of worship north of Chicago. White fluted columns with capitals wrapped in acanthus leaves surrounded the delegates in Corinthian Hall as they cast their secret ballots.



'Abdu'l-Bahá was named "Man of the Month" in the May 1912 issue of *The Crisis*.  
(*The Crisis*)

After the first round of voting there was a tie for ninth place between Frederick Nutt, a white doctor from Chicago, and Louis Gregory, the black lawyer from Washington, DC. In a dramatic departure from the vicious 1912 Presidential election, which raged all around them, each man resigned in favor of the other.

Then Mr. Roy Wilhelm, a delegate from Ithaca, NY, stood and put forward a proposal. His motion, seconded by Dr. Homer S. Harper of Minneapolis, recommended that the convention accept Dr. Nutt's resignation.

The delegates assented unanimously.

To have elected an African American to the governing board of a national organization of largely middle- and upper-class white Americans — and to have done so at the nadir of the Jim Crow era in 1912 — was rare in the extreme. Even the NAACP had only elected one black member to its executive committee when it had been formed in 1909.



'Abdu'l-Bahá's assault on the color line was beginning to bear fruit.

DAY 21  
MAY 1, 1912  
WILMETTE, IL

## Breaking Ground at Grosse Point

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 1, 2012

THE SMALL GOLDEN TROWEL wasn't up to the task. The rocky ground at Grosse Point, fourteen miles north of Chicago, could not be breached. Someone scrambled for an axe. At the center of the expectant crowd, about three or four hundred strong, 'Abdu'l-Bahá waited.

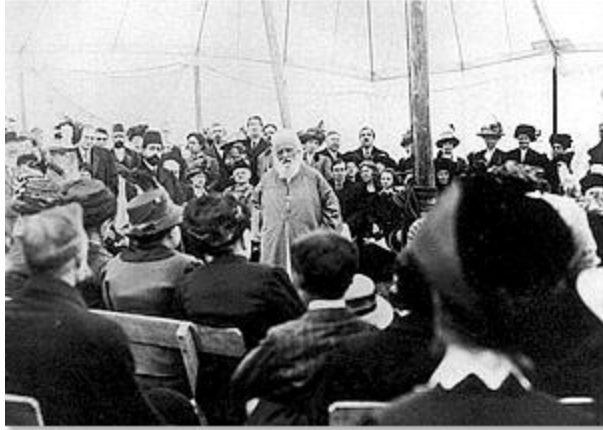


'Abdu'l-Bahá prepares to lay the cornerstone of the Bahá'í House of Worship at Grosse Point, Wilmette, IL, May 1, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Those who joined him at this groundbreaking ceremony for the new Bahá'í House of Worship came from a diversity of backgrounds one wouldn't expect to find in Chicago: Indian, African, Persian, French, Japanese, Native American, and more.

Early this morning, May 1, 1912, they had begun to assemble on this piece of land in the village of Wilmette. The Master had arrived at 1 p.m. First he took a private moment to console Mrs. Corinne True, whose son, Davis, had passed away the night before. Mrs. True had invested more

than five years of her life in finding a site for the temple, and in raising the funds necessary to buy the land. Today, in spite of her recent loss, she was here to see things through. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked under the large tent where three hundred people sat on chairs in concentric circles, between nine equally spaced aisles. He strode to the center and began to talk about this unique religious institution.



'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking under the tent at the dedication ceremony, Wilmette, IL.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Thousands,” he said, “will be built in the East and in the West.” But they were more than just places to pray. They would become the central edifices in a complex of institutions devoted to social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits. Together, they would offer a new model of faith dedicated to the service of humankind. They would become “one of the most vital institutions in the world.”

The temple’s design, by Louis Bourgeois, a French Canadian architect, spoke to its purpose. Circular, nine-sided, nine doors, a central dome. A skin made of quartz crystals embedded in white Portland cement, as delicate as lace, would cover its iron skeleton. Natural light would illumine it during the day, and at night it would become a beacon along the western shore of Lake Michigan. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described it as a model of unity: “that all religions, races and sects may come together within its universal shelter; that the proclamation of the oneness of mankind shall go forth from its open courts of holiness.”



**'Abdu'l-Bahá giving out handfuls of soil from the groundbreaking.**  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Then the crowd walked outside to break ground.

'Abdu'l-Bahá swung the axe high, then brought it down with purpose, piercing the earth with a thud. Corinne True suggested a woman should go next. Then others took their turns with a shovel, creating a small hole.

A small, crooked limestone block lay next to it. Nettie Tobin had found it discarded at a construction site in the city four years ago and had lugged it fourteen miles to the temple land. She didn't have anything else to offer. Those in attendance recalled the Book of Matthew, chapter 21, verse 44: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

'Abdu'l-Bahá reached down, scooped up handfuls of earth, and presented them to members of the crowd. Then he pushed the limestone block into the waiting hole, packed soil around it, and pounded the dirt down hard.

"The temple is already built," he said.



The Bahá'í House of Worship today, in Wilmette, IL. (Jonathan Menon)

DAY 22  
MAY 2, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## The Trials of Corinne Knight True

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 2, 2012

TODAY CORINNE TRUE buried her last surviving son. Just yesterday she had helped ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lay the cornerstone for a new temple in Wilmette. If ever a life reflected the human quandary about the nature and meaning of suffering, that life belonged to Corinne True.



Corinne Knight True (1861–1961). In spite of recurrent personal tragedies, she became the indispensable driving force in constructing the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, IL. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Corinne Knight True was born near Louisville, Kentucky, on November 1, 1861, seven months after the Civil War began. Her father, Moses Knight, was a Presbyterian minister. Her mother, Martha Duerson, was a Southern aristocrat who had inherited a plantation and some thirty slaves. When they married, Moses persuaded her to free the slaves. Nevertheless, he would side with his neighbors during the war – Moses was a proud Southerner.

After the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Moses moved his family to the city – he had invested in real estate there, a fortuitous move that soon made the family wealthy.

Corinne was the eldest child. Growing up, she was everything her father expected. As she entered her teenage years, he sent her to one of the finest finishing schools in the land. Then Corinne fell in love with the next door neighbor, a man who shared her father's name. While he respected young Moses True, he forbade his daughter to take the relationship any further. The problem? Moses True was a Yankee.



A group visiting the newly purchased land for the House of Worship in Wilmette. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Corinne simply could not understand her father's opposition. Would he deny her happiness simply because the man she loved came from the wrong part of the country? He sent her away to tame the love affair. It was then that Corinne did something rash – she got married in the municipal building of a small Indiana town with a stranger as a witness.

While Corinne's relationship with her father deteriorated, her marriage and family life flourished. Within ten years she and Moses had eight children. The family was tightly knit and successful. They built a life in Chicago and were active members in a Protestant church.

Then nine-year-old Harriet fell down the basement steps.

Corinne's marriage held together in the wake of her daughter's death, but her religious beliefs failed her. Shortly after the death of Harriet, she and her husband left their Protestant congregation and began seeking out new brands of Christianity. First they turned to Unity, a progressive Christian movement. Then it was Christian Science. Then Divine Science.

In 1899 diphtheria swept through Chicago. Several of the True children contracted it, including the baby, Nathanael. Doctors scrambled throughout the city trying to contain the disease, but there was no reliable cure.



On the first of May, Nathanael took his final breath.

Moses was comforted by Divine Science. But Corinne could not find the answers she was looking for. She pored over books on Creation and theology, and attended lectures by leaders of new philosophies and religious teachings. Mrs. True first learned about Bahá'u'lláh in late 1899. More than 700 Bahá'ís lived in Chicago. She accepted the faith almost immediately.

Then seven-year-old Kenneth passed away.

'Abdu'l-Bahá sent Corinne letters consoling her on the death of her boys. They were safe, he said, in the kingdom of God. She threw herself back into her religious work. But there was a problem. The city's Bahá'ís had two parallel organizing bodies, one for men and the other for women. While Corinne served on and off as president and secretary of the Women's Assembly of Teaching, she was dismayed. She wrote repeatedly to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, questioning her religion's commitment to the principle of the equality of the sexes.

In 1906, twenty-one-year-old Lawrence died in a sailing accident.



Delegates to the First Convention of the Bahá'í Temple Unity, March 20–23, 1909, photographed on the steps of Corinne True's home at 5338 Kenmore Avenue, Chicago. She stands in the middle of the back row.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)



Corinne arrived in Palestine to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on February 25, 1907. Four years earlier, the Bahá’ís had asked his permission to build a house of worship in Chicago. He agreed, but the project sat idle. Now, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Mrs. True exactly what to do. A few days later, when a delegation of three men from Chicago arrived to consult about the plan officially, they were more than a little bit surprised to find ‘Abdu’l-Bahá simply unwilling to discuss it. “When you return,” he told them, “consult with Mrs. True – I have given her complete instructions.” Somehow, the Master had entrusted the community’s defining enterprise to a woman.

At Mrs. True’s instigation, a new national body was created to coordinate the work of the temple. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made it clear that it must include women. It held its first convention in Chicago in March 1909. Delegates elected nine individuals to serve on the Executive Board of the Bahá’í Temple Unity. One of them was Corinne True.

Once again, she threw herself into the work even as her calamities mounted. Moses True died of a heart attack. Davis, her last surviving son, caught tuberculosis in 1910 and battled for nearly three years before passing away the night before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the temple’s cornerstone in Wilmette.

Today, on the morning of May 2, 1912, Corinne buried her son. In the late afternoon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked her to join him at the Plaza Hotel. There, the two of them sat gazing through the window that overlooked Lincoln Park. It was an improbable scene: an elderly Middle Eastern man and an upper class white woman. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá probably understood Corinne’s grief more than anyone else on this sad May morning, for not only did he also have children, but he, too, had lost all five of his young sons.



Corinne True, age 91 (right), with two of her daughters at the dedication of the completed House of Worship, Wilmette, IL, May 1, 1953. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Over the course of thirteen years 'Abdu'l-Bahá had shaped Corinne True's grief into purpose. He called her the "Mother of the Temple."

DAY 23

MAY 3, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## America Will Lead the World to Peace

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 3, 2012

THE PLAZA HOTEL in Chicago stands eight stories tall in heavy red brick. It's actually kind of boring. But the restraint ends there. Inside, it's a wedding cake. Heavy white columns with golden capitals hold up ceilings covered in intricate ornamentation. Red velvet seating sits atop rouge carpets. Rich red paisley dresses the mirrored walls. Everything appears to be frosted in gold.



While in Chicago, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed at the Plaza Hotel at 1553 North Clark Street, across from Lincoln Park. On May 3, 1912, he received visitors and spoke here in the parlor. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

On May 3, 1912, 'Abdul-Bahá met with visitors in the hotel's ballroom throughout the day. If he was impressed, he failed to comment. There were more urgent things at hand.

'Abdul-Bahá turned his attention once again to the war taking place in Libya. He painted an apocalyptic scene: "Observe what is taking place in Tripoli: men cutting each other into pieces, bombardment from the sea, attacks from the land and the hail of dynamite from the very heaven itself."

The subject of war and peace has occupied much of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s time. He has become a well-known voice in the international peace movement. In fact one of the reasons for his trip to America is to speak at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration on May 14.



Italian dirigibles bomb Turkish positions in Libyan territory during the Italo-Turkish war of 1911-12. It was the first war in which air attacks (carried out here by airships) determined the outcome. (Wikimedia)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá believes that the American nation is singly positioned to lead the world to peace: “Because I find the American nation so capable of achievement, and the American government the fairest of Western governments, its systems superior to others, my wish and hope is that the banner of peace may be raised first on this continent, that the standard of the Most Great Peace may here be unfurled.”

Though he arrived in America only a few weeks ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to have perceived something unique in the nation and its people. He has returned every few days to the theme of America’s great potential.

“I request that you strive and supplicate with heart and soul, devoting all your energies to this end, that the banner of International Peace in reality may be unfurled here, and that American Democracy may be the cause of the cessation of warfare in all other countries.”

During the next two weeks, ‘Abdul-Bahá will speak to various peace societies on the east coast, culminating in his major address at Lake Mohonk. At the Plaza Hotel today, he made the urgent plea to all those in attendance to unite in their efforts to spread peace, something he called “one of the greatest bestowals of God.”

*The Plaza Hotel, at 1553 North Clark Street in Chicago, was demolished in 1967.*



DAY 24  
MAY 4, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## Blame It On Religion

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 4, 2012

IT'S NOT BEEN A MONTH since 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived in America, yet he has succeeded in placing himself at the center of virtually all of the nation's raging debates. He has championed women's rights. He has challenged whites and blacks to work together. He has argued that, of all nations, America is uniquely capable of leading the world to peace.



'Abdu'l-Bahá poses with a group of parents and their children in Lincoln Park, on May 5, 1912.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

He is the unlikeliest of spokesmen: a sixty-eight-year-old Middle-Easterner, recently released from forty years captivity at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by an entourage of men wearing fezzes.

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has shown that he is entirely at home in America. He converses with ease in the company of scientists, philosophers, businessmen, politicians, and men of religion, whether Christian or Jew.

Racial equality. Social progress. International peace. For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá these matters are fundamentally *spiritual* in nature. Yet the faith he offers isn’t one of mystical contemplation, though there seems time for that too. As he noted at the temple’s cornerstone ceremony three days ago: spiritual devotion must be manifested in material action.



'Abdu'l-Bahá in Lincoln Park, Chicago  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'Abdu'l-Bahá argues that the urgent task of the modern world is to create a greater degree of unity in all spheres of human activity. He would concur with President Roosevelt that, "The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us." But this simple truth gets hidden by religious superstition and social

prejudice. Most of the blame, he says, lies at the feet of religion. He has often reminded his audiences that human beings generally worship their own creations.

What is the answer to this spiritual dilemma? Reason, says ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “It is most certain that if human souls exercise their respective reason and intelligence upon the divine questions, the power of God will dispel every difficulty, and the eternal realities will appear as one light, one truth, one love, one God . . . .”

America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, has a special sense of ingenuity. He has spent a lot of his time with its scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs, as well as those who strive practically for social reform. For him, this is God’s work.

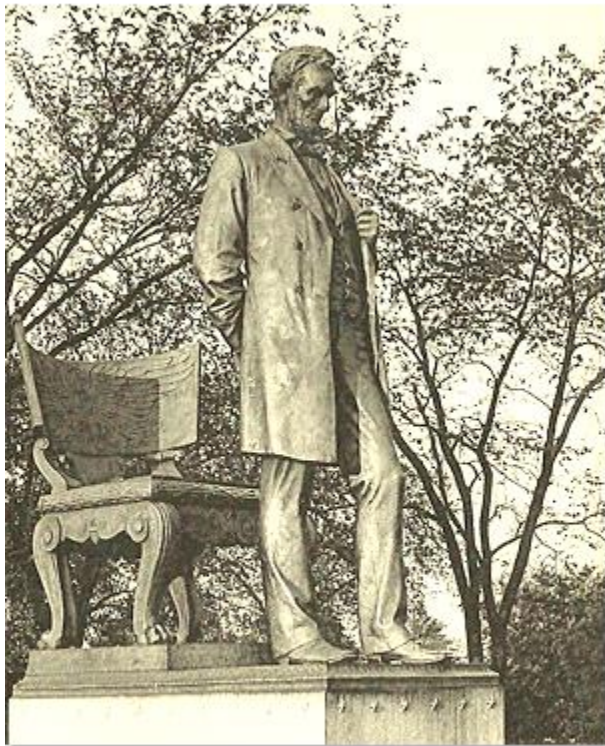


DAY 25  
MAY 5, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## The Master and the President

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 5, 2012

IF YOU'VE STOOD in front of the Lincoln Monument at the southern entrance to Chicago's Lincoln Park, you've caught something of the burden that must weigh on those called to change the world. The statue captures the President stepping forward to address the nation in the midst of the Civil War. His head hangs low and his eyes are weary.



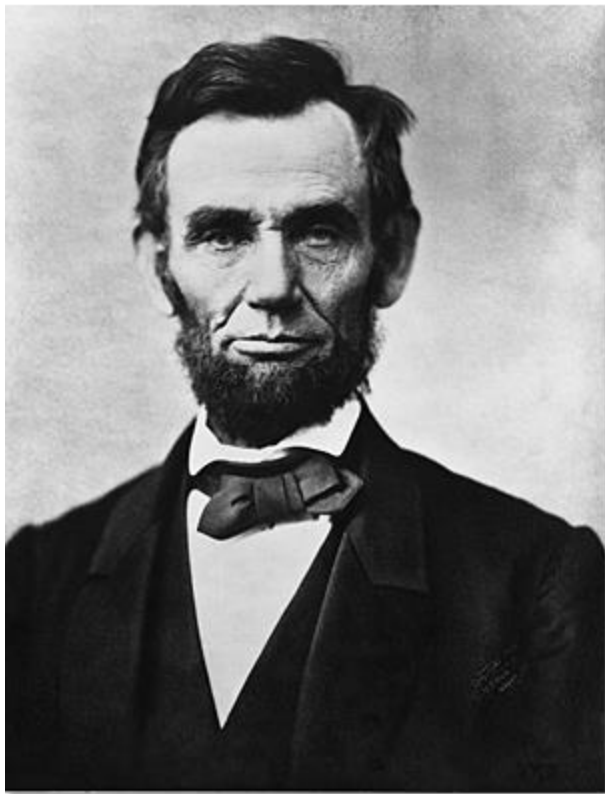
"Standing Lincoln," by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, from a postcard circa 1910. When raised in 1887 this statue, at the south end of Lincoln Park, Chicago, was regarded as the finest portrait statue in America. (chuckmanchicagonostalgia.wordpress.com)

On 'Abdu'l-Bahá's last day in Chicago — May 5, 1912 — he spent some time in the morning with children who had gathered at the Plaza Hotel, and walked with them into the park to be photographed. Then he said that he wanted to be alone. 'Abdu'l-Bahá left the group and paced down toward the entrance of Lincoln Park. There he stood gazing up at the sixteenth President cast in bronze.

President Abraham Lincoln was, by most accounts, a humble man of God. One of his aides wrote: “Benevolence and forgiveness were the very basis of his character.” Yet he had little time for religion. “He never uttered a prayer in public,” another aide said. “Yet prayers *for* him fastened our cause daily with golden chains around the feet of God.”

Lincoln, for his part, recalled the prayers his mother spoke to him as a child, noting in a poignant turn of phrase: “they have clung to me all my life.” His gift for words drove his political career, even as his unwavering moral compass set him apart from his chosen profession.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” So Lincoln declared to the 1858 Republican State Convention, in his hometown of Springfield, Illinois. He had borrowed Jesus’s statement from the Book of Matthew to stake out his position on the expansion of slavery in the United States. “I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*.” He saw things with a simple, profound clarity that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá found missing in many of those who spoke from a podium or a pulpit.



Alexander Gardner's "Gettysburg Portrait" of the 16th president, taken on November 8, 1863, two weeks before Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. (Library of Congress)

Within two years Lincoln secured the Republican Presidential nomination here in Chicago, and went on to win the critical election of 1860. Seven southern states seceded from the Union before he could even take office. Just five

years after that, America, with Lincoln at her helm, had traversed the greatest political, military, and moral crisis in its history.

Yesterday, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Oak Woods Cemetery on Chicago’s South Side, to pray over the grave of Corinne True’s son, Davis. No doubt he would have paused to note the nearly 4,500 Confederate soldiers buried there beneath a towering monument. They had died as prisoners of war at Chicago’s Camp Douglas.

Today, a few hours after his quiet moment alone with the President, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to the congregation of All Souls Church. In 1905, the church, which didn’t have a building of its own, constructed the Abraham Lincoln Center, a settlement house serving “the advancement of the physical, intellectual, social, civic, moral and religious interests of humanity, irrespective of age, sex, creed, race, [or] condition of political opinion.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded his speech at All Souls with a prayer. It was about unity:

“O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household . . . . O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home.”



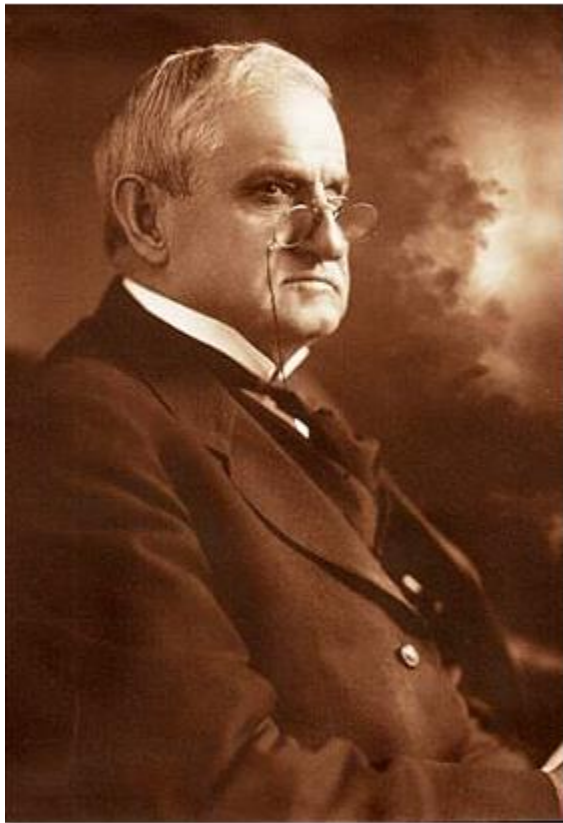
'Abdu'l-Bahá, the figure in white at the bottom left of the picture, spends a minute alone with the statue of Abraham Lincoln in Lincoln Park, Chicago, on the morning of May 5, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

DAY 26  
MAY 6, 1912  
CLEVELAND, OH

## The Ultimate Taboo

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 6, 2012

NO ASPECT OF SOCIAL EQUALITY THREATENED the sensibilities of both white and black Americans in 1912 more than the prospect of sexual union between the races. “I have three daughters,” ‘Pitchfork’ Ben Tillman declared on the floor of the US Senate in 1907, “but so help me God, I had rather find either one of them killed by a tiger or a bear and gather up her bones and bury them . . . than to have her crawl to me and tell me the horrid story that she had been robbed of the jewel of her womanhood by a black fiend.”



Benjamin Tillman, Democratic Senator from South Carolina. (Edgefield County Historical Society)

Racist brands of Christian theology added to the terror among whites: Charles Carroll argued that Africans “were not of the human family,” but rather the beasts that had fornicicated with Cain, thereby causing sin to flood the world.

The intimate connection between social equality and sexual fear in American minds emerges in Southern responses to Booker T. Washington's 1901 dinner engagement at the White House. "Eating at the same table," read a letter to the editor of the *Jacksonville Metropolis*, "means social equality. Social equality means free right of inter-marriage, and inter-marriage means the degradation of the white race. When the white race yields social equality with the negro it has defied the laws of God, and he will sweep them from the earth."

Race amalgamation would also bring *social chaos*. "All mixed races," wrote E. H. Randle in 1910, "are inherently violent, incoherent, incapable of national government, revolutionary, and are as the downgrade of civilization."

More forward-thinking Christian reformers, who believed in the essential unity of humanity and the danger of segregation, couldn't bring themselves to sanction interracial unions either.

Thomas Underwood Dudley, the Episcopal Bishop of Kentucky, had believed that American blacks and whites were "the descendants of one father, the redeemed children of one God, the citizens of one nation, neighbors with common interests." He had envisioned the day when "the red man, the yellow, the white, and the black may all have ceased to exist as such, and in America be found the race combining the bloods of them all." But he was careful to note: "it must be centuries hence." In the meantime, "Instinct and reason, history and philosophy, science and revelation, all alike cry out against the degradation of the race by the free commingling of the tribe which is highest with that which is lowest in the scale of development."



Frederick Douglass with his wife, Helen Pitts Douglass, seated. (Frederick Douglass National Historic Site)

African Americans — whenever they didn't share the same potent feelings — usually opposed interracial marriage on the grounds of racial pride and solidarity. The response of black leaders can best be described as conflicted. The issue carried serious consequences for their civil rights struggle, because even addressing it was certain to chase away virtually all their white supporters. Frederick Douglass married a white woman in 1884, but in his autobiography he sidestepped interracial marriage as an issue by taking the most far-fetched and ambiguous position imaginable: “If it comes at all, it will come without shock or noise or violence of any kind, and only in the fullness of time, and it will be so adjusted to surrounding conditions as hardly to be observed. I would not be understood as advocating intermarriage between the two races.”

Even W. E. B. Du Bois seemed unable to come to terms with the issue. He and other black leaders found themselves helplessly embroiled in a moral catch-22. If they supported interracial marriage they risked lynchings and racial violence by whites. But if they failed to campaign for its legality they exposed black women to sexual violence. White men had used their social power to take advantage of black women for centuries, while polite society quietly looked the other way.

When Du Bois's editorial in *The Crisis* in February, 1913, appeared to argue for interracial marriage, the white female members of the NAACP's leadership revolted. By 1920 he had



changed gears: “It is not socially expedient today for such marriages to take place; the reasons are evident: where there are great differences of ideal, culture, taste and public esteem, the intermarriage of groups is unwise, because it involves too great a strain to evolve a compatible, agreeable family life and to train up proper children.”



The lobby of the Hotel Euclid, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stayed overnight in Cleveland, from a postcard circa 1919. (Sourced from eBay)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived at Cleveland’s Union Station on the New York Central train from Chicago at 4:20 p.m. on May 7, 1912. During the past two weeks, Americans had learned of his battle against the ideologies of racial prejudice from major Washington newspapers and the *Chicago Defender*. But hardly anyone, whether black or white, had any inkling of just how far ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was willing to go.

Reporters and visitors followed him up to his rooms after his evening talk to 200 people at the Hotel Euclid. To an African-American clergyman and a group of about twenty white women sitting in a circle, he broached the most dangerous of all subjects. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, one of Ohio’s biggest newspapers, reported it unvarnished the next morning:



## **BAHAIST APPROVES UNIONS OF RACES**

**Persian Teacher Tells Cleve-  
land Women Intermar-  
riage Results Ideal.**

**One Negro Bishop Hears  
Plea for Amalgamation  
With Whites.**

Newspaper headline in the Cleveland  
Plain Dealer, May 7, 1912.

(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“Abdul Baha . . . declared last night for an amalgamation of the white and negro races by intermarriage.” What ‘Abdu’l-Bahá advocated was illegal in twenty-nine of the forty-eight states — but not in Ohio.

At Howard University in Washington, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had turned the tables on America’s entrenched language of race by recasting racial differences as a source of beauty. In Chicago at the NAACP conference he had used rhetorical questions to uncover the absurdity of color discrimination. Tonight in Cleveland, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took aim at the myth of mixed-race degradation.

“Perfect results follow the marriage of black and white races,” he said.

And he had evidence. A Negro woman had worked for his own family in Persia. “She married a white man,” he explained, “and her children married white men. These children are now in my household. The results of the union were beautiful. They were wonderful — perfect.”

On the issue of race, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had employed novel arguments before, but each time he had followed them up with action. After his talk at Howard he had made a point of overturning Washington protocol by bringing a black man to the table. In Chicago, his speech at Handel Hall synchronized with a group of white delegates from forty-three cities electing a Negro to their Executive Committee.

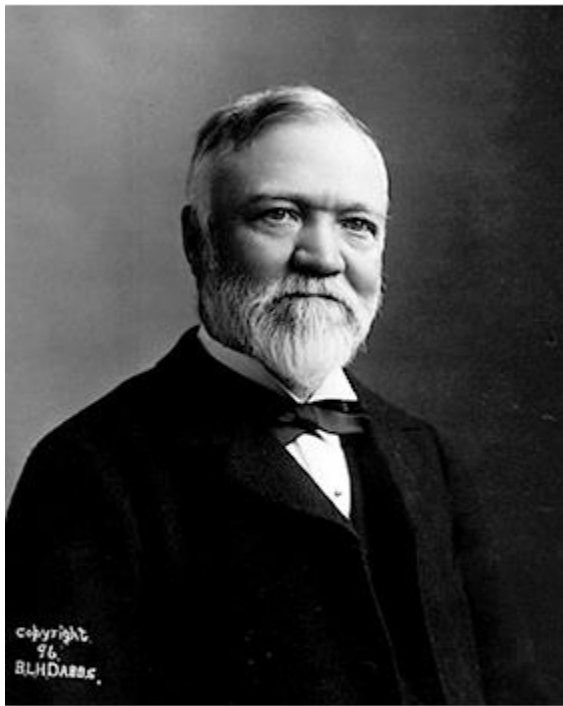
When it came to the ultimate taboo — interracial marriage — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wasn’t finished yet.

DAY 27  
MAY 7, 1912  
PITTSBURGH, PA

## “One of the Deep and Vital Problems of Society”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 7, 2012

THE POSH HOTEL SCHENLEY rises ten storeys high in red brick, on top of a green hill surrounded by trees on the outskirts of Pittsburgh. The founders of US Steel met here to concoct the largest corporation in American history. It's where the famous “Meal of Millionaires” took place in 1901: eighty-nine of them assembled in a single room.



Portrait of Andrew Carnegie by B. L. H. Dabbs in 1896.  
He was the largest producer of steel in the world.  
(Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of the “signs of prosperity everywhere” in America. They surround him at the Schenley. In 1901, J. P. Morgan bought Carnegie Steel from Pittsburgh’s most famous immigrant for \$492,000,000. It made Andrew Carnegie the richest man in the world.

But, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when spiritual and material civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured.”

As usual, his friends picked the Schenley for him to stay in before he arrived in Pittsburgh. Glossy marble pillars surround the impressive skyscraper. Chandeliers hang from its upstretched ceilings like clusters of diamond berries. Perhaps ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s friends, knowing his history as an exile and prisoner, wanted him to enjoy luxury for a change.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in Pittsburgh today — May 7, 1912 — his friends kept asking him if he liked his rooms. Each time he was asked he repeated “Very good! Very good!” But when they left he turned to one of his Persian travel companions, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, and said, “The friends are anxious to know if I like these rooms! They do not know what we had to go through in the past.” He recounted the time he spent in ‘Akká, where his family was forced to occupy a single prison cell with several other families for two years. He was unable to prevent the deaths of many of the prisoners from illness.



A five percent US Steel Corporation bond for \$100,000 issued to Andrew Carnegie on June 14, 1901, as part of his sale of Carnegie Steel to J. P. Morgan, which made him the richest man on earth. ([www.liveauctioneers.com](http://www.liveauctioneers.com))

At the Schenley Hotel, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called for justice in all economic affairs. He said: “The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been both extremely wealthy and extremely poor. As a child, his family was one of the wealthiest in Persia, and he lived in lavish luxury. But when he was eight years old, they were suddenly stripped of their wealth, lands, and houses, because of their religious beliefs, and left homeless overnight. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mother, Asiyih, would pull the gold buttons off her clothes and sell them in order to feed her children. Once, all she could offer her eldest son to eat was a handful of flour.



A family living in a tenement in New York, photograph by Lewis Hine. Tenements built before 1901 were only required by law to have one window, or a single ventilation shaft. (ephemeralnewyork.com)

So when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá talks about the moral implications of an unjust economic order, he speaks from experience on both sides of the tracks.

“It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government,” he said, “the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This drastic inequality is “one of the deep and vital problems of society.”

The solution? “The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions.” But, he says, “The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so.”

By combining these approaches — uncoerced generosity by the rich and laws that prevent economic extremes — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells his audience: “The composure of the world will be assured.”

DAY 28  
MAY 8, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## Juliet Thompson's Inside View

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 7, 2012

THE YOUNG JAPANESE CHERRY TREES on the northern shore of the Tidal Basin bloomed in coral pink. Washington in spring is a treat to the eyes of a painter. Juliet Thompson was born nearby, and although she has lived in Paris and New York she has returned — not to paint it, but to follow ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



Japanese cherry trees bloom along the north shore of the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park. The first trees were given to the United States by Japan in 1912, and planted here by First Lady Helen Taft and Viscountess Chinda, the wife of the Japanese Ambassador, on March 27, 1912, just a few days before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in America. (Flickr.com)

She met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the first time in ‘Akká in 1909, then was drawn to Thonon-les-Bains, France, when he was there in 1911, and now back to Washington. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá holds Juliet in high regard, not for her skill as a painter, (when she was 24, the New York Times called her “one of the most promising young artists of the day”), but for her sincerity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observed of her: “Everybody is your friend.”



In Washington, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met daily with crowds in Agnes Parsons’s ballroom. Juliet described its features in her diary: its “unusually high mantel,” “delicately carved with garlands,” and its windows, hung with “thin silk curtains the colour of jonquil leaves.” Juliet has many connections in Washington. In future years she will even paint a portrait of Mrs. Coolidge, one of the most popular First Ladies.



Juliet Thompson with her portrait of First Lady Grace Coolidge, on February 8, 1927. (Library of Congress)

On the morning of Saturday, April 27th, Lee McClung had breakfast with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This was the day before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was to meet President Taft at the White House. McClung had been one of Juliet’s idols when she was a young girl. He was a football star in his college days, the epitome of popularity. Now he charmed another field, as the twenty-second Treasurer of the United States of America.

Only a year earlier McClung had poked fun at her for her “conversion to Baháism.” He said it made him “laugh out of one eye and cry out of the other.” He was not as old as Juliet remembered him: he was still just thirty-eight.

Cutlery clinked against plates, and Juliet waited for a chance to ask her old friend what he thought of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Finally, once breakfast was away, she pulled McClung aside. Rather than play catch-up, she got to the heart of the matter and asked him, “How did you feel when you saw the Master?” A shy look came over McClung’s face — a rarity for a man unabashed to be the object of a crowd’s cheers. He took a moment to sort out his thoughts: “Well, I felt as though



I were in the presence of one of the great old Prophets: Elijah, Isaiah, Moses. No, it was more than that! Christ . . . no, *now* I have it. He seemed to me my Divine Father.”



Lee McClung, the athletic Treasurer of the United States, getting in a game of tennis in 1911. (Harris & Ewing)

Just yesterday, May 7, 1912, Juliet started to write her account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first trip to Washington. Her diary will become one of the most important historical sources about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey across America.

DAY 29  
MAY 9, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## It's Not All Sunshine and Roses

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 9, 2012

THE AMERICAN PRESS has been kind to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Dozens of articles in newspapers across the country have reported his progressive views on women's rights, international arbitration, his concept of a spiritual civilization, and his surprising position on the race issue.

But for some it's just too good to be true.



'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking at Rev. Milburn's Plymouth Congregational Church at 935 East Fiftieth Street in Chicago on May 5, 1912. Rev. Milburn, who had planned to travel to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká before learning he would soon be in the United States, stands listening with his left arm resting on his podium. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

On April 12, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's second day in America, a generous but skeptical op-ed columnist wrote as much in the *Oakland Enquirer*. "It is admitted that Abdul Baha is a man of deep

learning and thought,” he agreed, “but he will be a wonderfully old man if he lives to see the adoption of one tongue, one religion, one line of education, one code of morals, one method of work and one government.”

“We will be glad to see Abdul, but we feel that he is due to return to his Persian [sic] home a deeply disappointed advocate of advanced social, economic, educational, political and religious ideas.”

Two days later, the fiery Reverend Dr. Percy Stickney Grant seated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the chair reserved for the Bishop at the Church of the Ascension, on Fifth Avenue and 10th Street in Manhattan. It caused a sensation in church circles, because the Nineteenth Canon of the Episcopal Church prohibited any unbaptized person from sitting behind the altar rail. The next day the Bishop came to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Hotel Ansonia to apologize for the kerfuffle.



John Gardner Murray, Episcopal Bishop of Maryland. (rootsweb.ancestry.com)

But on April 27, the Bishop of Maryland, John Gardner Murray, banned ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Episcopalian churches throughout his state. “Abdul Baha does not profess to be a Christian,” the official Episcopal organ, *The Churchman*, printed. “What right[t], then, has he to preach in a Christian church? Still further, what right has the rector of one of our parishes to commit his people to the religious instruction of a teacher who does not believe in the Christian religion?” That was an inaccurate description of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s position on Christianity, but a useful one.

Other churches in Washington also objected to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The *Washington Post* reported on April 29 that Methodists were praying for him — that he would see the light and go home. The Rev. Dr. James Montgomery told his congregation at the Metropolitan Memorial M. E. Church that he wished that “some of those who have listened to Abdul’s lectures would take the role of

teacher themselves, and convert to Christ this remarkable priest of the ‘universal cult.’ ” While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was “doubtless sincere,” he said, he hoped that becoming a Christian would enable him to “return to his Eastern home a greater man.”



**St. Thomas's Parish Church, near Dupont Circle, Washington, DC, in 1910. The church burned down in the 1970s. (Library of Congress)**

Just four days ago, Dr. Ernest C. Smith reminded his congregation at St. Thomas's Church, near Dupont Circle, that “*By their fruits ye shall know them.*” Nothing good could possibly come out of Persia, he believed, but the bigger problem was that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá raised other religions to the same status as the one taught by Jesus Christ, “whom we dare not compare.” “Because of these things,” Smith said, “the only Godspeed we can bid him is a Godspeed back to his own country.”

In spite of these reports, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá doesn't seem at all perturbed by the negative press. He told one friend that he doesn't worry about criticism. “The denunciation by the leaders of religion,” he said, “is a proof of the greatness and influence of the Cause because no one pays any attention to something insignificant.”

DAY 30  
MAY 10, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## The Amazing and Versatile Barneys of Washington

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 10, 2012

THERE ARE THREE TOPICS you ought not bring up at the dinner table: religion, politics, and Washington's Barney family. But according to an article that appeared in a Sunday edition of the New York Times in 1910, if your party of "smart set gatherers" starts to die down, dropping the Barney bombshell into the conversation might not be such a bad idea.



Photographic portrait of Alice Pike Barney by Frances Benjamin Johnston. (Library of Congress)

Everybody has an opinion on the oddball Barneys, and especially of Alice Pike Barney, the wealthy American artist who recently returned from living in Paris, where she was a student of James McNeill Whistler.

"They are poseurs," somebody will say, "learned only in the stale devices of studied eccentricity!" Others laud the Barneys' tendency to reject the mainstream: "It is genius scorning the narrow conventionalities of society."

Alice Barney has committed herself to the arts, and is known as a painter, writer, theatre director, and philanthropist. When she was seventeen the explorer Henry Morton Stanley proposed marriage to her, but then he went off to Africa to find Dr. Livingstone ("Dr. Livingstone, I presume?") and Alice decided to marry Albert Clifford Barney instead, a wealthy banker and manufacturer of railway cars from Dayton, Ohio. But he died of a heart attack in 1902, leaving Alice and her two daughters free to pursue their artistic interests unencumbered.

Two years back, the Barney women attracted national press attention after they placed a nude statue shipped from Paris in front of their house in Sheridan Circle. Washington's chief of police eventually ordered it covered with a sheet.



Inside Alice Barney's "Studio House" circa 1909. The building, at 1219 Connecticut Avenue in Sheridan Circle, housed her many artistic treasures, designer furniture, and her own portrait paintings. (Library of Congress)

On 'Abdu'l-Bahá's second day in Washington he spoke to a group of children who visit Alice's "Studio House" every weekend for Sunday classes. She had designed it years before, to showcase artifacts she had collected during her travels. Its Spanish Mission façade jumps out, in true Barney fashion, from the Beaux Arts style of the surrounding buildings. Tiger and bear pelts, mouths agape, are spread on the tiled floor. The columns in the first floor reception room bear bunches of carved grapes; the textures and colors of the fabrics are a feast for little hands and eyes. But perhaps the most surprising detail is what the house lacks: neither a bed nor a closet can be found in it.

But although the press knows Mrs. Barney primarily for her bizarre tastes, the Times also writes about her "deep sympathy with human kind." The Studio House is not the only building in which Mrs. Barney has crystallized her ideals. Today, on May 10, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá will visit a

settlement house that she established in 1901. The settlement movement in America aimed to improve the lives of the urban poor. It is here that Alice Barney applies her many talents, teaching sculpture, theatre, painting, and other arts to assist Washington's less fortunate.



Children listening to a story at Alice Pike Barney's Settlement House in Washington, DC, circa 1912. (Harris & Ewing)

A century later, the Barney Settlement House still serves the citizens of DC: [www.barneynh.org](http://www.barneynh.org)



DAY 31  
MAY 11, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Everything in America Is “All Right!”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 11, 2012

THE FINAL LEG of the voyage that carries the Hudson River to the sea walks a tightrope between the New Jersey shoreline on its right and the island peninsula of Manhattan on its left. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat in a chair by the window of his apartment on Riverside Drive, and looked out across the water to the rising cliffs of the New Jersey Palisades, which formed a canyon along the opposite shore. He returned to New York today, the city that first greeted him upon his arrival to America. His friends had filled his rooms with flowers.



Looking north along Riverside Drive in Manhattan from 72nd Street. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s apartment is around the bend in the cliff at 95th Street. (Library of Congress)

The Hudson Apartment House was at 227 Riverside Drive, a boulevard on the western side of Manhattan that runs along the river from 72nd Street to north of Harlem, where it finally turns inland. It is a relatively quiet, upper class neighborhood with a strip of park that slopes dramatically to the water below. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s friends will call this park “His garden,” because he will return to it again and again.

Over the next two days ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is going to speak to a number of peace societies in the New York area, after which he will travel upstate to deliver the opening talk at the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration. It takes place every year at a lake resort about ninety miles north of the city, nestled among the mountains. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated that attending this conference is one of the primary reasons for his visit to America.

The reflective atmosphere of the apartment has now been shattered by the arrival of guests. Questions pour in. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá admits that he has “had no rest by day or night,” since his departure, and has been “either traveling, moving about or speaking.” However, “it was all so pleasantly done,” and he has been “most happy.”

## PROPHET PUTS HIS O. K. ON ‘ALL RIGHT’

Persian Declares American Op-  
timism Is Summed Up in  
Those Words.

MONTCLAIR, N. J., May 13.—Abdul Baha, Persian prophet of world-peace, who is now in this city, declares in an interview published here today that he has found the keynote expression of American optimism.

An article snippet about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá printed in the Oakland, CA, Tribune on May 13, 1912. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s flat is on one of the top floors of the building. Tomorrow he will cross the river once again for a day trip to Montclair, New Jersey. Now that he has spent a month in America, his impression of us is forming. We have been “kind and pleasant,” “polite,” and “inquisitive,” he says. He finds us energetic, progressive, and full of potential.

As his audience looks on, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells the story of an American man he met who disagreed with his position that religion is a cause of unity. Yet the man changed his mind after hearing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument, declaring: “All right!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeats it over and over — “All right! All right!” — sending a ripple of laughter through the audience.

“Wherever you go you hear it,” he later observed. “You ask the bell boy at the hotel to do something and he responds, ‘All right’; you inquire as to the health of a friend and he answers, ‘All right’; everything is ‘all right.’”

“I believe that it reflects the optimism of this great country.”

**DAY32**

**MAY 12, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **The Collapse of the Long Peace**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 12, 2012

NIKOLAY ALEXANDROVICH ROMANOV wrote a surprising letter. Or, rather, his Foreign Office did. Tsar Nicholas II, as he was better known, had already reigned in Russia for almost four years. It was August 24, 1898.



Tsar Nicholas II of Russia in 1898, about age 30, when he issued his "Rescript." (A. A. Pasetti)

“In the course of the last twenty years,” the letter read, “the longings for a general appeasement have become especially pronounced in the consciences of civilized nations.”

Then, out of the blue, it went on to attack the emerging arms race.

“The economic crises . . . and the continual danger which lies in this massing of war material, are transforming the armed peace of our days into a crushing burden, which the peoples have more and more difficulty in bearing.”

This was before Nicholas’s Imperial Guard would gun down 1,000 peaceful protestors outside the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, before the Black Sea Fleet would mutiny, before the Communists would toss him from his throne and slaughter his children alongside him.

Tsar Nicholas’s *Rescript*, as it came to be known, invited the Great Powers to a conference to address, once and for all, the problem of disarmament. He hoped that it would be, “by the help of God, a happy presage for the century which is about to open.”

The meeting began on a perfect spring morning, May 18, 1899 — which also happened to be the Tsar’s thirty-first birthday — at The Hague in the Netherlands. The city had spared no expense.

Flags from each of the participating nations flew from civic buildings and embassies, hotels and houses. Before half past nine the diplomatic quarter was abuzz with traffic.



A plenary session at the First Hague Peace Conference in 1899. (Google Books)

It all went downhill from there. The Tsar himself may have been sincere. But before long many of the plenipotentiaries began to suspect that the Russian government had only proposed the disarmament talks out of fear. Britain and Germany were arming rapidly, and Russia, preoccupied with expanding her sphere of control into the Far East, couldn't keep up, especially when it came to outfitting their army with rapid-fire artillery. The first Hague Peace Conference set in motion some important long-term trends, such as creating a court for the voluntary arbitration of international disputes — an idea that gathered major public support in America — but the disarmament talks went nowhere.

Then, just four years later, the Imperial Japanese Navy under Admiral Togo launched a surprise attack against Russia's Far East Fleet at Port Arthur, in Manchuria, three hours before making a declaration of war. The Tsar was stunned at such behavior, and sent armies across the Trans-Siberian Railway to reassert his power. The war raged on land and sea for more than a year, sending more than 150,000 men to their deaths. Finally, the unsung Japanese smashed Russia's mighty Baltic Fleet at the Tsushima Straits, south of Vladivostok, in the early morning hours of May 28, 1905.



A Japanese woodcut print by Getsuzo from 1904, celebrating the Japanese victory against the Russians at the Battle of Nanshan during the Russo-Japanese War: "In the Battle of Nanshan, Lieutenant Shibakawa Matasaburū Led His Men Holding up a Rising Sun War Fan." ("Throwing Off Asia," MIT Visualizing Cultures, ocw.mit.edu)

Shortly afterwards in 'Akká, a group of European visitors asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá if Russia could have avoided the calamitous war. Yes, they could have, he said. Russia's peace initiative at The Hague had generated substantial goodwill, but they had failed to leverage it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá took out a world map and described the Russian frontiers, the movements of the naval battle groups, and the roles of the ships in each, pointing out how Russia could have retreated while buying time to coordinate international pressure on Japan for a ceasefire. He then laid out for his visitors how a comprehensive peace plan could have been put in place.

The Second Hague Peace Conference convened at President Roosevelt's instigation in 1907. The International Council of Women submitted a petition signed by two million women from twenty countries, and American peace societies made their voices heard. But the Tsar, having survived the Revolution of 1905, was no longer interested in disarmament. The optimistic Americans were still small fish in the ocean of global power, and the conference failed again to address the critical questions.

But there's still room for optimism. The next Hague Conference is scheduled to take place two years from now. Let's hope 1914 brings better luck.



DAY 33  
MAY 13, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## One Spark Will Set Aflame the Whole World

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 13, 2012

Share<sup>57</sup>

“ON THE THIRTEENTH OF MAY,” Juliet Thompson writes, “a meeting of the Peace Conference took place at the Hotel Astor. It was an enormous meeting with thousands present. The Master was the Guest of Honour and the first speaker.” “The Master sat at the centre on the high stage, Dr Grant on his right, Rabbi Wise on His left.”



Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a co-founder of the NAACP, was one of America's leading Jewish thinkers. He campaigned for many Progressive causes. (Library of Congress)

Rabbi Stephen Samuel Wise was one of the most important Jewish intellectuals in America. He had co-founded the NAACP, was a major supporter of Zionism, and championed a Jewish brand of the Social Gospel. You already know Dr. Percy Stickney Grant. What you might not know is that Juliet was in love with him. Today was his birthday.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá began his talk by describing how Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh had all founded religions that welded together previously antagonistic groups. Religious teachings seem to disagree, he said, only because their followers cling to superstitions and imitate the past without understanding it. “Religion and reality are one and not multiple.”

He then took aim at the moral inconsistencies of public opinion when it came to the subject of war: “If a man kills another,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointedly remarked, “no matter what the cause may be, he is pronounced a murderer, imprisoned or executed; but the brutal oppressor who has slain one thousand is idolized as a hero, conqueror, or military genius.”

The issue of peace wasn’t just important: it was urgent. “Just now Europe is a battlefield of ammunition ready to spark,” he declared, “and one spark will set aflame the whole world.” He asked Americans to “take the step to prevent it,” then continued, “If other nations should attempt to do this, the motive would be misunderstood. . . . Your government has, strictly speaking, no colonies to protect.”

“Mere knowledge of principles is not sufficient,” he emphasized, “We all know and admit that justice is good, but there is need of volition and action to carry out and manifest it.”



The ballroom at the Hotel Astor on Times Square, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Rabbi Wise, and Rev. Percy Stickney Grant shared the stage on May 13, 1912. In this picture, a dinner at the Astor is held in honor of Robert Peary on March 5, 1910, whose expedition to the North Pole had taken place in April 1909. (Library of Congress)

Afterwards, Juliet wrote in her diary, “the Master shook hands with the whole audience, with every one of those thousands of people!”

“The Master was really too ill to have gone to this Conference,” she continued. “He had been in bed all morning, suffering from complete exhaustion, and had a high temperature. I was with Him all morning. While I was sitting beside Him I asked: “*Must* You go to the Hotel Astor when You are so ill?”

“I do not work by hygienic laws,” he replied. And then he laughed: “If I did I would get nothing done.”

DAY 34  
MAY 14, 1912  
NEW PALTZ, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Scales “The Gunks”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 14, 2012

THE TRAIN PUFFED black smoke through the towns north of New York City. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was on his way to the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in New Paltz, New York. A four-hour train ride would take him up the Hudson River into the countryside. Soon the view outside his window was wrapped in greenery. The peace conference is designed to be far from the hustle and bustle of urban life.



The Shawungunk Ridge from the Skytop cliff tower near the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, New York. The bedrock ridge, also called the Shawungunk Mountains or simply, “The Gunks,” runs from the New Jersey border north to the Catskill Mountains. The Hudson River Valley reaches into the distance on the left. (Jarek Tuszynski/Wikimedia)

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his party arrived at the station in New Paltz, a carriage waited to drive them the last seven miles to Lake Mohonk. For an hour they rode in the open air through the rising rocks and wooded hills of the Shawangunk Mountains — the locals call them “The Gunks.” Suddenly ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, exhilarated by the fresh wilderness around him, began to sing and told the others to join in. Dr. Fareed, his translator, couldn’t remember this ever having happened before.

Just then the red tips of the Lake Mohonk Mountain House became visible through the trees. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will stay in its magnificent, castle-like structure for the next three days. Albert Smiley, its owner, has hosted the peace conference each year since 1895. It takes place in a grand hall overlooking the lake, a room Mr. Smiley built especially for this purpose.

Anybody who’s anybody in the peace movement in North America is at the conference, including several Canadian leaders: Rabbi Joseph Silverman runs America’s leading Reform Judaism congregation at New York’s Temple Emanu-El; the Honorable William Lyon Mackenzie King was Canada’s Minister of Labor until last October when the Tories defeated his Liberal party in the Canadian Federal Election; John Lewis is the Editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*; Benjamin Franklin Trueblood is the famous Quaker who proposed a single world state in his 1899 book, *The Federation of the World*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá already knows some of the attendees, such as the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who hosted him at the Abraham Lincoln Center in Chicago nine days ago.



Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of Columbia University, opened the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference in the morning before 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke. (Library of Congress)

The conference got underway with a seemingly endless round of jubilant introductions. But the mood dampened when Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of Columbia University, took the podium and reflected on recent setbacks in the cause of peace:

“Many of us find ourselves troubled by doubts and harassed by disappointment,” he said. “Within sixty days after the Conference of 1911 . . . two of the greatest, most powerful and most enlightened nations known to history were widely believed to be on the verge of armed conflict.”

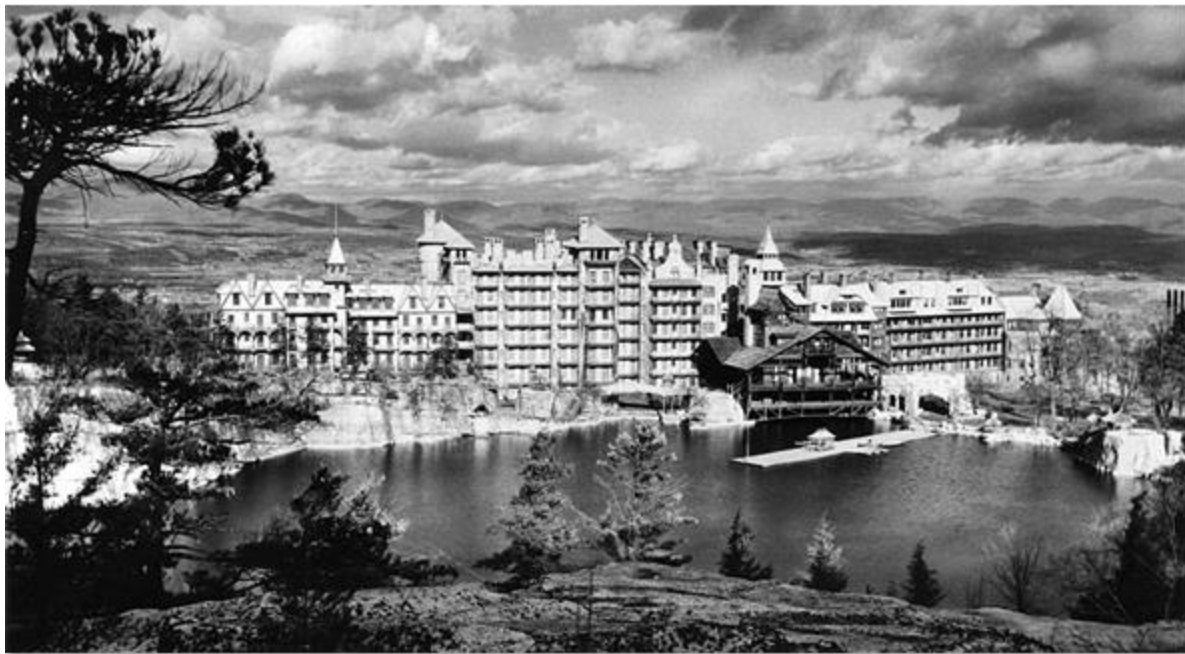
He was talking about the dispute between France and Germany over Morocco. France has taken control of the small nation, and Germany deployed a gunboat to the region to assert itself. Thankfully, conflict was avoided. Professor Butler commended the nations for refusing to take each other's bait, but tensions throughout Europe remain high.

In the evening, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood to deliver his twenty-minute talk on the “Oneness of the Reality of Humankind” to 250 people. He had traveled over 6,000 miles to be here. Almost



forty-five years ago his father, Bahá'u'lláh, had written from his prison cell to the world's major leaders. One of the things he presented to them was a comprehensive program for achieving lasting international peace. 'Abdu'l-Bahá now began to lay out, in matter-of-fact terms, eight principles that Bahá'u'lláh had defined as central to the enterprise.

The first had to do with religion. Many conflicts came down to disagreements over religious belief. But Bahá'u'lláh's point had been that if one investigated the fundamentals of the world's religions impartially, one would discover that they had an underlying unity. "It is incumbent on all nations," 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "to investigate truth."



In 1869 a visit to the region inspired Albert K. Smiley to build the Mohonk Mountain House on the rocky cliffs overlooking a crystal blue glacial lake in the Hudson River Valley. Named a National Historic Landmark in 1986, it remains in the hands of the Smiley family to this day. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

"The second principle of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of human kind. All humanity belongs to one family, inhabiting the same globe."

Third: "If a religious question be not in accordance with science, it is imagination."

Fourth: "If religion should be productive of strife and division, if it should cause bloodshed and war and rapine, irreligion is preferable to religion. Religion was meant to be a bond of love among mankind."

The fifth principle dealt with prejudice. "All the wars which have taken place since the inception of human history," 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "have emanated either from religious prejudice, racial

prejudice, patriotic bias or political greed and interest. As long as these prejudices last, so long will the foundations of humanity tremble.”

Sixth: “The difference which now exists between man and woman is only a difference of education. . . . Until perfect strength shall obtain in both, and woman shall attain equality with man, the happiness of humanity will not be insured.”



**Albert K. Smiley, founder of the Mohonk Mountain House and convenor of the Lake Mohonk Conferences. (A. K. Smiley Public Library)**

Seventh: “The rich now enjoy the greatest luxury, whereas the poor are in abject misery. Certain laws must be made whereby the rich cannot become over-rich and the poor shall not starve, both rich and poor enjoying the comforts according to their respective deserts.”

Finally, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whom many in the audience no doubt saw as a philosopher, questioned the ability of philosophy alone to generate lasting change. “Philosophy sufficeth not,” he said, “and is not conducive to the absolute happiness of mankind.” Great philosophers had proven capable of educating a few who followed them, but not the broad masses of mankind. “You



cannot make the susceptibilities of all humanity one except through the common channel of the Holy Spirit.”

After the applause, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked to continue. But he was far too tired and declined. Mr. Smiley stood and thanked him on behalf of the audience. Then Mrs. Smiley presented him with a pendant designed especially for the conference. Members of the audience streamed to the platform, and lined up to shake ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s hand.

Two weeks later, the Rev. Frederick Lynch of the Federal Council of Churches commented on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk at Lake Mohonk: “The address of the evening was full of this one thing, the unity of mankind. We are in this world, — one. When you get beneath the different languages, different nationalities, different races, different colors, different temperaments, after all, we are one.” It was, he said, “the most remarkable address I have ever listened to.”

DAY 35  
MAY 15, 1912  
NEW PALTZ, NY

## The Parliament of Rats

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 15, 2012

ONE MORNING AFTER his talk at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went walking with some friends near the Mountain House, where the conference was held. The group came upon a party of young people. After a few words of greeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said that he would recount a fable he had heard in the East.



An illustration for Jean de La Fontaine's fables by Gustave Doré, c. 1868 (Wikimedia)

Howard Colby Ives, a Unitarian minister from New Jersey, reported the occasion twenty-five years later in his book, *Portals to Freedom*. The fable ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told, which is often incorrectly attributed to Aesop, appeared for the first time during the Middle Ages. William Langland included a version of it in *Piers Plowman*, his allegorical narrative poem from the late fourteenth century, calling it “The Parliament of the Rats and Mice.”

Once upon a time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá narrated, the rats and mice held an important conference, the subject of which was to make peace with the cat. The cat, Langland wrote, "came whenever he liked and leapt on them easily and seized them at his will, and played with them perilously and batted them about."

"A rat of renown, most eloquent of speech," Langland continues, "presented an excellent remedy to them all. 'I have seen men in the city of London wearing bright necklaces around their necks, and some craftily worked collars. They go about unleashed both in warren and wasteland wherever they like, and elsewhere at other times, as I hear tell. Were there a bell on their necklace, by Jesus, it seems to me that men might know where they were and run away.' "

" 'And so,' " said the rat, " 'reason tells me to buy a bell of brass or bright silver and fasten it on a collar for our common good and hang it on the cat's neck; then we can hear whether he rides, rests, or roams about to play. If he wishes to amuse himself, then we can appear in his presence, and if he is angry, we can be wary and shun his way.' "



'Abdu'l-Bahá and his retinue on the lawn of the Mohonk Mountain House. (Swarthmore College Peace Collection)

This seemed like an excellent plan, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, until the question arose as to who should undertake the dangerous job of belling the cat. None of the rats liked the idea and the mice thought they were altogether too weak. So the conference broke up in confusion.

“Everyone laughed,” Ives tells, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá with them. After a short pause he added that that is much like these Peace Conferences. Many words, but no one is likely to approach the question of who will bell the Czar of Russia, the Emperor of Germany, the President of France and the Emperor of Japan.”

“Faces were now more grave,” Ives wrote.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá laughed again. “It is very easy to come here,” he concluded, “camp near this beautiful lake, on these charming hills, far away from everybody and deliver speeches on Universal Peace. These ideals should be spread and put in action over there, (Europe) not here in the world’s most peaceful corner.”

DAY 36

## The Amazing Race

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 16, 2012

THE GOOD DOCTOR leapt onto the caboose of the moving freight train, his hands gripping the steel pole attached to the carriage. Air whipped through his clothing and the trees blurred. Nobody believed he could do it. It was nine o'clock in the evening and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entourage was set to leave Lake Mohonk at ten o'clock the following morning. This gave Dr. Zia Bagdadi exactly thirteen hours to travel from Lake Mohonk to New York and back again.



Dr. Zia Bagdadi, a determined companion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'Abdu'l-Bahá kept several beautiful Persian carpets in his New York apartment. On the final evening of the Lake Mohonk Peace Conference he decided to make a gift of one of them to Mr. Albert Smiley, the conference's president. Only one thing stood in his way: one hundred and eighty miles. Still, 'Abdu'l-Bahá entrusted Dr. Bagdadi to the task.

With the keys to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s New York apartment on his person, Dr. Bagdadi held on tight. Straining to pull himself inside, he eventually secured a place for himself in the safety of the car.

Then . . . more trouble. A trainman spotted him, angrily protesting his stowing away. Once Dr. Bagdadi produced a business card with the credentials “Dr.,” the trainman relented, unaware that this doctor’s “urgent mission” involved delivering an oriental rug to a man named Smiley.

At two hours past midnight, Mrs. Grace Ober and her sister Ella Robarts, who minded ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s residence when he was away, woke up to the sound of a key turning in the lock, then the creaking of floorboards. They found Dr. Bagdadi, droopy-eyed, hastily rolling up one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s small carpets, then stealing away into the night.



**Albert K. Smiley standing in the sunshine, close to where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented him with the Persian carpet. The Mohonk Mountain House rises in the distance. (Mohonk Mountain House, [www.mohonk.com](http://www.mohonk.com))**

Dr. Bagdadi arrived at the Lake Mohonk train station with an hour to spare.

Yet he still had to get to the Mountain House. Three days earlier, this last leg of the journey was a glorious trip filled with song. Now it was a frantic race against time. The doctor’s eyes scanned for a vehicle. The wagon of a mail carrier caught his eye, and he begged the driver to take him the rest of the way.



Back at the Mountain House, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mr. Smiley were shaking hands and saying their goodbyes. Dr. Bagdadi came rushing up. It wasn’t so much the doctor’s disheveled appearance that shocked Mr. Smiley, nor even the gift of a Persian rug, but the gift of *this particular* Persian rug.

“Why this is just what I have been seeking for years!” Mr. Smiley exclaimed. “We had a Persian rug just like this one, but it was burned in a fire and ever since my wife has been broken-hearted about it.”

Mr. Smiley would bequeath the carpet to the Lake Mohonk Mountain House, where it remains to this day.



**The carpet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented to Albert Smiley, just as he was leaving the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration. It remains on display at the Mohonk Mountain House to this day. (Shahin Sobhani)**



DAY 37

MAY 17, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## On Earth as It Is in Heaven: The Social Gospel

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 17, 2012

“JESUS CHRIST gave his life upon the cross for the unity of mankind,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated on his second day in America. Most Christians might argue otherwise: Jesus gave his life for the forgiveness of sins, an act of atonement that assures our personal salvation. By placing an emphasis on social redemption over individual redemption, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá strayed from a millennium of church doctrine.



“Breaker boys in #9 Breaker, Hughestown Borough, Pa. Coal Co.” Photograph by Lewis Hine, January 1911. Breaker boys, between 8 and 12 years of age, would spend 12-hour days perched on wooden seats over coal chutes and conveyor belts, breaking coal rocks by hand, picking out slate and other impurities, and sorting them into uniform pieces. (Library of Congress)

Yet to his audience in Brooklyn that day, it was something of a rallying cry, a validation of their spiritual direction. Many who flocked to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks in cities such as New York and Chicago were aligned with an influential new Protestant movement. They had made the leap – a reorientation in their interpretation of the Gospel, focused on the regeneration of the social order.

Late nineteenth century America was in the throes a major shift. The mass exodus from the countryside to the city had reached critical mass. Cities in the north burst at the seams with the success of industrialization, but also felt its dark side. Tightly knit agricultural communities gave way to fragmented urban settings. In the city the church, the center of gravity in rural life, was often pushed aside.

Big-city Protestants, alarmed at the poverty, injustice, and suffering they witnessed, looked for a Christian response. But traditional theology just didn’t seem up to the task. They responded with the “Social Gospel.”



**Walter Rauschenbusch, leading thinker of the Social Gospel, whose 1907 book, “Christianity and the Social Crisis,” interpreted Christ’s purpose to have been the regeneration of the social order. (Georgetown College)**

“The individualistic gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart,” wrote Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist pastor serving in Hell’s Kitchen in Manhattan. “But it has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it.”

Rauschenbusch articulated a theological foundation for the new movement. He didn’t believe that Jesus, by dying, substituted his life for our sins. He understood that Christ died on the cross “to substitute love for selfishness as the basis of human society.”

The Social Gospel sought to establish, literally, Jesus's promise in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven." It was not simply about getting souls into heaven, but about transforming life to reflect heaven here on Earth. It meant solving social problems such as income disparity, child labor, poor schooling, and a host of other injustices.

Rauschenbusch set much of the blame for social ills at the feet of religion. He observed how the "Church" had gradually replaced Christ's "Kingdom." It was a theme 'Abdu'l-Bahá would return to often: over time, rituals, dogmas, and superstitions had created a man-made "imitation" of religion. For 'Abdu'l-Bahá, building the Kingdom meant building a just and unified global society.

On 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eighth day in America, he visited the homeless at the Bowery Mission. "We must be the servants of the poor," he said, "helpers of the poor, remember the sorrows of the poor, associate with them; for thereby we may inherit the Kingdom of heaven." That Sunday he had picked the Rev. Percy Stickney Grant's Church of the Ascension for his first American public address, a leading Social Gospel center in New York.



"The breaking point. A heavy load for an old woman. Lafayette Street below Astor Place." This photograph, taken by Lewis Hine in February 1912 for the National Child Labor Commission, depicts an old lady near Broadway in Lower Manhattan stooped by the weight of the pile of fabric she carries. (Library of Congress)

In Washington, he was unequivocal in his condemnation of the social conventions of race, a crucial issue for the Social Gospellers. In Chicago he laid the cornerstone for a unique religious institution – the Bahá'í House of Worship – that offered a new model of faith dedicated to the service of humankind. Then he had turned his attention to the cause of international peace, another vital component of the Social Gospel, addressing the International Peace Forum, the New York Peace Society, and the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration.

It was no wonder the Social Gospellers felt attracted to him.

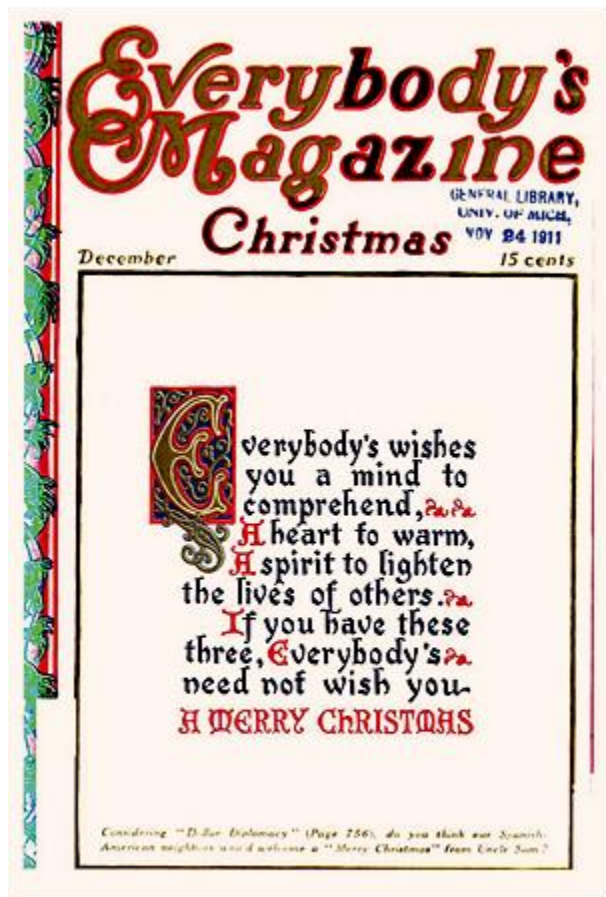
Now, just over a month after his arrival in America, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was preparing to speak at another unique institution inspired by the movement: the Brotherhood Church of Reverend Howard Colby Ives.

DAY 38

# The Truth for Which Men Ought to Die

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 18, 2012

IN THE CLOSING MONTHS OF 1911, Howard Colby Ives paused at a small book stall in Manhattan and looked upon the face of a man who would reorder the whole course of his life.



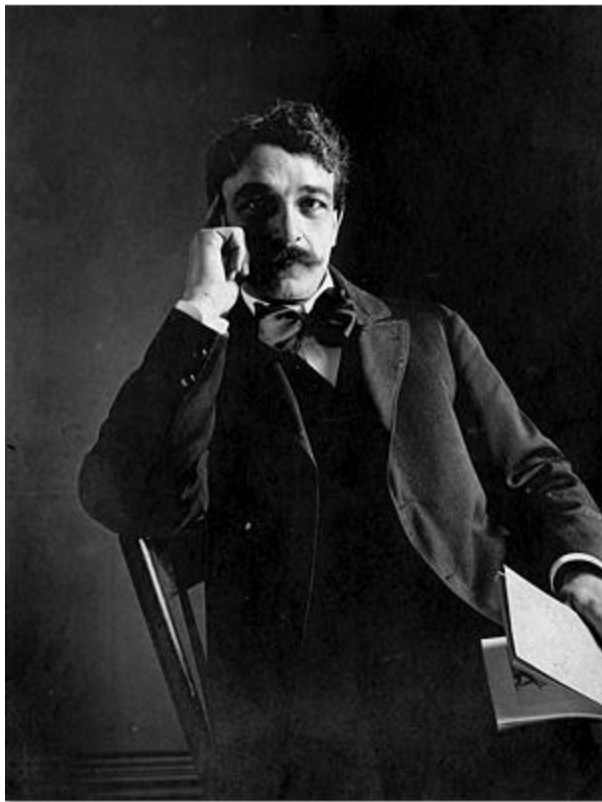
The December 1911 issue of *Everybody's Magazine*, which Howard Colby Ives saw on a newsstand in New York. (University of Michigan)

Ives was a Unitarian minister whose life had been a protracted, and often desperate, struggle for spiritual meaning. He was a voracious reader of weighty tomes on theology, philosophy, and social thought, but on this day he picked up the December issue of *Everybody's Magazine*. On page 775, amid leaves of advertisements for Waverly electric cars and AutoStrop safety razors, he read a story about the birth of a new religion.



“My life divides itself, in retrospect, sharply in two,” Ives later wrote. The years before he met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá he defined as “forty-six years of gestation.” His autobiography, *Portals to Freedom*, casts aside these nearly five decades in a few short paragraphs.

The article, “The Light in the Lantern” by Ethel Stefana Stevens, who had visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká, was a dramatic account of the beginnings of the Bahá’í Faith in nineteenth century Persia. It mentioned ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s pending trip to America, and promised the reader a “first-hand, intimate study” of the Master. It was a tale filled with rousing triumphs and brutal repression, complete with striking pencil sketches of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that captured Ives’s imagination.



Howard Colby Ives, tormented Unitarian minister from New Jersey. A life of soul-searching drove him in 1912 to seek out ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

“I had come to grips with the goblins of superstition masquerading as churchly creeds and had cast them out,” he said of his agnostic twenties. There were, he was convinced, “few, if any, Christians in the world, and certainly no expressions of social, economic and national life worthy of such a name.” Nevertheless, in his early thirties he decided to join the ministry.

His chosen vocation only created greater uncertainty:

“To preach once a week; duly to make my parish round of calls on elderly spinsters and the sick to whom my visits were simply what I was paid to give; never to forget the collection, for which lapse of memory my treasurer was always scolding me. . . . Did this round of living contain the germs of that ‘Truth for which man ought to die’?”

By the end of 1911, Howard Colby Ives’s spiritual quest had become a spiritual crisis. It was a period filled with “anxiety, darkness, and a vacancy of meaning.” Disappointed with his day job, he started a second “evening” church for poor men, dedicated to the principles of the Social Gospel – “a group of brothers of the spirit aiming to express their highest ideals in service to struggling humanity.” Meetings of the Brotherhood Church were held each Sunday night at the Masonic Hall in Jersey City.





A sketch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that appeared in the Christmas 1911 issue of Everybody's Magazine.  
(Everybody's Magazine)

Then his life took a surprising turn. A member of the Board of Trustees at the Brotherhood Church arranged an invitation for Ives to meet some Bahá'ís in New York. Ives hesitated: "Oriental cults, Eastern philosophies, and the queer, supposedly idealistic movements of which there are so many, had never appealed to me." His mind didn't connect this "oriental cult" with the story he had read in the magazine.

"I do not remember much of what happened," Ives later wrote of the event. "There were readings of beautiful prayers. . . . No hymns, none of the religious trappings I had been accustomed to: but there was a spirit that attracted my heart."

Little did Howard Colby Ives suspect that, just four months later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would stride up the aisle of his own Brotherhood Church, and address his congregation on the very meaning of brotherhood.

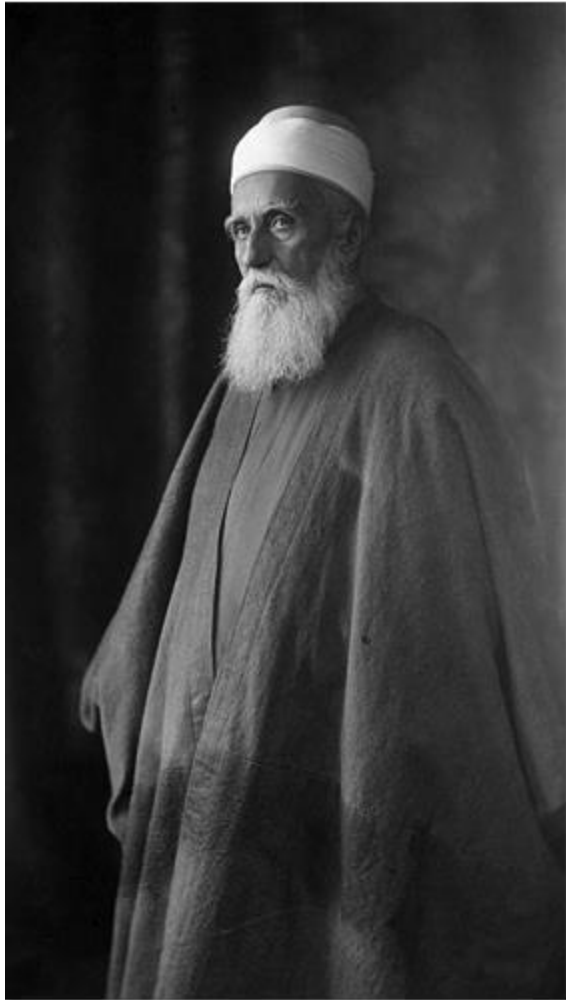
DAY 39

MAY 19, 1912  
JERSEY CITY, NJ

## **The Brotherhood Church of Howard Colby Ives**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 19, 2012

“IT WAS AN IMPRESSIVE, even to me a thrilling sight,” Howard Colby Ives later wrote, “when the majestic figure of the Master strode up the aisle of the Brotherhood Church.” It was Sunday, May 19, 1912.



Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá taken in Paris in 1911 by the photography firm of Boissonnas & Caponier. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Although Ives was employed as a Unitarian pastor in Summit, New Jersey, he had started the Brotherhood Church on his own. Every Sunday evening he held a service in the large hall at the Masonic Temple at Bergen and Fairview Avenues in Jersey City. On this evening, 500 people were waiting to hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Ives seated 'Abdu'l-Bahá directly behind the pulpit and began an introduction. "You know something of his life probably," Ives told the congregation. "[H]e has spent over forty years in prison. . . . He comes out of this prison and steps into the great societies of Paris, London and America. He finds the world open to receive him. He comes with nothing to back him. He has no great letters of credit; he does not even speak our language."

Five weeks before, Ives had stood amid 300 people wedged into a crowded home on West End Avenue in the Upper West Side, just a few hours after 'Abdu'l-Bahá had arrived in America. All he could get that day were a few glimpses of the visitor. He peered over a shoulder and saw

‘Abdu’l-Bahá seated, wearing a cream-colored turban and a white oriental robe, and accepting a cup of tea. But what impressed him the most was the silence in the room.

It was something he often noticed around this visiting Persian. “I looked at this stillness, this quietude, this immeasurable calm in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and it filled me with a restless longing akin to despair.” The pattern runs throughout his autobiography: the middle-aged clergyman thrown into turmoil as he contemplates the inscrutable serenity of the former prisoner.



**Howard Colby Ives in middle age. The Brotherhood Church, which he founded in Jersey City, catered to poor and homeless men. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)**

He felt it again at the Brotherhood Church on May 19. After Ives's introduction, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the pulpit. “Because this is called the Church of Brotherhood,” the Master began, “I wish to speak upon the brotherhood of mankind.”

Ives would later reflect: “As that beautifully resonant voice rang through the room, accenting with an emphasis I had never before heard the word Brotherhood, shame crept into my heart. Surely this Man recognized connotations to that word which I, who had named the church, had never known.”

Howard Colby Ives had been unable to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on that first day on the Upper West Side. And so he came early to the Hotel Ansonia on April 12, the next morning. But he didn’t have an appointment and another crowd was already waiting. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s eyes met Ives’s.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s right hand grasped Ives’s, drew him into an adjoining room, and, with his left hand, he waved everyone else out — including his translator, Dr. Fareed. The two men sat quietly for a long while, in two chairs facing each other at the bay window. Finally, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá broke the silence — in English.



**Howard and Mabel Ives in later years. They traveled across America teaching the Bahá'í Faith for the rest of their lives. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)**

“Softly came the assurance that I was His very dear son.” The Reverend began to weep. “A long-pent stream was at last undammed,” he commented. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pressed his two thumbs to Ives’s eyes and wiped the tears away.

Five weeks later, Ives sat among the congregation at the Brotherhood Church and watched ‘Abdu’l-Bahá look down at him from the pulpit and smile. He listened as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the disciples that had circled around Bahá’u’lláh: “Their bestowals and susceptibilities became one, their purposes one purpose, their desires one desire to such a degree that they sacrificed themselves for each other, forfeiting name, possessions and comfort. Their fellowship became indissoluble.”

Howard Colby Ives soon left the ministry. He spent the rest of his life teaching Americans about Bahá’u’lláh. In 1920, he married Mabel Rice-Wray. They answered an advertisement for traveling salespeople so they could set out across America, sold off all their possessions, and lived out of trunks and suitcases until their dying day.



DAY 40

MAY 20, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## “This Is a Symbol of My Power,” She Said

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 20, 2012

JOAN OF ARC’S silver suit shone in the late afternoon sun, but you couldn’t hear her milk-white horse’s hooves click against the pavement unless you were standing right next to her. Instead, the whistles of traffic officers blew, marching bands played, and cheers rose from the crowd, packed thick along the sidewalk.



The Suffrage March in New York on May 5, 1912. Ten thousand women marched from Washington Square north along Fifth Avenue to Carnegie Hall at 57th Street. Four hundred thousand people watched the parade from the sidewalks. (National Archives & Records Administration)

The women's suffrage march in New York had taken place two weeks ago, on May 5, 1912, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Chicago. At five o'clock sharp, an army of women and men began to march from Washington Square three miles up Fifth Avenue to Carnegie Hall at 57th Street. There were 10,000 of them, including 618 men. It was a parade "the like of which New York never knew before," said the *New York Times*. Nearly 400,000 people emptied themselves out of the surrounding buildings to look on.

This afternoon, May 20, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood beneath the huge McKinley Memorial Organ in front of a woman's suffrage meeting at Rev. Frederick Lynch's Metropolitan Temple in New York, at Seventh Avenue and 14th Street. "It has been objected by some," he told the audience, "that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is by creation deficient. This is pure imagination. The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education."

"In some countries," he said, "man went so far as to believe and teach that woman belonged to a sphere lower than human. . . .God is proving to the satisfaction of humanity that all this is ignorance and error. . . ."



**Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch, organizer of the march. She was the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had launched the suffrage struggle at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848. (Library of Congress)**

Women on horseback trotted around the east side of the Washington Arch to begin the march. Marie Stewart was the one dressed as Joan of Arc. Behind her 100 women carried painted green soapboxes. Instead of handing out literature to the spectators and risking a mess of discarded paper in their wake, they were going to place themselves strategically among the crowd, and to speak in support of the vote on their soapboxes.

Mrs. Harriot Stanton Blatch, of Seneca Falls, NY, was the chief organizer of the march. Her mother, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, had written the *Declaration of Sentiments* at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848, which launched the suffrage movement. Mrs. Blatch's "Final Word to Marchers" was printed the day before: "March with head erect," she told the women. "Eyes to the front. Remember, you march for the mightiest reform the world has ever seen."

"In past ages," 'Abdu'l-Bahá told his audience, "noted women have arisen in the affairs of nations and surpassed men in their accomplishments. Among them was Zenobia, Queen of the East, whose capital was Palmyra. . . . After her husband's death she assumed the royal diadem in his stead. . . . Afterward she conquered Syria, subdued Egypt and founded a most wonderful kingdom with political sagacity and thoroughness."



Suffrage marchers on Fifth Avenue on May 5, 1912. The large banner calls for equal representation for equal taxation, the suffragists' version of the famous American revolutionary slogan. (American Press Association)

As the first of the marchers left the square, more women joined their ranks along the way. Miss Albert Hill's contingent entered at the north end of Washington Square. She had just come from Albany where she has been trying to convince unwilling state senators to support the women's vote. Professional women — doctors, lawyers, writers, musicians, artists, librarians, lecturers, and social workers — merged with the army at East 9th Street. They met 2,000 industrial workers coming from the other direction along 9th — milliners, dressmakers, shirtwaist makers, laundresses, and domestic workers. Businesswomen joined one block up: managers, buyers, tea room proprietors, secretaries, bookkeepers, stenographers, and telephone operators. Then the suffrage pioneers turned left into the marching masses at the corner where the Church of the Ascension stood at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street. The Reverend Antoinette Brown Blackwell walked with them, America's first female ordained minister. Today was her eighty-seventh birthday; she was the oldest woman in the march. Little Harriet Blaten de Forrest was the youngest: she was just two years old, pushed in a stroller by her mother.



Inside the Metropolitan Temple in New York where 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on women's rights on May 20, 1912. This view is from December 13, 1908, when President-Elect Taft dedicated the new organ in memory of the assassinated President William McKinley. The Metropolitan Temple burned down in 1928. (The Music Trades, December 19, 1908)

“The Roman Empire sent a great army against her,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued. “When this army replete with martial splendor reached Syria, Zenobia herself appeared upon the field leading her forces. On the day of battle she arrayed herself in regal garments, placed a crown upon her head and rode forth, sword in hand, to meet the invading legions.”

Frederick S. Greene, leader of the men’s division of the parade, said that last year, in 1911, they had marched “amid a storm of hissing and missiles.” His group “had a wet towel thrown at us from one of the windows opposite the Waldorf.” But this year things were different. Even Inspector McClusky, head of the NYPD detective’s bureau, tightened his belt at 23rd Street: “It’s about time to give them the vote,” he said. “I wish to God they would. I’d be with ‘em.”



**"Queen Zenobia's Last Look Upon Palmyra." A detail from the painting by Herbert Gustave Schmalz. (Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide)**

Zenobia destroyed the Roman army. Finally, the Emperor Aurelian marched into Syria himself with 200,000 men. He besieged Palmyra for two years, eventually cutting off the city's water supply. Zenobia, faced with her city's starvation, was forced to surrender.

Aurelian, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, marched Zenobia into Rome with a golden chain around her neck. A procession of elephants, lions, tigers, birds, and monkeys preceded her, and on her head she wore a crown. "Verily, I glory in being a woman and in having withstood the Roman Empire," she told the crowd with "queenly dignity." "And this chain about my neck is a sign not of humiliation but of glorification."

"This is a symbol of my power," she said, "not of my defeat."

The sun began to set around 7:30 p.m. on May 5. The women brought out torches, turning the street into a river of fire. When they finally convened at Carnegie Hall, regiment by regiment, their army formed an audience.

Joan of Arc dismounted her horse and blended in with the crowd.

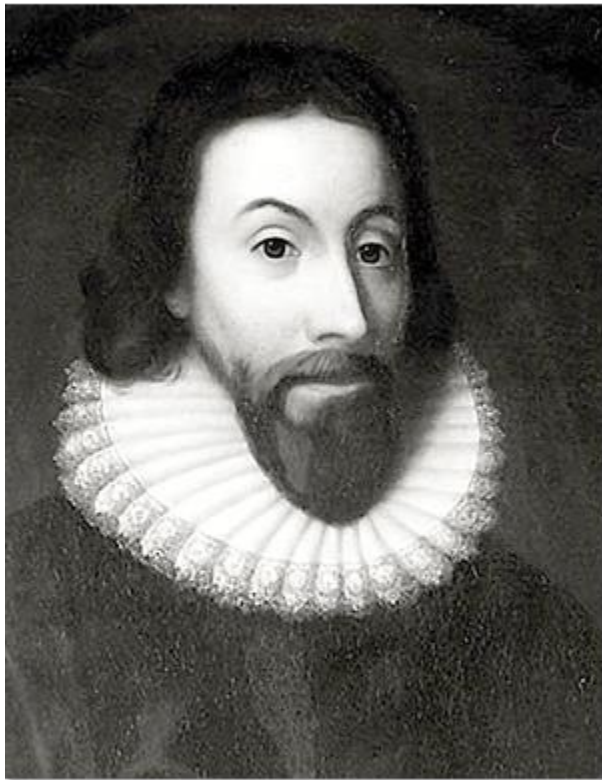
DAY 41

MAY 21, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## The Eyes of All People Are Upon Us

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 21, 2012

BOSTON WAS A REVOLUTIONARY TOWN from the start. In the fall of 1630, seven hundred British settlers aboard eleven caravels anchored off the shores of Massachusetts Bay and founded a town they believed would be a beacon to the world. They were Puritans, a group of religious renegades who had broken from the Church of England and had rattled English society for the better part of five decades.



John Winthrop in 1630. Winthrop was a wealthy Puritan lawyer from Suffolk who led the first group of migrants to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, later called Boston, in 1628. (Massachusetts Historical Review)

Standing upon the deck of the *Arbella*, the fleet's flagship, John Winthrop delivered a rousing sermon. He described "A Modell of Christian Charity," proposing to the colonists that they were entering into a new covenant with God. He



borrowed from the Sermon on the Mount to tell his followers, “[W]e must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.”

Hard work, moral uprightness, and an insistence on personal freedom: these Puritan values forged a new society. They also demonstrated how a spiritual enterprise could drive enormous material prosperity. The Puritan belief in higher education poured even more fuel on the fire. The colonists founded Harvard College in 1636, the first university in America. Boston rose to become the commercial, political, religious, and intellectual center of the whole New England region.

On November 5, 1773, Bostonians reclaimed their revolutionary heritage when they met at Faneuil Hall on a Friday evening to discuss what to do about the King’s new tax on tea. A few weeks later a mob tossed shiploads of His Majesty’s preferred brew into the harbor. The American Revolution spread throughout the country from Boston.

As the new nation got its bearings, Boston refused to sit still. Harvard embraced Unitarianism. The Unitarians rejected the Trinity, arguing that Jesus was a prophet of God but not God Himself. They brought a bunch of other radical notions to the American religious conversation as well, some of which might shed light on why Unitarians seemed to be so attracted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. They insisted that reason and science could coexist with faith. They rejected original sin. And they dared to believe that no one religion could claim an absolute monopoly on truth.



Quincy Market in Boston, Massachusetts, near Faneuil Hall, in 1910. (US National Archives)

But even they weren't ready for Ralph Waldo Emerson. On July 15, 1838, he stood before the graduating class at the Harvard Divinity School and spoke words that reverberated like hammer strokes off Harvard's hallowed walls.

Emerson, too, had graduated from Harvard, and had been a preacher at Boston's Second Church. But he lamented the lost devotion of the Puritans, and flatly told the students that churches weren't measuring up: "The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed . . . indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology." "It is the office of a true teacher," he pleaded, "to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake."



Ralph Waldo Emerson, founder of the Transcendentalist School of American thought, in 1857. An albumen print by Southworth & Hawes. (George Eastman House Collection)

Even though Emerson was speaking to young men about to begin careers in the Christian ministry, he removed the Church from the spiritual equation. The only way to restore true religion, he said, was to empower the individual soul to "go it alone." He challenged them to break with conformity, to inspire their congregations to "dare to love God without mediator or veil."

Ralph Waldo Emerson charged his “Transcendentalism” with the religious zeal of the original Puritan settlers, and fused it with the spirit of the American Revolution that set individual freedom and liberty above everything else.

It was a truly *American* take on religion.

DAY 42

MAY 22, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## “You Can Kill Me as Soon as You Like,” She Said

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on May 22, 2012

THE CAKE COLLAPSED in the oven the first time, so they gathered around the second cake. Sixty-eight candles stuck out of its moist surface. Three flags decorated it: an American flag, a Persian flag, and a British flag. “It was the wish of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to have a flag of every country on the cake,” the *Boston Herald* wrote, “as he is universal, and considers every country his own, but there was not room for all.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lit the first candle, and then asked the guests to take turns lighting the rest. It was his birthday.



An artist's impression of the murder of Táhirih, the first women's suffrage martyr. Painting by Ivan Lloyd. (Wikimedia)

On his second day in Boston, a hundred guests had gathered to celebrate at the home of Alice Breed. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left the party early. He

never celebrated his birthday because, on the day he was born, something else had also happened, which he considered to be far more important.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mother, Asiyih, gave birth to him in Tehran. But early that morning in Shiraz, a city 440 miles due south, a young man who called himself the “Báb,” meaning “The Gate,” had set in motion Persia’s greatest upheaval of the nineteenth century, by declaring himself a messenger of God. Within nine years, mobs throughout the country, instigated by religious leaders and aided by the Persian military, had slaughtered 20,000 of his followers and had executed the Báb by firing squad.

Among them was a woman named Táhirih. Three days earlier, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken to an audience of suffragists at the Metropolitan Temple in New York. What few of them knew was that, when he was just three or four years old, he used to sit on Táhirih’s lap in his father’s house in Tehran. She was the first women’s suffrage martyr.

Táhirih accepted the teachings of the Báb in her twenties, to the consternation of her father and her husband, and became one his most fearless and brilliant advocates. She was a poet, renowned for her learning and her skill in argument. At a conference near the village of Badasht, in 1848, she shocked her fellow believers by appearing before the all-male gathering without a veil. One of them felt so scandalized that he slit his own throat.



The house of the Kalantar in Tehran, where Táhirih was imprisoned. (The Dawn-Breakers)

By imposing this new image of equality on the Bábís, Táhirih forced them to make a critical break with the past.

On her way back to Tehran she was arrested, sent to the capital, and brought before the king, Násiri’ d-Din Sháh. If she would only renounce the Báb and return to Islam, His Imperial Majesty told her, he would make her his bride. She turned him down with a poem:



*Kingdom, wealth, and power are for thee,  
Beggary, exile, and loss are for me.*

*If the former is good, it's thine.*

*If the latter is hard, it's mine.*

They imprisoned her for four years.

The day before they killed her, the Sháh summoned her again. Again she rebuffed him. They strangled her with a scarf and threw her body down a well. *The Times* of London reported her death on October 13, 1852. She was thirty-six years old.

Táhirih remained defiant until the end. “You can kill me as soon as you like,” she said, as she faced her murderers, “but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.”



The Garden of Ilkhani in Tehran, where Táhirih was murdered. She was strangled by order of the Shah, and her body was thrown down a well. (The Dawn-Breakers)



**TAHIRIH  
JUSTICE  
CENTER**

*The Tahirih Justice Center, in Washington, DC, works to protect immigrant women and girls seeking justice in the United States from gender-based violence.*

DAY 43

MAY 23, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## “Free” Religion?

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 23, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ LOOKED OUT upon an audience of 1,000 Unitarian ministers and 2,000 guests on the evening of May 22, 1912, in the largest church in the New England region. Religion, he told them, was fundamentally dead. “The essential realities, which the Prophets labored so hard to establish in human hearts and minds, while undergoing ordeals and suffering tortures of persecution, have now well nigh vanished.”



The Tremont Temple about 1900, the largest church in New England. (Detroit Publishing Company)

It was the eighty-seventh anniversary celebration of the American Unitarian Association, a week-long event held at Tremont Temple in Boston.



The Unitarians had heard it before. Seventy-five years earlier one of their own, Ralph Waldo Emerson, delivered an address at Harvard Divinity School and told the graduates that their true calling was to breathe new life into the cold and rotting religious forms of their age.

Yet Emerson's talk on that day also removed the traditional church from the equation. The only way to restore things, he said, was to empower individual souls to "go it alone." It was a truly American take on religion that placed personal freedom above everything else. But it was only 1838, and most Unitarians called for Emerson's head.

By 1860 the Unitarians were disillusioned: they had become just another conservative Christian denomination.

Then a rebellion broke out at the conference of the American Unitarian Association in 1866. Reverend William James Potter cried out for a "spiritual anti-slavery society." He wanted a movement that would capture what he thought had been the essence of the Protestant tradition – a radical resistance to authority. It would take the freedom that Emerson had called for to its logical conclusion: a complete openness to any and all beliefs.

The next year, on May 30, 1867, the "Free Religious Association" was born, during the annual Unitarian Anniversary Week. They designed it to be inclusive. Among those in attendance were Lucretia Mott, a Quaker abolitionist and women's rights activist, who had started the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848 with Elizabeth Cady Stanton; Rabbi Isaac Wise, a Reform Jew; and, of course, Ralph Waldo Emerson.



Ralph Waldo Emerson late in life. In his Harvard Divinity School address in 1838 he took on the Church. The "idioms of [Jesus's] language, and the figures of his rhetoric, have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes." Harvard never invited him back. (Photograph by Otto Herschan)

But their openness soon proved to be their greatest problem. It was one thing to challenge religious orthodoxy, but quite another to build a model of "free religion" from the ground up. In other words, it was simple to list all the things it *shouldn't be*, but not so easy to decide exactly what it *was*. Potter insisted that the organization could not and should not take *any* positions — theological, social, or political.

By this point he was even refusing to be called a Christian in spite of leading a Unitarian congregation. He objected to any supernatural claims for religion, and understood God as simply an impersonal force hidden in the universe. He grew highly suspicious of Christians, or adherents of any other organized religion.

Potter managed to hold the organization together in spite of the radical individualism of most of its members, until he died in 1893. The Free Religious Association eventually fizzled out. It became a ragtag collection of eclectic individuals, many of them agnostics, some even atheists.

Then, on May 24, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood in front of what was left of them.



William James Potter, a founder of the Free Religious Association. (Harvard Square Library)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá didn’t speak in general terms about reform, renewal, and progress, as he had to the Unitarians two days earlier. To the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Free Religious Association he was very specific. He spoke in favor of the one thing the Reverend William James Potter had rejected: the *authority* of the prophets of God. “The prophets of God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, “have all promulgated the same foundation; they have given fundamentally the same teachings, and the teachings of the prophets of God are pure spirit, are pure religion, are pure love, are pure unity.” He mentioned, among them, Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Buddha, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh. It was one thing to challenge the religious authority held by church officials, but something quite beyond the pale to dethrone the prophets of God.

“Is it meet for us,” he asked the embattled Free Religionists, “to leave aside the wisdom of God and to create certain imaginary distinctions and to hold tenaciously thereto and to cause enmity among humanity? God forbid.”

DAY 44

MAY 24, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## The Invasion of the Easterners

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 24, 2012

THEY FIRST INVADED American shores in 1883, when Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, a leader in the Brahmo Samaj, an offshoot of Hinduism in the Indian region of Bengal, traveled across America. Anagarika Dharmapala, a leader of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism from Ceylon, had been in touch with Americans for many years before he was invited to represent “Southern Buddhism” at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Then, in September, 1893, Swami Vivekananda, a young firebrand from the *Advaita* branch of Hinduism, wearing a red turban and bright orange robes, lit up the conference with his fiery oratory, in perfect, poetic English.



A lithographic poster of Swami Vivekananda, perhaps the most colorful of the Eastern gurus who captured American imaginations at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. (Vedanta Society of Northern California)

“After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation,” the *New York Herald* wrote.

These eastern teachers were all from India, and Boston was kind to them. Sara Chapman Bull, of Brattle Street in Cambridge, became Vivekananda’s leading patron. And in Eliot, Maine, near Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Sarah J. Farmer provided a platform for them at Green Acre, her annual forum where she put the World’s Parliament of Religions on a permanent basis every summer. These were the men who offered American journalists the stereotypes that they would try to use to describe ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912.

But these earlier speakers differed from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in several important ways.

First, India was struggling to free itself from British control. Therefore, the Indians brought a heavy anti-colonial message with them to America. At the Parliament in Chicago, Vivekananda excoriated church missionary efforts in India, telling the audience that India could use many things from the West, but that the churches could kindly keep their religion to themselves. Dharmapala made no apologies for linking Sinhalese Buddhism to the struggle for Ceylon’s independence, and Mozoomdar, and the poet Rabindranath Tagore after him, who happened to

meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America in 1912, placed Indian *cultural* nationalism at the center of their concerns. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in contrast, argued for a single global identity, and rarely addressed political affairs.



The World's Parliament of Religions opened in Chicago on September 11, 1893. This photograph, taken that day, depicts three of the most influential of the Eastern religious leaders who attended. From left to right, the Jain scholar Virchand Gandhi from Gujarat, India; Anagarika Dharmapala of Sinhalese Buddhism from Sri Lanka, and Swami Vivekananda of the Advaita branch of Hinduism, from Calcutta. (Parliament of Religions, 1893)

Second, Vivekananda was no slouch when it came to turning on the charm with women. He was single and thirty years old when he came to Chicago. Dharmapala was also a single monk, aged twenty-nine, but he had taken a lifelong vow of chastity. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been married for over forty years. He and his wife, Munirih, had four educated, grown-up daughters and several grandchildren.

Third, while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had plenty of financial support for his trip, and a growing community of Bahá’ís in the United States who sometimes hosted him, the other easterners had no base of support in America. They were constantly raising money to support their travels and to fund their projects back home. Americans, especially the press, were regularly surprised that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was not only turning down offers of money, but was actually giving it out in America, such as at the Bowery Mission.

Fourth, and most importantly, the Indian teachers formulated a politicized rhetorical dichotomy that portrayed their “ancient” and “spiritual” East as superior to the degraded, *nouveau-riche*, “materialistic” West that surpassed them in global power. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from the moment he stepped off the *Cedric* in New York harbor, had praised America for its material, scientific, and entrepreneurial spirit, which he found to be powerful and unique. He also repeatedly stated his opinion that America’s great *spiritual* capacity would enable them to lead the world to peace.



DAY 45

MAY 25, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Draws a Line in the Sand

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 25, 2012

“SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF AMERICA!” the man said, dressed in bright orange. Then he had to wait for more than three minutes while 7,000 people rose from their seats at the Art Institute of Chicago and gave him a prolonged standing ovation.

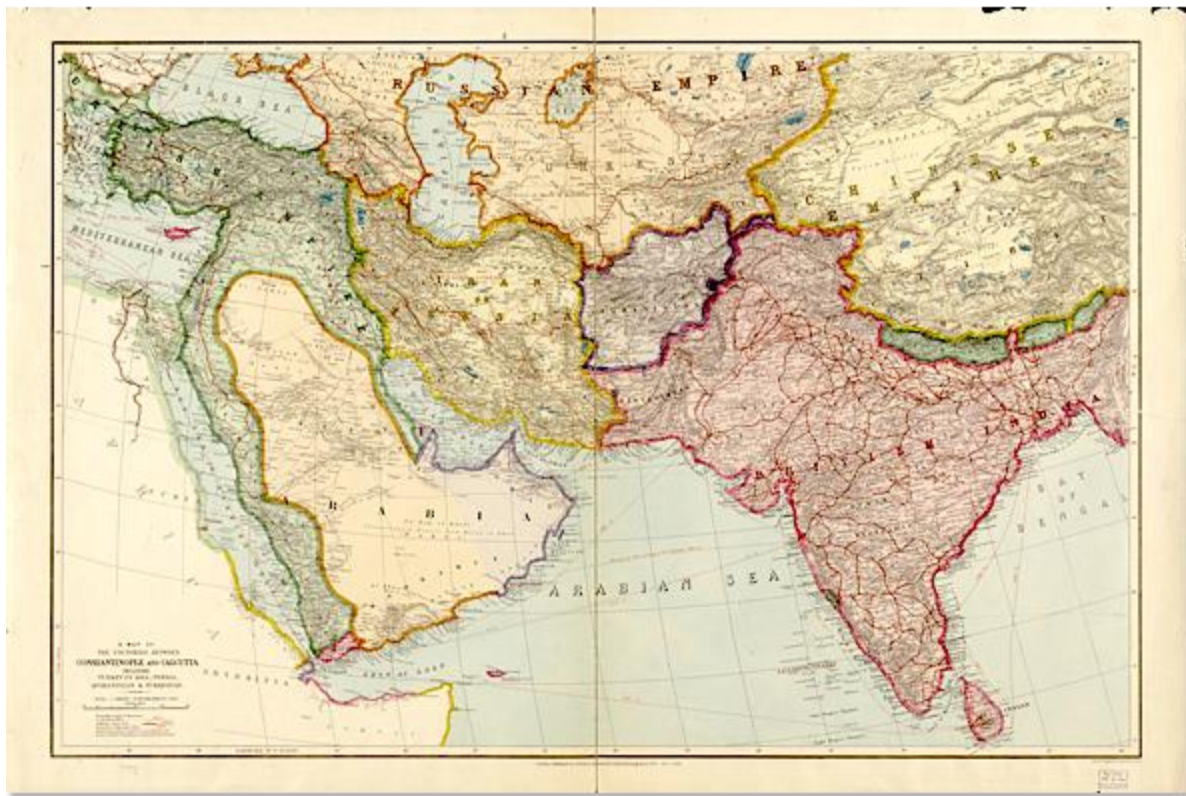


Speakers at the World's Parliament of Religions, Sept. 1893 (S. E. Norton)

“I am proud,” he continued, “to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.”

Everyone agreed that on that day — September 11, 1893 — the colorful Swami Vivekananda had captured the spirit of the World’s Parliament of Religions, which was being held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition. The nation he meant was India, and the religion Hinduism.

The trouble is, there was no such thing as “Hinduism,” or, at least, not until very recently. In fact, there was no word for “religion” in any of the Indian languages, nor any word for “spirituality” either. These terms had only appeared by 1893 as the result of a century-long reaction among educated Indians to the increasing encroachment by British colonialism. Out of India’s unfathomable diversity, the reformers of the “Hindu Renaissance” developed a single cultural, religious, and political identity that could compete with an expansionist Western cultural project. The result was an Indian spiritual mission to the West that portrayed India as the home of an ancient spirituality far superior to the modern materialistic civilization of Europe. In America, these radical ideas were incorporated by Emerson into Transcendentalism.



The “East” as constructed by Western politics in 1912. On the left the Ottoman Empire rings the Arabian desert in green while British India dominates the map in red. Persia, now Iran, stands between them in yellow. The map is by Edward Stanford, Ltd., London. (Library of Congress Geography and Map Division)

On the surface, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments about the “spirituality” of the East and the “materialism” of the West sounded virtually identical to the Indian reformers. But nothing could have been further from the truth.

On May 25, 1912, at a talk at Huntington Chambers in Boston, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made it clear that he didn’t put any stock in the ability of ancient traditions to meet the needs of the modern world. “Thoughts and theories of past ages are fruitless now,” he said. “It is evident that counterfeit and

spurious religious teaching, antiquated forms of belief and ancestral imitations . . . must also pass away and be reformed.”

Neither did he believe the nostalgic notion that modern society was somehow inferior to the civilizations of the past. “If comparison be made with the sum total of all former human achievements, it will be found that the discoveries, scientific advancement and material civilization of this present century have equaled, yea far exceeded the progress and outcome of one hundred former centuries.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was obviously talking about something very different than just combining ancient religious teachings into a new ecumenical spirit, such as Vivekananda had done in Chicago in 1893. He was here to describe a new revelation of God to man.

DAY 46

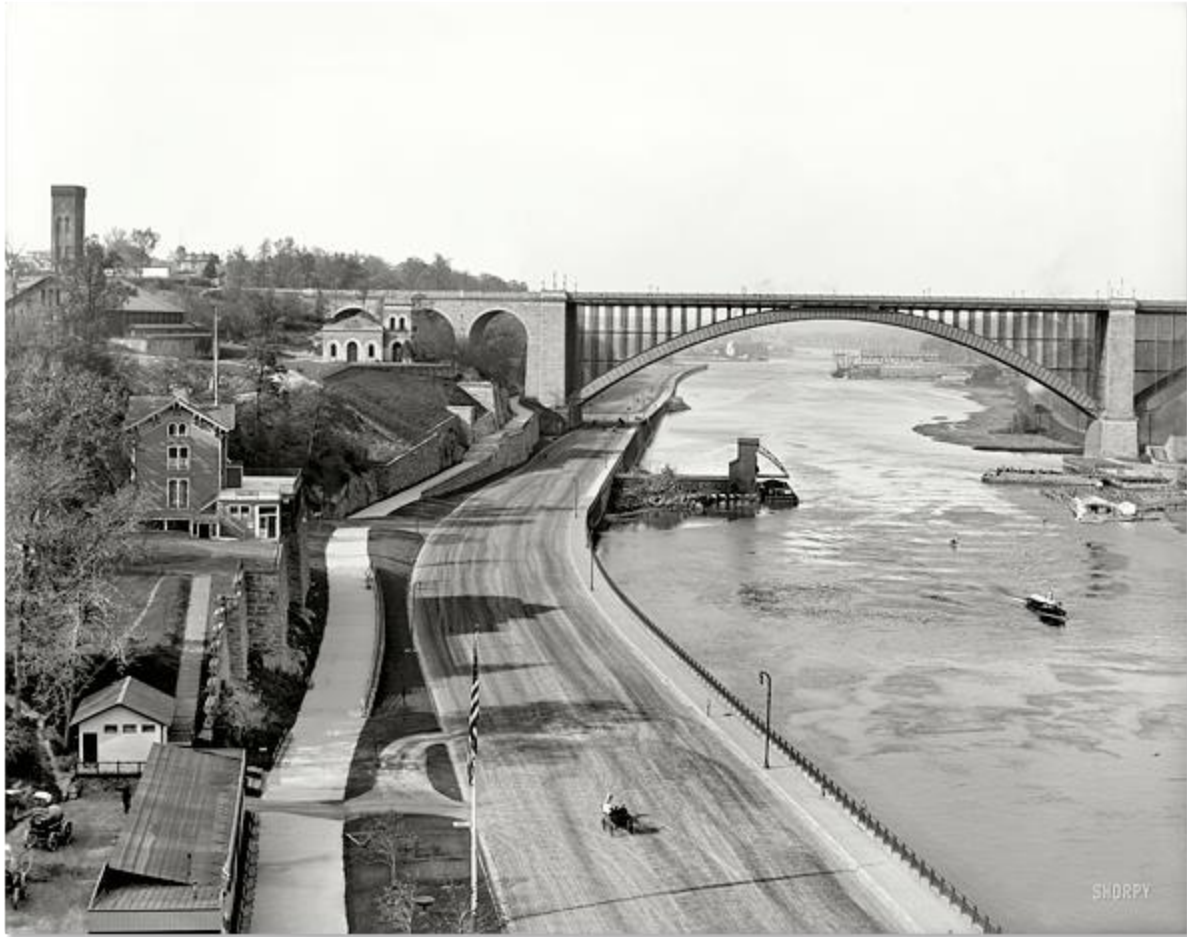
MAY 26, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Baptism by Fire

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 26, 2012

AS ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ APPROACHED Mount Morris Baptist Church at Fifth Avenue and 126th Street in Harlem at 7 p.m. on Sunday, May 26, 1912, he noticed the chorus of a popular Protestant hymn eddying out into the street.

*Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!  
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;  
Still all my song shall be nearer, my God, to Thee.*



Looking west down the Harlem River, about 1905. The Harlem River separates the island of Manhattan from the American mainland. The Washington Bridge, seen here, connects Harlem, in Manhattan, on the left with the Bronx, across the river on the right. (Detroit Publishing Co.)

This was the hymn the orchestra had played around midnight on the deck of RMS *Titanic* as she went down. Bands across the United States had played it at 3:30 p.m. on September 14, 1901, to commemorate President McKinley's assassination. The Confederate band had played it beneath the late afternoon sun on July 3, 1863, as the few survivors of Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg struggled back to camp.

*Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;  
Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee.*

This evening in Harlem, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was about to talk about the meaning of sacrifice.

He had arrived from Boston by train just an hour earlier and he was utterly exhausted. He rested in the chancel as Reverend J. Herman Randall led the service. Juliet Thompson recalls catching a glimpse of him "sitting — almost *lying* — in a big curved chair." Yet something about her description belies his fatigue: "The sleeves of His bronze-colored 'abá branched out from His



shoulders like great spread wings, hiding His hands, so that I was conscious only of His head and those terribly alive eyes.”



A 161 a. Mt. Morris Baptist Church, N. Y. City.  
A postcard of Harlem's Mount Morris Baptist Church from 1905. (The Rotograph Co.)

Reverend Randall extended a hand to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and welcomed him to the pulpit.

“The greatest attainment in the world of humanity is nearness to God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the congregation. “Every lasting glory, honor, grace and beauty which comes to man comes through nearness to God.”

“But nearness to God is not an easy accomplishment,” he said. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá evoked the early history of Christianity to illustrate his point: “During the time Jesus Christ was upon the earth mankind sought nearness to God, but in that day no one attained it save a very few — His disciples. Those blessed souls were confirmed with divine nearness through the love of God.” This nearness, he said, “is contingent upon self-sacrifice,” which “is made possible through the baptism of water and fire revealed in the Gospels.”

At the beginning of Jesus’s mission, he had walked down to the River Jordan and instructed John the Baptist to perform on him the ceremony that John had been carrying out for others: immersing them in water as a symbolic act of cleanliness that separated them from the mire of

sin. When Jesus stepped out of the water the heavens opened, and he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon him as a dove.

The Baptist audience ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed that evening based their faith on *Believer’s Baptism*, performed at an age when a soul could consciously exercise his or her own free will. Following Christian tradition, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained the meaning of the symbols of water and fire: “Water symbolizes the water of life, which is knowledge, and fire is the fire of the love of God.” “Therefore” he said, “man must be baptized with the water of life, the Holy Spirit and the fire of the love of the Kingdom. Until he attains these three degrees, nearness to God is not possible.”



"Wade in the Water." A postcard of a river baptism in New Bern, North Carolina, near the turn of the twentieth century. (Wikimedia)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned to a second example of sacrifice — that of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh in Persia. “They gave their lives for this station, sacrificed honor, comfort and possessions,” he explained. Twenty thousand of them, like the early Christians, had paid the ultimate price. “[They] hastened with the utmost joy to the place of martyrdom; their blood was spilled, their bodies were tortured and destroyed, their homes pillaged, their children carried into captivity. They endured all these conditions joyfully and willingly.” “Through such sacrifice,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded, “nearness to God is made possible.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then described by metaphor the outcome of such pain and suffering. “Behold how the sun shines upon all creation,” he said, “but only surfaces that are pure and polished can reflect its glory and light.” It takes great sacrifice to reflect God’s attributes. “The more pure and



sanctified the heart of man becomes, the nearer it draws to God, and the light of the Sun of Reality is revealed within it.”

As the evening drew on, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá leaned ever more heavily on the pulpit to support himself. He related Jesus’s Parable of the Sower, talked of the need for each soul to “strive for capacity and seek readiness,” and then he brought his address to a close.

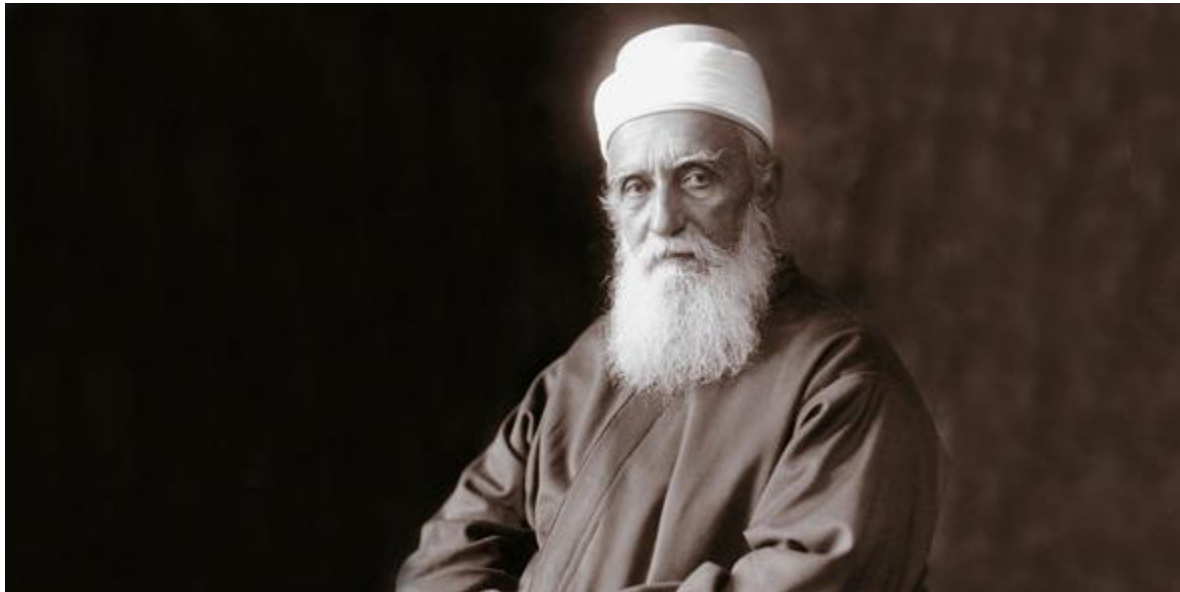
DAY 47

MAY 27, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 27, 2012

IT’S HARD TO BELIEVE that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been in America for just a month-and-a-half. We thought we’d take this opportunity to recap a few highlights from the journey.



Our first feature, [‘Abdu’l-Bahá Arrives in America](#), described what it was like on the SS *Cedric* as it entered New York harbor on April 11, 1912. The next day he took a whirlwind tour of the city, [‘Abdu’l-Bahá: New Yorker](#), and three days after that Hudson Maxim, the inventor of smokeless gunpowder, met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Hotel Ansonia: [An Arms Dealer Tries to Sell War to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá](#).

On his tenth day in America ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left New York for Washington where he began an assault on the issues of the color line. [Even Though the World Should Go to Smash](#), [This Shining Colored Man](#), and [Breaking the Color Line](#) all depicted moments in this offensive, as did a fourth story from Chicago on the day he addressed the NAACP: [The Fallout From a City in Flames](#).

In the Windy City, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the cornerstone for a unique religious edifice – [Breaking Ground at Grosse Point](#) — and we told of the tragic events in the life of the woman who helped set it all in motion in [The Trials of Corinne Knight True](#).

Returning to New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began to address the challenges of international peace, culminating in [‘Abdu’l-Bahá Scales “The Gunks”](#), which examined his arrival and speech at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also engaged with the ideas and advocates of the Social Gospel movement – [On Earth as It Is in Heaven](#) – including one preacher from New Jersey, Howard Colby Ives, whom we profiled in a two-part feature: [The Truth for Which Men Ought to Die](#) and [The Brotherhood Church of Howard Colby Ives](#).

Just a few days ago, he spoke to suffragists two weeks after a massive march for the vote in New York: [“This is a Symbol of My Power,” She Said](#). We followed it up two days later with a story of the first women’s suffrage martyr in [“You Can Kill Me as Soon as You Like,” She Said](#).

The journey has just begun. Stay tuned!

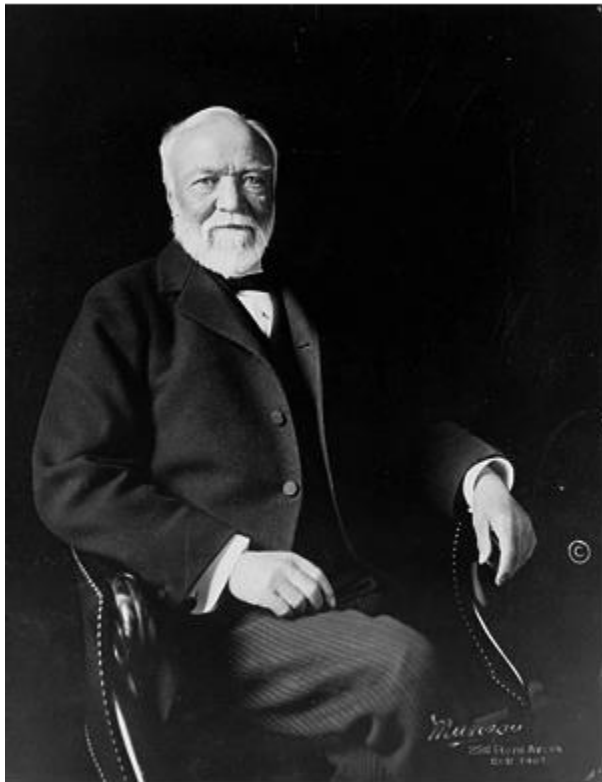
DAY 48

MAY 28, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## “The Smell of Blood Upon Us”

By ROBERT SOCKETT AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 28, 2012

ANDREW CARNEGIE had spent a fortune on it. In 1910 he had doled out ten million dollars – that’s more than \$230 million in today’s money – to set it up. We know it as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Its board of directors included Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler, who had spoken before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration on May 14, as well as Albert Smiley, who hosted the conference at his hotel atop the Shawangunk Ridge in New Paltz.



Andrew Carnegie, founder of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in 1913. (Library of Congress)

Carnegie also recognized the centrality of religion to the success of the peace movement. Despite being lukewarm on organized religion himself, in 1914 he would spend another half a million dollars to endow the Carnegie Church

Peace Union. Its thirty-person board of trustees was filled with Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders. He hoped it would mobilize the world's churches and other religious and spiritual organizations to take moral leadership in the cause of international peace.

The peace movement in America had been intertwined with religion from its start. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed the International Peace Forum at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church on May 12, 1912, he was looking out over a crowd of Christian, and Jewish faithful. It was the same at his talk to the New York Peace Society on the following day – an institution bankrolled by Carnegie. On both occasions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá alluded to Biblical prophecies regarding the inevitability of what he called the “Most Great Peace.”

Today, on the afternoon of May 28, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was about to address the International Peace Forum for a second time — this time at the Metropolitan Temple at Seventh Avenue and 14th Street, where he had spoken to the suffrage meeting just eight days earlier.

Reverend J. Wesley Hill, president of the International Peace Forum and former pastor of the Metropolitan Temple, welcomed everyone. “This is a great occasion,” he began. “It is graced and honored by distinguished guests, representatives of the great International Peace Movement, who have acquired fame at home and abroad.”

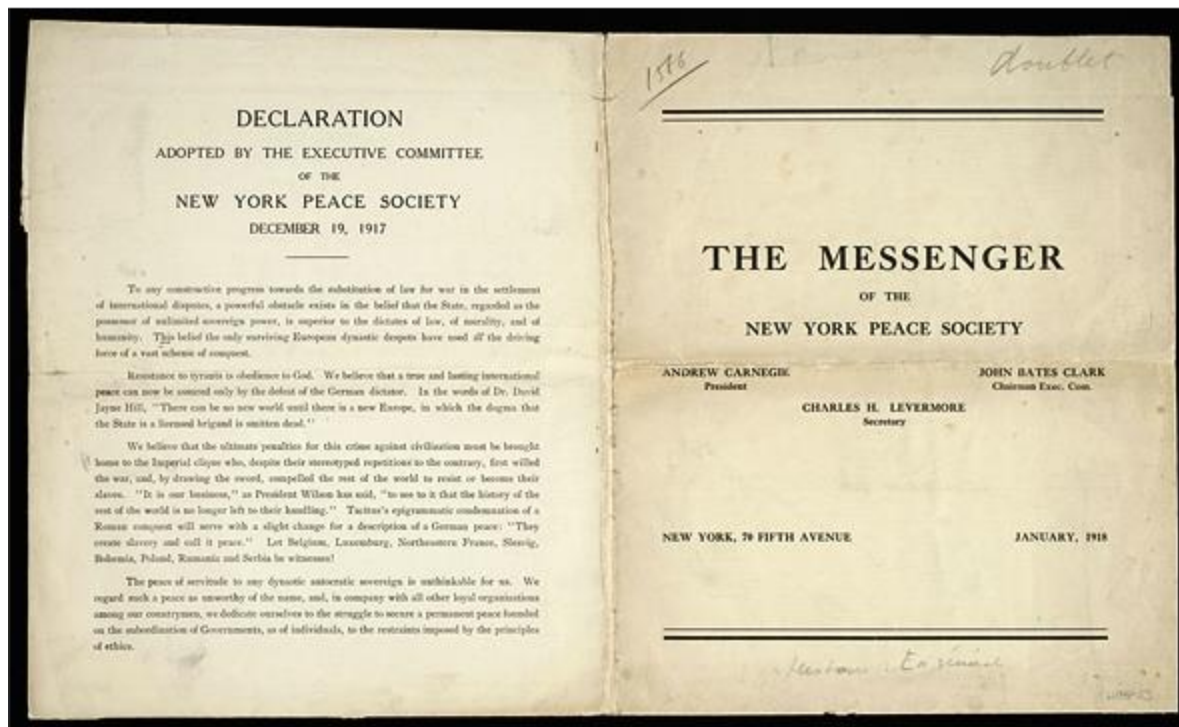


'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to the Metropolitan Temple, Seventh Avenue and 14th Street, to address the New York Peace Society. This view is from December 13, 1908, when President-Elect Taft dedicated the new organ in memory of President William McKinley. The Metropolitan Temple burned down in 1928. (The Music Trades, December 19, 1908)

There were over 1,000 of them in attendance that day, including two speakers who would share the program with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Reverend Lynch now led the Metropolitan Temple and would go on to become secretary of the Carnegie Church Peace Union. Rabbi Joseph Silverman ran America's leading Reform Judaism congregation at Temple Emanu-El at Fifth Avenue and 65th Street on the Upper East Side, and was a major voice in the American peace movement. Both men had listened to 'Abdu'l-Bahá at Lake Mohonk.

After the preamble, Reverend Lynch was the first to speak: "I do not intend to discuss any phases of the Peace question," he said. "I don't want to stand here and take your time when I know you want to listen to one who comes from the East."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, it seemed, was already a much anticipated voice on the New York peace circuit.



The Messenger, the publication of the New York Peace Society. The January 1918 issue is pictured, with Andrew Carnegie named as President. The Executive Committee Declaration from December 1917, shortly after America declared war on Germany reads, in part, "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God." (Wikimedia)

"I have been exceedingly interested in the visit of Abdul-Baha to this country," Reverend Lynch continued. "It may interest you to know where I first saw him. It was at Charles Grant Kennedy's play, the 'Terrible Meek.'" 'Abdu'l-Bahá had attended the play, which depicts the Crucifixion, on the afternoon of April 19, just before he met with Kate Carew and went to the Bowery Mission.

The play, Lynch said, was meant "to show us that we are not to go about in this world with the smell of blood upon us, but we are in this world to carry blessing to mankind."

"The last century," Lynch concluded, "was the century of nationalism in religion, but this twentieth century is the century of universality in religion. All our great religions are beginning to spread throughout the world, and we are beginning to find that which is good in them all."

"Now I welcome this great man today because he stands for all these things."

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá rose to speak.



*In tomorrow's feature: 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks at the Metropolitan Temple, and argues that the binding power of true religion must lie at the heart of humankind's hopes for peace.*

DAY 49

**MAY 29, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **The Good Shepherds**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 29, 2012

YOU MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak to the International Peace Forum on the scourge of war, or perhaps the need for international arbitration. Yet, just as he had done at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, and at various speeches to peace societies in New York, he tackled the subject in an unexpected way. He spoke instead about religion, and about the prophets of God throughout the ages.



A shepherd tends to his flock of sheep on the outskirts of Bethlehem. (Cardiphonia.org)

The peace movement in the early twentieth century was deeply intertwined with religion. Peace organizations met in churches and synagogues. Their membership pursued the cause of peace with religious conviction. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wasn’t simply taking advantage of a captive audience in order to present a religious message; his approach ran much deeper. He argued that the binding power of religion must lie at the core of humankind’s hopes for peace.

“[T]here is a brotherhood greater and superior to all other brotherhoods,” he said, “and that is the spiritual brotherhood, the heavenly brotherhood. This brotherhood is established by the Manifestations of the Holy One.”

At various times during his trip to America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had enumerated a list of these “Manifestations” including Abraham, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Bahá’u’lláh. At the Metropolitan Temple, he noted that “every one of the Holy, Sacred

Manifestations who have appeared have founded this spiritual brotherhood. They have striven to unite humanity to such a degree that all may be accounted as one soul.”



A postcard of the Metropolitan Temple at Seventh Avenue and 14th Street in New York. (Wikimedia)

Borrowing a Christian metaphor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defined their function: “Consider that the purpose or function of the shepherd is to gather together the sheep. . . . The purport is this: that the Prophets of God, the Manifestations, have all been Shepherds and they have gathered together the divine sheep. They have established a bond for the unity of humanity.”

At his talk to the International Peace Forum at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church on May 12, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had used the same metaphor, explaining that “Every divine Shepherd has assembled a flock which had formerly been scattered.” In that talk, he expounded a series of historical examples, beginning with Moses.

“At a time when the tribes of Israel were wandering and dispersed, He assembled, united and educated them to higher degrees of capacity and progress until they passed out of the wilderness of discipline into the holy land of possession. . . . It is evident, therefore, that Moses was a divine Shepherd, for He gathered the tribes of Israel together and united them in the power and strength of a great nationhood.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá described how the pattern continued with Jesus, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh. In each case, the historical record demonstrated the binding power of religion.



Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in 1922. It was gutted by a five-alarm fire in 1983. (George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

Yet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointed out, this bond weakens over time. “Imitations and superstitions” creep into religion, and there is a continuous need for renewal. At a gathering at the home of Edward Kinney a day later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defined another role of the prophets of God:

“The divine Manifestations have been iconoclastic in Their teachings, uprooting error, destroying false religious beliefs and summoning mankind anew to the fundamental oneness of God.” Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returned, again, to the binding power of the Manifestations of God, and their role in establishing peace.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s finished speaking, Rabbi Joseph Silverman took the podium. He led America’s largest Reform Judaism congregation at New York’s Temple Emanu-El. He responded to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument, commenting on “the religion of Peace” by stating “there is absolutely no other religion.” The various forms of religion that have appeared through the ages, he said, were as shells “carrying the kernel from place to place.” “[D]on’t mistake, as so many do, the kernel for the shell.” He also noted that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had made the same point using a similar metaphor: “don’t mistake the lantern for the light.”

“It is the light we need,” Rabbi Silverman said. “Seek the kernel; it will bring illumination to the mind; it will bring purity to the heart; it will bring brotherhood to all mankind.”

DAY 50

MAY 30, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## A Portrait in Moments

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on May 30, 2012

ONE OF THE FIRST recorded images we have of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shows nothing but his hand. He was reluctant to have his photograph taken, because he didn’t want portraits to circulate and be venerated in an excessive or inappropriate manner. In ‘Akká in 1903, Helen Cole persuaded him otherwise. When she produced her camera, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reached into the frame with an extended hand and waved. It’s all he gave her.



One of the earliest images of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, taken by Helen Ellis Cole in ‘Akká in 1903. Before he came to the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá preferred not to be photographed. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

There are sides to ‘Abdul-Bahá that belie the serious image one may get simply by reading the high-minded talks he gave in America.



He had a quick wit. Earl Redman recounts the story of a man announcing proudly: “O, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I came 3000 miles to see you.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a hearty laugh and replied: “I came 8000 miles to see you.”<sup>[1]</sup> Howard Colby Ives notes that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often “touched His fez so that it stood at what I called the humorous angle.”

Many afternoons ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went for a stroll in Riverside Park on the Hudson River. He explained: “When I sleep on the grass, I obtain relief from exhaustion . . . .” Seeing him at a small gathering in Cleveland, a reporter noted: “There was no churchy pomp in his manner.” He was also known to get up early to bake bread, and held dinner parties for which he acted as both chef and host.

Then there were *cars*. Agnes Parsons recounts the story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spotting an electric motor car across a busy street in Washington, and sending Mason Remey over with the directive “find out price.” Similar enthusiasm was directed at trains and trams, though ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had less affection for sea travel: the rollicking waves he experienced on the *Cedric* made his stomach queasy.



**'Abdu'l-Bahá strolling on Riverside Drive on the Upper West Side. He went walking in the parks along the Hudson, close by his residence, most afternoons when he was in New York. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)**

Yet lest this convey the impression of a man of leisure, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá slept no more than four or five hours each night. Howard Colby Ives recalls: “From five o’clock in the morning frequently until long after midnight He was actively engaged in service . . .” Beyond ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s busy schedule of public talks and private meetings, he was also directing the affairs of an international community. During his 7 a.m. breakfast and 10 p.m. dinner each day he responded to a perpetual stream of letters and cablegrams.

Then there were the children. On April 19 in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was heading to the Bowery Mission when a group of boys saw him and his Persian entourage and began to throw sticks. Carrie Kinney explained to them that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a holy man who was on his way to speak to the poor, and they decided they wanted to join him. Instead, arrangements were made for them to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



**A still image from a motion picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with some children, taken in Brooklyn, NY. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)**

When the day arrived, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood at the door of the Kinney’s home and greeted each boy as he entered. Howard Colby Ives tells the story of what happened next: “Among the last to enter the room was a colored lad of about thirteen years. He was quite dark and, being the only boy of his race among them, he evidently feared that he might not be welcome.”

“When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw him,” Ives wrote, “His face lighted up with a heavenly smile. He raised His hand with a gesture of princely welcome and exclaimed in a loud voice so that none could fail to hear; that here was a black rose.”

“The room fell into instant silence. The black face became illumined with a happiness and love hardly of this world. The other boys looked at him with new eyes. I venture to say that he had been called a black — many things, but never before a black rose.”

Of his time with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Reverend Ives noted: “Life has never been quite the same since.”

DAY 51

MAY 31, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Presidential Election Gathers Steam

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on May 31, 2012

*“The 1912 presidential election was a unique moment in the Progressive Era,” writes scholar Brett Flehinger, “because it drew together politicians, social reformers, intellectuals, and economists onto a single stage and produced a many-sided national debate about the future of America’s economic, political, and social structure.” This is the first in a recurring series of features on the political environment of the country in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke.*



The ever-jovial Theodore Roosevelt. This portrait of the former President was taken in 1916. (Library of Congress)

### PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT

decided not to run for a third Presidential term in 1908. He had become America’s youngest chief executive in 1901, when President McKinley was killed by an assassin’s bullet in Buffalo. During the next seven years Roosevelt fundamentally changed the nation’s highest office. In a government system riddled with political patronage and moneyed interests, TR recognized that the office of the President enabled him to both speak to and to represent the interests of *The*

*People*, directly. He called the Presidency the “bully pulpit.” At the turn of the century, the word “bully” carried more meaning than simply the negative connotation as a person who harasses the weak, indicating “superb” or “wonderful,” and was one of Roosevelt’s favorite exclamations. In 1904 Roosevelt appointed his close political ally, William Howard Taft, to be his Secretary of War, and groomed him to be his successor as President. With TR’s support, Taft won the election of 1908 easily.



**On his African safari in 1909 and 1910, Teddy Roosevelt shot 296 animals himself. Here the proud hunter poses with one of the eight elephants he took down. Most of the 11,000 animals killed during the expedition ended up at the Smithsonian Institution and in the American Museum of Natural History in New York. (Library of Congress)**

After leaving office in March, 1909, Roosevelt traveled to Africa on safari. He was a rugged outdoorsman, and had made a fortune writing books about the West. They landed in what is now Kenya, traveled through the Belgian Congo, and then sailed up the Nile to Khartoum and Egypt. The idea was to collect specimens for the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History in New York: the result was a slaughter of African wildlife on an unprecedented scale. Roosevelt’s expedition killed or trapped more than 11,000 animals in all. TR personally shot 296 of them, including nine lions, eight elephants, six buffalo, thirteen rhinoceroses, seven giraffes, seven hippos, and 177 antelope.

From Egypt the expedition sailed to Italy in early 1910, where Gifford Pinchot, one of Roosevelt's close friends, traveled to meet him. Pinchot shocked TR by explaining that Taft had fired him as Chief of the United States Forest Service, and reversed Roosevelt's popular stands on several key issues. Roosevelt and his supporters had then quietly begun to explore how to win Teddy the Republican Presidential nomination in 1912.



William Howard Taft on his campaign train in Chicago in 1908. Taft stands on the right side of the picture, on the second step of the train car. With Roosevelt in support, Taft won the 1908 election easily, with 52% of the vote and two thirds of the Electoral College. ([www.old-picture.com](http://www.old-picture.com))

Taft was head of the Republican party and had most of its delegates locked up. But there was something new coming round the bend in 1912. In the past, Presidential candidates had been nominated by delegates chosen by party insiders. But this year Republican and Democratic voters in sixteen states would select their delegates in binding primary elections. In these states the rank and file of the Republican party would decide, and most of them could be counted on to vote for Roosevelt. By April 25 he had won four primaries in a row: Illinois, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, and Oregon.

Today, on May 31, 1912, the *New York Times* reports that Taft still holds the delegate lead, but 254 of them are being contested. The Republican National Convention begins in Chicago on June 18.

Day 52

**JUNE 1, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **Percy Stickney Grant Doubles Down on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 1, 2012  
[Share](#)<sup>49</sup>

PERCY STICKNEY GRANT wouldn't take the job unless they conceded to his wishes. Like most Episcopal parishes, the Church of the Ascension at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street in New York collected monthly rents from its pews. Wealthy families could reserve seats closer to the front of the nave, and so, every Sunday, the congregation displayed the hierarchy of class distinctions among its members.





This photograph of Rev. Percy Stickney Grant was taken by George Grantham Bain's news service. It has no date, but most of Bain's early images date from the first decade of the twentieth century. (Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

When Grant was asked to become Rector in 1893, he would have none of it. He told the vestry, the organization of parishioners who ran this Episcopal church, that either the paid pews would have to go, or he would. They relented, and Grant accepted the position.

Over the next nineteen years Percy Stickney Grant's church became a center of social activism, and he became a lightning rod for controversy. Once Dr. Alexander Irvine, the Bowery evangelist and union organizer, had invited Grant to help with YMCA meetings in factories and repair shops. "Why should not the Church put a roof over their heads and surround them with beauty?" Grant thought to himself. So, every Sunday evening, he held a "People's Forum," where speakers addressed the congregation and discussed important issues of the day.

It lasted until 1920 when Grant ran afoul of the church hierarchy: such free public discussions frightened them. Grant was called to defend himself and his Forum before the 137th annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. "One cannot conduct a downtown church," he argued, "in the same way you do churches in the Plaza section of Fifth Avenue, Park Avenue,

and Madison Avenue. Don't you think it is about time this diocese aided the downtown churches instead of ripping them up the back?"



Rev. Percy Stickney Grant's Episcopal Church of the Ascension (foreground) at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street in New York, about 1900. (nyc-architecture.com)

Grant lost. The diocese sided with the Bishop of New York, Charles Sumner Burch, and killed the Forum.

But it wasn't the first time Grant had come up against Bishop Burch. Back in 1912 Burch had reprimanded him for inviting 'Abdu'l-Bahá to sit in the Bishop's Chair behind the altar rail on April 14, the morning 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered his first public address in America. Bishop Murray of Maryland had reacted even more strongly, banning 'Abdu'l-Bahá from Episcopal churches throughout his state.

"But an idiotic thing like that would never stop Percy Grant — only make him more defiant," Juliet Thompson later wrote in her diary.

Indeed it did. The Reverend Dr. Percy Stickney Grant had already invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá back to the Church of the Ascension, to speak to the People's Forum on Sunday evening, June 2, 1912.

*In tomorrow's feature, 'Abdu'l-Bahá takes questions from the People's Forum.*

Day 53

**JUNE 2, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **Superstition, Tradition, Mystery, and Confusion**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 2, 2012

CLOUDS HAD GATHERED above Manhattan as the sun dropped to the horizon, and they were expecting rain, but it was still a sweltering 79°F when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived at the Church of the Ascension at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street in New York, just before 8 p.m. on Sunday, June 3, 1912.



The Church of the Ascension, Fifth Avenue and 10th Street, restored by Leo Blackman Architects. Photograph by Tom Ligamari. Used with Permission. ([www.ligamari.com](http://www.ligamari.com))\*

“I suppose nobody is satisfied with all that background of superstition, tradition, mystery and confusion of thought,” Dr. Percy Stickney Grant said, the Rector of the Church, “which in many religions is regarded as the necessary beginning of belief.”

Every Sunday evening at this time, Grant held his “People’s Forum,” an open discussion with a guest speaker that got down to brass tacks on practical issues that mattered to New Yorkers. Back on May 12 Grant had invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to return to the Church of the Ascension — where he had given his first American public address on April 14 — to converse with the audience attending this evening’s Forum.

After Grant’s introduction, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke for a few minutes. But it was only when he had finished that the gathering really became a “Forum.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took a seat in the middle of the chancel beneath the mural, three stone steps up from the floor of the nave — and he took questions.



The Church of the Ascension’s eagle lectern was given to the church in honor of Right Rev. Gregory Thurston Bedell, the second rector of the parish, by his former parishioners in 1898. ([www.ascensionnyc.org](http://www.ascensionnyc.org))

They asked him all kinds of things: Is it true that universal peace will only be possible if all countries were democracies? What kinds of food will human beings eat in the future? What is the status of women in the East? Are you the successor to your father, Bahá’u’lláh, like the Pope in Rome is to Christ? What is your attitude toward family life? Is reincarnation true?

Someone also asked him about the different religions. “The religions of God have the same foundation,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “but the dogmas appearing later have differed.”

“Each of the Divine religions has two aspects,” he continued. “The first is essential. It concerns morality and development of the virtues of the human world.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often used this term, *the human world*, to distinguish humans from the animal kingdom. “This aspect is common to all.”

He also argued that religion comprised a “non-essential” aspect, which addressed particular social needs. “[T]hey undergo change according to the exigency of the time.”



“The Ascension of Our Lord,” by John La Farge, 1888, oil on canvas. ([ascensionnyc.com](http://ascensionnyc.com))

Moses, for example, had made laws for a society that dwelled in the desert. “As there were no penitentiaries, no means of restitution in the desert and wilderness, the laws of God were ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, an ear for an ear.’” But such a law, even a divine law, could have no value in modern times. “Today you have government and organization, a police system, a judge and trial by jury. The punishment and penalty is now different.”

Similarly, Jesus had torn down the Jewish law of divorce, since “in the time of His Holiness Christ,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “divorces were numerous and the cause of corruption. As they were not suitable for the time He made divorce unlawful, and likewise changed other laws.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response spoke directly to Grant’s opening comments about religious superstition, tradition, and confusion. The confusion came from holding on to old traditions, which then transformed into superstitions. Percy Stickney Grant had shown his willingness to

fight for the new, and his Church of the Ascension exemplified a practical approach to religion for the modern age. “The whole purpose of religion,” Grant had said, “is to make each one of us the strongest personality possible;—to make us progressive factors in the community.”

*\* We wish to offer our deepest thanks to Tom Ligamari, photographer for [Leo Blackman Architects](#), for permission to use his beautiful photograph of the restored Church of the Ascension. You can see more of [Tom's work for Leo Blackman here](#).*

**DAY 54**

**JUNE 3, 1912**  
**MILFORD, PA**

## **The War Will Be Staged in Europe**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 3, 2012

AFTER SHOOTING 296 ANIMALS on his African expedition of 1909, Theodore Roosevelt took a tour of Europe. On April 10, 1910, Gifford Pinchot, a member of Roosevelt's former Cabinet, visited him in Porto Maurizio, on the Italian Riviera. The press thought Pinchot might be trying to get him to run again for President in 1912.





Gifford Pinchot (right) and his boss, President Roosevelt, at the Inland Waterways Commission in 1907. Congress created the commission at TR's request, to improve the networks of industrial transportation in the Union. (Library of Congress)

From March through May, Roosevelt had barely had a day when he didn't have to give a speech. When he walked out on stage in Christiania, Norway — now Oslo — on May 5, his voice was almost at its end. Nevertheless, the *New York Times* wrote, he “made a deep impression on the audience which gathered to-day in the National Theatre to hear his address on ‘International Peace’ before the Nobel Prize Committee.” Roosevelt had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906, after mediating the end of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. That summer, diplomats from both sides had met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at his invitation, to hammer out their differences. It became the first example of “multi-track diplomacy,” where social events surrounding the hard-headed meetings enabled belligerents to build personal connections that they then took back to the bargaining table.

In Christiania, King Haakon and Queen Maud listened to the former President pitch an approach to peace based on extending the example of the Supreme Court of the United States to international arbitration, limiting armaments, and one other idea that the *London Morning Post* judged “too fantastic to be realized.”



“[I]t would be a masterstroke,” Roosevelt said, “if those great powers honestly bent on peace would form a League of Peace, not only to keep the peace among themselves, but to prevent, by force if necessary, its being broken by others.” Sadly, he found Europe’s leaders more interested in preparing for war than for peace.



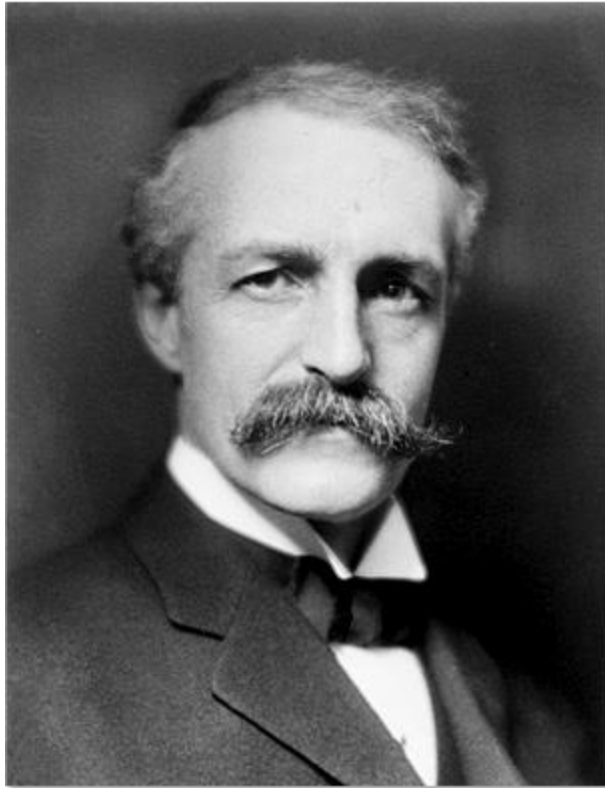
**Grey Towers, Gifford Pinchot's estate in Milford, PA, in 2007. The Pinchot family donated Grey Towers and its 102-acre grounds to the United States Forest Service in 1963. (Daniel Case/Wikimedia)**

Two years later, with Roosevelt winning primary after primary, Gifford Pinchot invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to his estate, Grey Towers in Milford, Pennsylvania, to spend two days with him and his friends. It was built in fieldstone like a French château with three tall conical towers, and stood on a hilltop just a mile from the Delaware River. Pinchot had been America’s first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, spearheading the conservation policies that were one of Roosevelt’s highest priorities.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the train to Milford on the morning of June 3, 1912, from Penn Station. His chronicler, Mahmúd, said that he conversed so much over the two days that his words alone would fill a book. Given the kinds of people who were Pinchot’s friends, the subject turned, inevitably, to politics and war.

In Norway, Roosevelt had suggested that the U. S. Supreme Court might point a way to international agreement, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went further. “Europe and most other areas will be

forced to follow your system,” he said. “Tremendous changes will take place in Europe. The great centralized powers will break up into smaller independent states.”



Portrait of Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the United States Forest Service under Roosevelt, by Pirie MacDonald, 1909. In 1910, Taft fired him, which incensed TR and instigated his 1912 presidential run. (Library of Congress)

In fact, the whole colonial project of governing from the center, he said, was unworkable, “for no matter how great the ability and wisdom of the statesmen of that center, or how developed their sense of justice, they will still not be fully informed of the needs of every town and village and cannot exert themselves justly for the betterment of their surrounding dependencies.”

The cause of the breakup, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, would be a major war. “It will certainly come about but America will not participate in it. This war will be staged in Europe.”

Day 55

JUNE 4, 1912  
MILFORD, PA

## The World Before the War

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 4, 2012

“THE CONTINENT OF EUROPE is one vast arsenal,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a New York newspaper. Even though he spoke energetically of peace, he harbored no illusions about the convulsions that were about to overtake Western civilization. The European arsenal, he said, “only requires one spark at its foundations and the whole of Europe will become a wasted wilderness.”

The decades leading up to the Great War have often been interpreted by historians as bursting with confidence — an unbounded faith in the future. In many ways it was true. The preceding century had seen an unprecedented pace of change. The signs of progress were everywhere.



Queen Victoria arrives at St. Paul's Cathedral in London during the Diamond Jubilee procession of June 22, 1897. (Guildhall Art Gallery)

Humanity, many people thought, had become less warlike. The better off countries became, the less violent they would be. Norman Angell, an English journalist, had made this thesis the core of his 1910 book, *The Great Illusion*. It was only an illusion, he said, that countries actually

benefited by war and conquest. But Angell had missed a key point: Europeans had merely transported their aggression to other, less visible parts of the world.

Just ask the Congolese. King Leopold II of Belgium had wanted a colony even before he became king in 1865, in order to bring prestige to his small country. His “Congo Free State,” a private corporation in which he was sole shareholder, operated from 1885 to 1908. Between eight and ten million Congolese were massacred in brutal labor campaigns, forced starvation, and indiscriminate violence, all in the king’s pursuit of his rubber empire.



**This cartoon from Punch depicts King Leopold II of Belgium as a serpent strangling a Congolese rubber collector. Under his regime, between 2 and 15 million Congolese people died. (Punch Cartoons)**

Leopold used this newfound wealth to raise cultural, artistic, and scientific institutions throughout Belgium. The Palace of Colonies, a natural history museum just outside Brussels, presented a romanticized portrait of life in the Congo. Meanwhile, Leopold’s henchmen in Africa sent him regular counts of the number of hands they had chopped off during their programs of terror, which they designed to keep the rubber profits flowing.

It was the British who finally put an end to it, as part of an international campaign that helped define the idea of “human rights” and created the legal notion of “crimes against humanity.”

England's own empire, of course, stretched over a quarter of the surface of the earth, and ruled a quarter of its people.

It had been on full display on June 22, 1897, at the high point of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Her Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, had proposed a festival celebrating the Empire. They held a procession in the streets of London, watched by over three million people. The prime ministers of the self-governing Dominions attended, along with 50,000 infantrymen from India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Borneo, Cyprus, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the West Indies, and Jamaica.



Queen Victoria in her Diamond Jubilee photograph, 1897. (Wikimedia)

They asked Rudyard Kipling, who had earned a reputation as the Poet of the Empire, to compose a piece for the occasion. So he did.

*Far-called our navies melt away—  
On dune and headland sinks the fire—  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!*

It wasn't what they were expecting. Kipling called it "Recessional," and tossed cold water on the triumphant mood of the day.

*Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

*In tomorrow's feature: Germany challenges Britain, Russia feigns peace, and America flexes its muscles, all in the decades leading up to the Great War.*

**DAY 56**

**JUNE 5, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **America on the Sidelines**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 5, 2012

“THERE IS NO BALANCE of power in Europe but me.” So said Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia, in 1901.

Nationalism dominated the mood in Europe in the decades leading up to the First World War. Nowhere was this stronger than in Germany. Within two years of ascending the throne, Kaiser Wilhelm had dismissed his Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, and begun to rule as an autocratic monarch. The entire continent of Europe would, he asserted, soon revolve around him.





Kaiser Wilhelm II. (1859–1941). Portrait by Bruno Heinrich Strassberger. (Historisches Museum der Stadt, Vienna, Austria)

At Grey Towers, Gifford Pinchot's estate in Milford, Pennsylvania, on June 3, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had argued that justice could not be served by governing vast regions from a single center. "Each of the colonial countries serves to adorn one great capital," he said. But "Tremendous changes will take place in Europe. The great centralized powers will break up into smaller independent states." In short, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the Americans, "Europe will be forced to follow your system."

It would take the Great War to achieve it.

In Russia, Tsar Nicholas II had another idea. He would secure the glory of his nation by declaring peace. On August 29, 1898, he surprised everyone by calling for a conference to discuss arms limitations. "The Czar with an olive branch," commented one newspaper, "that's something new."

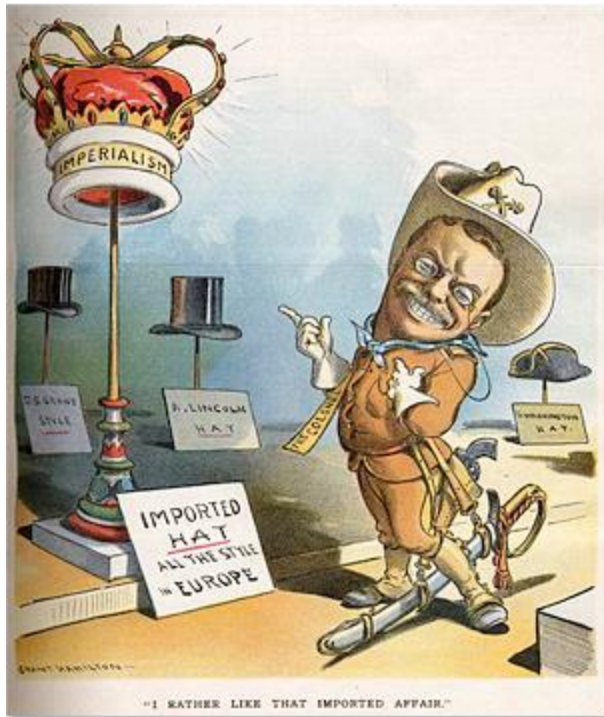
The peace movement found the prospect thrilling. But leaders in Europe met the Czar's call with suspicion. Surely it was nothing more than a pre-emptive move by a cunning strategist, whose nation's military prowess had fallen behind his European rivals.

The Kaiser was outraged at the notion that his state would submit to peace or arbitration. According to Wilhelm, military might *was* the state. His arguments sounded a lot like those



‘Abdu’l-Bahá had encountered in his meeting with Hudson Maxim, the arms dealer, in New York on April 15: war is ennobling to the race; conflict ensures a robust civilization; peace is stagnant, even decadent.

The Tsar’s conference opened on May 18, 1899, at the Hague in the Netherlands. It fell more than a little bit short of global peace. But it did create a permanent international court of arbitration, and banned bombing from the air, chemical warfare, and hollow-point bullets.



On the cover of its September 21, 1904, issue, Puck reflected the apprehension in American minds regarding President Roosevelt's intentions to intervene in Latin America. (Library of Congress)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá thought America had to be the driving force behind such an initiative, but getting involved in world affairs ran counter to the young nation’s instincts. President James Monroe, in his Monroe Doctrine of 1823, had declared that America would neither interfere with existing European colonies nor meddle in the internal concerns of European countries. He merely demanded that European nations stop extending their colonies in the Americas. In 1904, when President Theodore Roosevelt asserted the right of the United States to intervene in Latin America and beyond, he worried many Americans.

Unlike the nations of Europe, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, America could rise above accusations of self-interest. “Your government has, strictly speaking, no colonies to protect,” he said. “It is my hope that inasmuch as the standard of international peace must be upraised it may be upraised upon this continent, for this nation is more deserving and has greater capacity for such an initial step than any other. The other countries await this summons.”

DAY 57

JUNE 6, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Can You Paint Me in a Half Hour?

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on June 6, 2012

“YOU KNOW CHRIST didn’t look like a woman, the way all the pictures of Him look.” That was Juliet Thompson, talking to God, when she was just ten years old. “*Please* let me paint Him when I grow up as the King of Men.” She held onto this wish for the next twenty-six years.



Juliet Thompson as a young woman.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Juliet lived, and wrote, with her heart on her sleeve. Her diary is filled with Biblical metaphors, capitalized pronouns, and a highly personal, poetic language which, while heartwarming, can also be off-putting if you don't like that kind of thing. It is a diary, after all, not a newspaper, and it offers a unique insight into the kinds of close personal relationships 'Abdu'l-Bahá formed with a handful of Americans — in this case an effusive, rising portrait artist from Greenwich Village.

Juliet traveled to 'Akká to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1909. But her first meeting with him dashed her hopes of ever painting the Christ. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked into a room, she wrote, “His effulgence struck me blind.” “Could the sun with the whole universe full of its radiations, or endless flashes of lightning be captured in paint?” Besides, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was adamant that he *wasn't* Christ.

Then, the night before the SS *Cedric* docked in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cabled a message: “On My arrival in America Miss Juliet Thompson shall paint a wonderful portrait of Me.” (Those would be Juliet’s pronouns.) She described her “surprise and dismay, fear, joy and gratitude all mixed together” at hearing the news.



Juliet Thompson's apartment.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

On Monday, June 5, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat down with Juliet at 309 West 78th Street. “Can you paint Me in a half hour?” he asked. Juliet was appalled. It usually took her at least two weeks to paint a head. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá conceded: “Well, I will give you *three* half hours. You mustn’t waste My time, Juliet.”

The conditions were far from perfect. Juliet jammed herself into a small space in the basement for the portrait. She sat, but was used to standing. It was dim, but she usually painted in clear daylight. This was a woman, who, when she went on to paint Grace Coolidge, the First Lady, told the President to leave the room because she couldn’t stand the sound of him chewing an apple.



Juliet Thompson's portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.  
The original is lost. It only exists in a photograph.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

As she sat in front of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, something amazing happened. "All fear fell away from me," she wrote, "and it was as though Someone Else saw through my eyes, worked through my hand. All the points, all the planes in that matchless Face were so clear to me that my hand couldn't put them down quickly enough, couldn't keep pace with the clarity of my vision."

Four years later, in a *Washington Times* article about her painting, she described the experience: "there was something there, unrepressed, evident, unmistakable."

During their final sitting, Juliet held an empty brush and searched her portrait for a missing stroke. 'Abdu'l-Bahá then abruptly rose from his chair.

"It is finished," he said.

Day 58

**JUNE 7, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **Out and About in New York**

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on June 7, 2012

IT WAS HARD to get a decent meal in New York. By June 1, 1912, the waiters and cooks at seventeen New York hotels were on strike – from breakfast time through the dinner hour.



The main concourse at Pennsylvania Station, New York, c. 1910. (Detroit Publishing Co.)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train pulled into Penn Station from Milford, Pennsylvania, on the evening of the 4th. The new station, at Eighth Avenue and West 34th Street, had been designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White to resemble the interior of Caracalla’s baths in Rome. From the station ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was driven to 307 West 78th Street on the Upper West Side, still a stone’s throw from Riverside Park on the Hudson.

Since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had returned from Chicago on May 11, he had been living on the top floor of the Hudson Apartment House at 227 Riverside Drive, but the landlord had asked him to leave because the constant stream of visitors was too much for his staff to handle. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then moved for a few days to the home of Edward and Carrie Kinney, just around the corner at 780 West End Avenue. But before returning from Milford, he had asked his staff to rent the new house on West 78th Street.



The Brooklyn Bridge and the East River from Brooklyn, 1910. ([www.freewebs.com](http://www.freewebs.com))

There was already a gathering waiting to meet him. When speaking to them he compared the material advances of America to “a glass of the utmost transparency and purity,” the purpose of which is to bring about “divine civilization,” which acts as the “shining lamp.” Unlike the other famous Eastern visitors to America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not condemn the industrial success of the nation. Instead, “the more people advance in the material realm, he said, “the more their capacity for attaining spirituality is augmented.” He continued: “The sounder the body, the greater is the resplendency and manifestation of the spirit.” The material world does not impede spirituality,” but rather “the dogmas and imitations that are contrary to true science and a sound mind.”



The Concourse in Pennsylvania Station, New York, 1910. Designed by McKim, Mead & White. ([nyc-architecture.com](http://nyc-architecture.com))

In the morning on June 5, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat for Juliet Thompson for the first time. He then headed south and crossed the East River to Brooklyn, to attend a children’s event held by the Unity Club, the leading social club of Brooklyn’s Yiddish-speaking Jewish community. Admiral Robert Peary, the explorer who had returned in 1909 from his expedition to the North Pole, had invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak here. They had first met at

the Persian Legation in Washington, DC, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken at Howard University on April 23. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had congratulated Admiral Peary on his discovery, and said that the world had been very interested to know what was to be found at the North Pole. Peary, he said, had forever relieved the public mind by ascertaining that there was, in fact, nothing there! Although Juliet Thompson wrote that Peary had been nonplussed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s observation, it didn’t stop him from coming back to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá again and again.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá returned to Brooklyn again on June 6, spending part of the day at the home of Mrs. Newton. After taking a drive through one of Brooklyn’s public parks he returned to the Upper East Side in the evening.

On Saturday, June 8, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returned to Penn Station. This time, his ticket was for Philadelphia.

Day 59

**JUNE 8, 1912**  
**PHILADELPHIA, PA**

## **The Holy Experiment**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 8, 2012

THE FIRST OF A FLEET of twenty-three ships arrived at the mouth of the Delaware River on October 27, 1682. Commanding the lead ship, the *Welcome*, was William Penn, a pacifist Quaker with a land grant from the King of England, determined to fashion a utopia in the wilderness.





An etching of William Penn, c. 1682.  
(Wikimedia)

Penn had suffered imprisonment for his beliefs back in England, and set about building a “tolerance settlement” in the New World where freedom of worship would be absolute. His first act of business was to sign a “Great Treaty” with Tammany, the Chief of the Delaware tribe, a peace pact he never violated.

Thus began Penn’s “Holy Experiment” known as Pennsylvania. The King himself chose the name in honor of Penn’s recently departed father. Penn called the colony’s capital *Philadelphia*, a name that combined the Greek words for “love” and “brother.”

Penn made good on his promise. Philadelphia emerged not only as a commanding center of Quaker influence, but also as a Presbyterian stronghold, the national headquarters for the American Baptists, a place where Catholics and Anglicans worshiped in safety, and a refuge for German Lutherans and Mennonites. In due course the city would play host to the first independent black denomination in America: the African Methodist Episcopal Church.



"Declaration of Independence" by John Trumbull. (Wikimedia)

Philadelphia became the busiest port and largest city in the Thirteen Colonies, and a hotbed for those who demanded independence. On May 10, 1775, representatives from the colonies gathered on Chestnut Street in the Pennsylvania legislature to bring matters to a head. Five days later they declared the colonies in a state of defense. By June 14, they had nominated George Washington as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. The next July they issued the Declaration of Independence, whose words rang throughout both the Old World and the New.

Among those forging the Declaration was Philadelphia's leading citizen, and the man responsible for virtually all of its progressive public institutions, Mr. Benjamin Franklin. Franklin defines the American ethos of hard work, education, community spirit, and both political and religious freedom. He was heir to Penn's experiment, adding to it the scientific and rational ideals of the Enlightenment to forge a truly American identity.

He became known as "The First American."



Portrait of Benjamin Franklin by Joseph-Siffred Duplessis, 1778. (Wikimedia)

Penn's City of Brotherly Love continued to attract those dedicated to the experiment well into the next century. Russell Conwell — a Civil War veteran, lawyer, author of ten books, and ordained American Baptist minister — arrived in Philadelphia in 1882.

Conwell held classes at his church to tutor adults in university subjects, in tune with Penn's and Franklin's commitment to improving their fellow men. By 1884 his effort had become Temple University. By 1912 the Baptist Temple — Conwell's church — was surrounded by three hospitals and his congregation was one of the largest in America. It was here that Pastor Conwell welcomed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to speak, on June 9, 1912.

*In tomorrow's feature, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addresses a crowd of 2,500 at Russell Conwell's Baptist Temple in Philadelphia.*

Day 60

**JUNE 9, 1912**  
**PHILADELPHIA, PA**

## **Acres of Diamonds**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 9, 2012

“IN THE ESTIMATION of God all men are equal.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words at the Baptist Temple in Philadelphia on June 9, 1912, echoed the Declaration of Independence, conceived in that same city nearly a century-and-a-half before. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that his father, Bahá’u’lláh, “taught that an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted.”



Grace Baptist Temple in Philadelphia, 2012.  
([celebrationofunity.blogspot.ca](http://celebrationofunity.blogspot.ca))

It was something that the pastor at the Baptist Temple — Dr. Russell H. Conwell — had been practicing for over forty years. By the time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Conwell’s church, it was surrounded by a university, and not one but three hospitals, all designed to uplift the community of Philadelphia.

Conwell first heard about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during a visit to the Middle East. He later sent a cable to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt, inviting him to address his congregation. It wasn’t Conwell’s first trip to the Middle East. Forty years earlier he had gone as a journalist, a trip that set his life in motion.

Russell Conwell began his working life as correspondent for the American Traveller, a job that would take him to the four corners of the earth. While riding in a camel caravan through the

Tigris and Euphrates valley in Mesopotamia, Conwell listened as his guide recounted tall tales, one of which would change the course of his life.



Reverend Russell Conwell, founder of Temple University, Philadelphia, in 1922. (Kúbey-Rembrandt Studios)

It went something like this: A young Persian farmer named Ali was lured away from his fruitful fields by tales of diamond fields in a far-off land. He sold his farm and set out in search of the gems. Far and wide he roamed, year after year, until both his youth and his wealth disappeared. Ali died an old, poor, and disenchanted man. Not long afterward, acres of diamonds were found on his own land.

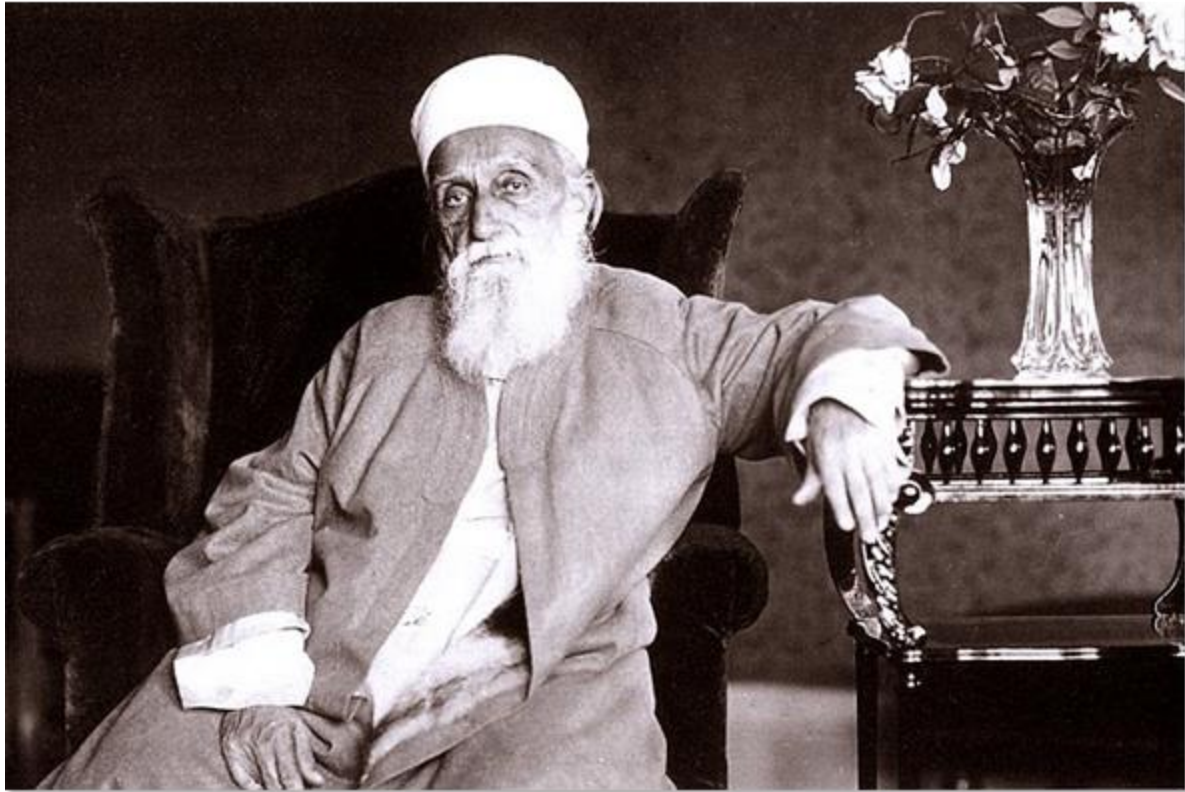
To Conwell's fellow travelers, it was just another story to pass the time. But in Conwell's mind a great truth had been sown. The story became the backbone of a speech – "Acres of Diamonds" – that he would deliver 6,000 times over the next forty years. From that point forth, Conwell said, his life focused on making the best of the community in which he lived, first as a journalist, then a lawyer, and finally as a pastor.

It must have made him smile when 'Abdu'l-Bahá, upon arriving in Philadelphia, told the Philadelphia Ledger: "Journalists must write significant articles, articles that shall foster the public welfare. If they do so they will be the highest promoters for the development of the community."

'Abdu'l-Bahá began his talk at the Baptist Temple stating that there are "two pathways in the world of humanity: the natural or materialistic, the other the religious or spiritual." The first he said is the "pathway of the animal realm" which is ultimately self-serving. The animal "follows



its own instincts and desires,” he said, “whatever its impulses and proclivities may be, it has the liberty to gratify them.”



**'Abdu'l-Bahá spends a tired moment at the Rittenhouse Hotel, where he stayed in Philadelphia in June, 1912.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)**

But “man is progressive” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked. He “possesses a mighty will.” The pathway of true religion, he said, “involves the acquisition of praiseworthy attributes, heavenly illumination and righteous actions in the world of humanity.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went on to enumerate the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, among them the unity of mankind, the elimination of all forms of prejudice, and the need for economic justice, universal human rights, and universal education.

“This pathway is conducive to the progress and uplift of the world,” he told the congregation at Pastor Conwell’s church. “It is the source of human enlightenment.”

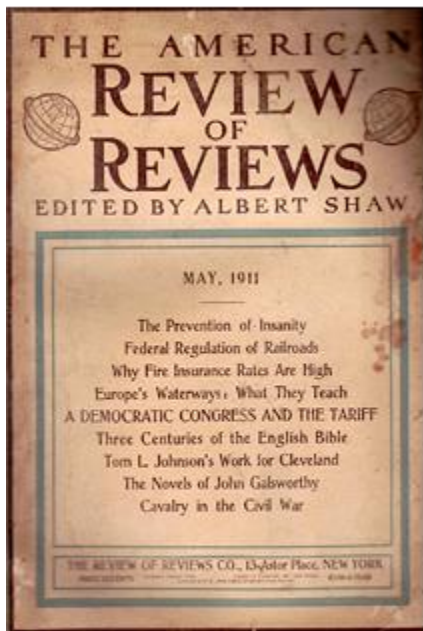
Day 61

JUNE 10, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## News, Insight, and Shredded Wheat

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 10, 2012

“FOR THE SUMMER DAYS,” the advertisement went, “when the appetite needs to be coddled with fresh fruits that nourish and strengthen without disturbing the digestion. There is nothing so deliciously satisfying as *Shredded Wheat Biscuit With Strawberries and Cream.*”



The May, 1911, edition of the American Review of Reviews. The June, 1912, cover was similar. (Image sourced from eBay)

The ad ran on the front inside cover of the June, 1912, issue of the *American Review of Reviews*, a magazine edited by Albert Shaw. Every month, for twenty-five cents, Shaw offered his readers original stories, and summarized noteworthy articles from other news sources around the world, providing an editorial perspective on each subject. In the June issue, which was about 130 pages long, one of Shaw’s “Leading Articles of the Month” was about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Many daily newspapers had covered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first two months in America, but the popular magazines, which had a longer editorial schedule, only began to appear in June.

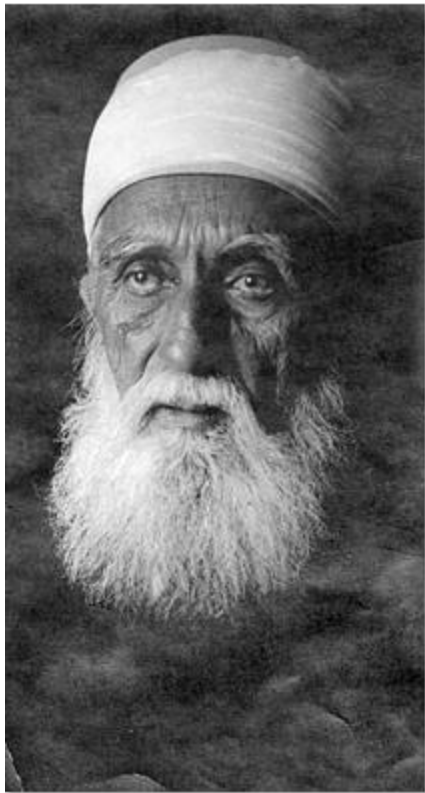
The *American Review*’s story on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá — “Will Bahatism Unite All Religious Faiths?”



— appeared on the 107th page of the issue. It reported on his 1911 trip to London, and began by quoting an English magazine, the *Fortnightly Review*:

“Surely the dawn of a new day was heralded on that Sunday evening when the Archdeacon of Westminster walked hand in hand with Abdul Baha up the nave of St. John’s Church.”

Then Shaw’s writer chimed in with his own opinion: “Considering . . . the fact that this little-known Persian prophet has come to the western world to proclaim the dawn of the millennium, to announce that the Messiah awaited by all nations has actually lived, taught and died upon this earth in the past century, to preach what he and his followers believe to be the new world religion, destined to include an supersede all others and to unite all nations under the banner of a common faith, this would hardly seem an extravagant statement.” The “Messiah” they meant was not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but his father, Bahá’u’lláh.



Photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá printed in the *American Review of Reviews*, June 1912. (Underwood & Underwood, New York)

The story was embedded among dozens of other stories on Progressive subjects. The 47th page of the edition offered a posthumous tribute to William T. Stead, one of the first investigative journalists. He had gone down on the *Titanic*. An article ten pages later explored “Roosevelt and the Third Term,” complete with cartoons. The 87th page carried a piece by Frank B. Kellogg, a Federal prosecutor, who wrote about the results of his

successful 1911 antitrust case against Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, which found the corporate behemoth guilty of manipulating the petroleum industry.

The article on 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested that humankind took priority over national ideals. "There is something above and beyond patriotism," he had said, as the *American Review* quoted him.

"When we see this, and know in very truth the brotherhood of man, war will appear to us in its true light as an outrage on civilization, an act of madness and blindness."

"Baha'u'llah announced this half a century ago in the slaughter-house of Persia," the story read, "and it is not less forcible because to-day it is the slogan of Peace Societies in every civilized country in the world."

The *American Review of Reviews* seemed to offer its reader everything, from war, politics, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, all the way to Shredded Wheat. "*No cooking or baking — no culinary skill required.*"

*In tomorrow's feature: W. E. B. Du Bois prints his account of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at last month's Fourth Annual Conference of the NAACP.*

Day 62

**JUNE 11, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **Along the Color Line**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 11, 2012

"THERE ARE in the United States 26,999,151 males of voting age," the story went. "Nine and one-tenth per cent of these are of Negro descent." W. E. B. Du Bois, the editor of *The Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP, opened each monthly issue with a section called "Along The Color Line," a collection of short news items from across the nation that told of the upliftment of African Americans.



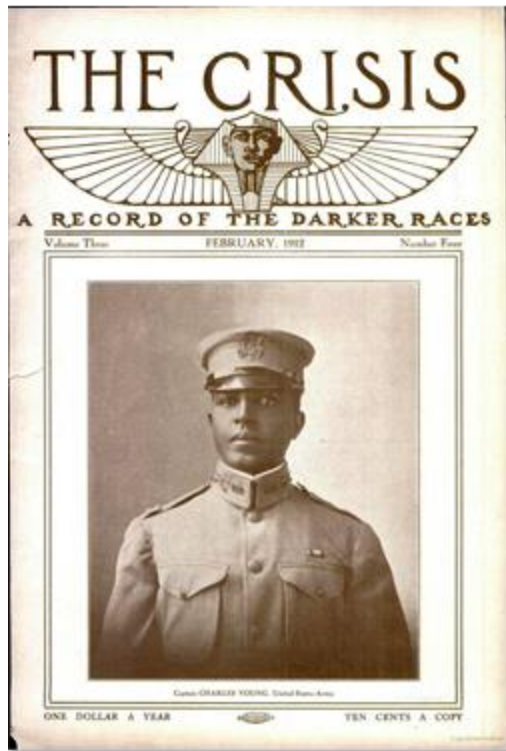
William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, Editor of *The Crisis*, 1918. (Library of Congress)

“An anti-Roosevelt meeting has been held by the colored citizens of Boston,” read an item in the June, 1912, issue. Another reported that “The late Benjamin Guggenheim, who went down with the ‘Titanic,’ left a bequest of \$5,000 to the Colored Orphan Asylum, New York City.” Of the 100,000 people recently made homeless by the flood in New Orleans, it also said, 90,000 of them were black.

But the main story in Du Bois’s magazine in June was the coverage of the Fourth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which had taken place April 28–30, in Chicago. It was, he wrote, “one of the most significant meetings ever held in the defense of the rights of colored Americans.”

“Many striking personalities were seen and felt in the gatherings,” Du Bois wrote, “first of all Jane Addams — calm, sweet and so absolutely fearless when she sees the right.” The diversity of the closing session, on the last evening, especially impressed him. It was, he said, “a scene which one would travel far to see.” Not only did a Jewish rabbi preside, but three dynamic speakers shared the stage: a Southern white man, the head of a colored settlement, and “a cultivated colored woman who in quiet tones told of the dynamiting of her own home.”

“As opening and climax to this remarkable gathering came a speech of Abdul Baha and a farewell from Julius Rosenwald. Small wonder that a thousand disappointed people were unable to get even standing room in the hall.”



Cover of the February, 1912, edition of *The Crisis*.  
(Image sourced from Google Books)

Of the dozens of speeches given at the conference, Du Bois chose to print just three. One of them was by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He had spoken for about fifteen minutes in front of the crowd jammed into Handel Hall at 40 Randolph Street in the Loop area of downtown. He had begun by quoting the Old Testament: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” “Let us find out,” he proposed, “just where and how he is the image and likeness of the Lord, and what is the standard or criterion whereby he can be measured.”

Then he had reeled off a series of rhetorical questions to reveal the incoherence of color-based definitions of what it means to be human: “[C]an we apply a color test as a criterion, and say such and such an one is colored a certain hue and he is therefore, in the image of God? Can we say, for example, that a man who is green in hue is an image of God?”

“Hence we come to the conclusion that colors are of no importance. Colors are accidental in nature. . . . Let him be blue in color, or white, or green, or brown, that matters not! Man is not to be pronounced man simply because of bodily attributes. Man is to be judged according to his intelligence and spirit.”

“That is the image of God.”

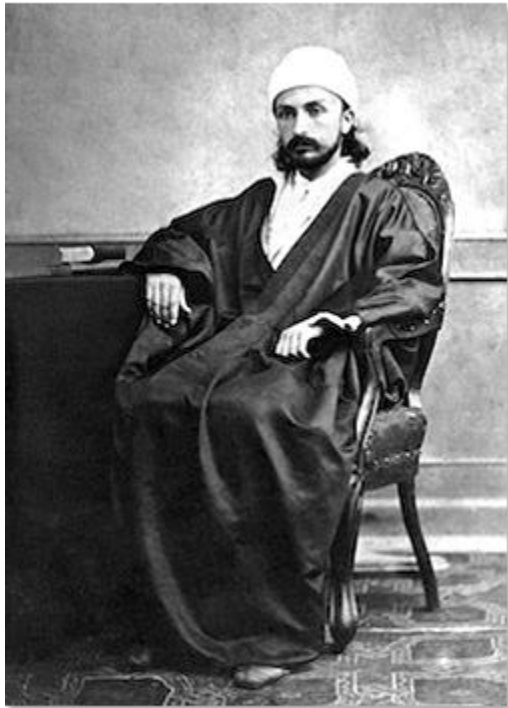
DAY 63

JUNE 12, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Handsomest Young Man in Baghdad

By ANNABEL KNIGHT | Published on June 12, 2012

“IF ANYONE HAS not yet met me,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “or if anyone has some urgent business, call them. All others I will meet in the public gatherings because I have no time and it is impossible to see everyone individually.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá as a young man. (Bahá'í International Community)

It was the morning of June 12, 1912, at 309 West 78th Street in Manhattan, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was staying. And he was exhausted. He was talking with one of his secretaries, Mahmúd. Perhaps polite New York society would have been piqued to encounter such forthrightness from ‘Abdu’l Bahá, but those friends who knew his life story would have understood completely.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was twelve years old — he was known as Abbás then — he began managing the crowds who came to see his father. Bahá’u’lláh had returned to Baghdad from the

mountains of Kurdistan in 1856. The family was in exile; as prisoners of the Ottoman Empire they weren't allowed to leave the city.

On his own door Abbás hung a placard: "Those who come for information may apply within," it read, but, "those who come only because of curiosity had better stay away." On his father's door he hung another. "Those who are searching for God," it said, "come and come and come."

The young Abbás had taken it upon himself to distinguish between crass voyeurs and truth-seekers, and to admit only the latter into his father's presence. While some visitors were sincerely hoping to learn about his father's religion, others were like inquisitive tourists, arriving to view an interesting exhibit. No doubt the same was happening to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in New York.



Map showing Turkey's borders between 1856 and 1878. Constantinople is center-right. (Nation Master)

In 1903, his sister, Bahiyih, told the story of the early years to Madame Canavarro, a friend of Myron Phelps, who published it in his book, *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, in 1904. She said that her brother's only diversion in his unusual childhood was horseback riding, and that he grew to become a dynamic and proficient

horseman. He had sky blue eyes, thick black hair, and a short, trimmed beard. “He was,” she said, “one of the handsomest young men in Baghdad.”

As a child of eight, Abbás faced down gangs of boys in the streets of Tehran who pelted him with stones. In Baghdad as a teenager, despite not having attended school, he challenged the city’s scholars to debates in the mosques. “Who is your teacher?” they would ask him. “Where do you learn the things you say?” His reply was invariably: my father. He became known as “The Youthful Sage.”

As a young man, Abbás continued to filter Bahá’u’lláh’s seemingly endless visitors for the remaining seven years the family spent in Baghdad. He went on to argue the exiles’ case in front of government officials in Constantinople, where the Sultan held the family under watch for four months. During the six years they faced starvation under house arrest in Adrianople, now Edirne, on the European side of the Bosphorus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá motivated them to survive. Then, for the last twenty-four years of Bahá’u’lláh’s life in and around the Ottoman penal colony of ‘Akká, he won the respect of the city by refusing to allow the group of exiles to see themselves as victims.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was finally released from prison in 1909.

*In tomorrow’s feature, the second in a series of three looking at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s youth.*

Day 64

**JUNE 13, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## **I Was Tired So I Slept**

By ANNABEL KNIGHT | Published on June 13, 2012

FRANK SINATRA SANG that he wanted to “Wake up in the city that doesn’t sleep.” He meant New York. But, on June 13, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá just wanted to sleep.

“I was tired so I slept,” he said, after resting briefly in the middle of the afternoon. It had been another busy day at his residence in Manhattan. Several prominent ministers had called to converse, drink tea, and invite him to speak at their churches. As usual, the front door had



opened to visitors at 7:30 a.m. and would remain so until midnight, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would often start attending to his correspondence.



A caravan approaching Mosul, in northern Iraq, along the Tigris River. (Library of Congress)

He frequently survived on less than three hours sleep.

In fact, throughout his life, sleep had often been something of a luxury.

When Bahá’u’lláh’s family was under house arrest in Adrianople, it had been the squealing of the rats that kept them awake. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would light bright lamps to keep the vermin away, but then the light would make it hard to sleep. Sleep was always hard won by the prisoners of the Ottoman Empire.

The family’s banishment eventually landed them in Constantinople, the empire’s capital, in 1863. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was nineteen, and saw himself as his father’s chief protector. He rode alongside Bahá’u’lláh’s wagon on a temperamental Arab stallion, taming it with his expert horsemanship. The horse became his partner in sleep. They would often gallop across the desert wastes of Iraq, far ahead of the exiles’ caravans, and dismount. Then they would lie down together and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would rest his head on the animal’s neck and sleep. When the party approached, the horse would awaken ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a kick and they would resume.



The prison occupied by Bahá'u'lláh in Akká.  
(Bahá'í International Community)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá honed his capacity to seize moments of rest under difficult circumstances. Toward the end of Bahá’u’lláh’s life, although still technically a prisoner, he had been allowed to move to a private house at Bahji, outside the prison city of ‘Akká, in 1879. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá chose to remain in the city to attend to the exiled community’s affairs, but he would walk to Bahji regularly, on foot and often in oppressive heat. If he got tired, he would simply lie on the ground and sleep, setting his head on a nearby stone.

People asked him why he didn’t travel on horseback anymore; “How can I come to my Lord riding?” he would answer. “When Christ went out he walked, and slept in the fields. Who am I, that in visiting my Lord I should go as greater than Christ?”

In New York on June 13, 1912, in the City that Never Sleeps, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá found himself with a bed, a pillow, a quilt, and a mattress with springs. So he slept.

*In tomorrow’s feature, the third in a series of three looking at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s youth.*

Day 65

JUNE 14, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## “Put Us in a Steamer and Drown Us”

By ANNABEL KNIGHT | Published on June 14, 2012

“DO THIS!” shouted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Take us out on a steamer and drown us in the ocean. You can thus end at once our sufferings and your perplexities. But we refuse to be separated.”



**'Abdu'l-Aziz, Sultan of Turkey. (sourced from eBay)** Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and his supporters — seventy-seven exiles in all — had just arrived in Gallipoli in the northwestern corner of Turkey, after their banishment from Adrianople in 1868. Upon their arrival, they were informed that the Governor of the city had received instructions from ‘Abdu’l-Aziz, the Sultan of Turkey, declaring that this close knit group of prisoners were now to be separated, and no one was to be informed of the others’ whereabouts. It was the second time they had been dealt this particular threat.

During his five years in Adrianople, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had become friends with the Governor of that city, often visiting him at his palace. When the Governor received the Sultan’s order that the family were not just to be banished, but also separated, he was distraught. He wrote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a contrite letter of apology and fled the city, leaving his subordinates to carry out the Sultan’s orders.

A cordon of soldiers surrounded the family's house. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá confronted them, he told the officer in command that they would rather die than be separated, and, flanked by two soldiers, he set off for the palace. He persuaded the officials there to send a telegram to Constantinople, asking that the order be changed. Constantinople refused; 'Abdu'l-Bahá persisted. He visited the palace daily to make further appeals. After a week, a telegram arrived with a concession: the bulk of the exiles would be separated, but the family would be permitted to remain together.

But 'Abdu'l-Bahá wasn't satisfied with that either. In Turkish, he demanded that the Governor, who had now returned to the city, should intervene. Another telegram arrived the next day. The company of exiles would stay together.



'Abdu'l-Bahá, his family, and companions in exile. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is just left of center. (Bahá'í International Community)

So, on arrival in Gallipoli, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá learned that this promise had been withdrawn, he told the Governor and his officials that they would prefer to be drowned in the ocean. And for the second time, the exiles were granted the right to endure the next phase of their incarceration together.

They were duly taken in small boats to the Ottoman penal colony of 'Akká, where criminals throughout the empire were sent. The air was so foul that it was said that if a bird flew over 'Akká, it would fall like dead weight out of the sky.

Yesterday in Manhattan, June 13, 1912, the painter Juliet Thompson had visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to complete the third and final sitting for his portrait. As she waited to begin her work, she watched

‘Abdu’l-Bahá sitting in the window seat, listening quietly to the outpourings of a distressed young girl.

The girl couldn’t understand why her life was so full of trials, especially when, as she told him, she read the 91st and the 23rd Psalms every night.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded: “To pray is not to read the psalms, to pray is to trust in God and to be submissive in all things to Him. . . . Strong ships are not conquered by the sea, they ride the waves. Now be a strong ship, not a battered one.”

Day 66

**JUNE 15, 1912**  
**BROOKLYN, NY**

## **Brooklyn Refuses to Silence ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 15, 2012

THE CONTROVERSY JUST wouldn’t go away. The Reverend Percy Stickney Grant had started it all by seating ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Bishop’s chair at his Episcopal Church of the Ascension on April 14. It was now June, but *The Churchman*, the official publication of the Episcopal Church, seemed determined to flog the subject to death.



Brooklyn in 1908. Photo by George Grantham Bain. (Library of Congress)

Reverend John H. Melish had written to *The Churchman* to defend Grant. The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Melish argued, were essentially Christian, and that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, himself, was “‘by nature Christian,’ as his whole doctrine is that of love.” On June 13, the Church’s response showed up in the daily edition of *The Independent*.

“The question is,” *The Churchman* had printed, “What is the law of the Church, not, What is the character of Abdul Baha or the nature of his teaching.”

*The Independent* agreed. “Dr. Melish cannot defend himself,” its columnist wrote, “except by the bold reply of Peter to the Sanhedrim which forbade him to preach in the temple.” *The Independent* seemed to be saying that Episcopal pastors who welcomed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to their churches could only justify it if they were willing to claim that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was equal to Christ.

But Brooklyn’s churches didn’t see it that way at all. John Howard Melish was one of their own. He was the Rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity, an Episcopal Church on the northwest corner of Clinton and Montague Streets in Brooklyn Heights, a short walk west from Columbus Park and just south of the Brooklyn Bridge. The surrounding churches made their response clear on Sunday, June 16, 1912.

Just before 11:00 a.m., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pulled up in his carriage to the Fourth Unitarian Church on Beverley Road in Flatbush, southeast of Prospect Park. The church had posted a large sign outside in bold letters:

“THE GREAT PERSIAN PROPHET, HIS HOLINESS ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, WILL SPEAK AT 11:00 A.M. IN THIS CHURCH ON THE 16TH OF JUNE.”



Rev. Samuel Parkes Cadman, Rector of Brooklyn's Central Congregational Church, in 1910. (Wikimedia)

Later that afternoon, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed the congregation at a second church in Brooklyn. When the Rev. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman welcomed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to his Central Congregational Church at 25 Hancock Street, he made sure that no one among the congregation could mistake his own position on the issue.

“I should like to say,” he emphasized at the outset, “that it is with great pleasure I ask Abdul-Baha to speak to us tonight.”

“Christian people,” he told his congregation, “can afford to be absolutely free, not tolerant — I do not care for that word — but free and catholic in their extension of liberty and courtesy to other people.”

For Cadman, it wasn’t merely religious regulations that should determine if ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be invited to speak in a Christian Church, but the Christian spirit of charity.

“Abdul-Baha our Elder Brother comes to us from the far East which has always been the birthplace of the world’s great religions . . . and I will leave you in the hands of this visitor whom we are proud to have with us.”

*In tomorrow’s feature: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses the Central Congregational Church in Brooklyn, and tackles the controversy head on.*



DAY 67

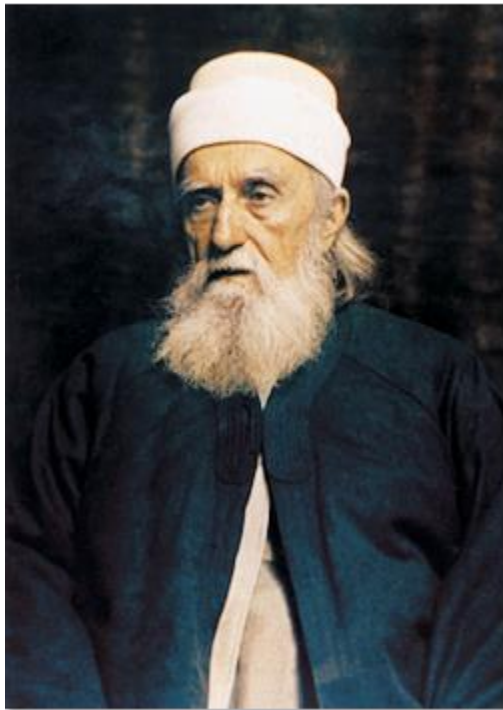
JUNE 16, 1912  
BROOKLYN, NY

## Brooklyn Gets More Than It Bargained For

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 16, 2012

“EVERY RELIGION AND EVERY RELIGIOUS ASPIRATION may be freely voiced and expressed here,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the congregation in Brooklyn.

Three days ago, a New York newspaper had criticized Reverend John H. Melish of the Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, who had defended ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s right to speak from the Episcopal pulpit. Pastors from other Brooklyn churches had made it clear that they didn’t agree with the Episcopal church hierarchy, including the Reverend S. Parkes Cadman who had invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak at his Central Congregational Church this afternoon.



A portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (National Bahá'í Archives, USA).“Consider what a vast difference exists between modern democracy and the old forms of despotism,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Cadman’s congregation. “Under an autocratic government the opinions of men are not free, and development is stifled, whereas in democracy, because thought and speech are not restricted, the greatest progress is witnessed.”

“It is likewise true in the world of religion,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted. Then he thanked Dr. Cadman for the invitation to speak, calling the Reverend “indeed a servant of the oneness of humanity.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented on the path to unity within the broader Christian church: “If Christians of all denominations and divisions should investigate reality, the foundations of Christ will unite them.”

Then he moved beyond the Christian religion: “Likewise, in the wider field if all the existing religious systems will turn away from ancestral imitations and investigate reality, seeking the real meanings of the Holy Books, they will unite and agree upon the same foundation, reality itself.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wasn’t referring to the religious systems pieced together by man. He had been clear on many occasions that man-made religious hierarchies could never be reconciled. He was speaking about the source of those religions.



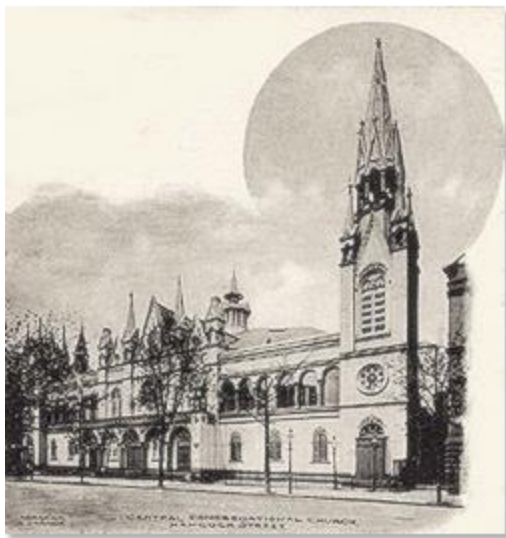
Rev. Samuel Parkes Cadman, Rector of Brooklyn's Central Congregational Church, in 1910. (Wikimedia)

“The holy Manifestations Who have been the Sources or Founders of the various religious systems were united and agreed in purpose and teaching,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained. “Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are one in spirit and reality.”

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned it up a notch: he started to speak about Islám. Cadman had said, after all, that all religious opinions were welcome here. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wanted to convince his audience that Muḥammad had revered Christ. “[I]n the Qur’án there is eulogy and commendation of Christ such as you do not find in the Gospel,” he said. “In this sacred Book there are explicit texts . . . stating that Christ was the Word of God, that He was the Spirit of God, that Jesus Christ came into this world through the quickening breaths of the Holy Spirit.”

“For more than a thousand years,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the congregation, “there has been enmity and strife between Muslims and Christians.” He asked: “How much blood has flowed in their wars; how many nations have been destroyed; how many children have been made fatherless?”

The point was clear: “If the Holy Books were rightly understood, none of this discord and distress would have existed, but love and fellowship would have prevailed instead.” The same, he remarked, applies to all religions.



A postcard of Central Congregational Church in Brooklyn, 1906. (nycago.org)

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke about his father.

Bahá’u’lláh, he noted, had spoken out in the East when “the various peoples and nations were in a state of antagonism and strife.” He described how his father was imprisoned by the Persian and Ottoman governments, his followers tortured and murdered, and how, in spite of being a prisoner, Bahá’u’lláh “wrote to the kings and rulers of the world in words of wonderful eloquence, arrainging them severely and summoning them to the divine standard of unity and justice.”

Bahá’u’lláh “removed all the imitations and prejudices which had caused separation and misunderstanding,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “and laid the foundation of the one religion of God.”

“Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists all were united in actual fellowship and love. The souls who followed Bahá’u’lláh from every nation have become as one family . . . willing to sacrifice life for each other. The Muslim will give his life for the Christian, the Christian for the Jew and all of them for the Zoroastrian.”

“They have attained to the condition of rebirth in the Spirit of God.”

Day 68

**JUNE 17, 1912**  
**NEW YORK, NY**

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far: Month Two

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 17, 2012

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been in America for a little over two months now. We thought we’d take this opportunity to look back at some of the highlights of the previous few weeks.



A commemorative medallion from the 1912 visit commissioned by Agnes Parsons. Created by Theodore Spicer-Simson, an English sculptor living in Washington, D.C. ([master-in-america.blogspot.ca](http://master-in-america.blogspot.ca))

In [“The Smell of Blood Upon Us”](#) and [The Good Shepherds](#) we continued our series on the peace movement in America. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has become a regular fixture in a network of leaders who shape the movement.

[The Presidential Election Gathers Steam](#) marked the beginning of a new series covering the 1912 presidential election. We'll continue to explore this story right through to election day on November 5.

On June 2, 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to Percy Stickney Grant's Church of the Ascension to host a question and answer session at the 'People's Forum.' [Percy Stickney Grant Doubles Down on 'Abdu'l-Bahá](#) and [Superstition, Tradition, Mystery, and Confusion](#) were both popular articles.

On Day 57, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked New York portrait painter Juliet Thompson, [Can You Paint Me in a Half Hour?](#) (The answer was no.)

'Abdu'l-Bahá then travelled to Philadelphia – the City of Brotherly Love – that began as a [Holy Experiment](#) and became the home of Benjamin Franklin, the Declaration of Independence, and the remarkable preacher Russell Conwell. In [Acres of Diamonds](#) 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed an audience of 2,500 at Conwell's Baptist Temple on the source of human enlightenment.

A pair of features – [News, Insight, and Shredded Wheat](#) and the slightly less edible [Along the Color Line](#) – looked at the coverage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's trip that began to appear in popular magazines starting in June.

Finally, we published a trio of features – [The Handsomest Young Man in Baghdad, I Was Tired So I Slept](#), and ["Put Us In a Steamer and Drown Us"](#) – looking back at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's youth.

## DAY 69

JUNE 18, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

# The Pursuit of Happiness

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on June 18, 2012

"ARE YOU HAPPY?" he asked.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was known to spring this disarming question on unsuspecting Americans. They had agreed to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" when declaring their independence from rainy England. Happiness, it seemed, was an important instrument in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's repertoire.



A rainy May Day in New York, May 1, 1909. (George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

On June 19, 1912, he tried it out again in New York. Mrs. Hinkle Smith came from a well-off family in Philadelphia. Her husband, William Hinkle Smith, was the director of a large copper mining outfit. When she first met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, she had asked him to give her a Persian name. He called her *Tábandih*, which means “Light-Giver.”

But today she had a headache.

After suggesting a particular type of medicine, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offered an additional remedy. “You must always be happy,” he said. “Happiness has a direct influence in preserving our health, while being upset causes illness.” Further, he noted, “You must associate with joyous and happy people.”

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s philosophy on happiness ran much deeper than platitudes and sentimentality. “The basis of eternal happiness,” he noted, “is spirituality and divine virtue, which is not followed by sorrow.” Then he added: “physical happiness is subject to a thousand changes and vicissitudes.”



This week's issue of *The New Republic* (June 28, 2012) features an essay on "HAPPYISM: The Creepy New Economics of Pleasure." ([tnr.com](http://tnr.com))

By the time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in America in 1912, his body had been worn down by a lifetime of oppression. “He is sixty-eight but looks ninety,” one reporter observed. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been in a constant state of exile, imprisonment, and house arrest from the time he was eight years old. Yet, as much as he was known for his grace and fortitude during those years, he was also known for his positive outlook.

“Anybody can be happy in the state of comfort, ease, health, success, pleasure and joy,” he said in New York, “but if one will be happy and contented in the time of trouble, hardship and prevailing disease, it is the proof of nobility.”

On April 12, 1912, the Reverend Howard Colby Ives sat opposite ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, next to the bay window in his suite at the Hotel Ansonia in New York. They sat in silence a long while, then Ives broke down. Ives later commented: “He wiped the tears from my face; admonishing me not to cry, that one must always be happy.” Then came the disarming part. “He laughed,” Ives said, “such a ringing, boyish laugh. It was as though He had discovered the most delightful joke imaginable: a divine joke which only He could appreciate.”

Another American, Stanwood Cobb, wrote: “This philosophy of joy was the keynote of all of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teaching.” But, Cobb added, “Those who were unhappy (and who of us are not at times!) would weep at this. And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would smile as if to say, ‘Yes, weep on. Beyond the tears is sunshine.’”

Such was the divine philosophy of happiness of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



DAY 70

JUNE 19, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

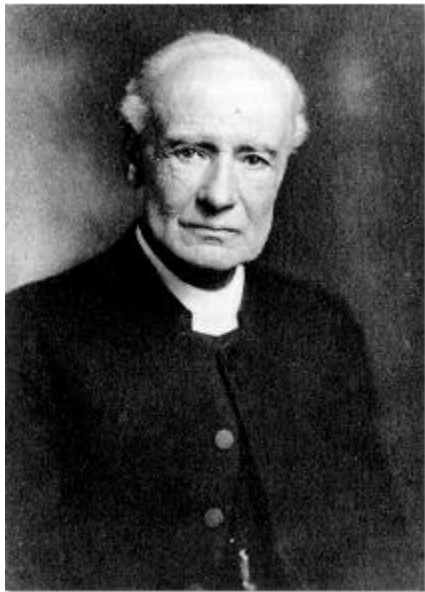
## To Drag the Soul Down to Hell

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 19, 2012

IT WAS A “SATANIC SYSTEM” of control and submission, Reverend Peter Z. Easton thought. He wrote his opinion in an article called “Bahaism: A Warning,” in the September and October, 1911, issue of the British magazine *Evangelical Christendom*.

America wasn't the only place 'Abdu'l-Bahá faced controversy. It had happened during his trip to England as well.

On September 17, 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Smith Square, Westminster. The English magazine the *Fortnightly Review* reported the event like this: “Surely the dawn of a new day was heralded on that Sunday evening when the Archdeacon of Westminster walked hand in hand with Abdul Baha up the nave of St. John's Church.”



The Venerable Basil Wilberforce, Chaplain of the House of Commons, Archdeacon of Westminster. (wellesleytudorpole.com)

The Archdeacon was Basil Wilberforce, the Chaplain of the House of Commons. He seated 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Bishop's chair, addressed him as “Master,” and even knelt to receive his blessing. But Reverend Easton, who had been a missionary in

Azerbaijan for many years, was incensed by the warm reception given to a Persian by a minister of the Church of England.

“One wonders how it is that Christian men and women can be so deceived,” Easton pleaded.

When Peter Easton met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for an interview on September 21, he found the Master unwilling to get into an argument. Instead, Easton sought out ammunition to attack him in a book by Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau. Gobineau was a former French diplomat whose theory of a white, “Aryan” master race, and the danger of “race-mixing” had made him famous.

Gobineau had spent time in Persia chronicling the early days of the Bahá’í religion, but he layered his story with fantastic notions of an ancient Persian cult dating back 2,500 years. Easton decided that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was preaching its latest incarnation.

Easton characterized Bahá’u’lláh as a “betrayal, assassin, and blasphemer — a worthy successor of that long line of Persian antichrists from the beginning of its history down to the present day.” He argued that Bahá’u’lláh’s followers would become “the slaves of the most awful despotism which ever showed itself on earth,” and that the impressive-sounding truths in his words and those of his son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, were no more than “the bait upon the hook to drag down the soul to hell.”



The Church of St. John the Evangelist in London, restored as a concert hall in 1969. (Westminster Collection, [venues-london.co.uk](http://venues-london.co.uk))

By the time “Baháism: A Warning” appeared in print, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had left the UK, and was planning his trip to America. Easton’s comments traveled across the Atlantic, and made the American papers. But then the article came to the attention of Mirzá Abu’l-Fadl in Beirut. Abu’l-Fadl had been Professor of Islamic Jurisprudence at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the Oxford of the Islamic world, and had spent years in prison for being a Bahá’í. Despite being bedridden from age and illness, Mirzá Abu’l-Fadl took up his pen and began to write.

*In tomorrow's feature: 'Abdu'l-Bahá receives Mirzá Abu'l-Fadl's dramatic response to Easton's sensational attack.*

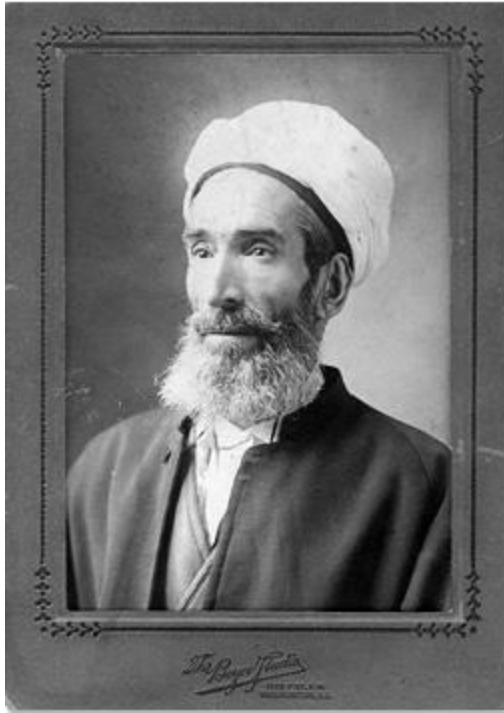
**DAY 71**

**JUNE 20, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY**

## **I Have Seen a Curious Article Which Astonished Me**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 20, 2012

MIRZÁ ABU'L-FAZL WAS ILL, bedridden, and sixty-seven years old when the attack on 'Abdu'l-Bahá — published under the title “Bahatism: A Warning” — was given to him in Beirut. The article, written by Reverend Peter Z. Easton, had appeared in the September and October, 1911, issue of the British magazine *Evangelical Christendom*. By December it had found its way to Syria.



Mirzá Abu'l-Fazl of Gulpáygán. A portrait taken in Washington, DC, about 1902. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Defending the Bahá'í religion was nothing new for Abu'l-Fazl. Yet he appeared genuinely taken aback by Reverend Easton's attack. "Abdu'l-Bahá calls the people of Europe to the lofty attributes of humanity," Abu'l-Fazl wrote, "but Peter Z. Easton teaches them libels, execration, falsehood and calumnies!"

Mirzá Abu'l-Fazl Gulpáygání was a renowned scholar who had once risen to the highest ranks of the Shí'í Muslim clergy in Persia. His expertise encompassed Islamic and European sciences, rational philosophy, speculative theology, and even Buddhism. But then, in 1876, he became a Bahá'í. He was stripped of his position, imprisoned for four years, and narrowly escaped the campaigns of murder against Bahá'ís in the Middle East.

Abu'l-Fazl began his treatise by questioning Reverend Easton's motives: "[J]ealousy has caused many to fall from the high station and lofty summit of courtesy," he wrote. The implication was that Easton was jealous of Archdeacon Wilberforce, who had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his church and prompted Easton's attack.



Abu'l-Fazl braving the winter, during his years in America, 1901-1904 (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“Are there not enough revilers, calumniators and prevaricators in the other parts of the world,” Abu'l-Fazl asked, “that such should also appear from Europe?”

“[H]ave not the people of Europe read history?” he added. Easton had based his attack on Bahá'u'lláh on a few questionable sources. The ancient Roman historians, Abu'l-Fazl said, had done exactly the same thing to Christ. Tacitus had accused Christianity of being “the enemy of humanity” without knowing the first thing about it.

Easton had also claimed that Bahá'u'lláh's followers would become “slaves of the most awful despotism which ever showed itself on earth.” But, Abu'l-Fazl pointed out, Bahá'u'lláh had designed “the organization of a House of Justice in every city of the world, the members of which . . . shall be elected by the people. Such members must hold their consultations in the utmost purity of conscience and good will.”

Finally, the Persian scholar answered Easton's central challenge: “What has Bahá'u'lláh brought which is not found in the Christian religion?”

Abu'l-Fazl had a lot of things to list: the rejection of oral tradition in favor of authenticated, written texts; the obligation to engage in a profession; elevating work to the status of worship;

universal compulsory education for both sexes; the abolition of slavery; and democratic, constitutional government.



Mirzá Abu'l-Fazl, Ali-Kuli Khan (right), and a young Ahmad Sohrab at Green Acre, Eliot, ME. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

He then tossed in a few additional ones, among them “the prohibition of haughtiness and egoism,” perhaps a final nod to Reverend Easton. The rebuttal now complete, Abu'l-Fazl signed it, and mailed it to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “so that he can, in his wisdom, decide what to do with it.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá received the manuscript at 309 West 78th Street in New York on June 19, 1912. He had it translated and printed, and called it *The Brilliant Proof*. “Each one of you should have a copy,” he told the Americans. “Read, memorize and reflect upon it. Then, when accusations and criticisms are advanced . . . you will be well armed.”

**JUNE 21, 1912**

**NEW YORK, NY**

Day 72

## Swifter, Higher, Stronger

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on June 21, 2012

“INDIAN THORPE FIRST in Olympic Pentathlon,” the *New York Times* announced on May 19, 1912, reporting on one of the first rounds of the Olympic tryouts. Jim Thorpe, whose parents were both half Native American, from the Sac and Fox nation in Oklahoma, had tried out in

Brooklyn for the American Olympic team, and he had blown the field away. “Physically, he is a magnificent specimen,” the *New York Evening World* wrote of him, “fit to be compared with the greatest of the ancient Greeks. . .” Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Games, hoped the Olympics would help realize international peace. By June 20, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá prepared to leave New York for a few days of rest in Montclair, New Jersey, the Games were nine days away. They would begin June 29 in Stockholm, Sweden.



American Olympic trials also took place in Boston, at Harvard Stadium, in June, 1912. Here's the stadium hosting the Harvard-Yale football game in 1911. (Wikimedia)

In a few weeks time the Reverend Percy Stickney Grant would ask ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the Olympics. Grant believed in the building up of physical strength as a prerequisite for moral uprightness. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a different point of view. “We do not deprecate physical development,” he said, “for the sound mind should work through a sound body, but We think that the people of the West are too much concerned with mere physical development. They forget the need of spiritual development.”

This morning he told those assembled at his apartment at 309 West 78th Street in Manhattan that he would soon hold a spiritual feast, a “feast of unity.” He wanted it “outdoors under the trees, in some location away from the city noise — like a Persian garden.” “[H]earts will be bound together,” he said, “spirits blended and a new foundation for unity established. All the friends will be my guests.”





Poster for the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm.  
(Encyclopedia Britannica)

Coubertin hoped universal peace might emerge from a new generation of unprejudiced youth. The Games he envisioned were a form of peace education to bring young people together for “amicable trials of muscular strength and agility.” But in 1912, during the age of colonialism, only twenty-eight nations actually competed. Japan became the first Asian nation to join, and Egypt the first Arab and African nation.

After the first modern Olympic games took place in 1896, Coubertin reflected that “One may be filled with a desire to see the colors of one’s club or college triumph in a national meeting, but how much stronger is the feeling when the colours of one’s own country are at stake!” But the Olympics were more symbol than substance when it came to the peace movement.

Two years after celebrating international reciprocity in Stockholm, German regiments were marching across the Rhineland, machine guns were tearing flesh apart on the Marne, British dreadnoughts were barricading the continent, and even Sweden, a country that declared itself as neutral, was planning to lay mines along its main shipping lane, the *Kogrundsrännan*, to keep Allied ships out of the Baltic Sea.



Jim Thorpe throwing the discus during the decathlon at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

“The great mass of humanity does not exercise real love and fellowship,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience on June 20. He believed that if humanity were to unite, people needed a universal cause that extended beyond national loyalties. It wasn’t enough for people to merely tolerate each other. He wanted people to “be as the parts and members of one body.” The organs of the human body are diverse in shape, composition and function, he explained, but the result of their harmony is a healthy human being, much more than the sum of its parts.

Such a degree of unity, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, had existed among Bahá’u’lláh’s early Persian followers: “There was no duality but complete mutuality of interests and love.” “If in need of a hat or cloak,” he said, “they would take and use it. The owner would be thankful and grateful that the garment had gone.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hoped his unity feast would enable each participant to become “a cause of unity and center of accord,” and that it would generate “this same degree and intensity of love.”

Day 73

JUNE 22, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## Elephants in Chicago

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 22, 2012

*Today's feature is part of an ongoing series on the political environment of the nation in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke.*

THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION would be over this evening. It had begun on Tuesday, June 18, 1912, at the Chicago Coliseum on Wabash Avenue. After months of campaign speeches, accusations, and rebuttals — and twelve weeks of primary elections in sixteen states — the delegates were ready to choose either President William Howard Taft or former President Theodore Roosevelt to be the Republican Presidential nominee.



William Jennings Bryan, circa 1908.  
(Library of Congress)

Unlike almost everyone else in the building, William Jennings Bryan didn't have any skin in the game. He was a Democrat, and had run as the Democratic candidate for President three times, in 1896, 1900, and 1908, losing each time. This week he was here not to politick, but to report. The nation wanted his viewpoint; he was in high demand.

Several daily newspapers had contracted with him for his eye on each day's proceedings. Monday morning's dispatch evoked the early skirmishes on the convention floor:

"The delegates as they come in are badged, tagged and buttonholed," Bryan wrote. "The prophets are revising their lists as they learn of additions or defections and the corridors of the hotels resound with the cheers of partisans. These things are to be found in every convention, but they are here in unusual abundance."

Although he was enjoying himself ("We are having a great time") he could also see through the hullabaloo. "There is a liberal education in a national convention," he told the public on Monday, "but much that one learns is not useful to him afterwards."



The Republican National Convention, June, 1912, at the Chicago Coliseum. (Library of Congress)

On Wednesday afternoon the Roosevelt delegates struck up a spontaneous parade inside the hall, disrupting the proceedings for about forty-five minutes. "Some of the standards were carried in a parade through the aisles, with delegates young and old marching in lock step."

In spite of all the clamor of the assembly hall, Bryan explained that picking the candidate really came down to a few backroom arguments. The Roosevelt progressives and Taft conservatives had sent competing delegations to the convention: each thought their own delegates were the rightful ones. By Monday they still disagreed on seventy-six of them. Whichever side could get their delegates seated would win a "temporary roll-call," which would, in turn, give them a majority of the Credentials Committee. The Credentials Committee was the key because it could issue a "majority report" that would finalize the delegate count. One candidate would get a majority of the votes: it was really all about the numbers.



A section of Thomas Nast's 1874 political cartoon that established the elephant as the symbol of the Republican Party. (Harper's Weekly)

Roosevelt's parade, Bryan explained, didn't matter. "It illustrates how much noise can be turned loose in a convention without materially affecting the result," he wrote. "Stampedes are about as much exaggerated in effect as what is known as personal popularity is in quantity. Nothing is more likely to be overestimated in politics than that peculiar quality known as personal popularity."

Nevertheless, even though William Jennings Bryan saw through the political theatre taking place before him in Chicago, he still invested his faith in the political process. "The casual observer may be carried away by the exciting incidents of a convention," he concluded, "but the sober citizen will see in a national convention a great human agency for the accomplishment of an important end."

*In tomorrow's feature: The headlines from the outcome of the Republican National Convention reach 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Montclair, New Jersey.*

Day 74

JUNE 23, 1912  
MONTCLAIR, NJ

## Politicking and Personalities

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 23, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ ARRIVED in Montclair, New Jersey, on Friday, June 21, 1912, for a respite from the heat and humidity of New York. In Chicago, the Republican National Convention was about to choose its Presidential nominee. It was going to be William Howard Taft. Theodore Roosevelt refused to accept the outcome, and instructed 344 of his delegates not to vote. On Saturday evening in Chicago’s Orchestra Hall, he and his supporters decided to start a new political party with Roosevelt at its head.



Postcard image of Bloomfield Avenue in Montclair, NJ, in 1903. ([firstbaptistbloomfield.org](http://firstbaptistbloomfield.org))

In recent days — indeed, for the last three months — political news had dominated the headlines. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed not at all interested in parties or candidates, vote counts or political platforms. At the beginning of June, Gifford Pinchot, a close friend of Roosevelt and a member of his political team, had invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to stay overnight at his estate in Milford, Pennsylvania. The conversation turned, inevitably, to political subjects: fair taxation, the battle of capital and labor, trusts, and strike-breaking.

“Tonight you have spoken of politics,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “but we are not accustomed to talk of politics. We speak about the world of spirit. We speak of the wealth of the kingdom, not of the wealth of the nether world.”

But he did have something to say about the process of selecting leaders, and the qualities of leadership. One of Pinchot’s guests that day in Milford had asked him about the election. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded by discussing the way Americans elected their President.



Front page of the New York Tribune on June 23, 1912, announcing the results of the Republican National Convention. (Library of Congress)

The politicking at the conventions and the sensational press obscured a deeper debate about what kind of nation the United States should become. To what extent should The People rule? What should the role of the nation’s Chief Executive be?

The mass of the people, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted, tend to follow personalities. Indeed, the dramatic news stories during the past several months had demonstrated that the party nomination process had largely become a popularity contest. Instead, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that the most suitable candidate would be the one chosen by the wisest people.

“It is evident that it is better the people elect the noble ones among them,” he said, “and then these elect the president of the republic. That is to say, the president should be the elect of the elect, because the public in general are not as well informed as they should be in regard to political affairs.”

“The affairs should be in the hands of the wise,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. But then he clarified how the wise must act: “[T]he wise people must be in the utmost faithfulness and sincerity of purpose, they must serve the people, and protect and safeguard their welfare.”



DAY 75

JUNE 24, 1912  
MONTCLAIR, NJ

## June 24, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 24, 2012

NINE DAYS OF REST AND RECUPERATION. That's what awaited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Montclair, New Jersey, twenty miles northwest of New York. He had remarked that the heat and humidity of the big city, along with its incessant crowds, were impairing his health. Today, he's strolling in the park with friends.



"An Old Roadway (Montclair, New Jersey - Landscape)" by George Inness, 1880. Inness was a renowned American landscape painter who lived in Montclair. (Spanierman Gallery)

Here at *239 Days in America* we thought we'd give ourselves a day of rest as well. We'll be back first thing Monday morning.

In the week ahead: 'Abdu'l-Bahá contrasts the influence of Christ and Napoleon, an agonizing moment from his childhood, coverage of the 1912 Democratic Convention in Baltimore, and a "Unity Feast" in West Englewood, New Jersey.

DAY 76

JUNE 25, 1912  
MONTCLAIR, NJ

## “Thy Pomp Shall Soon Pass Away”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 25, 2012

“EVERYONE WISHES to be remembered,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. It was Sunday, June 23, 1912, and the sound of church bells rang out in the distance. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented to those gathered at his residence in Montclair: “The church bells are pealing in memory of Jesus Christ although more than nineteen hundred years have passed since He lived upon the earth.”



“Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon I and Coronation of the Empress Josephine in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris on 2 December 1804,” by Jacques-Louis David, 1805-07. (The Louvre/Wikimedia)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá contrasted Christ with an example of an “earthly conqueror”: Napoleon Bonaparte. He recalled a moment when Napoleon, still a general for the French revolutionary government, was sailing back to France in 1799 after his Middle Eastern expedition. The fortress of ‘Akká, in Syria, had proven too difficult, and Napoleon had retreated to Egypt after a two-month siege. Then he learned that a revolution had broken out back home.

The revolutionaries in France had banned Christianity. The priests had fled; Napoleon decided to return. “The ship sailed out into a night brilliant with the light of the moon,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá related. “Napoleon was pacing up and down the deck. His officers were sitting together, talking. One of them spoke of the similarity between Bonaparte and Christ. Napoleon stopped and said grimly, ‘Do you think I am going back to France to establish religion?’”

Napoleon overthrew the government, was elected First Consul, and became the most powerful man in France. Five years later, weary of democratic rule, he declared himself emperor.



**“L’Empereur Napoleon se couronnant lui-même”  
(Napoleon Crowns Himself). Sketch by Jacques-Louis David. (The Louvre/Wikimedia)**

Napoleon’s propagandist painter, Jacques-Louis David, captured his coronation on canvas. It took place in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris on December 2, 1804. Pope Pius VII had stood near the church’s altar holding the imperial crown. But Napoleon had not knelt before him: instead he had taken the crown in his own hands, and crowned himself. The massive painting – 32 feet wide and 20 feet tall – depicts the scene a few moments later as Napoleon prepares to crown Joséphine, his wife, as Empress. The emblems of Christianity surround them, including the crucified Christ, but Napoleon had usurped everything.

Napoleon’s dominion lasted just eleven years. He died a prisoner in permanent exile on the tiny island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s point: “Jesus Christ established the religion of God through love. His sovereignty is everlasting. Napoleon overthrew governments in war and bloodshed. His dominion passed away.”

The same thing happened to Napoleon's nephew, Napoleon III. He, too, had carried out a coup in France, and he too went down to defeat, at the Battle of Sedan in 1870, which established the German Empire. Bahá'u'lláh had written to Napoleon III in 1868, and the king had laughed. "If this man is God," he said, "I am two Gods!" Then he flung the letter to the floor.

"Hadst thou been sincere in thy words," Bahá'u'lláh wrote back, "thou wouldst have not cast behind thy back the Book of God." 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted the letter to those gathered in Montclair: "[T]hy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred. . . . Thy pomp shall soon pass away."

DAY 77

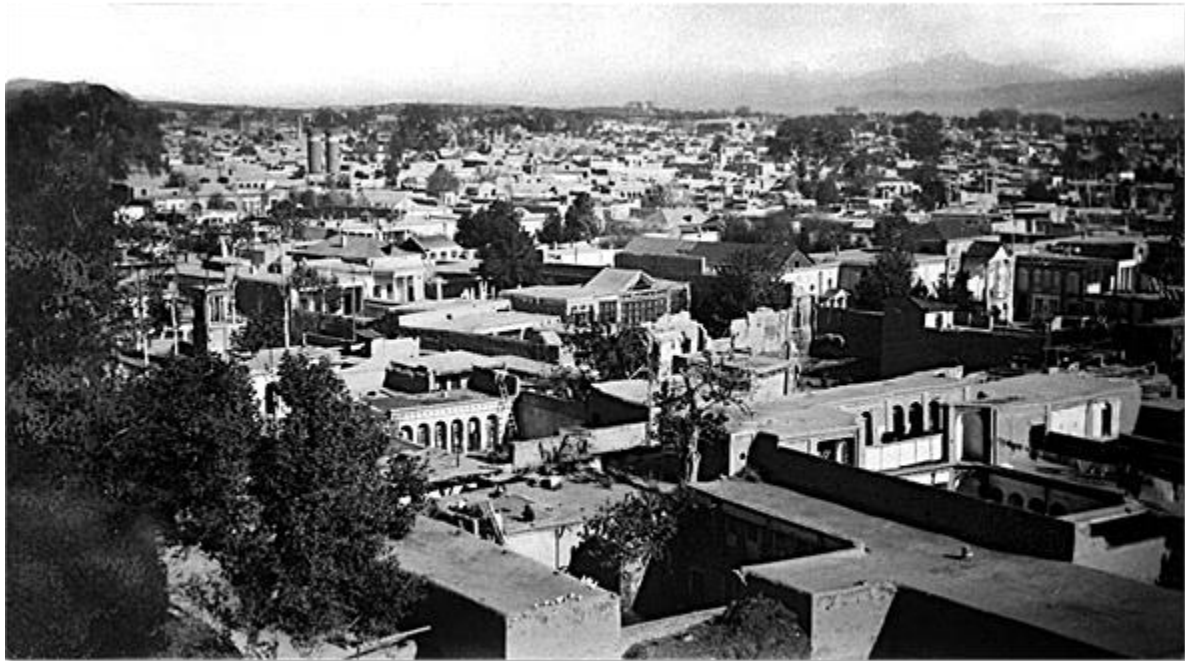
JUNE 26, 1912  
MONTCLAIR, NJ

## “Do Not Bring Him in Here”

By ROBERT SOCKETT AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 26, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ WAS IN the best of health after more than a week recuperating in Montclair, New Jersey, away from the heat and humidity of New York. On June 27, 1912, he had taken the tram to the park with Mr. Edsall, his host, who had insisted that they get some fresh air. “What great changes have occurred!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reflected. “What waves have swept over us and brought us here!”

The afternoon among the trees could hardly have been more different than that hot day sixty summers ago when hell had broken loose in Tehran.



Panorama of Tehran, Iran, circa 1930. (Effie Baker)

In 1844, a young man called the “Báb,” meaning “The Gate,” had set in motion Persia’s greatest upheaval of the nineteenth century by declaring himself a messenger of God. By 1850 mobs throughout the country, instigated by religious leaders and aided by the Persian military, had slaughtered 20,000 of his followers. The Báb himself was executed by a regiment of guns in the northern town of Tabríz.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s father, Bahá’u’lláh, was the last surviving Bábí leader. He had been protected by his social position and the respect he had earned throughout Tehran. But then, on August 15, 1852, three misguided young Bábís made a feeble attempt to assassinate the Shah.

When Bahá’u’lláh heard what had happened he rode at once to the Shah’s summer palace in Níyávarán, a resort town nestled among the foothills of the mountains north of Tehran. There they arrested him, and marched him amid hostile crowds to the Síyáh-Chál, the “Black Pit,” an underground prison in the city.

“The dungeon was wrapped in thick darkness,” Bahá’u’lláh wrote, “and Our fellow-prisoners numbered nearly a hundred and fifty souls: thieves, assassins and highwaymen. Though crowded, it had no other outlet than the passage by which We entered. No pen can depict that place, nor any tongue describe its loathsome smell.”



**Four Bahá’í prisoners in chains in Iran, 1896. (Bahá’í International Community)** The prisoners sat in two rows, amid piles of human excrement and crawling rats, facing each other over stocks that restrained their feet. The Síyáh-Chál was famous for its instruments of torture – chains that weighed 112 pounds and had their own names. Bahá’u’lláh wore them around his neck for the four months he was incarcerated: the chains cut through his skin and left scars for the rest of his life.

Insistent on seeing his father, the eight-year-old ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went to the prison. He was carried on the shoulders of a servant along a narrow corridor, through a small doorway and down two steps. He couldn’t see anything in the pitch black. But he heard his father’s voice coming through the darkness:

“Do not bring him in here.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá waited in the prison yard until it was time for the inmates’ brief quota of fresh air. From a distance he saw Bahá’u’lláh emerge, chained to several others, beard and hair unkempt, walking with great difficulty. His neck was bent, swollen and bruised by the pressure of the chains and the weight of the massive steel collar. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá watched as his father bent down to wash his face from a mildewed pond. The boy passed out; they carried him home unconscious.

In the bright Montclair sunshine of 1912, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stepped off the tram, his words rang out: “What waves are still to come?” It was sixty years since he had caught that first glimpse of his father in prison. He had spent virtually all the intervening years as an exile or prisoner himself.

He and Mr. Edsall walked over to the gazebo at the center of the park. As Mr. Edsall listened, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him a stunning piece of news: “[B]oth internal and external enemies are laying plans to imprison me again on my return to the Holy Land.”



DAY 78

JUNE 27, 1912  
MONTCLAIR, NJ

## Militarizing Human Ingenuity

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on June 27, 2012

IN THE EARLY MORNING hours of December 17, 1903, two brothers left their camp in the Kill Devil Hills, a few miles north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and made their way to a fishing village at the base. The village, called Kitty Hawk, offered an endless expanse of beach alongside the Atlantic and a steady supply of strong winds.

They were the Wright brothers – Wilbur and Orville – and they were about to make history.



The 'Wright Flyer' makes its first successful flight on December 17, 1903. (Argent Editions)

At 10:35 a.m. their invention, the Wright Flyer, lifted off the ground with Orville at the controls. The plane bobbed up and down as it sailed slowly over the sand, coming to rest with a thud just twelve seconds later. It was a short flight, but, nevertheless, a successful one.

Orville commented on the first flights at Kitty Hawk: “The desire to fly is an idea handed down to us by our ancestors who, in their grueling travels across trackless lands in prehistoric times, looked enviously on the birds soaring freely through space, at full speed, above all obstacles, on

the infinite highway of air.” Wilbur added: “More than anything else the sensation is one of perfect peace mingled with an excitement that strains every nerve to the utmost . . .”



The Wright brothers, circa 1906. (Wikimedia)

The invention of flight was an example of the ingenuity and aspiration that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá found so compelling in Americans. What surprised many was his eager embrace of technology. When speaking to Americans about the spiritual nature of humankind — in essence, what sets us apart from animals — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned to technological examples.

“A human being can soar in the skies or speed in submarine depths,” he told an audience in New York on April 15. “All the sciences, arts and discoveries were mysteries of nature, and according to natural law these mysteries should remain latent, hidden; but man has proceeded to break this law, free himself from this rule and bring them forth into the realm of the visible.”

In the early morning hours of November 1, 1911, a lone aircraft took off from a desert strip and headed towards a Turkish camp at Ain Zaram on the outskirts of modern-day Tripoli. A dispute had erupted between the Italians and the Ottoman Empire in their conflict over control of



The Taube ("Dove"), designed by Igo Etrich, on display in 1915. (Wikimedia)

Libya.

The aircraft, known as the "Taube" (German for "dove") looked like a giant ominous bird. Lieutenant Giulio Gavotti of the Italian army sat at its controls. Once in position over the camp, he proceeded to drop four Cipelli grenades from his cockpit, each weighing four-and-a-half pounds, as the Turks scrambled below.

"The greatest intelligence of man is being expended in the direction of killing his fellow man," 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said in his interview with the munitions maker Hudson Maxim in New York. "The discovery of high explosives, perfecting of death-dealing weapons of war, the science of military attack, all this is a wonderful manifestation of human intelligence, but it is in the wrong direction."

During 'Abdu'l-Bahá's time in the West, he spoke often about the dangers of material progress unhinged from spiritual and moral development. In New York he offered an aeronautical metaphor to define a dilemma central to modern progress: "[T]wo wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible . . . no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization."



First World War dogfight, as photographed from a nearby airplane, 1917. (Vetfriends.com)

The possibilities of the airplane proved too much for military engineers to resist. In 1918, as World War I was coming to an end, American Brigadier General William Mitchell, the father of the U.S. Air Force, commented: “The day has passed when armies on the ground or navies on the sea can be the arbiter of a nation’s destiny in war. The main power of defense and the power of initiative against an enemy has passed to the air.”

Only fifteen years had transpired since the Wright brothers had first gotten their fragile Flyer off the ground.

DAY 79

JUNE 28, 1912  
ENGLEWOOD, NJ

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s “Feast of Unity”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on June 28, 2012

THE ORIENTAL PASSENGER waved his arms on the steps of the train parked at Lackawanna station. He had to stall the train. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s attendants, “ten fez-wearing Persians,” as *The New York Times* put it, had already loaded their baggage on the train headed northeast from Montclair to West Englewood, New Jersey. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had not yet arrived. Missing the train could mean missing the event he had organized in nearby Englewood.



'Abdu'l-Bahá and his guests at the "feast of unity" in Englewood, New Jersey. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The distressed passenger pulled the bell rope, a job usually reserved for the conductor of the train to indicate an unplanned stop. Then one of the Persians – perhaps accidentally – knocked off the train conductor’s hat, distracting him. At last ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in his car, the train halted, and his friends hustled him into the coach.

The feast was to be held at the estate of Roy Wilhelm, a wealthy coffee importer. He was a Wall Streeter, little interested in religion until 1907, when he traveled to ‘Akká to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with his mother, who had insisted on the trip.



'Abdu'l-Bahá at Roy Wilhelm's home. Mr. Wilhelm is seated on the far right and looking at the camera. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

It was June 29, 1912, and between two and three hundred people gathered for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's feast of unity. The guests arranged the tables in a large circle under a cluster of tall pine trees. 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked among them and greeted them individually. Before they ate, he led them underneath the trees. He noted that most of the time "people are drawn together by physical motives or in furtherance of material interests," but that "this meeting is a prototype of that inner and complete spiritual association in the eternal world of being."

By the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá had finished speaking, the food was ready. Then, as if on cue, thunder crashed from above, black clouds boiled up and big drops of rain pelted their tables. 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked calmly to the end of the driveway, and stopped at a crossroad where a single chair stood. He sat in the chair and turned his face upward toward the sky. Soon, as if the weather was merely testing them, "the clouds began to race away; blue patches appeared above and the sun shone out," Juliet Thompson wrote.



'Abdu'l-Bahá at the "feast of unity." (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Abdu'l-Bahá told them that "This assembly has a name and significance which will last forever." He paced back and forth as he spoke: "Hundreds of thousands of meetings shall be held to commemorate this occasion. . . ."

Once the friends organized themselves around the tables, a colorful Persian rice pilaf, sherbet, and many sweets were served. The food had been cooked in New York and transported to Englewood by ferry in large new garbage cans. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not sit down. Instead, he walked around the tables anointing each of his guest’s foreheads with attar of rose.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá raising his hand to speak at the feast.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

The sun began to set, but a group of fifty or sixty friends had no interest in leaving. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat on a chair at the top of the porch, and the others joined him on the steps and the lawn below. The summer skirts of the women made pleated circles on the grass, and the tapers in their hands kept away the mosquitoes. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke again: “[T]his association of ours is in order to bring about and proclaim the oneness of the world of man. . . .”

Juliet Thompson later wrote: “Before He had finished He rose from his chair and started down the path still talking, passing between the dim figures on the grass with their lighted tapers, talking till He reached the road, where He turned and we could no longer see Him.”



DAY 80

JUNE 29, 1912  
MORRISTOWN, NJ

## Speaking Persian in America

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on June 29, 2012

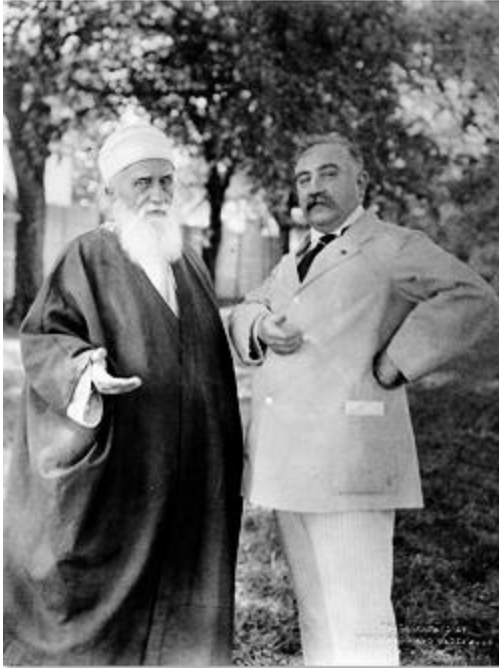
MR. TOPAKYAN DIDN'T NEED A TRANSLATOR to understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He already spoke Persian. He had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his attendants to his home in Morristown, New Jersey, on June 30, 1912, for a barbecue. They chatted away without pause. Topakyan sported a Western suit with a jacket that draped past his belly. He didn't wear a fez, unlike the Persians who joined him, but kept an imperial mustache that curled slightly upwards.



'Abdu'l-Bahá and his attendants at Mr. Topakyan's house. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Mr. Topakyan, the Persian Consul of New York and the Shah's representative, was "one of the ablest and most distinguished foreigners that has ever chosen [New York] for his adopted home," the *New York Times* said. Born in Turkey to one of the oldest families of the Armenian aristocracy, he was known to refuse to dine unless entirely satisfied with the arrangements. In July, 1910, at the Hotel Astor, he noticed that a place had been set for the Turkish Ambassador among the guests of honor, but not for himself. He "considered it an affront to the Shah of Persia" and promptly left.

As a young man Topakyan made a business trip to the United States and fell in love with the country. So much so, that he decided to move there and start a business importing Turkish, Persian, and Indian rugs. Before he became the Consul-General, Topakyan had organized the Persian exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair.



'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Persian Consul of New York.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

He reproduced the Shah's palace, displaying the lavish lifestyle of the Persian royal family and the finest Persian rugs, silks, metals, and jewelry.

Topakyan first met 'Abdu'l-Bahá at a meeting of the New York Peace Society on May 13, 1912, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá shared the stage with Rabbi Stephen Wise and Percy Stickney Grant. He had called 'Abdu'l-Bahá "the Glory of Persia," a notable remark seeing as how Topakyan represented the country responsible for much of the suffering of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his family.

On Sunday, June 30, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled by car through the countryside to Morristown, New Jersey. Mr. Topakyan had invited him and his attendants for a barbecue. He was known for his "Oriental barbecues," as *The New York Times* called them, at which an entire lamb was roasted and served on a bronze and gold table.



'Abdu'l-Bahá sits with Mr. Topakyan. Note the phonograph on the left. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The consul was gracious when he thought it was warranted. On June 30 he refused to sit without 'Abdu'l-Bahá's permission. Topakyan had invited several reporters to come and speak with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. After they had eaten lunch, a photographer came and took 'Abdu'l-Bahá's picture.

'Abdu'l-Bahá kept in touch with Topakyan for years after the meeting. One of his letters reads: "I will pray for you and Madame so that the Doors of the Kingdom of God, be always open before your faces and the Infinite Divine bestowals may descend upon you uninterruptedly so that according to the statement of Christ you may be of those who are chosen and not of those who are called."

DAY 81

JUNE 30, 1912  
BALTIMORE, MD

## Donkeys in Baltimore

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on June 30, 2012

EVERYBODY SEEMED TO BE in a hurry on Saturday, June 29, 1912. The rush began before dawn when a special train left New York's Pennsylvania Station, carrying a special overnight edition of the *New York Times* to the Democratic National Convention in Baltimore.



The main entrance to the Democratic National Convention, at the Fifth Regiment Armory, in Baltimore, Maryland. (George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

The delegates had been in session there since Tuesday, and by Friday evening the *Times* newsroom anticipated a decision before midnight. That would give them plenty of time to send the regular Saturday morning edition to Baltimore. But by 11:00 the delegates had already voted on twelve ballots without choosing a candidate, and the *Times* ordered up their “Special” edition. The convention adjourned at 3:05 a.m. on Saturday morning, the news arriving in New York by telegraph at 3:15. In a few minutes the presses in the basement of

the *Times* building, at Broadway and 43rd Street, were running off the special Baltimore edition. They loaded it onto wagons, clattered down Seventh Avenue, lowered the papers to the train level using the station elevator, and then pulled out of Penn Station at 4:17 a.m.



An 1870 political cartoon by Thomas Nast. Nast's cartoons established the donkey as the symbol of the Democratic Party. (Harper's Weekly)

The *New York Times* wasn't the only outlet pouring news into the convention. By Wednesday, 110,000 telegrams had already peppered the delegates, many of them sent by groups of voters back home. Exactly 1,128 of them were addressed to William Jennings Bryan, from 31,331 persons in forty-six states. Although Bryan had been a detached observer at the Republican Convention in Chicago, he was in the thick of things in Baltimore.

Bryan was a progressive, and, after running as the Democratic Presidential nominee in 1896, 1900, and 1908, he still carried nationwide support. In 1906 he had traveled to Palestine and had visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká, writing about it in the *Chicago Daily News*. But this week "The Great Commoner" was all politics.

One thing had particularly riled him: the extent to which a few New York tycoons, such as J. P. Morgan, could shape the voting at both the Republican and the Democratic conventions. "It is a spectacle never before witnessed in American politics," Bryan wrote. "Two conventions of opposing parties meeting within two weeks, and the same financial jugglers of Wall Street attempting to use the convention like the wooden figures in a Punch and Judy show."



A ticket to the Democratic National Convention in Baltimore, June 25 to July 2, 1912. (Library of Congress)

By this morning, Sunday, the delegates had voted on an additional fourteen ballots, and the *New York Times* printed the results of each vote on page two. Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey was slowly breaking down the lead of the frontrunner, Champ Clark, the Speaker of the House.

There weren't many stories in today's *Times* that didn't have to do with politics, but one of them was about 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "PROPHET'S DASH FOR TRAIN: Abdul Baha in Spectacular Rush from Montclair" described the spectacle on Saturday morning at the Lackawanna station when his attendants had tried to stop the train from departing without him. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was sandwiched between two Roosevelt stories on page six. The column to his left told how TR was gobbling up Republican newspaper endorsements. To his right Teddy chatted with reporters about Baltimore, his clothing still damp after a thunderstorm, which had narrowly missed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unity feast in West Englewood, New Jersey, and had decided to wash out the Roosevelt family picnic in Oyster Bay instead.

## PROPHET'S DASH FOR TRAIN.

Abdul Baha in Spectacular Rush from Montclair.

*Special to The New York Times.*

MONTCLAIR, N. J., June 29.—The departure of Abdul Baha, leader of the Baháist cult, from Montclair to-day was attended by excitement. Abdul Baha and a retinue of ten fez-wearing Persians had been staying at 11 Bradford Place for several weeks. Arrangements were made for the departure of the aged prophet to-day for West Englewood, where he addressed a meeting of Baháists. Several members of his retinue left for the Lackawanna station in advance of their leader.

When train time came, Abdul Baha was not in sight. He had been delayed.

Article in the New York Times on June 30, 1912, about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's race to catch the train in Montclair. (New York Times)

“TIMES SPECIAL GOES 90 MILES AN HOUR,”

the paper reported on page four. By the time the Special train reached Wilmington, Delaware, yesterday morning, it was eight minutes behind schedule. But the Engineer, Mr. Siter, kicked it into overdrive, covering 27.3 miles in 18.2 minutes. “The train fairly shot through space,” the paper said.

At 9:00 a.m. in Baltimore, a New York delegate spread out the *Times* Special on a restaurant breakfast table and began reading passages out loud, throwing in interjections of his own. “New York gives Clark its ninety votes. Announcement starts a big demonstration in the convention. Wilson men respond.”

“Say, this is right up to the minute, isn't it? It's the greatest thing in the world!”

DAY 82  
JULY 1, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## July 1, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 1, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ ARRIVED back in the city late yesterday evening. He’ll stay in New York for just over three weeks before heading up the east coast for a month-long trip to Dublin, New Hampshire and Eliot, Maine.





The battleship USS Florida steaming up the East River in New York City in 1912. (Library of Congress)

In the week ahead: a profile of New Yorker Juliet Thompson, Woodrow Wilson wins the Democratic nomination, and fireworks on the Fourth of July.

DAY 83

JULY 2, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Memoirs of an American Painter

By COREY TAMAS | Published on July 2, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S JOURNEYS in America were filled with interesting people. Beyond the rich and famous, there are many who are familiar to us only because they left vivid accounts about him. Juliet Thompson was such an individual. A reputable painter, speaker, and author, Thompson’s personal connection to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defined her life and work. She displayed her affinity for him in her memoirs, published in 1947 as *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, which would chronicle their time together in both the east and the west.



The smoky skyline of New York from the Manhattan Bridge, c. 1915. (Detroit Publishing Company)

Born in Washington, DC, in 1873, Thompson attended the Corcoran School of Art and demonstrated skill in painting from a young age. Her father passed when she was only twelve

years old and left the family in poor financial condition, but even then she was able to sell her paintings for profit to help her widowed mother. By her twenties she had established herself as a respected artist and received frequent commissions for work, such as painting a centerpiece for the Cosmos Club's annual show in 1897. Her reputation would eventually lead her to paint a portrait of the First Lady, Mrs. Grace Coolidge, President Calvin Coolidge's wife. She learned about Bahá'u'lláh in Washington in 1898, but didn't become a Bahá'í until 1901, during a trip to Paris.



The Jefferson County Courthouse at 6th Ave. and West 10th St. in Greenwich Village, c. 1905. Juliet Thompson's home is about 100 yards behind the camera, and to the left. (Detroit Publishing Co.)

Thompson first met 'Abdu'l-Bahá when she was thirty-six, during a spiritual pilgrimage to the shrine of Baha'u'llah in 1909. "That first sight of Carmel," she wrote in the *Diary*, "with its Mystery, the Holy Mountain, 'the Mountain of the Lord,' broke me down."

In 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Europe. Thompson sailed on the *Lusitania* to meet him in Thonon-les-Bains, France, and then in Vevey on Lake Geneva in Switzerland. He returned to Egypt for the winter before sailing for America on March 25, 1912.

On April 5, 1912, Juliet stood waiting at Pier 59 on the Hudson River as the *Cedric*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ship, pulled in at the White Star Line docks. She'd attend many functions he attended or spoke at while in the New York and New Jersey area, and spend much time with him in private conversation as well. She painted his portrait on June 1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to an audience at her home at 48 West 10th Street on November 15.



Juliet Thompson in her studio.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

On December 5, the day 'Abdu'l-Bahá left America, Juliet was there to watch him go. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was bound for Liverpool on board the Celtic. "It was death to leave that ship," she wrote. "I stood on the pier with May Maxwell, tears blurring my sight. Through them I could see the Master in the midst of the group of Persians waving a patient hand to us. It waved and waved, that beautiful patient hand, till the Figure was lost to sight."

Juliet Thompson never saw 'Abdu'l-Bahá again. She would continue to paint professionally and work with Bahá'ís in the United States until the end of her life. She passed away in December 1956 in her home in New York and a memorial service was held for her at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. Her many accomplishments of art and faith were remembered at the event and, of course, her heartfelt personal connection with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

DAY 84

**JULY 3, 1912**  
**SEA GIRT, NJ**

## **Woodrow Wilson: The Man Who Would Be President**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 3, 2012

THIRTY MILES SOUTH of the Narrows, which divides New York's Upper Bay from the sea, the wide sandy beaches of Sea Girt, New Jersey, welcome the cool winds off the ocean. The Governor's summer mansion, paneled in white wood and dark shutters, rested on lawns set back 1000 yards from the water, behind the National Guard rifle range that intervened between house and sea.

Yesterday afternoon at 2:48 p.m., Governor Woodrow Wilson got a telephone call from Baltimore. Although he hadn't yet completed two years as New Jersey's chief executive, he walked upstairs to inform his wife, Ellen, that he was about to be named the 1912 Democratic Presidential nominee.



Woodrow Wilson, Governor of New Jersey and 1912 Democratic Presidential nominee. (Bloomberg Businessweek)



In Baltimore the marathon was about to finish. Five long days of deadlock, and forty-two ballots, had failed to give either of the two leading candidates, Wilson and Champ Clark, the two-thirds majority each needed to win the nomination. Then, on the forty-third ballot, Illinois moved, casting all fifty-eight of her votes for Wilson. The third-place candidate, Oscar Underwood, released his delegates, as did Champ Clark. The roll call for the forty-sixth ballot got underway as mid-afternoon approached. Charles F. Murphy stood to announce that his state, the largest in the Union, had changed sides: “New York casts 90 votes for Woodrow Wilson,” he said, and got the biggest cheer of the roll call. On Champ Clark’s suggestion, the convention acclaimed Woodrow Wilson unanimously.



The Governor's Summer Mansion in Sea Girt, New Jersey. (Library of Congress)

Thomas Woodrow Wilson, now fifty-six years old, was a Southerner: he was born in Staunton, Virginia, in 1856. His earliest memory was of being three years old, hearing that Abraham Lincoln had been elected President and that there was going to be a war. Wilson earned his doctorate at Johns Hopkins University in history and political science, and taught constitutional law at Princeton, where he was appointed President of the university in 1902, serving until 1910. As Governor of New Jersey he pursued an agenda of progressive reform, introducing worker’s compensation and sidelining the party bosses by introducing Presidential electoral primaries. His quick rise to national prominence catapulted his Presidential run.

Wilson stepped out onto the wide front porch of his house to face the crowd of reporters camped outside. His acceptance speech was short, and devoid of triumphalism. “The honor is as great as can come to any man by the nomination of a party,” he said, “and I hope I appreciate it at its true value; but just a[t] this moment I feel the tremendous responsibility it involves even more than I feel the honor.”



Woodrow Wilson with James Beauchamp "Champ" Clark in Sea Girt, New Jersey. (George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

“The news was received in a spirit of solemnity,” the *New York Times* said. “There were no cheers, no exclamations, no shouts. Even the soldiers on the rifle range near by stopped firing.”

Two weeks ago the Republicans had re-nominated President Taft at their Chicago convention. Now, in Baltimore, the Democrats had unanimously acclaimed Woodrow Wilson as their candidate. Former President Roosevelt still waited in the wings. The Presidential election campaign was about to begin.



DAY 85

JULY 4, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Happy Fourth of July!

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 4, 2012

“THERE WERE CELEBRATIONS EVERYWHERE,” Mahmúd wrote on July 4, in his chronicle of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s trip to America.

Mahmúd-i-Zarqání had traveled to America with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the *Cedric* from Egypt, and accompanied him on his journey across the country as one of his secretaries. On July 4, 1912, Mahmúd was about to get his first taste of a good old-fashioned American celebration: a Fourth of July parade in New York.



“The Birth of the American Flag.” A patriotic tableau, taken in Washington, DC, about 1915. Note the modern shoe styles and the flag’s 48 stars. (Harris & Ewing)

New York Mayor William J. Gaynor had sent ‘Abdu’l-Bahá an invitation the week before while he was still in Montclair, New Jersey. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who was recovering from exhaustion, replied that he would come if time permitted. His schedule in America involved periods of intense activity where he greeted guests from 7:00 a.m. to well after midnight, or spoke at five gatherings in a single day, alternating with shorter periods of rest. He didn’t say yes to every invitation.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá managed his itinerary rather spontaneously. When Reverend Howard Colby Ives invited him to speak at his Brotherhood Church, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá smiled and said “God willing.” Reverend Ives wondered, with humor, “how many engagements for public speakers would be made in our modern world if both parties referred the decision to the will of God before its ratification.”



A marching band at the Fourth of July parade in New York in 1911. (Library of Congress)

Not long after the first Americans had traveled to ‘Akká to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1898, he began to receive invitations to visit America. But it only became a real possibility after 1909, when the Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman Empire freed him from prison. Most of these invitations came from Bahá’ís: by 1912 there were about 1,500 Americans who called themselves by that name. They lived in towns and cities from coast to coast, and struggled with many of the same challenges that faced the rest of the country. Chicago’s Bahá’í community had one governing body for men, and another for women. Most Bahá’í events in Washington were divided along racial lines. Therefore, when the requests for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to travel to the United States became more numerous after 1909, he laid out some conditions.

“In view of the differences among the friends and the lack of unity,” he asked them, “how can Abdu’l-Baha hasten to those parts?” If they wanted him to come, he said, they “must immediately remove from their midst differences of opinion and be engaged in the practice of

infinite love and unity.” By March 25, 1912, the day he sailed from Alexandria, Egypt, he had decided that the conditions had been met.

As for the invitation to the parade, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá politely declined. He sent Mahmúd and a few of his other Persian attendants in his place. Mahmúd explains how they were “received with great honor as representatives of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and were given seats near the mayor’s chair.”



‘Abdu’l-Bahá with his attendants on June 17, 1912, in Brooklyn. Mahmúd at far left. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

His description of the Fourth of July parade, which he wrote mainly for the benefit of the Persian Bahá’í communities back home who had never seen such a thing, continues at some length:

“There were people there from many nations including China, Japan, Turkey and India, as well as members of the American military and businesses carrying flags and decorations for the celebration. All of these passed before the mayor and were followed by parades of men, women, boys and girls in gala dress and singing sweetly. As they passed by the mayor’s stand, he spoke to all gracefully and kindly. After the parade it was the turn of the poets and speech-makers.”

On returning from the festivities, Mahmúd concluded that it had been better that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had made the decision to stay behind. “It was well that He did not go,” Mahmúd wrote, “because the excessive heat and crowds would have been a strain to His strength and health.”

DAY 86

**JULY 5, 1912**  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Lesson of the Titanic

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 5, 2012

“IT TAKES A TERRIBLE WARNING to bring us back to our moorings and our senses,” the Senator declared, referring to the Titanic disaster.

It was May 28, 1912, and the Senate hearings into the Titanic were in full swing. Senator Isidor Rayner of Maryland took the floor and summarized the lessons the shipwreck offered the nation. After commenting on maritime law, legal jurisdiction, and safer navigation, he allowed himself a personal flourish.



An advertisement for the *Titanic* from the ship's owner and operator, White Star Line. (Titanic Universe)

“There is another lesson,” he noted, “of far greater and more overwhelming significance than the lesson of corporate responsibility, and that is the lesson of religious faith.” For the Senator the Titanic served as a reminder to the wayward nation, which he felt was “abandoning the devout and simple lives of our ancestors.”

Rayner’s speech was printed along with the Senate report, buried amidst 1,100 pages of text. It would never have seen the light of day, except that on July 7, 1912, in a ‘Letter to the Editor’ of the New York Times, a reader brought it to the attention of the paper’s 100,000 subscribers.



A poster advertising trips departing from Pier 59 in New York harbour. (Lancastria.net)

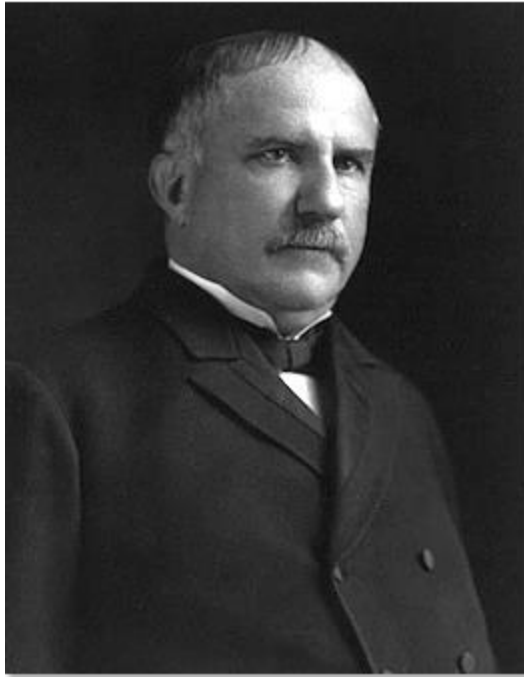
Three months had passed since the Titanic had disappeared beneath the sea. “The mind stands aghast and appalled as these calamities come thick and fast,” Senator Raynor told his colleagues. But it was more than just a ship and its passengers that had stunned the public in both Great Britain and America – it was the very idea of the wreck.

Fifteen thousand people had labored for more than three years to bring the Titanic into being. It was the largest construction project since the creation of the pyramids. In the opening decade of a new century, it symbolized the ingenuity and technological know-how that would propel humankind into a new age.

Then she sank on her maiden voyage.

The day after the disaster the stock markets plunged. In New York, thousands of people wandered the streets in tears. “We forget in our moments of sorrow that it never was intended that the intellect of man should reason out such a problem,” Senator Rayner said.

Rayner was sixty-two years old when he addressed the hearings. He was nearing the end of a long career of public service, and was a devout Jew. “We are to a large extent today defying the ordinances of God,” he stated. “[T]he sooner we awaken to a . . . sense of our responsibility the better it will be for the spiritual elevation of the country.” The nation, he felt, was “running mad with the lust of wealth and of power and of ambition.”



Isidor Rayner, United States Senator from Maryland.  
(Library of Congress)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who had been offered tickets on the Titanic, had spoken about the tragedy in Washington just as the Senate hearings began. “Although such an event is indeed regrettable,” he said, “we must realize that everything which happens is due to some wisdom.” He was consoled, he noted, “by the realization that the worlds of God are infinite . . .”

Like Senator Rayner, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá perceived a deeper meaning in the Titanic disaster. “We are living in a day of reliance upon material conditions,” he stated. “Men imagine that the great size and strength of a ship, the perfection of machinery or the skill of a navigator will ensure safety, but these disasters sometimes take place that men may know that God is the real Protector.”

Yet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was also pragmatic. “Let no one imagine that these words imply that man should not be thorough and careful in his undertakings,” he said. “[H]e must provide and surround himself with all that scientific skill can produce. He must be deliberate, thoughtful and thorough in his purposes, build the best ship and provide the most experienced captain; yet, withal, let him rely upon God and consider God as the one Keeper.”

Senator Rayner, for his part, concluded with a warning: “If this disaster teaches no lesson or points no moral, then let us pass it by with stoical indifference until the next disaster comes, and in the meantime let the carnival go on.”

DAY 87

JULY 6, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Impressions of New York

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 6, 2012

THE HOT SUN BEAMED DOWN on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his companions as they sat on the grass in an expansive New York park. One of them read aloud from the July 7, 1912 edition of *The Sun*, a popular New York paper. The half-page story was entitled: “ABDUL BAHHA GIVES HIS IMPRESSIONS OF NEW YORK.”



An original design by artist Gertrude Kasebier as featured in *The Sun* on July 7, 1912. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

“He hasn’t cared to see any of the notable buildings of New York and has not visited the museums and art galleries,” the article stated. In fact, “[He] has seen less of New York and this country than the average traveller from abroad, and although he is to remain here until fall, there is little likelihood that he will see much more before he departs.”

Despite an itinerary that has had him moving between New York, Washington, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Boston, and Philadelphia, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can hardly be classified as a tourist. “I am not interested in things that are merely beautiful to look at,” he said. “I have nothing to do with mortar and clay. I wish to view an edifice that is never to be destroyed.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, despite the great praise he had often given America’s material development, their democratic government, and their commitment to liberty, pointed out that something was



missing. Speaking to the reporter about his time in Europe and America, he commented: “Consider that the body politic in these countries is day and night exerting itself to the utmost in order to obtain wealth, but you do not have happiness, love and unity among hearts such as ought to obtain.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá walking on Riverside Drive in New York.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

He went on to present a solution: “From the beginning of human society the means for advancement may be reduced into two,” he said. One he described as philosophy, which entails human thought and material civilization, and the other religion, taught by the successive manifestations of God, creating divine civilization. “These two civilizations are like two wings for man wherewith he can soar,” he noted, then added in a poetic turn-of-phrase: “The earth’s sphere, however much it may ignite lamps, nevertheless is ever in need of the effulgence of the sun.”

The article *did* convey a few of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s more “touristy” impressions of America. The nation’s capital had made an impression on him. “Washington is small, but it is a good city,” he commented. “It is most delightful and refreshing, like a garden.” Then he added: “While the capitals of Europe are very much larger, I like Washington best.”

The article ended by noting that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a message for America: “I counsel them all that they may day by day strengthen the bond of love and amity . . . that they may unfurl the divine banner of justice” and “realize and treat each nation as a family composed of the individual children of God.”

DAY 88

JULY 7, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Who Is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 7, 2012

IT SEEMED THAT everyone who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a different opinion about who this man really was. A newspaper article covering his arrival in America introduced him as “ABDUL BAHÁ ABBAS, HEAD OF NEWEST RELIGION . . .” He was called a philosopher, a saint, “His Holiness,” and every possible variation of prophet — “Prophet of Peace,” “Prophet of the East,” “The Great Persian Prophet” — in spite of him having announced “I am not a prophet” as he stepped onto American soil.



An article snippet about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá printed in the Oakland, CA, Tribune on May 13, 1912. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

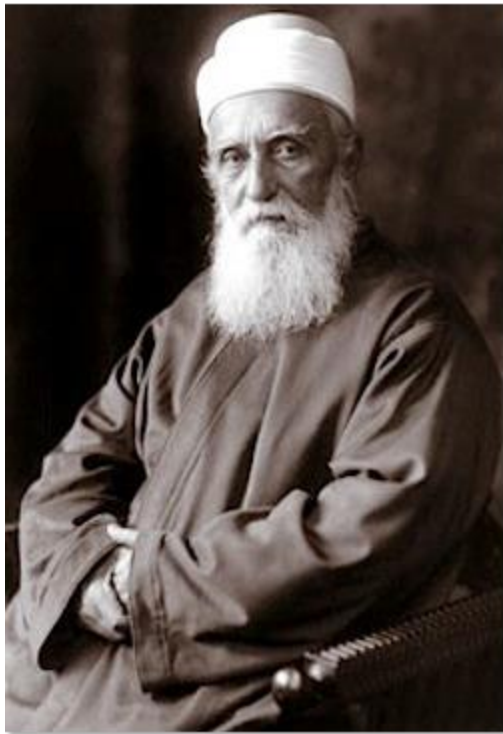
In Washington, DC, on April 27, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had breakfast with Lee McClung, Treasurer of the United States. McClung commented: “I felt as though I was in the presence of one of the great old Prophets: Elijah, Isaiah, Moses. No it was more than that! Christ . . . no, *now* I have it! He seemed to me my Divine Father.” Many Americans, in fact, had decided that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the return of Christ, something he emphatically denied. Some clung to the belief for years.

Others, who were less concerned with names and titles, had trouble pinning him down. Kate Carew, the *New York Tribune*’s celebrity interviewer, described ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as both

wonderfully childlike and venerably wise. Howard Colby Ives, a Unitarian minister from New Jersey, wrote that his time with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left him simultaneously in a state of peace and incredible turmoil.

Yet virtually everyone agreed on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s compelling presence, and the power of his words. As he traveled across America presenting the teachings of his father, Bahá’u’lláh, he drew audiences by the thousands.

On June 2, 1912, at the Church of the Ascension in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked a question that got to the heart of how he saw himself. A woman asked: “What relation do you sustain to the founder of your belief? Are you his successor in the same manner as the Pope of Rome?”



A photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá taken in Paris in 1911.  
(Bahá'í International Community)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was neither a priest, nor an ecclesiastical leader, nor a figure to be worshipped. His father, Bahá’u’lláh, in his Will and Testament, gave ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sole authority to interpret his teachings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained what this meant to an audience in America on December 2, 1912: “To ensure unity and agreement [Bahá’u’lláh] has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world, including the interpreter and explainer of His teachings, so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding . . .”

Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to ensure that his religion would never splinter into competing sects, as had happened to every other major faith. His name, literally, means “servant of Bahá.”

This concept took some time for the American followers of Bahá'u'lláh to grasp. Years before, in a letter to an American who was confused over whether he was the return of Christ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stated exactly how he saw himself: “My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My qualification is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except 'Abdu'l-Bahá.”

DAY 89

**JULY 8, 1912**  
NEW YORK, NY

## July 8, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 8, 2012

IT HAS BEEN a sweltering weekend in New York. These kids, in a picture taken on Saturday, July 6, 1912, have the right idea about how to beat the heat. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is visiting the Museum of Natural History this afternoon.



Beating the heat. Children in New York City licking blocks of ice on a hot Saturday, July 6, 1912.  
(George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

In the week ahead: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visits the Museum, has lots to say about raising children, and speaks on the binding power of religion at All Souls Unitarian Church in Manhattan.

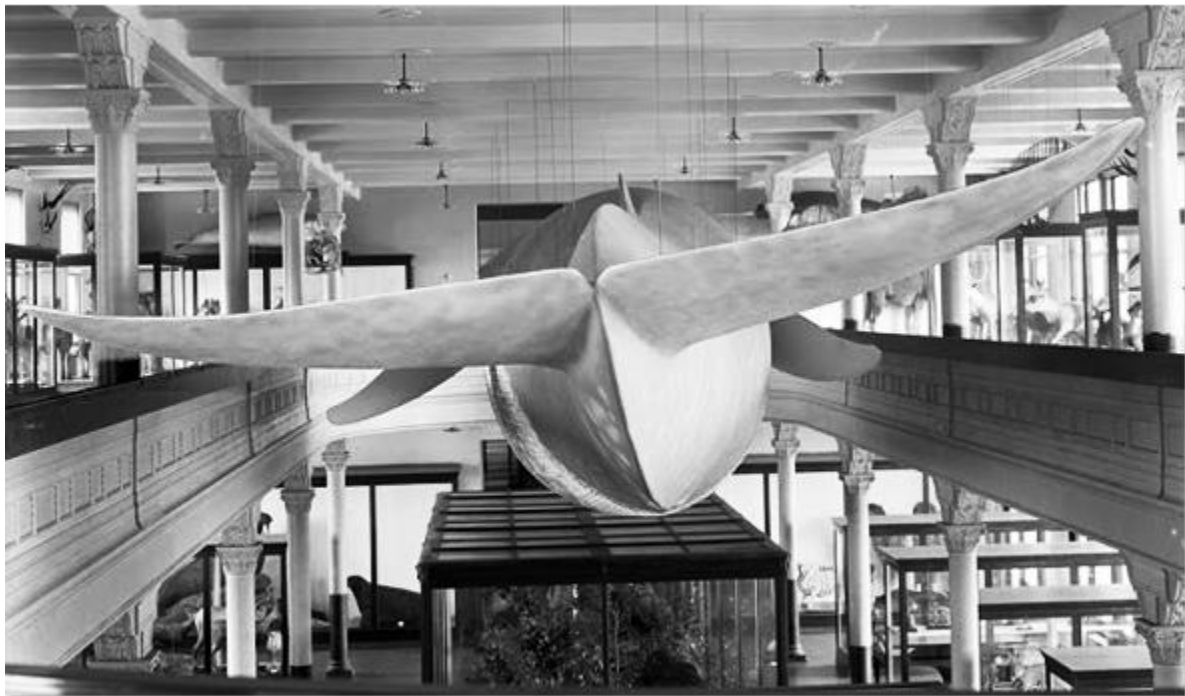
DAY 90

**JULY 9, 1912**  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Jewish Watchman and the Blue Whale

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 9, 2012

THE BELLY OF THE BLUE WHALE was lined with deep corrugations, like a field that had just been plowed. It hung from the ceiling of the Mammal Gallery in the American Natural History Museum in New York, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited on July 9, 1912.



The Blue Whale model as seen from the second floor of the Mammal Gallery, circa 1907. (Scientific American)

It was seventy-six feet long and weighed four tons. It wasn't a real blue whale but a model of one, the largest in the country. It had taken eight months to build in 1907; its skin was papier-mâché.

The sight of the whale made ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laugh. “*He* could hold seventy Jonahs!” he declared. The walk to the museum from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, at 309 West 78th Street, had taken about twenty-five minutes. But the heat that day was oppressive, and he sat down on a stone ledge to rest before traversing the last half block to the museum’s main door. Juliet Thompson, who accompanied him, looked for a closer entrance. She tried the employee entrance, but it was locked. Then a shrill whistle stopped her in her tracks.

She turned around to face an old, bent little man with a kind face. He was the watchman of the museum grounds, and he was Jewish. She pointed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “I must find a nearer door than the main one. See Who is sitting on that ledge! I *must* find it for Him.” The watchman turned and looked at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

“Is he a Jew?” he asked.



The American Museum of Natural History in New York, 1902.  
(Library of Congress)

“A descendant of Abraham.”

“Ask *Him* to come to me,” the watchman said.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Juliet Thompson, and the Persian attendants followed the watchman, who showed them a shortcut across the grass. After seeing the blue whale and viewing a few more exhibits, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked outside and sat on the grass under the shade of a birch tree.

The watchman stole up beside Juliet. “Who is He?” he asked. “He looks like such a great man.”

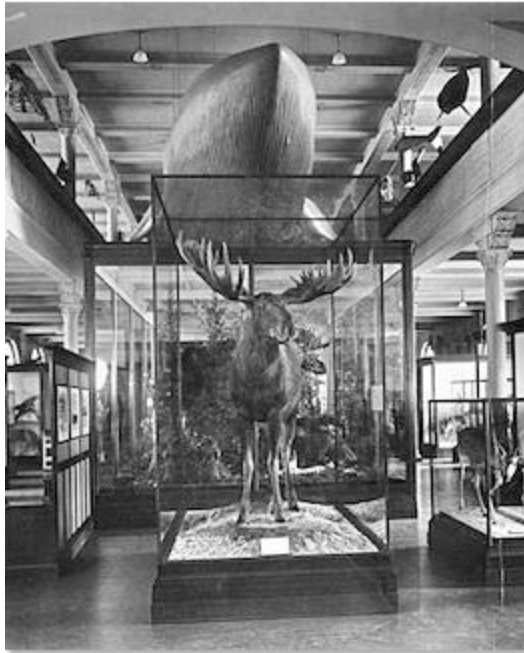
“He is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of Persia,” she replied, “and He has been a great Sufferer because of His work for the real Brotherhood of Man, the uniting of all the races and nations.”

“I should like to speak to Him,” the watchman said. As he approached, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called him to sit down on the grass. “Thank You, Sir, but I am not allowed,” he answered.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked if it was against the museum rules to sit on the grass.

“No, *You* may sit there all day,” the watchman replied, his eyes fixed upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood up and stood next to the tree, his white robe catching the sunlight. “You didn’t see the whole of the Museum,” the man continued. “Would You like to go back after You have rested? You didn’t go up to the third floor. The fossils and the birds are up there. Wouldn’t You like to see the birds?”





The Mammal Gallery in the American Natural History Museum, circa 1907. The whale model is hanging from the ceiling. (Scientific American)

“I am tired of travelling and looking at the things of this world,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded, his voice gentle, “I want to go above and travel and see in the spiritual worlds. What do you think about *that*?”

The watchman remained silent and scratched his head.

“Which would you rather possess,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked him, “the material or the spiritual world?”

The old Jewish man thought about it. “Well, I guess the material world,” he said, finally. “You know you *have* that, anyway.”

“But you do not lose it when you have attained the spiritual world,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded.

“When you go upstairs in a house, you don’t leave the house. The lower floor is under you.”

“Oh I see!” the watchman cried, his face lighting up. “I see!”

When she returned to the museum the following week in order to invite the watchman to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, Juliet Thompson found a young watchman in his place, who knew nothing of the old Jewish man. She never found out what happened to him, but in her diary she wondered if he had, perhaps, died.

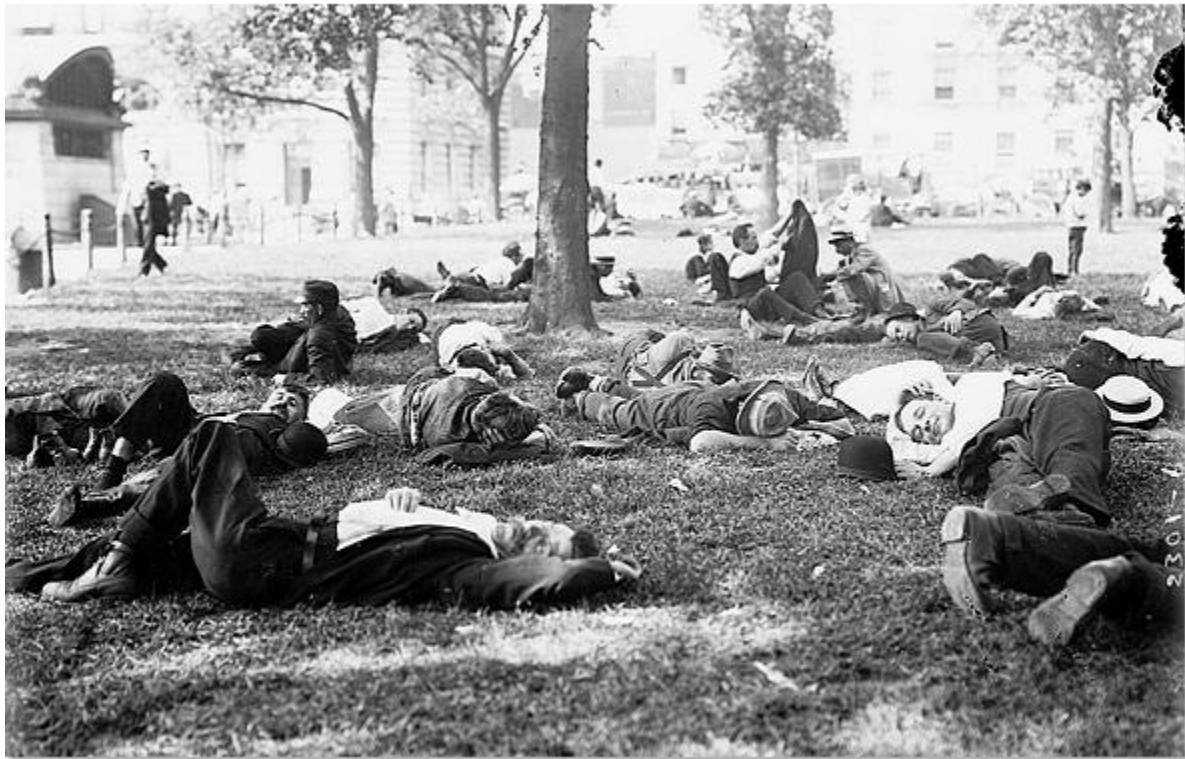
DAY 91

JULY 10, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Heat Wave Knocks Out the Northeast

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 10, 2012

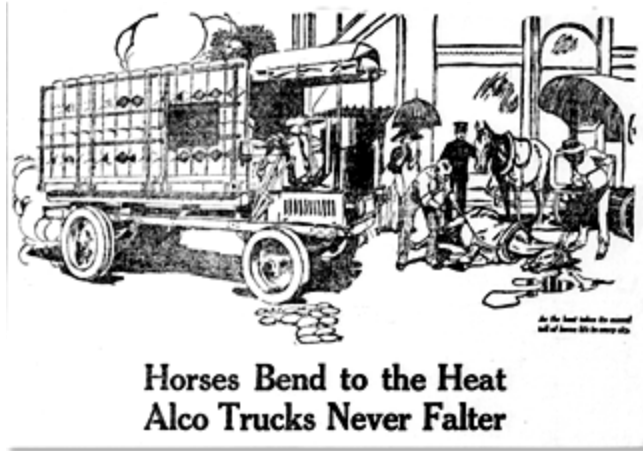
“NINE DIED, THIRTY-SIX WERE PROSTRATED, and two were driven insane by the torrid heat of yesterday,” the *New York Tribune* said on its front page today, July 10, 1912. Two others died in Boston, nine in Chicago, and seven in Philadelphia, where the heat wave drove three people to suicide. Yesterday afternoon at 3 p.m., two thermometers on Broadway registered 100 degrees Fahrenheit.



Men napping in the shade in Manhattan's Battery Park on a hot day. (Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

“The heat in New York is very terrible,” Ahmad Sohrab, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s translators, wrote to Agnes Parsons on July 9. “[E]specially the last three days it has been unbearable, yet the Master is standing firm on his ground.” In spite of the heat, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to hundreds of people every evening at 8 p.m. in his house at 309 West 78th Street on the Upper West Side. “There is a great change in New York,” Sohrab wrote, “and although it is in the height of summer every night the three large rooms on the second floor are crowded by new people.”

Ahmad Sohrab had lived in the United States since 1901, and had arranged many of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s speaking engagements in America. Agnes Parsons, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had stayed with in Washington, had already invited him to visit her summer home in Dublin, New Hampshire, but he had turned her down. “It will be well if you write him at this time another letter asking him to go to Dublin,” Ahmad told her. “I cannot see him living through this heat. It melts iron.”



Advertisement for the American Locomotive Company in the New York Tribune, July 10, 1912. (Library of Congress)

*The Sun* called New York “a wilting, breathless furnace.” “The pavements were scorching hot,” the *Tribune* explained, “and little spirals of heat waves rose from the sun-softened asphalt and the burning sidewalks.” Even the horses were dying. Last year’s heat wave had killed more than 1,200 of them in the month of July alone.

“In the tenement house districts of the East Side, Harlem and the lower West Side the suffering was greatest. Only children and those whose work left no choice were to be found in the streets during the intense heat of the day.” In the past four days, churches and clinics had referred six hundred families to the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor.

Battery Park was filled with those who didn’t have the means to leave the city for the coast. “The baths at the Battery were taxed to full capacity all day until they closed, at 9 o’clock at night.” For the past several nights thousands of people had slept on the grassy slopes of Riverside Park, just down the street to the right from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, in order to escape their sweltering tenements. (Willis Haviland Carrier, the inventor of the air conditioner, wouldn’t install his invention in a home until 1914, and it would cost \$10,000.)



Competing for the water fountain in New York.  
(George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

The Park Commissioner, Mr. Stover, didn't appear to be moved by any of this news: he told reporters that he was closing the parks at night. Why? "Because there are a number of persons in this city who have been permitted in the past to sleep on the lawns in the parks because of the hot weather they take it for granted that they should be permitted to do so now. Well, I am not going to encourage that practice."

The *New York Tribune* didn't seem to think such a hard-hearted, bureaucratic response was justified when people were dying from the heat. "Commissioner Stover gave no reason why he wished to close the parks other than his conviction that some people were prone to convert privilege into license," they wrote.

DAY 92

JULY 11, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far: Month Three

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 11, 2012



Juliet Thompson's portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.  
The original is lost. It only exists in a photograph.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Today marks the end of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's third month in America. We thought we'd take this opportunity to look back at some of the highlights of the past month.

[The Pursuit of Happiness](#) was one of our most popular features. 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented on the challenge of achieving true happiness.

[I Have Seen A Curious Article Which Astonished Me](#) covered Reverend Peter Easton's sensational attack against 'Abdu'l-Bahá, along with the dramatic response of one scholar. In "[Thy Pomp Shall Soon Pass Away](#)", 'Abdu'l-Bahá distinguished the glory of Jesus Christ from the dominion of human leaders like Napoleon.

[Militarizing Human Ingenuity](#) placed the story of the invention of flight alongside 'Abdu'l-Bahá's commentary on the dilemma that sits at the heart of modern progress.

On June 29, 'Abdu'l-Bahá hosted a "feast of unity" in Englewood, New Jersey, which we covered in ['Abdu'l-Bahá's "Feast of Unity"](#).

We continued our coverage of the 1912 Presidential election in four features: [Elephants In Chicago](#), [Politicking and Personalities](#), [Donkeys In Baltimore](#), and [Woodrow Wilson: The Man Who Would Be President](#). The Republicans re-nominated President Taft as their candidate; the

Democrats have chosen Woodrow Wilson; while former President Roosevelt is hovering the wings. The election campaign is about to begin.

Finally, while Americans had many different ideas about who 'Abdu'l-Bahá was, we let him answer the question in an aptly title feature: [Who Is 'Abdu'l-Bahá?](#)

DAY 93

**JULY 12, 1912**  
NEW YORK, NY

## **The Short and Fearless Life of Lua Getsinger**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 12, 2012

ABOUT MIDNIGHT on December 8, 1898, dozens of pairs of eyes peered at Louisa Moore Getsinger through the darkness of a poorly-lighted coffee house near the beach where the ship had dropped them off. Lua was a long way from home: this was Haifa, an outpost of the Ottoman Empire on the shores of the Holy Land. A group of men sat cross-legged on the floor, sipping tea, and speaking Persian and Arabic. One of them nodded; the rest stared in amazement.



**Lua Getsinger in her younger years.**  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Earlier that year Lua had set out for California to teach one of the most powerful women in America about Bahá'u'lláh. Strong-willed, fearless, passionate, restless: that's how her friends would eventually come to describe Lua.

The woman she met was Phoebe Apperson Hearst, wife of the Senator from California, George Hearst, who had died in 1891. Mrs. Hearst still actively managed America's largest private mining company, which she had inherited from her husband. She was a feminist, a suffragist,



and one of the nation's most generous philanthropists. Her son, publisher William Randolph Hearst, was busy building an empire of his own.

That's how Lua's trip here, to the Bay of Haifa, began. Mrs. Hearst had originally planned a winter cruise down the River Nile, but now the trip had become a pilgrimage to the prison city of 'Akká to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Everything was wrapped in secrecy so as not to arouse the suspicion of the authorities, because 'Abdu'l-Bahá was still a prisoner under house arrest. The group of fifteen pilgrims had been instructed to arrive in the Holy Land in groups of two. Lua and her husband, Edward, were the first to arrive.



Louisa Moore Getsinger. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

They waited almost two days before receiving permission to proceed to 'Akká, a five-mile journey on horseback along the sandy edge of Haifa Bay. Lua later wrote of the "violent beating of my heart." When she first laid eyes on 'Abdu'l-Bahá she ran to him, threw herself at his feet, and cried like a child.

"Arise and be of good cheer!" she remembers 'Abdu'l-Bahá saying. He wasn't one for outbursts of devotion, not to mention people prostrating themselves at his feet. Lua would stay in the Holy

Land for four months, learn to speak Persian, and listen as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá instilled in her the need for women to arise and do “great things.”

Lua traveled to ‘Akká again in the summer of 1900. Then in 1902 she stayed a full year to teach English to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family. Upon returning to America she toured the country teaching her new religion. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would later send her to Europe, travel across America with her in 1912, and then dispatch her to India in 1913. For over a decade she was continually homesick, chronically short of funds, and plagued by frequent illness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told her repeatedly that giving birth to a divine religion is achieved through sacrifice.



Lua Getsinger during her travels to India.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Lua was with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Palestine when the Great War broke out. She was there when the bombs begin to drop on ‘Akká. In August, 1915, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent her to safety in Cairo. She was seriously ill for most of the winter, but continued to teach.

Lua Getsinger died unexpectedly of heart failure on May 2, 1916. She was just forty three.

DAY 94

JULY 13, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## “Every Child Is Potentially the Light of the World”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 13, 2012

DURING HIS STAY in America 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed governance, peace, gender equality, and the role of religion. Yet one underreported subject that he spoke about often was children, and this in a country still struggling with child labor.



'Abdu'l-Bahá in Lincoln Park in Chicago. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was an advocate for the youngest members of society. When speaking to the International Peace Forum in New York on May 12, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shed light on an often neglected consequence of war. “Consider what is happening in Tripoli,” he said, “children, made fatherless; fathers, lamenting the death of their sons; mothers, bewailing the loss of dear ones.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had four daughters of his own, and attended many children’s gatherings in America. Whether listening to them sing, commenting on their work in classrooms, or writing age-appropriate prayers for them, he treated them with respect.

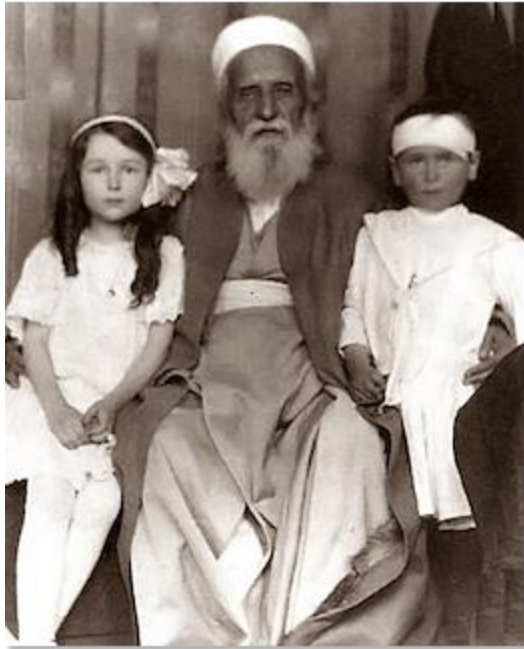


Roland, eleven year old newsboy in Newark, New Jersey.  
Photograph by Lewis Hine. (Library of Congress)

On April 19, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was heading to the Bowery Mission in New York when a group of boys saw him and his Persian entourage and began to throw sticks at them. One of his hosts, Mrs. Kinney, explained to the boys that he was a “holy man” going to see the poor. The boys decided that they wanted to join him, but instead, Mrs. Kinney gave them her home address and told them to visit.

When they arrived, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood at the door and greeted each boy personally. The Reverend Howard Colby Ives explains: “Among the last to enter the room was a colored lad of about thirteen years. He was quite dark and, being the only boy of his race among them, he evidently feared that he might not be welcome.”

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw him, Ives wrote, “His face lighted up with a heavenly smile. He raised His hand with a gesture of princely welcome and exclaimed in a loud voice so that none could fail to hear; that here was a black rose.” Ives continued: “The other boys looked at him with new eyes. I venture to say that he had been called a black – many things, but never before a black rose.”



Abdu'l-Bahá with Musette Jones and Joseph Ioas.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“Every child is potentially the light of the world,”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá would argue, “and at the same time its darkness.”

“Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning,” he said. “The child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned.” Of course, he commented, instilling both moral education and book learning in children would be preferable.

“Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote on the subject of child rearing. “Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art.” Yet he wasn’t suggesting a life of indulgence. “Bring them up to work and strive,” he added, “accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.”



DAY 95

JULY 14, 1912  
BROOKLYN, NY

## Religion: The Greatest Cause of Human Alienation

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 14, 2012

“‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ WILL SPEAK upon the oneness of humanity,” Reverend Leon Harvey told to his congregation at All Souls Unitarian Church in Brooklyn. “It is a great gospel,” he said. “Many have dreamed of it, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has lived it.”



Brooklyn in 1908. Photo by George Grantham Bain. (Library of Congress)

The congregation at All Souls was one of the largest in the city. During its hundred-year history it had counted among its members some of New York’s most prominent reformers and cultural figures, including novelist Herman Melville. It was founded in 1819 under the Congregationalist banner, but by the late 1800s had become a Universalist Unitarian church – a movement with roots in Christianity, which accepted people of every religious background, unified by a dedication to spiritual growth and a commitment to serving the local community.

Reverend Harvey was pleased that he had assembled such a large crowd on one of the hottest days in memory. He began with a prayer: “We thank Thee for him whom we shall hear this morning and pray that whatever may come to us may not fall upon barren soil.”



All Souls Unitarian Church in Brooklyn.  
([www.nycago.org](http://www.nycago.org))

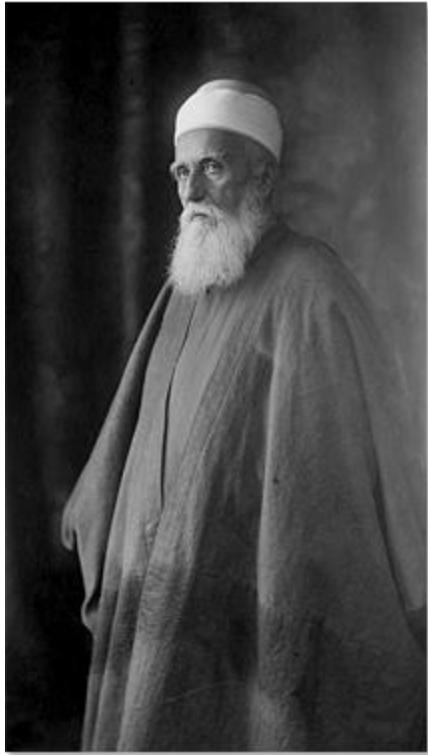
Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the pulpit and began. “In this great century the most important accomplishment is the unity of mankind,” he announced, “it has now become the paramount issue and question in the religious and political conditions of the world.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk followed a similar outline as many he had given in churches over the past three months. However, on this Sunday he was particularly forthright, even blunt. “Consult history,” he said, “you will find a continuous record of war brought about by religious, sectarian, patriotic, racial and political causes.” He was particularly hard on religion, stating simply: “The greatest cause of human alienation has been religion. . .”

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s subject was “the oneness of humanity” and he intended to point the way forward. He invoked a metaphor from his father’s writings. “Ye are all the leaves of one tree,” Bahá’u’lláh had written. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accepted that people were imperfect, and that there were seemingly legitimate reasons for discord. But he asked his audience to focus on humanity’s common foundation.

“Humanity shares in common the intellectual and spiritual faculties of a created endowment,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “This equal participation in the physical, intellectual and spiritual problems of human existence is a valid basis for the unification of mankind.”





Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

In considering the effects of disunity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá invoked the image of the family. "Consider the harmful effect of discord and dissension in a family; then reflect upon the favors and blessings which descend upon that family when unity exists among its various members." He concluded: "What incalculable benefits and blessings would descend upon the great human family if unity and brotherhood were established!"

Speaking of disagreements over religion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá again quoted from his father, who had said: "If religion and faith are the causes of enmity and sedition it is far better to be non-religious." Then, as if to drive home the point, 'Abdu'l-Bahá added: "When we make the remedy the cause of disease it would be better to do without the remedy."

'Abdu'l-Bahá left his audience with a call to action. "Now in this radiant century let us try to do the will of God that we may be rescued from these things of darkness and come forth into the boundless illumination of heaven, shunning division and welcoming the divine oneness of humanity."

DAY 96

JULY 15, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## July 15, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 15, 2012

AFTER HIS TALK IN BROOKLYN YESTERDAY, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took an evening trip to West Englewood, New Jersey, where he spent the night. Many New Yorkers took a ride on the Sea Beach Line this weekend, to spend the day at the amusement parks and along the ocean shore at Coney Island.



Luna Park and Surf Avenue on Coney Island on a hot sunny day in 1912. (Irving Underhill)

In the week ahead we take a look back forty years to Bahá'u'lláh's letters to the kings, to the birth of the Progressive Era in America, and to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's program of reform for the modern nation-state. It will be ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's last full week in New York before a long trip: he won't be back in the city until November 12.

In other news: Jim Thorpe won the decathlon in Stockholm today, helping America win the Olympic medal count for the first time.

DAY 97

JULY 16, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Join the Conversation!

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 16, 2012

IT'S BEEN ALMOST one hundred days since we began to explore 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey across America. On April 11, 1912 he arrived in New York, and began to engage Americans in conversation about the issues that confronted the nation, including race, religion, gender, social justice, international peace, and America's future. We have been telling the story here at *239 Days In America* in real time, time-shifted by exactly 100 years.



Infrared photograph of the Statue of Liberty. (Beckerman Photo)

One thing we've learned over the past three months is that 1912 wasn't all that different from 2012. A fiercely contested election challenged Americans to decide what kind of country they wanted to live in. Minorities and women fought for civil rights. Workers faced off against corporations. American soldiers landed on foreign shores, sparking debate about the nation's role in the world.

To those of you who have accompanied us on the journey so far, thank you. And if you're just joining us, welcome!

Now we'd like to invite you to join the conversation. The idea is to use our history, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unique take on America and its place in the world, as a starting point for a dialogue about subjects that matter in 2012. There is room to post comments at the end of every article.

If you'd like to start reading *239 Days In America* from the beginning, we've added a banner on our home page. If you would rather just jump to the highlights, here's a list of what we think are our Top Eleven Daily Features so far (because Top Tens are so overdone):

DAY 1: ['Abdu'l-Bahá Arrives in America](#)

DAY 5: [An Arms Dealer Tries to Sell War to 'Abdu'l-Bahá](#)

DAY 12: [Even Though the World Should Go to Smash](#)

DAY 13: [This Shining Colored Man](#)

DAY 22: [The Trials of Corinne Knight True](#)

DAY 24: [Blame It On Religion](#)

DAY 26: [The Ultimate Taboo](#)

DAY 34: ['Abdu'l-Bahá Scales "The Gunks"](#)

DAY 46: [Baptism by Fire](#)

DAY 69: [The Pursuit of Happiness](#)

DAY 94: ["Every Child Is Potentially the Light of the World"](#)

Many thanks for accompanying us on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey across America, from all of us here at *239 Days in America*.

DAY 98

JULY 17, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## “Have Mercy on Yourselves and on Those Beneath You”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 17, 2012

“LAY NOT ASIDE the fear of God, O Kings of the Earth,” Bahá’u’lláh wrote in 1868, “and beware that ye transgress not the bounds which the Almighty hath fixed. Be vigilant, that ye may not do injustice to anyone, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. Tread ye the path of justice, for this, verily, is the straight path.”



A view of Adrianople where Bahá’u’lláh wrote the *Súriy-i-Mulúk*. Photograph circa 1900. (Explo.com)

During ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s time in America, he spoke frequently of his father’s incarceration, and how this prisoner had addressed the rulers and kings of the earth. “If we study the historical record,” Abdu’l-Bahá noted, “we will find that none of the Prophets of the past ever spread His teachings or promulgated His Cause from a prison.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was only [eight years old when Bahá’u’lláh was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál](#), Tehran’s notorious underground dungeon. The family would endure a lifetime of imprisonment



and exile, first in Baghdad, then in Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally in the Ottoman prison city of ‘Akká in Palestine.

In 1863 in Baghdad, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was almost nineteen years old, Bahá’u’lláh told a few of his followers that he was the latest of God’s messengers. In 1868 in Adrianople he announced it to the world’s major leaders in his Súriy-i-Mulúk, or Tablet of the Kings.



The bridge at Büyükçekmece, Turkey, which Bahá’u’lláh crossed on his way from Constantinople to Adrianople in December, 1863. (Bahá’í International Community)

The monarchs Bahá’u’lláh addressed were, for the most part, heads of state churches. They judged the Bible or the Qur’án to be the unerring truth, and interpreted these books to legitimize their political authority. “It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms,” Bahá’u’lláh told them. “Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men.”

Bahá’u’lláh asserted that the power these rulers held came with the responsibility to exercise justice. “God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government of the people,” he stated, “that ye may rule with justice over them, safeguard the rights of the downtrodden, and punish the wrongdoers.”

Then he questioned their priorities. “We have learned that ye are increasing your outlay every year, and are laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is more than they can bear, and is a grievous injustice.”

“Compose your differences and reduce your armaments,” Bahá’u’lláh wrote, “that the burden of your expenditures may be lightened, and that your minds and hearts may be tranquilized. Heal the dissensions that divide you, and ye will no longer be in need of any armaments except what the protection of your cities and territories demandeth. Fear ye God, and take heed not to outstrip the bounds of moderation and be numbered among the extravagant.”



A modern view of the residence of Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople. (Bahá'í International Community)

Bahá'u'lláh identified military spending as a central cause of poverty, and warned these European and Middle Eastern leaders that their subjects would not long put up with it:

“If ye pay no heed unto the counsels which, in peerless and unequivocal language, We have revealed in this Tablet,” Bahá'u'lláh wrote, “Divine chastisement shall assail you from every direction, and the sentence of His justice shall be pronounced against you. On that day ye shall have no power to resist Him, and shall recognize your own impotence.”

“Have mercy on yourselves,” he pleaded, “and on those beneath you.”

*In tomorrow's feature, Bahá'u'lláh writes letters to Queen Victoria and to the kings of the earth: Napoleon III of France, Czar Alexander II of Russia, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria, Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz of Turkey, and Násiri'd-Dín Sháh of Persia.*

DAY 99

JULY 18, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## “Bind Ye the Broken With the Hands of Justice”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 18, 2012

WHILE UNDER HOUSE ARREST in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh addressed the rulers of the nineteenth century in his *Tablet of the Kings*. Over the next few years he would continue to write messages to the monarchs in Europe and the Middle East. Sometimes he wrote letters directly to them, and at other times addressed them by name in his other works. In 1873, in his book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh called the leaders of the New World to a unique role in establishing justice.



A session of the United States House of Representatives, February 2, 1880. (Library of Congress)

Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz had banished Bahá'u'lláh from city to city across the Ottoman Empire. Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Ottoman prime minister, ‘Alí Páshá, and warned him that the Sultan would soon lose control of his realm. “The day is approaching when the Land of Mystery [Adrianople] and what is beside it shall be changed, and shall pass out of the hands of the King,” he wrote. ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz was overthrown on May 30, 1876. Two weeks later he committed suicide.



Napoleon III of France in 1853, just after he became Emperor. (Auguste Boulard)

When Napoleon III, the Emperor of France, received Bahá'u'lláh's message through diplomatic channels, it was reported that he laughed, threw it over his shoulder, and said, "If this man is God, I am two Gods!"

After arriving in the prison city of 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh wrote back. "It is not Our wish to address thee words of condemnation," he wrote, "out of regard for the dignity We conferred upon thee in this mortal life." But, he charged Napoleon: "Hadst thou been sincere in thy words, thou wouldst have not cast behind thy back the Book of God, when it was sent unto thee by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. We have proved thee through it, and found thee other than that which thou didst profess."

In 1870 Napoleon III was supreme. But by September he was gone, baited by Bismarck into going to war against the rising technological might of Prussia. Prussia's shocking victory at the Battle of Sedan unified Germany: Kaiser Wilhelm I was crowned Emperor of Europe's new leading power in Napoleon's residence at Versailles.



Napoleon III (left) with his captor, Otto von Bismarck, in 1870 after the Battle of Sedan. (Wilhelm Camphausen/Wikimedia)

Two years later, in his *Most Holy Book*, Bahá'u'lláh wrote about Germany and the ephemeral nature of earthly glory, recalling the example of Napoleon III. “We hear the lamentations of Berlin,” he wrote, “though she be today in conspicuous glory.”

Bahá'u'lláh's tone changed when he wrote to Queen Victoria. He praised this ruling monarch for abolishing the slave trade and for her representative government. “Thou, indeed, hast done well, for thereby the foundations of the edifice of thine affairs will be strengthened, and the hearts of all that are beneath thy shadow, whether high or low, will be tranquillized.”



Queen Victoria in 1882. Portrait by Alexander Bassano. (Wikimedia)

Bahá'u'lláh indicated that he thought little of the capacity of the rulers of the nineteenth century to properly manage the planet. “And whenever any one of them hath striven to improve its condition,” he said, “his motive hath been his own gain, whether confessedly so or not; and the unworthiness of this motive hath limited his power to heal or

cure.” Instead, he addressed the “elected representatives of the people in every land.” “Take ye counsel together,” he wrote, “and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof.”

Later, in the *Most Holy Book*, Baha’u’lláh gave a specific mission to the leaders across the Atlantic. “Hearken ye, O Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein,” he wrote. “Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice, and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the commandments of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise.”

DAY 100

**JULY 19, 1912**  
NEW YORK, NY

## **1912: A Year Supreme With Possibilities**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 19, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ COULD HARDLY have picked a better time than 1912 to join the conversation about America. “Nineteen twelve,” said Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party’s candidate for President, “is a year supreme with possibilities.” That year marked the highpoint of a flurry of new social movements that had begun two decades earlier.



View of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893. (Source unavailable)

The ingenuity and growing industrial power of the United States had been on show at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. The palaces of the White City symbolized the economic transformation of John Winthrop's "City on a Hill" into a global industrial power that was prepared to extend its influence across the world. But on January 8, 1894, just three months after the fair closed, flames swept through the monuments in Jackson Park.

The roof of the Manufactures Building collapsed in a mass of molten glass. The eastern end of the Court of Honor was now a blackened heap. The Electricity Building went up in smoke, while thousands of bystanders watched a barrage of light that dwarfed the pyrotechnics that twenty-seven million visitors had come to the Fair the previous summer to see. "Athens has crumbled; the chief attraction of the White City has resolved itself into ashes."





The burning of the White City, 1894. (Benjamin Andrews, *History of the United States*, Vol. V (1912))

The neoclassical palaces had been grand, but they had been lies: they were constructed from plaster of Paris supported on shoddy wooden frames to project grandiosity at minimal cost. Such, too, was the country Americans of the era found themselves living in. By the time the fair ended, the Panic of 1893 was in full swing. The Pullman railroad car works had laid off more than eighty percent of its workers; the Illinois Steel Company went bankrupt, as did 350 banks. Farm prices plummeted. The national unemployment rate stood at twenty-five percent.

It was more than just a downturn: the very fabric of the American Dream was at stake. Middle-class Americans felt they had lost control of their lives to a few men named Morgan, Rockefeller, or Carnegie. Their fate was now determined largely by distant managers: impersonal forces they could neither see, nor understand, nor control. Meanwhile, they watched as conglomerates bought members of Congress and used federal power to enforce the status quo. When a strike against the Pullman Car Company reached Chicago in the summer of 1894, President Cleveland sent in federal troops to squash it. “Men became economic slaves,” wrote Benjamin Parke De Witt. “Slowly, Americans realized they were not free.”



Children working at a mechanical loom in a textile mill. Child labor was a key concern in the Progressive Era. (Lewis Hine)

Their response: a multifaceted approach to national reform that became known as the Progressive Movement. Settlement houses like Jane Addams's Hull House sprang up to help solve the problems of the urban poor. Reformers enlisted the new sciences of statistics, economics, sociology, and psychology to investigate the laws that governed human behavior. Advocates of the Social Gospel lined up Protestant churches on the side of the poor. Muckraking journalists shaped a new social force — public opinion — by exposing the injustices of industrial capitalism. Progressive politicians fought the status quo by campaigning for government intervention in the laissez-faire economy on behalf of *The People*.

As 'Abdu'l-Bahá crossed the country in 1912, the national debate around the Presidential election crystallized the forces of change that had been brimming for twenty years. Woodrow Wilson summed up the challenge facing the American people:

“Now this is nothing short of a new social age,” he said, “a new era of human relationships, a new stage-setting for the drama of life.”

DAY 101

JULY 20, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Secret of Divine Civilization

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 20, 2012

“IT IS A SPECTACLE never before witnessed,” William Jennings Bryan wrote from the Democratic National Convention in Baltimore. He was surprised at how aggressively moneyed interests had entered the political process in 1912. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had first gone on record about leadership and corruption thirty-seven years earlier, when he was just thirty-one years old. In 1875 he wrote a long, open letter — called *The Secret of Divine Civilization* — to the people and government of Persia in support of the early modernization efforts of Násiri’-d-Dín Sháh, the king who had banished Bahá’u’lláh and his family from Iran.



The eastern facade of the Capitol building in Washington, DC, circa 1915. (Shorpy.com)

In *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá demanded a high standard of conduct from political leaders: “First,” he wrote, “the elected members must be righteous, God-fearing, high-

mindful, incorruptible.” “These give no thought to amassing enormous fortunes for themselves; they believe, rather, that their own wealth lies in enriching their subjects.” He added: “They take no pride in gold and silver, but rather in their enlightenment and their determination to achieve the universal good.”



The Shrine of the Imam Reza, a holy place for Shi'i Muslims in Mashhad, Iran. Picture taken in 2005. (Wikimedia Commons)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s open letter to the people of Persia engaged a wide range of national issues. In America, Social Gospel churchmen marched in the forefront of reform, but in Iran the clergy, and their arbitrary interpretation of the law, was a major barrier to progress. Two plaintiffs could go to two different religious officials about the same case and receive opposite decisions. “It may even happen that in one and the same case two conflicting decisions will be handed down by the same mujtahid, on the grounds that he was inspired first in one direction and then in the other,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote. “There can be no doubt that this state of affairs has confused every important issue and must jeopardize the very foundations of society.”

Much of the debate during the American election of 1912 was about the *structure* of political leadership — Should Senators be elected directly? What powers should the President have? — but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was generally more concerned with the *qualities* of political leadership. “It is unquestionable that the object in establishing parliaments is to bring about justice and righteousness,” he wrote, “but everything hinges on the efforts of the elected representatives.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1868, about 24 years old.  
(Bahá'í International Community)

In *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed the subject at length: “If these individuals prove to be pure and high-minded, if they remain free from the taint of corruption, the confirmations of God will make them a never-failing source of bounty to mankind . . . . If, however, the members of these consultative assemblies are inferior, ignorant, uninformed of the laws of government and administration, unwise, of low aim, indifferent, idle, self-seeking, no benefit will accrue from the organizing of such bodies.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá grasped the tendency of human beings to mishandle power. “[A]ny agency whatever, though it be the instrument of mankind’s greatest good, is capable of misuse,” he wrote. “Its proper use or abuse depends on the varying degrees of enlightenment, capacity, faith, honesty, devotion and highmindedness of the leaders of public opinion.”

DAY 102

JULY 21, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Deeds, Not Words

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 21, 2012

THROUGHOUT HIS TIME in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke on peace, social justice, generosity, and even thankfulness. In each case he stressed the need for practical solutions over mere words. “Those who do most good use fewest words,” he once commented.



The Bowery Mission in New York, 1910. (Library of Congress)

On May 14, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delivered a talk to the leaders of the peace movement at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in the Shawangunk Mountains outside of New York. He laid out a number of principles necessary to peace, including the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, and the need for harmony between the systems of science and religion. The next day, to a group of youth, he noted: “It is very easy to come here, camp near this beautiful lake, on these charming hills, far away from everybody and deliver speeches on

Universal Peace. These ideals should be spread and put in action over there, [Europe] not here in the world's most peaceful corner.”

Even as a prisoner under house arrest in ‘Akká, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took action to provide solutions to



Suffragettes demanded "Deeds not words" in 1908.  
(barbadosfreepress.wordpress.com)

the needs of the community.

He set up a school to educate children, helped feed the poor and find them jobs, and encouraged his fellow exiles to attend to the sick, crippled, and aged, regardless of their religion. In America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued this pattern, making a point of visiting the Bowery Mission in New York.

On May 30, 1912, at the Theosophical Lodge in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointed out that knowledge is not enough to solve the world's problems. “To admit that health is good does not constitute health,” he said. Knowledge must be applied, he said, “the remedy carried out.”

Even in such matters as thankfulness ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stressed the need for deeds over words. To an audience on the Upper West Side on July 15, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described two ways of giving thanks. “There is verbal thanksgiving, which is confined to a mere utterance of gratitude,” he noted. “This is of no importance because perchance the tongue may give thanks while the heart is unaware of it.” Real thankfulness, he offered, “expresses itself in the deeds and actions.” He told his audience to “render good deeds, be self-sacrificing, loving the servants of God, forfeiting even life for them, showing kindness to all the creatures.”





Settlement Houses, such as Hull House in Chicago, founded by Jane Addams, marked the beginning of social work in America. (Swarthmore Archives)

After reading a prayer about “renunciation,” Reverend Howard Colby Ives, an American who wrote a book that described his interactions with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, questioned the concept. Renouncing the world, he said, “smacked of papacy and the monkish cell.” But Ives soon discovered that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá meant he should act without attachment to material things — it had nothing to do with removing himself from society. Ives remembered that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him that it was time for “great things.” “[W]ith literally flashing eyes and emphatically raised hand,” Ives wrote, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá exclaimed that “I should remember His words that This is a Day for very great things — VERY GREAT THINGS.”

DAY 103

JULY 22, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## July 22, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 22, 2012

TODAY IS 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LAST DAY IN NEW YORK. Tomorrow morning he will leave for Boston and then he will spend three weeks in the lush countryside of Dublin, New Hampshire. He delayed his trip until tomorrow so that he could meet Prince Muhammad-'Alí Páshá, the brother of Egypt's ruler, who came to visit him today. 'Abdu'l-Bahá won't be back in New York until November.



'Abdu'l-Bahá walking near Riverside Drive, on the Upper West Side. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

In the week ahead, 'Abdu'l-Bahá visits Boston, and on Thursday the quirky inhabitants of Dublin, New Hampshire, awaken to find 'Abdu'l-Bahá among them.

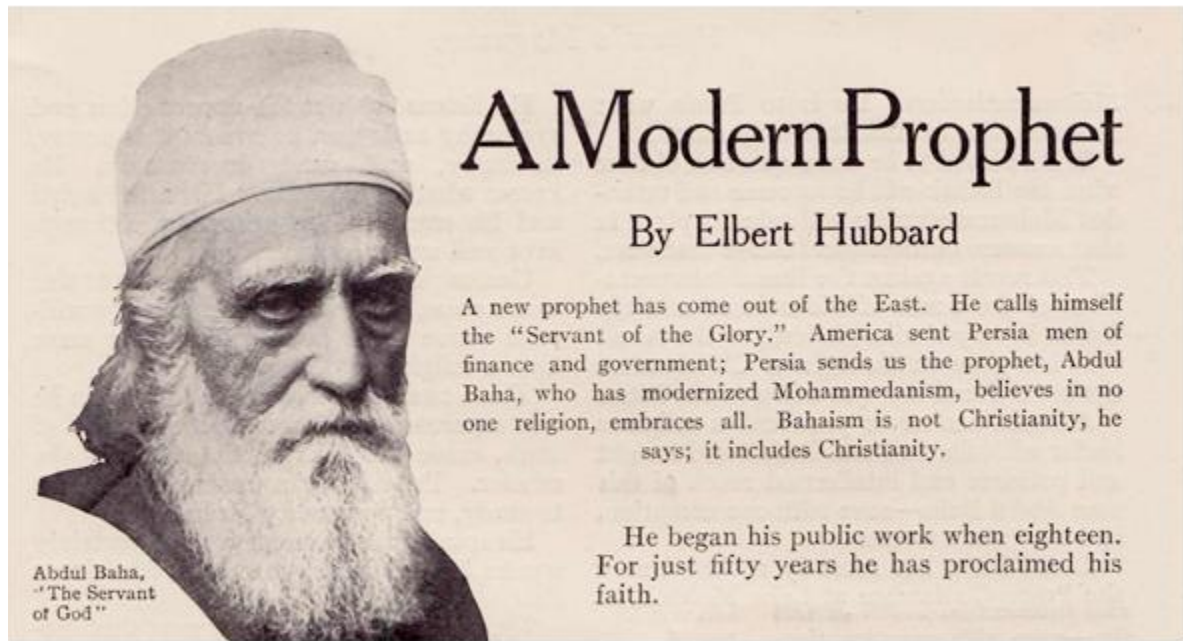
DAY 104

JULY 23, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## The Modern Prophet and the Original Hippie

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 23, 2012

“THERE IS NO DOUBT, among thinking people, that this man represents, in great degree, the growing and evolving spirit of our times.” That was Elbert Hubbard in “A Modern Prophet,” an article he wrote about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the July 22, 1912, issue of *Hearst’s Magazine*.



Elbert Hubbard's article, "A Modern Prophet," printed in *Hearst's Magazine* on July 22, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Elbert Hubbard was a businessman turned marketing guru who, after climbing to the highest ranks of the Larkin Soap Company before the age of thirty, decided he was spiritually empty. He moved to East Aurora, a country town south of Buffalo, and established an Arts and Crafts community called Roycroft. The movement was in protest to the industrial revolution, he said, which was rendering handcrafted goods obsolete. Roycroft soon became a site for the meetings of socialists, freethinkers, and suffragists.

Hubbard also developed a second career as a populist writer, using his skills as an ad man to repackage ideas from philosophers and poets into mass market slogans. “Conformists die, heretics live forever,” was one such slogan. He also wrote popular essays with titles like “Jesus Was An Anarchist.” Ironically, the man who would one day be called America’s “original

hippie” became famous for a 1899 short story on worker obedience. It catapulted him into the realm of celebrity.



Elbert Hubbard wore a hat long out of fashion. He said the hat indicated: "I think thoughts that to you are impossible." (pbs.org)

“According to Abdul Baha,” Hubbard wrote in *Hearst’s Magazine*, “we are now living in a period of time that marks the beginning of the millennium – a thousand years of peace, happiness and prosperity.” He told his readers that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had come to the West with a mission, and that no one should doubt his sincerity. “He is no mere eccentric,” Hubbard added.

Elbert Hubbard likely never met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Whatever means he used to research his article, he managed to simultaneously capture the spirit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s message while getting most of his facts wrong. “He speaks many languages and certainly speaks English better than most Americans do,” Hubbard wrote. Of course, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá barely spoke a word of English. Hubbard also claimed that one-third of all Persians had joined the Bahá’í religion.

Hubbard’s article was designed to cater to a country disillusioned with the status quo. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s message, he stated, “presages a world-wide up-springing of vital religion.” “In the world of economics, we in America are infinitely beyond anything that can come to us from the Orient,” Hubbard wrote. “But the divine fire of this man’s spirituality is bound to illuminate the dark corners of our imaginations and open up to us a spiritual realm which we would do well to go in and possess.”



Elbert Hubbard established the Roycroft Print Shop to create independent magazines. ([www.linngroveiowa.org](http://www.linngroveiowa.org))

By 1912 handcrafted goods and the bungalows that housed them were going out of style. Hubbard's marriage ended in divorce when a longtime affair with Alice Moore was exposed. Then the war broke out. "Who lifted the lid off of hell?" Hubbard said. He blamed it all on big business.

On May 1, 1915, Elbert Hubbard and wife Alice boarded the *Lusitania* bound for Europe. He hoped to interview Kaiser Wilhelm. Hubbard had once written a moving tribute about the *Titanic*, and the death of a couple who had refused the lifeboats in order to die together. At ten minutes past two in the afternoon on May 7, a torpedo from a German U-Boat glided across the water toward the *Lusitania*. Hubbard and Alice linked arms, entered a room on the top deck, and closed the door.

DAY 105

JULY 24, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Science Proves the Human Spirit

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on July 24, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ RECEIVED a last-minute invitation just before dinner on July 24, 1912. He had already spoken to hundreds of people that day in Boston, in at least five different venues. Then the request came from the President of the American Theosophical Society. Although exhausted, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wasn’t one to say no, especially to a group devoted to the pursuit of spiritual matters.



Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market in Boston, circa 1910. (US National Archives)

“There is no religion higher than truth,” was the maxim of the Theosophical Society. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian noblewoman, had founded the organization in New York in 1875. Madame Blavatsky traveled the world in order to glean truths from the belief systems of the East, then immigrated to the West to inspire Americans. The event in Boston that evening took place just a stone’s throw away from the Victoria Hotel where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was staying.

“In the world of existence there is nothing so important as spirit,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “The spirit of man is the animus of human life and the collective center of all human virtues.”





The emblem of the United Lodge of Theosophy. The emblem combines several different religious and occult symbols. (Wikimedia Commons)

Theosophists emphasized mystical experience.

They sought direct contact with a spiritual reality they believed they could access by intuition or meditation. But when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood before his audience, he approached the subject of “spirit” from a different perspective.

“The animal,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “is a captive of the world of nature and not in touch with that which lies within and beyond nature; it is without spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the attractions of consciousness, unconscious of the world of God and incapable of deviating from the law of nature.”

“It is different with man. Man is possessed of the emanations of consciousness; he has perception, ideality and is capable of discovering the mysteries of the universe.”

Theosophists held that certain mysteries of existence required specialized knowledge and could only be accessed by a select few. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, on the other hand, demonstrated that some of the most astounding proofs of the human spirit were rational, and had nothing to do with the occult.

As proof of humanity’s superiority over the animal, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned not to religious sensibilities, but to science and technology. “All the industries, inventions and facilities surrounding our daily life were at one time hidden secrets of nature, but the reality of man



penetrated them and made them subject to his purposes.” Electricity was a prime example: “Man has discovered this illimitable power and made it captive to his uses.”



Madame Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, in New York in 1877. (blavatskyarchives.com)

“Man has accurately determined that the sun is stationary while the earth revolves about it,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued, “The animal cannot do this.” “Man perceives the mirage to be an illusion. This is beyond the power of the animal.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that “abstract intellectual phenomena” were “human powers” – powers that manifested themselves in the physical world, but not by magic.

“[M]an wrests the sword of dominion from nature’s hand and uses it upon nature’s head,” he said. “For example, it is a natural exigency that man should be a dweller upon the earth, but the power of the human spirit transcends this limitation, and he soars aloft in airplanes.”

“Man transcends nature,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded, “while the mineral, vegetable and animal are helplessly subject to it. This can be done only through the power of the spirit, because the spirit is the reality.”

DAY 106

JULY 25, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## What Can the Hypocrite Know?

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 25, 2012

WHILE IN AMERICA ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to a wide variety of public audiences, including peace societies, church congregations, women’s groups, and social justice organizations. But he also spoke directly to groups of Bahá’ís — followers of his father’s religion — and often when he did so, his tone changed.



'Abdu'l-Bahá, seated on the top step, with a group of Bahá'ís in Cleveland on May 6, 1912.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“I am expecting results from this visit,” he told them on July 25, 1912, at the Hotel Victoria in Boston, “and hope that my coming may not be fruitless. The results I expect are these: that the individual soul shall be released from self and desire and freed from the bondage of satanic

suggestions.” By “satanic” he meant “the natural inclinations of the lower nature,” and not some independent evil spirit.

“Man possesses two kinds of susceptibilities,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “the natural emotions, which are like dust upon the mirror, and spiritual susceptibilities, which are merciful and heavenly characteristics.” It was an analogy he had used many times before — the soul as a mirror reflecting divine qualities and virtues, and the constant struggle to keep it pure.

“What is the dust which obscures the mirror?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked. “It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire,” he said. The “natural emotions,” he argued, are the “rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God.” He contrasted these emotions with what he called “spiritual susceptibilities,” a list which included “sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love for the believers of God.”



The view from Cambridge, Massachusetts, toward Boston, across the Charles River Dam Bridge of 1910. (Detroit Publishing Company)

Then he laid out the standard he expected from the Bahá’ís. “It is my hope that you may consider this matter, that you may search out your own imperfections and not think of the imperfections of anybody else. Strive with all your power to be free from imperfections. Heedless souls are always seeking faults in others. What can the hypocrite know of others’ faults when he is blind to his own?”

“As long as a man does not find his own faults,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasized, “he can never become perfect. Nothing is more fruitful for man than the knowledge of his own shortcomings.” It was, he said, “a guide for human conduct.” He ended his short talk by quoting his father, Bahá’u’lláh: “I wonder at the man who does not find his own imperfections.”

At 4 p.m. that afternoon, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said farewell to his friends and well-wishers in Boston and headed eighty miles northwest into the countryside. He arrived in Dublin, New Hampshire, at 7 p.m.

DAY 107

JULY 26, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## A Sleepy Morning in Dublin, New Hampshire

By MORELLA MENON | Published on July 26, 2012

THE SUN RISES on Dublin Lake, illuminating the western shore. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is already awake.

Throughout Dublin there are stirrings of the sleepyheads, their linens now tangled in untidy heaps. On the south shore of the lake, the cold and damp air has roused the family of Abbott Thayer, artist, naturalist, ornithologist. A strong believer in fresh air and toughening of the person, Abbott requires that his family and any guests sleep in open-sided huts, even in the winter. Paintings adorn his studio and bird skins carefully set by pins lie in ordered trays on the bench.



The sun rises over Mount Monadnock, near Dublin, New Hampshire.  
(Photograph by Fraser Whitbread. Used with Permission.)\*

Along the shore, at Loon Point, where the land juts into the lake, among his carefully crafted Italianate and oriental gardens, through his Moon Gate, Joseph Lindon Smith, artist, archaeologist, imagines his next literary piece to be acted in *Teatro Bambino*, a theatre he has created among the trees.

Knollwood, the estate of Franklin MacVeagh, Secretary of the Treasury, sighs beneath the weight of government. The Cabinet meets in the Cape Cod across the lawn from the main house. His nephew Charles, and Charles's family, are staying for the summer.



Amy Lowell on the cover of TIME, March 2, 1925. (TIME Magazine Archives)

Across the lake on the north side at Beech Hill, Amy Lowell, the poetess, stirs her large frame. She will not be rising for some hours yet: she works all night and sleeps all day. Her pack of cigars lie open and welcoming by her side. Here she writes her poems of Dublin. It is said that she sleeps on a custom-made bed with exactly sixteen pillows. Later in life she will say of Keats: “The stigma of oddness is the price a myopic world always exacts of genius.”

Abbott Thayer — whom we have just met — is a bit of a recluse, but his friend George De Forest Brush is not. George the acclaimed painter, his daughters Nancy and Mary, guest Margaret Sanger, and maybe more tucked away in this sociable family, will come down to breakfast on time at Brush Farm so as not to keep mother and cook waiting.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is staying on the Parsons’ estate, on the east side of the lake, near Knollwood and Brush Farm. The Parsons have three houses: Stonehenge, Ty-ny-maes, fondly called Tiny May, and Day-Spring, the double-gabled three-storey “cottage” with Doric columns, which Agnes Parsons had readied for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. From one side of the balcony is a wide view across the

fields and on the other can be seen the mountain ranges disappearing into the distance. This morning he will walk in the “bird cage,” a grove of trees where the birds feed, cool and quiet, with the smell of pine beneath his feet.



Franklin MacVeagh, Secretary of the Treasury, in 1909.  
(George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

It is here, in Dublin, that the rich and famous from Boston and Washington spend their summers. But they do not entertain in grand and glittering style as would those who live near the Vanderbilts in Newport, Rhode Island. The Dubliners spend their evenings around open fires discussing politics, literature, music, and art.

Agnes Parsons wants to keep ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival a secret so he can rest. She will succeed for twenty-four hours. Then the continuous stream of visitors will begin.

*\* We wish to offer our deepest thanks to Fraser Whitbread, a Calgary-born naturalist, botanist, photographer, now transplanted to New Hampshire, for permission to use his beautiful image of the sunrise over Mount Monadnock. You can [see more of Fraser’s astounding work here](#) or [read his Flickr profile](#). If you pay attention, you might even meet his red Saab convertible — her name is Sally.*



DAY 108

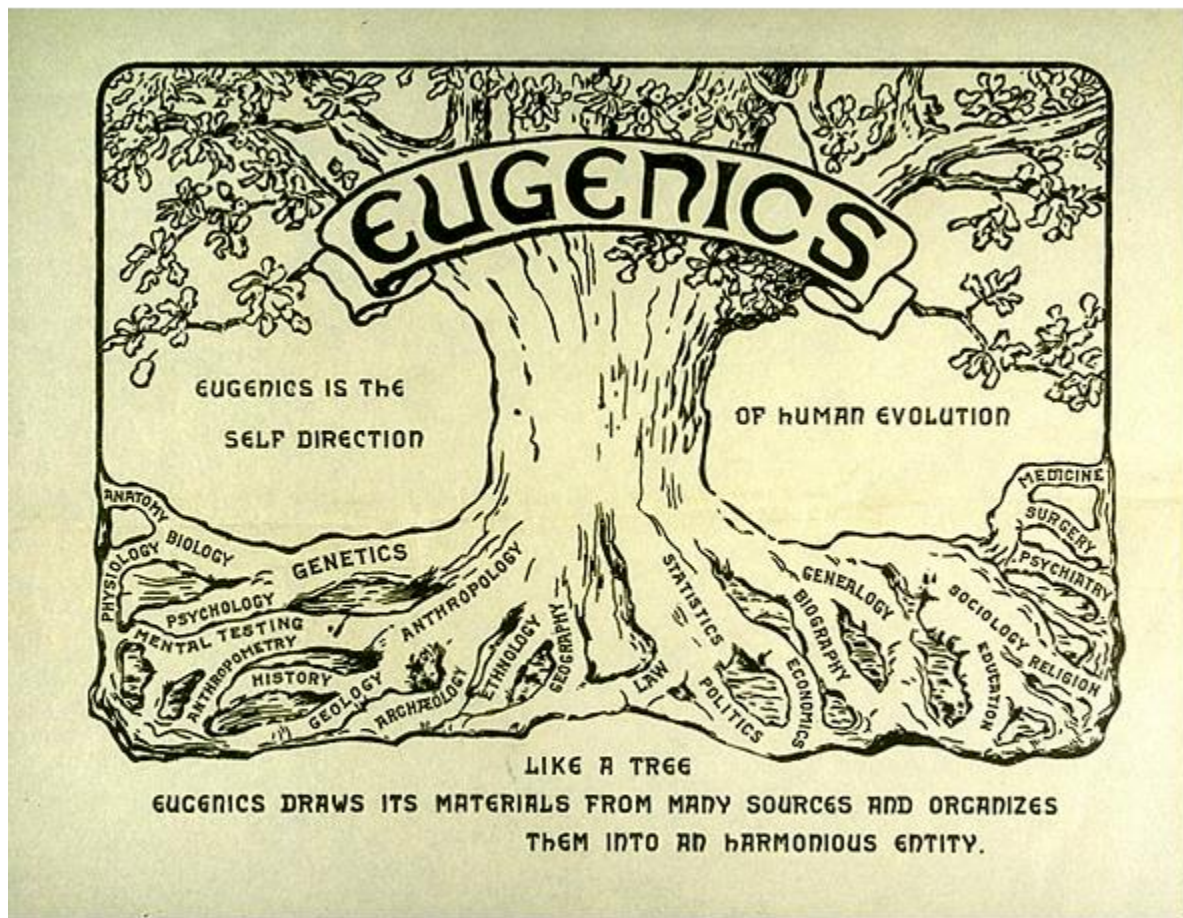
JULY 27, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## The Modern Science of Breeding Better People

By MORELLA MENON | Published on July 27, 2012

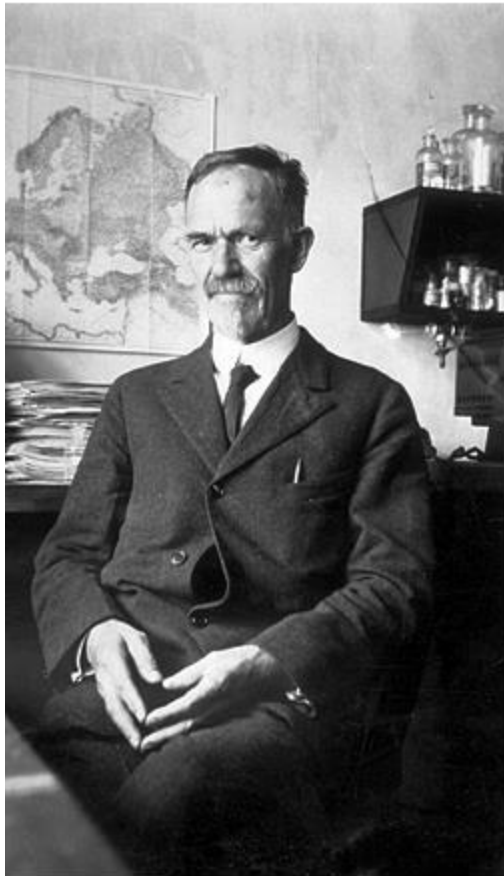
‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ WALKED with Agnes Parsons from Day-Spring up the hill towards Tiny May where he sat on the grass near some trees. They spoke about Agnes’s eldest son, Royall. Earlier, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had met Royall, but the boy had bolted. “He flew away from me,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told her, “but I was very pleased with him.” Agnes wondered how he could be pleased with her son when he had acted so badly. Royall was mentally handicapped.



The Eugenics tree logo illustrated how the study of Eugenics was fed by scientific roots representing many disparate fields of human endeavor. (American Philosophical Society)

Across the ocean — at exactly the same time — a group of men were talking about what should be done with people like Royall. It was the First International Eugenics Congress at the University of London, which was being held between July 24 and July 30, 1912.

Charles Davenport, a member of the American Breeders Association, was a leader in the study and application of eugenics in America. “Forget unessentials like skin color,” he said. “Focus attention on *socially important* defects. Then by sterilization or segregation, prevent the reproduction of the socially inadequate. Thus will the mentally incompetent strains be eliminated. . .”



**Charles B. Davenport of the American Breeders Association. He was head of the Eugenics section, and one of the most important American Eugenic thinkers. (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory)**

Eugenics was the science of how to create a pure society by selective breeding. Charles Darwin’s son, Leonard, had captured the aspirations of many when he opened the Congress and asked: “[M]ay we not hope that the twentieth century will be known in the future as the century when the eugenic ideal was accepted as part of the creed of civilisation?”

By 1912 eugenic ideals had seeped into every facet of life, and were favored by many reformers, including scientists like Alexander Graham Bell; businessmen like Vernon Kellogg, the cereal magnate; politicians like Theodore Roosevelt; and playwrights like George Bernard Shaw. Even those whose motive was to alleviate the conditions of the poor, like Margaret Sanger, succumbed to its powerful voice. Eugenecists were especially concerned with the African, the immigrant, the mentally ill, and those they described as feeble-minded. “May we not hope,” Willett M. Hays wrote, “to advance greatly the average of efficiency, to practically lop off the defective classes below, and also increase the number of the efficient at the top?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a completely different opinion about what the response to Hays’s so-called “defective classes” must be:

“Even though we find a defective branch or leaf upon this tree of humanity or an imperfect blossom,” he told Reverend Harvey’s congregation in Brooklyn last week, “it, nevertheless, belongs to this tree and not to another. Therefore, it is our duty to protect and cultivate this tree until it reaches perfection.”



An exhibit comparing white and Negro fetuses at the Second International Eugenics Congress in 1921, which attempted to classify racial differences. (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory)

Pruning, he argued, was not a strategy acceptable to humanity: “If we examine its fruit and find it imperfect, we must strive to make it perfect. There are souls in the human world who are ignorant; we must make them knowing. Some growing upon the tree are weak and ailing; we must assist them toward health and recovery.”

“If they are as infants in development, we must minister to them until they attain maturity,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “We should never detest and shun them as objectionable and unworthy. We must treat them with honor, respect and kindness; for God has created them.”

As Agnes and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat talking about Royall, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained why he had been pleased with her son. “He judged from what was within, not by externals,” Agnes heard him say, “that such people as Royall are pure, clear sighted, inspirational, even prophetic.” He assured Agnes that all are in God’s hands and that “there is a wisdom in this experience.”

DAY 109

JULY 28, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## A Different Side of America

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 28, 2012

*Beginning today we will publish short editorial pieces each Saturday, which will discuss the important themes that are emerging in our coverage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey through America. We’ll also share with you some of the challenges of covering history one hundred years later, and will explore what that history might mean today. We look forward to your input, too. Please post your comments and join the conversation.*

IT IS A FUNDAMENTALLY different task to write feature stories about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Dublin, New Hampshire, than it is to reconstruct life in New York, Washington, or Chicago. Only about 500 people lived in Dublin in 1912. Like many summer destinations, the population swelled during the sunny months, but it remained a small country village. While many newspapers covered the goings-on in the big metropolitan areas, and many of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s speeches there were written down, in Dublin there are very few sources to mine.



A postcard view of the village of Dublin, New Hampshire, as seen from the west in 1906.  
(Detroit Photographic Company/Wikimedia)

In Dublin it is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interactions with the unique characters who lived there in the summer of 1912 that comprise the most interesting aspects of the story. We have met some of these families already in the last two days: the Parsons, the Joseph Lindon Smiths, the Brushes, and the Thayers. They were not national figures. Some possessed extreme wealth; others were artists with compelling personal histories.

During our research for these three weeks in Dublin we were surprised by how many currents of thought, emblematic of the times, reached into this tiny village. The artists here, whom we will meet, did not merely paint beautiful images or write beautiful sentences. They constructed a view of human nature that we may consider to be controversial or retrograde today, but that wrestled with the outlooks of the age, whether Eugenics, Orientalism, Positivism, or Late Transcendentalism. These viewpoints were central to the conversations 'Abdu'l-Bahá encountered among intelligent people in 1912. As we shall see in the days to come, they reveal a different side of America.



DAY 110

**JULY 29, 1912**  
DUBLIN, NH

## July 29, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on July 29, 2012

The residents and vacationers of Dublin, New Hampshire have awoken to find ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in their midst. Special thanks to our guest writer, Morella Menon, for her feature series covering Dublin, which continues through to August 15.



A present-day greeting sign approaching Dublin, New Hampshire. (source unknown)

In the week ahead, profiles of Dublin painters George de Forest Brush and Abbott Thayer, surprising news concerning African American Bahá’í Louis Gregory, and Theodore Roosevelt expels southern black delegates from the party at the Progressive Presidential Convention in Chicago.

DAY 111

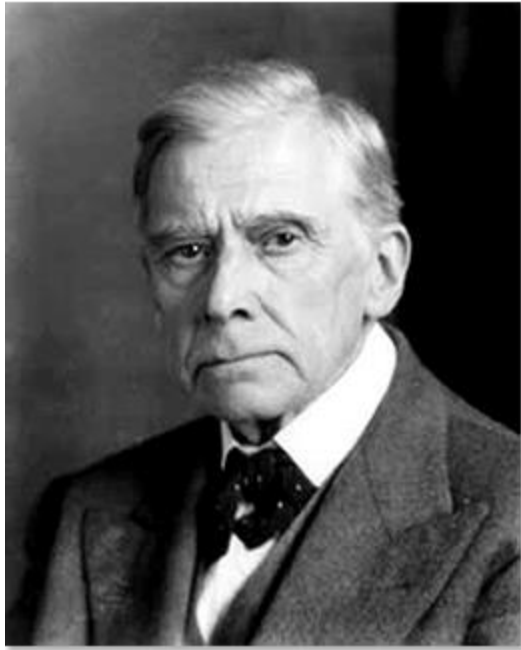
**JULY 30, 1912**  
DUBLIN, NH

## George De Forest Brush, “Lover of Indians”

By MORELLA MENON AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on July 30, 2012



A FIRE BURNED in a clearing a few steps from the house on Brush Farm. A chair tottered on top, as the flames licked its legs. It cracked and gently succumbed to the heat.

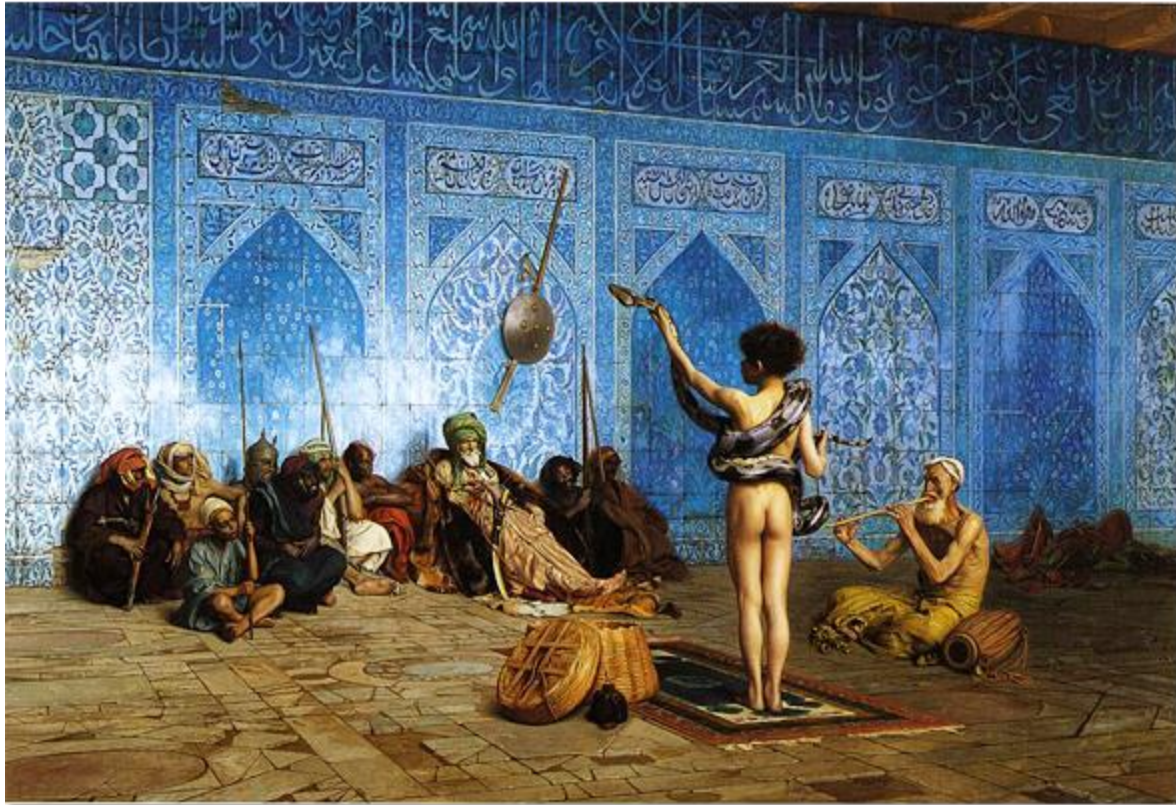


George de Forest Brush. (Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum)

They never knew on Brush Farm when George De Forest Brush would go on a rampage through the house checking for furniture with lathe-turned legs, to see if it had been made by machine. If it was, then out it went to the bonfire. “No machinery can do joyful work,” he believed. “The really useful things,” he said, “are made ugly by machinery and only the few things of life are beautiful.”

Brush’s daughter, Nancy, wrote in her memoirs that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked Mrs. Parsons to explain Bahá’u’lláh to Brush. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also told her that Brush would laugh at her. Everything Agnes Parsons did was high Washington society, dressed to the nines, stiff and formal with her strong Southern accent. Here in Dublin folks were more relaxed, especially the easy-going artists.

George studied in New York and then in Paris at the conservative École des Beaux-Arts under Jean-Léon Gérôme, the orientalist painter. “Orientalism,” several Middle Eastern scholars have argued, was more than just the study of the East. It was “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Western scholars, poets, and painters took control of the intellectual content of the Eastern world, they argue, “by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.”



"The Snake Charmer," by Jean-Léon Gérôme, c. 1880. (Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute)

One of Gérôme's most famous paintings, *The Snake Charmer*, displays the kind of romanticized, erroneous view of the East that the critics of Orientalism objected to. A python wraps around the naked body of a young boy, suffused in a mystical blue light, while a group of men observe the show, dressed in colorful tribal costumes and carrying strange weapons. The image is an exotic and erotic blend of Arabic, Turkish, Egyptian, and Indian motifs. Gérôme's near-photographic realism sparkles from the canvas, but the scene is entirely concocted from his imagination: it has no basis in fact.

From Gérôme, Brush learned to paint the anatomy of the human form: a skill acquired laboriously, by copying Renaissance and classical sculpture, and, eventually, by drawing and painting directly from live nude models. But when Brush returned to America, he was met by a society not interested in mythological themes or paintings of nudes.



"The Indian and the Lily," by George De Forest Brush, 1887. (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art)

So he had to find a subject. Brush went West to Wyoming with his brother for a year. Here he lived with the Shoshone tribe and he spent some time with the Crow people. According to Walt Schnabel "a Crow chief named Plenty Coups said that he had never forgotten Brush's visit or his 'words of eternal wisdom' that had a profound effect on the Crow nation."

George de Forest Brush had found his perfect subject: the Indian. Quintessentially American, romantically exotic, and almost nude — what a good substitute for the gods of Greece and Rome. What he didn't find in his travels he created in his studio. His daughter fondly called him a "lover of Indians," but, as he pointed out, "I live for art and not for Indians." "[T]he Indian," he said, "is part of nature and is no more ridiculous than the smoke that curls up from the wigwam, or the rock and pines on the mountainside."

Brush's technique was delicate and meticulous, and his ideal Indians won a gold medal at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. The Chicago fair promoted Orientalist viewpoints on a large scale for the first time in America. It was these perceptions of Easterners that [shaped Americans' initial views of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a "Wise Man Out Of The East" in 1912.](#) You can find more of Brush's work here, [at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.](#)



DAY 112

JULY 31, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## Abbott Thayer, Father of Camouflage

By MORELLA MENON | Published on July 31, 2012

“OH, ABBOTT, DON’T DO THAT!” George De Forest Brush cried, “DON’T!” He stood in his studio in front of his latest perfectly-rendered masterpiece. Abbott Thayer, as was usual, had come to give his opinion on the work. “George,” he said, “I think that there’s a place on that picture where it would be much better if you lowered the tone of it a little bit.” Abbott had just licked his thumb, rubbed it on the dirty floor, and had raised it to the picture ready to *lower its tone*.



Can you see the snake? Abbott Handerson Thayer, "Copperhead Snake on Dead Leaves," Collaboration with Rockwell Kent, Gerald H. Thayer, and Emma Beach Thayer, watercolor with copper overlay, 1903. (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

Abbott Handerson Thayer and Brush were best friends. They had studied together in New York and Paris. Unlike Brush, Abbott did not approve of the paintings of Jean-Léon Gérôme: he considered Gérôme to belong to “that raft of whore painters,” given that Gérôme often painted nudes. Brush was so enamored of his teacher that he named his son Gerome. Abbott, however, named his first son Ralph Waldo.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings inspired Thayer. In Emerson's 1836 essay, "Nature," he writes: "I see the spectacle of morning from the hilltop over against my house, from daybreak to sunrise, with emotions which angels might share." It was a sentiment that defined Emerson's Transcendentalism: the presence of God as reflected in the everyday displays of nature, a way of thinking that resonated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá.



Abbott Thayer, "Angel," oil on canvas, 1887.  
(Smithsonian American Art Museum)

'Abdu'l-Bahá stood on the lawn near Day-Spring one day, looking at the view over the hills. "When a man observes the wafting of the breeze," he said, "hears the rustling of the leaves and sees the swaying of the trees, it is as though all are praising and acknowledging the one true God."

Abbott Thayer's fame spread as a painter of the ideal figure. He gave them wings, and they came to be known as "Thayer's Angels." Their soft flowing robes mimicked the drapery of Grecian figures and their perfection set into relief the harsh world Thayer saw around him. They were pure and virginal; it was poor, dirty, and greedy.

Later on, Thayer set aside his figures and concentrated on the beauty and grandeur of Dublin and Mount Monadnock. He described what "art" meant to him: "a no-man's land of immortal beauty where every step leads to God."

Abbott Thayer and his family live in a house without insulation, built as a summer retreat. His first wife, Kate, had died of an infectious disease, so Thayer makes his family sleep outdoors in three-sided huts even while the snow falls.



Abbott Handerson Thayer with Richard Meryman,  
"Male Wood Duck in a Forest Pool," oil, 1905–09.  
(Smithsonian American Art Museum)

Every morning for three hours Abbott works in his studio, humming Beethoven. He passes his work to his students and then roams the countryside, climbing up to his beloved mountain or rowing his boat on the lake. As an ornithologist, Abbott had traveled the world collecting bird specimens, and had formulated the technique of *countershading*, and “Thayer’s Law” of protective coloration in nature. He is sometimes called the “Father of camouflage.”

Abbott Thayer is a man of charm, grace, and warmth on his days of “allwellity,” but he battles mood swings every day, which he calls “the Abbott pendulum.” Many evenings you can hear a violin playing Beethoven to lull the family to sleep.

DAY 113

AUGUST 1, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## Out and About in Dublin

By MORELLA MENON | Published on August 1, 2012

IT IS THE AGE of calling cards and formal social visits. Agnes Parsons has called on many people and left many cards in preparation for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Dublin.



Dublin Lake and the Dublin Lake Club where 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

On 'Abdu'l-Bahá's second day in Dublin, Agnes takes him on a drive through the village in her carriage, along the Jaffrey Road, through MacVeagh Woods, and then out to the Lake. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Dr. Fareed, his translator today, stop at the Parsons' boathouse, while Agnes continues on to the club where she tells the members that her Persian guest has arrived.

On the way home 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes sure that all bills concerning his stay will be sent to him; he insists on paying his own way in America. Day-Spring has become a home for the seven Persians and some guests, but after a few days 'Abdu'l-Bahá takes a room down the hill in the village, at the Dublin Inn. Agnes says it's because he's not sleeping well in the cooler, windy air; Alice Breed and Dr. Getsinger think he's tired of being waited on.





'Abdu'l-Bahá in a carriage outside Day-Spring.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Even the children have noticed the man with the long white beard and flowing robes. “The venerable Persian, Abdul Baha,” the Peterborough Transcript writes, “bears so much resemblance to Santa Claus that two little tots begged to take out their go-cart and get it filled with presents from him. They had espied the supposed Santa Claus sitting on the piazza of the Wilcox Inn. . . .”

On the first of August seventy-five people arrive at the Parsons' to listen to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's afternoon talk. When asked if he finds the people interested, he says: “They are very much alive. In this country an old maid of eighty will want to know all about politics.” In America, it seems, everyone wants to know about everything.

So 'Abdu'l-Bahá settles in for his three-week stay. Although offers of motor car rides abound, he travels mostly by carriage or he walks. The Cabots, the Pumpellys, the Parmalees, and others invite him for lunch. At one home a cook wishes to hear him speak, so her employer tells her to sit out of sight behind a tree: she is black.

Amy Lowell, the poet, writes of Teatro Bambino, Joseph Lindon Smith's open-air theatre:

*How still it is! Sunshine itself here falls  
In quiet shafts of light through the high trees  
Which, arching, make a roof above the walls  
Changing from sun to shadow as each breeze  
Lingers a moment, charmed by the strange sight  
Of an Italian theatre, storied, seer  
Of vague romance, and time's long history;  
Where tiers of grass-grown seats sprinkled with white,  
Sweet-scented clover, form a broken sphere  
Grouped round the stage in hushed expectancy.*



Joseph Lindon Smith reproducing an Egyptian relief. (ARCE CHICAGO)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá walks across the lawn at the Teatro and finds a seat. Joe, a painter and archaeologist, fulfills his passion for dramatics by writing plays and performing them here every summer. Soon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá moves to the shade by a tree. Agnes says later that the play was somewhat risqué, and perhaps ‘Abdu’l-Bahá didn’t like it. However, when it’s over ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shakes hands with all the guests and tells Joe that he is a genius.

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not hesitate to say those things which need saying in Dublin. On July 29, during his first afternoon talk at Agnes’s home where her wealthy friends have gathered, he tells them that they will become religious when religion and spirituality become a fad. “They want to be ‘it,’ whatever the fad is,” one listener reports.

DAY 114

AUGUST 2, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## Being Black in the Progressive Era

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 2, 2012

LOUIS GREGORY INHALED the sea air as his ship broke from the shore. He was leaving America, crossing the same throes of the Atlantic his African ancestors had — but Louis Gregory was unchained. It was March 25, 1911, and he was on his way to Alexandria, Egypt, to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It was here, in the middle of the ocean, Gregory later said, that he finally felt truly “American.”



The docks at Alexandria, Egypt, circa 1910. (Postcard courtesy Jonathan Menon)

Louis’s grandfather had been murdered before he was born. He was a blacksmith who had prospered after the Civil War. He bought a mule and a horse and for this was targeted by the Ku Klux Klan, who drove up to his house one night, called him out, and shot him.

The years between the end of the Civil War and 1877 were the era of Reconstruction. Congress, aided by the Union Army, disbanded the Confederate governments of Southern states and implemented the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed due process and equal protection of

the laws to all Americans. The Fifteenth Amendment spurred new elections in which newly-freed slaves could vote. Reconstruction also led to the improvement of educational opportunities for African Americans.



Louis Gregory, Certificate of Admission to practice before the United States Supreme Court. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Louis's mother was freed from slavery when she was fourteen. She managed to go to school for a few years before giving birth to two sons: Louis was born on June 6, 1874. But at around the age of five Louis Gregory's father died of tuberculosis. His mother struggled to support them, but Louis's grandmother sustained their spirits, bringing dignity, courage, and a love of laughter to the family.

The Compromise of 1877 ended Reconstruction. In a political deal, Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, was elected President in return for removing Federal troops from the South. Without the troops to enforce them, the racial legal reforms ceased to function. Throughout the South "Jim Crow" laws at the state level entrenched segregation as a way of life.

The Progressive Era wasn't very "progressive" for African Americans either. It had begun on a sour note. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court upheld the legal basis of racial segregation under the formula of "separate, but equal." "Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences," they wrote in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. "If one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."

In the North, educated black men pushed forward. After graduating from Howard University, Louis Gregory opened a law office in Washington, DC, in 1902. In 1906 he took a position with

the Treasury Department. In 1911 he boarded the ship to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt. As Louis Gregory interacted with the other passengers on board, his biographer Gayle Morrison wrote, “he concluded that blacks had made a unique adaptation to America precisely because their ties with Africa had been so ruthlessly cut. . . .” His fellow travelers, who came from all parts of the world, read his nationality on sight, simply calling him “The American.”



Freedmen Voting In New Orleans, 1867. (New York Public Library Digital Collection)

By 1912 little had improved for African Americans on the political front. None of the political parties seemed willing to risk losing the Presidency by upholding the rights of Southern blacks. The Democrats remained the party of segregation. Not much progress had been made under the Republican administrations of Presidents McKinley, Roosevelt, or Taft. While the Socialists upheld black political rights in theory, currents of prejudice ran through the rhetoric of many leading Socialist figures. And then just yesterday, on August 1, 1912, African-American delegates from the South learned that they would not be admitted to the Progressive Party’s upcoming convention. In order to secure Southern votes the Progressives needed a Southern party that was “lily-white,” not one that threatened whites with racial integration.

Shortly after arriving in Alexandria, Louis Gregory met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “If it be possible, gather together these two races, black and white, into one assembly,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him, “and put such love into their hearts that they shall not only unite but even intermarry.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s solution to the American race problem seemed to be far more fundamental than the political deals that had been struck — and had failed — since Reconstruction.

*In tomorrow’s feature, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes a surprising announcement to a group of African Americans in Dublin.*

*In previous features we have examined 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse on race in America. You can find them here:*

[Day 12: Even Though the World Should Go to Smash](#)

[Day 13: This Shining Colored Man](#)

[Day 14: Breaking the Color Line](#)

[Day 20: The Fallout from a City in Flames](#)

[Day 26: The Ultimate Taboo](#)

*and* [Day 62: Along the Color Line.](#)



DAY 115

AUGUST 3, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## “Get the Races to Intermarry”

By MORELLA MENON | Published on August 3, 2012

IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, a boathouse of large dimensions, tucked into the trees on the shore of Dublin Lake. Water is lapping at the pylons which support it, rooted into the lake bed. It is built of natural wood and has a dock for the boat to moor. Perhaps there are some chairs or benches and the comforting smell of wood and rope.



Dublin Lake with Mount Monadnock in the distance, circa 1880. (Keene Public Library)

It is

Saturday, August 4, 1912, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is meeting with the servants of the summer residents of Dublin. They are mostly black. Their names will vanish from history because they were never recorded. They are known only by the names of their employers, such as Parsons’ cook and Cabots’ maid.

Now imagine ‘Abdu’l-Bahá making an announcement, and the boathouse going quiet in astonishment.



Louise Mathew had been astonished when he had told her, too. She had first heard about it on the steamer to America, but hadn't quite grasped what he meant. In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been planning for this moment for more than two years.



Agnes Parsons's boathouse on Dublin Lake, in 2011.  
(Anne Gordon Perry)

Louise Mathew was born in England to wealthy parents. She did not marry, but instead she enrolled into one of the women's colleges in Cambridge University, where she studied economics, languages, and voice. She was into middle age before she went on pilgrimage to Alexandria to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was here that Louise met Louis Gregory. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had delayed Gregory's pilgrimage to make sure the two of them arrived at the same time.

Louise was shy and in delicate health. 'Abdu'l-Bahá invited her to travel to America with him aboard the *Cedric*, which she did. One morning, while walking on the deck with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Louise realized what 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted: he wanted her to marry Louis Gregory. In Chicago, Louise inquired further, asking 'Abdu'l-Bahá if this was what he intended. "I wish the white and colored people to marry," he said. Louise explained that, as a woman, she could do nothing about it.

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá questioned her. "Do you love him?" he asked. "Would you marry him if he asked you?" Louise: "Yes." "Then if he loves you he will marry you," 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied.

That same morning 'Abdu'l-Bahá called Louis to his suite in the Plaza Hotel. "[M]arriage is not an ordinance and need not be obeyed," he said, "but it would give me much pleasure if you and Miss Mathew were to marry."



Louis Gregory and Louise Mathew Gregory in 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

In many states Louis Gregory could be lynched for even looking at a white woman, let alone marrying one. Interracial marriage is not recognized in twenty-five out of the forty-eight states; in many it is illegal. In fact, in a few months, Seaborn Roddenbery, the Democratic congressman from Georgia, will introduce an amendment to the Constitution that will seek to outlaw interracial marriage everywhere in America. The proposed amendment will read:

“That intermarriage between negroes or persons of color and caucasians or any other character of persons within the United States or any territory under their jurisdiction, is forever prohibited; and the term ‘negro or person of color,’ as here employed, shall be held to mean any and all persons of African descent or having any trace of African or negro blood.”

Louis froze; his hands went stone cold. He turned and left the suite. He walked into the elevator and out to the grand lobby, oblivious to the marble pillars and green velvet chairs. Out onto the Chicago streets he strode, where he wandered aimlessly for two hours before regaining his composure.

Today in the boathouse ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is announcing that the wedding will take place in September.

“If you have any influence to get the races to intermarry,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had told Louis in Alexandria, “it will be very valuable.” Little did he suspect that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was talking about *him*.

DAY 116

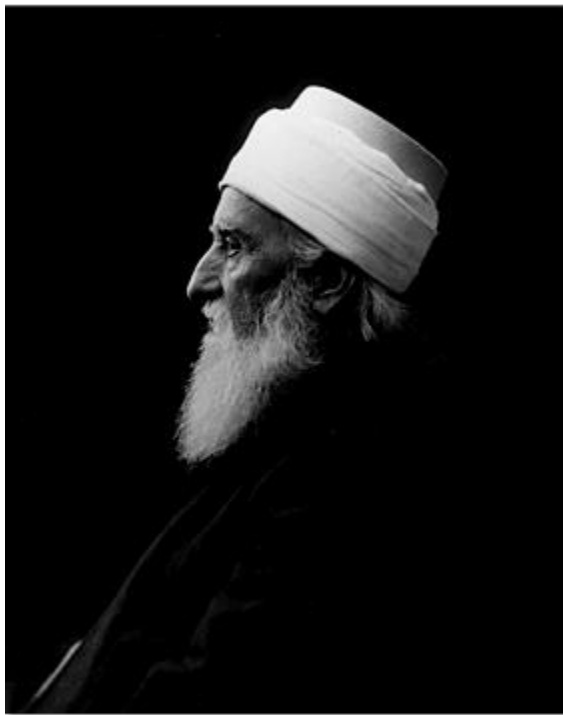
AUGUST 4, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## The Challenges of Finding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

By ROBERT SOCKETT AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 4, 2012

THE MOST EXTENSIVE primary sources for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey across North America in 1912 come with difficult problems. If you were to ask Mahmúd-i-Zarqání how Americans responded to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, you might always get the same answer. They were — almost every one of them — “astonished” at what they saw and heard from the Master. Mahmúd was a devoted follower on unfamiliar terrain in America, who felt the greatest reverence for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and held him in awe. In his preface he writes that he generally found himself overwhelmed by the events he saw, and in his account he ascribes such wonder to everyone.



Portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, circa 1912.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

Juliet Thompson’s ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is an otherworldly figure whose every look, every slight gesture, is imbued with a magical quality that she flourishes with her own emotions. How close was the real ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Juliet’s perception of him? It is difficult to say.

Reverend Howard Colby Ives wrote an autobiography of his time with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called *Portals to Freedom*. Its pages are filled with turns of phrase that mix metaphors and burst with personal drama, yet he seems deeply sincere and his story often brings one eerily close to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. [The scene he paints of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wiping the tears from his eyes](#) on April 12 at the Hotel Ansonia in New York is so moving that it’s hard not to well up with tears yourself. Agnes Parsons wrote a nuts-and-bolts diary account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Washington and Dublin, full of interesting details but largely free of the romantic aura that surrounds Thompson’s and Ives’s accounts. But Agnes’s social circle constrains her perspective. She [hosts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in her home](#) and plans many of his activities, but when he attends events in Washington with African Americans, you wouldn’t know from her diary that they carried any significance. Journalists portray ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a variety of ways. Their first impressions are sometimes shaped by Orientalist ways of thinking that cause them to see him and his retinue of Persians as strange and foreign: such is [Nixola Greeley-Smith’s article in the \*New York World\*](#) on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s second day in America. But very quickly these reporters see something new in this visitor that upsets their preconceptions: a man who turns out to be more modern, aware, and active than they have been trained to expect. Kate Carew’s [Sunday magazine profile of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá](#) in the *New York Tribune* so skillfully combines the light sarcasm of her gossipy style with such an obvious respect for her subject that it seems she must have known a great deal about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá before she ever set foot in the Hotel Ansonia.

The memoirs that recount ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey focus so deeply on him as their subject that they isolate him from the bustling reality around him. In these accounts there seems to be little else going on in America, this rising industrial nation of a hundred million people, other than the talks he gives and the meetings he holds. In *239 Days In America*, we have sought to embed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a rich context of time and place, and to see what this context reveals.

On one hand this means examining the larger issues that define American life, such as [the stunning reality of race](#). On the other, it means realizing that many of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements, even small ones, were spoken with a keen sense of what was happening around him: the murmurs in the room, the stories that day in the newspaper, the other half of the conversation that was never recorded. To find more of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, you sometimes have to put that stuff back in.

We hope this approach not only makes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey in America seem more vivid, but also helps us make clearer connections between what he said in 1912 and today’s pressing issues.

DAY 117

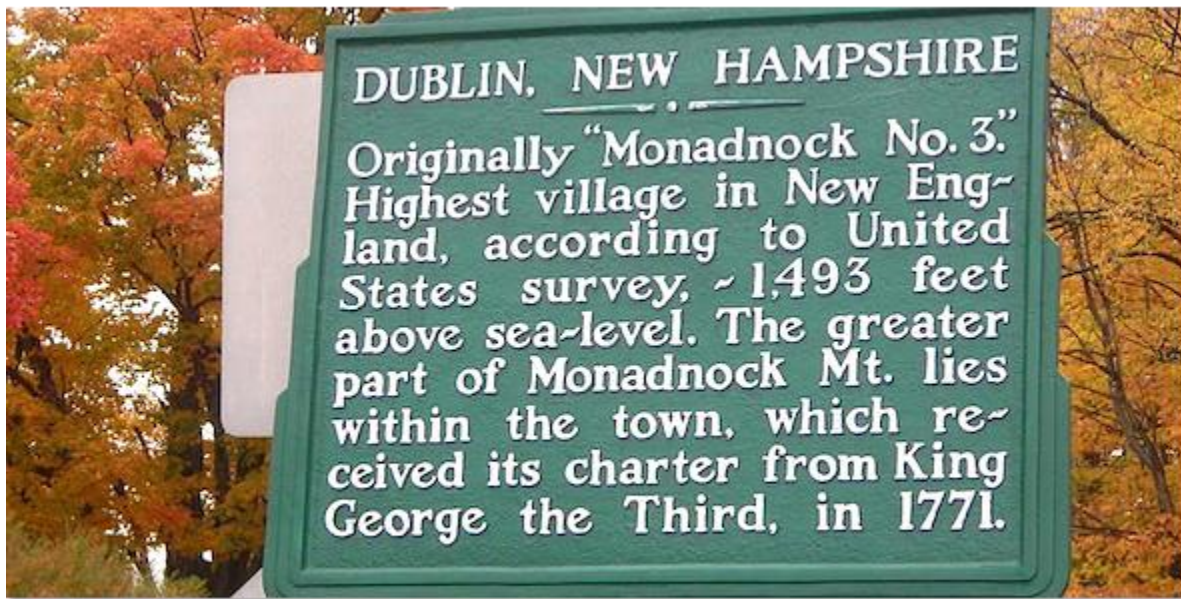
AUGUST 5, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## August 5, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 5, 2012

THE QUIET LITTLE TOWN of Dublin, New Hampshire, it turns out, is a crossroads of some of the most controversial discussions in American life. Over the last ten days we've looked at Eugenics, the artistic representation of indigenous peoples, and interracial marriage.



A present-day road marker in Dublin, New Hampshire. ([www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com))

In the week ahead, the new Progressive Party convenes for its national convention in Chicago, 'Abdu'l-Bahá weighs in on materialist philosophy, and a look at "the language of religion."

DAY 118

AUGUST 6, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## Socialism, Strikes, and Oscar Wilde

By MORELLA MENON | Published on August 6, 2012

THE AIR IS CHILLY TONIGHT. The time is well past midnight and most of Dublin is asleep. At Brush Farm, George de Forest Brush is chatting with his guest, Margaret Sanger, who is busy adding another log to the fire. Margaret writes a column for the Socialist newspaper the *New York Call*. Three months from now she will start a new series on sex education entitled “What Every Girl Should Know,” which will be censored by the United States Post Office. Tonight she departs from the theme of women’s health and talks to George about Oscar Wilde’s essay, “The Soul of Man under Socialism.”



Women garment workers striking in New York in 1910. (Library of Congress)

Margaret Sanger is one of the leading members of the Socialist Party of America and the radical labor union the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW for short. Earlier this year, on February 9, she had helped evacuate two hundred children from Lawrence, Massachusetts, where a strike of millworkers was taking place. The strikers were mainly immigrant women and they were striking over a pay cut. Industrial unrest is making itself felt in America and Margaret is in the

thick of it. So tonight, as she sits down to her cozy chat by the fire on Brush Farm, she does so with enthusiasm.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is sleeping tonight, but he had addressed the problem of strikes even before he was freed from house arrest in Palestine. “The principal cause of these difficulties,” he said, “lies in the laws of the present civilization; for they lead to a small number of individuals accumulating incomparable fortunes, beyond their needs, while the greater number remain destitute.”



Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, lightning rod for controversy, in 1922. (Library of Congress)

“[R]ules and laws should be established to regulate the excessive fortunes of certain private individuals,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted, “and meet the needs of millions of the poor masses.” But, as usual, he rejected the fundamental premise of Socialism: that perfect economic equality should be legislated. Excessive equality, he argued, would destroy the body politic: “[A]bsolute equality is just as impossible, for absolute equality in fortunes, honors, commerce, agriculture, industry would end in disorderliness, in chaos.”

George de Forest Brush’s ideas on Socialism vary greatly from those of Oscar Wilde and Margaret Sanger. Wilde considers all manual labor “absolutely degrading.” Margaret asks Brush a question: “You would not leave man [to] continue to do the laborious and disagreeable work which has so enslaved and degraded him today?”



George leans back in his chair. He is thoroughly enjoying the subject. His eyes sparkle as he answers her. “Labor is the most delightful thing in the world when one does the thing one loves to do,” he says quietly. “When man labors for the joy of it, when everything he does will be a thing of beauty, there will be joy in his labor.”



Children of striking millworkers from Lawrence, MA, marching in protest down Fifth Avenue in New York on Feb. 17, 1912. (Library of Congress)

A log falls and Margaret prods it with the poker. Their conversation has veered away from Oscar Wilde and Socialism. As the night gets darker and quieter, and the fire burns low in the grate, George de Forest Brush rises and raises his hand in a goodnight to Margaret.

“In my Socialism there will be no getting on without art,” he says, “for every act of life will be an emotion and every work a piece of art.”

In New York in June, to an audience at his residence at 309 West 78th Street, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained Bahá’u’lláh’s position on work. “All humanity must obtain a livelihood by sweat of the brow and bodily exertion,” he said, “at the same time seeking to lift the burden of others, striving to be the source of comfort to souls and facilitating the means of living. This in itself is devotion to God.”

DAY 119

AUGUST 7, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## The Progressive Party Acclaims Theodore Roosevelt

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 7, 2012

THE MOMENT THEODORE Roosevelt appeared on stage, a sea of red bandanas erupted from the ten thousand people who filled the Chicago Coliseum. It was one o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday, August 6, 1912. TR stood smiling, waving, and shaking hands for fifty-eight minutes before the demonstrations, the songs, and the cheering died down enough for him to finally step forward and speak.



Theodore Roosevelt, standing just left of center beneath the banner, addresses 10,000 people at the National Progressive Party Convention at the Chicago Coliseum, on Sunday, August 6, 1912. (Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

The National Progressive Party Convention was the fourth convention of this unusual election year. The Socialists had named their presidential candidate in May, the Republicans in June, and the Democrats at the beginning of July. A few hours after losing the Republican nomination to

President Taft on Saturday, June 22, Roosevelt and his supporters had met in Chicago's Orchestra Hall and started a new political party.

"The victory shall be ours," he told them. "We fight in honorable fashion for the good of mankind; fearless for the future; unheeding of our individual fates; with unflinching hearts and undimmed eyes; we stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord!"

"Never before had Roosevelt used such evangelical language, or dared to present himself as a holy warrior," Edmund Morris writes in his 2010 Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of the Colonel. "Intentionally or not, he invested progressivism with a divine aura."



Roosevelt on August 6, 1912, riding through Chicago.  
(Chicago Daily News/Library of Congress)

More than a month later, as the Progressive Party convened in Chicago, the transcendent glow remained. "It was not a convention at all," the *New York Times* deduced on August 6. "It was an assemblage of religious enthusiasts. . . . It was a Methodist camp meeting done over into political terms." The New York delegation marched into the Coliseum singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers"; "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" rang out repeatedly.

Roosevelt's speech, entitled "A Confession of Faith," lasted for two hours, partly because the Coliseum interrupted him with applause 145 times. Jane Addams of Hull House sat in the front row. The next day, August 7, she became the first woman to second the nomination of a presidential candidate. "I have been fighting for progressive principles for thirty years," she said as she left the stage. "This is the biggest day in my life."

But in spite of the prolonged cheers, the red swarm of waving flags, and the militant hymns, the fanfare in Chicago on this first weekend in August belied the mundane reality at the heart of the 1912 election. Months before any American would have a chance to cast a vote for President, the outcome had already been determined.

“My public career will end next election day,” Theodore Roosevelt had admitted to a visitor on July 3. The previous afternoon, on July 2 in Baltimore, the Democratic Party had nominated Woodrow Wilson. Wilson’s record of progressive reform as Governor of New Jersey had brought him to national prominence. Roosevelt, by splitting the Republican vote, had handed the pen to the Democrats, and they, by nominating the progressive Wilson, had sealed the deal.



The 1912 Progressive Party Convention in the Chicago Coliseum.  
The image is damaged. (Library of Congress)

“In writing the history of a presidential election,” scholar Lewis L. Gould explains, “one can easily convey the impression that a majority of the American people felt a passionate interest in the outcome.” But fewer Americans cared in 1912. “To some degree,” he argues, “Americans were now more spectators than participants in the operation of this presidential race.”

After 1912, Gould writes, “Americans would be less politically mobilized, participation would recede, and the nature of government itself would become more bureaucratic and removed from the people.” Like so many of the legacies of the 1912 presidential election, the decline of voter participation in national elections continues to this day.

DAY 120

AUGUST 8, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## The Rights Not Only of Women, But of Men

By MORELLA MENON | Published on August 8, 2012

AGNES PARSONS AND HER husband, Jeffrey, walk down the hill from Tiny May to Day-Spring to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. They are on their way to the Cabots’ for lunch. The grass is dry and Agnes’s shoes become dusty from the walk. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá approaches, Agnes asks Jeffrey to clean them off for her. Jeffrey bends down to clean the shoes, and looks up at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a humorous expression which, Agnes will recall, “He enjoyed very much.”



Mount Monadnock on the horizon, as seen from West Keene. (Keene Public Library)

In November in Chicago, in front of a group of women, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will recall the incident with the shoes differently: “I said, ‘Madam! Do you also clean your husband’s shoes?’ She replied that she cleaned his clothes. I said, ‘No, that is not equality. You, too, must clean his shoes.’”

The suffragists are busy in 1912. The women of California won the right to vote on March 28. The suffragists paraded up Fifth Avenue in New York City on May 5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has argued

vigorously for women's rights from the first day he landed in America. But his memory of the incident with Agnes Parsons's shoes in Dublin prompts him to argue for the equal rights of men, too.



The suffrage march up Fifth Avenue in New York, on May 5, 1912.  
(Library of Congress)

“How many men in Europe and America work from morning until evening,” he tells the women in Chicago, “and whatever they save is spent on adornments and jewelry and colorful clothes and the latest fashions for their wives who spend their time in pleasure and enjoyment? In reality, these poor men are servants of their wives.”

“Now then, it would be better if you occasionally stand up for the rights of men,” he says. “A condition must be realized in which the man and woman sacrifice their rights for each other, serve each other with heart and soul and not through force and violence.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues: “Hearts must be attracted to the divine fragrances, so that each one prefers the other to himself.”

Later this month ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will speak to a group in Boston concerning women's rights. “The realities of things have been revealed in this radiant century,” he will say, “and that which is true must come to the surface. Among these realities is the principle of the equality of man and woman — equal rights and prerogatives in all things appertaining to humanity.”



Emmeline Pankhurst, being arrested in Victoria Street, London, on Feb. 13, 1908. (The British Library)

“But while this principle of equality is true,” he will qualify, “it is likewise true that woman must prove her capacity and aptitude, must show forth the evidences of equality. She must become proficient in the arts and sciences and prove by her accomplishments that her abilities and powers have merely been latent. Demonstrations of force, such as are now taking place in England, are neither becoming nor effective in the cause of womanhood and equality.”

A few days ago, while lunching at the Parsons’ home, Agnes told ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that many women objected to having to say “obey” in the wedding service. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá agreed that the word should be removed, as God intended the man and the woman to be one, and the use of the word “obey” assumes two. “He was profound, joyous, amusing,” Agnes said.



DAY 121

AUGUST 9, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## The Symbolic Language of the Bible

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 9, 2012

“THE HOLY BOOKS have their special terminologies,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told an audience at the Dublin Inn on August 5, 1912. “Physicians have their own peculiar terms; architects, philosophers have their characteristic expressions; poets have their phrases; and scientists, their nomenclature.” It was one of the few talks he gave in the scenic town of Dublin, New Hampshire, that was transcribed for posterity. His subject was religious scripture and the symbolic language it employs.



“Adam and Eve in the Earthly Paradise,” Peter Wenzel, 17th century. ([www.artexpertswebsite.com](http://www.artexpertswebsite.com))

Narrow-minded interpretations of scripture, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, have held people back from recognizing the truth. Christians and Jews, for example, had clung to the literal meaning of prophecies that said “The Messiah shall appear from heaven.” Although Christ was in their midst

these people denied him, saying, “This man came from Nazareth; we know his house; we know his parents and people.” The true meaning of the statement, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, “is that the divine reality of Christ was from heaven, but the body was born of Mary.”



“The Raising of Lazarus,” Vincent Van Gogh, 1890.  
(Wikimedia)

Abdu’l-Bahá then invoked the story of Lazarus from the Gospel of John. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus entered his tomb and raised him from the dead. The true meaning, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated, must be “symbolical and spiritual.” His interpretation was that “the power of God is infinite,” and “it is within that power to accomplish anything.”

Years before, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was still a prisoner, Laura Clifford Barney, of the artistic Barney family of Washington, DC, traveled to ‘Akká to visit him on several occasions. She brought many questions with her about Christian subjects. She collected the answers ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave and published them in America as a book called *Some Answered Questions* in 1908. In response to Laura Barney’s questions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offered fresh readings of familiar stories in Genesis, Isaiah, and the Book of Revelation. For example, he argued against the common approach to the Genesis story, which blames women for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.



“Adam and Eve,” Lucas Cranach, 1526.  
([www.artbible.info](http://www.artbible.info))

“If we take this story in its apparent meaning, according to the interpretation of the masses, it is indeed extraordinary,” he argued. “The intelligence cannot accept it, affirm it, or imagine it. . . .”

“Adam,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggested, “signifies the heavenly spirit of Adam, and Eve His human soul. For in some passages in the Holy Books where women are mentioned, they represent the soul of man.” The serpent, he added, symbolizes “attachment to the human world. This attachment of the spirit to the human world led the soul and spirit of Adam from the world of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the Kingdom of Unity to the human world.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá urged his audience in Dublin to search for the “inner meanings” of things. He quoted a popular Eastern phrase: “When my friend entered the house, the doors and walls began to sing and dance.” The point, he said, is to “engage in the matter according to its own terms and usages.”



DAY 122

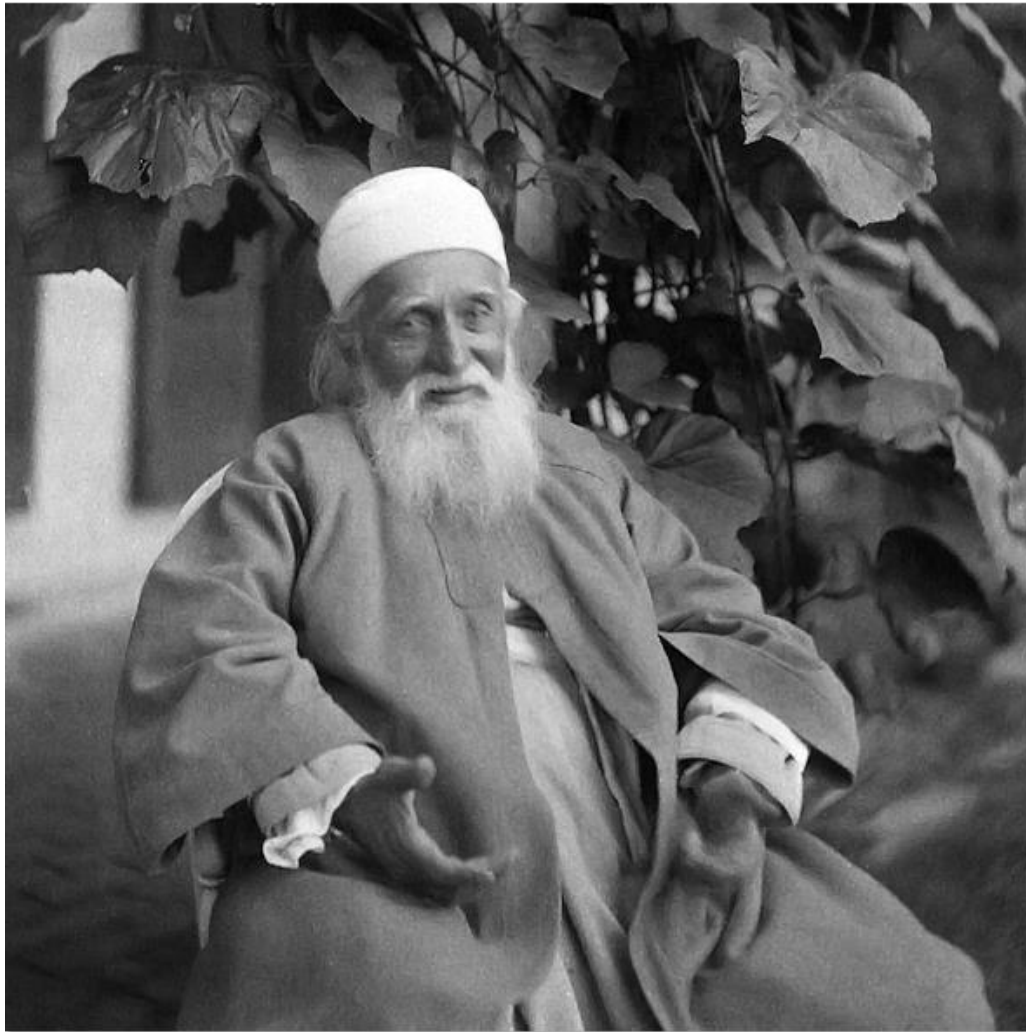
AUGUST 10, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far: Month Four

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 10, 2012

TODAY MARKS THE END of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s fourth month in America. We thought we’d take this opportunity to look back at some of the highlights of the past month.



Photograph of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taken in Dublin, New Hampshire in 1912. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

On Day 94, a feature entitled [“Every Child Is Potentially the Light of the World”](#) noted that for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the moral education of children is paramount to the creation of a successful civilization.

[Religion: The Greatest Cause of Human Alienation](#) covered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s address to one of the largest congregations in Brooklyn.

We took a look at the Progressive Era in [1912: A Year Supreme with Possibilities](#), then covered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument for enlightened leadership in [The Secret of Divine Civilization](#).

On July 24, to the Theosophical Society in Boston, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued for [‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Science Proves the Human Spirit](#).

Our story then moved to the scenic environs of Dublin, New Hampshire, which we covered in a series of features, including: [A Sleepy Morning in Dublin, New Hampshire](#), [The Modern Science of Breeding Better People](#), [A Different Side of America](#), and [Out and About in Dublin](#).

We also returned to our theme of race in a pair of features: [Being Black in the Progressive Era](#), and [Get the Races to Intermarry](#).

On Day 116, we shared some observations on our approach to discovering and portraying ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in [The Challenges of Finding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá](#). We thank our readers for the generous comments you posted on this day.

Finally, we did a piece on labor entitled [Socialism, Strikes, and Oscar Wilde](#).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has now passed the halfway mark on his journey through America. We look forward to having you join us for the final four months. And please, join the conversation!

AUGUST 11, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## On Cows and Materialist Philosophy

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 11, 2012

“THEY SAY THAT had there been a spiritual world they would have sensed it,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked at the Dublin Inn on August 5, 1912. He was talking about modern materialist philosophers. “If inability to sense constitutes proof of perfection,” he joked, “the cow must be the greatest philosopher, for she does not realize anything beyond the animal world.”



Holstein cows grazing in the New England countryside. (Yankee Magazine)

Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s take on materialist philosophy that day was jovial, he generally treated the subject with great seriousness. The philosophical schools he appeared to be addressing were the materialists of the Enlightenment, the German dialectical materialists of the nineteenth century, and perhaps empiricism and naturalism which were influential in Anglo-American philosophy.

French materialist philosophers like Denis Diderot (1713–1784) postulated a universe consisting of nothing but matter. Knowledge and reason were to be built on what could be acquired through direct perception by the five senses; religion was a dangerous fiction. A century later, German Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) characterized God as a projection of human consciousness, of human needs, and of human nature. In his magnum opus, *The Essence of Christianity*, he wrote: “God is man writ large.”



Denis Diderot. Painting by Louis-Michel van Loo. (Wikimedia) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá disagreed. On June 9, 1912, at Russell Conwell’s Baptist Temple in Philadelphia, he argued that “There have been two pathways in the world of humanity, one the natural or materialistic, the other the religious or spiritual.” The materialistic, he said, “is the pathway of the animal realm.” “One of the strangest things witnessed is that the materialists of today are proud of their natural instincts and bondage.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá founded his argument on bold dichotomies between humankind and the natural world: “Nature is inert; man is progressive. Nature has no consciousness; man is endowed with it. . . . Nature is incapable of discovering mysteries or realities, whereas man is especially fitted to do so.” “Man can voluntarily discontinue vices,” he said, “nature has no power to modify the influence of its instincts.” “How strange then it seems that man, notwithstanding his endowment with this ideal power, will descend to a level beneath him.”



In New York, [back on April 19](#), Kate Carew of the *New York Tribune* had asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá if he thought the attention Americans paid to material things signaled a lack of social development. “Your material civilization is very wonderful,” he had answered. “If only you will allow divine idealism to keep pace with it there is great hope for general progress.”



Ludwig Feuerbach. Etching by August Weger. (Wikimedia)

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was far less complimentary toward the Parisians. During his visit to France in 1911 he made the incessant materialism he saw there the subject of one of his final speeches in the city. He lamented that “Men are becoming like unto beasts that perish, for we know that they have no spiritual feeling — they do not turn to God, they have no religion. These things belong to man alone, and if he is without them he is a prisoner of nature, and no whit better than an animal.”

After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá finished his talk in Dublin, New Hampshire, on August 5, a group of friends invited him to ride in their automobile. They were driving through the rolling hills surrounding the town when a herd of cattle ran into the road. The cows saw the car, and then fled in all directions. Those riding in the car with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cried out: “Oh Master, see the crowd of philosophers. How frightened they are running away from us.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it was reported, laughed so hard that he tired himself out.

DAY 124

AUGUST 12, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## August 12, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 12, 2012

ITS BEEN A RESTFUL, yet eventful few weeks for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Dublin, New Hampshire, but it’s time to make the ninety mile trip eastward to his next stop in Eliot, Maine.



Dublin Lake in New Hampshire, present day. (New Hampshire Geology)

In the week ahead, the sun sets on Dublin Lake, we take a look at “spiritual cravings,” and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrives at Green Acre.

DAY 125

AUGUST 13, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## Listening to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Unitarian Church

By MORELLA MENON | Published on August 13, 2012

THE UNITARIAN CHURCH in Dublin is packed. It is Sunday, August 11, 1912. During the past three weeks the varied inhabitants of Dublin have become accustomed to this Persian in their midst, as he rode in his carriage or motor car to invitations for lunch or dinner. Today in the church many of them are present in one gathering: the black servants are here; the storekeepers and innkeepers; the artists and wealthy mansion owners all wait for the talk to begin. This is the last chance for many of them to see and hear ‘Abdu’l-Bahá before he leaves.



The Unitarian Church in Dublin, New Hampshire. (nhsearchroots.com)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá delivers each sentence with deliberate intensity. He speaks a line, then stops — perhaps smiles — looks toward his interpreter, waits for the translation, listens to it carefully. He nods when a particular point is made. Only then does he turn back to the congregation and continue with his next sentence. One interviewer wrote that his words, “even repeated by an

Interpreter, are so fraught with the Baha's wonderful personality that they seem never to have been uttered before.”

Today ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks about the need for education, how it lifts man up from being an animal, just as cultivating a wild and unproductive forest can make it a fruitful garden. He points out that the philosophers were material educators whereas the divine messengers of God are the spiritual educators. Reverend Josiah Seward — whose church this is — will later write that “The patriarchal appearance and Oriental costume of the speaker imparted a peculiar solemnity to his utterances.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá at Plymouth Congregational Church in Chicago on May 5, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Howard Colby Ives, a Unitarian minister from New Jersey, was present in Dublin that morning. “My memory is all of the quiet New England church,” he writes, “the crowded pews, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the platform. His cream-colored robe; His white hair and beard; His radiant smile and courteous demeanor.” Ives describes his gestures: “Never a dogmatic downward stroke of the hand; never an upraised warning finger; never the assumption of teacher to the taught. But always the encouraging upward swing of hands, as though He would actually lift us up with them. And His voice! Like a resonant bell of finest timbre; never loud but of such penetrating quality that the walls of the room seemed to vibrate with its music.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out that Bahá’u’lláh, his father, came to renew the divine spiritual teachings, at a time when they had been abandoned.

What are they? The unity of all peoples. The elimination of hostility based on race, nationality, politics, religion, and economics. Universal peace and the elimination of war. The need for every individual to independently investigate religious truth and avoid blind imitation. Equality between men and women. Universal education in both material and spiritual matters. Saving religion from superstition by applying science; tempering science with the moral guidelines of religion.



Agnes Parsons with her son, Jeffrey  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

It is, Reverend Seward will write, “a pure, rational system of philosophy, inculcating the practice of moral and religious precepts of the highest order.”

This morning’s meeting in the church is the culmination of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s stay in Dublin. He speaks for fifty minutes. Agnes Parsons’s younger son, Jeffrey, fidgets in the pew beside her. “The service is too long,” he tells her, “but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not too long.”

At the end of the service ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stands, chants a prayer in Persian, and shakes everyone’s hand. The Pumpelly’s carriage awaits to take him to lunch.



DAY 126

AUGUST 14, 1912

DUBLIN, NH

## The Religious Pulse of Modern America

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 14, 2012

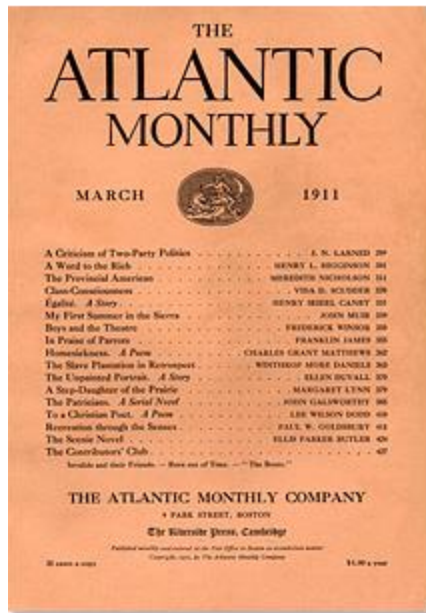
“LET ANY ONE OF US look around him, and talk to his neighbors, humble or prosperous, and see if he does not find a spiritual craving.”



"Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865." By Albert Bierstadt. Oil on canvas. (Collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art)

These were the words of Winston Churchill, not the future British prime minister but a bestselling novelist in America at the turn of the twentieth century. Like many artists, Churchill frequented Dublin, staying most summers in nearby Cornish, on the border with the state of Vermont. He came for horse shows, and to attend Joseph Lindon Smith's plays at *Teatro Bambino*.

In the January 1912 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Churchill wrote an article entitled "Modern Government and Christianity." It offered a window into the religious pulse of America.



The cover of *The Atlantic Monthly* in March 1911. ([workerseducation.org](http://workerseducation.org))

“Think of the people we all may count among our acquaintances who are studying Buddhism and Sufism and Babism!” Churchill wrote. “All of this means something; it is surely a sign of the age.” He observed in his contemporaries “the emptiness of a life that does not include service,” yet noted a growing consciousness of “the glaring inequalities and injustices of our modern civilization.” He concluded: “If we have eyes to see, and ears to hear, we stand on the threshold of a greater religious era than the world has ever seen.”

The spiritual transformation of the modern world was one of the main themes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had addressed in America. At Tiny May on August 6, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw several new faces in the crowd, and he decided to answer a few questions.

Someone asked if there was difference between being a Christian and being a Bahá’í.

“[T]he foundations of Christianity and the religion of Bahá’u’lláh are one,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “The foundations of all the divine Prophets and Holy Books are one.” The distinction between them, he said, is merely a distinction of when they appear: “For though the sun is one sun, its dawning points are many. We must not adore the dawning points but worship the sun.” Therefore, “We must adore the reality of religion,” he said, “and not blindly cling to the appellation Christianity.”

“Does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá find Christianity is not lived up to and carried out in America?” another person asked.



“My meaning is that it should be completely carried out and lived up to,” he said. But simply knowing what Christian teachings are wouldn’t be enough to change society. “A house is not built by mere acquaintance with the plans,” he said.



Winston Churchill, the American novelist in 1900.  
(Encyclopedia Britannica)

He argued that the modern era required an entirely new level of collective action. “[A]n effort must be put forward to complete the purpose and plan of the teachings of God,” he said, “in order that in this great Day of days the world may be reformed. . . . This is necessary; this is needful. Mere reading of the Holy Books and texts will not suffice.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that the messengers of God, such as Jesus Christ and Bahá’u’lláh, were the indispensable “divine Physician[s]” who provided society with the necessary impetus to change: “It is possible for a man to hold to a book of medicine and say, ‘I have no need of a doctor; I will act according to the book; in it every disease is named, all symptoms are explained . . . and a prescription for each malady is furnished; therefore, why do I need a doctor?’” But, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, “This is sheer ignorance.”

“[I]deas and principles are helpless without a divine power to put them into effect,” he said.

AUGUST 15, 1912  
DUBLIN, NH

## The Sun Sets on Dublin

By MORELLA MENON | Published on August 15, 2012

THE SUN SETS ON DUBLIN LAKE, illuminating the eastern shore. The boathouse is now quiet, just the lapping of the water can be heard, the buzzing of mosquitoes, and the occasional sound of the loon.



The sun sets over Mount Monadnock, near Dublin, New Hampshire. (Photo by Fraser Whitbread. Used with Permission)\*

It is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s last day in Dublin. Down in the village, Hiram Carey, livery stable man, has had a prosperous three weeks. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave him a hundred dollar bill for the many horse and buggy teams he rented during his stay.

Elize Cabot carefully stores the photographic plate she took today of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Persians on the Parsons’ lawn. The Reverend Josiah Seward’s church is now quiet; it was packed to the rafters to hear ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak last Sunday.



'Abdu'l-Bahá standing on the lawn outside Day-Spring, in Dublin.  
Photo by Elize Cabot. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

This afternoon Agnes hosted the musical interlude for Miss Stickney, before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk. It rained, and few came to hear Mr. Whitney's concert, but by the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá rose to speak the Parsons' home was full to bursting. He stood next to the piano this time, not in the bay window as he usually did. "I have answered every question for you, delivered to you the message of God", he said. "Expounded the mysteries of the Divine Books for you, proved the immortality of the spirit, and the oneness of truth and expounded for you economic questions and divine teachings."

The Thayer family will light their lamps to make their way to the huts to sleep. George de Forest Brush will settle himself beside the fire ready for an evening chat, and Amy Lowell may find her pen and scribble a new idea as she settles down to write.

Charles MacVeagh remembers 'Abdu'l-Bahá sitting in the garden this morning, having lemonade, under their old maple tree. Charles will be appointed US Ambassador to Japan in 1925. When he is offered a pamphlet by a visiting American Bahá'í teacher, he will tell her about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to his house in Dublin. She will be invited to meet his wife and have tea.



Day-Spring, the Parsons' cottage, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed in Dublin, NH. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Agnes and some friends, and all the Persians have been at the Pumpelly's home, called "On the Heights," having dinner and telling stories. "Now let me tell you an Arabian story," 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "It isn't going to be a sermon."

"This he did, to the accompaniment of peals of laughter, repeated again and again," Agnes Parsons writes. "Needless to say 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought out every subtle point in the brilliant story, and the mental picture of this beautiful Oriental telling the story with all the enthusiasm of the storytellers of old, is one never to be forgotten."

Soon 'Abdu'l-Bahá rises; the Cabot children cling to him as he leaves. They do not let go until he is in the motor. On the way home Agnes thanks him for making the evening so special. He looks at her and asks, "Now are you all pleased with me?"

*\* Thanks again to Fraser Whitbread, a Calgary-born naturalist, botanist, photographer, now transplanted to New Hampshire, for permission to use his beautiful image of the sunset over Mount Monadnock. We used another one of his photographs [on our first day in Dublin](#). You can [see more of Fraser's astounding work here](#) or [read his Flickr profile](#).*

AUGUST 16, 1912  
ELIOT, ME

## Five Hundred Welcome ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Green Acre

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 16, 2012

TWELVE MILES FROM THE OCEAN, near the town of Dover, New Hampshire, the Salmon Falls and Cocheco rivers combine to give birth to the mighty Piscataqua River.



Green Acre, above the Piscataqua River, during the 1890s. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

The Pis-CAT-a-qua, as the locals say it, flows rapidly. Its wide tidal estuary floats beneath the green painted steel struts of the Piscataqua River Bridge, which cantilevers the six lanes of Interstate 95 across the river from south to north. It flows beneath the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge that carries US Route 1, and past the Memorial Bridge, now being replaced, which links Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with Kittery, Maine. Here in Kittery, settled by the Shapleighs and the Chadbournes in 1623, the river waters flow around the *Los Angeles*-class nuclear submarines being retrofitted at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, before emptying, finally, into the sea. Halfway along the Piscataqua's route, six miles from the ocean, a three-storey hotel stands in Colonial Revival style on a plateau sixty feet above the river's north bank, among twenty-three

acres of rolling meadow in Eliot, Maine. About a dozen other structures rest nearby: lodging houses, offices, a library and archives, and a conference center. The place is called Green Acre.



The Piscataqua tidal estuary at low tide. (Jonathan Menon)

In 1912, a flagpole made from two ship's masts rose from the grounds to a height of eighty-five feet. It flew a white flag, thirty-six feet wide, the word "PEACE" emblazoned across it in large green letters. 'Abdu'l-Bahá could see it from the seat of his automobile. He had left Dublin, New Hampshire, at 10 a.m. on Friday, August 16, 1912, with three of his secretaries and Mr. Alfred Lunt, a New England lawyer. The party stopped for lunch in Nashua, arriving in Eliot in the afternoon. At last the car descended from the main road to the Inn on the river, over a long driveway that had been dressed on both sides with a thousand multicolored Japanese lanterns. Five hundred people waited to receive 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Green Acre had been founded by Sarah J. Farmer in 1894. Her intention: to place the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions on a permanent basis. The Green Acre forum soon became a flourishing center of thought, where Hindu swamis, Iranian scholars, social Darwinists, New Thought advocates, Japanese artists, electrical engineers, opera singers, social reformers, and the last of the Transcendentalists gathered each summer. At Green Acre thousands of New Englanders — guided by Sarah Farmer's vision of the practical role of religion and spirituality in a rapidly modernizing America — first learned to converse with the brimming intellectual, cultural, and religious diversity that Americans were beginning to encounter as they took their first tentative steps as a nation onto the international stage.



Japanese lanterns line the drive to Green Acre, on the afternoon of August 16, 1912. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

Leigh Eric Schmidt, an American historian of religion, describes how Sarah Farmer's forum on the Piscataqua's northern bank became a crossroads for many of the spiritual quests that characterized America at the turn of the century. In his 2005 book, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, Schmidt argues that "Green Acre was among the greatest sources of religious innovation anywhere in the country." "It was the last great bastion of Transcendentalism, a school of philosophy and art for Emersonians and Whitmanites; it was a New Thought proving ground for such leaders as Ralph Waldo Trine, Henry Wood, and Horatio Dresser; it was a hub for representatives of the Society of Ethical Culture, Theosophy, Buddhism, Reform Judaism, Vedanta, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith. It was the World's Parliament of Religions brought to its grandest fruition, attracting the curious and the questing . . . by the hundreds and even thousands in these years."

"At Greenacre," Schmidt writes, "the dream of a cosmopolitan spirituality found its flesh and blood."



AUGUST 17, 1912

ELIOT, ME

## The Methods for Investigating Truth

By ROBERT SOCKETT AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 17, 2012

TODAY, GREEN ACRE comprises twenty-three acres of grassland and mixed pine and deciduous forest. But in 1912 the land west of the Inn was bare: a treeless view stretched as far as the curve of the river, affording the visitors a panoramic view of the reflecting sunset.



The Inn at Green Acre, surrounded by tall trees in 2010. (Jonathan Menon)

Half an hour after arriving at Green Acre yesterday afternoon, and checking into a corner room on the third floor of the Inn, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá delivered a short address to over eight hundred people. They overflowed the flower-laden “Eirenion,” a lecture hall that Sarah Farmer, Green Acre’s founder, had built and named with a Greek word meaning “The Hall of Peace.” Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set off for Portsmouth to visit Miss Farmer, who had been confined in a private sanatorium against her will for the past two years.

In the evening, as the sun settled over the wide western horizon, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood again in the Eirenion and gave one of the longest speeches he would deliver during his time in America. Its subject: the methods available to the human mind for investigating reality.



The panoramic view west from the Inn at Green Acre, at the turn of the century. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

“[T]here are four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued. “[F]irst, through sense perception; second, through the reasoning faculty; third, from traditional or scriptural authority; fourth, through the medium of inspiration.” His point was that each of these methods are unreliable.

The senses can’t be trusted, he said: “The eye sees the mirage as a body of water; it regards images in the mirror as realities when they are but reflections.” But if the senses are unreliable, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted, so is human reason. “The ancient philosophers in particular considered the intellect to be the most important agency of judgment,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá related. “They held that every matter submitted to the reasoning faculty could be proved true or false and must be accepted or rejected accordingly.” “But, he pointed out, “this criterion is likewise defective and unreliable, for these same philosophers . . . have differed widely among themselves upon every subject of investigation.”

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned to scriptural authority. The problem here, he noted, is one of interpretation. “Who understands these books?” he asked. “By what authority of explanation may these Books be understood?” “It must be the authority of human reason,” he emphasized, “and if reason or intellect finds itself incapable of explaining certain questions, or if the possessors of intellect contradict each other in the interpretation of traditions, how can such a criterion be relied upon for accurate conclusions?”



The Eirenon, or Hall of Peace, on the grounds at Green Acre. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

Finally, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rejected clairvoyance and inspiration as a reliable standard of truth. Such a statement played strongly at Green Acre, where a dozen different gurus from the East and specialists of esoteric Western thought spoke with presumed authority.

But then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument took a novel turn. While each of the standards of judgment he had examined proved “faulty and inaccurate,” they could, he concluded, be relied on when combined:

“[A] statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete.”

It was not an obvious conclusion, but it aligned with many of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s earlier conversations in America. Investigating truth, he seemed to be saying, is a multifaceted human endeavor, not one that can be confined to certain kinds of rationality but not others; certain kinds of inspiration but not others; or certain kinds of religion but not others.

When he was finished, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke a prayer for Miss Farmer, whom he called “the source of this loving fellowship and assemblage.”

AUGUST 18, 1912

ELIOT, ME

## Hand-in-Hand with the Indomitable Kate Carew

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 18, 2012

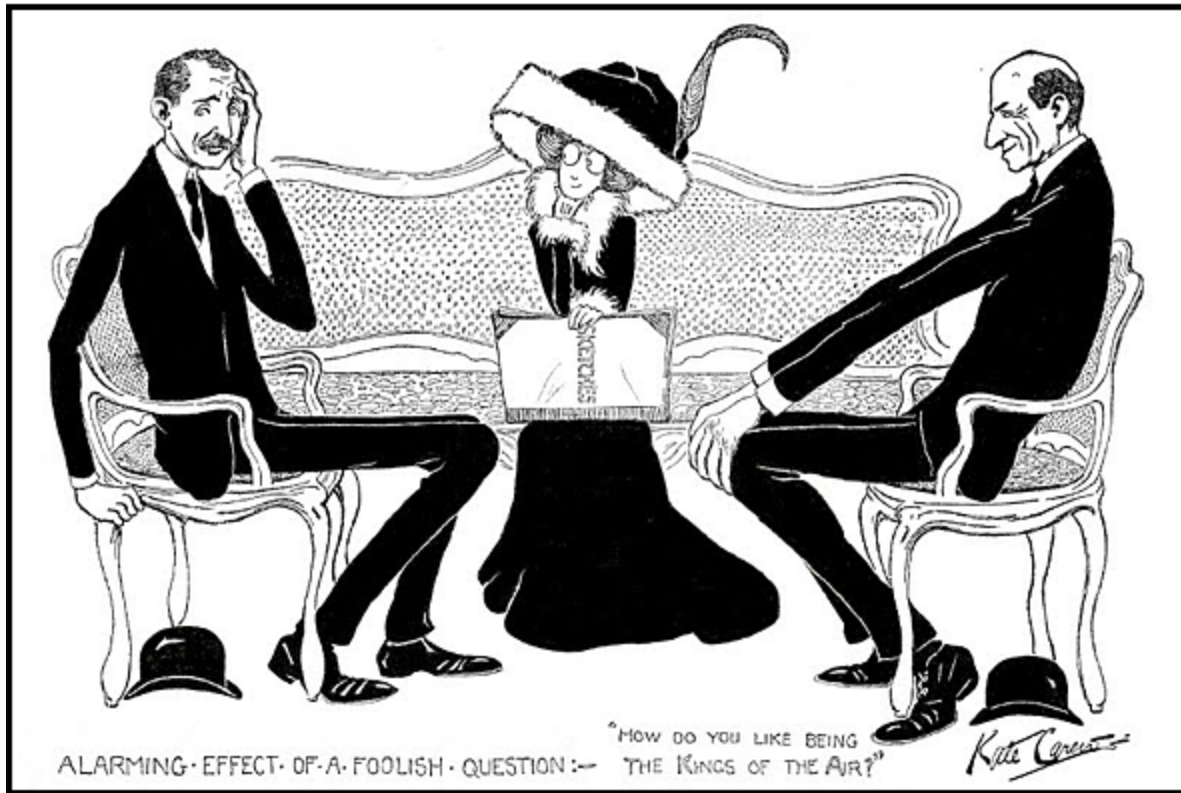
LAST WEEK, AS WE reached the midpoint of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey, someone asked me what aspect of the story had surprised me the most. What immediately came to mind was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s engagement with the issue of race. Living on this side of the Civil Rights era, it is perhaps impossible for any of us to truly understand the racial milieu of 1912, and to grasp how singular it was for a man from the Middle East to arrive on American shores and begin to enact change.



Louis Gregory and Louise Mathew Gregory in 1912. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

On further reflection, I realize that I have been continually surprised at how modern — or even *American* — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was. He had been in exile or prison for almost sixty of his sixty-seven years, yet here he was strolling through the streets of New York, fully in sync with the hectic pace, and often improvised character, of American life. This unlikely convergence is perhaps [best exemplified in his interview with Kate Carew](#). Carew was an urbanite, a hard core New Yorker. In 1890 she leveraged her artistic skill and gargantuan personality to land a job at Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. She would sketch the rich and famous, and interview them at the same time. First up was Mark Twain who flatly

refused to be interviewed. He had a contract with a publisher that granted them rights to everything he said. But Kate took him to breakfast with her sketchbook and coaxed out an interview that launched her career. In no time, she crafted herself into a brand, complete with a pseudonym (her real name was Mary Williams), a closet full of trademark flamboyant hats, and a fearless wit.



Kate Carew's sketch from her interview with the Wright brothers in *The New York World Magazine*, January 23 1910. (New York World Magazine)

She called Picasso “the forerunner of heaven alone knows what in art.” The Wright brothers feared her, but, once things got going, they couldn’t stop giggling. She asked if women passengers were hard to manage. “Much better than men,” they said. She added: “And yet they deny us the suffrage.” When interviewing the controversial black boxer Jack Johnson, she asked: “Are you anxious to undermine the supremacy of the Caucasian race?” Johnson rolled his eyes and played along.

Carew went on to interview entertainers such as Ethel Barrymore and Sarah Bernhardt, politicians including Winston Churchill and Theodore Roosevelt, and tycoons such as J. Pierpont Morgan. She was quicker on her feet than any of them: a few even walked out.

So what would one expect when she interviewed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?



Kate Carew's impression of 'Abdu'l-Bahá from behind. (New York Tribune)

Her story began in typical fashion. “I felt all sorts of mystic possibilities awaited me the other side of the door,” she wrote. “I stripped my mind of all its worldly debris . . . I closed my eyes. I attained the holy calm.” One might expect things to go downhill from there; that Carew might presume ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a charlatan, or that he would find her frivolous or rude.

But within the hour, the two of them were strolling hand-in-hand through the lobby of the Hotel Ansonia, en route to the Bowery Mission. Carew took the time to carefully convey to her readers ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interactions with the homeless men there. She was genuinely surprised as she witnessed him distribute money to the destitute, convinced “of the absolute sincerity of the man.”

“What you don’t expect!” she wrote.

The more I think through the events of that evening, the more remarkable I find them. And I tip my hat to you, Ms. Kate Carew.



AUGUST 19, 1912

ELIOT, ME

## August 19, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 19, 2012

IT HAS BEEN a busy few days for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá since his arrival at Green Acre, a unique retreat center alongside the Piscataqua River that serves as a crossroads for many of the spiritual quests that characterize America in the early years of the twentieth century.



'Abdu'l-Bahá and his translators walking the grounds at Green Acre, on Saturday, April 17, 1912. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

In

the week ahead: Fred Mortensen rides the rails to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a look at Green Acre’s remarkable founder Sarah Farmer, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá travels fifty-five miles south to Malden, Massachusetts just outside of Boston.



DAY 132

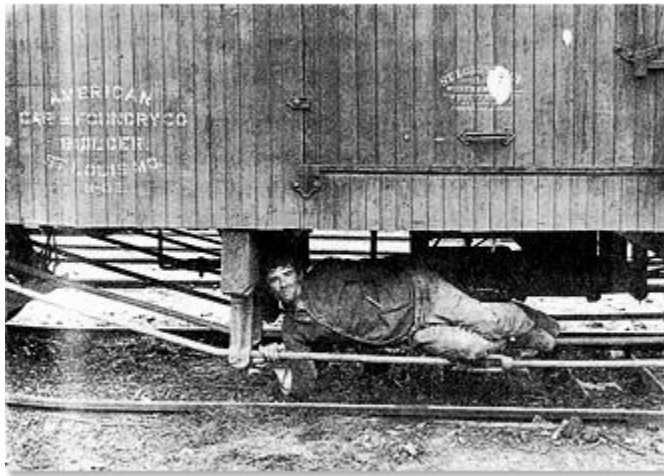
AUGUST 20, 1912

ELIOT, ME

## Fred Mortensen Rides the Rails

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 20, 2012

THE TRACKS WHIZZED beneath him, just a few inches from his face, as he clung desperately to the iron rods on the underside of the railcar, amidst the relentless vibrations and unbearable sound. He had made the 750-mile journey from Minneapolis to Cleveland, and was now stealing away on the Nickel Plate Railway bound for Buffalo.



A hobo riding the rails in Jack London's 1907 book "On The Road".

It was no way to travel. Hundreds died each year riding the rails. Hundreds more lost arms or legs. Then there were the thugs hired by railroads to beat the non-paying riders. At midnight Fred Mortensen raced across the tracks in Buffalo and jumped a train bound for Boston. It didn't help that he had a bad leg, acquired while trying to rob a railroad mail car eight years earlier.

Fred Mortensen was just twenty-five, but had already seen much of life. Raised in the slums of Minneapolis, he was working the streets by the age of ten, robbing local shops to help feed the family after his father walked out. He and his brothers joined a gang and spent their days drinking, brawling, and terrorizing the community. "I violated any law I saw fit, man's or God's," Fred later recalled. He was seventeen when they decided to rob the train. Things went awry. Police descended; bullets flew; Fred leapt off a rail bridge thirty-five feet high and shattered his leg.

Fred's defense lawyer was Albert Hall, who had a track record of helping the poor. Hall was also a Bahá'í. He spent hours talking to Fred in prison. "Honestly, I often wondered then what Mr.

Hall meant when he talked so much about love,” Fred wrote years later. “God’s love, Bahá’u’lláh’s love, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s love . . . I was bewildered.” Then one night Fred grabbed a guard by the neck, strangled him unconscious, and made his escape. He spent the next four years on the run.



A railway bridge over the Lackawanna River, New Jersey, circa 1900. (Detroit Publishing Company)

During his time as a fugitive, Fred rediscovered some books Albert had given him. He became engrossed in the words of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Eventually, Fred returned to Minneapolis and sought out Albert Hall. Hall didn’t turn Fred in, and the authorities seemed to have forgotten about him.

That’s how Fred found himself on top of a passenger train on the final leg of an adventure to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He hopped off at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, took a boat ride across the river to Kittery, then rode the streetcar to Green Acre.

“There I was at the Gate of Paradise,” Fred later wrote. But after his grimy voyage he looked like something out of the gutter. He cleaned up as best he could, rose the next morning at 6 a.m., and headed to the Inn to add his name to a very long list of visitors waiting to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Fred’s was the second name called. “Why, I nearly wilted,” he wrote.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá welcomed Fred with a smile and a warm handclasp. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked him if he had a pleasant journey. “Of all the questions I wished to avoid this was the one!” Fred recalled. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked again. “I lifted my eyes to his and his were as two black, sparkling jewels, which seemed to look into my very depth. I knew he knew. . .”



Young Fred Mortensen. (Sourced from <http://abduhainnewyork.org>)

“I did not come as people generally do, who come to see you,”

Fred told ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

“How did you come?”

“Riding under and on top of the railway trains.”

“Explain how.”

“Now,” Fred wrote years later, “as I looked into the eyes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I saw they had changed and a wondrous light seemed to pour out. It was the light of love and I felt relieved and very much happier. I explained to him how I rode on the trains. After which he kissed both my cheeks, gave me much fruit, and kissed the dirty hat I wore.”

The next day, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was about to leave Green Acre for Malden, Massachusetts, Fred waited among the crowd waving goodbye. Then, “to my astonishment he ordered me to get into the automobile with him,” Fred wrote. Fred was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guest for an entire week.

Fred’s life changed. He moved to Atlanta, hoping to combat the racial injustices there by spreading Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings of unity and equality. He raised four children and campaigned for the labor movement, fighting for age limitations, the minimum wage, and safer working conditions.

Fred Mortensen died on June 13, 1946. At Fred’s funeral his family read, at his request, the account of the time he spent with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

AUGUST 21, 1912  
ELIOT, ME

## “Within Greenacre’s Mystic Charm and Calm”

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 21, 2012

“IT APPEARS A singular thing,” the journalist wrote, “that so many famous people could have been attracted to this little town up in Maine. . . . But as soon as one arrives at Greenacre and gets to know that wonderful woman, Miss Sarah Farmer, the life and the spirit of the Greenacre movement, wonder vanishes.”



Sarah Farmer walking on the grounds at Green Acre in the summer of 1899. At left: actor Joseph Jefferson and Swami Abhedananda. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

We don't know this reporter's name, but he spent a day in Eliot during the second week of August, 1899, recording his impressions in a long news feature printed in the Lewiston Saturday Journal on the twelfth of the month: “Within Greenacre’s Mystic Charm and Calm: The Remarkable Colony of Ideals That Has Been Grafted Upon a Prosaic Maine Country Side.”

He watched a silent crowd under the main tent sit wrapt in meditation. He listened to the actor Joe Jefferson tell stories “like a boy, full of quips and larks and pranks.” And he took a walk with Sarah Farmer, “up the slope of the great hill that lay broad in the blaze of the sun.”



Sarah Jane Farmer, about age 48.  
(Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

As they looked out over the glint of the distant river from the top of the hill, Miss Farmer spoke:

*The foundation of our work here is constructiveness. We have no room for iconoclasts. Those are the only ones we bar. All others are welcome to come and express their views. All are listened to with respect and attention. If they bring us anything that seems good to us we accept it. If there is nothing that appeals to the rest there is no cavil, no supercilious criticism. At least it has harmed no one.*

*What he brings we take and build on to what we have already constructed as a bulwark of our faith in the good or as a superstructure of a higher ideal. But we do not tolerate here the man who seeks only to tear down. Some say that certain things are frauds, are delusions, are shams and that they should be exposed. But the attacking of any man's cherished beliefs or ideals, faulty though they may be in our eyes, brings only mischief in its train. I have had some eminent men propose to come here and display their iconoclasm but I have had to ask them to stay away until they could come in the constructive mood to bring us something as building material — not*



Raising the Peace Flag at Green Acre. Photo from 1926.  
(Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

*as battering ram.*

*And I must tell you that some of them have come here and have been conquered by the Greenacre spirit.*

The journalist continued: “Much did this true woman of the steadfast eye and purpose say to me as we sat there in the sunshine, but I will not venture to put into my words the expounding of her faith as she revealed it to me.”

“Go to Greenacre! If for a moment you can draw this gentle woman in gray from the throng that greets her whenever she appears on the grounds, and will ask her to tell you what there is in life for the heart that seeks further than cold creed, biased sect, Pharisaical doubtings and material grossness, then you will come down from the hill-tops of Greenacre with the blues in your heart transformed to a pink flush, in harmony with one of those magnificent Greenacre sunsets.”



DAY 134

AUGUST 22, 1912

ELIOT, ME

## The Battles of Sarah J. Farmer

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 22, 2012

THE CAR APPROACHED from the direction of Kittery, slowed as it reached the streetcar depot at the top of Green Acre's long driveway, and then stopped. While a tall man with dark hair kept watch in the front seat, 'Abdu'l-Bahá got into the back, and sat next to Miss Sarah J. Farmer. It was Tuesday, August 20, 1912, and she had not set eyes on Green Acre for more than three years. The trouble had started way back during the 1890s. The problem was that she was a woman.

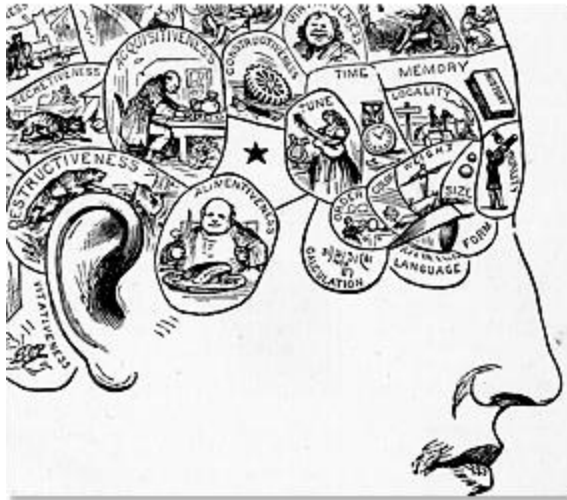


Sarah J. Farmer with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, along the road above the Green Acre grounds, on Tuesday, August 20, 1912. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

In 1889, Sarah Farmer signed on as silent partner in the Eliot Hotel Company. Four local men had started the venture to capture the tourists flocking to nearby York Beach. But somehow the partners had overlooked the fact that Eliot was six miles from the sea, and the enterprise failed. They were therefore delighted, when, in 1894, Miss Farmer proposed to lease the boarded-up hotel each summer for a few weeks of lectures on religion.

Within two years, thousands of people were attending each July and August, and newspapers across the Northeast followed the proceedings. Sarah J. Farmer secured the leading public intellectuals of the era to speak at Green Acre, transforming it from a center for inter-religious dialogue into a place that encompassed the social and intellectual movements that were on the verge of launching the Progressive Era.

Even the phrenologists got in on it. The *Phrenological Journal* measured Sarah Farmer's scalp with calipers for its August, 1899, issue. The so-called scientists who practised phrenology believed that personality traits, such as *Combativeness*, *Benevolence*, and *Spirituality*, lodged in certain parts of the brain, and could be determined by measuring skulls. The qualities they imprinted on Miss Farmer indicate the esteem in which she was held by the thinking classes in New England:



A section of a phrenological diagram of a human head. (People's Cyclopaedia of Universal Knowledge, 1883)

“Miss Farmer, as her profile picture indicates, has a large development of Firmness, which gives her a persistency of purpose which is not easily overcome by the persuasions or arguments of others. . . .” “She has a keen ambition to excel,” they wrote, “and possesses a self-possession which knows no trifling or lowering of her standard.”

But not everyone was delighted by Miss Farmer's persistence, especially not the powerful men whose fringe interests found new life among her largesse at Green Acre. Many of the speakers made money off the lecture circuit, but Sarah Farmer insisted that the programs at Green Acre be free to all. Carried along by her Transcendentalist optimism, she had assumed full financial responsibility for everything, confident that her commitment would attract comparable support from collaborators. Instead, speakers, their families, and even attending guests assumed that their accommodations should be free of charge, too — which Sarah Farmer paid for.

Another problem was that they were indebted for their success to a woman, and not an entirely “respectable” one at that. At the age of fifty-one Sarah Farmer was unmarried, having turned down eighteen proposals of marriage and broken three engagements. Unlike many of her contemporaries, such as Jane Addams, she didn't work primarily in the fields of social action common among women, such as child welfare, temperance, or urban reform. Instead, Sarah J.

Farmer had decided to shape directly the male-dominated strands of thought that emerged from New England's intellectual elites.



**Sarah J. Farmer, Founder of Green Acre, about 1907. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)**

Many people tried to convince Sarah Farmer that the high ideals on which she ran Green Acre were unrealistic, but she pushed back. “With regard to forming a corporation at Green Acre,” she wrote, “that cannot be. It has been suggested three times, and it has nearly crushed the life out of the work. The moment that a corporation gains possession, the Spirit of Green Acre is gone.”

At the same time, she encountered growing intellectual opposition from associates like Lewis Janes, the man she had hired to run her school of comparative religion, whose formalistic

academic approach made no room for the primarily moral and social passions that preoccupied her. “I regret exceedingly this difference of understanding,” Janes wrote to her, “which could never have occurred between two men accustomed to business matters.” By 1898 the forum was in financial collapse.

Her business partners decided enough was enough, and summoned her to a meeting in December, 1899, where they planned to force her to sell the property. Instead of giving her their ultimatum, they received unexpected news: Miss Farmer had sailed for Europe.

*This is the first of a two-part feature on the life of Sarah J. Farmer. Read Part Two here: [Sarah J. Farmer: One Of America's Great Religious Innovators](#)*

## Sarah J. Farmer: One of America's Great Religious Innovators

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on August 23, 2012

*This is the second in a two-part feature on the life of Sarah J. Farmer. Read Part One here: [The Battles of Sarah J. Farmer](#)*

SARAH J. FARMER SAILED from New York aboard the SS *Fürst Bismarck* on January 1, 1900, accompanied by her best friend, Maria P. Wilson, bound for Egypt and a cruise up the Nile. They met two other friends on board who, she soon found out, were keeping their destination a secret. They were traveling from Egypt to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Ottoman penal colony of 'Akká. Sarah Farmer cabled ahead for permission to join them. When she returned to America on November 1, 1900, she returned as a Bahá'í.



Sarah J. Farmer among the Pines, about 1909.  
(Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

More than ten thousand pages of source material trace the life of Sarah J. Farmer. It is impossible to summarize here even the major events of her last sixteen years. How her intellectual battle with Lewis Janes reached a climax, then ended (he died); how she averted Green Acre's financial collapse; how fire destroyed her personal wealth when her home burned to the ground; how the New England press suddenly turned against her; how she was attacked by the special interest groups who feared that her embracing 'Abdu'l-Bahá might curtail their freedom at Green Acre; how emotional exhaustion from the resulting turmoil finally felled her; and how she was eventually imprisoned in a private sanitarium for five years on the presumption that she had lost her mind, under the control of a man who drugged his patients to oblivion, censored her mail, prevented family from seeing her, and kept her locked up behind bars in a second-storey room on Middle Street in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, while battles for control over her person and her property raged in the courts and in the popular press — all of these things we must leave aside for another time.



Sarah J. Farmer with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, along the road above the Green Acre grounds, on Tuesday, August 20, 1912. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

It was that doctor, Edward S. Cowles, who sat in the front seat of the automobile on Tuesday, August 20, 1912, keeping watch lest the crowd at Green Acre swarm the car and remove Miss Farmer from his control. Although she had been away for three years, he didn't even let her set foot on Green Acre's grounds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá got into the car and it whisked them off to Sunset Hill, a high plateau on the other side of Eliot that Miss Farmer had named *Monsalvat* after the sacred mountain in Wagner's *Parsifal* where they kept the Holy Grail. Here she had planned to build a university and a second Bahá'í House of Worship, like the one whose cornerstone 'Abdu'l-Bahá had laid near Chicago in May. "When we were almost at the top of the hill," an eyewitness on that day reported, "'Abdu'l-Bahá took Miss Farmer's hands in his and said very loudly, 'This is hallowed ground made so by your vision and sacrifice.'"

It was important, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, that Sarah Farmer visualize the great university her efforts had made possible. He told Miss Farmer that the university would be built, the eyewitness said; he extended his arms to indicate that it would cover the whole plateau. Then he pointed to a spot where he said the House of Worship would eventually be raised.

Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned again to Miss Farmer: "You will be revered above all American women one fine day," he told her.



'Abdu'l-Bahá at Green Acre on Wednesday, August 21, 1912. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

In his 2005 book, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, historian Leigh Eric Schmidt names Sarah J. Farmer as one of the great religious innovators of America's nineteenth century, alongside Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. For sixteen years, between 1894 and 1909, she shepherded the parliament of religions at Green Acre. In the end she suffered the price of her choices, castigated by Green Acre's advocates of unencumbered liberty for her embrace of a single path which, she believed, was the very definition of freedom.





Sarah J. Farmer with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in front of the Inn on Tuesday, August 20, 1912. (Eliot Bahá'í Archives)

In this way, Sarah Farmer is emblematic of one of the core dilemmas in America's religious life, which even the philosopher William James wrestled with. "The struggle at the heart of Farmer's spiritual journey," Schmidt writes, "and James's religious psychology — the tension between autonomy and self-surrender — has hardly disappeared from America's contemporary seeker culture."

What *has* changed is America's willingness to accept a woman's autonomy to make her own decisions.

DAY 136

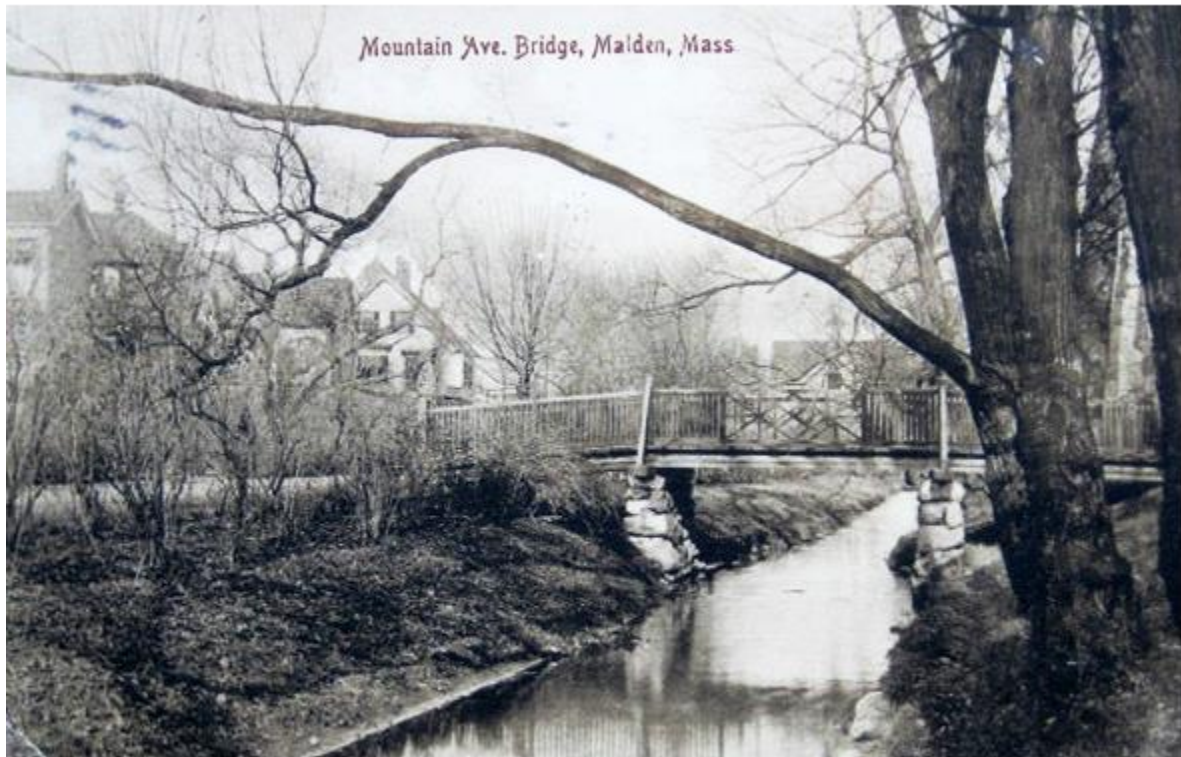
AUGUST 24, 1912

MALDEN, MA

## “The Unmistakable and Universal Reformation”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 24, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ WAS STEPPING into the automobile when he noticed Fred Mortensen standing in the crowd that had gathered at Green Acre to bid him goodbye. Just two days earlier, Mr. Fred Mortensen had arrived at the conference center in Eliot, Maine, after having traveled 1,600 miles as a stowaway on the rails. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked Fred to get into the car. The former convict would be his personal guest for the next week.



A postcard of Mountain Avenue Bridge in Malden, Massachusetts, circa 1910.

At 1

p.m. they arrived in Malden, Massachusetts, the next stop on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey in America. He was staying at the home of Maria Wilson, who, twelve years earlier, had sailed with Sarah J. Farmer, her best friend, to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá while he was still a prisoner. At the time, he had told Miss Wilson: “When I come to America I will visit you.” On August 23, 1912, he made good on that promise.

On ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s third evening in Malden, he made the ten-mile trip to nearby Boston, to deliver a talk to the New Thought Forum. To ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s surprise, the president of the society announced that he would speak on the subject of “Captivating the Souls.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, more than a little adept at improvisation, complied.

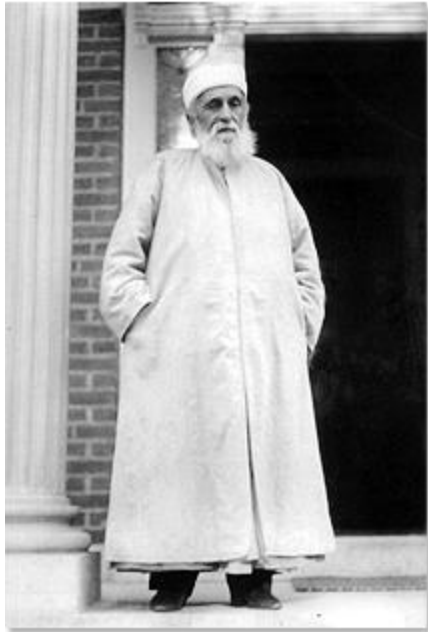


Maria Wilson's home in Malden, Massachusetts, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed for seven nights. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“It is easy to bring human bodies under control,” he began. “In former centuries kings and rulers have absolutely dominated millions of men. . . . If they desired to send men to the field of battle, none could oppose their authority; and if they decreed their kingdoms should enjoy the bliss and serenity of immunity from war, this condition prevailed.” The point, he said, is “that to gain control over physical bodies is an extremely easy matter, but to bring spirits within the bonds of serenity is a most arduous undertaking.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that captivating the souls of men is something that can only be achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit. He noted that “Christ was capable of leading spirits into that abode of serenity.” In this age, he added, “Bahá’u’lláh has appeared and so resuscitated spirits that they have manifested powers more than human.”

It was a subject that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returned to often during his time in America: the authority of divine teachers — such as Moses, Krishna, Jesus, Muhammad, Bahá’u’lláh — and the imperative for their teachings to be renewed in every age.



A picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahá taken during his time in America. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'Abdu'l-Bahá drew some analogies to make his point about the need for the reformation of civilization. He asked: "Are the laws of past ages applicable to present human conditions?" He added: "If modes of transportation had not been reformed, the teeming millions now upon the earth would die of starvation . . . How could great cities such as New York and London subsist if dependent upon ancient means of conveyance?"

Why, indeed, was it, that modern people would never confine society within the bounds of ancient technology, but seemed content with spiritual teachings that were thousands of years old?

"In the unmistakable and universal reformation we are witnessing," he asked them, "when outer conditions of humanity are receiving such impetus, when human life is assuming a new aspect, when sciences are stimulated afresh, inventions and discoveries increasing, civic laws undergoing change and moralities evidencing uplift and betterment, is it possible that spiritual impulses and influences should not be renewed and reformed?"

DAY 137

AUGUST 25, 1912

MALDEN, MA

## A Few Thoughts on the Potential of Youth

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 25, 2012

I RECENTLY READ a statement, attributed to Sigmund Freud, that the period of adolescence is a “temporary mental illness.” At best, our culture, and especially our media, considers adolescence as a time of fun and frivolity. We rarely see youth as capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá thought otherwise. During his time in the United States and Canada, he spoke frequently about the need to look beyond outer appearances, advice we should surely apply to our perceptions of young people.



Dorothy King Beecher, circa 1911. (From *Copper to Gold, the Life of Dorothy Baker*)

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited New York in 1912, he encountered a unique thirteen year old named Dorothy King Beecher (later Dorothy Baker). Dorothy’s grandmother took her to hear ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak. She was not looking forward to it. She spent the duration of the trip staring at the floor of the carriage. “What if he looks at me?” she later recalled thinking. “If he speaks to me I will die!” When she arrived, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

motioned for her to sit on a footstool beside him. Without looking up at him, she sat on the stool; her eyes fixed on her little black shoes.

It may have seemed as if Dorothy was disengaged, but this proved to be far from the truth. Dorothy later recalled that once ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began speaking, she felt an “intense, overpowering urge for the harmony of united love. . .” By the end of the talk, she found herself facing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “elbows on her knees, chin in hands, unwilling and unable to remove her gaze from his face.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote often about the potential of children and youth. He commented that the period of youth “stands out as the choicest time of human life.” He told young people to be distinguished for their “loftiness of purpose,” “determination, noble mindedness,” and “tenacity.” He believed that from the youngest age, all of us are capable of developing our intellectual and spiritual capabilities, and effecting a positive change in our communities.

After meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Dorothy wrote him a letter expressing her wish to follow his path of service to humanity. He replied: “My hope is this: that you succeed in your desire.”

Years later, the shy girl who had seemingly just stared at her shoes, traveled throughout the continents of Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America, speaking to hundreds and thousands of people from all backgrounds about the Bahá’í teachings of unity and service. She was appointed to the Race Unity committee of America, a committee designed to support and assist in organizing race unity events across the country. She was later elected to the national governing body of the Bahá’ís of the United States, acting as its first female chairperson.

Dorothy Baker never forgot her meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in New York in 1912. “In that hour,” she later wrote, “all fear was replaced by a passion for all people.”



DAY 138

AUGUST 26, 1912

MALDEN, MA

## August 26, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on August 26, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ HAS SETTLED in at Maria Wilson’s home in Malden, Massachusetts — a woman he first met when she visited him in the Ottoman penal colony of ‘Akká in 1900, along with her best friend Sarah J. Farmer.



A postcard of the train station in Malden, Massachusetts, circa 1910.

In the week ahead: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks to a group of working women at Franklin Square House; a humorous yet poignant look at Bostonian Harry Randall; and Abdu’l-Bahá crosses the border into Canada.



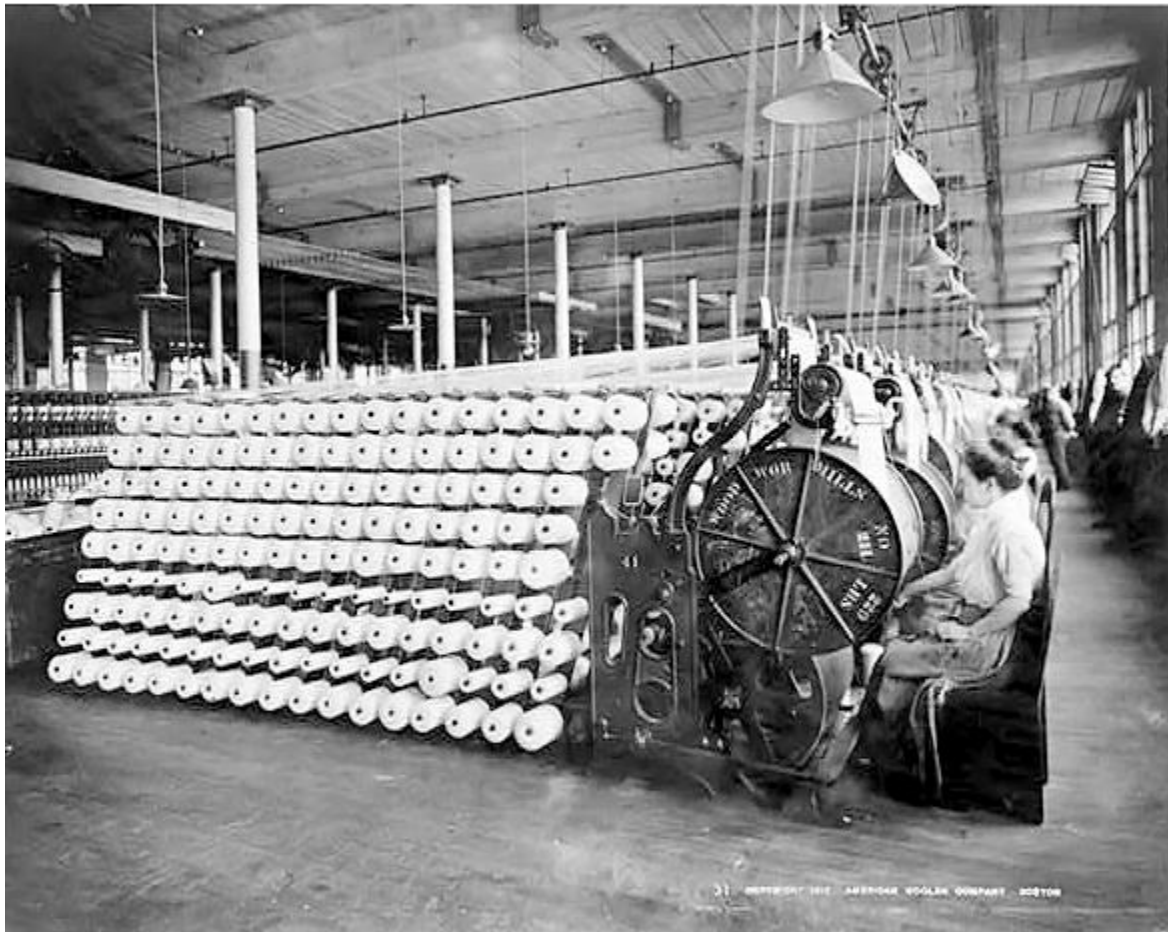
DAY 139

AUGUST 27, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## Women's Work

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 27, 2012

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA was not a rewarding time to be a working woman. While the wages of men were low, women's pay was drastically lower. The number of females employed – typically in factories or as domestic servants – was rapidly increasing. Emma Goldman, a leading voice in the Socialist movement, wrote in 1910: “Nowhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex.”



Women beaming and inspecting yarn at the American Woolen Company in Boston in 1912. (Library of Congress)

Reverend George L. Perin, a pastor serving inner city Boston, decided to lend a helping hand. He was appalled at the housing that single, working women in Boston were compelled to live in. Through a tireless fundraising effort, Perin managed to buy an unoccupied hotel in Boston's

South End. His goal was to “furnish for girls living away from home a dwelling place which is morally safe, as well as comfortable and sanitary, and to give them food that is both palatable and wholesome.” The New York Times called Franklin Square House “the largest hotel for young working women and girl students in the world.”



Reverend George L. Perin, the founder of Franklin Square House, in 1906. ([www.postcards.delcampe.com](http://www.postcards.delcampe.com))

‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Franklin Square House on the evening of August 26, 1912. He had been invited by its superintendent to give a talk to the nearly six hundred women that called the vine-covered, red brick building home. He began by confirming the equality of women and men. “[E]ach is the complement of the other in the divine creative plan.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted that God distinguishes a person’s “purity and righteousness” in “deeds and actions,” and not their gender. He acknowledged the history of the subordination of women, attributing it to a lack of equal access to education.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then offered a series of historical examples of women with “superlative capacity and determination,” who have been “peers of man in intellect and equally courageous.” They included Zenobia, Queen of the Palmyrene Empire, who “manifested the highest degree of capability in the administration of public affairs.” He added to the list Cleopatra, Catherine, wife of Peter the Great, and Queen Victoria, whom he noted was “superior to all the kings of Europe in ability, justness and equitable administration.”

The audience at Franklin Square House was given some practical advice. Women, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told them, “must become proficient in the arts and sciences and prove by her accomplishments that her abilities and powers have merely been latent.” He



A postcard of Franklin Square House in 1909.  
([www.cardcow.com](http://www.cardcow.com))

noted: “Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ended by addressing certain militant aspects of the women’s movement. He had met Emmeline Pankhurst, the leading British suffragist, who had resorted to aggression in order to call attention to the disenfranchisement of women. “Demonstrations of force, such as are now taking place in England,” he said, “are neither becoming nor effective in the cause of womanhood and equality.”

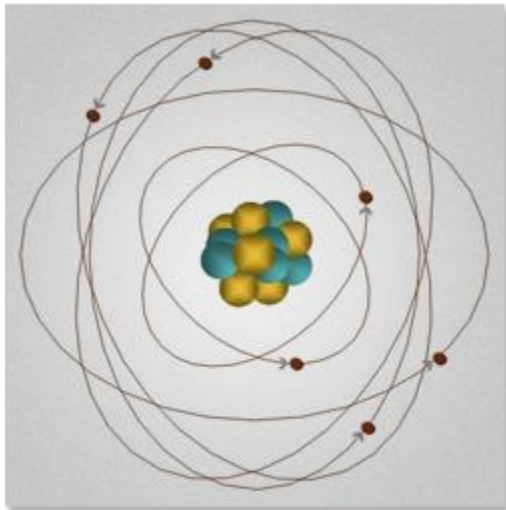
‘Abdu’l-Bahá had great hope that women would champion the peace movement, adding that women’s “efficiency in the establishment of universal peace,” would be “real evidence of woman’s superiority.”

AUGUST 28, 1912  
BOSTON, MA

## The Responsibilities of Oneness

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 28, 2012

“UPON THE FACES of those present,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said as he looked out at the crowd, “I behold the expression of thoughtfulness and wisdom.” It was August 27, 1912, and he was speaking to the Metaphysical Club of Boston. The organization, which had been meeting for about seventeen years, devoted itself to an exploration of the relationship between the physical matter and abstract realities. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a talk that gracefully united the two.



The structure of the atom was determined in 1911 by British physicist Ernest Rutherford. (mrgallagherstudentsites.com)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá began by discussing the interconnectedness of matter at the atomic level. It was an extremely timely illustration, since British physicist Ernest Rutherford had just determined the structure of the atom the year before. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted that the smallest of particles are in a state of “perpetual motion, undergoing continuous degrees of progression.” A single atom, he said, can progress through the mineral world, into the vegetable world, the animal world, and even the human world. As atoms progress, he stated, they become “imbued with the powers and virtues,” as well as “the attributes and qualities,” of whatever category they embody.

“It is evident,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded, “that each elemental atom of the universe is possessed of a capacity to express all the virtues of the universe.” He was claiming the essential oneness of everything in existence. He then argued that God is the power that underlies and animates these

transformations. “[T]he origin and outcome of phenomena,” he said, “is the omnipresent God; for the reality of all phenomenal existence is through Him.”



First formal portrait taken of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'Abdu'l-Bahá turned his attention to the human world. “This human plane,” he stated, “is one creation, and all souls are the signs and traces of the divine bounty.” The implication, 'Abdu'l-Bahá noted, is that no one could be rejected. “In this plane there are no exceptions,” he said.

'Abdu'l-Bahá then laid out for his audience at the Metaphysical Club the responsibility this places on each of them. “[S]ome souls are weak,” he said, “we must endeavor to strengthen them.” He added: “Some are ailing; we must seek to restore them to health.” It may have sounded obvious enough to those assembled that evening, but in an America where Social Darwinism was beginning to take root in both economics and the social sciences, and where eugenics was seriously debated by mainstream intellectuals, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was making a clear statement.

“[W]e must exercise extreme patience, sympathy and love toward all mankind,” he said, “considering no soul as rejected. If we look upon a soul as rejected, we have disobeyed the teachings of God.”

AUGUST 29, 1912  
MALDEN, MA

## William Henry Randall and a Glass of Grape Juice

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 29, 2012

WILLIAM HENRY RANDALL, or “Harry” for short, was never late. He attributed his success, in part, to this habit. Randall had climbed the ranks of a shipping company – starting out by sweeping floors and running errands – and was now its president. In May, 1912, however, he found himself climbing up to the sixth floor of the Victoria Hotel in Boston to deliver a glass of grape juice to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



Harry Randall photographed with Martha Root and others, circa 1918. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Henry had investigated all the world’s religions, or so he thought. Despite his professional responsibilities, he found the time to study under the tutelage of a Harvard professor. Yet Henry did not care to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “What do I want to meet another oriental for?” he said. “I’ve met Vivekananda and all the great orientals that have come to this country, and I don’t want to meet any more.”



Finally, out of politeness, Randall accepted an invitation to hear ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak. He later wrote: “I was very much impressed with his beautiful appearance, his words and the love which seemed to radiate from the very words he spoke.” Henry discovered that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was different from any man he had ever met. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá was what he talked about,” Randall said. So when someone asked if he would deliver grape juice to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Victoria Hotel, he was happy to comply. He purchased six bottles and rushed right over.



Harry Randall with Mirza ‘Abbas Kuli during a trip to Haifa in 1919. (Star of the West)

Henry didn’t expect to deliver it personally. Outside of the room he handed the bottles to one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Persian attendants, but was told he should deliver it to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in person. Randall was hesitant to enter, until someone gave him a gentle push.

Moments later, Randall found himself alone in a large room with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who was sitting in a large chair, and appeared to be sleeping. “Here is the glass of grape juice,” Henry said, placing it on a table by the door. He was about to slip out when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá looked up and commanded him to sit down. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá closed his eyes again.

“I sat. I waited. And I waited,” Randall later recalled. “I was not used to be kept waiting and I was getting angry clear through.” Soon, he began to feel a prickling all over his body. Within a few minutes, his arms and legs, and then the rest of him, had all gone to sleep.



Henry berated himself for his lack of patience. “Here I am in the presence of a tired old man and I cannot remain reposeful for ten minutes. What good has my study of all the religions of the world done for me?” With this thought, the prickling in his body immediately stopped.

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke. “Great is the power of the intellect,” he said, “but until it becomes the servant of the heart it is of little avail.” It was the first of many meetings between the two; often humorous, and always poignant.

AUGUST 30, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Arrives in Montreal

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on August 30, 2012

MAY MAXWELL’S TWO-YEAR-OLD daughter, Mary, was fast asleep when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá disembarked from his train at Windsor Station in downtown Montreal, Quebec, at about 8:40 p.m. on Friday, August 30, 1912. He and two secretaries were met by May’s husband, architect William Sutherland Maxwell, and taken by carriage to the door of their home at 716 Pine Avenue West. The neighbors were wide awake though, and under the full summer moon caught glimpses of the figure in flowing robes from their windows. That night, after a fire was lit to warm ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he asked after Mary, but on hearing that she was asleep, declined to wake her. He would sleep just two doors down the hallway from her room, on the second floor, up the winding staircase and at the end of the hall. Before the close of that first evening, he would say of the Maxwell house: “This is my home.”



The room in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed at the home of May and William Sutherland Maxwell on Pine Street in Montreal. (ca.bahai.org)

The

train had left Boston at 9:00 a.m., and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had crossed the international border separating the United States from Canada as the sun descended in the early evening. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá's relationship with the Maxwells began years ago, in the penal colony of 'Akká. May Ellis Bolles, who had been born in New Jersey, was among the first Westerners to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá there in 1899. She was twenty-eight years old, and suffered from a chronic illness, causing her to remain bedridden for months at a time. It was during a particularly bad period of ill health, while her family was living in Paris, that May had first heard of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Her godmother, the industrialist Phoebe Apperson Hearst, had organized the trip and stopped over in Paris on the way. She was disturbed by May's condition. Phoebe's naturopathic doctor, Edward Getsinger, attended to May, but advised that the healing she needed was only one that his wife, Lua, could provide.



Windsor Station, Montreal, circa 1900. (Wikimedia)

May later recalled that Lua had told her:

“There is a prisoner in ‘Akká who holds the key to Peace.” When May discovered that the purpose of their trip was to see him, she resolved to go with them. She tried to sell her only jewelry to buy a ticket, but when Mrs. Hearst learned of it, she intervened, and bought one for her. Like many of the early Westerners who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká, May was spellbound. “[O]f that first meeting,” she later recalled, “I can remember neither joy nor pain nor anything I can name.”

During the decade between May’s first and second journeys to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, she married William Sutherland Maxwell, the Scottish-Canadian architect who was studying in Paris at the time they met. She immigrated to Canada with him, and returned to ‘Akká again in 1909. It was during this time that May told ‘Abdu’l-Bahá she could not have children. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assured her that this was not true. The next year May Maxwell gave birth to Mary, a daughter.

May’s correspondence with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was constant; she wrote from a small writing desk situated in the corner of her living room on Pine Avenue. She traveled to New York to meet him off the *Cedric* on April 11, 1912, and invited him to visit Montreal. He accepted to stay for three days, but this was eventually extended to ten.



May Maxwell. (ca.bahai.org)

May had wanted to host ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in her own home, but her husband was reserved, and shrank from the publicity that hosting him would rouse. The day before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived, however, William had a change of heart. A man of great aesthetic tastes, while pondering the furniture of one of their bedrooms, he declared: “This is not good enough for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I’m going right down to Morgans to buy a new set.” It was settled: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would stay with them.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s stay at the Maxwell home provides an intimate window into his relationship with the family. Little Mary was especially attracted to the visitor. On another day, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was sleeping on the couch at the foot of his bed, Mary waited until her mother’s back was turned, dashed into his room, climbed up onto his chest, pried open his eyelids with her fingers and cried, “Wake up, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!”

AUGUST 31, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Tells Canada: “Be Happy!”

By TONY MICHEL | Published on August 31, 2012

ON ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S FIRST morning in Canada, the front page of the largest newspaper in the country’s largest city printed an original pencil sketch of the “messenger of peace from the Orient to the Occident” who brought the city a clear message: “Be happy! You in Canada live in a magnificent, peaceful country. Be happy!”



In 1912 the official flag of Canada was the Union Jack. However, from 1868 to 1921, most Canadians used this four-province version of the Red Ensign flag. (Imperial War Museum, London)

The editor of the Montreal *Daily Star*, who was waiting for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to arrive on the night of August 30, chose to highlight the apparent contrast of this “Apostle of Peace” predicting “an Appalling War” in Europe.

One of the major differences between Canada and the United States in 1912 was that Canadians saw world events through the lens of their membership in the British Empire. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke about a coming war in Europe, the warning held an immediacy for Canadians that it lacked in the United States. Britain was sure to be a principal player in any coming conflict, and as part of the Empire, Canada would be automatically involved.

Amongst Anglophone Canadians especially, talk of war was framed in terms of imperial or national duty and an opportunity to demonstrate manly virtues. In the context of such dominant

ideas, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements about war were bold and, as the editor saw them, quite surprising.



Pencil sketch of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the front page of the Montreal Daily Star, August 31, 1912. (Montreal Daily Star)

“War must cease,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares. “There is something above and beyond patriotism, and it is better to love your fellowmen than to love only your countrymen. When we see this and know in very truth the brotherhood of man, war will appear to us in its true light as an outrage on civilization, an act of madness and blindness. . . . we shall recognize that we were like men in a dungeon, fighting and slaying ourselves.”

In his interview with the *Star*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised Canadians to the extent that they were not building up armaments. “What a contrast is presented in your country,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the reporter. “Canada should be a very happy land. So far removed from such a condition of strife.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá found great receptivity to the message of peace in Canada and the United States. “On this side of the Atlantic the peace message is well received; but in Europe, there is an apathy, a listlessness that is distressing,” he said. In “the old world, the inventive genius of man now seemed to be turned almost exclusively to the fabrication of murderous weapons of warfare.”



‘Abdu’l-Bahá was sure that an “era of universal peace” was possible, but feared that before this, the world was headed towards “a war of colossal proportions” which “would be the most appalling in the world’s history.” He noted that much of the suffering endured by the common people of Europe was connected to this arms race. The idea that men would be pulled away from “productive employment” and “trained to slay one another,” he said, “was supreme madness.”

The *Star* noted that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been “deeply impressed by his tour of the United States and is looking forward with a great interest to his visit to Canada” where “the [Bahá’í] movement has many adherents,” including “quite a number” in Montreal. Montreal was in fact the center of greatest activity for the early Bahá’í community in Canada, and at the center of this activity was May Maxwell.



Postcard of the Maisonneuve Monument in Montreal, commemorating the 1911 coronation of King George V. (Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was staying at the home of May and her husband Sutherland Maxwell, who were members of Montreal’s Anglophone minority, living in the city’s most exclusive and wealthy neighborhood. They used their extensive social networks to maximize the impact of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit.

Within the first few hours of his arrival in Montreal, the impact of these efforts were evident in the growing public knowledge of his arrival in the city. Over lunch, Sutherland Maxwell told

them how easy it was to retrieve the visitors' luggage at the customs house when the government official opened their bags and saw a photo of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The official asked, "Is this the picture of the prophet of Persia?" When Sutherland Maxwell told him "Yes" he released the bags, saying "There is no need to inspect this luggage."

'Abdu'l-Bahá's stay in Montreal, originally a two day detour to visit May Maxwell, was quickly transforming into one of the most publicized, eventful, and attended stops on his entire North American tour. He drew such a crowd on the first full day in Montreal that those managing his schedule suggested he send everyone away and get some sleep. "No, this is the time to work," 'Abdu'l-Bahá told them. "We must not think of fatigue. Everyone is to be met."

One of those he had met early that morning was a reporter for the *Standard* who published his interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the paper's afternoon edition.

"You have a very beautiful country and you must be very happy here," 'Abdu'l-Bahá told him. "My message to the Canadian people is this: Your country is very prosperous and very delightful in every aspect; you have peace and security amidst you; happiness and composure are your friends; surely you must thank God that you are so submerged in the sea of His mercy."

DAY 144

SEPTEMBER 1, 1912

MONTREAL, CANADA

## Blood Shed Over “Imaginary Lines”

By TONY MICHEL | Published on September 1, 2012

THE CENTURY THAT stretches between 1912 and today is the bloodiest in human history. Millions have been killed in wars, massacres and other acts of persecution, terror, violence and genocide. Brutality on an inconceivable scale has been variously justified in the name of nationalism, ideology, race, religion and class. One hundred years ago today, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that all such excuses for bloodshed have no basis in reality.



Europe in 1914. (Rand McNally Company)

“Man has set up imaginary lines,” he said, “only to have them become causes of strife. A river is made a boundary; one side is called France and the other Germany. What a superstition! An imaginary line to become a cause of bloodshed!”



On September 1, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was speaking at the Unitarian “Church of the Messiah” in Montreal. The Rev. F. J. Griffin introduced him to the packed church. A journalist from the Montreal *Star* considered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s address on the causes of war to be “a powerful plea for peace and unity among the nations.” Despite the unusual sound and sight of a Persian speaker “in flowing robes,” the newspaper accounts did not dwell on the exoticism of the speaker’s appearance, but focused on the challenging content of his talk.

The true “reality” was the unity of all humans, said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Everyone “came from the same elements, all were descended from the same race and all had to live on the same globe.” Because “God created all mankind, maintained all and protected all,” there was “no difference in His bestowal of mercy among His children.”



“The Battle of Lundy’s Lane” during the War of 1812, by Charles William Jefferys, c. 1921. (Archives of Ontario)

“Before God,” stated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “all mankind is one. There is no Germany and no England, no Frenchman, no Turk and no Persian.” [As he often did](#), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compared animal and human behavior. He pointed out that a “dove or a sheep from the Orient would consort” with their counterparts in the Occident without prejudice. “Why could not men do likewise?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated that the major religions “rebuked all things which brought about difference and discord.” Their message was always about “the goodness of God” and they worked “for the solidarity of the [human] race.” However, he noted, “imaginary differences” had been introduced to religious practice throughout history, and these had “nothing to do with the original teachings of the prophets,” leading to “strife and contention.”

War, explained ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “became rampant” and men became “like beasts of prey engaged in each other’s murder, wiping out homes and laying waste each other’s country.” Through forgetfulness of the laws of God, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience, people have “allowed themselves to be governed by racial and religious prejudice, or patriotic and political bias.”

The *Star* reported ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reference to the teachings of his father, Bahá’u’lláh, who had said:

“If war arose from religion, then no religion was better; if a remedy produced sickness, then it was better to have no remedy. When religion became a cause of warfare and bloodshed, it was worthless and it was a thousand times better to have none of it.”



Inside the Church of the Messiah, Montreal, about 1870. (Alexander Henderson/McCord Museum)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s critique of “imaginary lines” extends beyond national borders and religious denominations. He challenged his listeners to examine all social constructions, cultural norms and categories of identity that led to conflict and disunity. As an example, he mentioned need for “the equality of the sexes in everything, political and social.” These challenges to nationalism, religion and gender roles in 1912 captivated his listeners. He called upon them to re-examine the “imaginary lines” they lived by.

“All this enmity and discord is the fruit of ignorance and a lack of mutual understanding,” he said. “Get instruction, so that all this may be banished. Drive all this away so that all mankind may become united.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged his first Canadian public audience, “the people of this young and noble nation,” to “assist in the great movement for the peace and unity of the world.”

SEPTEMBER 2, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## “A Traveler Should Stay at a Hotel”

By TONY MICHEL | Published on September 2, 2012

ON HIS THIRD DAY in Montreal, Sunday, September 1, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá decided that it was time to move to a hotel. His original plans for a two or three day trip were extended given the positive reception he received. On the morning of September 2, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his party of two moved from the Maxwell home to the Windsor Hotel.



Main Corridor, Windsor Hotel extension, 1916. (Wm. Notman & Son/McCORD Museum)

Sutherland and May Maxwell had done everything in their power to make sure that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had all that he needed. They reserved the top three floors of their four bedroom house in Westmount, Montreal. They had succeeded in generating a great deal of positive newspaper

coverage. “While here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will stay at 716 Pine Avenue West,” reported the *Montreal Star*. “All who wish to visit him will be made welcome, if arrangements are made beforehand by telephoning Uptown 3015.”

When they arrived on August 30, May Maxwell informed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “So many people have telephoned and sent letters about your arrival and I have replied to all.” She was no doubt running on little sleep. According to his secretary, Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, visitors came “day and night,” the talks were attended by “a great multitude,” and the large number of “longing souls” would “not let the Master rest.” For the three nights that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his party stayed at the Maxwell house, it was more like a reception hall than a private home.



Windsor Hotel with the new annex built after the fire of 1906. (Wm. Notman & Son/McCord Museum)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá recognized May Maxwell’s exhaustion, and, rather than denying this fact, she replied, “I consider this fatigue the greatest comfort of my life.” But after two nights, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Mahmúd, “Tomorrow we should move to a hotel. A traveler should stay in a hotel.”

The Windsor Hotel billed itself as the finest in the Dominion. Staying there made it easier for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to devote more time to visitors and it provided an appropriate setting to receive prominent callers, including McGill University faculty members and the Archbishop of Montreal. But it was the opinion of Dorothy Wade, a housekeeper for the Maxwells, that the primary reason for the move was that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá considered the steady flow of visitors to be an excessive burden on the Maxwells.





The Maxwell House in Montreal, Canada, present day. (ca.bahai.org)

After breakfast on September 2, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his party left the Maxwell home for the Windsor Hotel, although he continued to visit 716 Pine Avenue West on a daily basis, often by “tram” (streetcar), where he gave regular evening talks.

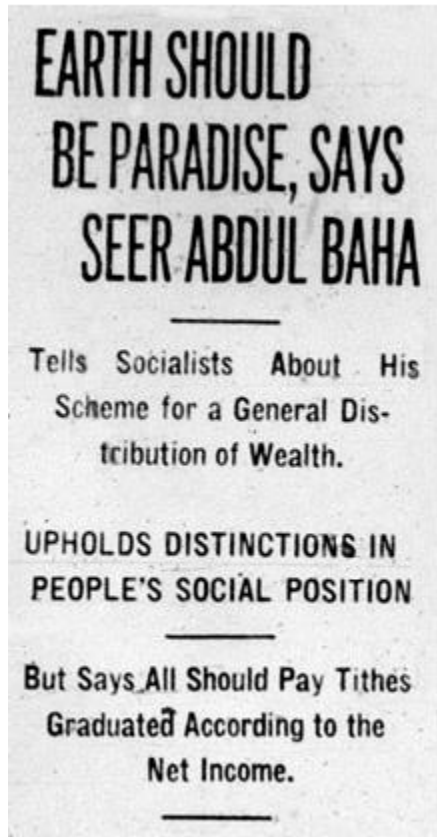
In the week ahead ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will receive unprecedented positive press, will be warmly received by large crowds of Socialists and Methodists, and will explore the city by carriage, tram, and foot. He will even acquire a genuine Canadian souvenir: a Montreal head cold.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Montreal’s Socialists

By TONY MICHEL | Published on September 3, 2012

OVER FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE crammed into Montreal’s Coronation Hall on September 3, 1912, for a meeting of Montreal’s Socialist Club. They had come to hear ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak on “The Economic Happiness of the Human Race,” wrote the *Montreal Star*, and “they seemed to represent almost every nationality under the sun.” The President of the association, Mr. H.A. Goulden introduced ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “a great messenger of love and brotherhood from the East to the West.” Mahmúd-i-Zarqání noted that Goulden told the crowd that they would hear about “the principles of brotherhood, prosperity and the upliftment of the poor.”



An article on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's address to Montreal's "Socialist Club" published on September 4, 1912. (Montreal Daily Star)

It is very difficult in 2012 to think back before the modern welfare state, before the many self-proclaimed “socialist” states of the twentieth century, before the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917. We cannot be exactly sure what socialism meant to all

five hundred gathered there that day, but it is safe to assume they shared a belief that the economic system in a newly industrial Canada contributed to the suffering of the poor.

The *Star* referred to the group as a “gathering of Socialists” and to Mahmúd they were the “Socialist Club.” The Canadian Socialist League, the Canadian Socialist Party, and the Canadian Social Democratic Party were all active in the city at that time. Canadian workers had organized into unions since the 1870s, which included the creation of “Labor Day” in 1872 as part of the campaign to bring the work week down to fifty-eight hours. But Socialism in Canada at this time was ill-defined, not necessarily associated with the union movement, nor even the working class. Its leaders were variously influenced by ideas of Christian brotherhood, Fabian socialism and perhaps smatterings of Marx. What they heard from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, according to the *Star*, was a plan to help every individual enjoy “a right to live in comfort and happiness by sharing in the general welfare.”



Working-class housing in Montreal, 1903.  
(Musée McCord Museum)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk began with the statement that humans were not solitary creatures, but “ever in need of cooperation and mutual help.” He told the assembly that “God desired that each individual member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare.” An absence of this was “a lack of symmetry in the body politic.”

The *Star* quoted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s characterization of “the selfish” who say “Let us look after ourselves. Let others die, so long as I am comfortable, everything is going well.” “Such a callous attitude,” he said, “is due to a lack of control and a lack of a working law.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then identified economic proposals that he explained were elaborated by his father Bahá’u’lláh in the late nineteenth century. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá introduced the idea of a “general storehouse” to which all members of society would contribute a percentage of their income “on a graded scale.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggested rates of 0%, 10%, 20%, 25% and 50% for the poor on up

to the rich. The papers referred to this concept as “tithes”—the idea of income tax did not come into place in Canada until 1917 as a “temporary measure” to aid the war effort. Of course, in a 1912 context, words like “tithe” and “tax” carried different connotations than today, and may be imprecise descriptions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s message, especially as they were filtered through a journalist’s report.



Workers in Montreal's Garment District.  
(Jewish Public Library)

The people “would elect trustees for the administration of the public trust,” explained ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and from this “general storehouse” of funds, which would come from various sectors of industry—agricultural, resources, manufacturing, inheritance tax—“the less fortunate” would “secure their share of the general welfare.”

In 1912, such a system of social benefits for the poor had no equivalent in the Americas and it would be decades before “a working law” could put such programs into place in Canada. This was not socialism, since it involved no collective ownership of the means of production, and since it “upheld social distinctions,” noted the *Star*. It was also by no means the full extent of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s many talks on economics. The following night, he would elaborate further on spiritual dimensions of economics. But for tonight’s crowd, these novel ideas generated such applause that, in the words of Mahmúd, “the walls of the building seemed to vibrate to their foundations.”

SEPTEMBER 4, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## Economics and Spirituality

By TONY MICHEL | Published on September 4, 2012

“THE GREAT QUESTION raised by the Socialists was of paramount importance,” the Montreal *Daily Star* reported ‘Abdu’l-Bahá telling a packed parlor at the Maxwell home at 716 Pine Avenue West, on the evening of September 4, 1912. One night after receiving enthusiastic press coverage of [his talk on economics](#), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that while the Socialists asked the right questions, they were unable to provide society with any permanent settlement to its most important problems.



The street market in Jacques Cartier Square in Montreal, circa 1900. (Detroit Publishing Company)

Unfortunately, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted, although the question of economic disparity was of great importance, “the governments of the world had failed to give it the earnest attention it deserved.” In 1912, weak labor laws and the absence of social benefits throughout the industrializing world

meant that many members of society lived in conditions of abject poverty. Growing expectations of economic justice had to be met, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “otherwise disorder everywhere would be the culmination.”



Vladimir Illyich Lenin, on the eve of the Russian Revolution, 1917.  
(Sourced from lacrememagazine.co.uk)

In the same way that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s repeated warnings of a catastrophic war in Europe were prescient, so too his 1912 forecasts of widespread social disorder preceded by five years the world’s first Socialist Revolution in Russia. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, labor strife was ubiquitous in industrial societies worldwide.

To adequately address the “the economic ills of the nations,” the paper reported ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saying, would first require the “establishment of a great spiritual brotherhood worldwide.” He noted that political movements such as socialism were unable to do this. And the Socialists had extreme views. While some people idealized the notion of a classless society, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented that “grades in society could not be abolished. . . . Public order was impossible without this conservation of degrees.” On many occasions throughout his time in North America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued in front of audiences that governments could not mandate absolute economic equality. Different degrees in wealth were desirable, necessary in fact, but the significant disparity between poverty and wealth had to be resolved.

# SOCIALISM NOT CURE FOR EVILS OF PRESENT DAY

Abdul Baha Says Only Spiritual  
Brotherhood is Ef-  
fective.

KINGS ARE NOT AT EASE.  
NOR ARE THEIR PEOPLES

Says to Bring Earthly Paradise  
Out of the Potential and  
Into the Real.

Headline on page 2 of the Montreal Daily  
Star, Sept. 5, 1912. (Montreal Daily Star)

The evening before, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken about what governments could do to help reduce this disparity. At the Maxwell home today, he added that a lasting remedy must be based on a “true brotherhood amongst all the people of the earth.” The basis of such a brotherhood, however, could not be based on blood, or nationality, or class. While “families quarreled,” nations had civil wars, and “even socialists fought each other,” there could be no unity that would be lasting “save that of the spiritual type.” That is, a unity based on our common qualities as human beings instead of material considerations like politics, culture, or class. The reporter from the Montreal *Daily Star* wrote that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the audience how the establishment of “a great brotherhood for the illumination of the human heart” had been planned out by Bahá’u’lláh in his works.

Earlier that afternoon, when the Maxwells and their friends were commenting on the positive press coverage of the previous evening’s talk, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told them that explaining his father’s economic prescriptions in theory was insufficient: their implications couldn’t be fully grasped unless they were put into practice. “Not one of a hundred has as yet come into force,” he said.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk at the Maxwell home that evening closed with an encouragement for his listeners to take this concept of a global spiritual brotherhood and make it a reality. “Let us bring the kingdom, the earthly paradise, out of the potential and into the real.”

SEPTEMBER 5, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## Principles for a Modern Religion

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 5, 2012

IT WAS A DRY and warm evening; a necessary break from the three days of steady Montreal rain. On September 5, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a talk at St. James Methodist Church, located on the north side of rue Sainte-Catherine and west of de Bleury. The church was called the “Westminster Abbey of Canada,” due to its Gothic Revival architecture and large, circular window of tracery. In contrast to its old-world design, an electric illumined sign outside the church read: “This evening the Prophet of the East will speak on the principles of the Bahá’í Faith and the salvation of the world of humanity.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk would similarly address a convergence of the old and the new.



Interior view of St. James United Church, formerly St. James Methodist Church, in 2011. (Photo by Oleg O. Moiseyenko. Used with permission)

“So people are calling me a prophet,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, when he saw the sign as he approached the church, and the meaning of it was translated for him. “Oh, would that they had omitted that word!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk that night would clarify the matter: his father, Bahá’u’lláh, was the prophet. Bahá’u’lláh appointed his son to interpret and clarify his teachings after his passing.

The Reverend Herbert Symonds chaired the gathering. His views were controversial: he insisted that the teachings of Christ had to be renewed in every age to address contemporary concerns, and encouraged interchurch collaboration.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that Bahá’u’lláh’s religion “embodies completely the teachings of all the Prophets, expressed in principles and precepts applicable to the needs and conditions of the modern world, amplified and adapted to present-day questions and critical human problems.” He told them Bahá’u’lláh’s words “are the very spirit of the age and the cause of the unity and illumination of the East and the West.”



St. James Methodist Church, Montreal, QC, circa 1905.  
(McCord Museum)

He went on to argue how his father’s most important principles constitute the modern mission of religion: that each individual must investigate reality for themselves, not relying on experts, priests, or gurus; that humankind is a single race and should live accordingly; that “religion must be the mainspring and source of love in the world,” for it is “the revelation of the will of God”; that “religion must reconcile with science and reason”; the elimination of all forms of prejudice; the need to draw on human spiritual powers to rise above the condition of the animal; the responsibility for providing education to all children; the establishment of universal peace through international agreement; the equality of rights for men, women, and all of humanity, and the establishment of an international language.

Perhaps it was unexpected that a voice calling for modern religion came from the East. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that religious truth must change along with the evolving needs of society. Rather than deny the existence of a creator, or the benefits religion had given humanity, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke of the need for a reformation so that modern religion could meet the needs of an increasingly complex world.



View of the Hochelage tram station on Notre-Dame street in 1912. ([www.memorablemontreal.com](http://www.memorablemontreal.com))

Mr. Riger, a judge who had just heard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak for the first time, stood and said: “Some have imagined that the succession of the Prophets and the bounties of God were limited. But tonight we have heard with our own ears these divinely ordained teachings from an Eastern prophet who is the successor of the Prophets of God. We will never forget his message.”

The Reverend Symonds agreed. “It is an error,” he said, “to think that the West has attained perfection and that the East has no bounties or teachings to offer to the West. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said many things which we have not heard before or understood.”

As for the weather, the dry Thursday came too late, and, that night, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá caught a cold.

*\*Many thanks to Oleg O. Moiseyenko, a Russian-born photographer and world traveler residing in Princeton, NJ, for allowing us to use his striking image of St. James United Church in Montreal. [We encourage you to view more of his work here.](#) We particularly like his [landscapes of Mt. McKinley and Lake Baikal.](#)*

DAY 149

SEPTEMBER 6, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Montreal’s Not-So-Yellow Press

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 6, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ HAD BEEN warned about Montreal. “The majority of the inhabitants are Catholics,” he had been told, who “are in the utmost fanaticism,” covered by “impenetrable clouds of superstitions. . .” Percy Woodcock, a Canadian who had traveled with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to North America aboard the SS *Cedric*, had advised him in these terms against traveling to Montreal. Yet the concerted response of the Montreal press to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during his stay in Canada’s largest city proved Percy Woodcock wrong.



Press coverage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Montreal newspapers. Left to right: *La Patrie* (Sept. 6, 1912), *Le Canada* (Sept. 4, 1912), *Montreal Daily Witness* (Sept. 10, 1912), *The Montreal Daily Star* (Sept. 3, 1912), *The Montreal Daily Star* (Sept. 2, 1912). (van den Hoonaard Collection, University of New Brunswick Archives)

Montreal’s newspaper industry was highly competitive by 1912. At least fourteen newspapers, in both English and French, were published daily. Another fourteen weekly magazines, which focused on smaller, special interest groups within Montreal, provided the city’s inhabitants with plenty to read. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited Montreal during Labor Day and the visit of Prime Minister Robert Borden. Still, as Will C. van den Hoonaard recorded in his book, *The Origins of the Baha’i Community of Canada, 1898-1948*, twenty-five English language articles, and nine French language articles were published, a substantial number for a nine-day stay.

It wasn’t only the quantity of the articles that distinguished them, but their content as well. The English language publications of Montreal lacked the sensationalism that characterized several

major American newspapers of the time. Literacy rates in America had rapidly increased, meaning that newspapers no longer had to rely on a small, educated readership for revenue. They began to sell the masses stories of adultery and crime, often told in hyperbolic, charged language and intentionally controversial. This became known as the Yellow Press.



A man reading a French newspaper on the street in 1964. (Photo by Leon Levinston)

It was in this climate that journalists were challenged to write about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. On June 30, 1912, *The New York Times* published the article “Prophet’s Dash For Train,” about how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá nearly missed his train at Lackawanna Station in Montclair, NJ. It was dramatic. Nixola Greeley-Smith wrote a colorful article for Pulitzer’s *The New York World*: “Of course nobody could be named Baha without having a beard,” she joked, admitting that she had tried to interrupt ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk “in the interest of those who seek lighter reading,” and was consequently “squelched.” One headline simply reads, in a reductive pun, “Hopes to Convert U.S.”

Canadian newspapers were delayed in taking on the methods of the Yellow Press. In the days before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in the city, detailed and accurate articles about his life, the Bahá’í faith, and his position in it were published. The Montreal *Daily Star* printed an article on August 24, 1912, six days before his arrival, and got most of its facts right. Of the religion it wrote: “It has no clergy and no ritual. It is not a cult. . .” “The one point insisted upon,” read the article, “is that the fundamentals of spiritual teaching shall be universally admitted and practically applied to the affairs of daily life and in the social, business and political life of nations.”

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did arrive, the content of his talks, rather than his identity as an Easterner, was the main focus of all the articles. The Montreal *Daily Star* published an account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk at Coronation Hall. Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of an economic system based on mutual



support and cooperation, but far from the oppressive rigidity of socialism, was described in full detail. Canadian newspapers called ‘Abdu’l-Bahá an “Oriental Seer,” a “Persian Preacher,” and an “Eastern Sage,” but rarely a prophet.



One of the last newsstands in Montreal, on Pine and St. Laurent, in 1991. By 1996 this and all other newsstands in the city had disappeared. (spacingmontreal.ca)

The French press coverage was of a different tone. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks had to be translated into French to be published. This could be one reason why they focused more on the impression ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s appearance made on them than on the content of his speeches. One article titled “Le Prestige de l’Exotisme,” (The Prestige of Exotic Things), published in *La Patrie*, according to van den Hoonard, “attributed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s success to the fact that he was an oriental, rather than to the ‘deep, but old truths’ he set forth.” *Le Canada* focused on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s economic teachings, summing them up as an “admixture of socialism and Christianity.” The most biting article was published in *Le Nationaliste*. “Caliban [the writer] explained how one must have an ‘unusual’ name like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” van den Hoonard wrote, “not an ordinary one, before he can call himself a ‘prophet.’” “Many souls warned me not to travel to Montreal,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote several years after his journey. “But these stories did not have any effect on the resolution of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. [He] turned his face toward Montreal. When he entered that city he observed all the doors open, he found the hearts in the utmost receptivity...”

DAY 150

SEPTEMBER 7, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Montreal Odyssey

By TONY MICHEL | Published on September 7, 2012

AS A TRAVELER, Henry David Thoreau wrote that what he got from his visit to Canada was a cold. Undeterred by a week of wetter and cooler than average Montreal weather, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw a different part of Montreal practically every day of his visit. The unpredictable weather did not stop him from seeing the city between his many public talks and appointments with visitors.



Notre Dame Church, Montreal, circa 1890.  
(courtesy of the McCord Museum)

On ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first afternoon in Montreal, Sutherland Maxwell took him and a small party for a carriage ride around town. They drove past the Unitarian Church where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would speak the following morning and through the McGill University campus. They then went to one of the oldest and grandest Catholic churches in the city, Notre Dame Basilica, on Place d’Armes square in the historic Old Port. The party stopped here and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praised the building. Mahmúd-i-Zarqání said that after they had left the church, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned to the party and said, “Behold what eleven disciples of Christ have accomplished, how they sacrificed themselves! . . .When a person is detached, he is capable of revolutionizing the whole world.”

A couple of days later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was traveling between [The Windsor Hotel](#) and Pine Avenue by tram, rather than by carriage, to cut down on expenses. On September 3, he spent a full morning and early afternoon at the hotel meeting ministers and academics, including the principal of McGill University, Dr. William Peterson, as well as a pastor from an African-Canadian congregation on St. Antoine Street. Mahmúd said that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “was completely exhausted,” but rather than resting, he set off alone for a walk “to refresh himself.”



Tram at St. Catherine and St. Denis in Montreal, circa 1910. (courtesy of the McCord Museum)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then got on a streetcar heading outside of the downtown, and soon transferred to a second one. Historian Will Van Den Hoonard has identified unsubstantiated reports that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá headed east and may have spent some time in Lafontaine Park, but concludes that no one can be really sure since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was alone. He did not know this part of the city, nor the tram routes and spoke neither English nor French. After a while, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá hailed a taxi, but was unable to tell the driver the name of his hotel. Mahmúd relates that he returned, “with his hair dishevelled and his smiling face” to tell the story of how he got lost and how he guided the driver to “go straight on” and “by chance I reached my hotel amongst all these hotels.”

That same night, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke on economics to [Montreal’s Socialists](#). The following morning, “for a change of routine,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went up to the top of Mount Royal, taking a steam driven cable car that climbed an inclined railway track up to a lookout. It was “a magnificent sight,” wrote Mahmud, “with a view of the whole city stretched before us.” As they stood on the top of Mount Royal, the papers that had reported the previous evening’s talk were translated and read aloud to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



The Lookout, Mount Royal Park, Montreal, 1916. (courtesy of the McCord Museum)

After his talk at [St. James](#), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá caught a cold. His planned departure the following day was postponed so that he could recover. At that point during his Montreal visit, he no longer gave large public talks but, from September 6 to 8, he continued to receive visitors at the Hotel Windsor, to answer letters, and to give regular talks at the Maxwell home.

## DAY 151

SEPTEMBER 8, 1912  
MONTREAL, CANADA

# ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Bids Farewell to Montreal

By TONY MICHEL | Published on September 8, 2012

SEPTEMBER 8, 1912, was a wet Sunday and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spent his last day in Montreal at his hotel, saying farewell to the Maxwells and other Montreal friends and well-wishers. After a similar period of time, I, too am bidding farewell to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Montreal. If there was one overarching message I got from covering the week, it was his emphasis on the need for humanity to undergo a wholesale transformation.



Montreal from Notre Dame Church tower, QC, 1905 (McCord Museum)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw with clarity that Europe was headed towards an “appalling war,” and that economic injustice would lead to labor unrest on an unimagined scale. He defined the underlying spiritual principles of economic ills, international conflict, gender inequality and domestic poverty. His novel concepts defied conventional categories, yet were taken seriously by the mainstream media that could have all too easily represented him as a foreigner with exotic ideas.



May and William Sutherland Maxwell, circa 1935. (ca.bahai.org)

During his time in Montreal, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met with the leading members of society, including the Archbishop of Montreal and the principal of

McGill University, as well as ministers, rabbis, labor leaders and wealthy merchants. But he was not on what one might today call a profile-raising public relations tour. He was in Montreal to enunciate his father's teachings, and to boldly invite social leaders to help actualize them. "Would you not like to serve such an ideal?" he said to a group of McGill professors.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's public reach in the city was greater than in any other stop on his western tours. Historian Will Van Den Hoonard estimates that approximately 2,500 individuals heard 'Abdu'l-Bahá speak in Montreal, and up to 440,000 readers of English and French language newspapers were exposed to his ideas. As impressive as those numbers sound, we have no way of measuring the impact of this visit on the people of Montreal as a whole. What we do know is that for the small number of those who already knew of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the visit was transformative.



William Sutherland Maxwell's drawing of the Shrine of the Báb, 1944. (bahai.uga.edu)

Nowhere was this effect more evident than in the Maxwell household itself. Near the end of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, May Maxwell described to him the change his visit had brought about in her husband, William Sutherland Maxwell. When May told Sutherland she was a Bahá'í, he told her: "Very well, you are responsible for this yourself. I have no hand in it." As a result of personal contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Sutherland Maxwell became actively engaged in the Bahá'í community. Years later, the couple's daughter Mary would wed the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Sutherland moved to Haifa and turned his well-established architectural skills to the design of the most prominent Bahá'í shrine in the world on the slopes of Mount Carmel.



A new generation of Montreal Bahá'ís, 1929. Mary Maxwell is second from the left, front row. ([communitybaha.blogspot.ca](http://communitybaha.blogspot.ca))

So too the visit altered the lives of the handful of Bahá'ís in Montreal at the time. Their experience of meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and seeing how their own city recognized and regarded him, had a qualitative difference on how they understood themselves. In the years before the twentieth century's terrifying revolutions of class, race and nation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá presented an alternative revolutionary mission for the nascent Bahá'í community in Montreal. "I have sown the seed," he told them on his final day in the city. "You must water it."



SEPTEMBER 9, 1912  
HAMILTON, CANADA

## The Golden Horseshoe Returns ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to America

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on September 9, 2012

“I CONSECRATED MY LIFE to making Canada a nation,” Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Canada’s former Prime Minister, said yesterday — Sunday, September 8, 1912 — in Marieville, Quebec. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá might have seen the news story on the front page of the *Toronto Globe* late this afternoon — Monday, September 9 — while he paced the platform of Toronto’s Union Station after a dusty seven-hour train ride from Montreal.



The eastern end of Toronto Harbor in 1910, from a panoramic photograph. Old Union Station is out of the picture, to the right. (Library of Congress)

Last night in Montreal was a night to remember. The new Prime Minister, Robert Borden, whose Conservative Party had defeated Laurier’s Liberals in last autumn’s election by opposing Laurier’s free trade agreement with the United States, disembarked from the steamer *Lady Grey* at Montreal’s Victoria Pier at about 8 p.m. He had just come from Europe, where he had joined other leaders from King George V’s empire in renewing Britain’s pledge to the *Entente Cordiale* with France. Flags and bunting lined the streets, marching bands played, and thousands of citizens gathered and cheered. Hundreds of automobiles clogged the parade route, as if trying to prove how eagerly the new transport revolution was sweeping the city. A mile-long procession accompanied the Prime Minister to the Windsor Hotel, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also happened to be staying on his final night in Montreal.

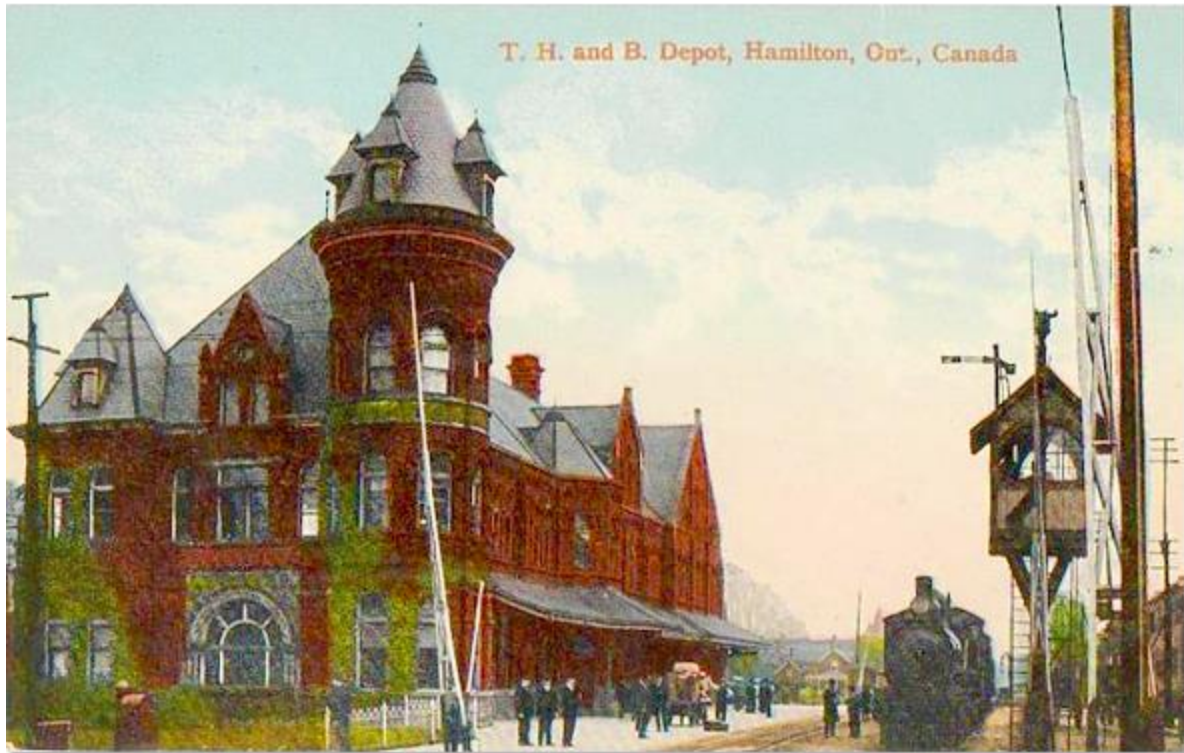


A TH&B Railway timetable from 1901.

(Library and Archives Canada/collectionscanada.gc.ca)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá left Montreal an hour ahead of Prime Minister Borden this morning, on a 9 a.m. train bound for Buffalo. It stopped in the town of Brockville, near the Thousand Islands, at about 10:30. It passed Kingston, and then Belleville at 1:47 p.m., from where the Great Peacemaker, Deganawidah, set out across Lake Ontario in a canoe hewn from stone to forge the Iroquois Confederacy among six warring nations in present-day New York state. Near Oshawa, at about 3:30 p.m., a four-year-old Mohawk boy, Jimmy Loft, saw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wave to him from a window of the passing train.

They pulled into Toronto’s Union Station at 4:30 p.m. The station’s 200-foot-long south platform, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked for a while, was open to the waterfront. The front page of *The Globe* announced that construction on the new Union Station would not begin in 1912; in fact, the building wouldn’t open for another fifteen years. The final leg of the journey to Buffalo began when the locomotive of the Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo Railway (TH&B) puffed out of Union Station at 6:05. Then the tracks swung south through cities with climbing skylines that would soon comprise the bulk of Canada’s industrial and financial strength.



The Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo Railway station at Hunter and James Streets in downtown Hamilton, Ontario, circa 1910. (John Chuckman/chuckmantorontonostalgia.wordpress.com)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá entered the city limits of Hamilton, Ontario, at the westernmost end of Lake Ontario, not long after 7 p.m. As the train crossed the narrow strip of land that skirted the western edge of Burlington Bay, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could see the last dull grey shimmer of evening light reflected from the waters of Cootes Paradise, a rich wetland on his right. A few minutes later the TH&B train pulled out of a tunnel downtown beneath Hunter Street, stopped traffic as it crossed Park and MacNab Streets, and came to rest for a few minutes beside the graceful Norman arches of a turreted, gabled, gingerbread castle of a passenger station, cased in natural stone and red brick at the corner of Hunter and James.

From there the train would head southeast along the TH&B rail line, hoist itself up the Niagara Escarpment on steel trestles between Stoney Creek and Vinemount, achieve Welland, and finally cross the international border at the Niagara River to arrive, after a fourteen-hour trek, in Buffalo, New York, at about 11 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 10, 1912  
 OSHAWA, CANADA

## Jim Loft and the Man on the Train

By COREY TAMAS | Published on September 10, 2012

JIM LOFT WOULD NEVER meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá personally, nor would he play a role in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels across North America in 1912. Yet Jim would experience, and recount throughout his life, one of the unique tales about that historic journey.

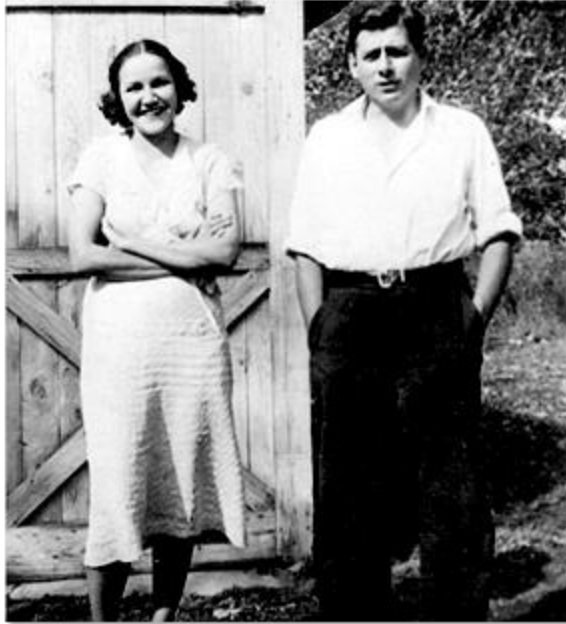


A passenger train circa 1914. (Canadian Pacific)

On the afternoon of September 9, 1912, four-year-old James Loft — or “Jim” as he liked to be called — sat on a fence just outside of Oshawa, Ontario, alongside the railroad tracks. Five hours earlier, a train had left Montreal, beginning its fourteen-hour journey to Buffalo. It had stopped in Brockville near the Thousand Islands about 10:30 a.m., and was now making its way west across the north side of Lake Ontario.

At about 3:30 p.m. near the town of Oshawa, Jim watched the train hurtle by. Through one of its windows he saw something that so overwhelmed him that he fell backwards off the fence and onto the grass below. He described what he saw as “a man wearing a long flowing white robe waving from the train.” Later in life he would explain that this was his earliest surviving memory.

Jim Loft was born on July 13, 1908. His ancestral home was the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory but he grew up in Oshawa, Ontario. His father, Newton Loft, lost his leg in a train accident when Jim was just a young boy. The family would camp at the side of the road where his father made and sold wicker chairs. But chair sales couldn't support the family. Jim went to work at the age of twelve, claiming to be fifteen so he could earn a legal wage.



Jim and Melba Loft. (One Voice Press)

Jim was greatly affected by the prejudice he encountered growing up an aboriginal in rural Canada. Years later, his daughter, Evelyn, wrote: “[H]e knew he was Indian. But not the kind he was called by ignorant people. . . . He said it just wasn't from children or his peers. It came from so-called religious ladies.” Though submerged in a society that had little regard for him, Jim believed from childhood that racial equality was a just principle, and he later noted that he felt a strong pull to spiritual matters. During his difficult teen years, he would often ask God's help to inspire him to help alleviate the poverty, oppression and alcoholism that plagued his people.

On October 23, 1931, Jim married Melba Whetung, who was raised on the Curve Lake Ojibwa First Nation. Like Jim, she had a keen interest in spiritual topics. It was Melba's friend Emma who first spoke to her about Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Melba was the first Canadian of Aboriginal descent to join the Bahá'í community in Canada, followed soon after by Jim. The vision from Jim's childhood soon became clear. “Now I know who that old man was,” he said. “It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá when he was in this country.” It had taken Jim Loft decades to make the connection.

In 1949, Jim and Melba settled on the Tyendinaga Reserve and dedicated themselves to serving and supporting the First Nations community. Despite grueling poverty, they were unswayed in their dedication. For Jim, the memory of the man in a flowing white robe waving to him from the train inspired him to his final day.



SEPTEMBER 11, 1912

BUFFALO, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far: Month Five

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 11, 2012

OWE HAVE REACHED the end of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’S fifth month in North America. As he engages the press in Buffalo, New York, we thought we’d take this opportunity to look back at some of the highlights of the past month.



Main Street in Buffalo, New York, on Labor Day, 1900. (Detroit Publishing Company)

In the last thirty days we completed our coverage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s time in Dublin, New Hampshire. On Day 123, he presented his argument against the advocates of materialism in [On Cows and Materialist Philosophy](#). On Day 125, we were [Listening to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Unitarian Church](#) as he delivered a broad message to Dublin’s diverse inhabitants.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived at Green Acre in Eliot, Maine, on Friday, August 16. To a packed house at the Eirenon, the “Hall of Peace,” he spoke about the fallibility of human knowledge in [The Methods for Investigating Truth](#). A two-part feature explored the remarkable life and gender struggles of Green Acre’s founder: [The Battles of Sarah J. Farmer](#) and [Sarah J. Farmer: One of America’s Great Religious Innovators](#). A former convict made a life-altering visit to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in [Fred Mortensen Rides the Rails](#).

During the month we also published two editorial pieces. Our producer Robert Sockett commented on what he found most surprising about the journey so far in [Hand-In-Hand with the Indomitable Kate Carew](#). Another of our writers, Caitlin Shayda Jones, shared [A Few Thoughts on the Potential of Youth](#).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá returned once again to the Boston area. At Franklin Square House he argued for women’s “superlative capacity” in front of a group of working women in [Women’s Work](#). At the Metaphysical Club in Boston, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discussed how the abstract notion of oneness can apply in everyday life in [The Responsibilities of Oneness](#).

On the evening of August 30, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá crossed the border into Canada, where he spent ten days in Montreal, Quebec. Highlights of his time in Montreal included: [‘Abdu’l-Bahá Tells Canada: “Be Happy!”](#), [Blood Shed Over “Imaginary Lines”](#), [‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Montreal’s Socialists](#), [Principles for a Modern Religion](#), and [‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Montreal’s Not-So-Yellow Press](#).

155 SEPTEMBER 12, 1912

BUFFALO, NY

## Europe “One Vast Arsenal,” Says ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on September 12, 2012

FOUR IRANIAN MEN stood watching the mighty waters fall, and marveled at the greatness of America. It was Tuesday, September 10, 1912. “The great river feeding the falls,” one of them, Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, wrote, “is flanked on both sides by lakes, fields, mountains and woods. At some places the river falls from a height of a hundred meters. Because of the height of the falls and the crash of the water, small droplets of water form sprays which appear like a great sand storm.”



View from the American side of Niagara Falls, in 1905. This lookout no longer exists, having collapsed into the falls decades ago. (jeannetreat.wordpress.com)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, Dr. Ameen Fareed, and Ahmad Sohrab had arrived in Buffalo by train from Montreal at about 11 p.m. the night before, and had taken up residence in suites


118 and 120, on the third floor of the Iroquois Hotel. In the afternoon, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave interviews to the press in his suite, the four men each paid a streetcar fare of fifty cents for the hour-long ride to Niagara Falls.

From a perch engulfed in mist, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his secretaries watched the Niagara River thunder over the cliffs into the basin below. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gazed into the roaring waters for more than half an hour. Ahmad Sohrab wrote that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá found the sight “unsurpassed in beauty and unique in awe inspiring charm.” For a time he sat on the bank of the river eating some grapes and pears. Ahmad Sohrab took the opportunity to write postcards to friends across America, and then the party returned to Buffalo by 8 p.m. After resting in his room for thirty minutes, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then came downstairs and spoke to a group of about seventy people in the hotel’s ballroom.

**PERSIAN PEACE APOSTLE  
PREDICTS WAR IN EUROPE**

**Abdul Baha Urges Local  
Bahaists to Do All in  
Their Power to Avert  
Terrible Bloodshed  
Which He Says Is Pend-  
ing in East.**

**Peace Apostle Who  
Predicts Bloodshed**



Warning against a great European war and pleading that the people of this country do what they can to avert terrible bloodshed, Abdul Baha, Persian peace apostle, addressed the local body of Bahaists at the Iroquois Hotel last evening. Of the seventy persons in attendance about sixty were women.

The Persian prophet and his three secretaries, Dr. Fereed, M. Ahmad and M. Muhlirrod were escorted to the reception parlor by J. Harrison Mills at whose home, No. 494 Elmwood avenue, the local followers hold regular meetings. Abdul Baha wore a black robe with a white turban, one of the secretaries wore all black and the other two wore plum colored robes with black turbans. One acted as interpreter and each of the others took a seat to right and left of their leader and took down in Arabic shorthand his words. He said:

“The very cause of life is due to the Supreme One’s love, for by His grace we move, we see, we hear, we feel, and all phenomena is based on His love. The prophets are sent to bear a message of holy love and the

**ABDUL BAHÁ.**

Headline in the Buffalo Courier on September 11, 1912.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

The papers of the next morning — September 11, 1912 — printed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s verbal assault against the pretexts for war.

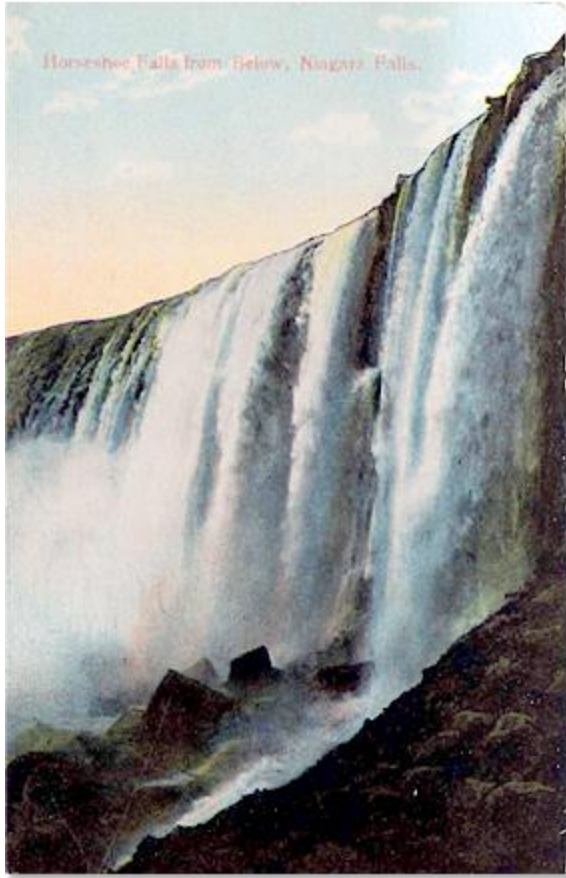
“The very cause of life is the Supreme One’s love, for by His grace we move, we see, we hear, we feel, and all phenomena is based on His love. . . . But, alas, the shadow obscuring the sun of affection. Alas, that on earth should breed a contrary spirit in the hearts of men. Alas, hatred and enmity should spring forth to make a hell of war and bloodshed.”

“The continent of Europe is one vast arsenal,” he said, “which only requires one spark at its foundations and the whole of Europe will become a wasted wilderness. And what flimsy, what impudent pretexts they use. Patriotism, say they; glory, say they; the upbuilding of the continent, say they. What a travesty on God’s truth.”

“Therefore,” he told the Americans, “forbid that spark! Pray that this shall not be: that the infernal warfare should be ceased.”

“You who comprise a large and peaceful nation, who are prosperous, who enjoy so just a government, shall try to cease these quarrels among nations, that the factors of tyranny and oppression shall pass away.”

In Washington almost five months ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had called for a “reciprocal alliance” between the United States of America and the nation of Iran, in front of 600 people at the Carnegie Library on Massachusetts Avenue. “May they become one race,” he had said, “endowed with the same susceptibilities.”



A postcard sent from Niagara Falls by Ahmad Sohrab.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The papers on September 11, 1912, reported similar sentiments: “I praise God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience in Buffalo, “for the means afforded to people of the Orient to come to see the people of the Occident, and make known their love for them. I am hopeful that day by day this love will increase.”

At 5:35 a.m. on September 12, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá departed on the train for Chicago, the first leg of a long western trip that would take him to Minneapolis, Denver, Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska, Salt Lake City, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. He would not return again to New York until November 12, two full months from today.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## “Sometimes I Made Him Laugh”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 13, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ STEPPED DOWN onto the platform at LaSalle Street Station in Chicago just after 8 p.m. on Friday, September 12, 1912. He knew this part of the city well. Seven blocks north of here he had addressed the Federation of Women’s Clubs at the Hotel LaSalle on May 2. Eleven blocks up he had spoken to a standing-room only crowd [at Handel Hall on May 1, to the Fourth Annual Conference of the NAACP](#).



Saichiro Fujita in Haifa in 1920.  
(bahai-library.com)

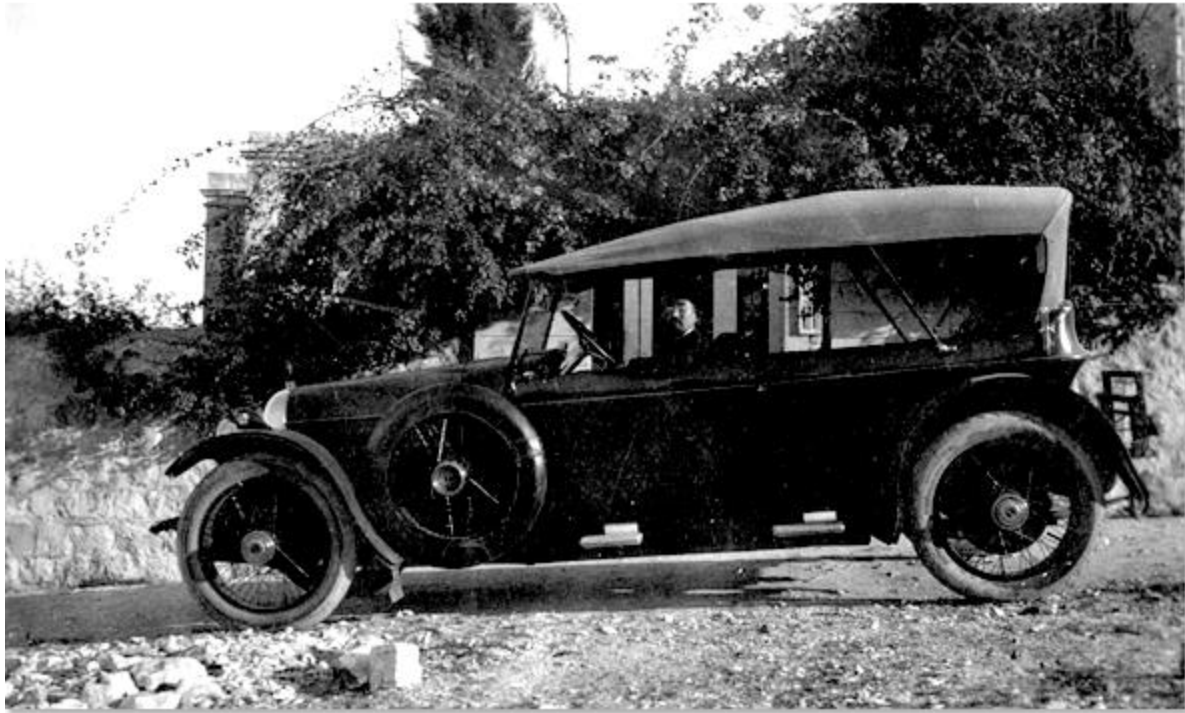
The crowd of well-wishers on the platform parted into two lines to make way for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Come down Zacchaeus,” he called out, “for this day I would sup with thee.” Those who were close enough to hear him turned their attention to a skinny Japanese man dangling above their heads. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus had singled out Zacchaeus, who had climbed the branches of a tree in order to catch a glimpse of him. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed Saichiro Fujita in the same words; Fujita was hanging from a lamp post.

Saichiro Fujita was born in 1886 in Yanai, on the southwestern tip of the large island of Honshu, Japan, thirty miles southwest of Hiroshima. He arrived in Oakland, California, in 1904, to attend school, met some of the city’s Bahá’ís, and soon embraced the religion. Having missed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on his swing through Cleveland in May, 1912, where Fujita then lived, he made sure that



when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá came back to the Midwest in September he had the best vantage point possible.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá waved Fujita down. Then, as he had done [with Louis Gregory in Washington](#) and [Fred Mortensen in Malden](#), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá kept Fujita by his side throughout his stay in the city. When he left for San Francisco, he asked Fujita to come along. Few of the people who saw the two men together knew that they had corresponded since 1906. Fujita had asked if he could come to Palestine to work for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged him to stay in school instead.

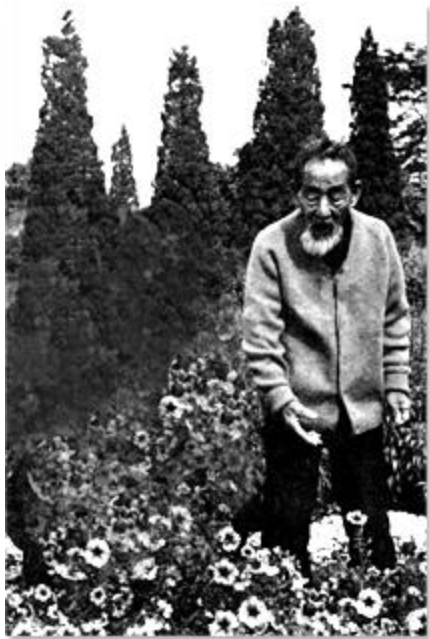


Saichiro Fujita at the wheel of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s automobile, circa 1920. ([bahai-storytelling.blogspot.ca](http://bahai-storytelling.blogspot.ca))

‘Abdu’l-Bahá later arranged for Fujita to live in the home of [Mrs. Corinne True in Chicago](#) for the next seven years. When the Great War ended, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá finally invited him to come to Haifa.

Saichiro Fujita came bearing gifts, or at least escorting one. He arrived with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s automobile, a gift from an American friend. In a 1965 interview, Fujita recalled that the day he first arrived in Palestine. He met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister, Bahiyyíh, was told that he was now part of the family, and that he should make himself at home. He did: Fujita would be buried in Haifa fifty-seven years later, at the age of ninety.





Fujita in the gardens of the House of  
Worship in Wilmette, IL, in 1971.  
(bahaisworldwide.blogspot.ca)

The two men ate breakfast and lunch together almost every day. They developed a routine of practical jokes, including one where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá challenged Fujita to grow a beard like his, then pulled on it every day when it proved Fujita could only generate the merest collection of hairs. Fujita hid ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s cat in retaliation, and it went on from there.

Having stayed in school paid off for Fujita in the ensuing decades. He planted many of the gardens that would eventually cover the Bahá’í properties in and around Haifa; he helped install electrical fixtures in the many buildings. But in the short term ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took advantage of Fujita’s unassuming nature and endearing sense of humor by having him host the pilgrims who came in ever greater numbers once the war was over.

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá was very, very kind to me,” Fujita recalled in 1965. “We had many trips, many jokes.” When asked what he did for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Fujita replied: “I never felt that I could do very much for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> Then, after a pause, he added: “Sometimes I made him laugh.”

DAY 157

SEPTEMBER 14, 1912

CHICAGO, IL

## What's Love Got to Do With It?

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 14, 2012

“LOVE IS FICTION,” an article published in *The Chicago Tribune* on January 28, 1912, stated. “There is no such thing,” it declared. “We talk of love, we read of love, we think of love. Yet we know there really is no love.”



Looking south down State Street from Lake in downtown Chicago, 1907. The second building on the left is the Masonic Temple, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to the Bahá'í Temple Unity convention on May 1, 1912. (Hans Behm/Shorpy)

Edward Burnett Tylor, often credited as being the founder of cultural anthropology, wrote the *Tribune* article. He based his argument on his extensive research into “primitive” societies, which he viewed as the kernels of modern polities. Marriage, he believed, originated as a dowry transaction to deal with surplus cows; he didn't think much had changed.

Love, in its many forms, was something ‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked about throughout his time in America. While it is, perhaps, a word more likely to be found in an anniversary card than in mainstream social discourse, and an easy one to disregard, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set out to redefine it.

## There Is No Such Thing.

Declare These  
Scientific Men  
Who Have Been  
Studying the  
Question.

BY E. B. TYLOR.  
(Author of "Primitive Culture.")

LOVE is fiction. There is no such thing. Most of it is in the story books. The rest of it is in the divorce courts. Love is fiction. We talk of love, we read of love, we think of love. Yet we know there really is no love. History shows us there is no love. Science tells us there is no love. Our own experience tells us there is no love. Read how people make love and marry and you will know 'love' does not exist. Not alone do you find convincing evidence among the barbarians. In France today most of the marriages are arranged by the parents," says science.



*Aaron and Tamara  
From Titus Andronicus*

possession for a woman he goes to one of his neighbors and says: "Well, you've got more girls than you need and I've got some cattle I can afford to part with, so let us make an exchange." He looks the girls over and sees which he thinks is the handsomest, which means the strongest and fattest, and then starts to drive a bargain. The future father-in-law then goes round to the head and investigates the cattle.

\* \* \*

**Cattle Valued More than Women.**

The affair is soon arranged and the modest bride at the end of a week is ready to go to her new home, without any marriage license.

Edward Burnett Tylor's article on the nonexistence of love, January 28, 1912. (Chicago Daily Tribune)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted that love, at its most basic level, is a bond between human beings that begins in the family unit. “Marriage,” his father Bahá’u’lláh had written, is “a fortress for well-being.” The Reverend Howard Colby Ives, whose chronicle of his time with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America spends an entire chapter explaining the Bahá’í teachings on marriage, wrote “the development of the institution of marriage. . . from the promiscuity of the earliest history of mankind to the more or less monogamous ordinance now in vogue. . . have been in direct ratio to the ethical and spiritual development of the race.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Americans that in the current age they had the capacity to extend the love that exists *within* families to ever wider circles of humanity. “A family is a nation in miniature,” he said. “Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá often referred to the bond that must exist between all humanity as “brotherhood.” Yet he warned that if this brotherhood is simply based on material interest, it will amount to nothing. It must be based on a love such that people are willing to sacrifice their lives for one another. True love, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, moves beyond words, and comes from conscious

decisions. He called on people to exhibit a love that isn't simply "the yielding of the hearts to the accidents of life." In other words, love isn't something that simply *happens* to you.



The cheerful-looking English cultural anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor, who was certain love did not exist. (Image sourced from [berakash.blogspot.com](http://berakash.blogspot.com))

Ultimately, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, love originates from a source beyond the human realm. “The very cause of life is the Supreme One’s love,” he told journalists on Tuesday in Buffalo, “for by His grace we move, we see, we hear, we feel, and all phenomena is based on His love. . . .” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s primarily Christian audience would have understood much of his mystical discourse on love in the context of the creative “Word” described in the Gospel of John, where God calls His creation into being. This divine act of creation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, is ultimately an act of love, and that all other forms of love flow from it. Human love must therefore be mediated by the love of God, he said, so “Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in the soul.”

Edward Burnett Tylor argued of love that “Most of it is in the story books. The rest of it is in the divorce courts.” But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá believed that love had the power to transform the reality of human relationships. “Love is the light that guideth in darkness,” he said, “the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul.”

DAY 158

SEPTEMBER 15, 1912

CHICAGO, IL

## Documenting a “Luminous Journey”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 15, 2012

FOR THE PAST FIVE years, Anne Perry and her husband Tim have been working on a feature-length documentary film chronicling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s 1912 journey through the United States and Canada. I recently had the chance to interview Anne about the film.

*RS: Tell me about the genesis of the film.*



Filmmaker Anne Perry. (Perry Productions)

AP: My husband and I were drawn together because of our mutual interest in artistic expression. I’m not sure when the idea was born to do a feature-length film about the journey of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to America, but I know that for decades we have both had a special feeling about the centenary year. In 2007 we went to Washington, DC, for our first location scouting. Then the research and writing phase began. A major challenge was choosing the most essential things to put into the script, which meant shortening the initial eight-hour version down to ninety minutes. We began shooting in June 2011, in Colorado.

*RS: What are your goals for the project?*

AP: To give a sense of what it was like to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912, and of course to celebrate the centenary of a moment in history with astonishing aspects and ramifications. The visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the United States and Canada is part of history — little known, but nonetheless incredibly important. It is larger and more complex than any single story can portray or even



suggest. But we hope we can capture enough to help people understand that it contains inspiration to impel us to live differently.

*RS: I understand that you have logged quite a few miles over the past year.*

AP: We've shot in about twenty locations across North America. The list includes Baltimore; New York; New Jersey; Lake Mohonk; Washington, DC; Green Acre in Eliot, Maine; Dublin, New Hampshire; Boston, Malden, and Brookline in Massachusetts; Philadelphia; Montreal; Chicago; Colorado; and the San Francisco Bay area. We recreated a few locations in Texas and Florida. We've been incredibly blessed with hospitality and assistance.



*A scene from Luminous Journey. (Perry Productions)*

*RS: What stories have you found most compelling?*

AP: One of the most vibrant and beautiful scenes we've shot depicts the banquet honoring African Americans after they were excluded from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's farewell dinner at the Great Northern Hotel by the hotel's proprietor. They are being served by white women at the Kinney home. The scene takes place in New York, but we actually shot it in Berkeley, California. We know from the historical record that it pleased 'Abdu'l-Bahá greatly to have such evidence of unity.



Filming the banquet scene originally held at the Kinney home in New York. (Perry Productions)

A particularly touching moment was the scene with Fred Mortensen, a poor man who had ridden the rods to Green Acre. We were shooting late at night. We had extras in the lobby representing society people, and Fred standing there with dirt on his shirt and hat. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s room, we seated Fred across from where we imagined ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would have been, and focused on Fred’s eyes. At one point, Fred holds out his dirty hat to the camera, and the narrator will describe how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá kissed it. Since the walls and floor are very thin, a guest came up to complain that he couldn’t sleep. We were mortified! But he realized the scene was important. I think that everyone who hears Fred’s story is touched by it.

We shot a scene at the Bowery Mission in New York that came about in an unexpected way. After some confusion over the Bowery address, we found ourselves giving a gentleman named James a ride from the corporate headquarters of the Bowery, to the Bowery itself. James was one of the mission’s trustees, and soon every door was opened to us. He arranged for us to shoot inside the chapel and to meet the Chaplain, who gives three services a day there. It was quite a profound sensation — we truly felt and could imagine the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Juliet Thompson, the journalist Kate Carew, and the impoverished men that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to in that narrow chapel.

*RS: Have there been any unexpected moments?*





The chapel at the Bowery Mission in New York.  
(Perry Productions)

AP: At the White mansion in Brookline, Massachusetts, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke, a caretaker came out and told us that he had been keeping the grounds beautiful because he knew the Bahá’ís would want to come back sometime to hold a commemoration. He even pointed out to us where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood.

*RS: What are the various roles you and your husband play?*

AP: Tim and I are co-producing. Tim’s directing and editing, and was responsible for most of the cinematography. I wrote the script along with Gary Lindberg, have acted in a few roles, and worked with Laurie Eley on the costume design.

*Interviewer’s Note: Anne shared with me a vast list of the film’s entire cast and crew — nearly two-hundred in all. Her incredible level of thankfulness towards each one of them was really quite poignant. While there isn’t room to include their names, I’ve provided a link to the film’s website at the end of this article.*



Filmmaker Tim Perry. (Perry Productions)

*RS: Dare I ask what it's like working on a film for such a long and intense period of time with your spouse?*

AP: Creating a work with one's spouse can be a huge challenge. In many film productions the writer passes on the script to the producer or director, who then does as he/she will with it. In our case, we are co-producers. I am the kind of writer who wants to make collaborative decisions, where Tim simply wants to re-arrange and cut without consultation! And of course there are times we are at odds over what to depict, which music to use, and so forth.

But it truly does represent the fruit of our lives. It is a true product of our marriage, and something that neither of us could do without the other.

For more information on the film visit: [www.LuminousJourney.org](http://www.LuminousJourney.org)

159 SEPTEMBER 16, 1912

KENOSHA, WI

## September 16, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 16, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ IS SPENDING the weekend in Kenosha in southern Wisconsin after being invited to visit there last week.



Looking east up the Chicago River from Rush Street Bridge, 1905. (Detroit Publishing Company)

In the week ahead: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returns to Chicago. We’ll take a look at the city’s vibrant newspapers. He will then ride the train northwest to Minneapolis and St. Paul where he will stay for two days and deliver two landmark talks on moral progress and what “Divinity” means. Then on Friday, he will continue his journey west across the wheat fields of Nebraska, and visit the home of William Jennings Bryan in Lincoln, Nebraska.

DAY 160

SEPTEMBER 17, 1912

CHICAGO, IL

## Following the Example of America

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on September 17, 2012

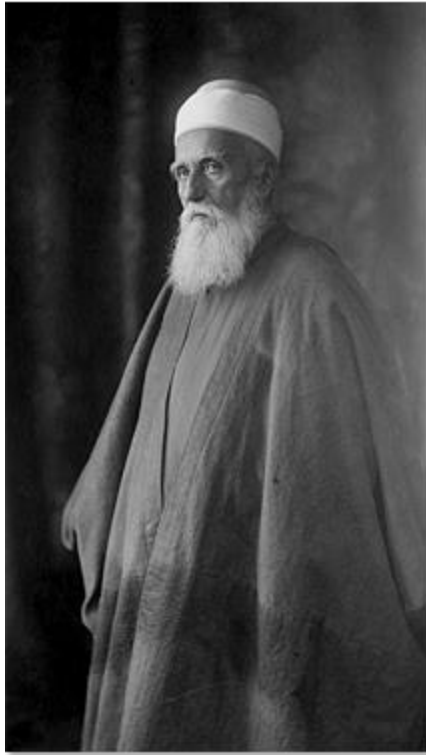
“THE PEOPLE OF THIS land enjoy many blessings,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a reporter from *The Independent*, a popular national weekly newspaper. In 1908 *The Independent*, published from Boston, had printed [William English Walling’s account of the Springfield Race Riot](#). On July 19, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat for his interview: it appeared in print on Chicago’s newsstands during the week of September 12, 1912.



“In spite of the lofty position ascribed to him by his followers,” the editor wrote, “his interest in ordinary human affairs is keen. He was dressed in flowing robes and turban, which accorded well with his square cut grey beard. His blue eyes are frank, lively and humorous, his figure of medium height [*sic*] and slight, but erect and graceful in spite of his sixty-eight years.”

“I am very pleased with America and its people,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “I find religion, high ideals, broad sympathy with humanity, benevolence and kindness widespread here, and my hope is that America will lead in the movement for universal peace.”

*THE INDEPENDENT*: “Is peace always desirable?”



Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ: Undoubtedly it is. What is best in a family — peace or strife? Every good man will answer that family peace is best. So it is also with a nation, and so it is also with the whole world. In the United States of America forty-eight countries or States are gathered, living in peace with each other, and their enlightenment, happiness, progress and civilization serve as a model and inspiration to all men. It was not always so. . . . The States support, love and are proud of one another, and what America has done, the rest of the world can do, following the example of America.

*THE INDEPENDENT: But would it be practical for a country to lay down its arms and submit itself to the will of its neighbors — would not such a country be robbed and abused?*

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ: Assuredly it is not practical for a single country to disarm and trust the other nations to do justice for the sake of justice. Universal peace must be brought about by means of agreement among the great powers. They must assemble in convention, represented by their best and wisest men, and they must bind themselves by the strongest pledges and promises not to make war. Each should maintain an army and navy, but very small, merely enough to enforce order in its own territory.

*THE INDEPENDENT: Do not nations degenerate in peace?*

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ: No. Again I refer to the example of America, which has prospered, grown strong and enlightened in peace and because of peace. I was in Africa and found warring tribes

and much degradation. From there I went to Switzerland, and found peace with high enlightenment, intelligence, justice and respect for the rights of fellow men. There can be no question as to the blessings of peace.



Randolph Street east from LaSalle, downtown Chicago.  
September 1, 1900. (Detroit Publishing Company)

But nature is full of war. Beasts, birds, reptiles, insects, rob and destroy each other. Surely; there is much in nature that seems not good. But man has mind and soul. He has knowledge of good and evil, and his relation to God and duty to his fellows. . . . There are many things in nature that seem evil, as the venomous serpent and the scorpion, but we who are men must choose the good.

*THE INDEPENDENT: What is good?*

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: That which bestows or preserves life and happiness is good. That which destroys life and happiness is evil.

“The people of this land enjoy many blessings,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “Day by day they are advancing and progressing, their fortunes are in their own hands, their patriotism is strong, they enjoy freedom in a superlative degree. . . . In a hemisphere they are supreme, and as kindness is

their natural disposition, the world will expect them to bear the banner of the peace movement.”



SEPTEMBER 18, 1912  
CHICAGO, IL

## The Century of Motion

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 18, 2012

“THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked, “are not content to stand still.” From the moment he arrived in the United States, on April 11, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has called attention to the nation’s relentless technological innovation, its commerce and material development, and its commitment to progressive social ideals. He has even noted America’s passion for modern modes of transportation, a passion he seems to share.



Inside the Chicago & North Western Railway station, from where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá departed Chicago for Minneapolis and the West. (Detroit Publishing Company)

At 10 a.m. on the morning of September 18, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left the Chicago & North Western Railway station in the busiest rail hub on the planet, and embarked on a four hundred

mile train ride west to Minneapolis. It would be the first stop in a two-week journey that would take him nearly two thousand miles to the edge of Pacific Ocean in the state of California.

For a man who had spent the majority of his life in a state of captivity, the relentless travel was both exhilarating and exhausting. “Steam power is truly a wonderful thing,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said onboard the *Cedric* as he crossed the Atlantic. “It is impossible to sit in a train every day from morning until afternoon,” he noted, on the ride from Buffalo to Chicago, “the body cannot stand it.”



The service garage of the R.L. Taylor Motor Co, a Ford dealer in Washington, DC, in 1923. (National Photo Co.)

For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, however, modern transport was not simply an efficient means of travel, but proof of the higher faculties of humankind. “Man is not the captive of nature,” he repeatedly told audiences, then proceeded to speak of planes, trains, ships, and submarines to make his point. “The power of steam has linked the continents,” he said in <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> Boston on May 25. “Trains cross the deserts and pierce the barriers of mountains; ships find unerring pathways upon the trackless oceans.” He even invoked modern communication devices in service of his argument. “According to his natural power man should be able to communicate a limited distance,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted in New York on April 15, “but by overcoming the restrictions of nature he can annihilate space and send telephone messages thousands of miles.”

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, science and technology were reshaping civilization at an alarming pace. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá believed that for all the incredible progress that had taken place in the material realm, it was “time for man to strive and put forth his greatest efforts in spiritual directions.” “Material civilization alone,” he said, “will not satisfy.”



Switchboards of the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. in Washington, DC, about 1919. (Harris & Ewing)

“If the life of man be confined to this physical, material outlook,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá commented, “the animal’s life is a hundred times better, easier and more productive of comfort and contentment.” Again he invoked transportation, this time to more somber effect: “Man, restless and dissatisfied, runs from morn till eve, sailing the seas, diving beneath them in submarines, flying aloft in airplanes, delving into the lowest strata of the earth to obtain his livelihood — all with the greatest difficulty, anxiety and unrest.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that technology and innovation must serve a higher purpose. To a crowd at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the nation’s capital on April 23 he asked: “How shall we utilize these gifts and expend these bounties?” His answer: “By directing our efforts toward the unification of the human race.” He considered modern forms of transportation and communication as essential in facilitating this unification. Things, quite simply, needed to keep moving.

“Motion is life,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told an audience of Unitarian ministers in Boston on May 24. “This is the century of motion.”

SEPTEMBER 19, 1912  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN

## **Minneapolis, Flour Power, and the Ideal Virtues of Man**

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 19, 2012  
25

THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER rushed over the half-circled ledges of layered limestone and sandstone, pouring forward on its long journey toward America's south. St. Anthony Falls was the focal point of a city that was the world leader in flour milling: Minneapolis, Minnesota. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at the industrial center on September 20, 1912. He talked about the need for moral progress in addition to the material progress so evident in America.

“If we review history,” he told his audience, “we will observe that human advancement has been greatest in the development of material virtues. Civilization is the sign and evidence of this progression.”



**The milling district surrounding St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis, circa 1910. (Hillcrest-Books-Paper)**

Civilization in Minneapolis had been built on St. Anthony Falls, the only major natural waterfall on the Upper Mississippi River. Early on, the white settlers of the Minnesota Territory harnessed the power of the falls for industrial use. They built a dam — shaped like a “V” to divert water on either side of the river — and power mills along its banks. First came the sawmills, chewing through the logs of white pine that had floated down from the forests up north. During the 1870’s, the flour mills began to take over. Minneapolis soon became known as “The Flour Milling Capital of the World,” passing Budapest as the world’s leading processor of grain in 1897; by 1900 its mills produced over fourteen percent of America’s flour. The wheat came in by way of rail lines across the Northern Plains, was processed in Minneapolis, then shipped out to destinations in the Eastern United States for export and domestic distribution.

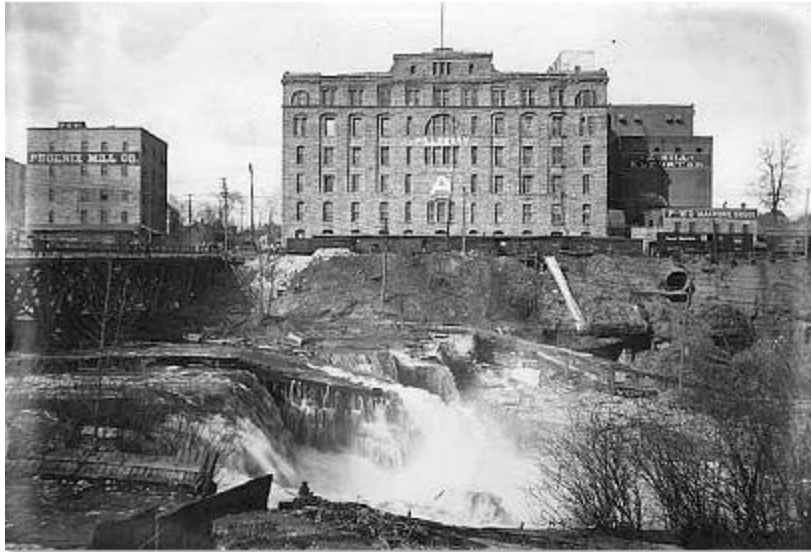


Mill workers sacking and weighing flour in Minnesota.  
(Underwood & Underwood)

“Throughout the world,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in Minneapolis, “material civilization has attained truly wonderful heights and degrees of efficiency — that is to say, the outward powers and virtues of man have greatly developed, but the inner and ideal virtues have been correspondingly delayed and neglected.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s audience in Minnesota could see the material power he discussed all around them, stemming from the unceasing march of the water that drove their mills.

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set out across America in 1912, Minnesota’s flour industry was reaching its peak. Culture and sophistication had followed. “Minneapolis has built for herself a social fabric that is in every way creditable to the high standard of Western civilization,” *Harper’s Weekly* had observed in 1890.

But today ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued for more. “It is now the time in the history of the world,” he asserted, “for us to strive and give an impetus to the advancement and development of inner forces — that is to say, we must arise to service in the world of morality, for human morals are in need of readjustment.” “[T]he minds of men,” he said, had to “increase in power and become keener in perception . . . so that the ideal virtues may appear.”



Pillsbury 'A' Mill and Phoenix Mill above St. Anthony Falls, Minneapolis, circa 1905.  
(Wikimedia)

Minneapolis's milling industry started to collapse after 1916. Steam power, and then electricity, surmounted the advantage which the water power of St. Anthony Falls had given Minnesota. Wheat fields along the Red River Valley exhausted themselves from repetitive planting. Farmers on the southern plains developed a new brand of winter wheat, which could be processed closer to the source in Kansas City. Finally, the Interstate Commerce Commission ruled that flour was a manufactured product, which should be shipped at a higher rate. This meant that it now made better economic sense to send unprocessed grain further east along the iron rails to be processed closer to market. Soon Buffalo supplanted Minneapolis as America's flour capital.

'Abdu'l-Bahá had begun his talk in Minnesota with a statement of intent. "There are many meetings in the world," he said, "thousands of them perhaps being held at this very moment, mostly for social, political, scientific or commercial purposes; but our gathering here tonight is for God, for heavenly purposes." If spiritual advancement was to occur, it necessitated its own structures, its own enterprises. The ideal virtues that 'Abdu'l-Bahá discussed, which included "insight," "memory," "the power of love," and the "ability to prove the existence of God," would strengthen as these societal structures gradually emerged.



DAY 163

SEPTEMBER 20, 1912  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN

## Thinking for Yourself

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 20, 2012

“IF YOU SHOULD ASK a thousand persons, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience, ‘What are the proofs of the reality of Divinity?’ perhaps not one would be able to answer.”

On September 20, 1912, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at the home of Albert Hall, a lawyer known for his defense of the poor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked a number of rhetorical questions about spiritual reality: “What proofs have you regarding the essence of God?” he asked; “How do you explain inspiration and revelation?”; “What are the evidences of conscious intelligence beyond the material universe?”; “Can you suggest a plan and method for the betterment of human moralities?”; “Can you clearly define and differentiate the world of nature and the world of Divinity?” It is not hard to imagine, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had said on September 20, that “you would receive very little real knowledge and enlightenment upon these questions” if you asked them.



'Abdu'l-Bahá in St Paul, Minneapolis. Albert Hall is standing on the far right, with Fred Mortensen next to him. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Abdu'l-Bahá went on to discuss several reasons for this. One was that the “development of the ideal virtues has been neglected.” People do not investigate such matters for themselves, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá argued; instead, they rely on the superstitions and traditions of the past to provide them with an understanding of spiritual concepts. The average American might have more to say about the weather than about the questions that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá posed.

Still, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá thought that the ability to talk about spiritual reality was a prerequisite for the appearance of the “ideal virtues” of humanity. In other words, it could help us to become better people. Yet discussing spiritual reality involved logic. “[W]e must be able to prove Divinity,” he told those in Minneapolis, “from the standpoint of reason so that no doubt or objection may remain for the rationalist.”



Robert Street in St. Paul, Minneapolis, circa 1908. Dentists are in abundance. ([www.shorpy.com](http://www.shorpy.com))

The symbols that humans create to represent Divinity, through repeated use, had replaced the broader concepts they were supposed to represent. “Divinity is not what is set forth in dogmas and sermons of the church,” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá argued. “Ordinarily when the word Divinity is mentioned, it is associated in the minds of the hearers with certain formulas and doctrines,” he noted. But the real “intellectual proofs of Divinity” were not based on tradition. Those in his company were challenged to use their powers of observation to logically prove “the reality of Divinity,” “the effulgence of mercy,” and “the certainty of inspiration and immortality of the spirit.”

Instead of uncritically following the traditions and opinions of others, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the use of reason to investigate reality. “We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is,” he noted. “If a man’s father was a Christian, he himself is a Christian; a Buddhist is the son of a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian of a Zoroastrian.” “This is absolute imitation,” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá

emphasized. “The requirement in this day is that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of reality.”



How could the question that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá initially posed be answered? “In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “nay, rather, we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and then only the reality of things will be revealed to us.”

DAY 164

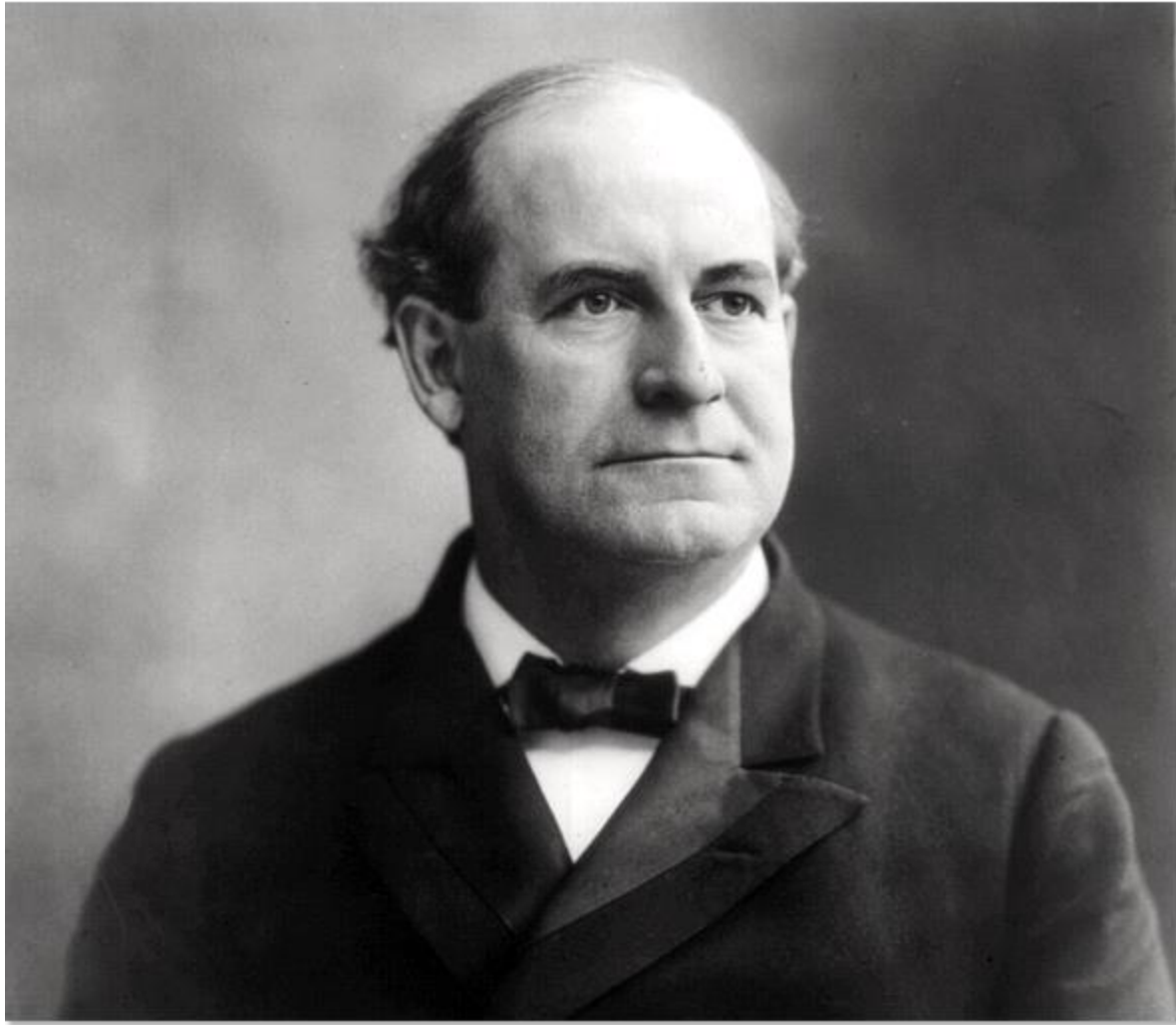
SEPTEMBER 21, 1912

LINCOLN, NE

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Calls On “The Great Commoner”

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on September 21, 2012

THE GRITTY CRUNCH of the dirt road gave way to a rhythmic humming from the smooth bricks that paved the long driveway. Their tiny vibrations traveled along the axles of the rented automobile, through its iron chassis, and into the seat cushion on which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat. Trees lined the drive on either side, and at the top of the hill a mansion made of soft-toned red brick looked down across rolling countryside to the thickly wooded valley of nearby Antelope Creek. *Fairview*, the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Jennings Bryan, stood three miles south of Lincoln, Nebraska. It was the afternoon of Monday, September 23, 1912.



"The Great Commoner." William Jennings Bryan about 1908, two years after he visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (Library of Congress)

'Abdu'l-Bahá had taken the train from Omaha to Lincoln, the capital of the state, to return the courtesy of Bryan's visit to 'Akká six and a half years earlier. "We called on Abbas Effendi as we were leaving Palestine," Bryan had written from Vienna on June 5, 1906, in an article for the *Chicago Daily News*. He was traveling the lands of the Ottoman Empire, and had stopped to visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá who was still a prisoner in 'Akká.

## TOUR WITH W. J. BRYAN

Turkey, Its Pomp, Its Despotic  
Ruler and Teachings of  
Mohammedanism.

WHEN ABDUL HAMID PRAYS

Low Stratum of Faithful—Women Are  
Prisoners—Effendi, a Reformer  
—Official Crimes.

BY WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN.

Special Correspondence of The Chicago Daily News.

Vienna, June 5.—I was unable to crowd into the last article all of our experiences in the land of the Turk, so I devoted it to Constantinople, leaving to this paper the discussion of the sultan, his religion and his government.

The headline from William Jennings Bryan's article on his trip to Palestine, in the Chicago Daily News, 25 Aug 1906. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“The Great Commoner,” as William Jennings Bryan was known at home in America, had not been impressed with Sultan ‘Abdu’l-Hamíd II and the bureaucracy he ran. “The government of the sultan is the worst on earth,” he wrote. “It is more despotic than the Russian government ever was and adds corruption to despotism. . . . [T]he sultan still rules by his arbitrary will, taking life or granting favor according to his pleasure. He lives in constant fear of assassination and yet he does not seem to have learned that his own happiness, as well as justice to the people, demands that the government shall rest upon the will of the governed.”

He found ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whose teachings he likened to Tolstoy’s minus the strict pacifism, to be a welcome voice of reform. “How much he may be able to do in the way of eliminating the objectionable features of Mohammedanism no one can say,” Bryan thought, “but it is a hopeful sign that there is . . . an organized effort to raise the plane of discussion from brute force to an appeal to intelligence.”



Fairview, before the porch was enclosed. (Nebraska State Historical Society)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s car pulled up in front of the house.

Its design, Queen Anne combined with Classical Revival, sported a slate roof with protruding gables and dormer windows, cornices decorated with wooden saw-work, a tower with a bell-cast pyramid roof, and an enclosed reception room that had once been a windswept porch. Mrs. Bryan hurried toward the car to welcome her visitors, but her husband at that moment was 1300 miles away. Ever since returning in August from a vacation in the mountains with his wife, Bryan had spoken every day for seven weeks on the campaign trail for Woodrow Wilson. This week he had campaigned from the back of his train through the western states, speaking during short stops in towns like Bozeman, Montana; Pocatello, Idaho; and Ogden, Nevada.





A Los Angeles Times sketch of William Jennings Bryan speaking in Fiesta Park on September 23, 1912. (Los Angeles Times)

Bryan arrived in Los Angeles at 7 a.m. on the 23rd, spoke twice in the morning, and then, not long before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s car rode up the brick-paved driveway in Lincoln, he rose to address “the greatest outdoor political meeting that Los Angeles has ever known.” There, at Fiesta Park, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, the Great Commoner held an audience of 25,000 people spellbound with his “wonderful voice” and “magnetic eloquence” for more than two hours.

“The President has more power in his hand than any King, or Czar, or Emperor,” Bryan said at the close of his speech. Although he had taken a political side in this campaign — for Woodrow Wilson and against Roosevelt — some of what William Jennings Bryan said in Los Angeles about the moral qualifications for the Presidency resonated with much of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had argued about the responsibilities of those who held elective office. “[W]hen a frail human being is elevated to this supreme pinnacle of power,” Bryan declared, “he should tear from his breast every shred of ambition, and on his bended knees consecrate his term to his country’s service with no selfish purpose to blind his eyes or pervert his judgment. That is our idea of the Presidency.”



Mr. Bryan's study at Fairview, Lincoln, NE. (Nebraska State Historical Society)

After having tea with Mrs. Bryan and her daughter, inspecting the library and Mr. Bryan's study, and noting the large white head of a mountain goat that hung from one of *Fairview's* walls, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a prayer in Persian for the Bryans, in the Great Commoner's autograph book:

"O Lord!" he wrote. "Confirm this distinguished person in the greatest service to the human world, which is the unity of all mankind, that he may attain to Thy good pleasure in this world and obtain a bounteous portion from the surging ocean of Divine outpourings in this luminous age."

DAY 165

SEPTEMBER 22, 1912

LINCOLN, NE

## 150 Years of the Emancipation Proclamation

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 22, 2012

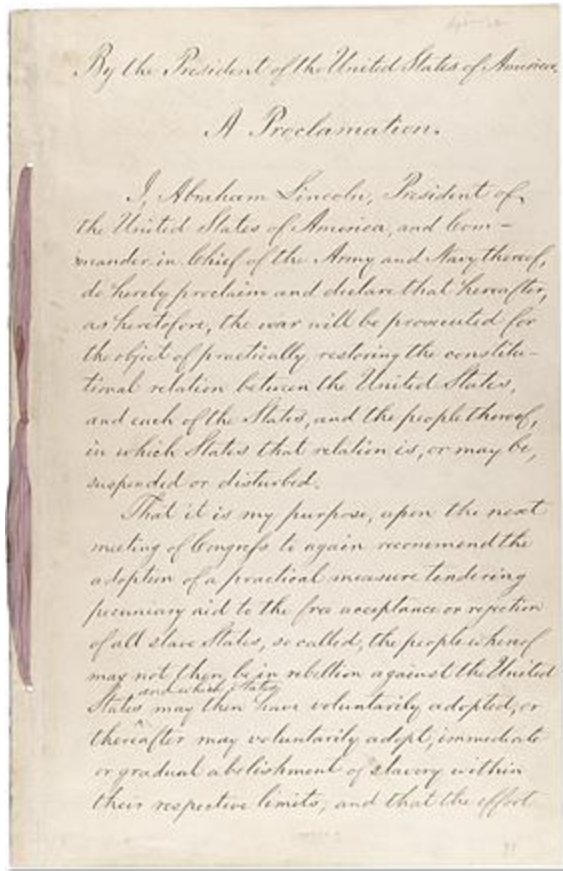
ABRAHAM LINCOLN SIGNED the emancipation proclamation on September 22, 1862. When it came into effect on January 1, 1863, more than three million of the four million slaves in the United States of America were freed. Fifty years later, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá entered the capital city of the state of Nebraska, which had been named after the Great Emancipator in 1867, celebrations were breaking out in African American communities across the country.



Thomas Nast's 1865 illustration of the "Emancipation of the Negroes," depicting scenes in African Americans' struggle for freedom. (Harper's Weekly)

They began at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, where [‘Abdu’l-Bahá had challenged racial imagery on April 23](#). A “song jubilee” preceded an address by the new president of Howard University, Dr. Stephen Newman, on “Fifty Years of Freedom.” The observance, *The Chicago Defender* wrote, “shall stand as a model of a dignified,

constructive and inspiring recognition of a day that means everything to the 12,000,000 Negroes on this continent.”



The preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, first page, issued by President Lincoln on September 22, 1862. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Ten days earlier, readers of *The Independent* had seen ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assessment of the moral courage that it had taken for white Americans to go to war to free the slaves. “Never in all the annals of the world do we find such an instance of national self-sacrifice as was displayed here during the Civil War,” he said. “Americans who had never seen a weapon used in anger left their homes and peaceful pursuits, took up arms, bore utmost hardships, braved utmost dangers, gave up all they held dear, and finally their lives, in order that slaves might be free.” In his interview, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called attention to the talk he had given at Howard University, America’s leading black university. “I told them that they must be very good to the white race of America,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “that they must never forget to be grateful and thankful.” Likewise, “The white people must treat those whom they have freed with justness and firmness, but also with perfect love.”

Sixteen years later, in 1938, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s grandson, Shoghi Effendi, elaborated on the mutual demands that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on race placed on both the black and the white citizens



of America. “Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other,” he wrote in a letter to the Bahá’ís in the United States.

“Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem,” Shoghi Effendi told them, “to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds.”



**A black man reads a newspaper by candlelight.**  
Watercolor by Henry Louis Stephens, circa 1863. The headline reads: "Presidential Proclamation, Slavery."  
(Library of Congress)

On the other hand, Shoghi Effendi wrote, “Let the Negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds.”

“Let neither think,” he emphasized, “that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility, consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and

prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country.”

Read President Lincoln’s [Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation](#), issued on September 22, 1862 — 150 years ago today.

DAY 166

SEPTEMBER 23, 1912

LINCOLN, NE

## September 23, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 23, 2012

DURING THE PAST week, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá traveled from Chicago to Minneapolis, then continued westward to Omaha, Nebraska, and finally to nearby Lincoln, where he visited the family of William Jennings Bryan.



A train stop in Wilber, Nebraska, circa 1910. ([nebraskahistory.org](http://nebraskahistory.org))

In the week ahead: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrives in Denver, Colorado, where he addresses the congregation at the Divine Science Church, a center of the New Thought Movement. While in Denver, news reaches him of a much-anticipated marriage that has taken place in New York City. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then continues his trip west, making stops in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and Salt Lake City, Utah.



DAY 167

SEPTEMBER 24, 1912

DENVER, CO

## The World Is Thinking of War

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 24, 2012

“THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD are thinking of warfare,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told an audience in Denver, Colorado, on September 24, 1912, “you must be peacemakers.” Two days earlier, in Omaha, Nebraska, news reached ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of the impending conflict in the Balkan Peninsula. By the time he arrived in Colorado, the front pages of every newspaper in the country were trumpeting that the tensions in the Balkans were about to escalate.



The Greek fleet at Phaleron Bay prepares to head to the Balkan War on October 18, 1912. (Wikimedia)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had lamented Italy’s invasion of Tripoli on April 12, 1912, his second day in America. In 1911, Italian troops had landed on the shores of the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, in what is now western Libya. Italy’s victory emboldened the Balkan states in their own military aspirations against the Muslims. During the summer months of 1912, the Christian Balkan states — Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Bulgaria — created the Balkan League, whose mandate was to rid the area of the Ottomans.

On September 22, in Omaha, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had described how a general European war could be averted. North and South American republics should put pressure on European nations,

financiers should refuse to give military loans, railroads should refuse to transport arms. When he arrived in Denver on September 24, he raised the issue of war and peace immediately.



Greek soldiers during the Battle of Sarantaporo, which took place on October 9-10, 1912. (Military Photos)

“We are living in a century of light,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his first Denver audience at the home of Mrs. Sidney E. Roberts at 1751 Sherman Street in downtown Denver. But, he said, “Observe how darkness has overspread the world. In every corner of the earth there is strife, discord and warfare of some kind.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá appears to have taken for granted that the audience at Mrs. Roberts’s knew of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings on the responsibilities of peace. “A man may be a Bahá’í in name only,” he said. “If he is a Bahá’í in reality, his deeds and actions will be decisive proofs of it.” Accounts refer to a gathering so large that it extended to the front door. Nona Brooks, the minister of the Divine Science Church in Denver was in attendance, and invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak to her congregation the following evening.

“Many holy souls in former times longed to witness this century,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Mrs. Roberts’s crowd. He invoked the words of Jesus that “Many are called but few are chosen,” then proceeded to define the nature of being “chosen” not as a position that conferred superior status, but rather as a calling to sacrifice and service. “God has chosen you for the progress and development of humanity,” he said, “for the expression of love toward your fellow creatures and the removal of prejudice; God has chosen you to blend together human hearts and give light to the human world.” In short, he told them, be “occupied with service to all mankind.”



A Turkish cavalry in Constantinople during the Balkan War, October, 1912. (Daily Mirror Collection)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá finished by calling his audience to action: “The nations are self-centered; you must be thoughtful of others rather than yourselves. They are neglectful; you must be mindful. They are asleep; you should be awake and alert.”

The Balkan War broke out two weeks later. It was short and brutal, lasting just eight months. Most of the Ottoman Empire’s remaining European territories were captured and partitioned among the allies. Only then did the Balkan states turn on each other. On June 16, 1913, Bulgaria, disgruntled over the division of Macedonia, attacked its former allies. The small states that lined the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, and clustered among the Balkan mountains, had become a powder keg that would soon bring the rest of Europe to the brink of war.

DAY 168

SEPTEMBER 25, 1912

DENVER, CO

## “The World is a School”

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 25, 2012

“WHEN I ARRIVED in this country,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the congregation at the Divine Science Church in Denver, Colorado, “I realized that American ideals are indeed most praiseworthy. . . .” The nations of Europe were on the verge of war, he noted, driven by prejudice and fanaticism. “You are free from such prejudice,” he added, “for you believe in the oneness and solidarity of the world of humanity.”



“Denver’s Great White Way.” The theatre district along Curtis Street in 1913. (Denver Public Library)

The church that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke in on the evening of September 25, 1912, had a distinctive history. Its founder, Nona Lovell Brooks, was one of the first female pastors in America. She

was also an early proponent of the New Thought movement. While the movement held beliefs that were considered unorthodox by mainstream Christianity — among them spiritual healing and the non-existence of evil — it was more mainstream than some of the groups ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had encountered in America, such as the [Theosophists](#) or the [Free Religionists](#). The congregation in Denver believed that truth came through the Bible, and that Jesus was a guide for human behavior.



Nona L. Brooks, a leader in the New Thought movement and a founder of the Church of Divine Science. (Wikimedia)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived at 8 p.m. in an automobile put at his disposal by the editor of the *Denver Post*. He delivered what was perhaps his most expansive exposition yet on the common foundation of the world’s religions, and the barriers to religious unity.

“The world is a school,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience, “in which there must be Teachers of the Word of God.” It was a deceptively simple metaphor — one that implied not only that humankind was a single body functioning within a single structure of guidance, but that it progressed over time under the direction of successive teachers.

Expanding the metaphor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that these educators brought two types of teachings, “essential” and “accidental,” what he also called “eternal” and “temporal.” The essential teachings, he noted, “seek to stabilize morals, awaken intuitive susceptibilities, reveal

the knowledge of God and inculcate the love of all mankind.” The accidental ones “concern the administration of outer human actions and relations. . . .”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá added that the accidental teachings change “according to exigencies of time, place and condition.” He gave the example of laws concerning theft, divorce, and polygamy in the time of Moses. Jesus later changed these laws, he said, as “minds had developed, realizations were keener and spiritual perceptions had advanced.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that it was adherence to these temporary laws — what he called “blindly following and imitating ancestral forms” — that creates differences between religions “resulting in disunion, strife and hatred.”



The Arch of Welcome on 17th Street, with Union Station behind it, in Denver, Colorado, about 1908. (Denver Public Library)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá questioned whether we can prove the validity of the the divine teachers. “[W]e must discover for a certainty,” he said, “whether They have been real Educators of mankind.”

Once again he raised the example of Moses. “The people of Israel were ignorant, lowly, debased in morals — a race of slaves under burdensome oppression,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted. Yet Moses led them out of captivity. “Through the education of Moses these ignorant people attained an advanced degree of power and prestige, culminating in the glory of the reign of Solomon,” he said. “From the abyss of bereavement and slavery they were uplifted to the highest plane of progress and civilized nationhood.”

“It is evident,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded, “that Moses was an Educator and Teacher.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had opened his talk that evening by praising the American people for their high ideals. He went on to tell the congregation that the ultimate purpose of religion was to bind

people together. He brought the evening to a close by telling them: "My highest hope and desire is that the strongest and most indissoluble bond shall be established between the American nation and the people of the Orient."

"This is my prayer to God," he said.



DAY 169

SEPTEMBER 26, 1912

DENVER, CO

## Drinking Tea with “The Girl from Kansas”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 26, 2012

“THE CONVERSATION OF ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not stop,” the newswoman noted, “even as we drank our Persian tea together.” The pair sat near the window of his room at the Shirley Hotel in Denver, Colorado. He looked out at the “rain flecked leaves of a swaying tree,” she wrote, “and occasionally closed his eyes as though looking into the future for the realization of the message which he believes is finding material ground for fruitage in America.”



Alice Rohe, circa 1920. (Library of Congress)

Those who encountered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on America’s Western frontier were still grappling with their first impressions of him. Among them was Alice Rohe, a thirty-six year old reporter from Lawrence, Kansas. Her interview with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took place on September 24, 1912, and was published the next day in *The Daily News: Denver, Colorado*.

Alice Rohe had met with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for an hour at the Shirley Hotel. She described him as a “patriarch of old — his gray beard falling upon his breast, his white locks surmounted by a white turban, his erect figure draped in the flowing garments of Persia . . .” Yet, she added, “this

statement refers only to the first fleeting impression.” When he speaks, she noted, “the keen dark eyes become afire with the words he utters — the first impression of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá becomes a superficial one.”

Alice Rohe was among the first generation of American women to attend university. She entered Kansas State University in 1892 at the age of sixteen. By the age of twenty-four she was in New York, working as a reporter for the *Evening World*. She was even given her own column — “The Girl From Kansas” — featuring stories of young, professional women navigating the big city. After five years of overwork, she contracted tuberculosis and moved to Colorado Springs to help with the recovery. It was here that she was inspired to travel to nearby Denver to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



Downtown Denver, circa 1917. The Shirley-Savoy Hotel is in the background. (Denver Public Library)

“I was thrilled for an hour by the flow of sonorous words that rolled from the lips of this man of the Orient,” she wrote. Ms. Rohe spoke of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a “man of deep sympathies, who shrinks from the exploitation of his own personality, who wishes to get his message of brotherly love, of unity to all mankind. . . .”

Alice Rohe, who would later become an outspoken supporter of women’s suffrage, was especially interested in what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had to say on gender equality. “The accomplishments of wonderful women in our own times,” he told her, “gives us the keen anticipation of many extraordinary women in the future.” Rohe wrote that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá believed women, “having finer sensibilities, finer intuitive powers, are often man’s superior.”

After overcoming tuberculosis, Alice Rohe's career continued to take off. During World War I, she was the first woman to lead an overseas bureau for a large news agency, the United Press, in Rome. She interviewed the likes of Ezra Pound, the King of Greece, and Queen Marie of Romania. Her Italian connections enabled her to meet with Mussolini early on — she was among the first to predict the Italian leader's rise to power.



The interior of Shirley-Savoy Hotel in Denver, Colorado, circa 1910. (whatwasthere.com)

In addition to his words, the tea Alice shared with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left an impression on her. “[F]or the benefit of the tea drinkers,” she wrote, “until one has sipped this fragrant tea of Persia, served in small glasses poured over two lumps of sugar and stirred with a tiny spoon — on a plate of Persian design — one has never tasted tea.”

DAY 170

SEPTEMBER 27, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## A Forbidden Marriage

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 27, 2012

IT WAS A FALL DAY in New York. A light rain blurred the windows of the parsonage where the wedding was about to take place. Christians, Jews, Bahá'ís, as well as whites and blacks from both England and America were represented in the small group. For the duration of the ceremony, the divides of the world were held at bay.



Louis Gregory and Louise Mathew Gregory in 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The groom was Louis Gregory, a [prominent African-American lawyer](#); the bride, Louise Mathew, a white, educated woman born in England. Their marriage was illegal in twenty-five of America's forty-eight states, and by popular opinion, unacceptable everywhere. The wedding was kept quiet; the guest list few. As the groom put it, "We do not wish any sensational newspaper articles written."

The marriage was initially set in motion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. His intervention was anything but subtle. "Do you love him?" he had asked Louise several months earlier in Chicago. If she did, he told her, then the two should marry. That same day, 'Abdu'l-Bahá informed Mr. Gregory: "[I]t would give me much pleasure if you and Miss Mathew were to marry." Louis reported that after hearing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, he froze and his hands went stone cold. He left 'Abdu'l-Bahá's suite and wandered about the streets of Chicago for two hours before regaining his composure.



Louis Gregory as a young man.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promptings were integral to their union, it was not an arranged marriage. The couple had first met in 1911 in Ramleh, Egypt, where they had travelled to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was here that they had first become friends.

On August 4, 1912, in Dublin, New Hampshire, 'Abdu'l-Bahá [announced in front of an astonished group](#) that Louis and Louise were to be married. On September 27, 1912, the marriage took place in New York, performed by a sympathetic minister in the parsonage of an Episcopal church, since Bahá'í marriages were not yet recognized in the state.

As the couple said their vows, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was halfway across the country, bound for Salt Lake City. A letter he had written to Louis Gregory in 1909 was read during the ceremony: "I hope that thou mayest become the herald of the Kingdom, become the means by which the white and colored people shall close their eyes to racial differences, and behold the reality of humanity." When Louis had first read those words, he had no idea that his personal life would someday become one of the foremost testimonies of his beliefs.



**Louise Mathew as a young woman.**  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The marriage of Louis and Louise was by no means an easy one — even finding a place to live proved difficult. They were discouraged from traveling together by nervous but well-meaning friends. The couple spent long periods apart, since Louis's race amity work took him regularly to the South, where her presence was impossible. During these times there were speculations that they had split, often by those who hoped the marriage would fail. Yet Louis and Louise Gregory remained happily married until his death nearly forty years later. Throughout their lives, Louis once commented, they shared “one spirit, one purpose.

DAY 171

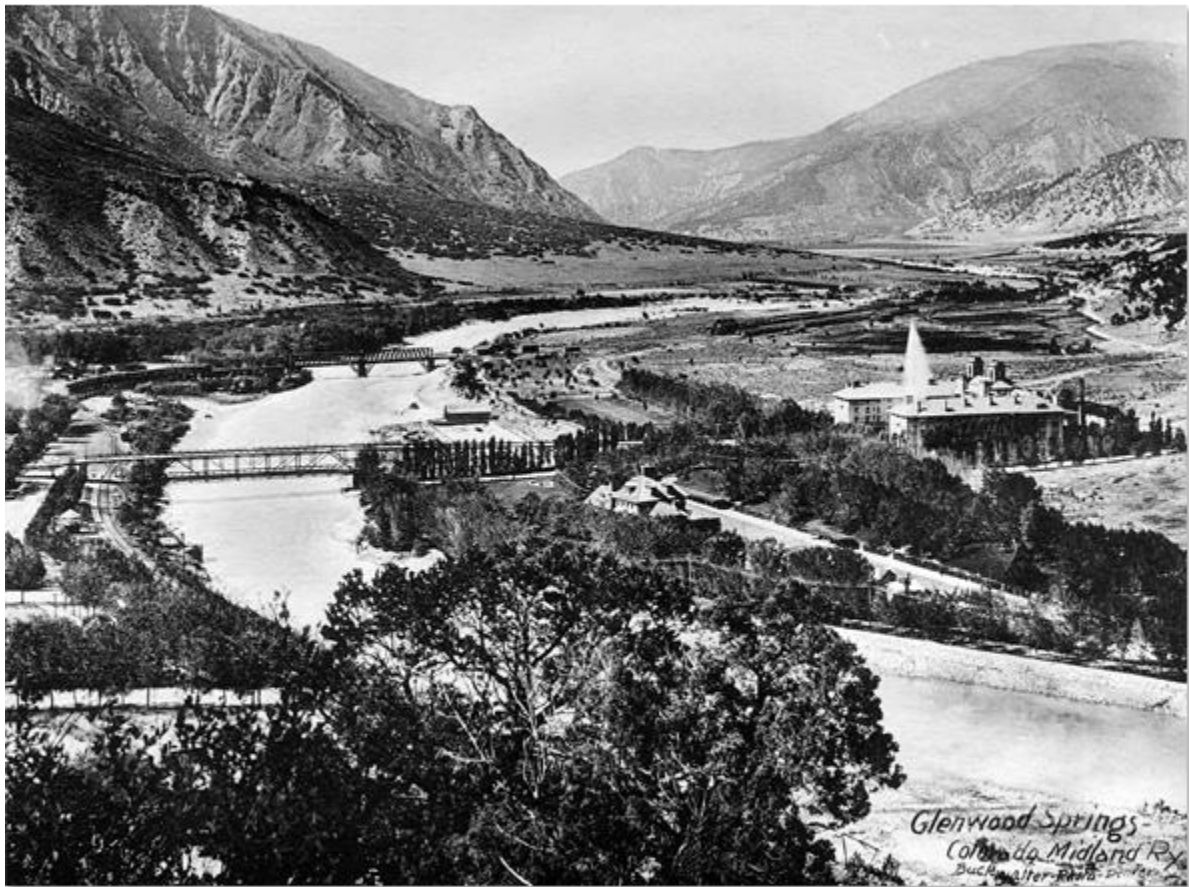
SEPTEMBER 28, 1912

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, CO

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Crosses the Continental Divide

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on September 28, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, AS WAS his usual practice, arose from his bed before dawn at the Shirley Hotel, Broadway and 17th Street, Denver, on Friday, September 27, 1912. He said goodbye to a number of early visitors and then took an automobile — perhaps a carriage — fourteen blocks northwest to the train station.



The town of Glenwood Springs, with the Colorado River in the foreground. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stayed overnight at the Hotel Colorado, with its hot springs, on the right. (Denver Public Library)

A wall of rock still separated ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from the Golden State. In 1912 the advanced technologies of the century of motion had not yet fully subdued the Rocky Mountains; the cliffs due west of Denver were still too steep for the railway to climb. The train that departed Union Station at 9 a.m. that morning, therefore, headed due south, skirted the treed foothills of the



eastern edge of the Front Range, and completed the first leg of its long and winding route to Salt Lake City when it reached Colorado Springs, seventy miles from Denver.

The snow-capped summit of Pikes Peak receded into the distance as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train continued south across the desert toward Pueblo. The town of Pueblo, Colorado, which produced both steel and saddles, bridged not only the Arkansas River, but also the changing transportation technologies of the era. From there the railroad jackknifed right, pulled west around the southern tip of the Front Range, and began to make a slow, 640-foot ascent to Canon City, nestled among the low mountains.



“Royal Gorge, Grand Canyon of the Arkansas,” by William Henry Jackson, circa 1896. (Wikimedia)

The route of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway snaked northwest along the Arkansas River, threaded the needle of Royal Gorge, and then climbed a full mile straight upward toward Leadville, Colorado, the highest incorporated city in the United States, at 10,152 feet. Leadville, founded in 1877, became the center of the Colorado Silver Boom when lode deposits of silver-lead were discovered during the Pikes Peak gold rush. The Wild West came with it; Doc Holliday moved to Leadville shortly after the shootout at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train crossed the Continental Divide just north of Leadville, at a height of 10,845 feet, slowly descended on a northern route toward the Colorado River, banked west near Vail, traversed scenic Glenwood Canyon, and arrived in the town of Glenwood Springs, Colorado, at about 2 a.m. on Saturday, September 28. Glenwood Springs lies just 100 miles west of Denver as the eagle flies, but the roundabout, early-century train route had taken ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his

secretaries seventeen dusty, bumpy hours. By the time they reached Glenwood Springs, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá felt very ill.



Miners taking part in a drilling competition in Leadville, Colorado, about 1901. (Bennett Studio/Denver Public Library)

Instead of continuing on to Salt Lake City, they disembarked in Glenwood Springs and took rooms at the Hotel Colorado, where they spent the next day visiting the hot springs, looking at the shops, roaming the gardens, and breathing the mountain air.

“Today I am relieved of fatigue,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “We have been to many lovely places during this journey but because of our work we had no time to look at the scenery. We did not even think of a moment’s rest. Today, however, we have had a little respite.”

DAY 172

SEPTEMBER 29, 1912  
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

## “The Supreme Psychiatrist”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on September 29, 2012

THE COCKROACHES SCUTTLED as she approached, fleeing the sugary drops that had hardened on the countertop under the soda fountain. Feny E. Paulson had traveled to Salt Lake City all the way from Missoula, Montana — an approximately twenty-four hour journey. She lodged at the Young Women’s Christian Association. Feny noted that she found a dead fly in her German fries, and the chicken wings she ate still wore most of their feathers. But she was not there to be entertained; she had come to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.



The corner of 200 South and Main Street in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1909. (Utah State Historical Society)

Meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had its own logistical complications. A telegram had been sent to Ms. Paulson, informing her of the date of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival. But it failed to mention what railroad he would be arriving on. “Hence I spent most of my second day making the streetcar circuit,” Feny wrote in her diary, “station to station, reading schedules of train arrivals.”

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá finally arrived in Salt Lake City at 2 p.m. on September 29, 1912, on the Grand Central R.R., Feny was there to greet him. “It was an oriental picture in an occidental setting,” she wrote of the scene. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had arrived with his retinue of companions, including a young Japanese man, [Saichiro Fujita](#).



A postcard of the Kenyon Hotel in Salt Lake City, Utah, circa 1910. (Card Cow)

Two days later, Ms. Paulson received the phone call she had been hoping for — an invitation for a personal meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She met him in a reception room he had rented at the Kenyon Hotel, on the corner of 200 South and Main Street. He had moved here from the more expensive Salt Lake City Hotel shortly after his arrival in the city. As she entered the room, Feny noticed the roll-top desk and chairs lined against the walls. She later wrote in her diary for any future readers to see: “Recall my mentioning the dirty hall at the Y.W.C.A. and the battle I had with food?” As their meeting began, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá announced: “Luxury and comfort are not the all-important things in this life.” He later sat her down and served her tea, saying: “This is the Lord’s Supper you are having with Me.”

Ms. Paulson’s diary doesn’t relate all the details of her meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but it seems the encounter moved her deeply. Feny had never known her own father, and this troubled her. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, she wrote, told her he was her spiritual father. He quietly whispered a prayer for her, and gave her a locket as a gift. She wrote of the encounter: “Incidents forgotten and hidden in the recesses of one’s being, in His presence, are in a flash perceived and unobtrusively aired. . . .” Near the end of her diary entry, she adds: “‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the Supreme Psychiatrist.”

DAY 173

SEPTEMBER 30, 1912  
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

## September 30, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on September 30, 2012

DURING THE PAST WEEK, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spent three days in Denver, Colorado, before continuing his train ride westward. After spending the night at the Hotel Colorado in Glenwood Springs, amidst the spectacular mountain scenery and natural hot springs, he arrived in Salt Lake City at 2 p.m. yesterday. Today, he is attending the National Irrigation Congress at the Mormon Tabernacle, where he has been invited to sit on the speakers’ platform.



The Salt Lake Fire Department, Station No. 1 poses for a photograph on May 22, 1912. (Signature Book Library)

In the week ahead: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá travels to San Francisco. During the train ride, he writes an extensive letter to Agnes Parsons, addressing a wide range of economic issues. We’ll take a close look at the contents of this letter. We’ll also paint a portrait of San Francisco in 1912, and cover

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s meeting with the Mayor of Berkeley.

DAY 174

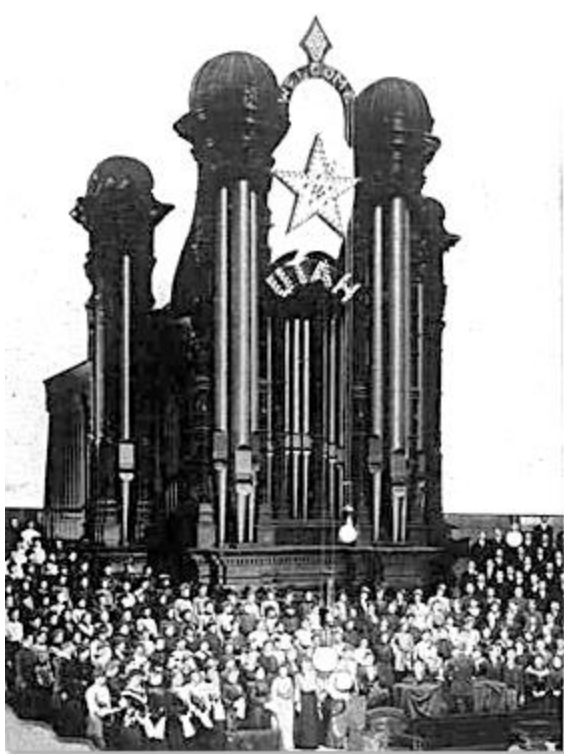
OCTOBER 1, 1912

SALT LAKE CITY, UT

## The Biggest Week in the History of Salt Lake City

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 1, 2012

A FLICKERING SWARM of bees circled the hive many storeys above ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s head. They were fashioned from light bulbs whose filaments blinked as if to suggest busyness. The illuminated hive formed the heart of the blazing Star of Utah — symbols of a state that had boldly reduced its motto to a single word: “Industry.” It was the centerpiece of a massive pipe organ, draped in American flags, which bellowed forth the Grand March from Verdi’s opera, *Aida*.



The organ in the Mormon Tabernacle with the Star of Utah and the beehive at its center, circa 1896. (ilovehistory.utah.gov)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá gazed out at 12,000 spectators as Lucile Francke, dressed as the Queen of Irrigation and Empress of the Valley, climbed the stage of the Mormon Tabernacle and mounted her throne on the uppermost tier of the platform. At 10 a.m. on September 30, 1912, she gave the order for the proceedings of the twentieth annual convention of the National Irrigation Congress to begin.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had arrived in the city the day before. The streets were decked with patriotic regalia, and overflowed with visitors. The annual State Fair was also occurring that week, side by side with the convention of the Irrigation Congress. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had planned a short stopover in Salt Lake City on his way to California, but decided to extend his stay. Shortly after his arrival he received an invitation to sit on the stage as an honorary guest the following morning.

The Mormon Tabernacle, a long domed space shaped like a longhouse, lay next to the Mormon Temple in Temple Square. Its ceiling was painted white like a planetarium, as if to evoke the desert sky; the seats beneath it had begun to fill at 9 a.m. The convention was no small event, with 1,000 official delegates from throughout the United States, and more than 11,000 visitors. The President of the Irrigation Congress, Francis G. Newlands, a United States Senator from Nevada, noted that the event’s focus was the creation of a national policy for the regulation of waterways. The American states west of the Mississippi had started a series of massive irrigation



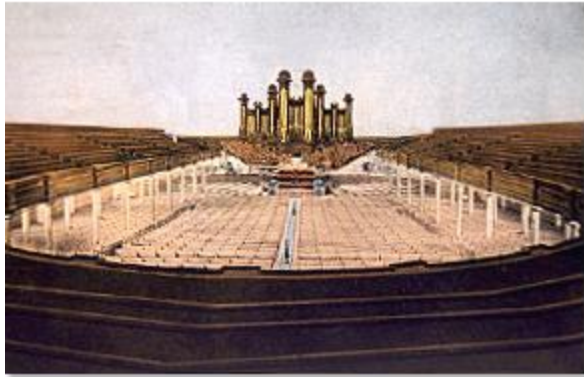
projects a decade earlier, designed to bring rural prosperity to otherwise barren land. In their scope and complexity they rivaled the Panama Canal. By 1912 they were nearing completion.



The Mormon Temple grounds in Salt Lake City, photograph by L. Hollard in 1912. The Mormon Tabernacle is the long, low building with the dark domed roof. (Library of Congress)

“It is with joy and pleasure that we gaze upon the fruitful fields scattered over these bountiful valleys,” the Queen announced. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá listened as she dedicated the week to the “workers in this great field of endeavor, who are driving back the desolation of the desert; to you who with your brains and hands have transformed these waste spaces into smiling gardens.”

Governor Spry of Utah took the podium and noted that Salt Lake City had been the first to introduce modern irrigation in America. “You have come to the place where irrigation has been, and is yet the mightiest factor in our civilization,” he said. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá looked on as the city’s mayor, Samuel C. Park, spoke of the mutual interests of all those present. “The irrigation system of a community may be likened to the circulatory system of the individual,” he noted. “It is the blood of our commercial and industrial development.” “Take it away and we have got to move,” he added, “Waste it and our children will have to go.”



A postcard of the interior of the Mormon Tabernacle, circa 1910. (Vintage Postcards)

As the opening ceremonies came to a close, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wandered out into the pavilions at the State Fair. There were segments devoted to produce and livestock, mining and manufacturing, and a circus-like midway that featured horse racing, parachuting, and a high-wire act.

Later that evening, he attended the “Electrical Pageant,” a parade through the downtown core, its floats festooned with thousands of electrical bulbs. The windows of every building “were black dots of humanity” *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported. It was a grand display of American industriousness, of rural and urban cooperation, and of the growing economic interdependence of a nation.

So began the “BIGGEST WEEK IN THE HISTORY OF SALT LAKE CITY,” the *Tribune* declared the next morning.

**DAY 175**

**OCTOBER 2, 1912**

**EN ROUTE TO CALIFORNIA**

## **Economics Begins with the Farmer**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 2, 2012

IN 1912 AMERICA, the long process of twentieth-century urbanization was just beginning. In spite of the rapid growth of urban industries — the garment factories of the East Coast, the automobile manufacturing plants in Detroit, the steelworks of Pennsylvania and Indiana — most Americans still lived and worked on farms. Such rural vitality was on dazzling display during the National Irrigation Congress in Salt Lake City.



A threshing crew in western Kansas, circa 1900-1919. (Kansas Historical Society)

After spending the day on September 30, 1912, attending the opening convention at the Mormon Tabernacle in Temple Square, visiting the State Fair, and watching the bright lights of the electrical parade that evening, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá departed Salt Lake City on October 1 at 2:50 p.m. for the final leg of his long train journey to San Francisco. The train steamed forty miles north to stop in Ogden, Utah, then headed due west over the briny waters of Great Salt Lake on the Lucin Cutoff Railroad Trestle, a fifty-one mile long shortcut built across the middle of the lake in 1904.



A poster for the annual agricultural fair in Troy, Kansas, 1889. (Kansas Historical Association)

Throughout his trip in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken in general terms about the economic issues that plagued the nation’s growing industrial society: widespread poverty, industrial slavery, the need to avoid coerced equality, and the missing moral principles — such as generosity and service — that were required to balance competing interests. But in Montreal on September 3, to a meeting of Socialists, he had laid out economic prescriptions in more detail. As the train sped toward San Francisco on October 2 and 3, he wrote to clarify his position to Agnes Parsons. “My explanation,” he told her, “has been mis-reported in the papers.”

Unlike the presidential candidates, whose arguments began with the macro-economic debates of national industrial growth and international trade, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá placed farming at the center of the discussion. “The question of economics must commence with the farmer,” he wrote, “and therefrom reach and end with the other classes . . . for the farmer is the first active agent in the body politic.” A self-sustaining rural economy, he seemed to say, must underlie a sound national one.



A wheat farmer in Russell County, Kansas, among his crop of winter wheat in the fall of 1912. (Kansas Historical Society)

In 1912 the primary source of government revenue was the protective tariff: a tax levied on foreign goods at the national level in order to protect American industries. What to do with the tariff was the most important issue in the presidential election. But at the local level ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identified seven sources of income for the local treasury, perhaps the largest of which was a set percentage of the harvest and one-third of the value of all mining activities, presumably including oil. He also proposed a tax on personal net income after necessary living expenses were deducted.

Out of this balanced income, the local treasury would be responsible for funding education, the infirm, and the department of public health. It would also use its funds to supplement the incomes of the poor. Anyone whose income could not meet “his absolute needs essentially necessary for his liv[e]lihood . . . provided he has not failed in effort and exertion,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “must be helped from the General Storehouse that he may not remain in need and may live in ease.” Any excess revenues remaining locally after these expenditures were made, would be forwarded to the national treasury.



The wife of a Texas tenant farmer in the Panhandle, 1937.  
Photo by Dorothea Lange. (Library of Congress)

“When such a system is established,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Mrs. Parsons, “each individual member of the body politic will live in the utmost comfort and happiness.” And, as he had explained to the Socialists in Montreal, such a mechanism on the local level would retain differing levels of wealth in each community. Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá opposed legislated equality, the Montreal *Daily Star* reported on September 4, “all had the right to share in the general well-being.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s bottom-up approach to a self-sustaining rural economy, and his emphasis on its priority in each nation’s economic health, counters much of twentieth-century development thought. It was only in 2007 that the urban population of the planet surpassed the rural. The urban bias of development thinking around the world over the past half-century has impoverished rural communities, drained resources from agriculture, reduced the status of farmers and their political power, and driven the destruction of the global environment.

DAY 176

OCTOBER 3, 1912

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Reaches the City by the Bay

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 3, 2012

NOT UNTIL 1930 would they build bridges to span the gulf between the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay and the resurrected city that gave it its name. The iron ribbons therefore terminated in Oakland, emptying passengers who had chugged west across the continent into ferry boats for the final ply across the water to their docks. From there they would walk along the wharf, and down a long corridor, and step out onto The Embarcadero to be met.



Pier One, the Eureka Ferry boat, and the Ferry Building, in San Francisco, 1910. (SFimages.com)

“Slowly the hours seemed to pass,” Dr. Frederick D’Evelyn wrote many years later. “Eventide came, and with it, disconcerting reports of delay. . . . [T]elegrams to railway headquarters brought the discomfoting news that [the] schedule time had been abandoned, and no time of arrival was hazarded.”



‘Abdu’l-Bahá had departed Salt Lake City at 2:50 p.m. on October 1. After crossing Great Salt Lake he and his party had missed their train connection in Montello, Nevada, causing a delay of many hours. Now it was the middle of the night on October 2. In San Francisco, at 1815 California Street, near Lafayette Park, Dr. D’Evelyn waited impatiently for the visitors to arrive. Just after midnight he received a telegram, telling the friends who were with him not to wait. “Send only one friend to depot,” it read.

“Securing two taxis we left for the Ferry,” he wrote. They drove east down the dim sleeping streets toward the terminal, which lay along the waterfront at the northeastern end of Market Street. “Arriving there we ascertained the sections may possibly arrive about 1:30 a.m. The night deepened, the Ferry was deserted. The lights of the city waned to a minimum. The ever dimly lighted corridor became still darker and still more gloomy and lonely.”



Ferries departing the terminal at the end of Market Street in San Francisco, 1912. (San Francisco Public Library)

Finally, at 1:40 a.m. a siren acknowledged the approach of the ferry. “Some minutes later,” D’Evelyn continues, “the slide at the end of the corridor was upraised. A few, very few emerged. They reached the street, still no evidence of the Master.”

“What, if he was not there?” Other than D’Evelyn and the two taxi drivers he had brought with him, only a night patrol man and a porter in a red cap occupied the corridor. He asked the porter if all the passengers had disembarked. The porter said no. “Still hoping, we ventured to enquire — were there any unusual looking people on board?”

“Yes, he replied, there is a very old gentleman with strange dress and several other strangers with Him.”

“Once again we hoped and centred our gaze upon the far end of the corridor. Some minutes later Abdul Baha appeared, walking slowly, calmly, majestically, followed by his secretaries.” “Abdu’l-Bahá had departed Buffalo on his train trip west at 5:35 a.m. on September 12. Twenty-one long days later, “in the weird moments between two and three in the morning,”

D'Evelyn noted, "the white turban of Abdul-Baha at last issued from the long exit at the ferry . . . and the welcome of his eyes eliminated all the weary hours of hope delayed." "Forgetful of boundary lines," Frederick D'Evelyn recalled, "we advanced to meet him. He drew near more rapidly and with outstretched arms he embraced us, uttering a salutation followed by the English words — 'Very good; very Good.'"

DAY 177

OCTOBER 4, 1912

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## America's Unique Geopolitical Position

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 4, 2012

“MY GREATEST HAPPINESS this morning is this,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a reporter from the *San Francisco Chronicle* on October 3, 1912, “That I have come to such a modern and progressive city. Praise be to God everything is beautiful and there seems to be much joy here.”



Before the earthquake: Market Street in San Francisco circa 1905, the main retail center of the city. The Palace Hotel, where Caruso stayed, is the second building up on the left. It was destroyed in the fires. (Photo sourced from [www.sfimages.com](http://www.sfimages.com). Hand-tinted by Bennett Hall. All Rights Reserved.)

It was morning in San Francisco in more ways than one. Much of the modern, progressive city ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw around him in the morning light was, in fact, brand new, having risen from the smoking rubble of a catastrophic earthquake six years earlier. At 5:12 a.m. on Thursday, April 18 1906, the Pacific and North American tectonic plates shifted fifteen feet along the San Andreas Fault. For forty seconds in San Francisco hell roamed the streets.

The tenor Enrico Caruso was asleep in his bed on the fifth floor of the Palace Hotel on Market Street when the shaking began. “I wake up about 5 o’clock,” he wrote in 1906, “feeling my bed rocking as though I am in a ship on the ocean . . . I see the buildings toppling over, big pieces of masonry falling, and from the street below I hear the cries and screams of men and women and children.”



The buildings along Market Street, gutted by fire after the quake. Eighty percent of the city was destroyed. (Library of Congress)

The earthquake, followed by the fires that raged out of control for several days afterward, razed eighty percent of San Francisco, but not the old mansions here in the neighborhood of Pacific Heights, where visitors crowded around ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on his first morning in San Francisco.

The house he rented at 1815 California Street, a three-storey Italianate Victorian mansion, was made of stone and light-colored brick, and seated itself at the northwest corner of an almost square property just a block up the steep hill from Van Ness Avenue. Nine marble steps rose to the front door beneath the overhang of an arcade porch supported by Ionic columns and decorated with pots of flowers. The main floor comprised a single large hall — standing room only every morning and afternoon — which was cordoned off into separate spaces by heavy velvet curtains.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá received guests on the second floor. From his corner room he could gaze out over the descending cobblestone streets to his right, past the sandy-colored Mission Revival church at the corner of California and Franklin, and then into a wide panorama of the city that sparkled at night.

The *Chronicle* reporter showed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a copy of his newspaper, which carried accounts of the lead-up to war in the Balkans. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked if actual hostilities had begun, and then asked: “Will the *Chronicle* take a message from me to the American people?”

Yes, the reporter replied, and then began to scribble. “The United States has in reality made extraordinary progress,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “[T]hey are not engaged in warfare with any nation.”



The mansion at 1815 California Street, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s home base in San Francisco. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

Such independence from petty international squabbles made America unique among the Great Powers. “First, the nations are rivals with each other so far as commercial advantages are concerned. Second, they are thinking of national self-aggrandizement. Third, they are thinking of planting new colonies. Therefore, it is difficult for them to step into this field, to uphold international peace, because they are contending, warlike, victory-loving people.”

On the other hand, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted, “[T]he American democracy is not founded upon warlike doctrines. Hence it becomes this democracy to uphold international peace and spread it throughout the world.” But he was advocating more than diplomatic niceties. America, he said, had the ability to use its moral suasion and industrial power to forge an international court of arbitration backed by a binding global collective security agreement that could banish international war. “In case any Government or nation should prove rebellious concerning any decision of the court,” he told the *Chronicle*, “the other nations should coalesce to force it into obedience.”

“A more fervent hope and a fonder desire concerning the American people,” he concluded, “is that their instrumentality shall be such as to enlarge the scope of this scheme and that earnest concerted action from the nations of the world will result therefrom.”

DAY 178

OCTOBER 7, 1912

OAKLAND, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Addresses a Persecuted Minority

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 5, 2012

THREE LANGUAGES, from three corners of the Earth, reverberated in rapid succession off the walls shortly after 8 p.m. on Monday, October 7, 1912. The sonorous Persian of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá started the rhythm. Fluid English followed from the tongue of Dr. Ameen Fareed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpreter. As each string of Fareed’s words fell silent, the Reverend Kunio Kodahira intoned the same sentence in Japanese for his congregation’s ears at the Japanese Independent Church at 552 Sycamore Street in Oakland, California.



The ferry “San Francisco” pulling up to the Key Route Pier at the Oakland Mole, Oakland California, circa 1920. Sourced from [www.worldwidearchive.com](http://www.worldwidearchive.com). Sepia toning by Bennett Hall. All Rights Reserved.

In 1912 Americans were conflicted about how they felt about increasing numbers of Japanese immigrants in their midst. Like everyone else in the world, they had been astonished by Japan’s crushing victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904. When President Roosevelt invited the warring sides to settle their differences in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1905, he chose the small city partly to avoid the rampant anti-Oriental racism of Boston or New York.

But since Japanese families were disembarking — or swimming — onto California’s shores at the rate of 1,000 per month, anti-Japanese prejudice was on the rise in San Francisco. After the 1906 earthquake, the San Francisco School Board had moved quickly to segregate the ninety-three Japanese students in their elementary schools. Every Japanese child on the West coast, Roosevelt biographer Edmund Morris writes, “would now learn what it was like to be a black



child in Alabama.” In the spring of 1907, President Roosevelt was exasperated to hear that anti-immigrant riots had broken out in San Francisco, conducted by mobs of workmen fearing competition from low-cost Japanese laborers.



“The Yellow Peril” from Puck, March 23, 1904. Blazing Japan, wrapped in modern values, treads Medievalism underfoot while pronouncing judgment against the a tyrannical Russian soldier. The image represents both positive and negative aspects of Americans’ views of Japan’s rising power during the Russo-Japanese War. (Library of Congress)

Five years later at the Japanese Independent Church, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rose to speak to an audience comprised of a persecuted minority, something he had, by now, done many times in the United States. “I feel a keen sense of joy being present among you this evening,” he began, summoning almost exactly the same words as he had used back on April 23, in front of the black audience at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, DC. “It is for some time that I have entertained a special desire to meet some of the friends from Japan, for, as I have often observed, the Japanese nation has achieved extraordinary progress in a short space of time — such progress, such achievements, have astonished the world.”

“I am face to face with a revered group of the Japanese,” he told the congregation, “and from the accounts which have reached mine ears the Japanese nation, as a nation, is not prejudiced.”





Downtown Oakland, California, before the 1906 earthquake destroyed Old City Hall, center. (Oakland Public Library)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already tried to counter the racism he witnessed against the Japanese in America. The first target had been Saichiro Fujita, the student whom he had asked to accompany him on his trek westward to the Golden State. In Glenwood Springs, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s party of six arrived for dinner in the Hotel Colorado’s restaurant to find only five places set for them. “Well,” the waiter said, “he is your servant,” indicating Mr. Fujita. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as he had done in Washington with Louis Gregory, had another place-setting brought to the table. Once they arrived in San Francisco, a newspaper listed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretaries by name; Fujita, again, was merely listed as “a Japanese servant.”

“Any kind of prejudice,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasized to Reverend Kodahira’s congregation, “is destructive to the body-politic. When we refer to history, we shall observe that from the inception of human existence unto this day of ours, every warfare or battle which has taken place, every form of sedition which has occurred, has been due to this sort of prejudice.”

“Thus may religious prejudice, racial prejudice, political prejudice, patriotic prejudice, partisanship, sectarianism, all cease amongst man.”

DAY 179

OCTOBER 6, 1912

OP-ED

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ayn Rand, and the Poor

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 6, 2012

AYN RAND, the libertarian philosopher and novelist, has enjoyed enormous press coverage this past year. For those of you who haven’t encountered Ms. Rand, her corpus of fiction and non-fiction works, published in the mid-twentieth century, are a triumphant celebration of capitalism, of heroic class competition, and of individuals emboldened by an unapologetic commitment to selfishness.

Rand’s 1957 novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, grabbed the bulk of the coverage. It imagines an era when the world’s “productive” people go on strike, withdrawing their services from an ungrateful society. The novel’s social vision rests on a binary opposition between “producers” who generate wealth and “moochers” who feed off them. It also contains a sixty-page-long social darwinist fantasy — a speech by John Galt, the novel’s protagonist — which argues that making life hard for the poor is good for them.



**"Philip Sowa, Polish Boy, Doffer at Shoe Mill." Photograph by Lewis Hine, June 20, 1916. Hine used his camera as a tool for social reform, focusing on poverty and child labor. (National Archives)**

The novel's resurgence this year was prompted by a budget resolution introduced in the House of Representatives, which included deep cuts to programs that aid the poor. The budget triggered a series of letters from the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, including one to the sponsor of the resolution, himself a Catholic. "In short," the letter concluded, "your budget appears to reflect the values of your favorite philosopher, Ayn Rand, rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Jesus, of course, had been very clear regarding the treatment of the poor: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a young man, his father wrote a series of letters to the world's political and religious leaders. He called them to account for their treatment of the powerless. "Fear the sighs of the poor," he wrote to Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, ruler of the Ottoman Empire, "and of the upright in heart who, at every break of day, bewail their plight." The poor, Bahá'u'lláh stated, "are thy treasures on earth. It behoveth thee, therefore, to safeguard thy treasures from the

assaults of them who wish to rob thee. Inquire into their affairs, and ascertain, every year, nay every month, their condition, and be not of them that are careless of their duty.”

In America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke regularly of the means of alleviating poverty. Legislation must protect the poor, he said, and work to limit extremes of poverty and wealth. But more essential, he argued, was a change in people’s hearts — something that would demonstrate itself through material generosity and sacrifice. Moreover, he called on people to *associate* with the poor. It was something he had spent a great portion of his life doing.

When Myron Phelps — one of the first Americans to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá — visited the prison city of ‘Akká in 1902, he told of a street scene that unfolded beneath his window. A group of men and women wearing tattered garments had gathered. “Many of these men are blind,” Phelps wrote, “many more are pale, emaciated, or aged. Some are on crutches; some are so feeble that they can barely walk. Most of the women are closely veiled, but enough are uncovered to cause us well to believe that, if the veils were lifted, more pain and misery would be seen.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá emerged and approached them. “He knows them all,” Phelps wrote. “He caresses them with his hand on the face, on the shoulders, on the head. Some he stops and questions.” For those too proud to be seen, Phelps added, “he sends bread secretly.”

On April 19, his ninth day in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited the Bowery Mission in New York, a homeless shelter for men. “Tonight I am very happy, for I have come here to meet my friends,” he told them. “I consider you my relatives, my companions; and I am your comrade.” Then he asked them to accept him, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as their servant.

DAY 180

OCTOBER 7, 1912

BERKELEY, CA

## October 7, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 7, 2012

IN THE PAST WEEK, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá attended the annual convention of the National Irrigation Congress in Salt Lake City, then made the final leg of his long train journey to the west coast. He arrived in San Francisco in the early morning hours of October 3, 1912, and was interviewed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* later that morning.



Union Square in San Francisco, 1910. (Round the World Picture Co.)

The next five days stand out as the most eventful of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s entire trip to America. He addresses 2,000 at Leland Stanford Junior University in Palo Alto, speaks on evolution at the Open Forum in San Francisco, and is welcomed to the Temple Emanu-El by its chief Rabbi, Dr. Martin Meyer, where he delivers his longest talk in America. He then prepares to visit Phoebe Hearst’s 1,900 acre estate, the Hacienda del Pozo de Verona, just outside of San Francisco in Pleasanton.

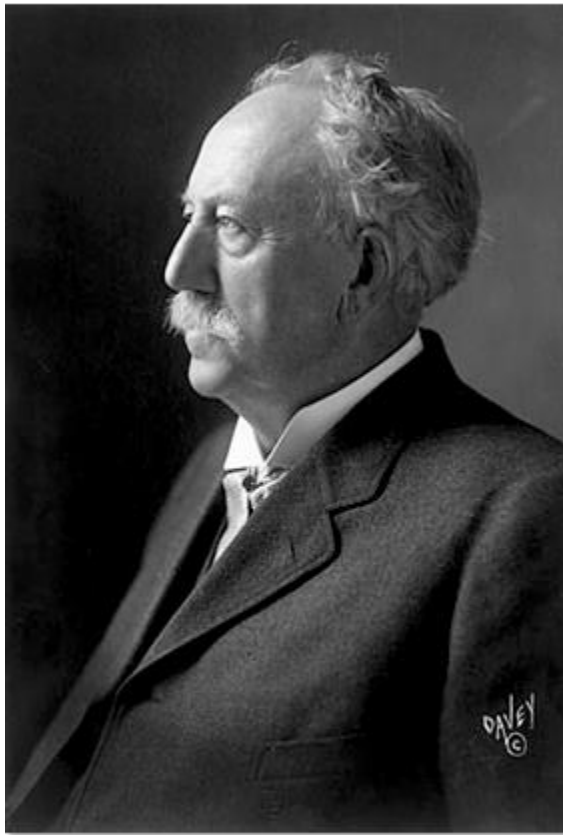
DAY 181

CTOBER 8, 1912  
PALO ALTO, CA

## A Most Extraordinary Day

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 8, 2012

DR. DAVID STARR JORDAN, the President of Stanford University, arrived at the train station in Palo Alto, California, to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá not long after 9 a.m. on Tuesday, October 8, 1912. Last Thursday, just a few hours after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had arrived in San Francisco, Jordan had been one of the first to call on him. He invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to address his student body at 10:15 this morning.



Dr. David Starr Jordan, the first President of Stanford University. (Stanford University)

Dr. Jordan, now sixty-two years old, had served as the university’s president since 1891 when the institution opened. Leland Stanford, Jr., an only child, had died of typhoid fever two months shy of his sixteenth birthday while on a trip to Europe in 1884. His parents — the tycoon, Senator, and former Governor Leland Stanford and his wife Jane Elizabeth Lathrop — founded the university in his memory. “The children of California shall be our children,” Leland Stanford said.

'Abdu'l-Bahá left San Francisco early. He usually traveled with secretaries and a few other companions, but today an entourage of twenty-nine persons crowded into the train cabins for the commute south along the western shore of San Francisco Bay, through the lands that would later become known as Silicon Valley. From the Palo Alto station, 'Abdu'l-Bahá rode in Jordan's car up the long driveways to the Mission Revival buildings of Stanford's Main Quad, which appeared on approach as a long low row of orange and red, stretched out above a lawn of green.

The large auditorium was filled to capacity with 1,800 students and 180 faculty and staff. Jordan mounted the stage with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and began his words of introduction.

“It is our portion to have with us . . . one of the great religious teachers of the world, one of the natural successors of the old Hebrew prophets,” Jordan began. “He is said sometimes to be the founder of a new religion. . . . It is not exactly a new religion, however. The religion of brotherhood, or goodwill, of friendship between men and nations — that is as old as good thinking and good living may be. It may be said in some sense to be the oldest of religions.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá with his secretaries and a journalist from the Stanford student newspaper at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, October 8, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)



Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “Inasmuch as the fundamental principle of the teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity,” he stated, “I will speak to you upon the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena.” It was a theme he had presented many times in America, but at Stanford, he would approach it from a scientific perspective.

“It is evident that each material organism is an aggregate expression of single and simple elements,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued, “and a given cellular element or atom has its coursings or journeyings through various and myriad stages of life.” He summarized: “From the fellowship and commingling of the elemental atoms, life results.”

But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument wasn’t simply designed to explain the intrinsic oneness of material phenomena. The “myriad stages of life” — mineral, vegetable, animal, and so on — were progressive, culminating in the human being. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s purpose was to distinguish man from animal. “God has created man lofty and noble,” he said, “made him a dominant factor in creation.” While nature was about the “law of the survival of the fittest,” he said, humankind is designed to rise above it and demonstrate its intrinsic oneness. The alternative, he noted, is war. “It is my hope that you who are students in this university may never be called upon to fight for the dust of earth.”



After the meeting, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went with Dr. Jordan on a tour of the campus; met thirty boys from the Montezuma School who had walked five miles from their school in Los Gatos and ridden thirty more on the train to meet him; stood giving an interview to a student reporter in the blazing sun on the wide, open driveway in front of the Quad; accompanied Jordan to Xasmin House, his home, for lunch and a rest; and then arrived in the president’s car at 4:30 p.m. for his next call of the day at the Waverley Street home of Mrs. Frederick Marriott, whose mother, Mrs. Isabel Merriman, had invited him for tea.

For the next three and a half hours ‘Abdu’l-Bahá conversed with visitors including Professor Gray of Stanford and Reverend Clarence Reed, at whose Unitarian Church ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was scheduled to speak at 8 p.m. Given the name of the church, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá again spoke on unity. In return for the glorious bounties of God, he said, “[w]e must all become unified as one family. We must all become as one people. . . . We must all become as *one* nation.”

Dinner was served back at the house by Mrs. Merriman at 9 p.m., and then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked with Mr. H. W. Simkins, the editor of *The Palo Altan*, the local newspaper, an interview that went late into the night. When Mrs. Merriman suggested to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that he would miss his train for the return trip to San Francisco, he replied: “Then we will stay the night.”

Mrs. Merriman had to quickly figure out how to find twenty-nine people places to sleep.

Tabletops turned into beds, mattresses appeared in bathtubs. Mrs. Merriman, herself, slept in a clothes closet. “Thus ended,” historian Robert Stockman writes, “what may have been the most extraordinary day in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s North American tour.”

*In tomorrow’s feature, full coverage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s landmark speech at Stanford University.*

DAY 182

OCTOBER 8, 1912

PALO ALTO, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Speaks at Stanford University

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 9, 2012

“THE HIGHEST PRAISE is due to men who devote their energies to science,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “and the noblest center is a center wherein the sciences and arts are taught and studied.” He wouldn’t have heard many complaints from the audience he was addressing on the morning of Tuesday, October 8, 1912 — two thousand students and faculty of Stanford University.



Two thousand students and faculty listened to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak at the Assembly Hall at Leland Stanford Junior University on Tuesday, October 8, 1912. (Stanford University)

They had filled the Assembly Hall just before 10 a.m. and now, at about 10:25, they looked up at the stage from the rows of wooden seats arcing across the floor of the auditorium, and down upon it from behind the filigreed balustrade of the balcony that ringed the space in a semicircle. They awaited the “venerable prophet, with his long gray beard and Persian cloak and turban,” The Palo Altan, a local newspaper observed.

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set out to establish for this educated audience a scientific foundation for peace, there could hardly have been a better embodiment of the combination than the man who had introduced him, and who now sat listening nearby. In addition to being one of the original trustees of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dr. David Starr Jordan, the President of Stanford University, was America’s leading authority on ichthyology, the branch of zoology that deals with the study of fish. It has been said that every practicing ichthyologist in the world today can trace his or her professional ancestry back to Jordan’s work and training.



Dr. David Starr Jordan at Stanford. (Stanford University)

But unlike many natural scientists, who often drew descriptive models of human social interaction from zoology, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned instead to the atomic model in physics for his argument. “From the fellowship and commingling of the elemental atoms,” he said, “life results. In their harmony and blending there is ever newness of existence. It is radiance, completeness; it is consummation; it is life itself. Just now the physical energies and natural forces which come under our immediate observation are all at peace.”

Ever since Herbert Spencer had coined the phrase “the survival of the fittest” in 1864, social scientists had used it to craft a normative intellectual basis that defined animalistic aggression as intrinsic to human nature. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá now set out to refute that approach. “If the animals are savage and ferocious,” he told his audience, “it is simply a means for their subsistence and preservation. They are deprived of that degree of intellect which can reason and discriminate between right and wrong, justice and injustice; they are justified in their actions and not responsible.”



Front page of The Palo Alto, the local newspaper, on Friday, November 1, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

On the other hand, humankind possessed a unique capacity for abstract thought, scientific advancement and technological ingenuity, which meant that, “When man is ferocious and cruel toward his fellowman, it is not for subsistence or safety. His motive is selfish advantage and willful wrong.” His point: “From every real standpoint there must and should be peace among all nations.”

Having made his delicate scientific argument, the demeanor of ‘Abdul-Bahá’s words suddenly changed. He turned to a verbal attack on the “delusions” that led to war, and on the tyrants who supported them. “[T]orrents of precious blood are spilled in defense of these imaginary divisions of our one human habitation, under the delusion of a fancied and limited patriotism.”

“These boundary lines and artificial barriers have been created by despots and conquerors who sought to attain dominion over mankind, thereby engendering patriotic feeling and rousing selfish devotion to merely local standards of government. As a rule they themselves enjoyed luxuries in palaces, surrounded by conditions of ease and affluence, while armies of soldiers, civilians and tillers of the soil fought and died at their command upon the field of battle, shedding their innocent blood for a delusion such as ‘we are Germans,’ ‘our enemies are

French,' etc., when, in reality, all are humankind, all belong to the one family and posterity of Adam, the original father.”



The lush green countryside of Europe during the Great War.  
(thesun.co.uk)

“We live upon this earth for a few days and then rest beneath it forever,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared, as his words rose to a climax. “Shall man fight for the tomb which devours him, for his eternal sepulcher? What ignorance could be greater than this? To fight over his grave, to kill another for his grave! What heedlessness! What a delusion!”

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá swept a final gaze upon the young faces in the Assembly Hall, many of whom would soon roam the fields of Flanders under a firestorm of bullets and clouds of poison gas, he concluded: “It is my hope that you who are students in this university may never be called upon to fight for the dust of earth which is the tomb and sepulcher of all mankind.”

Sometime later, Dr. David Starr Jordan was asked for his impressions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “He will surely unite the East and the West,” Jordan replied, “for he walks the mystic way with practical feet.”



DAY 183

OCTOBER 10, 1912

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far: Month Six

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 10, 2012

WE HAVE REACHED the end of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sixth month in North America. Let’s look back at some of the highlights of the past thirty days.



A postcard of the Music Stand in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, 1910. (The O. Newman Co.)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá left Chicago on September 18, 1912, for the first leg of a nearly two thousand mile trek to California. Joining his entourage was a university student, [Saichiro Fujita](#), whom we met five days earlier when the young man dangled from a lamp post. The group began its arduous journey across the nation, passing through Minneapolis and Omaha, before paying a visit to the home of the [“Great Commoner”](#) — William Jennings Bryan — in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Having reached Denver, Colorado, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke at Nona Lovell Brooks’s Divine Science Church, a center of the New Thought movement, which we discussed in [“The World is a School”](#). He also spent an hour with journalist Alice Rohe in [Drinking Tea with “The Girl from Kansas”](#). As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued on to Salt Lake City, [the interracial marriage of Louise Mathew and Louis Gregory](#) took place in New York — a marriage he had helped set in motion.



On Day 171, in [‘Abdul’-Bahá Crosses the Continental Divide](#), we traced his seventeen-hour train voyage from Denver to Glenwood Springs, where he visited the hot springs and took in the fresh mountain air. On September 29, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reached the capital of Utah during [The Biggest Week in the History of Salt Lake City](#). He witnessed a bold display of American industriousness, and on the train ride to San Francisco two days later was inspired to write a letter to Agnes Parsons in [Economic Begins with the Farmer](#).

Arriving in San Francisco on October 3, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked a reporter to take a message to the American people. [America’s Unique Geopolitical Position](#) covered the resulting article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

October 8, 1912, was [A Most Extraordinary Day](#) — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to an audience of two thousand in Palo Alto in the morning, and the day had just begun. We covered this talk in [‘Abdu’l-Bahá Speaks at Stanford University](#).

During the month we also published three editorial pieces: [What’s Love Got to Do With It?](#), [150 Years of the Emancipation Proclamation](#), and [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Ayn Rand, and the Poor](#).

DAY 184

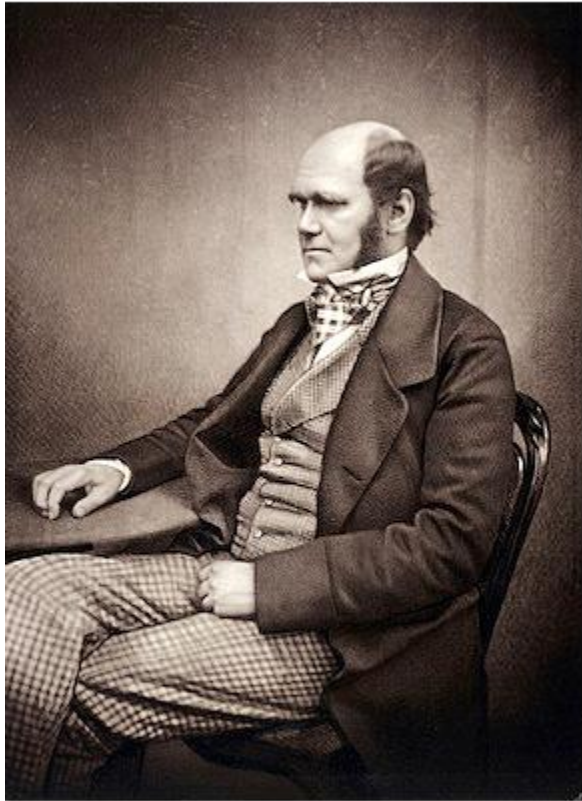
OCTOBER 11, 1912

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Darwin, and the Evolution of All Things

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 11, 2012

CHARLES DARWIN’S BOOK, *On the Origin of Species*, was printed in Britain on November 24, 1859, and reached American readers two months later. Theories of evolution had gained currency in the decades prior to the book’s publication, including those that suggested that species might change over time. The theories were controversial, conflicting as they did with the orthodox notion of a hierarchy of creatures operating within a fixed system of divine creation, and the scientific community largely opposed them.



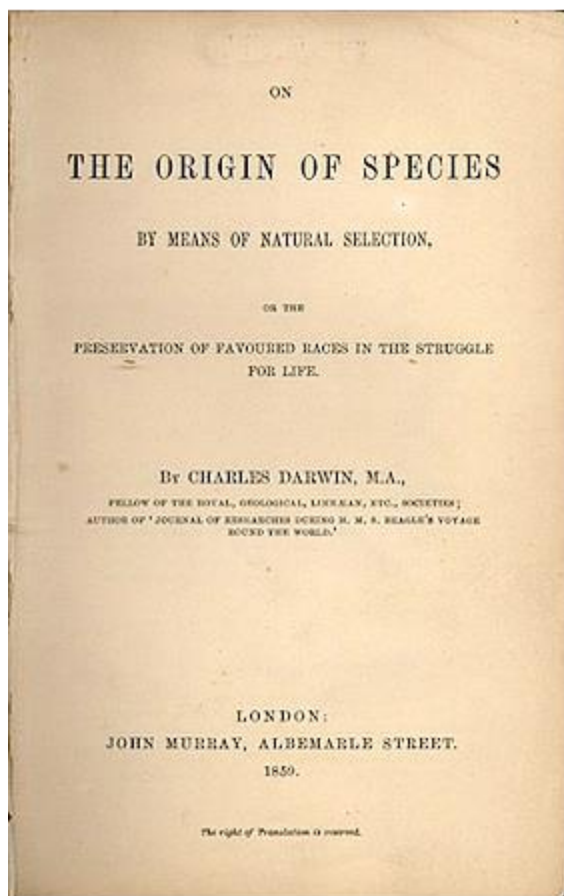
A sepia toned portrait of Charles Darwin, circa 1859.  
(English Heritage Archive)

Darwin’s book not only argued in favor of evolution, but put forth a compelling theory for how it operated. It explained that in the struggle for life within natural systems, populations more suited to the environment are more likely to survive, and therefore more likely to reproduce. These populations leave inheritable traits to

future generations — a process Darwin called “natural selection” — and over time, the resulting variations accumulate to form new species.

The book generated widespread discussion in scientific, philosophical, and religious circles. Liberal theologians welcomed its challenge, noting that religious ideas cannot remain stagnant. Others declared its hypothesis metaphysically neutral. But gradually, its implications became undeniable. If science could explain the creation of increasingly complex forms of life in purely material terms, then perhaps there was no compelling reason to believe in a Creator.

On the evening of October 10, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed the Open Forum in San Francisco — a group devoted to the discussion of economic and philosophical ideas — and he tackled the issue of evolution head on. He argued in favor of evolution, albeit with critical differences from the physical mechanics of Darwin’s theory, and he drew an entirely different set of metaphysical conclusions.



The title page of the 1859 British edition of *On the Origin of Species*. (Wikimedia)

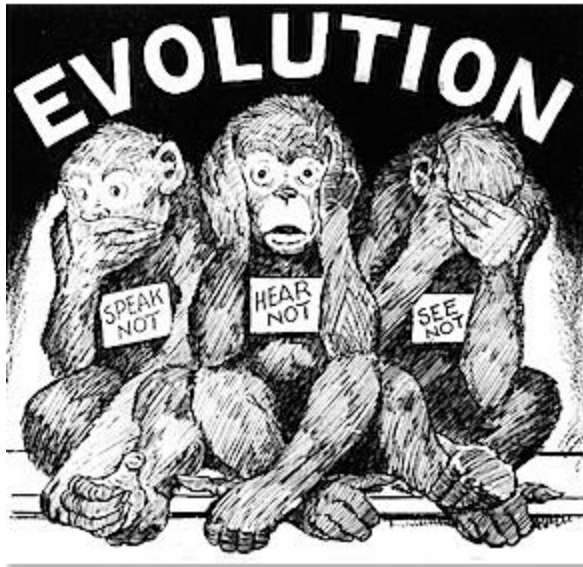
In Darwin’s second book on evolutionary theory, *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, he drew biological analogies with baboons,

dogs, and “savages” to provide evidence for the descent of humans from animals. In San Francisco on October 10, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá crafted a more precise definition based on what *differentiates* humans from animals. Among those critical elements, he said, are reason, abstract thought, and scientific advancement. The animal, he argued, is bound by its five senses and lives entirely within the dictates of natural instinct. “[A]ll phenomena,” he said, “are captives of nature.”

But man is the exception to this rule. “By defying the laws of nature,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, “he can soar in the air, or sail over the seas in a ship, or explore the deep in a submarine. He can imprison in an incandescent lamp such a tremendous and powerful force as electricity and convert it to his use.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued with examples of the most remarkable inventions of the age: the phonograph and telephone among them.

“In brief,” he said, “all the arts and sciences, inventions and discoveries now enjoyed by man were once mysteries of nature and should have remained hidden or latent. But through the ideal faculties of man the laws of nature have been defied, and the secrets of nature have been brought out of the invisible into the plane of the visible.”

Yet despite these distinctive characteristics, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted that materialist philosophers “endeavor to prove by the human anatomy that man originated from the animal.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá agreed that humans had undergone biological changes through time. “Let us suppose,” he said, “that the human anatomy was primordially different from its present form . . . that at one time it was similar to a fish, later an invertebrate and finally human.” Yet throughout this progression, he argued, “the development of man was always *human* in type, and *biological* in progression [*italics added*].”

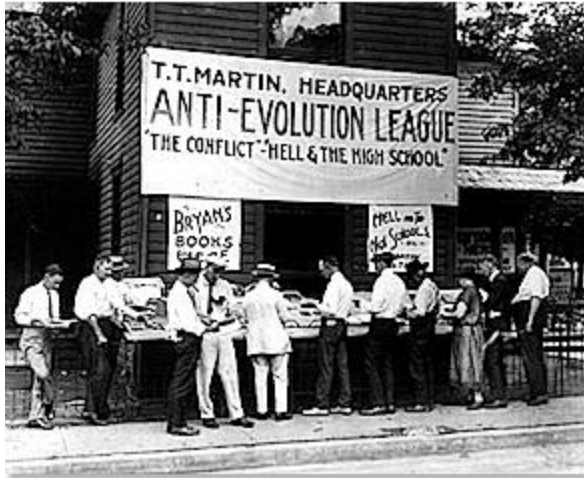


The debate over evolution in America proved to be a boon to political cartoonists. (wheninhistory.com)

In 1904 in Palestine, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had described how complex entities develop in response to some questions by Laura Clifford Barney of Washington, DC. “[T]he growth and development of all beings is gradual,” he had told her, “this is the universal divine organization and the natural system.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk at the Open Forum was one of the longest and most intricate he delivered during his time in America. But its underlying logic rested on two principles. First, while human beings have developed biologically through many stages of evolution, we were always destined to be human, realizing a latent potential over time. Second, the qualities that distinguish us — reason, abstract thought, scientific advancement, and so on — are not merely minor differentiators, but characteristics that separate us fundamentally from animals.

An additional element in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s engagement with Darwinian evolution was not covered in his San Francisco talk, but was documented by Ms. Barney during her time in Palestine, and published in the 1908 book *Some Answered Questions*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá disagreed with Darwin’s contention that evolution is “blind,” lacking purposeful direction or intent. Instead he argued that the evolutionary scheme was part of a divine plan. The appearance of humans, he said, was the culmination of the process. In fact, creation would be imperfect and incomplete without us.



Christian evangelist and anti-evolution crusader T.T. Martin rented a book store during the Scopes trial. His 1922 book *Hell and the High School* was a best seller. (Today in History)

Thirteen years after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s address to the Open Forum, the debate over evolution in America came to a head during the infamous “Scopes Monkey Trial.” The State of Tennessee had passed a law that made it illegal to teach evolution in state-funded schools. The American Civil Liberties Union financed a test case in which John Scopes, a high school teacher, agreed to violate the law. The nation was transfixed as two legendary figures took up the cause: three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan argued for the prosecution; eminent defense attorney Clarence Darrow defended Scopes.

By the time it was over, a line had been drawn in the sand: science dug in on one side and built a fortress around itself; on the other, religious fundamentalists held firm to a literal interpretation of the Biblical creation story. Those who argued for dialogue, or for a more sophisticated understanding of the issue, found their voices increasingly drowned out in the public sphere.

*[Note: The quotations from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk at the Open Forum used in this article are taken from the Ella Cooper Papers in the National Bahá’í Archives, United States.]*

OCTOBER 12, 1912  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## Rabbi Martin Meyer Hosts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Temple Emanu-El

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 12, 2012

THE LATE MORNING SUNLIGHT filtered down through opalescent windows and settled on the soft features of Rabbi Martin A. Meyer. At 10:45 a.m. on the cool morning of Saturday, October 12, 1912, he stood upon his pulpit, hand-carved from weathered oak, and looked out over two thousand members of his congregation. They filled the majestic sanctuary of San Francisco’s Temple Emanu-El.



The august Temple Emanu-El at 450 Sutter Street in San Francisco, in 1867. Its bronze-plated Russian domes and golden spires dominated San Francisco's skyline for forty years. (Library of Congress)



Built during the 1860s, the massive Gothic Revival synagogue was one of the largest vaulted chambers ever constructed in the state of California. Two octagonal towers shot up at the temple's front corners on Sutter Street, supporting bronze-plated Russian domes that impressed themselves on the city's skyline. The vaults and the domes had come crashing down on the fateful morning of April 18, 1906, and the temple had burned to its skeleton in the fires. But just sixteen months later Temple Emanu-El rose again from the ashes: squat towers now stood where the domes had been, a ceiling of Oregon pine replaced the vaults, and chandeliers hung down in the shape of six-pointed stars.



Rabbi Martin A. Meyer of Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. Sourced from [centenary.bahai.org](http://centenary.bahai.org).

“It is a privilege, and a very high privilege indeed,” Rabbi Meyer said, “to welcome in our midst this morning Abdul Baha, a great teacher of our age and generation. . . . Abdul Baha is the representative of one of the religious systems of life, and it appeals to us Jews, because we Jews feel that we have fathered that ideal throughout the centuries of men.”

The Progressive Era had been as much a period of change for the Jewish community in America as it was for the rest of the nation. German-American Jews found their enlightened Reform ideals challenged by the poor, ragged orthodox Jewish immigrants who swarmed into America from Russia and Eastern Europe. The young Rabbi Meyer — tall, blonde, handsome, a San Francisco native, and only thirty-four years old — walked a delicate line. He bridged religious boundaries

on social justice issues, but felt that San Francisco's Reform community, in order to accommodate to the Gentile society around them, had slipped their commitment to traditions that were central to Jewish identity. They knew little about Jewish rites and artifacts, and too many of them celebrated Christmas and Easter, but not Hanukkah or The Passover. Instead, Rabbi Meyer pinned his hopes on the Eastern European Jews, who wanted to remain Jewish because they felt the call of blood and tradition.

So when 'Abdu'l-Bahá mounted the rostrum with his translator, stood between two palm trees in front of the curtain that concealed the Ark, and invited the congregation to explore religion's civilizing force, he spoke to a tension at the center of their religious life. "[W]e should investigate religion as seekers of truth," he said. "When we do so, we find that religion is the cause of progress and development."



Temple Emanu-El gutted by fire after the 1906 earthquake.  
(U.S. Geological Survey)

Over the next ten minutes, he recalled the signal events of Jewish history: the founding of the nation by Abraham; its flourishing under Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph; the captivity in Egypt; the rise of a high Israelite civilization under David and Solomon, distinguished by its moral culture, arts and sciences, philosophy, and craftsmanship. Even the philosophers of Greece traveled to the Holy Land to study at the feet of the children of Israel, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said. "A Cause which changed such a weak people into a powerful nation," he observed, "makes it evident that religion is a source of honor and progress for humanity, a foundation for eternal happiness."

But even as it transforms civilization, religion itself is continuously transforming. While the spiritual essentials, the moral core of religions are eternal, 'Abdu'l-Bahá argued, its social laws are "laid down in every Dispensation in accordance with the needs of the age and are subject to

change.” The Reform congregation at Temple Emanu-El may have agreed, believing as they did that Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with the surrounding culture.

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá broached another subject, this one far more delicate. Just as the Jewish prophets had reclaimed a lost people and turned them into a mighty society, so had Jesus and Muhammad. “When the light of Muhammad dawned,” he said, “the darkness of ignorance was dispelled from the Arabian desert. In a short space of time those barbarous tribes reached a degree of civilization which extended to Spain and was established in Baghdád and influenced the people of Europe. What proof is there concerning His prophethood greater than this?”



The restored Temple Emanu-El as it appeared in 1912. Squat towers have replaced the domes. (UC Hastings)

“The Christians believe in Moses as a Prophet of God. The Muslims are believers in Moses and praise Him highly. Has any harm come to Christians and Muslims because they have admitted the validity of Moses? No, on the contrary, their acceptance of Moses and confirmation of the Torah prove that they have been fair-minded.”

Rabbi Meyer wiped a bead of perspiration from his forehead.

“Why should not the children of Israel praise now Christ and Muhammad?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked. He was not suggesting that they become Christians, but that vocal respect for the founders of the great religions was the first essential step in setting aside religious prejudice. “As it is possible to

do away with warfare and massacre with a small measure of liberalism in the world, why not do it? Thus bonds are established which can unite the hearts of men.”

On Saturday, October 12, 1912, at Temple Emanu-El, Rabbi Martin Abraham Meyer hosted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s longest talk in America. He was far more interested in practice than theory, and so for the next eleven years, until his untimely death in 1923, Rabbi Meyer would work to heal the rifts in the Jewish community and build bridges with nearby Christian churches. “He was proper,” scholar Fred Rosenbaum writes, “but capable on occasion of taking great risks, in exposing the inadequacy . . . of his flock’s religious expression.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s impression of the young Rabbi was simpler. “Rabbi Meyer,” he said, “is a very broad minded man.”

DAY 186

OCTOBER 13, 1912  
PLEASANTON, CA

## Phoebe Apperson Hearst

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on October 13, 2012

PHOEBE APPERSON HEARST held her dress above her shoes to step from the limousine parked in front of 1815 California Street, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been staying. It was October 13, 1912. She was a small woman and kept her hair pulled tight on top of her head except for several short curls that hung loose to frame her face. After her husband died in 1891, she took over what was then the largest private mining company in the United States. The University of California at Berkeley had risen on her dollars. Today she had arrived to escort ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to her 1900-acre estate in nearby Pleasanton for a three-night stay in the countryside.



The San Francisco Ferry Building, located at the end of Market Street. ([www.sfimages.com](http://www.sfimages.com))

It was a sunny day, and they drew the blinds in Mrs. Hearst’s limousine, then sped off down California Street toward the ferry terminal at the end of Market Street. After disembarking from the ferry across the bay in Oakland, the journey to Phoebe Hearst’s estate took them thirty-five miles through the redwoods of California.

Phoebe Hearst and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had first met almost fourteen years earlier in the penal colony of ‘Akká, Palestine, a city so polluted that most of its vegetation had vanished. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s father, Bahá’u’lláh, had called it “The Most Great Prison.” Mrs. Hearst had planned and paid for the first Americans to travel to ‘Akká to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, where he lived as a political prisoner of the Ottoman Empire.

The Hearst estate in Pleasanton was more of a castle than a house. Its white Spanish Revival towers were topped with red shingles. Gardens covering the surrounding property overflowed with flowers that Mrs. Hearst sent as gifts to her large circle of friends all over the country. She called her home “Hacienda del Pozo de Verona” after a fountain she had imported from Italy and placed in a courtyard.



Inside a room at Phoebe Hearst's "Hacienda del Pozo de Verona." She was an avid art collector, funding and even traveling on numerous archeological expeditions. (bancroft.berkeley.edu)

The estate was a business in and of itself. It was surrounded by machine shops, a dairy, orchards, vegetable gardens, and a working ranch with cows, poultry, hogs, pheasant, ducks, and geese, providing Mrs. Hearst and her stream of guests with everything they needed. Her home had forty guest rooms, each with a fireplace and a marble bath. The estate even had its own train station and telephone line, and eventually housed the first indoor swimming pool in California.

Paintings, tapestries, oriental rugs, bronzes, cabinets, and chests, as well as rare clocks and artifacts, adorned every room of her home. Mrs. Hearst was an avid art collector: in fact, she

funded and traveled on many archeological expeditions in conjunction with the University of California at Berkeley. Living at her Pleasanton estate was like living in a museum.



**Phoebe Apperson Hearst in 1895.**  
(Library of Congress)

But the woman known as one of the most important philanthropists of her generation had not always been wealthy. Phoebe Apperson was born in Franklin County, Missouri, in 1842, and raised in a log cabin. Her father, a farmer, managed to provide her with an above-average education. She became a teacher at the age of sixteen. She worked for a few years, at one time tutoring the children of a wealthy family, until the circumstances of her life changed.

When young Phoebe Apperson was eighteen years old, George Hearst, a former neighbor who had made a fortune mining silver, returned to town to care for his mother. He soon began to court the intelligent and beautiful young woman, despite their twenty-three year age difference; George was forty-one. Phoebe was petite, reserved, and intellectual. George was six feet tall and more at ease around a campfire than at an elite social club. In spite of these differences, they married in 1862. Phoebe Hearst returned from their honeymoon in Panama pregnant, and in a very different world than the one from which she came.

*In Monday's feature: Phoebe Hearst takes the first group of Americans on pilgrimage to 'Akká, where they meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the first time.*



DAY 187

OCTOBER 14, 1912  
PLEASANTON, CA

## October 14, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 14, 2012

THE PAST SEVEN DAYS stand out as some of the most eventful of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s entire trip to America. He argued for a novel, scientific basis for peace in front of two thousand at Stanford University in Palo Alto, tackled the subject of evolution at the Open Forum in San Francisco, and engaged Rabbi Martin A. Meyer’s Reform Jewish congregation at the Temple Emanu-El by delivering his longest address in America. Over this weekend he is spending three nights in the countryside, at the palatial estate of Phoebe Hearst in nearby Pleasanton.



"Hacienda del Pozo de Verona," Phoebe Hearst's residence in Pleasanton, California. The residence burned down in 1969. (bancroft.berkeley.edu)

In the week ahead we will hear Americans’ earliest impressions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, during the 1898 pilgrimage to ‘Akká that Mrs. Hearst organized, and we will follow ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Los Angeles as he pays his respects to the first American ever to reach out to him across the ocean, the late Thornton Chase.

DAY 188

OCTOBER 15, 1912  
PLEASANTON, CA

## Mrs. Hearst Visits a Prisoner in ‘Akká

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 15, 2012

IN 1898 IT WASN'T EASY to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was still a political prisoner after thirty years, and Ottoman government spies reported on his activities. It was a dangerous prospect for him to be seen welcoming one of America’s wealthiest and most famous women into the prison city of ‘Akká in the bright light of day. Therefore, Phoebe Hearst stole into ‘Akká under cover of night.



A steamer arriving in Port Said, Egypt, early in the twentieth century. Photograph by Lehnert & Landrock, Cairo. (servatius.blogspot.ca)

Not long after she had first heard of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his father, Bahá’u’lláh, Mrs. Hearst had planned a trip to Egypt and Palestine, and had invited some younger members of her family and a few friends. The pilgrims arrived in small groups so as to avoid raising the suspicions of the authorities; Mrs. Hearst, her maid, and her British friend, Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper, reached Palestine on or around Tuesday, December 20, 1898. “Mrs. Hearst and I arrived in Cairo, Egypt, after a terrible storm at sea,” her friend later wrote, “and remained there for a few days until all had been explained to us regarding our actual journey into the prison city.”

After a storm-tossed trip to Haifa in “a small, miserable boat,” the ladies checked into a hotel to wait for the sun to retire. Once darkness descended they mounted a carriage for the five-mile trip

around the bay to 'Akká along the hard beach sand. The carriage entered the prison city's wooden gates, and turned left toward the house of 'Abdu'lláh Páshá, a residence originally built about 1817 by the governor of the city, but which was now a run-down complex of apartments whose stucco suffered from an advanced stage of decay. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had rented rooms for his family there in 1896.



The house in 'Akká that 'Abdu'l-Bahá rented in 1896. It served as his residence until he moved to Haifa in 1910. (media.bahai.org)

Mrs. Hearst's party rode the carriage up to the building's studded metal gate, walked in the darkness through a courtyard decorated with a roughly-hewn geometrical garden, and started up a long flight of uneven stone steps, which clung to the outside wall of a four-storey building in the southwestern corner of the complex. "Someone went before us with a small piece of candle," Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper wrote, "which cast strange shadows on the walls of this silent place."

At the top of the stairs, a small courtyard on the top level of the building, which transmitted light and air throughout the upper rooms during the day, opened to the night sky. They turned left, climbed one more step, and entered a plain-looking reception room that faced due west across the stormy Mediterranean waters. Low divans tucked up underneath the western windows, the ceiling was high, and cedar panels wrapped the space, absorbing the salty spray from the ocean waves which smashed up against 'Akká's old sandstone sea wall just beyond the windows.

“Suddenly the light caught a form that at first seemed a vision of mist and light,” Mrs. Thornburgh-Cropper wrote. “It was the Master which the candle-light had revealed to us. His white robe, and silver, flowing hair, and shining blue eyes gave the impression of a spirit, rather than of a human being. We tried to tell Him how deeply grateful we were at His receiving us.”

“No,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered in carefully measured English, “you are kind to come.”



Mrs. Hearst's dining room at her hacienda in Pleasanton, CA.  
(Library of Congress)

Due to the danger that such a prominent American visitor could bring down on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Mrs. Hearst spent just three days in ‘Akká. On February 20 her butler, Robert Turner, arrived from Egypt, becoming the first African American to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “God gave you a black skin,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told him, “but a heart white as snow.”

Fourteen years later, on October 14, 1912, a freed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived with Mrs. Hearst at her hacienda in Pleasanton, California, in the bright morning sunshine. The next evening, over dinner, she told the story of her pilgrimage to a privileged group of guests. “Those three days were the most memorable days of my life,” she later wrote.

[Today’s feature is based heavily on the story and descriptions of Mrs. Hearst’s pilgrimage as told by Kathryn Jewett Hogenson on pages 96 to 101 of her book, *Lighting the Western Sky*, published in Oxford by George Ronald in 2010. If you would like to purchase the book, you can [buy it here on Amazon.com.](#)]

DAY 189

OCTOBER 16, 1912  
PLEASANTON, CA

## The Grand Benefactress of California

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on October 16, 2012

ON OCTOBER 16, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá woke up in one of Phoebe Hearst’s forty rooms in her mansion in Pleasanton, California. Most of the other rooms were empty; only a few close friends and family had joined Mrs. Hearst for the duration of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s stay. Since George Hearst’s death twenty-one years earlier, Mrs. Hearst had been busy managing an immense mining fortune, including the Homestake gold mine in South Dakota, and the Anaconda copper mine in Butte, Montana.



Mrs. Phoebe Apperson Hearst, about 1900.  
(Library of Congress)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not give lengthy talks while in Pleasanton; instead, he casually answered the questions of those around him. “How is it that the desires of some people are achieved while others are not?” someone asked. “[G]ood intentions and sound thoughts attract confirmations,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered. “The desires of human beings are endless. . . He can never find peace but through effort and resignation, so that, notwithstanding all efforts in worldly affairs, the human heart remains free and happy.” ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá concluded: “He neither becomes proud on attaining wealth and position nor becomes dejected on losing them.”

The morning of October 15, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá toured Mrs. Hearst’s home and gardens. He chose a few plant specimens to take home with him and cultivate next to the resting place of his father, Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enjoyed the company of Mrs. Hearst’s grandchildren that evening, saying, “In reality, children are the ornaments at the table, especially these children, who are very sweet! The hearts of children are extremely pure and simple. A person’s heart must be like a child’s, pure and free from all contamination.”

Among Phoebe Hearst’s foremost concerns was uplifting women and children. In 1886 her husband, George Hearst, was appointed to a vacant seat in the United States Senate, and two years later won it by election. The couple built a mansion in Washington, DC, at 1400 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, about ten blocks from the White House, and moved there. But Phoebe wanted nothing to do with politics — her passion was education.



Inside the Hearst home at 1400 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, in Washington, DC. (Library of Congress)



Mrs. Hearst first donated to the University of California, Berkeley, to provide scholarships for women. She was the first woman to ever serve as Regent of the university, a controversial appointment at the time. She established the first free kindergarten for America's poor, open to not only white children, but African Americans as well. She also cofounded the National Congress of Mothers, which is known today as the Parent-Teacher Association.

Through the University of California in Berkeley, Mrs. Hearst underwrote archeological expeditions to Peru, Guatemala, rural California, and the American Midwest and Southwest. She donated artifacts from the South Pacific, Alaska, the Etruscan region of Italy, and the Philippines.



Mrs. Hearst with President Benjamin Wheeler of the University of California at Berkeley. (Library of Congress)

She also quietly provided financial assistance to women's suffrage organizations, the Young Women's Christian Association, established free libraries in mining towns, and was a leading promoter in building the Washington Monument. She even funded Green Acre, the conference center started by Sarah Farmer in Eliot, Maine. She was one of the few sources of funding that Sarah Farmer trusted would come with no strings attached.

Before leaving her estate on October 16, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called together the servants and attendants of Hearst home. They stood in a line as he pressed two guineas in each of their hands before he left, encouraging them to be "honest and devoted to their work."



DAY 190

OCTOBER 17, 1912  
LOS ANGELES, CA

## The Last Days of Thornton Chase

By ROBERT SOCKETT AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 17, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S TRAIN WEST arrived in Glenwood Springs at two o’clock in the morning on Saturday, September 28, 1912. That afternoon the party took a walk in the gardens of the Hotel Colorado, and crossed the bridge to visit the shopping district. As the Colorado River swept beneath them, a messenger approached with some telegrams that had arrived for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. One of them, from Los Angeles, reported that his friend, Thornton Chase, had been rushed two days earlier to the Angelus Hospital and was awaiting emergency surgery.



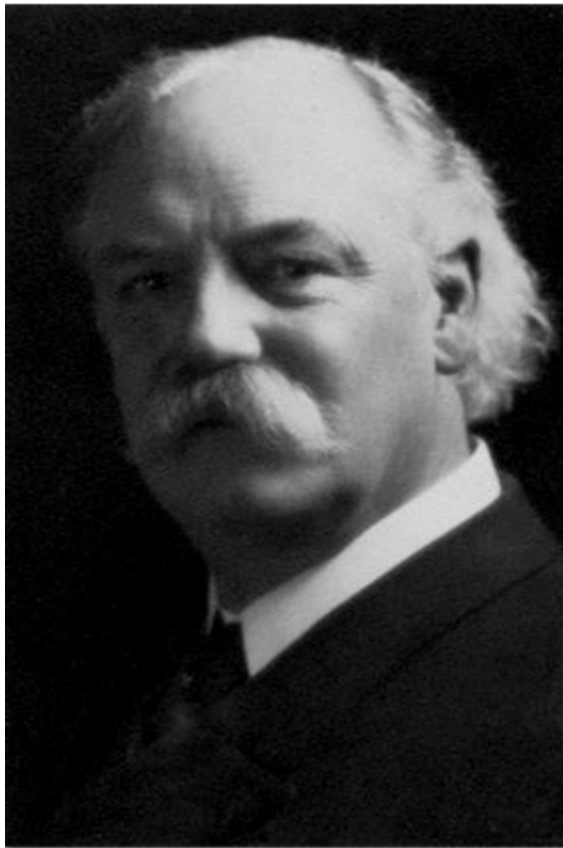
Thornton Chase in his study. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Thornton Chase had first heard about Bahá'u'lláh from the speech Dr. Henry Jessup had given at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. By mid-1894 he was studying the new faith in Chicago. Three other Americans became Bahá'ís before Chase, but, of the four, only Chase had stuck. He was, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá later said, “the first Bahá'í in America.”

When Phoebe Hearst planned her pilgrimage to ‘Akká in 1898, Chase’s work with the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company prevented him from accompanying them. “I am heart broken,” he wrote to one of the party, “to learn that you are going and it is impossible for me to join you.” Instead, he sent along a letter to be hand-delivered to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, beginning a correspondence between the two men that would unfold over the next fourteen years. Of all the Americans ‘Abdu’l-Bahá knew, none were closer to him than Thornton Chase.

“Dear Master,” Chase wrote in one of his letters, “Thou seest that I am laying my heart bare before Thee.” Chase asked for insight on some of the central dilemmas of his life. Sometimes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would respond to one letter from Chase with four of his own.

“I desire greatly that I may be of service to GOD,” Chase wrote. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá challenged him to sacrifice everything in service to his fellow Americans.



Thornton Chase (1847-1912)  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

Chase wanted to know what value and justice there was to the suffering of children and other innocent human beings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “In brief, for those souls there is a recompense in another world . . . For those souls that suffering is the

greatest mercy of God. Verily that mercy of the Lord is far better and preferable to all the comfort of this world and the growth and development of this place of mortality.”

Chase even expressed concern at the leadership role women were assuming among American Bahá'ís, and at some of the statements about gender from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “The purport is that some women in this wonderful age have surpassed some men,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered, “and not that all women have surpassed all men.”

Thornton Chase finally made the trip to Palestine in 1907. Even after nine years of letters, Chase was surprised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “I had formed an idea of Jesus as very meek, humble, lowly, gentle, quiet, soft and sweet,” he wrote, “and I looked for such another one. . . . I found in Abdul-Baha a man, strong, powerful, without a thought as to any act, as free and unstilted as a father with his family or a boy with playmates. Yet each movement, his walk, his greeting, his sitting down and rising up were eloquent of power, full of dignity, freedom and ability.” “I have revised my idea of Jesus,” he said.

By the time ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in America in 1912, Thornton Chase’s company had sent him to Los Angeles. By July, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had decided to cancel his western trip. “O thou, my ancient Friend,” he wrote to Chase, asking him to travel east if his health would permit. But then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá changed his plans, and Chase was ready to travel to San Francisco to meet him. On September 26, Chase quickly wrote a note to a friend: “They have just brought me to the hospital and are going to operate on me . . . . It is a very serious operation and will tie me up here for two weeks or more. Please let Abdul Baha know.”



Postcard of Angelus Hospital in Los Angeles, California, where Thornton Chase died. (M. Rieder Publications)

Thornton Chase died from complications just before 7 p.m. on Monday, September 30. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was still in Salt Lake City, preparing to leave for San Francisco the next morning. The electrical parade of the National Irrigation Congress had just begun. “Never before in the city’s history were so many thousands of people

congregated to witness a similar celebration,” the newspaper reported. As Thornton Chase departed this life, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was on the streets of Salt Lake City, watching the lights stream by.

*In tomorrow’s feature: In his early life, Thornton Chase battles personal tragedy and takes off for the Colorado frontier.*

DAY 191

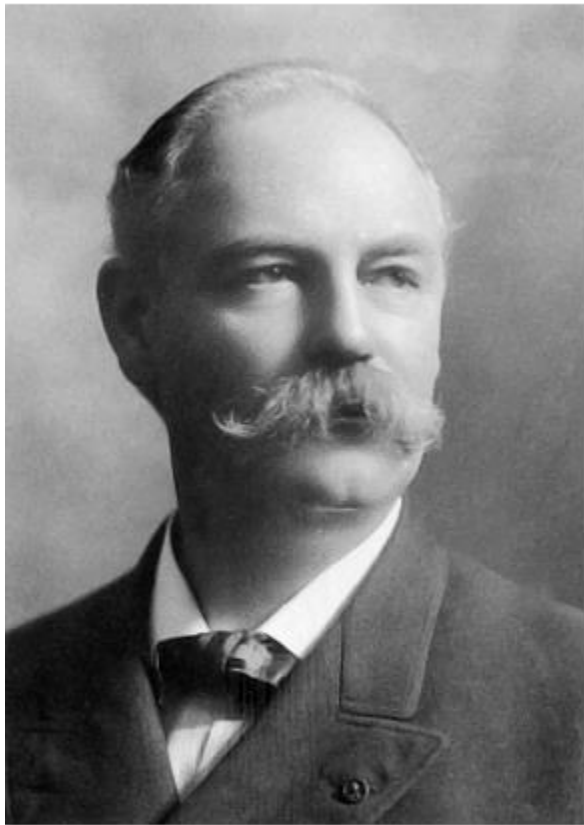
OCTOBER 18, 1912  
LOS ANGELES, CA

## Thornton Chase's Long Season of Suffering

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 18, 2012

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, the first thirty-three years of Thornton Chase's life were a torrent of suffering, heartache, and failure.

He was born James Brown Thornton Chase on February 22, 1847, in Springfield, Massachusetts. His mother, Sarah Thornton Chase, died of complications from childbirth sixteen days later. His father, Jotham Chase, remarried, but his new wife had no affection for the young boy. By the age of thirteen James was in the care of a Baptist minister in nearby Newton. His father and stepmother had begun a new family.



Thornton Chase in his early forties. (Mr. Chase Nelson)

James entered the Union Army at the age of sixteen, fought in two battles in the final year of the Civil War, and went deaf in his left ear from a cannon blast. After the war he entered college, only to drop out in his freshman year. Then, at the age of twenty-three, he secured his first taste of happiness.

He was now going by the name “Thornton,” taking his mother’s maiden name as his first. He married a young teacher, Annie Allen, and they bought a home in Springfield. Ten months after the wedding they welcomed their first daughter, naming her Sarah Thornton Chase after Chase’s mother. He started a business dealing in timber.

Within a year, the business went belly up.

With no means to support his family, and few opportunities in Springfield, Thornton sought work in nearby Boston. But there were tens of thousands of other men chasing the same work, and Chase could only find odd jobs. Then Annie was pregnant again and things seemed hopeless.

Chase left Annie and the young Sarah in Springfield and headed to the frontier in a desperate search for employment. Over the next five years it led him to Fort Howard, Wisconsin, a logging town on the western shore of Lake Michigan; then south to Chicago, still devastated from the Great Fire; on to White Church, Kansas, a prairie hamlet just outside of Kansas City; then further west to the tiny village of Wabaunsee; and finally to Del Norte, a mining town on the edge of the San Juan Mountains in Colorado. But Chase could barely keep a roof over his head, let alone send money home.

In February 1878, he received notice that Annie had filed for divorce, claiming that Chase had deserted her.



Thornton Chase (lower left) and Eleanor posing with the Maxwell Brothers of New York, 1884. (Mr. Chase Nelson)

Chase wrote the court in earnest, telling his side of the story, but the judge sided with Annie and dissolved the marriage. Chase turned his back on his old life and ventured into the San Juan Mountains in search of gold and silver. The only account of Chase during these years describes him as “undoubtedly crazy.”

Years earlier, before Chase had left Springfield for the frontier, he had a vision which, he later said, pulled him back from the brink of destruction. It was his refuge during these long and difficult years. “[M]y experience was in the presence of a Man,” he said. “It was the Christ.” He felt “a perfect evanescence, an absolute oneness, the actual ‘Nirvana.’” It was, he wrote, “exhilaration and joy in the midst of grief and pain.” Reflecting back on this moment, he asserted: “It comes to *sufferers*.”

By 1880 Chase was back from the mountains. Something had changed. At the age of thirty-three he married Eleanor Pervier from Iowa, found work as a journalist, and became a published poet. His verses revealed a strong mystical bent. In his spare time, he began an intensive study of world religions. Chase soon landed a full-time sales job at the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company. Then he and Eleanor had a son.





Thornton Chase with his son, William Jotham Thornton Chase, in Los Angeles. (Mr. Chase Nelson)

In 1893, Chase received a major promotion that would provide him with the success and stability that had eluded him his entire life. The company appointed him superintendent of agencies, making him one of its top officers. It would also cause him to relocate to Chicago, where he would discover the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Chase arrived in Chicago the same year the city hosted the World's Columbian Exposition. Chase either attended the World's Parliament of Religions or read a transcript of the proceedings, and was deeply moved by Dr. Henry Jessup's speech, which quoted Bahá'u'lláh. Shortly thereafter he met Ibrahim Kheiralla, a Syrian-born Bahá'í who had traveled to America to pursue business opportunities. Kheiralla gave a class on Biblical prophecies and Chase attended. He even bought a Bible, cut out key prophetic verses, and arranged them on long sheets of paper.

By 1894, at the age of forty-seven, Thornton Chase had found what he was looking for.

*In tomorrow's feature: 'Abdu'l-Bahá takes a special trip to Los Angeles to pay his respects at Thornton Chase's gravesite.*

DAY 192

OCTOBER 19, 1912  
LOS ANGELES, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the City of Angels

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 19, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ DIDN’T LEARN the sad news until he arrived in San Francisco on the ferry boat from Oakland, where he had stepped off the train from Salt Lake City in the early morning hours of October 3, 1912. Thornton Chase had passed away three days earlier, on September 30, at the Angelus Hospital on Trinity Street in downtown Los Angeles.



Downtown Los Angeles, looking up Broadway, about 1915. (csulb.edu/~odinthor/socal7.html)

They held the funeral the next day, October 4, at 10 o’clock in the morning in the chapel of Pierce Brothers, an undertaker’s establishment in the City of Angels. Flowers covered the open casket, banked themselves upon easels, and overflowed to knit a carpet across the floor. A quartet of male voices sang “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” and “Lead, Kindly Light,” by John Henry Newman:

*Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th’encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on!*

Three hundred and fifty miles to the northwest, at 1815 California Street in San Francisco, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seemed to disagree with the words that rang out in faraway Los Angeles. *“I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears, Pride ruled my will,”* they sang. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remembered his friend Chase as “free from the troubles of this world.” *“Remember not past years!”* they sang. But “The life of Mr. Chase was spiritual in character; his service will ever be remembered,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said.



The main lobby of the Hotel Lankershim, Los Angeles, CA.  
(Cardcow.com)

Thornton Chase was only sixty-five years old when he died. “No matter how long he might have remained here, he would have met nothing else but trouble,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “The purpose of life is to get certain results. . . If the tree bring forth its fruit young, its life is short; it is praiseworthy.” “Praise be to God!” he said, “the tree of Mr. Chase’s life brought forth fruit. . . therefore he is free.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had not intended to voyage beyond the San Francisco Bay area, but once Chase died he changed his plans. He left for Los Angeles on Friday morning, October 18, and after a pleasant train ride arrived that evening. No sooner had he checked into the Hotel Lankershim on Broadway at 7th Street (as usual, friends had booked him into the best hotel in the city), than the customary torrent of invitations started to pour in for speaking engagements at local churches and societies. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declined them all. “I have absolutely no time,” he said. “I have come here to visit Mr. Chase’s grave . . . I will stay here one or two days and then I must leave.”



The gravesite of Thornton Chase, with an inscription by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The next afternoon, just before 1 p.m., 'Abdu'l-Bahá watched the countryside fight back against the spreading concrete of the metropolis as his streetcar glided slowly out of the city. Five and a half miles southwest of downtown, in the green suburb of Inglewood, California, he stepped from the car and, without waiting for directions, made his way through the Inglewood Park Cemetery to the spot where Thornton Chase had been laid to rest. "The place is charming," a bystander wrote, "the meadows are green, and there are many trees." Twenty-five people followed him in silence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá stood for a while leaning against a nearby tree, remarked on the beauty of the surroundings, and scattered the flowers each person had brought over Chase's resting place. Then he stood at its head, chanted a prayer in Arabic, and spoke for a few minutes about the distinguished life of his friend. At the end 'Abdu'l-Bahá dropped to his knees, placed his forehead on the grave, and kissed it.



DAY 193

OCTOBER 20, 1912

MILWAUKEE, WI

## The Stubborn Hide of the Bull Moose

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 20, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ WAS SEATED in Phoebe Hearst’s garden in Pleasanton, California, when it happened.

The news “flashed outward along telephone and telegraph wires, jolting every night editor in the country,” writes biographer Edmund Morris, “penetrating even into the Casino Theatre in New York, where Edith Roosevelt sat watching Johann Strauss’s *The Merry Countess*. She emerged from the side entrance weeping. ‘Take me to where I can talk to him or hear from him at once.’ A police escort whisked her to the Progressive National Headquarters in the Manhattan Hotel, which had an open line to Milwaukee.” [The presidential election was only three weeks away.](#)



Theodore Roosevelt in Washington, DC, on May 19, 1914, after returning from the Panama Canal. (Library of Congress)

The former President had strolled out of the Gilpatrick Hotel on Third Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at exactly 8:10 p.m. on Monday, October 14, 1912. He had walked across the pavement, and sat down in his customary back seat on the right-hand side of his car — a roofless, seven-seater that would take him to the Milwaukee Auditorium for his speech. In response to the cheering crowd, which formed a dense mass for a block in every direction, Roosevelt stood and waved his hat. There was a glint of steel; a shot rang out. Seven feet from the car a “weedy little man,” Mr. John. F. Schrank of 370 10th Street, New York, stood holding a .38-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver, still smoking from the discharge.



John F. Schrank, who believed the ghost of President William McKinley had told him to shoot TR.  
(Library of Congress)

The bullet, Morris writes “lay embedded against the fourth right rib, four inches from the sternum. In its upward and inward trajectory, straight toward the heart, it had had to pass through Roosevelt’s dense overcoat into his suit jacket pocket, then through a hundred glazed pages of his bifolded speech into his vest pocket, which contained a steel-reinforced spectacle case three layers thick, and on through two webs of suspender belt, shirt fabric, and undershirt flannel, before eventually finding skin and bone.”

Teddy’s knees bent, he reached for the folded canopy of the convertible to steady himself, and then he hoisted himself back up. Below him on the pavement he saw one of his stenographers, Elbert Martin, trying to break the would-be assassin’s neck. “Don’t hurt him,” Roosevelt yelled. He placed his hands gently on either side of the man’s face, peered into his eyes, and asked, “What did you do it for?” His query received only a blank stare. “Oh, what’s the use? Turn him over to the police.”

Urged by his staff to go the hospital, Roosevelt insisted on keeping his appointment at the Auditorium instead. “You get me to that speech,” he rasped. And so, with a cracked rib, bleeding from a dime-sized hole in his chest, Roosevelt shook off his handlers and mounted the stage. It was only when he opened his fifty-page speech and saw its “double starburst perforation” that the emotions of what had happened finally hit him.



**Elbert Martin holds the bullet-pierced speech that saved Theodore Roosevelt's life. (New York Daily News)**

“Friends, I shall have to ask you to be as quiet as possible,” he began, in this era before microphones. “I do not know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot, but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose.” He went on for an hour and fifteen minutes, throwing down leaf after leaf of his speech as he finished each page — fifty of them in all.

Roosevelt did not know the man who shot him, he said, but he was not surprised that the escalating rhetoric and personal attacks, which had suddenly become commonplace in this election, had led to violence. “I wish to say seriously to all the daily newspapers, to the republican, the democratic and the socialist parties that they cannot month in and month out and year in and year out make the kind of untruthful, of bitter assault that they have made and not expect that brutal violent natures . . . will be unaffected by it.”



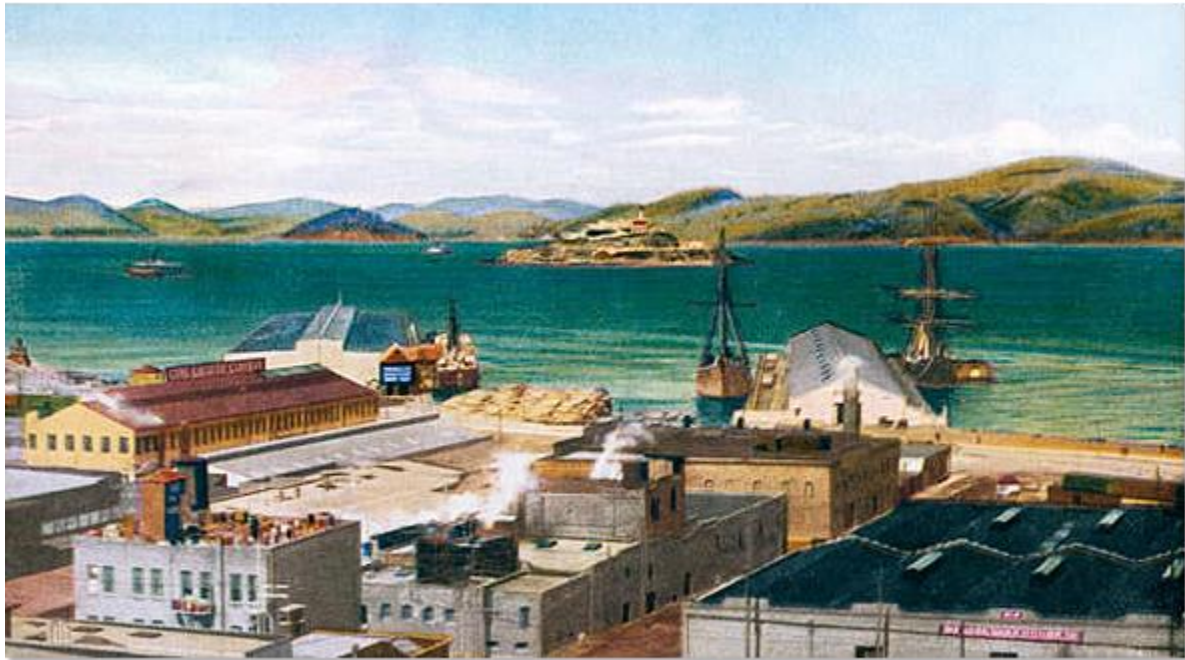
DAY 194

OCTOBER 21, 1912  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## October 21, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 21, 2012

IN THE PAST WEEK, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited the Hearst estate in Pleasanton, California, where he spent three relaxing days in the company of Phoebe Hearst and her family. Then we traced the final days of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s close friend Thornton Chase, and looked at the profound correspondence that passed between the two men over the years. We followed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Inglewood Park Cemetery in Los Angeles, where Chase had recently been laid to rest, and watched as he knelt and kissed the stone.



A postcard featuring San Francisco Bay, circa 1910. (timeshutter.com)

In the week ahead: conflicting press coverage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s trip to San Francisco; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses the Century Club of California, a prominent women’s organization; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá heads north to Sacramento, where he delivers two major public addresses, the second of which reiterates his fear that Europe is destined for war.

DAY 195

OCTOBER 22, 1912  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## A Fearful Dose of Fashionable Religion

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 22, 2012

“WE FORESEE THAT the daily papers are about to give this city a fearful dose of ‘fashionable religion,’” warned an editorial in the San Francisco *Monitor* on October 5, 1912, referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival in the city. It described ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “the leader of the latest in fads,” and warned that the local press would soon be flooded with coverage. “Be prepared for the deluge!” the writer declared.



Market Street at Powell, San Francisco, 1910. Hand-tinted by Bennett Hall. All Rights Reserved. (WorldwideArchive.com)

At least he was right about the deluge. At least thirty-seven separate articles and announcements covered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to California. With the exception of the *Monitor* piece, the press coverage was positive, inquisitive, and reasonably accurate. John D. Barry, a celebrated essayist, fiction writer, and travel journalist, wrote two editorials on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the San

San Francisco *Bulletin* — on October 12 and 14 — which provided a counterpoint to the piece that appeared in the *Monitor*.

“The harm in Baháism and all such so-called ‘religions’ is first of all this:” the *Monitor* claimed, “They deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. They draw Him down to the level of a mere good man, a kindly philosopher.” In churches throughout the nation, of course, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had affirmed the divine nature of Jesus. Seven days after the *Monitor* article, he would argue at length on behalf of Christ [in front of two-thousand people at the Temple Emanu-El](#), San Francisco’s largest Jewish synagogue.



The Humboldt Tower (left) and the Pheasant Building (right) on Market Street in San Francisco. Hand-tinted by Bennett Hall. All Rights Reserved. (WorldwideArchive.com)

John D. Barry, in crafting his editorials for the *Bulletin*, took a different approach. First, he took the time to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Barry arrived at 1815 California Street, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s residence in San Francisco, and described a brief but revealing conversation with a woman in the foyer. “It sounded like practical Christianity,” he wrote. “I wondered if indeed the spirit of Christianity had returned to earth, this time by way of Persia.”

Then, as if providing a rebuttal to the *Monitor* piece, he “speculated on what would happen if it were generally known in San Francisco that the new religion was not merely a philosophical cult, appealing to the fashionable, but a broad, practical religion, reaching out to all mankind with a special tenderness for those in distress.”



Barry posed a question to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the new religion: “What message did it have for the disinherited millions?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered: “Society is like the army. There must be degrees. There must be officers and there must be soldiers. Thus far there has not been a just distribution of rewards. The few have had more than their share. The soldiers have been neglected.”

The *Monitor*’s attack on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went on to assert that his denial of Christ “is only the beginning of the abominations which are brought into this land by these Oriental cults which are so eagerly taken up by the idle-brained and the lazy-spined.” One wonders what David Starr Jordan, the President of Stanford, would have made of the comment, who, only two days before the article appeared, had invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to [address the faculty and student body at his university](#).



Market Street at Grant in San Francisco, 1910. Hand-tinted by Bennett Hall. All Rights Reserved. (WorldwideArchive.com)

The author made clear his narrow Orientalist views. He lumped ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in with what he considered [a group of pernicious teachers from the East](#). He also betrayed the misogyny still ascendent in 1912. “Woe to those women (for Baha and his ilk appeal chiefly to women) who lend an ear to the seductive teachings,” he wrote. Then he did what dozens of other journalists back east had done since 1900, which was to attack [the so-called “unbalanced” mental state of Sarah J. Farmer](#), the innovator who had founded Green Acre. “[L]iving in the atmosphere of that strange and impenetrable cult,” he wrote, “unbalanced her mind, and she is now an inmate of the insane asylum in Waverly, Mass.” In fact, she was in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, imprisoned against her will. If that weren’t enough, he also lashed out at May Wright Sewall, the President of the National Congress of Women, whom he said was “a physical wreck through the practices of Yoga and the study of occultism.”

John Barry would return for a second interview with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, where he received a detailed account of the history of the Bahá’í religion. Barry pressed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on his own biography, but the translator commented that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wasn’t particularly interested in talking about himself. “Perhaps, too, it would have been a painful history to discuss,” Barry wrote. “For, as I knew, it included long years of imprisonment for the sake of the faith.”

As the interview concluded, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood up and went downstairs to address those who were waiting. “At once he began to speak of the message of the new faith,” Barry wrote. “It came not to destroy or disrupt,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “but to create in mankind a universal harmony.”

DAY 196

OCTOBER 23, 1912

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## “The Great Educator of Man Is Woman”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on October 23, 2012

“I AM DELIGHTED to speak before this gathering of revered ladies,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began, “who have met for the purpose of investigating the realities of life.” On Tuesday, October 16, 1912, he addressed the Century Club of California, a private social club for women founded in 1888, which devoted its energies and financial resources to the advancement of women. Phoebe Hearst had been its first president. Julia Morgan, the architect of Ms. Hearst’s estate in Pleasanton, had also designed the club’s illustrious Edwardian mansion. Ella Cooper, who had traveled in Mrs. Hearst’s party to ‘Akká in 1898, [in the first group of Americans to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá](#), sat in on the gathering, scribbling down ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words as they were translated.



Phoebe Apperson Hearst, circa 1900. (Library of Congress)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá made his position on gender equality unequivocal. “Some believe that man is the greater and preferable member of the body politic,” he told the women, “that he is created with certain superior virtues, and that woman, however great may be her attainment, can never reach man’s level, because she is not endowed with equal

faculties.” He refuted this position, noting instead that in the eyes of growing majority, and surely in the eyes of God, “perfect equality already exists.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned to the role of mothers in the development of society. “The great educator of man is woman,” he argued, “for it is the mother who is the first teacher.” “In the world of humanity the most productive and useful member, after all, is woman,” he said to reinforce his point, “for it is woman who educates man, not the reverse. She rears the children; she cares for the home upon which the body politic is founded; she gives birth to mighty leaders.”

It is, therefore, men’s duty to be “grateful” to womankind, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued. It would be impossible for men to progress without women, he pointed out, yet “when woman demands her rights she is refused. . . .”



“Anna Brand with son Leonard and other children reading a lesson.” Photograph by John L. Johnson, circa 1910. (Museum of History & Industry, Seattle)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá proceeded to debunk several common arguments against women’s equality with men. One of the nineteenth century’s favorite pseudosciences, phrenology, held that because men had larger heads and brains than women, it followed that they were more intelligent than women. “[T]his argument is not in accordance with facts,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted, “since the history of brain efficiency shows that large brains and large heads are not necessarily indicative



of intelligence. . . .” “If the weight of the brain and the size of the skull were indicative of brain efficiency,” he added, “then verily the donkey would be more brainy than man!”



The Century Club of California, present day.  
(The Century Club of California)

After discrediting the arguments of phrenology, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took aim at another commonly held myth: that women were not the equal of men because they did not engage in war and combat. “[C]apability in this direction is ferocity,” he said, “and a lack thereof is not a deficiency.” Nevertheless, he pointed out several historical accounts, such as the case of [Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra](#), in which women had exceeded men on the battlefield.

Finally, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá redefined courage altogether. “[It] is not dependent upon an exhibition of ferocity, upon the shedding of blood,” he argued. “On the contrary, it is dependent upon perception, reason, knowledge, attainment, perfection.”

DAY 197

OCTOBER 24, 1912

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Practical Spirituality

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 24, 2012

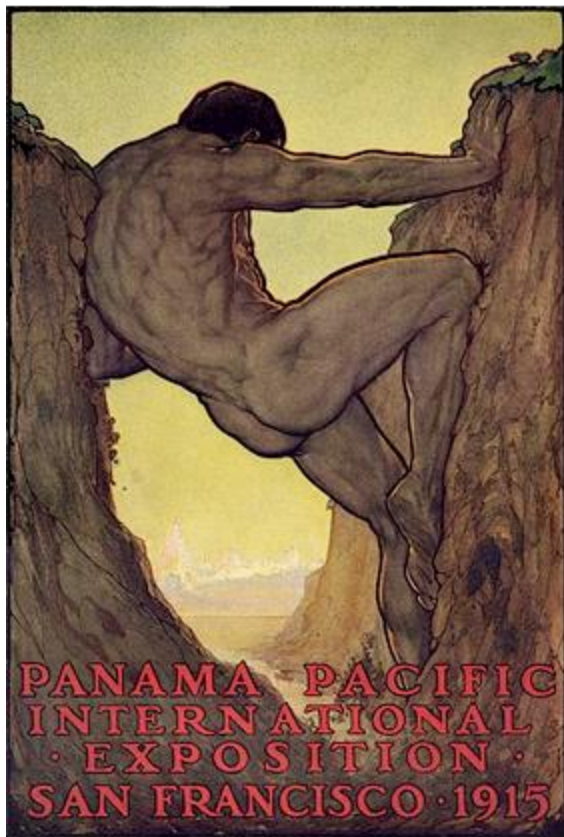
ON SEPTEMBER 12, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had set out from Buffalo on the longest overland trip of his life — a distance farther than the perilous trek he had taken with his family when he was eight years old, in the dead of winter, without proper clothing, over the freezing mountains of Iran to Baghdad; farther than the voyage of his father’s second exile from Baghdad to Constantinople in 1863. On that trip he had served the exiles at night and galloped ahead of the caravans to steal moments of sleep by day: dismounting, laying down, and resting his head on the neck of his horse.



The 43-storey Tower of Jewels at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, 1915. The tower was decorated with hundreds of thousands of glass jewels that dangled from its surface. The spotlights at right were multi-colored and projected at night from a barge. Hand-tinted by Bennett Hall. All Rights Reserved. (WorldwideArchive.com)

Here in America his horse was made of iron and he had slept upright in a passenger car while his train skirted the southernmost Great Lakes, whisked across the wheatfields of Iowa and Nebraska, traversed the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, the salt flats of Utah, and the desert plains of Nevada, and finally arrived, in the middle of the night on October 3, on the shore of the opposite sea.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá hadn’t even planned to travel to the Golden State: it was too far and he had pressing business back in Palestine. But a campaign of letters from his friends in San Francisco and Los Angeles had changed his mind. Now, on the evening of Thursday, October 24, 1912, as he said goodbye to friends at his rented house at 1815 California Street in Pacific Heights, he could look back to three of the most eventful weeks of his entire trip through America.



The Panama Canal as the "13th Labor of Hercules," in a poster for the by Perham Wilhelm Nahl, 1915. Note the towers of the Exposition on the horizon. (Wikimedia)

At Stanford University on October 8, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had argued for a scientific basis for international peace. At Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco’s largest Reform Jewish congregation, he challenged his hearers to make interfaith unity a reality by accepting the founders of other religions. At a Japanese church in Oakland he stood up for the ingenuity and progress of the Japanese people, who would be tossed into internment camps less than thirty years later. “Any kind of prejudice is destructive to the body politic,” he told them.

Whereas in Boston and at Green Acre ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s New England audiences had a theoretical bent, in frontier San Francisco practicality ruled the day. Mr. Jackson Stitt Wilson, the socialist Mayor of Berkeley, California, had been one of the first guests to call on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on California Street, in the afternoon of October 5. They spoke of economics, the rights of farmers, the dangerous impasse between capital and labor in Europe, and Stitt Wilson expressed relief: “The religionists do not give any importance to these matters,” he said, “they laugh at us. How wonderful it is that in the personality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá these two great powers exist — the spiritual and the practical.” “He will surely unite the East and the West,” Stanford’s president, David Starr Jordan, said, “for he walks the mystic way with practical feet.”

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train departed the bay area, chugging east on the morning of October 25, 1912, architects in San Francisco were already setting in motion the city’s next great enterprise. The Panama Canal would be completed in 1914, and San Franciscans planned to celebrate. Just nine years after the earthquake had toppled and burned the City by the Bay, it would announce to the world that it had risen again from the ashes.



View of the grounds of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition looking north. San Francisco Bay and Marin County in the distance. (Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley)

The grounds of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, held between February and November, 1915, stretched out along the northern shore of the city between Harbor View and the Presidio. Palaces and courts covered seventy-six city blocks, and at its center stood the Tower of Jewels, a forty-three-storey landmark covered by more than 100,000 jewels in colored glass that dangled individually to shimmer and reflect the changing light as the Pacific breezes moved them.

In spite of the Great War that raged in Europe, the Exposition was a resounding success. John D. Barry, a writer from Hearst's San Francisco *Bulletin* who had taken note of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's pragmatic approach to religion, explained why. "[T]hough the Exposition had been designed to commemorate the services of the United States Army in building the Panama Canal," he wrote, "it was essentially dedicated to the arts of peace. It would show what the world could do when men and nations co-operated."

DAY 198

OCTOBER 25, 1912  
SACRAMENTO, CA

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the “Home of Truth”

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on October 25, 2012

“‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ HARDLY REQUIRES an introduction, as nearly all who are present have been looking forward to his coming to Sacramento.” The speaker was Christine Fraser from The Home of Truth, a branch of the New Thought movement gaining momentum in America at the turn of the twentieth century. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had left San Francisco that morning, on October 25, 1912, arriving in Sacramento by noon. At 8:30 p.m. that same evening, an audience gathered in the Assembly Hall of the Hotel Sacramento to hear him speak.



Sacramento in 1910. (Center for Sacramento History)

The Home of Truth movement was founded by Annie Rix Militzin. She was Christian, but at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago she met [Swami Vivekananda](#), and thereafter took an



interfaith approach to religion. By 1903 there were eight Home of Truth centers in the United States. In her introduction Christine Fraser expressed her thanks that “someone can come to us from the far ends of the earth, from that beautiful place Palestine, for Mt. Carmel, we are told in scripture, was the school of the prophets.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk drew parallels between the lives of Jesus and Bahá’u’lláh, both of whom were subjected to persecution for challenging the religious authorities of the day. Then, to this crowd accustomed to mystical explorations, he enumerated a number of practical principles that he characterized as “true religion.” True religion caused unity, peace, and love, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked, while religious imitations led to war and strife. The main reason that people turn to irreligion or atheism, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, was because “the blind imitations or dogmatic interpretations current among men do not coincide with the postulates of reason. . . .” All should investigate reality for themselves, he explained: “Reality is one; and when found, it will unify all mankind.”



Downtown Sacramento, circa 1910. The Hotel Sacramento is in the foreground on the left. (sacramentohistory.org)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá went on to underline the importance of expelling prejudice, whether racial, political, patriotic, or religious. He affirmed woman’s equality with man. “In the estimation of God there is no gender,” he explained. “The one whose deeds are more worthy, whose sayings are better, whose accomplishments are more useful is nearest and dearest in the estimation of God, be that one male or female.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá delineated two kinds of civilizations that evening. “Material civilization,” he explained, “concerns the world of matter or bodies, but divine civilization is the realm of ethics and moralities.” The Prophets of God, such as Christ, are the founders of divine civilization, without which, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “eternal happiness cannot be realized.”



DAY 199

OCTOBER 26, 1912  
SACRAMENTO, CA

## To Fight For a Handful of Dust

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on October 26, 2012

AS ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ BOARDED the train that would conduct him eastward from Sacramento to Salt Lake City and Denver, Ottoman troops in Europe retreated from the Bulgarian border along a front that reached from Adrianople and Lozengrad. The heavy rain that accompanied them did not subside for three days, and many men threw down their guns in despair as they withdrew toward the Bosphorus.



Machine Gunners in the Bulgarian Army. ([www.bulgaria-life.com](http://www.bulgaria-life.com))

The war had been going on for several weeks. Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Bulgaria had formed an alliance intent on reclaiming all European territories from the Ottoman Empire. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had traversed the terrain they fought on: as a young man he had accompanied his father in the dead of winter from Constantinople to Adrianople, their latest place of exile. Although he was half a world away from the battles now, the signs of war loomed close.

While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was on the train, several railway employees approached him to say that he was on the very same train that had taken him to California. After a brief chat, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked them a question: “On this train there are many Greek passengers. Do you know where they are going?” When the railway staff told him that they were going to join the war against Turkey.



A Bulgarian propaganda postcard from the first Balkan War issued in 1912 with images of Montenegrin, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Greek rulers. ([www.njegos.org](http://www.njegos.org))

“God does not want war,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told the railway staff. “God is kind to all,” he said. “We, too, should be kind to one another.” He continued: “We should not fight for a handful of dust. The earth is our endless tomb. Is it worthy of us to wage war and shed blood for this tomb while God has destined that we win the cities of men’s hearts and bestowed upon us an eternal Kingdom?”

In fact, that very morning at the Hotel Sacramento, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called on Californians to be “advocates of peace.” *The Sacramento Bee* reported that he was “simple and unassuming” as he sat talking with his audience. But his words were strong, and predicted an even more destructive war looming on the horizon.

“The European continent is like an arsenal,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience, “a storehouse of explosives ready for ignition, and one spark will set the whole of Europe aflame, particularly at this time when the Balkan question is before the world.”

The first Balkan War would last until May of the next year, and most of the European states held by the Ottoman Empire were divided among the members of the Balkan League. Quarrels about how to split up Macedonia eventually led to a second war, only a month later, among the former allies.

“I have visited your Capitol and its gardens,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had told his audience that morning. “No other Capitol has such beautiful surroundings. Just as it is imposing and distinguished above all others, so may the people of California become the most exalted and perfect altruists of the world.”

DAY 200

OCTOBER 27, 1912

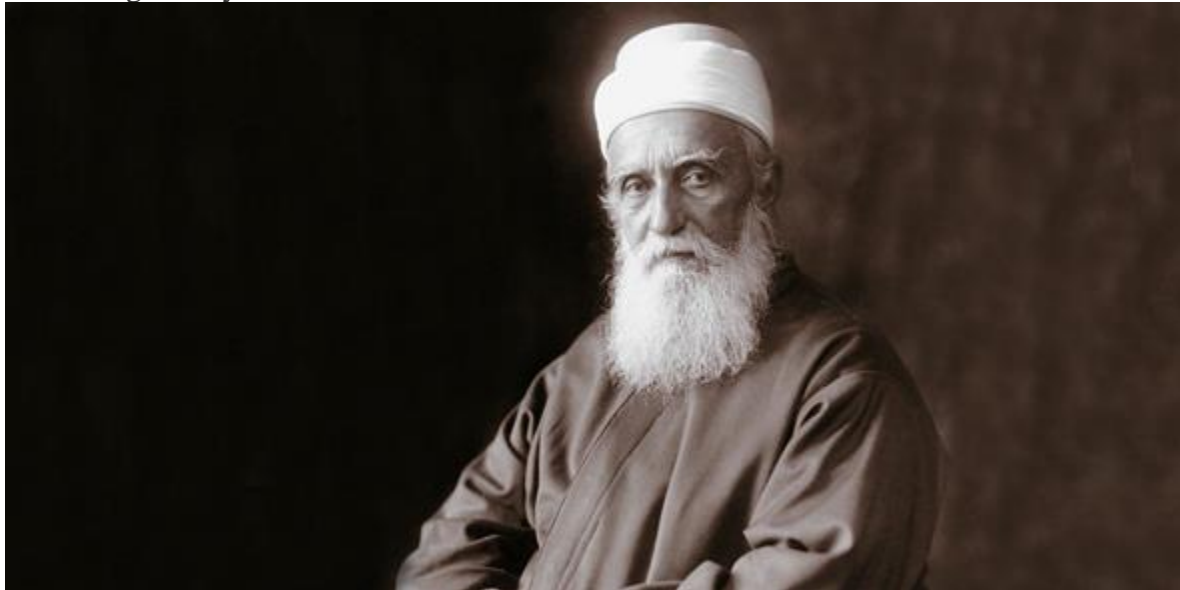
OP-ED

## The Home Stretch

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on October 27, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S JOURNEY through America is almost complete. One hundred years ago today he rode the train from Sacramento to Salt Lake City, the first leg of his return trip across the continent. In thirty-nine days he will step aboard the *SS Celtic*, at the White Star Line piers along the Hudson River near West 18th Street in Manhattan, and sail for Liverpool.

Here at *239 Days In America* this leaves us less than six weeks to bring to a conclusion all the many threads we have explored in the past 200 days. It’s a race to the finish, and we still have a lot of things to say.



The year 1912 turned out to be a watershed in American history, its traces cascading forward into the coming twentieth century. It began with a group of Polish women weavers shutting down their looms and walking out of the Everett Cotton Mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on January 11, shouting “Short pay! Short pay!” They had just picked up their pay envelopes to find they were thirty-two cents short, enough to buy several loaves of bread. By the end of the month 20,000 millworkers were on strike in Lawrence, the government had declared martial law, and a century-long battle between regular people and corporate power had begun.

There could hardly have been a better time for Teddy Roosevelt to throw his hat into the ring to seek a third term. But by the end of October, and in spite of the hype that newspaper offices continued to pump out each day, the outcome of the presidential race was a foregone conclusion.

By walking out of the Republican National Convention with 344 delegates on June 22, Theodore Roosevelt had split the Republican vote, handing the election over to the Democratic Party, which proceeded to nominate the progressive Governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson, as its candidate.

Under Wilson, the Progressive Movement's agenda was about to shift the nation, but it was not to last. The decline of the Progressives, and the collapse of the political unity in which they had invested their hopes, is one of the tragedies of modern America. As we shall see in the coming weeks, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had argued time and again that political agreement would not be enough to solve the pressing problems of this rising industrial nation.

For 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the whole ballgame was about what "human nature" truly meant. As we bring these 239 days to a close, we will engage with this overarching theme of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's American conversation, and explore how American history unfolded in the years after 1912's watershed moment.

DAY 201

OCTOBER 28, 1912

EN ROUTE TO DENVER

## October 28, 1912: The Week Ahead

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 28, 2012

IN THE PAST WEEK, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá departed the San Francisco Bay area and spent two days in Sacramento, where he talked with a New Thought group, The Home of Truth, about the practical implications of modern religion. Today, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train is traversing the cold and treacherous mountain passes of Colorado, on its way back to Denver.



The view from the rugged peak of Mt. Elbert, near Leadville, Colorado, the highest mountain along ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s journey. Photo by Joe Lyon. ([gosomewhereglorious.blogspot.ca](http://gosomewhereglorious.blogspot.ca))

In

the week ahead: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compares events in the life of Jesus to the pageantry he saw surrounding a Cardinal of the Catholic Church in California, then heads northeast across the plains of Nebraska toward Chicago. While there he will meet the Indian poet and activist Rabindranath Tagore, whose book of poems, *Gitanjali*, will bring Tagore the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.



DAY 202

OCTOBER 29, 1912  
DENVER, CO

## A Gentle Rebuke

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 29, 2012

“ONE DAY IN CALIFORNIA I saw a cardinal walking with pomp and ceremony in front of a procession,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told an audience in Denver on October 29, 1912. “I was told that a new church had been built and the cardinal was to officially open its doors to the public.” We don’t know precisely who the cardinal was, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretary, Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, wrote that this Catholic leader had previously singled out ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a false Christ. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá decided to juxtapose the life of this religious leader with that of Jesus.





"Denver's Great White Way." The theatre district along Curtis Street in 1913. (Denver Public Library)

"This show and ceremony of the cardinal is like that of Christ," 'Abdu'l-Bahá said. "However, there is a slight difference." He began to enumerate the elements of this disparity. "Christ had a crowd following Him, but they were there to hurl contempt and abuse at Him. This cardinal had a crowd with him but they are there to help. Christ had a crown but it was made of thorns, while this cardinal wears a crown set with lustrous jewels. Christ had clothes but they were made of old, coarse cloth, while this man's robe is made of the finest brocade of the day. Christ spent His days in sorrow, while this cardinal's days are spent in security and comfort."

'Abdu'l-Bahá had argued to audiences across America that self-sacrifice had driven the progress of humanity down the ages. When he spoke with Bahá'ís — followers of his father's religion — he was uncompromising in the standard of conduct that he expected from them, often holding up Jesus's Apostles as their example. "I am expecting results from this visit," he told a group of Bahá'ís [at the Hotel Victoria in Boston](#) on July 25, "and hope that my coming may not be fruitless. The results I expect are these: that the individual soul shall be released from self and

desire.” He told them to replace “avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire” with resolute self-sacrifice.



The Oxford Hotel, at left, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed on October 29, 1912, on his second visit to Denver. (Denver Public Library)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s father, Bahá’u’lláh, had written a similar message to Pope Pius IX forty years earlier. “Sell all the embellished ornaments thou dost possess,” he told the Pope, “and expend them in the path of God.” “Should anyone offer thee all the treasures of the earth, refuse to even glance upon them. Be as thy Lord hath been.”

In Denver, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned the same lens on this particular cardinal: “Christ’s home was a desert,” he said, “while this cardinal’s home is a splendid building, like that of a king. Christ’s throne was upon a cross, while this man’s place of rest is a throne of ease and comfort. The adornment of Christ’s banquet was the blood of that beloved countenance, while the ornament of this man’s court is the goblet of colored wine.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded with a humorous touch. “This cardinal’s display is similar to that of Christ,” he said, “with only the slightest differences.”

**DAY 203**

**OCTOBER 30, 1912  
DENVER, CO**

## **Conversations in Transit**

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on October 30, 2012

HAD ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ ARRIVED in America fifty years earlier, and been unable to take advantage of the size and efficiency of 1912’s railway networks, his journey across America would have been almost impossible.



Inside a standard pullman car on a deluxe overland limited train, circa 1910. (Library of Congress)

The Overland Route, later known as the First Transcontinental Railroad, was only completed in 1869, when the last spike was hammered into a railway tie at Promontory Summit, Utah. Until then, American pioneers had to cross the western frontier in wagon trains pulled by donkeys, cows, and horses — much as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had had to travel during his family’s exile. But the trek across the Iraqi desert from Baghdad to the shores of the Black Sea had taken three long months in 1863, and the distance from New York to San Francisco was three times as far.

Once it became possible to travel long distances on America’s trains, railroad companies introduced dining cars so their passengers wouldn’t have to stop for meals. Berths in the sleeping cars, which had been invented by George Pullman and were manufactured by his company, could be rented at an extra cost to ensure a good night’s rest. In a standard Pullman car, the seats

facing each other on the floor could be extended to make a bed, and beds resting on hinges could be pulled down from the ceiling at night.



A 1912 reenactment of Mormon pioneers traveling in a wagon train in Salt Lake City. (Wikimedia)

But the trains that carried ‘Abdu’l-Bahá through the rugged country, from where he watched the sun rise and set many times from his passenger car, were still a long way from the smooth rides on Amtrak today. One railway passenger of the period, who traveled west to San Francisco, recounted having to hold herself in her compartment over the rough patches of terrain so she wouldn’t be tossed into the aisle.

Nevertheless, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often declined the luxury of a bed. When he departed Denver for Chicago, he chose not to reserve a sleeper for the night. “It is not a matter of our reluctance to pay one dollar,” he explained, “but of our unwillingness to be dependent on bodily comfort. We must be equal to the hardships of traveling like a soldier in the path of truth and not be slaves to bodily ease and comfort.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was just as busy when riding the trains as he was while off them. He met a wide variety of people on trains, many of whom had seen his picture in the newspapers and approached him to converse.

On Saturday, October 28, while en route to Denver, a vendor came by. Mahmúd-i-Zarqání recounts that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was looking at some ore specimens when a few curious children gathered nearby. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá beckoned them to come closer. “What shall I buy you?” he asked. “He spoke to them with more love and kindness than the most benevolent father,” Mahmúd wrote, “and bought each child various items costing about a dollar.”



An interior view of the dining cars on the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton R.R. in 1894. The two seated men are being served by an African-American porter. (University of Minnesota)

There had also been a company of Greek men heading east to fight in the Balkan War, and the next day, October 29, Mahmúd wrote that more than fifty Turkish men were heading in the same direction to face them on the battlefield. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to the Turks about universal peace and the unity of mankind, Mahmúd wrote, after which he ordered them tea.

On the afternoon of October 30, a Sufi, who followed a mystical tradition in Islam, approached ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and asked if he could sit next to him and listen in. After listening for a brief period the Sufi declared: “All are from God,” a basic idea in Sufi theology. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded: “Yes, this is true, but one man is so exalted that others bow down before Him and He is adored by them like Christ or Moses, who called people to the oneness of divinity and who became the cause of the education of a nation, while another is so degraded that he bows down before dust and worships ants and serpents. Are these two one and the same? No, certainly not! Divine Manifestations are a different creation.”

That evening, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá decided to reserve sleeper cars for his whole party. “We slept in our seats last night and that is enough. Let us not suffer any more hardship.” His secretaries suggested that they stay in their seats and only ‘Abdu’l-Bahá get a sleeper, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refused: “No, we must share equally.” Six sleepers were reserved that night.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been particularly happy that day. “Now we are going again toward the East,” he said. “We have no more work to do in America.”



DAY 204

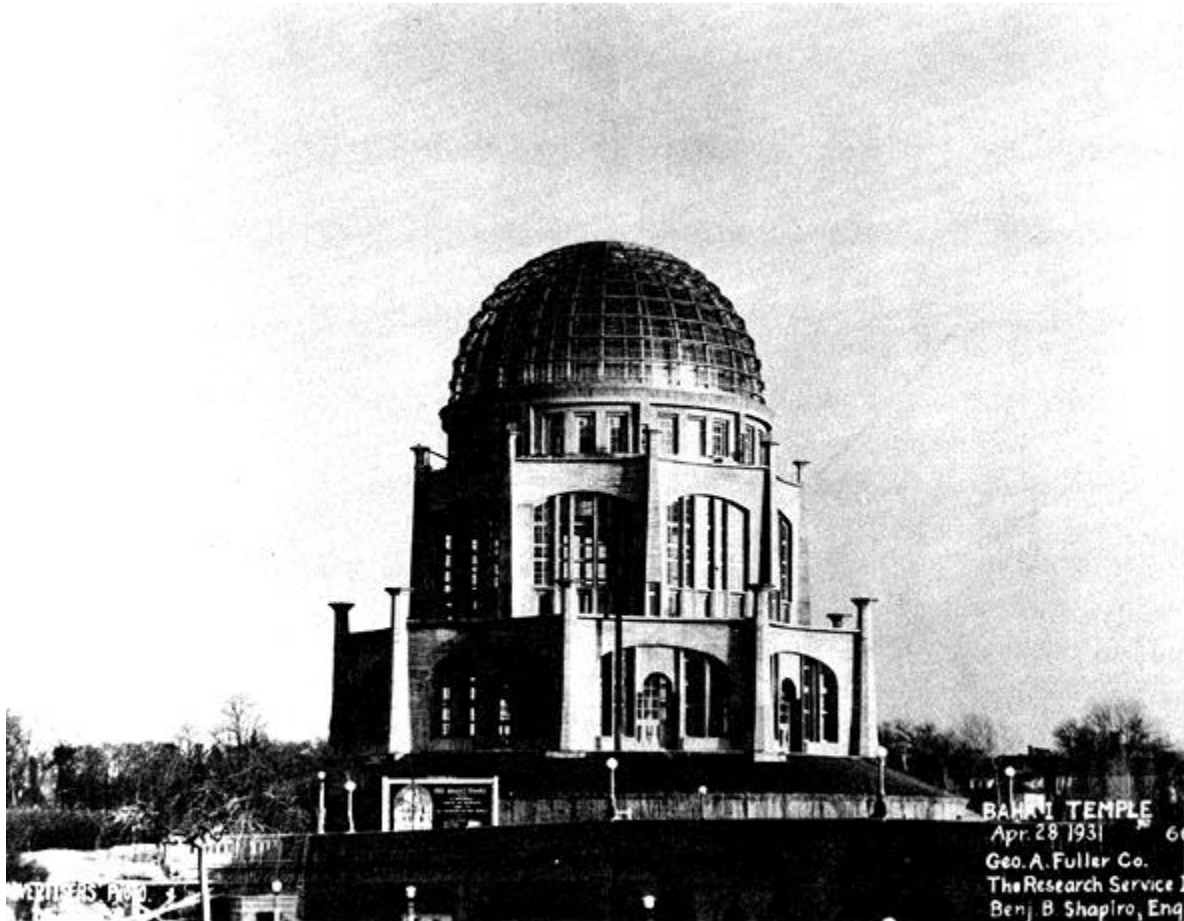
OCTOBER 31, 1912

CHICAGO, IL

## In Chicago, Anything Is Possible

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on October 31, 2012

THE SUN PEEKED over the horizon as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train steamed toward the western outskirts of Chicago for his third, and final, stay in the city. He had first disembarked in the Windy City on April 29, 1912, less than three weeks after he set foot in America. On that trip he [laid the cornerstone](#) of the first Bahá’í House of Worship in the West. Over the next four decades, the structure’s shimmering figure, draped in a filigreed gown of white quartz and portland cement, would slowly rise over the construction site at Grosse Point, on the western shore of Lake Michigan just north of Chicago.



The concrete and iron structural skeleton of the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, in April, 1931.  
(Geo. A. Fuller Co./National Bahá’í Archives, United States)



‘Abdu’l-Bahá had returned to Chicago on his trip west on September 12, stopping for five days with a side trip to Kenosha, Wisconsin. Stepping onto the platform at LaSalle Street Station, he saw [a young Japanese student](#) dangling from a lamp post, struggling to get a glimpse of him. Saichiro Fujita became ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guest for the four thousand mile trip to California and back. Now, seven weeks later, Fujita would leave the party and live in Chicago. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá once again took up residence at the Plaza Hotel on Lincoln Park, where, to a packed ballroom six months before, he had [argued for America’s immense potential](#), challenging the young nation to play a leading role on the world stage.



The Home Insurance Building in Chicago, completed in 1884, is widely considered the first skyscraper in the world. (Wikimedia)

It is hard to believe that the massive city ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited had only been in existence for seventy-nine years. In 1833 Chicago was incorporated with a population of 350, but now, in 1912, more than 2.3 million residents swelled its streets, making it the world’s sixth largest city. It was also the busiest transportation hub on the planet, and competed only with New York for the distinction of having the world’s tallest building — an honor that changed hands every few years.

Historian Paul Johnson, in his monumental *A History of the American People*, identifies an early moment in Chicago’s history as emblematic of American determination and ingenuity. In the mid-1850s it became clear that the city’s lack of proper drainage was responsible for growing

epidemics of typhoid fever, dysentery, and cholera. It simply sat too low in the water table. The solution? Lift up the hundred or so buildings that comprised downtown: lift them six feet. Over the next ten years entire city blocks were raised, an incredible feat of engineering involving tens of thousands of jackscrews and hydraulic lifts. And, even as they were being hoisted out of the muck, the buildings stayed open, and Chicago's daily business continued. This could never have happened in Europe, Johnson notes, because a uniquely American conviction drove the enterprise: "that nothing material is impossible."



The Bahá'í House of Worship outside of Chicago was dedicated on May 2, 1953. (peace.mariposa.com)

'Abdu'l-Bahá had praised America's material ingenuity and advancement from the moment reporters greeted him aboard the SS *Cedric* in New York Harbor on April 11. But he also believed the nation's people had a unique spiritual potential, and called on Americans to realize it. During his final visit to Chicago, he raised the point again.

"Chicago has great capacity," he told those gathered at the Plaza Hotel on November 1. "I hope that the banner of the unity of mankind will be unfurled in this city." As usual, hundreds of Chicagoans turned up to meet him each day. "This is the third time that I am in Chicago," he said, and joked with the visitors that it was now their turn to return the favor and visit him in Palestine. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a specific challenge for the city's Bahá'ís. "Strive day and night for the public weal," he told them. He encouraged them to display a level of unity and sacrifice that would cause "the dormant pulse of this country [to] beat vigorously."

"You must not look at present accomplishments," he admonished some listeners at Corinne True's home at 5338 Kenmore Avenue, "for this is but the beginning."



DAY 205

NOVEMBER 1, 1912

CHICAGO, IL

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Strolls in Lincoln Park

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 1, 2012

THINGS WERE COMING to an end as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá contemplated the view from his window at the Plaza Hotel at the corner of North and Clark Streets, during his final few days in Chicago. He was preparing to leave America soon, on an early ship from New York after brief stops in Cincinnati and Washington, DC. Across the nation the presidential candidates were wrapping up the campaign season. Almost fifteen million Americans — almost all of them men, almost all of them white — would go to the polls next Tuesday. Even autumn was fighting for its life: the mercury dipped just below freezing overnight on Friday, November 1, and brisk northerly winds raked the leafless trees of Lincoln Park across the street from the Plaza Hotel.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá strolling toward the High Bridge in Lincoln Park, Chicago, in May, 1912.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

During his stays in Chicago ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made a habit, every morning and evening, of taking walks across the lawns and woods of Lincoln Park, which extended northward from the hotel for

a mile and half along the western shore of Lake Michigan. One morning in early May, with most of the tree branches still bare, he visited the Lincoln Park Zoo. Honoré Jaxon was there to tell the story in his sentimental, somewhat grandiose prose. “The many strange and beautiful forms of bird and animal life herein presented,” Jaxon wrote, “proved very interesting to Abdul-Baha, as he walked among them with a manner which somehow reminds one of the legends of St. Francis of Assisi.”



Honoré Jaxon, one of the leaders of Canada's North-West Rebellion, in Chicago in 1907. (Chicago Daily News)

Honoré Jaxon had been born William Henry Jackson in Toronto, but in his younger life he moved west to Saskatchewan, which was then part of Canada's Northwest Territory. He became a leader in the North-West Rebellion of 1885, the struggle of Métis people against the Canadian federal government, converted to Catholicism, took a French name, and served as Louis Riel's secretary. After Riel was hanged for treason, Jaxon was declared innocent by reason of insanity and placed in an asylum. He quickly escaped and fled to Chicago, where he joined the labor movement. Many years later, in 1894, he marched on Washington with Coxey's Army.

After stopping for a photograph with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the twenty or so other people who accompanied them, Jaxon followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a section of the park “where — springing from the midst of heavy bushes on either shore — a single arched foot-bridge rises high above a wide lagoon. . . . The landscape disclosed from this viewpoint is indeed one of the fairest in Chicago.” “‘Beautiful,’ was the comment made by Abdul-Baha in English,” Jaxon wrote, “as he gazed northward from the parapet of the bridge.” The group then sauntered back to the animals,



where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood “engrossed in contemplating the movements of a majestic polar bear.”



A postcard showing the bear pit at Lincoln Park Zoo, c. 1910. (chuckmancollectionvolume16.blogspot.ca)

“And now came the most striking feature of the morning’s experience,” Jaxon related as he prepared to bring the story to a fitting end. “From the episode of the bear’s den, Abdul-Baha led the friends toward the lake, and taking one of a number of seats conveniently disposed under a group of trees, invited the friends to likewise be seated. They found themselves arranged in a circle, and, after dictating an answer to a letter which had been read to him that morning as he had walked along, Abdul-Baha suddenly commenced talking to them in a strain of intimate and friendly counsel . . . which warmed the determination of each one to be doubly on guard against any future possibility of becoming a cause of disunion or discord.”



‘Abdu’l-Bahá with some of the group in Lincoln Park, after visiting the zoo. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

“Some of you may have observed that I have not called attention to any of your individual shortcomings,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, a course of action in stark contrast to the kinds of political activity Honoré Jaxon was no doubt used to, and which

was part and parcel of the campaign of 1912. “I want you to be organized like a flock of the doves of Heaven, whose attitude and conduct toward each other is a symbol of that which will take place among human beings when human beings shall become willing to accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

“With those words,” Jaxon wrote about that morning in May, “the homeward course was taken, and so concluded a typical and memorable Bahai meeting in a park, which will ever hereafter be associated in memory with the blessed influence of the ‘Servant of Baha.’”



DAY 206

NOVEMBER 2, 1912

CHICAGO, IL

## To Remind Us We Were Neighbors

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on November 2, 2012

“I NEVER QUITE RECOVERED from the shock and pain of my first bitter realization that to be a colored woman is to be discredited, mistrusted and often meanly hated,” she said, writing of her first experience in America’s south.



Fannie Barrier Williams, one of Chicago's most important African-American reformers, educators, and women's rights activists. Photo taken in 1902. (Wikimedia)

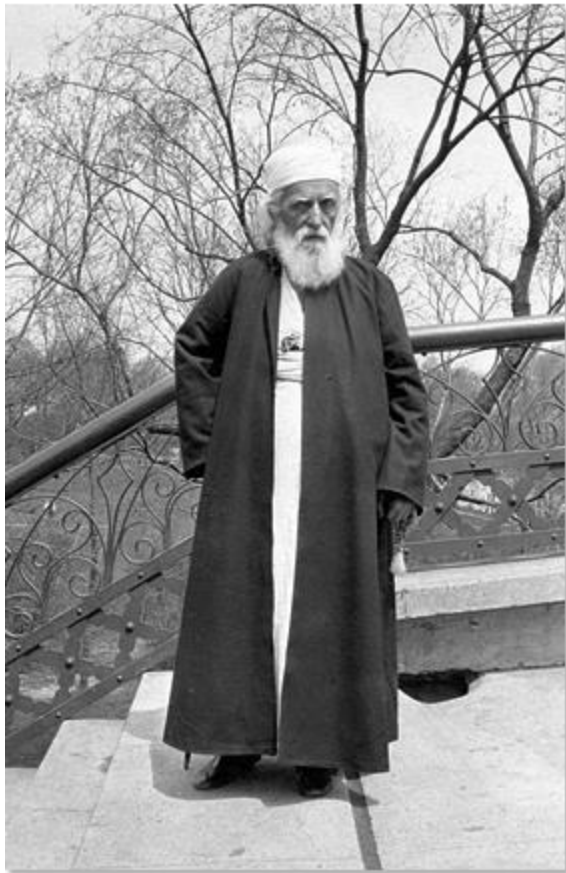
She, Fannie Barrier Williams, was an African American teacher, journalist, and social activist, one of the key founders of the Frederick Douglass Center, a settlement house that served Chicago’s African American population. On Saturday, November 2, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke at the center, located about five blocks west of Lake Michigan at 2032 South Wabash Street.

By growing up in the North, Fannie Williams was sheltered from the worst of the anti-black oppression that took place elsewhere in the country: her family was generally accepted by the

surrounding society of middle-class whites. But after the Civil War, and inspired by Frederick Douglass, a family friend who had escaped slavery and become the nation's foremost abolitionist, she decided to accept a teaching position in the south among newly freed slaves. Appalled by the oppression she faced, Fannie soon left.

Fannie Williams sought to extend to her fellow African Americans the type of education that had opened the way for her own achievements. She founded the settlement house in Chicago, where she had been living with her husband, in 1905.

The Frederick Douglass Center was not the only settlement house that 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at in the United States. On April 30, 1912, he spoke to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at Hull House, a settlement house founded by Jane Addams. In Washington, DC, he visited to a settlement house set in motion by Alice Barney, a prominent artist.



'Abdu'l-Bahá on the High Level Bridge in Lincoln Park, Chicago, after a visit to the Lincoln Park Zoo, May 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's words at the Frederick Douglass Center were not recorded. Mahmúd-i-Zarqání wrote that 'Abdu'l-Bahá "gave an impressive talk at a gathering of blacks. Many white people were also present. He spoke on love and

brotherhood among the different races and nationalities.” “If a believer in God prays for piety,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “it does not matter whether he is robed in black or white.””

Settlement houses were usually located in poor urban areas, so that middle-class men and women could live among the people they aimed to serve. Most houses set out to uplift immigrants by teaching them “proper” ways of life — everything from dancing and painting to housekeeping and civic reform — as well as middle-class values.

Not everyone agreed with the approach of the Frederick Douglass Center. *The Broad Ax*, a black newspaper, claimed that not one of the men or women connected with the center could explain “what it stands for; or what method it is pursuing or it contemplates in pursuing in order to be of the slightest practical benefit to the great mass of the Afro-Americans residing in the city.” But historian Harry P. Kraus, writing decades later in 1942, could cast his evaluative eye back to the settlement movement and conclude that, “It was the settlement house, more than any other single institution of the time, which sought to ‘counteract the dogma of individualism and restore the social principle to thought about civilization.’” Settlement workers were meticulous at keeping records of the conditions of their neighborhoods, which drove the new discipline of social work.



African American WWI veterans queuing up for benefits at the Urban League, 3032 S Wabash, 1920, Chicago. The Frederick Douglass Center eventually merged with the Urban League. ([www.calumet412.tumblr.com](http://www.calumet412.tumblr.com))

“Idealistic and pragmatic,” Kraus wrote, “the settlement workers sought to know and act. They were the first to recognize the responsibilities of all citizens for the inequalities within the industrial, urban ghetto and they were the first to voluntarily take up residence in the ghetto.” Another commentator wrote that the settlement movement aimed “to remind us we were neighbors.”

And for Fannie Barrier Williams's black neighborhoods in Chicago, the neighbors were soon to come knocking. Beginning about 1915, and for the next six decades, the Great Migration would swell the black neighborhoods of Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and dozens of other northern cities. Fifteen million African Americans, escaping the Jim Crow caste system and the virtual slavery of sharecropping, would change America as they picked up themselves and their families and set out for a new life in the new world of the North.



A convention for former slaves was held in Washington, DC, in 1916. From left to right, these ladies are: Annie Parram, age 104; Anna Angales, age 105; Elizabeth Berkeley, 125; and Sadie Thompson, 110. (National Photo Company)

DAY 207

NOVEMBER 3, 1912

OP-ED

## An Ultimately Disastrous Notion of Human Nature

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 3, 2012

NOW THAT ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ’S final few weeks in America are upon us, we might reflect on how frequently he challenged what we today refer to as “Darwinism.” In 2012, our public conversation continues to invoke Darwin’s name as shorthand for a fully naturalistic explanation of human existence, where everything in life is interpreted as the result of the mechanistic workings of evolution, where a Creator has no reason to exist. Over the past decade, a number of evolutionary thinkers, such as Richard Dawkins, seem to have set Darwin up as the prophet-figure in a brand of atheism born of a conviction that science has driven the final nail into religion’s coffin.



Painted in response of the 1937 bombing of a village in northern Spain during the Spanish Civil War, Picasso's "Guernica" was quickly hailed as the century's most monumental depiction of the violence, terror, and chaos of war. (Wikimedia)

“Darwinism” is often used with an adjective in front of it —

*social Darwinism; economic Darwinism* — with the notion of “survival of the fittest” brought to the fore. This phrase, first coined by Herbert Spencer after reading Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, quickly spilled over into social and economic thought. It defines human nature as rooted in self-interest, competition, and conflict, and has subsequently been used to justify everything

from colonialism to eugenics, unrestrained laissez-faire capitalism, the abandonment of the poor, and ultimately, war.

When you read ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks in America, you realize that he rarely engaged with the biological science of evolution, many aspects of which he agreed with. But he was intensely concerned with its wider implications — how the perception that human beings are nothing more than evolved animals generates an ultimately disastrous notion of human nature. Instead of highlighting the aspects of human life *that we share with* animals, he articulated a distinct conception of human nature rooted in the factors *that make us different*: consciousness, abstract thought, scientific advancement, moral reasoning, and qualities such as love, compassion, and justice.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá refused to glorify war in an age when humankind stood on the brink of its first global conflict. “It is neither seemly nor befitting,” he [said to an audience at Stanford University](#), “that such a noble creature, endowed with intellect and lofty thoughts, capable of wonderful achievements and discoveries in sciences and arts, with potential for ever higher perceptions and the accomplishment of divine purposes in life, should seek the blood of his fellowmen upon the field of battle.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá looked out upon the audience of 2000 people, filling the aisles and overflowing the balcony in the Stanford Assembly Hall, and asked them: “Shall we now destroy this great edifice and its very foundation, overthrow this temple of God, the body social or politic? When we are not captives of nature, when we possess the power to control ourselves, shall we become captives of nature and act according to its exigencies?”

Looking back on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discourse in 1912, you can see him engaged in a constant rhetorical battle against the destructive ideologies he found flourishing in America. He took on Social Darwinism, and the idea of the survival of the fittest, over and over again. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s address at Stanford stood at the climax. “There is no lower degree nor greater debasement for man,” he said, “than this natural condition of animalism.”

DAY 208

NOVEMBER 4, 1912

EN ROUTE TO CINCINNATI

## November 4, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 4, 2012

TODAY AT 9:15 A.M. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá departed Chicago on the Pennsylvania Railroad. The train skirted the southern rim of Lake Michigan, then took off cross-country, heading southeast across the patchwork fields of Indiana, steaming through Logansport, Kokomo, Anderson, and Richmond. At 5:15 P.M. it will reach the Ohio River, delivering ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Cincinnati for an overnight stay.



Nightfall on the Ohio River at Cincinnati, circa 1910. (Detroit Publishing Company)

In the week ahead, the presidential election season of 1912 comes to a conclusion as Americans go to the polls to vote. As the results scurry across America along the telegraph wires, ‘Abdu’l-



Bahá pays a final visit to the nation's capital.

DAY 209

NOVEMBER 5, 1912

CINCINNATI, OH

## On Election Day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Praises Cincinnati’s Favorite Son

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 5, 2012

CLEAR SKIES ACROSS the country east of the Rocky Mountains promised a big turnout at the polls on this Election Day, November 5, 1912.



President Taft sending a message over Twitter . . . er . . . that is, over the telephone. (Library of Congress)

President Taft arrived in Cincinnati last night at half past seven, about two hours after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train had pulled in from Chicago. But whereas ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had arrived quietly, a throng of ten thousand people turned out at the train station to greet Taft, their city’s favorite son, many of them workers who had missed their suppers in order to catch a glimpse of the President. Taft got into an automobile while a brass marching band played. He was driven north through downtown toward his brother Charles’s house on Pike Street, while green and red fire lit up the sidewalks and an impromptu parade formed around the car.

William Howard Taft stood six-foot-two and weighed 330 pounds. To see him you'd expect that he spent most of his time sitting on the couch with a beer. But Taft was a teetotaler, light on his feet, a good dancer, and a master horseman. While Taft was Governor of the Philippines under President Roosevelt in 1903, news arrived at the White House one day that he had just finished a twenty-five mile ride. Elihu Root, the Secretary of War, promptly cabled Manila: "HOW IS THE HORSE?" And Taft loved to laugh at his own jokes. His biographer Henry Pringle wrote that the President's laughter began softly, a "trembling of his ample stomach." His chuckle became louder as his story continued, and, paired with an expansive grin, rumbled from his frame, often eliciting laughter from his audience before he had even finished the tale.



The lobby of the Grand Hotel in downtown Cincinnati, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed overnight on November 4. (cincinnativiews.net)

'Abdu'l-Bahá had planned to depart Cincinnati early this morning, but he had so many visitors he couldn't leave. At the Grand Hotel, on Central Avenue at 4th Street, he talked of the President. "I am most grateful to President Taft for having extended his influence toward the establishment of universal peace," he said.

Taft had spent much of his presidency signing arbitration treaties with America's sister republics in Central and South America. Yesterday in New York, Andrew Carnegie had made the same point to a *New York Tribune* reporter. "Above all his services we should rank his untiring efforts for international peace," Carnegie said. "He is emphatically the great peace preserving official of our day."

But, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, treaties of arbitration between nation-states were only the first step in Bahá’u’lláh’s comprehensive plan for global peace, and the chance to achieve it was uniquely America’s. America, he said, “is at peace with all the world and is worthy of raising the flag of brotherhood and international agreement. When this is done, the rest of the world will accept. All nations will join in adopting the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revealed more than fifty years ago. In His Epistles He asked the parliaments of the world to send their wisest and best men to an international world conference which should decide all questions between the peoples and establish universal peace. . . . Its accomplishment would be more far-reaching than the Hague tribunal.”



William Howard Taft, 27th President of the United States (1909-1913); 10th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (1921-1930). (History.com/CORBIS)

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s train pulled out of Cincinnati’s Union Central Railroad Depot at noon, bound for the nation’s capital, President Taft was again in the backseat of his car. He had little regard for the speeding limits, and on many occasions he would try to outrun the police, leaving them covered in dust and never knowing whom they had been chasing. But today, with all eyes on him, he was smiling to the crowds on his way to cast his vote in Precinct M of Cincinnati’s Third Ward, at 2008 Madison Road. The President spent the five full minutes in the voting booth, filling out six separate ballots for federal, state, and local offices.

“What he has accomplished in making treaties with various nations is very good,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in praise of President Taft, “but when we have the interparliamentary body composed of delegates from all the nations of the world and devoted to the maintenance of agreement and goodwill, the utopian dream of sages and poets, the parliament of man, will be realized.”

NOVEMBER 6, 1912  
PRINCETON, NJ

## The Wilson Landslide

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 6, 2012

A BRIGHT LOG FIRE warmed the parlor of a cottage on Cleveland Lane in Princeton, New Jersey. A few guests sat in front of the fireplace, sharing some meaningful moments.

Their host stood with his back to the fire, his hands clasped behind him. He was a professorial type, fifty-six years old next month, with a long narrow face, a prominent jaw, fine grey hair, and an angular nose — often called a “beak” by the newspapers — that was usually seen to be graced with a pair of pince-nez. At ten o’clock a tall woman with dark hair stepped quickly into the room; the firelight glimmered in her tears. She had just come from the dining room, where the journalists had installed the telegraph machine. She placed her hand lightly on her husband’s shoulder and kissed him. “My dear,” Mrs. Wilson said, “I want to be the first to congratulate you.”



Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey, 28th President of the United States, (1913-1921). (Bloomberg Businessweek)

It was Election Day, Tuesday, November 5, 1912. Fifty miles to the northwest, record crowds packed Times Square in New York. “Among the lights of Broadway’s electric signs there shot forth darts of white light,” *The New York Times* reported. “They came from the top of *The Times* tower, and the light was all white, denoting a Democratic landslide.” At 5:02 p.m., two

minutes after the polls had closed, the first returns from Massachusetts flashed up on three synchronized bulletin boards inside the north and east windows of the Times Building. As the operator received the latest results from the newsroom, he typed them out on an electrical device which then printed the news onto three large sheets of scrolling paper, in letters three inches high. Within five minutes, 5,000 people had rushed to the sidewalk. By six o'clock there were 10,000; fifteen minutes after that, 15,000; and the crowd continued to grow until more than 100,000 people filled the square.



Ellen Axson Wilson (1860-1914),  
First Lady of the United States.  
(Carnegie Library, Rome, Georgia)

At the northeast corner of the building, a revolving bulletin board stood thirty feet high, each of its panels written in chalk and lifted above the street by a man turning a crank. “The most popular device, however,” *The Times* explained, “was the especially erected canvas suspended over the ground windows on the north side of the Times Building. . . . Opaque lantern slides, on which the bulletins were etched in thick, legible style, made it possible for persons to see not only the highly illuminated canvas, but each individual bulletin, from a distance of five blocks.”

Back in Princeton, a thousand undergraduates — all of them male — streamed out of Alexander Hall where they had been following the election returns, paraded up Nassau Avenue which was alight with red fire, and camped outside the President-elect’s house on Cleveland Lane. At 11:30, Woodrow Wilson stepped up onto a chair on the small front porch of his cottage to address his

former students. “I have no feeling of triumph tonight,” he said, “but a feeling of solemn responsibility. I know the very great task ahead of me.”



The front page of the New York Tribune on November 6, 1912, announcing Wilson's landslide. (Library of Congress)

“Prosperity has carried us into devious paths. There is much to reconstruct, and it will take a generation to work out what America must achieve.”

The audience of young men gave the President-elect their college yells. After losing recently to the Harvard football team, Princeton hadn't had much to cheer about. But now, the *New York Tribune* said, “Princeton was satisfied. If it could not win the football championship it had at least elected a President.”

DAY 211

NOVEMBER 7, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

**“These Are, Indeed, United States”**

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on November 7, 2012



THE MERCURY WAS RISING quickly when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá finally stepped down from the train just before 9 a.m. He got into Agnes Parsons’ carriage and was ferried to the house he had rented at 1901 Eighteenth Street, NW, just a five-minute walk from the Parsons’ home, near Dupont Circle. Every day for the next five days he would speak to large crowds in the Parsons’ bright white and yellow ballroom at 4 p.m. — it sat 150 people — and would welcome guests to his own residence every morning.



Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC, in February, 1913. A parade of woman suffrage hikers is arriving from New York. Notice the two women riding horses at the center of the picture, dressed in white from head to toe. (Harris & Ewing)

At 8:15 p.m. that night, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rose to speak at the Universalist Church of Our Father, at Thirteenth and L Streets. Back on April 21 the church’s pastor, the Reverend Dr. John van Schaick, had waited on the sidewalk to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and had conducted him through a side door to the chancel. After an introduction, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke on the underlying unity of the world’s religions. This time, he spoke about liberty.

“Praise be God! The standard of liberty is held aloft in this land,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began. “You enjoy political liberty; you enjoy liberty of thought and speech, religious liberty, racial and personal liberty. Surely this is worthy of appreciation and thanksgiving.”



The Universalist Church of Our Father at Thirteenth and L Streets, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on two occasions in 1912. (Bahá'í National Archives, United States)

Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá prized America's liberty, his long years of imprisonment had given him a fundamentally different understanding of freedom. "After being forty years a prisoner I can tell you that freedom is not a matter of place," he told reporters on the SS *Cedric* in New York Harbor, on his first day on America. "When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed a release."

At the Universalist Church, 'Abdu'l-Bahá connected liberty with being liberal toward others. "Liberalism is essential in this day," he said, defining it as "justness and equity toward all nations and people." Speaking of the openness and acceptance one must extend to all nations, races and creeds, he told the congregation: "Human attitudes must not be limited; for God is unlimited, and whosoever is the servant of the threshold of God must, likewise, be free from limitations."

'Abdu'l-Bahá then spoke about brotherhood and fraternity. He enumerated various types of brotherhood — those based on familial bonds, patriotism, race, even a sense of altruism towards the entire human race — noting that each, ultimately, was limited. Only a brotherhood based on the power of the Holy Spirit, he said — one that is truly "spiritual in character" — ensures that "indestructible brotherhood which includes all the divine possibilities and significance in humanity."



A street scene on Ninth Street Northwest in Washington, DC, in 1915. ([www.shorpy.com](http://www.shorpy.com))

‘Abdu’l-Bahá concluded his talk that evening by restating the unique role America must play in achieving international peace. “This noble nation,” he said, “intelligent, thoughtful, reflective, is not impelled by motives of territorial aggrandizement and lust for dominion.” He told his audience that Americans displayed a “oneness of interest and unity of national policy.”

“These are, indeed, United States,” he said. “Therefore, this nation possesses the capacity and capability for holding aloft the banner of international peace. May this noble people be the cause of unifying humanity.”

DAY 212

NOVEMBER 8, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Assault on the Color Line

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 8, 2012

“HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON has been a triumphal march,” the *Chicago Defender* announced in its edition of Saturday, May 4, 1912. America’s most influential black weekly newspaper was reporting on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first visit to Washington, DC. “Southern people whose hearts were once filled with the most bitter prejudices against their brothers in black, have publicly acknowledged their change of heart and now treat the colored people as brother indeed.” “He has met and conquered southern prejudices.”



Black janitors, cleaning the Capitol building in 1914. (Harris & Ewing)

That might have been a bit optimistic. Even before he arrived in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already shown his grasp of how deeply these “southern prejudices” ran; they certainly could not be conquered overnight, and they remain with us in diminished form today. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

neither harbored any illusions about the systemic crisis that the race problem posed for America's social fabric, nor understated how much deep personal soul-searching and mutual goodwill would be necessary to weed out such an entrenched pattern of life. The problem was urgent, and required immediate, systematic intervention.

“Until these prejudices are entirely removed from the people of the world,” he later wrote, “the realm of humanity will not find rest. Nay, rather, discord and bloodshed will be increased day by day, and the foundation of the prosperity of the world of man will be destroyed.” “Now is the time for the Americans to take up this matter and unite both the white and colored races. Otherwise, hasten ye towards destruction! Hasten ye toward devastation!” “Indeed, there is a greater danger than only the shedding of blood. It is the destruction of America.”



The front page of The Chicago Defender on May 4, 1912. The article "To Break the Color Line," about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appeared in this edition. (Chicago Defender)

During his first trip to Washington, from April 20 to 27, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had begun to weave together a strategy aimed not just at promoting economic and civil rights for African Americans, but at healing the centuries of mistrust that racial prejudice had perpetuated between white and black. It amounted to a frontal assault against the racial ideologies that legitimized the color line in American life.



At Howard University on the morning of April 23, and at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church that evening, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had begun to elaborate a new language of race — a new set of racial images and metaphors — that consciously contradicted the popular associations of the racial term “black” with evil, darkness, and filth. “In the clustered jewels of the races,” he said in one of many such statements, “may the blacks be as sapphires and rubies and the whites as diamonds and pearls. The composite beauty of humanity will be witnessed in their unity and blending.”

In addition to his compelling use of language, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá found opportunities to put his racial discourse into practice: seating a black man in the place of honor at a diplomatic dinner to which the man, being a Negro, had not been invited; insisting that meetings should be mixed race; emphasizing that both white and blacks had to change their behavior in difficult ways for unity to be constructed out of the divisiveness of the present; and by coming out for interracial marriage in 1912 America.



Agnes Parsons with her son, Jeffrey.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discourse on race hadn’t yet “conquered” the southern prejudices the *Defender* identified, they had already begun to work change in the lives of many of the individuals who surrounded him. Delegates to the Bahá’í Temple Unity convention elected Louis Gregory to their national council just days after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s opening salvo in Washington. Agnes Parsons, whose home near Dupont Circle was one of the centers of social Washington, began 1912 without any contact with the African American life of the city. Her diary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s days in Washington omits mention of most of

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s engagement with the issue of race. Yet she opened her home to black guests, and, within a few years, was energetically taking the lead in organizing nationwide Race Unity Conferences, having been asked to do so by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

On November 10, 1912, during his final visit to the capital, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reprised his theme at a mixed-race gathering at the home of Pauline and Joseph Hannen: “In the sight of God there is no distinction between whites and blacks; all are as one. . . . How then can man be limited and influenced by racial colors? The important thing is to realize that all are human, all are one progeny of Adam. Inasmuch as they are all one family, why should they be separated?”

“[E]xcellence does not depend upon color,” Abdu’l-Bahá argued. “Character is the true criterion of humanity.”



DAY 213

NOVEMBER 9, 1912  
WASHINGTON, DC

## Challenging Washington's Oldest Jewish Congregation

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 9, 2012

ON THE EVENING of November 8, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed the Washington Hebrew Congregation, led by Rabbi Abram Simon, at the Eighth Street Temple in the nation's capital. One month earlier, he had spoken to a similar Reform congregation at the Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, asking them to consider that just as the Jewish prophets had reclaimed a lost people and turned them into a mighty society, so too had Jesus and Muhammad. His approach in Washington was similar, though this time around his argument was met with less enthusiasm.



A view of the White House executive mainson from above the West Wing looking east past the Treasury and along Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. (Harris & Ewing)

'Abdu'l-Bahá began by laying much of the blame for conflict in the world at the feet of those who professed a belief in God. "Most regrettable of all," he said, "is the state of difference and

divergence we have created between each other in the name of religion, imagining that a paramount duty in our religious belief is that of alienation and estrangement, that we should shun each other and consider each other contaminated with error and infidelity.”

Then, following precisely the same structure as his lengthy address at the Temple Emanu-El, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá outlined the transformation that Moses had achieved in the children of Israel. “They had been slaves,” he said, “[Moses] made them princes. They were ignorant; He made them learned . . . They became renowned throughout the ancient world until finally in the zenith and splendor of their new civilization the glory of the sovereignty of Solomon was attained.”



The Washington Hebrew Congregation's temple at 8th and I Streets in Washington, DC. (Historical Society of Washington, DC)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá spent a few minutes preparing his audience for the next phase of the argument. He asked them to be “just and fair in your judgment of the following statements.” He then proceeded to articulate the accomplishments of Jesus, going so far as to ask: “Were it not for Jesus Christ, would the Bible, the Torah have reached this land of America? Would the name of Moses be spread throughout the world?”

“This produced a stir among the people,” Agnes Parsons noted in her account of the evening. She states that Rabbi Simon made an effort through the translator, Dr. Fareed, to stop the address. Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretaries, wrote that the people seated near the pulpit made signs that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s time was up.



Rabbi Abram Simon of the Washington Hebrew Congregation. (whctemple.org)

“A few words concerning the Qur’án and the Muslims,” was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s abrupt transition to the final step in his argument. He outlined the achievements of Muhammad, making sure to include Muhammad’s praise of Moses. While the congregation in San Francisco had thanked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warmly for his thoughts, challenging as they may have been, some in Washington began to leave the synagogue. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued, undeterred. He posed the question: “Since the Prophets themselves, the Founders, have loved, praised and testified of each other, why should we disagree and be alienated?”

“We must be united,” he added. “We must love each other. We must ever praise each other.” The alternative, he said, was that “religious wars will have no end.”

Agnes Parsons telephoned Rabbi Simon the next morning and invited him to visit with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Later that evening, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a small gathering about the conversation that had transpired between the two men. He had told Rabbi Simon that Jews should be proud of Jesus, a “mighty personage” that they had, in fact, given to the world. “When you express your glory and honor in the recollection of Christ,” he told the Rabbi, “rest assured that the Christians will shake your hands in fellowship.”

Rabbi Simon eventually concurred. But he asked one thing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Cannot you tell the Christians to love us a little bit more?”

DAY 214

NOVEMBER 10, 1912

WASHINGTON, DC

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey So Far: Month Seven

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 10, 2012

WE HAVE REACHED the end of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s seventh month in America. We’ll take this opportunity to look back at some of the highlights of the past thirty-one days.



The eastern facade of the Capitol building in Washington, DC, circa 1915. (Shorpy.com)

We began the month in the middle of a week that was the high point of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s trip West. At the Open Forum in San Francisco, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tackled the contentious issue of evolution in [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Darwin, and the Evolution of All Things](#). On San Francisco’s Sutter Street on October 12, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited the Temple Emanu-El, delivering a challenging talk to the Reform Jewish congregation in [Rabbi Martin Meyer Hosts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at Temple Emanu-El](#).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then spent three relaxing days in Pleasanton, California, with the family of Phoebe Hearst, one of America’s greatest philanthropists. We explored her connection with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in three stories: [Phoebe Apperson Hearst](#), [Mrs. Hearst Visits a Prisoner in ‘Akká](#), and [The Grand Benefactress of California](#).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then traveled south to Los Angeles to visit the gravesite of his recently departed friend, Thornton Chase, whom he called “the first American Bahá’í.” [The Last Days of Thornton Chase](#), [Thornton Chase’s Long Season of Suffering](#), and [‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the City of Angels](#) told the tumultuous story of Chase.

Before leaving California for the long trek back East, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to the Century Club Of California, covered in a feature that was popular among our readers: [“The Great Educator of Man Is Woman”](#).

On the trip back across the country, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a Catholic cardinal [A Gentle Rebuke](#), and had many [Conversations in Transit](#). He paid one last visit to the Windy City, where we witnessed how [In Chicago, Anything is Possible](#).

The watershed Presidential election of 1912 also finished in the month just passed, which we covered in three features: [The Stubborn Hide of the Bull Moose](#), [On Election Day, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Praises Cincinnati’s Favorite Son](#), and [The Wilson Landslide](#).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then paid a farewell visit to the nation’s capital, where he reprised his rhetorical battle against America’s ideologies of race in [‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Assault on the Color Line](#).

During the month we also published two editorial pieces: [The Home Stretch](#), and [An Ultimately Disastrous Notion of Human Nature](#).

There are now just twenty-five days left until ‘Abdu’l-Bahá bids farewell to America.



DAY 215

NOVEMBER 11, 1912

BALTIMORE, MD

## November 11, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 11, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ LEFT the nation’s capital at 9 a.m. this morning on a train bound for Baltimore, arriving at Camden Station shortly afterward. He and his party checked into the Hotel Rennert to rest before making their way to Baltimore’s First Unitarian Church where he is scheduled to speak later today. He will step back onto his train at 3 p.m. for the final leg of his long eastern trip.



View of downtown Baltimore from Baltimore Harbor, in 1912. (Maryland Historical Society)

In the week ahead, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returns to New York after almost four months away, the Progressive Movement reaches a triumphant climax with Woodrow Wilson’s aggressive reform agenda, and, New York’s first big Mafia trial comes to a close, after filling the city’s newspapers with sensational gangland stories for two months.

DAY 216

NOVEMBER 12, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Returns to the City

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 12, 2012

SOMETIME AFTER MIDNIGHT, the glow of Manhattan appeared over the eastern horizon. The train carrying ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the final leg of his long trip back east slowed as it approached the city limits of Jersey City, and finally stopped at the Pennsylvania Railroad Terminal on the western shore of the Hudson River. The passengers disembarked and boarded the 23rd Street Ferry, which pulled away from the ferry terminal, turned against the Hudson’s current, and pushed north for four miles along the middle of the channel. Off to starboard the towers of lower Manhattan pricked the night sky with a thousand points of light.



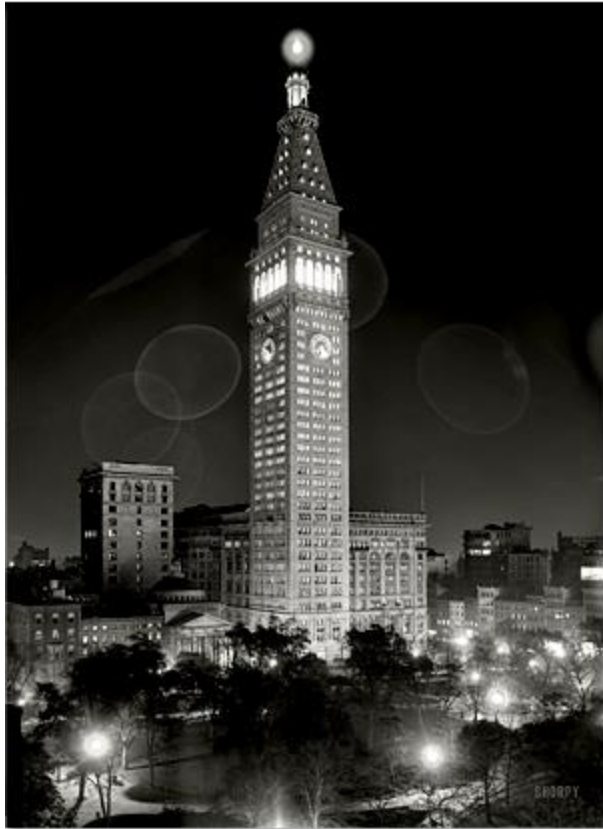
Lower Manhattan at night from the Metropolitan Life Tower, circa 1920. (Library of Congress)

Juliet Thompson stood at the end of the pier at the West 23rd Street ferry terminal in Manhattan, tracking the chain of lights that embossed the small steamship on its dark watery approach. She made out Dr. Fareed, the translator, standing on deck, and, next to him, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seated on a deck chair. He stood, stepped into the ship’s bright cabin, and, a few minutes after 1 a.m., walked down the gangplank to meet her.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá set foot in New York for the first time in almost four months. He had left the city on July 23 to escape the summer heat, which had beaten down in record temperatures through the month of July, forcing New Yorkers out of their sweltering tenements at night. They slept on the grass in the parks at the Battery, and thousands stretched out in Riverside Park beneath the cool breeze that wafted in off the Hudson, just a few hundred feet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s rented house.

In the 113 days since then, as the temperature in New York steadily subsided from the high 90s to the mid-50s, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had completed the longest overland journey of his life, engaging with a vast diversity of North Americans: the painters, playwrights, and patricians who summered in Dublin, New Hampshire; the religious liberals of Boston; the New Thought groups, the Vedantists, the Transcendentalists, the opera singers, and the nature enthusiasts of Green Acre; the English-speaking Protestants, French Canadian Catholics, and the socialists of Montreal; the East Indian students and poor African American residents of Chicago; the millworkers and industrialists of the Midwest; the farmers and the Mormons in Salt Lake City; newspapermen and women everywhere; and the practical minds of California: Japanese immigrants, African American servants, Reform Jews, university students, faculty members, college presidents, and government officials of the San Francisco Bay Area. Now he had returned to New York, the most diverse place of them all, where his journey had begun back on April 11 when he disembarked from the SS *Cedric* at these very piers.



**The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company building at night, about 1910. Note the 10-minute exposure time as recorded by the clock on the tower. (Detroit Publishing Company)**

From the ferry terminal ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s automobile went north, although we don’t know the route. They may have set out east along West 23rd Street toward Broadway, and then north through the glowing canyons of the boulevard past the theatres, through brightly lit Times Square, around the statue of Columbus at the corner of the black expanse of Central Park, and then up past the Hotel Ansonia into the Upper West Side. Or the driver may have turned left out of the ferry terminal, skirted the dark flowing Hudson on 13th and then 12th Avenue, skipped inland at West 59th Street around the locomotives parked at the south end of the New York Central & Hudson River Railway, and then up West End Avenue to Mrs. Champney’s house on West 78th Street, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would again take up residence for his final three weeks in America.

DAY 217

NOVEMBER 13, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## Triumph and Tragedy in a Vast and Progressive Nation

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 13, 2012

“HAVING TRAVELED FROM coast to coast,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá announced on Election Day in Cincinnati, “I find the United States of America vast and progressive, the government just and equitable, the nation noble and independent.”



Inauguration Day, March 4, 1913. Woodrow Wilson, standing behind the white balustrade in the middle of the photo, takes the oath of office to become the 28th President of the United States. (Harris & Ewing)

During his eight months in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had engaged a vast, diverse audience of Americans in conversation about the issues they felt were central to the future of their nation. He had praised “the optimism of this great country,” and the “quick perception, intelligence and understanding,” of the American people. “They are not content to stand still. They are most energetic and progressive.” “I find religion, high ideals, broad sympathy with humanity,

benevolence and kindness widespread here,” he said, “and my hope is that America will lead in the movement for universal peace.”

The Americans ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met in 1912 lived on the cresting heights of a decades-long wave of optimism generated by faith in the ability of new sciences — statistics, economics, sociology, and psychology prominent among them — to solve the injustices of the industrial age. Between 1890 and 1920, millions of Americans, calling themselves “progressives,” campaigned against child labor, for more representative government, against corporate control of the economy, for worker’s rights and women’s suffrage. “Progressivism,” historians Arthur Link and Richard McCormick wrote, “was the only reform movement ever experienced by the whole American nation.”



Boys in Macon, Georgia, mending an industrial sewing machine. (Photograph by Lewis Wickes Hine)

These threads coalesced in the presidential election of 1912. It was “a unique moment in the Progressive Era,” writes scholar Brett Flehinger, “because it drew together politicians, social reformers, intellectuals, and economists onto a single stage and produced a many-sided national debate about the future of America’s economic, political, and social structure.”

When, on March 4, 1913, Woodrow Wilson stood in front of the east facade of the U.S. Capitol building to take the oath of office, he announced to the American people that the time for change had come. “The Nation has been deeply stirred,” Wilson said in his inaugural address, “stirred by a solemn passion, stirred by the knowledge of wrong, of ideals lost. . . . The feelings with which we face this new age of right and opportunity sweep across our heartstrings like some air out of God’s own presence, where justice and mercy are reconciled and the judge and the brother are one.”

By 1916, the end of Woodrow Wilson's first term in office, most of the progressives' agenda had been enacted into law by Congress. They created the Federal Reserve to guard against financial panics, fight unemployment, and protect the American people from the financial power of Wall Street. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Clayton Antitrust Act prevented large corporations from engaging in unfair or anti-competitive practices. The Farm Loan Act made credit available to small farmers. The Keating-Owen Act took aim at child labor practices. The Adamson Act enforced an eight-hour workday on the railroads. The Seventeenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provided for the people to elect their Senators directly, instead of having them appointed by state legislatures. Then, in 1920, ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment granted women's suffrage in national elections.



The obverse side of the inauguration medal struck for President Wilson. (Dipity.com)

But 'Abdu'l-Bahá had argued repeatedly in his conversations that America's future depended on much more than the legal solutions made possible by tentative political accommodations. Indeed, the hopes of the progressives were soon to be dashed, their ideals disappointed, by new political and social divisions that rose out of the unexpected global war that they never saw coming. "Every reform we have won will be lost if we go into this war," the President said.

The Progressive Era, then, was a time of both great achievements and tragic shortcomings. In the remaining weeks of our journey, we will look to the years after 1912 to examine the central themes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's American discourse in light of the successes and failures of the Progressive Movement, and in the broad perspective of America's twentieth century.

DAY 218

NOVEMBER 14, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## The Trial of the Century

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on November 14, 2012

ON JULY 16, 1912, at approximately 2 a.m., “Lefty Louie” Rosenberg, “Whitey” Lewis, “Dago Frank” Cirofici, and “Gyp the Blood” Horowitz loitered outside the Hotel Metropole at 147 West 43rd Street, just off Times Square. When a slightly overweight man in a black striped suit emerged from the hotel, they reached into their pockets, each took out a revolver, and they shot him dead. Their victim had barely hit the sidewalk when the four gunmen jumped into a big white car, which had been waiting for them up the block, and raced off toward Sixth Avenue.



The Woolworth and Singer Buildings in New York City in 1916. (Library of Congress)

That same evening, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had returned to Manhattan from Brooklyn to attend a wedding ceremony. Although he didn’t comment on the murder case itself, he had written about



preventing crime, not by reforming laws or inventing new methods of punishing criminals, but through the education and moral development of society.

The bystanders who rushed to the murder scene recognized the victim instantly — it was Herman Rosenthal, whose face had been all over the news. He ran illegal casinos in cahoots with Charles Becker, a forty-three year old Lieutenant of the New York Police Department. Just two days before his murder, Rosenthal had told the press about how much money Becker had extorted from him. Becker and the four shooters were charged with first-degree murder. The complicated and sensational story of the Rosenthal murder, the corruption in the police force, and the resulting trial — one of the first that dealt with gang crime in New York — was featured on the cover of *The New York Times* for weeks.



A newspaper article addressing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's views on crime appeared in *The Boston Traveler* on Friday, May 24, 1912, shortly after an execution had taken place. (Bahá'í National Archives, United States)

Most of the trial took place while 'Abdu'l-Bahá was back in New York City in mid-November. "[C]ommunities are day and night occupied in making penal laws, and in preparing and organizing instruments and means of punishment," 'Abdu'l-Bahá had told an interviewer back in Palestine. But, "in reality, they are causing destruction of morals and perversion of characters." Something was missing in the justice system, he said. While the "laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating," 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him."



To prevent criminal behavior, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, the community should “endeavor to educate the masses,” so that “day by day knowledge and sciences would increase, the understanding would be broadened, the sensibilities developed, customs would become good, and morals normal; in one word, in all these classes of perfections there would be progress, and there would be fewer crimes.”



**Charles Becker, the police lieutenant who was found guilty of murder. (Bettmann & Corbis)**

Throughout his time in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had often praised the material civilization he saw flourishing, and called on the nation to likewise construct a “divine” one. Crime and punishment would work differently in a divine civilization. “With force and punishments, material civilization seeketh to restrain the people from mischief, from inflicting harm on society and committing crimes,” he wrote. “But in a divine civilization, the individual is so conditioned that with no fear of punishment, he shunneth the perpetration of crimes, seeth the crime itself as the severest of torments. . . .”

The four gangsters were found guilty of murdering Herman Rosenthal and went to the electric chair in Sing Sing on April 13, 1914. Charles Becker succeeded in getting a new trial, only to be found guilty again. They executed him on July 30, 1915.

DAY 219

NOVEMBER 15, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## Winning Suffrage, Losing Equal Rights: 1912-1920

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 15, 2012

EIGHT YEARS AFTER ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left America, all seemed lost one morning in Nashville, Tennessee. It was Wednesday, August 18, 1920. Outside the state legislature, forty-nine state representatives wore red roses, and only forty-seven wore yellow ones. This meant that forty-nine of the men walking into the chamber that day would vote against the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which proposed to grant equal suffrage to women, and only forty-seven were on the side of ratification.



The National Women's Party on Pennsylvania Avenue outside President Wilson's White House during the war. It was the first time anyone had ever picketed the White House. The contradictions between making the world "safe for democracy" but denying it at home eventually pressured Wilson to give in on the women's vote. (Library of Congress)

The yellow roses had descended on Nashville in the weeks before the vote. A diverse army of suffragists — wealthy and working class, urban and rural, black and white — wrote letters, made speeches, and lobbied legislators. Anti-suffragists, bearing red roses, did the same. If Tennessee voted yes, it would become the thirty-sixth of the forty-eight states to ratify the constitutional

Amendment, putting it over the top. If Tennessee voted no, the suffrage campaign had few other states to hope for.

But Representative Banks Turner switched his vote during the first roll call, and the issue was deadlocked. Nervous tension filled the hall when the second roll call produced no change. Then, on the third vote, Harry Burn, the youngest member of the legislature, who wore a big red anti-suffragist rose on his lapel, astonished the chamber by casting his vote in favor of the bill. Chaos reigned; opponents chased Burn around the room. He climbed out of a third-floor window, danced along a ledge, and hid in the Capitol's attic. After decades of battle, just one word from one man ("Yea") had delivered universal suffrage to the women of America. Although his lapel bore a red rose, Harry later explained, no one could see what he carried in his breast pocket: a telegram from his mother in East Tennessee urging him to do the right thing.

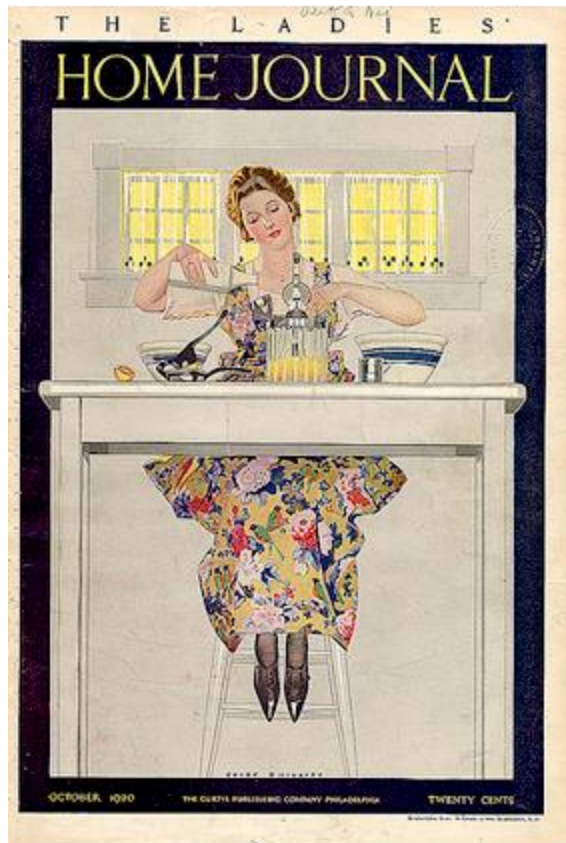


A suffrage picketer outside the White House asking President Wilson to live up to his pledge to "Make the world safe for democracy." (Library of Congress)

Sadly, no sooner had the drama passed than dominant voices began walking back the plan. That same month, August, 1920, *The Ladies Home Journal* was already asking women to cool it in their battle for equal rights. The magazine's "Credo for the New Woman" endorsed suffrage, but stressed the limits to equality that women should accept. "I believe in woman's assertion of self;" it read, "but I believe also in her obligation of service to her family. . . ." Journalist Marian Castle, in the July, 1930, issue

of *Women's Journal*, recast women's newfound freedom as oppression itself, explaining how she sang "paeans of joy over the fact that I may depend upon my husband for money instead of earning it myself." Dorothy Thompson wrote that if she had a daughter who wanted to be a novelist, she would tell her that "that little talent of yours" would be unlikely to produce anything worthwhile and that her time would be better spent raising a fine man than writing "a second-rate novel."

In hindsight, this resurgence of conservative thinking, a hallmark of the late Progressive Era, is not surprising. The early suffragists, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, had been true radicals in demanding changes to America's gender order. But other than holding noisy parades, they made little progress until conservatives took up the suffrage torch in the broader interests of temperance and urban reform. Instead of challenging the gender order, the conservatives, also sometimes called "maternal feminists," defined womanhood as a set of essentially domestic values, and sought suffrage to bring their motherly morality, piety, and purity to bear on social issues. When many women put aside the fight for equal rights in order to support the war effort, it became clear that women were "responsible," and could be counted on not to rock the boat if they were given the vote. "Once legislators became convinced that woman suffrage meant a strengthening rather than a questioning of social norms," feminist scholar Carol Lee Bacchi writes, "women had not long to wait for a ballot." "The feminist cry for women's equal educational and occupational rights became muted and died."



The October, 1920, cover of *The Ladies Home Journal*, which perpetuated the ideal of the domestic woman throughout the first half of the twentieth century. ([artdecoblog.blogspot.com](http://artdecoblog.blogspot.com))

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from the moment he arrived in America, had argued that transforming America’s gender regime would require more than a legal victory. Although he supported suffrage, he told reporters that the underlying problem was not legal, but *ideological*. “The chief cause of the mental and physical inequalities of the sexes,” he argued, “is due to custom and training, which for ages past have molded women into the ideal of the weaker vessel.” “It has been objected by some that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is deficient by creation,” he told a gathering of suffragists. “This is pure imagination.”

Even as his steamship was still crawling up New York Harbor to its pier on April 11, 1912, he was already laying out a far broader agenda for women’s equality than what the progressive suffragists envisioned. Women, he argued, must have the same educational and occupational opportunities as men, and they must march forward into the front ranks of the sciences and the arts. “If women were given the same advantages as men, their capacity being the same, the result would be the same.” It was more important to educate girls than boys, he said, and if a family could not afford to educate both its sons and its daughters, they should give the priority to the girls. “When women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world,” he declared, “when



they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá visualized not merely a society of equal legal and political rights, but an entirely different kind of civilization built on feminine ideals. “The world in the past has been ruled by force,” he stated, “and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities of both body and mind. But the scales are already shifting — force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals — or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced.”

In advocating a more feminine civilization, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could almost have been speaking to the men standing guard over the glass ceiling in 2012: “As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibility, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.”



When it became obvious that Woodrow Wilson wasn't interested in giving the vote to women, radical suffragists campaigned against his re-election in 1916. (Library of Congress)

DAY 220

NOVEMBER 16, 1912

OP-ED

## The Struggle to Be Fully Human

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 16, 2012

EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGISTS have been waging a war on many fronts against the notion of altruism for the better part of a century and a half. The idea that animals — which for them include human beings — engage in selfless acts toward each other has been a thorn in their side ever since Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. That one could witness, in a natural system governed by the “survival of the fittest,” frequent acts of selfless behavior was a problem that even Darwin feared might be his theory’s undoing.



**"Earthrise." The first photograph ever taken of the Earth from outer space, by Astronaut Bill Anders, as Apollo 8 orbited the moon on December 24, 1968. (NASA)**

The solution to this vexing problem had to wait until 1964, when another British biologist, William Hamilton, published a mathematical formula that explained how altruistic behavior emerged over time as organisms tried to increase the propagation of their own genes by aiding



close biological relatives. Altruism, it turned out, is just another form of self-interest. In recent years, the war against altruism has taken aim at everything from love and generosity, to philanthropy and the raising of children. Thanks to elaborate theoretical contortions, theorists are confident they have revealed each of them to be nothing more than forms of selfishness.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá appears to have seen it all coming. During his travels in Europe and America, he relentlessly promoted the idea of a human race that is distinct from the animal kingdom, defining both intellectual and spiritual capacities as fundamentally different than natural instincts. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá didn’t deny humankind’s nearly unlimited capacity for self-interest, but he rejected the reductionist view of human beings that considers our nature as consisting of little else.

“Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality,” he would often argue. “[T]hat is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light . . . he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and . . . he possesses the degrees of perfection.” Human beings, he said, are capable of both the most degraded behavior, and the most saintly. “Not in any other of the species in the world of existence,” he added, “is there such a difference, contrast, contradiction and opposition as in the species of man.”

At Stanford University on October 8, 1912, and again two days later at the Open Forum in San Francisco, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had defined humanity based on the qualities that differentiate us from animals — abstract thought, scientific advancement, the impulse for discovery, the capacity to struggle in the face of adversity, and moral reasoning among them. Yet these intellectual endowments, he frequently told audiences, must ultimately serve higher spiritual faculties such as justice, love, compassion, and generosity.

Our nature, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, is incapable of being stationary. We are always either moving forward or regressing. “Man is even as steel,” his father, Bahá’u’lláh, wrote, “the essence of which is hidden: through admonition and explanation, good counsel and education, that essence will be brought to light. If, however, he be allowed to remain in his original condition, the corrosion of lusts and appetites will effectively destroy him.”

In its highest form, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá defined being human as operating in a constant state of selfless service towards our fellow human beings. Unlike the rest of nature, which is driven entirely by instinct and reaction, we humans have the capacity to *choose* to sacrifice ourselves for one another. This ability invests us with a unique responsibility to help our fellow human beings achieve their potential. It is a vision of human nature with far reaching implications for politics,

economics, our approach to education, and even the smallest of our daily interactions.

DAY 221

NOVEMBER 17, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## An Ethos for a New Age

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 17, 2012

“ALL CREATED THINGS have their degree, or stage, of maturity,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained. “That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race, could neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day and period of newness and consummation.”



The Flatiron Building in Madison Square, Manhattan, 1912. (Shorpy.com)

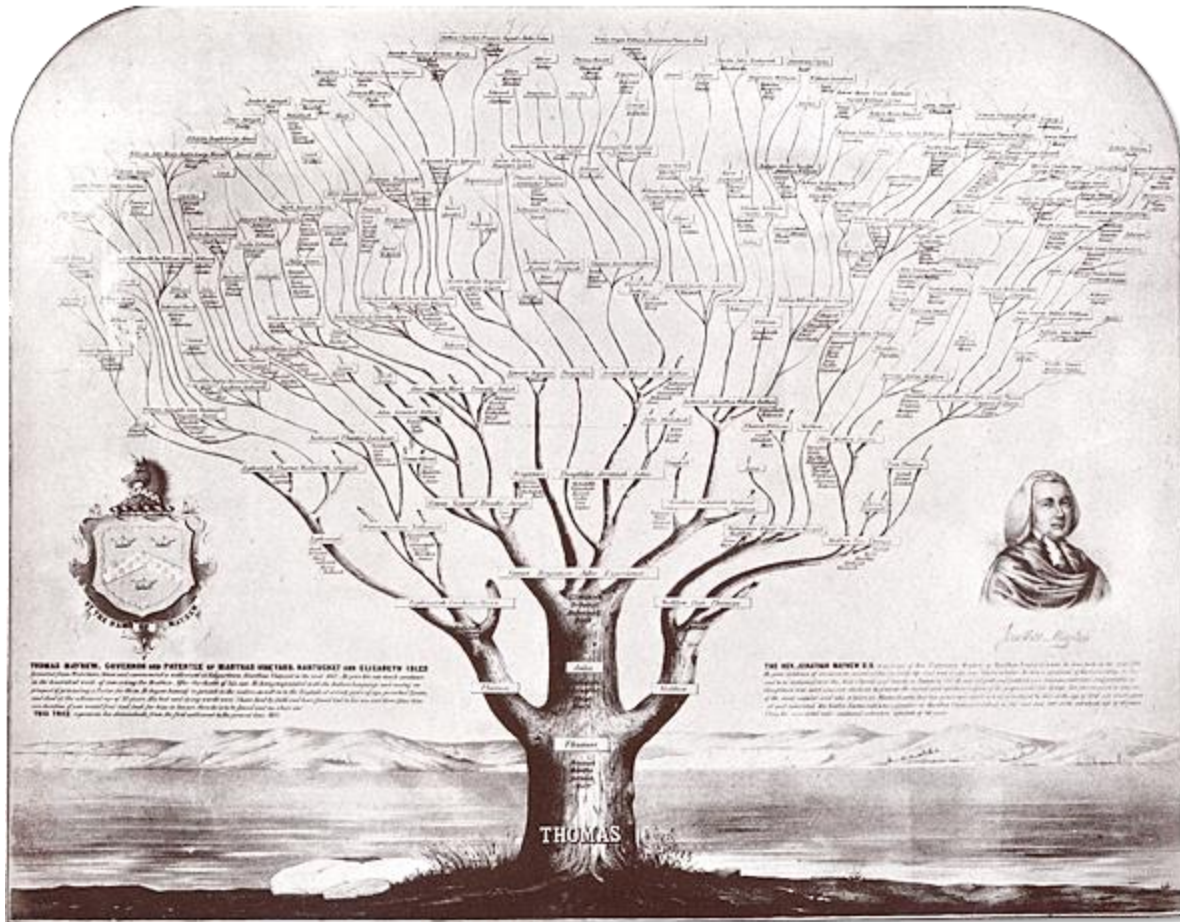
It was the evening of November 17, 1912. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was delivering one of his final public talks in America. The venue was Genealogical Hall, a stately four-storey brownstone at 226 West 58th Street on the southern fringe of Central Park in the heart of Manhattan. It was home to the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, an organization devoted to preserving family histories in the region, dating back to the colonial period. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá didn’t address the Society: it was an event arranged by New York’s Bahá’ís. Nevertheless, he framed his talk around the idea of the genealogy of the human family.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that just as an individual moves through various milestones in life, so too does humanity as a whole. Humankind, he explained, had passed through its childhood and

youth, and had “entered its long presaged period of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere visible and apparent.”

The evidences were all around him in New York. Skyscrapers climbed heavenward around the hall where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke, symbols of the material inventiveness of a highly entrepreneurial nation. He appreciated the American people for their openness to new ideas, and their ability to shake off the prejudices of the old world. He characterized the American government as equitable and committed to justice. He emphasized the nation’s spirit of scientific invention and discovery. “Everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity,” he told his audience at Genealogical Hall that evening, “indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation.”

The study of genealogy — the impulse to trace the roots of one’s family heritage — was initially met with great suspicion in America. In the era after Independence, many Americans viewed it as an attempt to secure a personal linkage back to the old British Empire, something antithetical to the new republic’s future-oriented convictions. “Old trees yield no fruitage,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience in Manhattan that evening, “old ideas and methods are obsolete and worthless now.”



The genealogical tree of Thomas Mayhew, Governor of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Isles in the seventeenth century. (Reed College)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá listened to the words his translator was delivering, and prepared to shift his focus to religion. Religion was in the midst of the same evolutionary dynamic. “This is the cycle of maturity and reformation in religion as well,” he said. “Dogmatic imitations of ancestral beliefs are passing. They have been the axis around which religion revolved but now are no longer fruitful; on the contrary, in this day they have become the cause of human degradation and hindrance.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s father, Bahá’u’lláh, had denounced all forms of particularism — national, racial, gendered, economic, religious — and presented a new universal ethos. This approach, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, was the solution to the pressing needs of a maturing human race, which was progressing materially at an explosive pace, running into new conflicts, and outstripping its adolescent capacity to live at peace.

NOVEMBER 18, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## November 18, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 18, 2012

THIS AFTERNOON ‘Abdu’l-Bahá takes up J. Pierpont Morgan on an invitation to visit his vast library on the corner of Madison Avenue and 36th Street. Morgan, the tycoon owner of railroads, steelworks, and telegraph companies, runs much of modern civilization in America.



Lower Manhattan from the mouth of the Hudson River. The Woolworth Building is still under construction in late 1912. (Bain Collection, Library of Congress)

In the week ahead, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá attends a farewell dinner at the Great Northern Hotel, which, it turns out, will refuse to let any African Americans through the door; he expresses two very different opinions of America’s two richest men; and, as the decade moves on, the Great War cuts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s home in Palestine off from the rest of the world while increasing prejudice engulfs African Americans at home.

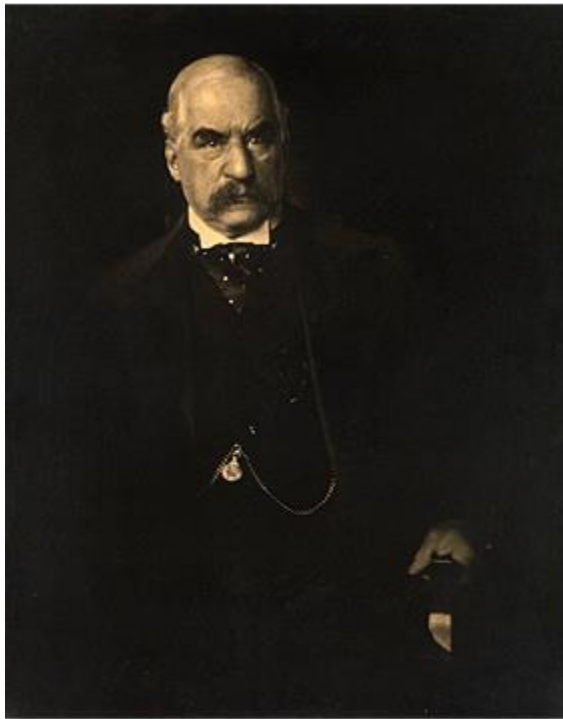
DAY 223

NOVEMBER 19, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

# The Trouble With J. P. Morgan's Millions

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 19, 2012

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S AUTOMOBILE halted in front of 33 East 36th Street after dark on Monday, November 18, 1912. He stepped out onto slushy pavement in the brisk evening air, and ascended a broad flight of steps between two sleek Assyrian lionesses named Prudence and Felicity, who kept watch in pink Tennessee marble before the recessed portico of an Italian Renaissance villa in midtown Manhattan.



"J. Pierpont Morgan, Esq." The famous portrait of Morgan by Edward Steichen, 1903. The dagger in his left hand is formed by the shape of the light glinting off his chair. (Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The architect of the place, Charles Follen McKim of the renowned firm McKim, Mead & White, had suffered a nervous breakdown over this building—or, more precisely, over having to accommodate the insistent demands and fastidious tastes of his client. On other projects McKim might have done as he pleased, but one simply did not say no to J. Pierpont Morgan.

Volcanic. Imperious. Intimidating. The qualities of the man blaze from the photographic portrait Edward Steichen took of him in 1903. Morgan's ferocious eyes burn from behind his massive nose, which had been swollen and turned purple by a chronic skin disease. His left hand grasps a dagger—or so it appears from the way the light glints off the arm of his chair.



Morgan's powerful physical presence symbolized his ubiquitous command over the national economy. Like millions of Americans, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had never been far from Morgan's mighty reach. He had sailed to New York on a Morgan ship; conversed after dinner beneath the glow of Morgan light bulbs; slept in Morgan-operated Pullman cars speeding along Morgan-controlled railroads and across bridges made from Morgan steel; had stories printed about him in the Morgan-financed *New York Times*; sent telegram messages from Western Union stations bankrolled by Morgan money, over telegraph wires fashioned from Morgan copper; and he had joined New Yorkers as they watched the new Woolworth Building rise on Broadway in 1912 to become the tallest building in the world, built by a Morgan civil engineering firm.



The fully-restored East Room in the J. P. Morgan Library, known as his "study," which he would use to receive, and intimidate, guests. (The Morgan Library & Museum)

The titan of Wall Street had invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá for a private interview this evening, here at his private library. 'Abdu'l-Bahá entered through heavy bronze doors into the illuminated splendor of a vaulted rotunda. Mosaic panels, and columns of veined skyros and cippoline marble, textured the space and at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's feet a colorful marble floor unfurled, inlaid with pieces from the Roman Forum and a central disc of deep purple porphyry. The domed ceiling of blue and white stucco bore paintings and reliefs of classical figures that Henry Siddons Mowbray had modeled on Raphael and installed beneath the gentle light of a central oculus, which was now blackened by the lightless sky. Gazing upward, 'Abdu'l-Bahá could see murals inspired by Pinturicchio, which adorned lunettes over the main entrance and above doors to the East and West rooms, depicting scenes and legendary lovers from Greek and Roman epics, Arthurian romances, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Renaissance lyric poetry.

Morgan received guests in the West Room, his large, plush study. His son-in-law wrote that no one could really know him who hadn't seen him sitting quietly in front of the fire; chomping on a big black cigar; playing solitaire beneath the coffered wooden ceiling; enveloped by the bright red damask silk that lined the study's walls.

But today he wasn't there. Some urgent business matter had arisen, and, 'Abdu'l-Bahá learned, Morgan wouldn't be able to come. He was directed instead to the East Room, a golden hall thirty feet high, which housed Morgan's enormous collection of rare books and manuscripts in three tiers of floor-to-ceiling bookcases, made from bronze and rich Circassian walnut. McKim had imported an ornate mantel from Italy for the room, carved from Istrian marble, and above it Morgan hung an old Flemish Renaissance tapestry, which dominated the long eastern wall. It was called "The Triumph of Avarice."



The interior of J. Pierpont Morgan's private library, restored in 2006. The sixteenth century tapestry on the right-hand wall, by Pieter Coecke van Aelst, is titled "The Triumph of Avarice." (New York Times)

A few years later, a New England lawyer wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá to ask his views on some economic problems—on profit-sharing between employers and workers, and on wealth. "The essence of the Bahai [*sic*] economic teachings is this," he replied, "that immense riches far beyond what is necessary should not be accumulated."

And 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of Morgan.

[T]he well-known Morgan who owned a sum of 300 million and was day and night restless and agitated did not partake of the Divine bestowals save a little broth. . . . He invited me to his library and to his home that I may visit the former and have a dinner at his house. I went to the library in order to look at the oriental books but . . . did not

accept his [dinner] invitation. In short, he eagerly desired that I should visit him in the library but meanwhile important financial problems arose which prevented him from being present and thus he was deprived of this bounty. Now had he not such an excessive amount of wealth, he might have been able to present himself.

“This wealth was for him a vicissitude,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said of him, “and not the cause of comfort.”



A displeased Morgan, being restrained as he shakes his cane at newspaper reporters. (Library of Congress)

Morgan’s *Sturm und Drang*, in fact, concealed an isolated, shy, and quiet man, prone to depression but having an uncompromising sense of integrity. “One nod of the massive head was security for fifty million,” Edmund Morris, Theodore Roosevelt’s biographer, writes. In the era before the Federal Reserve, when the United States had no central bank, J. P. Morgan twice found himself on the hook to rescue the national economy, forced to raise tens of millions of dollars on the spur of the moment and to make decisions that could ruin thousands of lives. During the Panic of 1907, when investors made a run on the Knickerbocker Trust, one of New York’s most reliable old-money banks, Morgan let it collapse. “I can’t go on being everybody’s goat,” he said.

“I wonder how many other people know, as I do, of the utter *loneliness* of his life?” Belle da Costa Greene, his librarian, wrote. She knew Morgan perhaps better than anyone:

It seems to me that he is bound to a perpetuity of pain . . . the ever-recurring bitterness of knowing that his kindness, friendship, and rare affection [have] met with a base or at best a poor return. He gives *all* and gets what? Only a sickening realization of his money and the world-power it brings him.

A member of Morgan’s staff laid the books out for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the viewing tables. When he was finished, he wrote and signed a short note in Morgan’s guestbook, a prayer for blessings upon the tycoon:

O Thou Generous Lord!

Verily this famous personage has done considerable philanthropy, render him great and dear in Thy Kingdom;—make him happy and joyous in both worlds, confirm him in serving the Oneness of the world of humanity, and submerge him in the sea of Thy favours.

An *Associated Press* reporter on the scene thought the whole business made a fine little spectacle. He twisted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sentiments into a catchy opening lead, and came up with a spiffy headline, which AP dispatched over those same Morgan copper wires the next day. “Persian Highbrow Dubs Morgan ‘Some Philanthropist,’” the headline read. “J. P. Morgan was written down yesterday as one who had done ‘considerable philanthropy’ when his library in East 36th street was visited by Abdul Baha.”

DAY 224

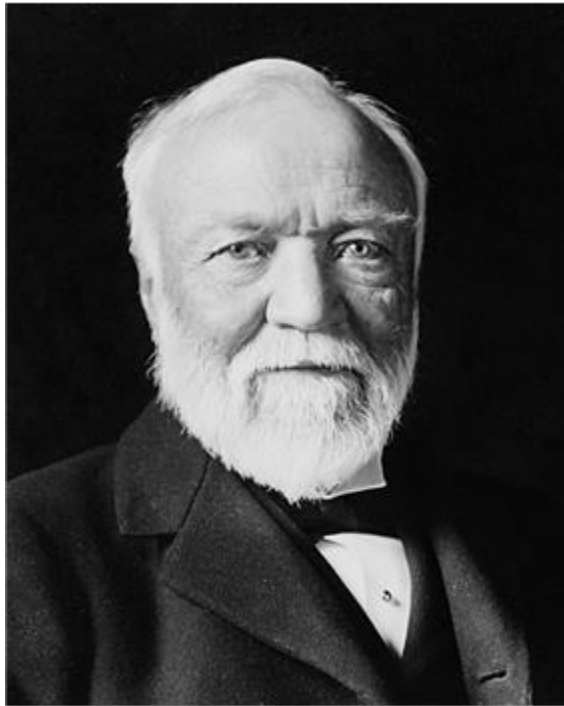
NOVEMBER 20, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth”

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 20, 2012

THE ONLY MAN wealthier than J. P. Morgan in 1912 was a Scottish immigrant from Dunfermline, County Fife, who emigrated with his family to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, at the age of twelve in 1848. He got his first job as a bobbin boy in a Pittsburgh cotton mill when he was thirteen, changing spools of thread twelve hours a day for \$1.20 a week. Two years later he was a messenger boy in the Pittsburgh office of the Ohio Telegraph Company: \$2.50 per week. At seventeen the Pennsylvania Railroad employed him as a telegraph operator: \$4.00 per week. By the time he was eighteen he was superintendent of the railroad’s Pittsburgh Division, and that year he had started investing his money. The returns he reinvested . . . and reinvested . . . and reinvested, slowly built up Andrew Carnegie’s base of capital.



The richest man in the world. Andrew Carnegie in 1913.  
(Library of Congress)

Having served out the Civil War running the Union’s military railways and telegraph operations in the east, Andrew Carnegie left the railroad and turned his attention to iron and steel. By 1889 he was the largest producer of pig iron, rails,

and coke in the world. His two major innovations, introducing the Bessemer furnace, which purified pig iron quickly by burning away its carbon content, and vertically integrating all of his suppliers, made Carnegie steel cheaper than anyone else's. In 1901 Carnegie retired at age sixty-six, selling his steel interests to J. P. Morgan for \$492 million and becoming the richest man on earth.

But even as he was living the life of a robber baron during the Gilded Age, piling up capital and repressing striking workers, Carnegie was already formulating a different outlook on wealth than most of his tycoon friends. "Man must have no idol," he wrote, "and the amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry! No idol is more debasing than the worship of money! . . . To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery."

'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at many meetings sponsored by Carnegie, including the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, which Carnegie's millions had underwritten. In November Carnegie called on 'Abdu'l-Bahá in New York, and gave him a copy of his essay, *The Gospel of Wealth*. In it Carnegie had argued for the responsibilities the rich had to improve society. Not only should they give away all their wealth, but they had to do it wisely, ensuring that they controlled the organizations who would use it, so the money wouldn't be frittered away. Later he refused to make a donation to a peace organization that a friend had recommended, because he felt that the money would cause harm, not good: "I wonder that you do not see this," he wrote, astonished. "There is nothing that robs a righteous cause of its strength more than a millionaire's money. Its life is tainted thereby." He also approved of the high estate taxes that had been established in England. "By taxing estates heavily at death," Carnegie wrote, "the State marks its condemnation of the selfish millionaire's unworthy life. It is desirable that nations should go much further in this direction."





Andrew Carnegie's first steel mill, the Edgar Thomson Works, in North Braddock, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh.  
(Detroit Publishing Company)

At least since 1875, when he wrote *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had upheld a similar set of views on the responsibilities of the wealthy. “Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá read *The Gospel of Wealth* and wrote back to Andrew Carnegie on January 10, 1913, shortly after he had arrived in London after his American journey. Carnegie was so impressed with the letter that he had it printed in *The New York Times*. But in one particular ‘Abdu’l-Bahá felt that Carnegie’s argument had to go a step farther. A critical aspect of successful wealth redistribution, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, was the need to maintain unity among the different classes of society. “‘Human Solidarity’ is greater than ‘Equality’,” he wrote. “‘Equality’ is obtained, more or less, through force (or legislation), but ‘Human Solidarity’ is realized through the exercise of free will.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued that although laws of redistribution were necessary, the lasting solution to the problem of rich and poor was that the rich should change their fundamental attitudes, going out of their way to give lavishly without being coerced. “For such coercion would be followed by disintegration, and the organization of



the affairs of society would be disturbed. But the idea of ‘Human Solidarity,’ would be the cause of the illumination of humanity.”



The Peace Palace at night. The palace at The Hague, in the Netherlands, was built by Andrew Carnegie and completed in 1913. It is now the seat of the International Court of Justice, the United Nations' highest legal body. (Wikimedia)

By the time the two men met in November, 1912, Carnegie had already built hundreds of public libraries, given pensions to his former employees, funded Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, and founded Carnegie Mellon University and England’s University of Birmingham. On December 11, 1910, he created the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: “Gentlemen — I have transferred to you as trustees of the Carnegie Peace Fund \$10,000,000 in 5 per cent first mortgage bonds . . . the revenue of which is to be administered by you to hasten the abolition of international war, the foulest blot on our civilization. Although we no longer eat our fellow men nor torture prisoners, nor sack cities, killing their inhabitants, we still kill each other in war like barbarians. Only wild beasts are excusable for doing that in this, the Twentieth Century of the Christian Era, for the crime of war is inherent, since it decides not in favor of the right but always of the strong.”

In May, 1915, in the midst of the war, the two men corresponded once again, which Carnegie also printed in the *Times*. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s praise of the philanthropist was effusive. “A number of souls who were doctrinaires and unpractical thinkers worked for the realization of this most exalted aim and good cause [i.e. a basis for universal peace], but they were doomed to failure, save that lofty personage [Carnegie] who has been and still is promoting the matter of international arbitration and general conciliation through words, deeds, self-sacrifice and the generous donation of wealth and property.” “Rest thou assured,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “that thou wilt become confirmed and assisted in the accomplishment of this most resplendent service and in this mortal world thou shalt lay the foundation of an immortal, everlasting edifice and in the end thou wilt sit upon the throne of incorruptible glory in the Kingdom of God.”



Inside Andrew Carnegie's Peace Palace at The Hague.  
(United Nations)

Today's richest man, the Mexican telecom magnate Carlos Slim, enjoys a net worth of \$69 billion, and Bill Gates of Microsoft, the second on *Forbes* magazine's 2012 World's Billionaires List, clocks in at \$61 billion. Back in 2008, the magazine printed a list of the wealthiest Americans of the past, basing its calculations of their net worth on the percentage of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that they owned. *Forbes* estimated Andrew Carnegie's personal fortune at \$298.3 billion in 2007 dollars, or, in other words, almost five Bill Gateses. And by the time Carnegie died in 1919, he had given more than ninety percent of it away.

On April 15, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's fifth day in America, he held a compelling interview with Hudson Maxim, the arms dealer. In the course of the conversation 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged Maxim to give up his business interests of supplying raw materials for the armaments of a militarizing society, and to turn his efforts to building peace. "Then will your life become pregnant and productive with really great results," 'Abdu'l-Bahá told him. "God will be pleased with you and from every standpoint of estimation you will be a perfect man." When 'Abdu'l-Bahá met Andrew Carnegie a few days before he sailed from New York, he met an American who had done exactly that.

DAY 225

NOVEMBER 21, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## Jim Crow Shows Up at the Great Northern Hotel

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on November 21, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ WAS TOO LATE. He was planning to leave America next Wednesday on the *Mauretania*, a four-funneled steamship of the Cunard line, the sister ship of the *Lusitania*. It would sail from its pier along the Hudson River at one o’clock in the morning on November 27, 1912, for Liverpool, England. But after spending much of the day in Montclair, New Jersey, on November 23, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá got back to New York too late to reach the ticket office, and missed making the booking. This meant that he would have to remain in New York for at least an extra week.



The view south over City Hall Park and Broadway in 1913. The completed Woolworth Building, the tallest in the world, rises on the right. (Library of Congress)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had returned from Montclair to attend a farewell banquet organized for him in the ballroom of the Great Northern Hotel that evening. The hotel was built just three years ago, in 1909, and shone among the deteriorating structures just south of Central Park at 118 West Fifty-Seventh Street.

Two long rectangular tables, decorated with flowers and crystal glassware, occupied the center of the banquet hall. A smaller head table was laid at one end for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and round dinner tables surrounded them on both sides. Chandeliers hung down among the ballroom’s thick pillars. “The electric lighting reflected [off] the glassware and caused the whole room to shine brilliantly,” Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretaries, wrote. Two flags — the American flag and the Persian flag — were hung side by side at the front of the room.



The farewell banquet for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the Great Northern Hotel. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is standing at the far left. (Bahá’í National Archives, United States)

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá entered the ballroom, the guests rose from their seats. He began his address that evening by drawing contrasts between their meeting, a spiritual one, from those that promote material civilization, whether agriculture, industry, or scientific research, however beneficial these fields may be. “This meeting of yours tonight is very different in character,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his guests. It was a divine gathering, because it “serves the oneness of the world of humanity and promotes international peace.”

“Consecrate and devote yourselves to the betterment and service of all the human race,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said. “Let no barrier of ill feeling or personal prejudice exist between these souls, for when your motives are universal and your intentions heavenly in character, when your aspirations are centered in the Kingdom, there is no doubt whatever that you will become the recipients of the bounty and good pleasure of God.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Kinney family on April 11, 1912, the day he arrived in America. (Bahá'í National Archives, United States)

Mahmúd-i-Zarqání figured that more than three hundred people attended the celebration. But not one of the guests had been black. Although the African American community had been invited, the hotel owner refused to let them enter the building. “If the people see that one colored person has entered my hotel,” Mahmúd heard him say, “no respectable person will ever set foot in it and my business will go to the winds.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá moved quickly to remedy the situation. The next day, on November 24, he hosted a second banquet for the African American guests who had been denied entry. It was held at the home of Edward and Carrie Kinney, at 780 West End Avenue on the Upper West Side — where he had spoken many times and met many guests during his many weeks in New York.

Not only was it an interracial meeting, attended by both blacks and whites, but the blacks were graciously served by their white hosts. “Behold what an influence and effect the words of Bahá'u'lláh have had upon the hearts,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá told them, “that hating and shunning have been forgotten and that prejudices have been obliterated to such an extent that you arose to serve one another with great sincerity.”

DAY 226

NOVEMBER 22, 1912

HARLEM, NY

## The Great Migration Turns the Tide for African Americans: 1912-1925

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 22, 2012

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA was anything but “progressive” for African Americans. In the era after *Plessy v. Ferguson*, black Americans learned that the great reform ethos that was sweeping the nation — for women’s suffrage, for justice for the working classes, for laws against child labor — simply didn’t extend to them.



The flag of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, hanging outside the NAACP offices at 69 Fifth Avenue, New York, in 1920. Lynchings increased during the 1910s, with the lynching of Willie Brown in Omaha, Nebraska, on September 28, 1919, being perhaps the most infamous of them all. (Library of Congress)

The so-called “Progressive” election of 1912 had seemed to offer great hope, but it turned out to be a lose-lose proposition for anyone whose skin wasn’t white. On August 1, Theodore Roosevelt had dashed the hopes of black southerners by refusing to allow them into his new

Progressive Party, for fear of alienating his white southern political support. Some black leaders, like W. E. B. Du Bois, played the counterintuitive card and placed their hopes in the progressive ideals of Wilson and the Democrats, the party of traditional anti-black opinion since the Civil

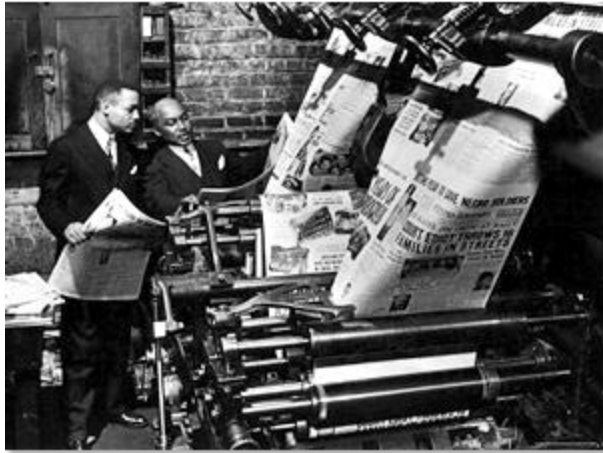


Louis Armstrong at the Aquarium in New York City in July, 1946. Portrait by William P. Gottlieb. (Library of Congress)

War. “Should I become President of the United States,” Wilson said, “they may count upon me for absolute fair dealing for everything by which I could assist in advancing their interests of the race.” But after his inauguration on March 4, 1913, Wilson’s Postmaster General and his Treasury Secretary issued orders segregating their departments. Fifteen of the seventeen most senior black government officials were dismissed; some departments came under White House pressure to segregate washrooms, working spaces, and eating places in government offices; and black appointees were fired all over the country. “There are no government positions for Negroes in the South,” the head of Georgia’s Internal Revenue division said as he fired all his black employees. “A Negro’s place [is] in the corn field.”

During ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s three visits to Washington, DC, in 1912, he had recast the mixing of the races as a source of beauty. “As I stand here tonight and look upon this assembly,” he had told an integrated meeting at a black church on April 13, “I am reminded curiously of a beautiful bouquet of violets gathered together in varying colors, dark and light. This is an evidence and indication that the United States of America is a just and free government, for I see black and white seated together in perfect harmony and agreement.” The new dark segregationist turn in the social fabric of the nation’s capital after 1913 couldn’t have been further from the integrationist message ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had promoted so aggressively.





Robert S. Abbott, Editor of the *Chicago Defender* and chief promoter of the Great Migration, at his presses in the 1940s. (Sourced from Art.com)

But in spite of the clampdowns, the resurgent lynchings and race riots, and the flurry of war preparedness after 1914, the tide for African Americans began to turn. Before the Civil War, thousands of African American slaves had been sold down the Mississippi River at high prices to staff the labor-intensive cotton economy of the Deep South. But now, with the Great War cutting off immigration from Europe and the war economy booming, their grandchildren flooded back North. The tide flowed up the eastern seaboard from Florida and Georgia to New York and Philadelphia, across the Texas and Arizona deserts toward Los Angeles, and against the Mississippi's mighty current to Chicago and Detroit. The Great Migration, pursued by a younger generation that had no memory of slavery, transformed the racial makeup of the great northern cities and changed the complexion of the nation. It was, historian Isabel Wilkerson writes, "the first big step the nation's servant class ever took without asking."

The Great Migration created a new generation of African American leaders, several of whom found themselves compelled by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision of race unity. Robert Abbott, the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, became the country's foremost promoter of the migration, and his newspaper the most influential black paper in the nation. He had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá when covering one of his Chicago talks in 1912, and became a Bahá'í in 1934. When the philosopher Alain Locke, the first African American Rhodes Scholar, published *The New Negro* in 1925, he had already been a Bahá'í for seven years. His book, an anthology of poems, stories, and political writing by black intellectuals and artists, including Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Weldon Johnson, became the definitive text of the Harlem Renaissance.



Alain LeRoy Locke, the "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance, in 1946. His book, "The New Negro," became the defining text of African American arts and letters. (LIFE Magazine)

Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's principles, Locke wrote, "and the leavening of our national life with their power, is to be regarded as the salvation of democracy. In this way only can the fine professions of American ideals be realized." When 'Abdu'l-Bahá had stayed at Agnes Parsons's house in Washington in 1912 she hadn't seemed interested in the issues of race. But in 1920 'Abdu'l-Bahá asked her to organize a "Race Amity" conference in Washington, DC. She held it at the First Congregational Church at 10th and G Streets in May, 1921, with Locke serving as session chair on May 21. From her home near Dupont Circle, just a few blocks north from Wilson's segregated White House, Agnes Parsons spent the next decade coordinating integrated meetings across the country, whose purpose was to build social bonds between black and white Americans. Through men and women like Robert Abbott, Alain Locke, Agnes Parsons, and the community of Bahá'ís that would continue to struggle against the easy compromises of a racially divided nation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá left an enduring imprint on the racial history of twentieth century America.



A Bahá'í Race Amity Convention, held in Springfield, Massachusetts, on December 5-6, 1921.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

DAY 227

NOVEMBER 23, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## The Spark That Set Aflame the World: 1912-1918

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on November 23, 2012

“WILL THE PRESENT WAR in the Balkans,” a New Yorker asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “terminate in the world war?” “No,” he answered, “but within two years a spark will rise from the Balkans and set the whole world on fire.”



Soldiers in Ypres, Belgium, during World War I. German forces invaded neutral Belgium in order to enter France, provoking Britain. Chemical warfare was first used in battle in Ypres during WWI. (CORBIS/Der Spiegel)

One of the main reasons ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had come to the United States was to warn about an imminent European war, and to push Americans to rally to prevent it. “Just now Europe is a battlefield of ammunition ready to spark,” he told a peace forum meeting in New York on May 12, “and one spark will set aflame the whole world.” After he visited Niagara Falls on September 10, the *Buffalo Courier* recorded him saying, “The continent of Europe is one vast arsenal which only requires one spark at its foundations and the whole of Europe will become a wasted

wilderness.” Throughout his journey ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had argued that America, because it had no empire to protect, was uniquely positioned to call other nations to peace.

In 1912, several prevailing theories made a large-scale war seem unlikely. Norman Angell, an English journalist, argued in his book, *The Great Illusion*, that because industrial states had become increasingly intertwined economically, the dislocation caused by war was simply too expensive. No one with any business sense would seriously consider it. The drive toward international arbitration was also gaining momentum among peace organizations. But America’s enthusiasm for peace was not shared among European powers, and soon the spark ‘Abdu’l-Bahá predicted plunged them into a conflict of unimaginable scale.



Lord Kitchener, British Secretary of State for War during WWI, is featured in a poster calling for army recruits. ([www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu))

Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian nationalist, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. The world watched in disbelief as secret treaties triggered other secret treaties, bringing one nation, then another, then another into belligerence by some sinister invisible momentum.

In America, Woodrow Wilson was reelected in 1916 on a plank of “He kept us out of war.” But German submarines kept sinking American merchant vessels, and Americans were dying on torpedoed passenger ships. On January 19, 1917, British naval intelligence intercepted a telegram sent by German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman to the German Ambassador in Mexico City, promising Texas and other southern states to Mexico if it would declare war on the United States. Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war on April 2. This Great War, he

said, had started as wars used to start, “in the old, unhappy days when peoples were nowhere consulted by their rulers, and wars were provoked and waged in the interest of dynasties, or of little groups of ambitious men who were accustomed to use their fellow men as pawns and tools.” “The world,” Wilson argued, “must be made safe for democracy.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá left New York aboard the SS *Celtic* on December 5, 1912. He arrived in Liverpool, England, on December 13, 1912, traveled through England, France, Austria-Hungary, and Germany for six months, then returned to Egypt. He did not finally arrive home in Haifa until December 5, 1913, a full year after leaving America. Within eight months, Europe was burning.

Martha Root, a forty-one year old journalist from Pittsburgh, found herself in Alexandria, Egypt in 1915 and tried to reach ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “I am within twenty-four hours ride of Haifa, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is,” she wrote to friends in Maine. “Day and night I try to plan how to reach him, but the way is mightily closed. No one can land in Haifa. The people in Palestine are starving, and massacres are hourly expected.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá is knighted by the British Empire in the garden of the Military Governor of Haifa for humanitarian work during World War I. He fed the city during a blockade with his personal store of grain. (Bahá'í National Archives, United States)

Root wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá through the American consulate in Jaffa, tried to get word and supplies to him through an American warship, and even asked a woman who was trying to enter Palestine and start a soup kitchen to write ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a letter, should she be successful. A Jewish man who had fled the region finally provided her with some news. “He works night and day helping the poor,” Martha Root wrote in her letter. “He will not leave them, as he could do, but insists on staying and caring for the poor, as many as he can.”



By 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had already been preparing for the worst. He had purchased farmland in the Galilee to grow wheat, and stored the grain underground near Haifa. When a blockade threatened the region with starvation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá fed northern Palestine: rich and poor, Muslims, Jews and Christians — a humanitarian act for which he reluctantly accepted a knighthood from King George V.

In the spring of 1918, Lady Sara Blomfield received a telephone call in Paris. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá in serious danger. Take immediate action.” She learned that the Ottoman commander of Syria, Jamal Pasha, had announced his plans to crucify ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and his family on Mount Carmel. She reached Lord Lamington at Whitehall, and, with the consent of Lord Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, a telegram was sent to General Edmund Allenby, the commander of the British army in Palestine. In September, 1918, the British defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Megiddo and marched on Haifa. Allenby sent messengers to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s home to inquire about the family’s condition. Then he cabled Whitehall: “Have today taken Palestine. Notify the world that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is safe.”



DAY 228

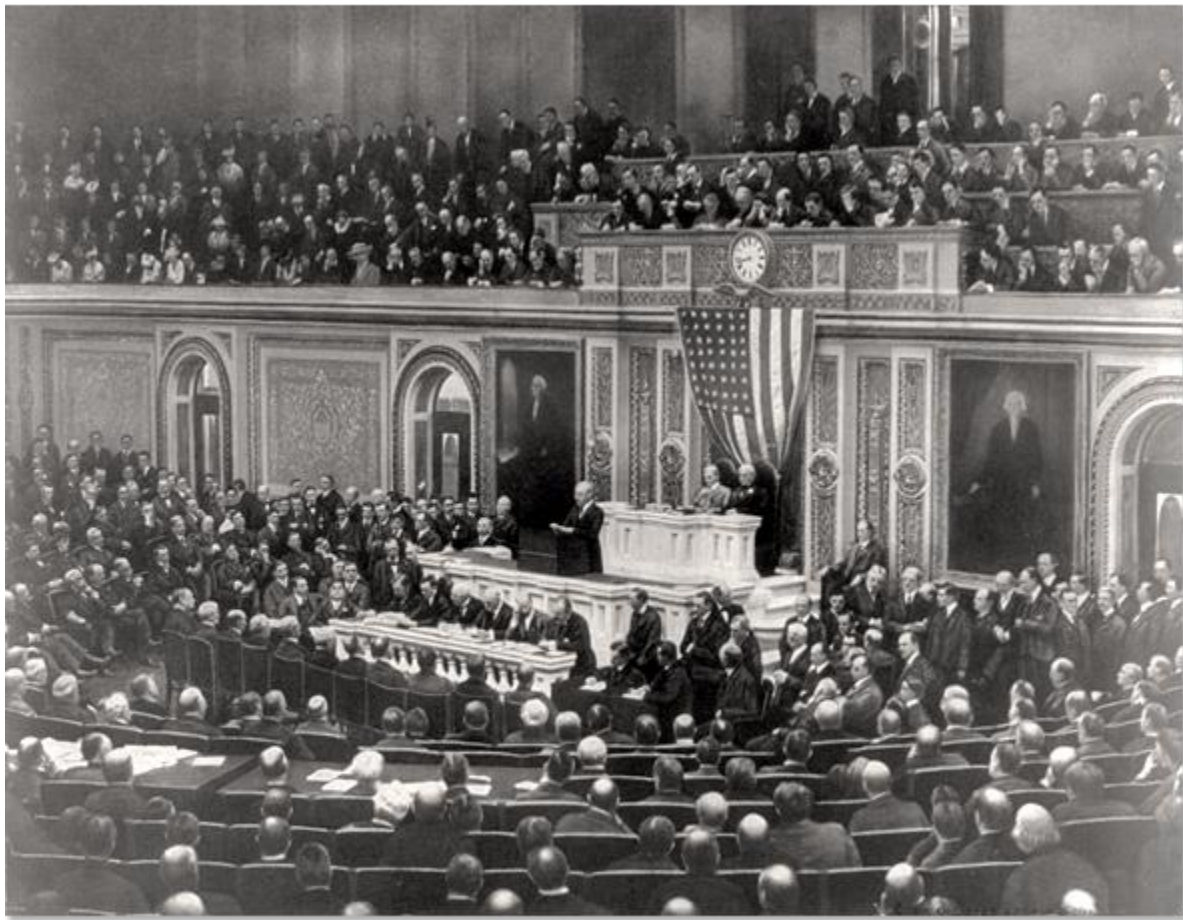
NOVEMBER 24, 1912

OP-ED

## The Militarization of Progressive America

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 24, 2012

WHEN WOODROW WILSON asked Congress to summon the nation to war on April 2, 1917, he shared his fellow Americans' reluctance to hurl themselves and their children into the ghastly spectacle taking place across the ocean. It was a war between aging empires, after all, monarchies obsessed with national aggrandizement and colonial expansion.



President Wilson addressing Congress on April 2, 1917, asking for a declaration of war against Germany. (Harris & Ewing Library of Congress)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had praised the American government for being free of the militaristic obsessions of the European powers. He had proposed to the nation a higher spiritual calling – that it use its unique position in the world to lead the nations towards lasting peace. President Wilson tried. He

encouraged the warring nations of Europe to negotiate a ceasefire, and offered to mediate peace talks. The war, he believed, directly contradicted every ideal of Progressivism. “Every reform we have won,” he declared, “will be lost if we go into this war.” And so he did everything possible to keep America out.



A European anarchist attacks the Statue of Liberty in this 1919 cartoon about the imminent threat of Bolshevism during the Red Scare. (Wikimedia)

But the very fact of war would infiltrate the peaceful conscience of his neutral nation and infest it with a sense of looming threat. Campaigns for “preparedness” swept the country after 1914. In 1915, a German u-boat sank the British liner *Lusitania*, sending 128 Americans to the bottom of the sea. Three months later, even the stoic Wilson voiced alarm that the United States was “honeycombed with German intrigue and infested with German spies.” When the Bolshevik Revolution toppled the imperial Russian government in October, 1917, the fear that a Communist uprising was imminent in America turned into national hysteria. During the “Red Scare,” Americans came to believe that their very way of life was under attack.

America was formally in the war for just eighteen months. In 1917, its industrial productivity exceeded any European nation, but its military was almost non-existent. America quickly recruited an army of four million men, and sent two million overseas. To mobilize the nation, President Wilson created nearly five hundred War Service Committees. A Committee on Public Information, under George Creel, set up a vast propaganda machine to ensure the populace was inspired and loyal, that goods and money kept flowing. Suspect individuals, including

conscientious objectors, labor activists, and many immigrant groups, were placed under surveillance. War study courses even made their way into elementary schools.



J. M. Flagg's 1917 poster, based on a British poster of 1915, was used to recruit soldiers for both World War I and World War II. (Wikimedia)

The nation that had been praised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for its liberty and optimism only five years earlier, whose buoyant energy he said was epitomized by its favorite statement — “All right! All right!” — was suddenly fixated on conflict and engulfed in fear. President Wilson’s great dread, that the war would brutalize human nature, was becoming a reality both at home and abroad.

America entered the Second World War just as reluctantly. In 1939, its military was the seventeenth largest in the world, one behind Romania. By 1945, America had dropped two atomic bombs and had emerged as a superpower. The specter of annihilation hung over America and the world in the Cold War that ensued. Preparedness for war became a permanent feature of American life.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower serves as a fitting bookend to Woodrow Wilson and his ambivalence over the militarizing of America. Eisenhower was Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe during World War II. He ran for President in 1952 advocating a strong

military and an activist foreign policy. He shepherded the end of the Korean War, forced Israel, Britain, and France to end their invasion of Egypt during the Suez Crisis, and worked hard to keep a lid on the Soviet-American rivalry. It was a reminder that those who have actually experienced the horrors of war are often the ones most committed to preventing it.

Shortly after his presidency began, the former five-star general found himself giving speeches on peace. “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed,” Eisenhower said in 1953. “This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.”



**Dwight D. Eisenhower, served as Supreme Commander of Allied forces in Europe during World War II. He was named Time magazine's "Man of the Year" for 1944. (Time)**

Eisenhower left office in 1961 warning of the growing power of the “military-industrial complex.” The potent term is what most remember from his farewell address, yet he also noted that perpetual preparations for war were at odds with the nation’s history. He cautioned that war was absorbing too large a proportion of national life, with grave ramifications for its spiritual health. He stated that America’s leadership depends “on how we use our power in the interests of world peace and human betterment.”

Eisenhower concluded his farewell address with a prayer for “all the peoples of the world,” that echoes many of the themes that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke about to Americans fifty years earlier. “We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied, that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.”



DAY 229

NOVEMBER 25, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## November 25, 1912: The Week Ahead

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 25, 2012

TODAY ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ is the guest of the Minerva Club, a women’s club in New York, where he is speaking on sex equality at their annual luncheon at the Waldorf Astoria. Wherever he has gone in America during the last seven months, he says, everything is always “hurry, hurry, hurry.”



The banquet hall at the Waldorf Astoria. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to the Minerva Club’s annual luncheon at the Waldorf on November 25, 1912. At the banquet pictured here, the 24th annual Lincoln dinner of the Republican Club of the City of New York, held on February 12, 1910, no women appear to have been invited. (Library of Congress)

“He made a great hit with the assembled Minervas,” the *New York Tribune* reports, “because he called them ‘a radiant faced assemblage,’ and told them that women were fully the equal of men where they weren’t men’s superiors.”

“The only real difference between men and women,’ he said, ‘is that men’s faces are covered with disagreeable growths of hair, while women’s faces are clean and decent.”

“And even that is true now only in Oriental countries, for I perceive that here in America gentlemen are doing away with that difference by shaving.’ Here the white haired sage let his blue eyes twinkle a little, just to show that a seer could crack a joke,” the reporter wrote.

The coming week will be ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s last full week in America. We will continue to look ahead to the future, the end of the Great War, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s program for global collective security, how the Progressive Era ends in a disappointing “return to normalcy” after the war, and we follow the places ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited in New York as they grow and change through the twentieth century.

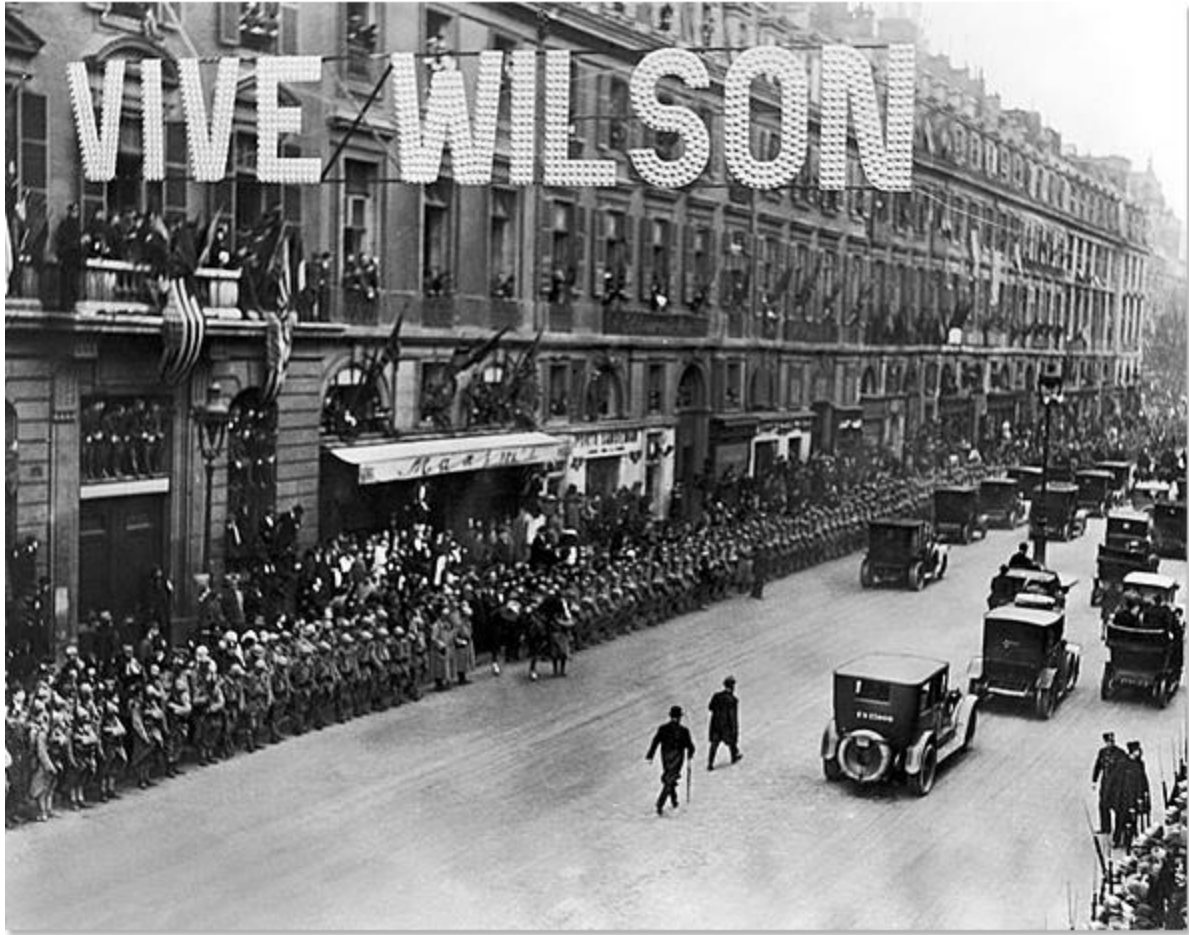


NOVEMBER 26, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## **“We Want a Wilson Peace”: 1919-2012**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 26, 2012

ONE MONTH AFTER the war ended, the USS *George Washington*, escorted by a flotilla of ten American battleships and twenty-eight destroyers, approached the coast of Brittany in northwestern France. It carried the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference led by President Woodrow Wilson. When the President disembarked at Brest on December 13, 1918, he met sunny streets lined with flags and laurel wreaths, listened to the warm drone of Breton bagpipes filling the air, and heard shouts of “Vive Amerique! Vive Wilson!” echoing above the crowd. “Huge numbers of people,” historian Margaret MacMillan writes, “many resplendent in their traditional Breton costumes, covered every inch of pavement, every roof, every tree. Even the lampposts were taken.”



President Woodrow Wilson arrives in Paris in December, 1918. The procession carrying Wilson passes the crowds outside Maxim's on the Rue Royal. (Photograph by the United States Signal Corps)

For six months in 1919, Paris was the capital of the world, and “Wilsonianism” embodied the hopes of hundreds of millions of people. Rejecting the traditional “balance of power” politics that had failed to prevent the Great War, Wilson approached international diplomacy from a new angle. Might would not dictate terms, he insisted: principles would. “[P]eoples and provinces are not to be bartered about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were mere chattels and pawns in a game,” he told Congress. “[E]very territorial settlement . . . must be made in the interest and for the benefit of the populations concerned, and not as part of any mere adjustment or compromise of claims amongst rival states.” There would be no more secret treaties, armaments would be reduced to a minimum, and colonial peoples would be freed from imperial control according to a new Wilsonian concept: “self-determination.”

Representatives from almost every nation and people flocked to Paris to present their petitions to the peacemakers: for a restored Poland, a free Belgium, a Jewish state; an Arab republic free from British and French control; a free Ukraine, a Kurdish state, and a free Armenia. Petitions

arrived in favor of rights for women and blacks; a Japanese proposal for a racial equality clause; a state for the south Slavs (or “Yugoslavs”). Queen Marie of Romania came in person to argue for Romanian land claims, and even a cook in Paris’s Ritz Hotel lodged a proposal for the freedom of his people, the Vietnamese, from French imperial rule. He would later become known to history as Ho Chi Minh.



Woodrow Wilson, doffing his hat, enters Paris. Raymond Poincaré, the President of France, sits beside him. (Library of Congress)

The meeting in Paris, which ran from January to June, 1919, appeared to be very much like the global conference ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, following his father’s lead, had argued for almost forty-five years earlier. In 1875, shortly after the end of the Franco-Prussian War, which had slaughtered 600,000 men and led directly to the World War, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá castigated the European states who had permitted such a catastrophe to break out on their so-called civilized continent. “Is it right and proper that peoples among whom, diametrically opposed to the most desirable human behavior, such horrors take place, should dare lay claim to a real and adequate civilization?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked. “No, by the Lord God! Even a child can see the evil of it.”

“True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world,” he wrote in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, “whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns — the shining exemplars of devotion and determination — shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world.”

The core of Woodrow Wilson's peace proposal seemed to be just that: a new, permanent international governance organization called the "League of Nations." Margaret MacMillan explains Wilson's sentiments: "If it could be brought into being, then everything else would sooner or later fall into place. If the peace terms were imperfect, there would be plenty of time later for the League to correct them. . . . And for future generations the League would oversee general prosperity and peace, encouraging the weak, chiding the wicked and, where necessary, punishing the recalcitrant. It was a pledge that humanity was making to itself, a covenant."



**The Big Four in Paris, 1919. From left to right: David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando of Italy, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Woodrow Wilson. (Photograph by United States Signal Corps)**

“This supreme and noble undertaking — the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world — should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had written. “In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government.” In short, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, only a binding global collective security pact, where national sovereignty would no longer operate as each nation’s guiding principle, could form a lasting peace.

But a covenant of such sacred importance had to be built on trust, something that was sorely lacking in Paris. When the French proposed that the League should have the power of

compulsory arbitration, the mandate to impose economic sanctions on recalcitrant states, and, ultimately, its own coercive military power, the British and the Americans balked. Surely the French wanted the League to be an armed coalition against Germany. The U. S. Congress would never consent to a plan that would allow some other authority to decide where and when America must go to war, and, besides, America would never trade away the Monroe Doctrine, which gave it supreme power in the western hemisphere. The British and French prime ministers, David Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau, didn't even attend the consultations about the League, and Winston Churchill, the young British Secretary of State for War and Air, thought that the League would be "no substitute for the British fleet." In the end, even the watered down League of Nations — no coercive power, its hands tied by the requirement of unanimous agreement — could not pass the Republican-controlled United States Senate. Woodrow Wilson had a stroke and spent the remainder of his presidency as a virtual invalid.



The Great Hall at Versailles, 1919. Wilson and the other leaders speak from the long table along the left wall, opposite the windows. (Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library)

The legacy of the Paris Peace Conference, both the triumphant and the tragic, continues to this day. Wilsonian idealism survives as one of the poles of present-day foreign policy; the notion

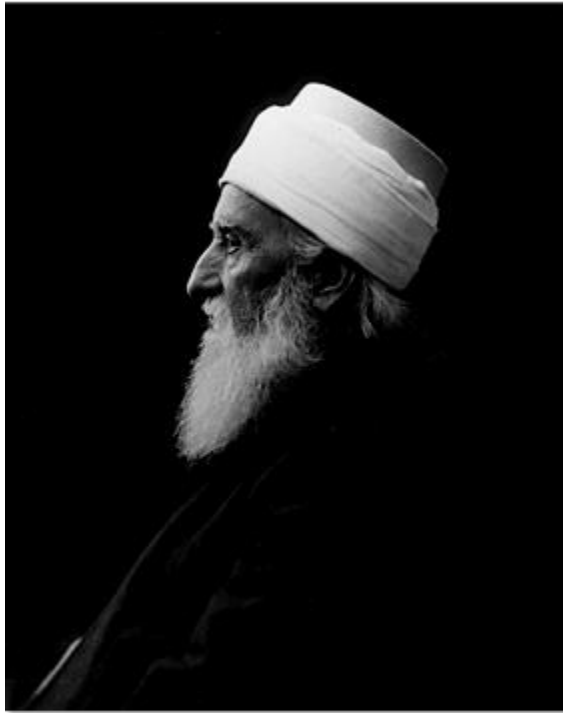
that international order should be based not on power, but on rights, has become a basic assumption of the modern world. But both the League and the Treaty of Versailles that created it failed disastrously. Rejecting Japan's call for a racial equality clause in the final agreement set that country on a path of militaristic expansion. Blaming Germany for a war that all of Europe was, more or less, responsible for created bitter resentment that brought a Fascist government to power. Tenuous postwar financial engineering generated the Great Depression. And the mistrust between the capitalist West and the Communist Soviet Union, the Vietnam War, the conflict over Israel and Palestine, the genocidal collapse of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, the wars in Iraq, and the rise of political Islam, can all be traced back to that six-month stretch of diplomacy in Paris in 1919.

NOVEMBER 27, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Program for a Durable Peace: 1919

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 27, 2012

“PEACE, PEACE, the lips of potentates and peoples unceasingly proclaim,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was heard to say in the months following the First World War, “whereas the fire of unquenched hatreds still smoulders in their hearts.”



Portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, circa 1912.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá began to advise Americans against putting too much faith in the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference before it had even begun. “Although the representatives of various governments are assembled in Paris in order to lay the foundations of Universal Peace,” he wrote to a friend in Portland, Oregon, on January 10, 1919, two days before the conference convened, “yet misunderstanding . . . is still predominant and self-interest still prevails. In such an atmosphere, Universal Peace will not be practicable, nay rather, fresh difficulties will arise.”



He argued the same point in a long letter to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, a commission set up in 1915 at The Hague to plan for an eventual postwar reconciliation. Fannie Fern Andrews, one of the American members of the commission, explained its purpose in front of the American Academy of Political and Social Science in 1916. “When the representatives of the states come together in the midst of the wreck and desolation left by the war, their task will be almost overwhelming,” she said. “[T]he fundamental basis of the new world order which must come after the present war must be laid today.” The Organization asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to present his proposals for global peace in February, 1916, but he was cut off behind enemy lines and didn’t receive the letter until after the war ended.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá writing a letter near his home in Haifa after the First World War. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

The central message of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s letter, which he sent to The Hague from Haifa on December 17, 1919, was that achieving universal peace required a more comprehensive approach than customary international diplomacy would permit. “If the question is restricted to Universal Peace alone the remarkable results which are expected and desired will not be attained,” he wrote. “The scope of Universal Peace must be such that all the communities and religions may find their highest wish realized in it.”

Peace, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, required a massive social transformation of the depth and scope that his father, Bahá’u’lláh, had proposed: the consciousness of the whole human race being a single people; the central motivating role of non-dogmatic, reasonable religious belief; deliberately weeding out religious, racial, class, partisan, and nationalistic prejudices; complete equality between the sexes; universal education for children; the conviction that the whole

surface of the earth is one native land. National boundaries, he argued, are imaginary lines that emerged during the early history of civilization to serve the selfish interests of a few individuals, and these in turn led to “intense enmity, bloodshed and rapacity in subsequent centuries.” “In the same way,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasized, “this will continue indefinitely, and if this conception of patriotism remains limited within a certain circle, it will be the primary cause of the world’s destruction.”



The first meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva, November 15, 1920. (League of Nations Archives)

Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed the collective security arrangements, or the lack of them, that had emerged out of Paris. “[A]lthough the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing Universal Peace.” In its place, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá proposed an institution far more powerful than either the League or the United Nations that succeeded it: a “Supreme Tribunal” whose powers Bahá’u’lláh had described. The key distinctions he outlined to the commission focused on the institution’s legitimacy and its jurisdiction.

First, the members of this supreme global body would have to be *elected* from among a pool of candidates proposed by each country’s parliament. The candidates from each country, the

numbers of them being determined relative to population, would have to be confirmed by the other national organs of government in their states—the upper house, the congress, the cabinet, the president, the monarch—so their legitimacy would be indisputable: “all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation.” This strong legitimacy would translate into effective action, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, because “When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority-rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant.” Should any country ignore the Tribunal’s ruling “the rest of the nations will rise up against it,” he wrote, providing the power of enforcement.



This cartoon spoofing the legitimacy of the League of Nations is from the December 10, 1920, issue of Punch. The sign reads: "This League of Nations Bridge was designed by the President of the U.S.A." (Wikimedia)

“Consider what a firm foundation this is!” he said. “But by a limited and restricted League the purpose will not be realized as it ought and should. This is the truth about the situation. . . .”

The new world order that emerged in Paris, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá believed, was inadequate to meet even the immediate challenges the world faced from new ideologies of power that were still an afterthought in 1919. “Movements, newly-born and world-wide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs,” he insisted in January, 1920. “The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread.”

“The ills from which the world now suffers,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, “will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war.”

DAY 232

NOVEMBER 28, 1912

OP-ED

## A Nation Shaped by Sacrifice

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on November 28, 2012

“NO AFFAIR IN THE WORLD succeeds without sacrifice,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told a gathering on December 1, 1912, in New York’s Upper West Side, while explaining the role America must play in leading the world to peace. Sacrifice was a theme he returned to often during his final days in America, telling the American people that they would be called upon to make great sacrifices in the upcoming decades.



The Statue of Liberty, bearing a tablet with the inscription "July 4, 1776," serves as a reminder to the American people of the great sacrifices that were made in the founding of their nation. (QT Luong)

America had been shaped by sacrifice since its inception. The inhabitants of the original Thirteen Colonies, and especially the wealthiest and most powerful, risked their lives and their fortunes, overcoming vast cultural, religious and political divisions, to fight a War of Independence, to forge a country free from the bonds of the old world. It was a revolution that ended not in chaos and ruin, but in a nation founded on the principle that “all men are created equal, that they are

endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Abraham Lincoln would invoke these words eighty-seven years later in his Gettysburg Address, in the midst of a war that would save the Union, abolish slavery, and leave more than 700,000 Americans dead. They had made the supreme sacrifice, the President said, and gave “the last full measure of devotion.” “It is for us the living,” he emphasized, “to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.” Fifty years later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would refer to the Civil War in mixed race gatherings in New York and Washington, highlighting the importance of the sacrifices made, and calling upon both blacks and whites to continue the arduous work of setting aside all traces of prejudice, and committing themselves to wholehearted integration.



Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima, Joe Rosenthal's historic photo depicts five United States Marines and one sailor raising an American flag over Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945. (Associated Press)

America would again be called to sacrifice: during the First World War, fighting for an old world it had long left behind; during the Great Depression; and again in a Second World War that would cause it to emerge as a superpower with the weight of the world on its reluctant shoulders.

James Reston of *The New York Times*, a two-time Pulitzer prize winning author who operated at the highest levels of American journalism from the 1930s to the 1960s, covering the Presidencies of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon, the founding of the United Nations, the Bay of Pigs, and the Vietnam War, had an uncanny insight into the soul of the nation. “Americans have always been able to handle austerity and even adversity,” he wrote. “Prosperity is what is doing us in.” Reston knew that Americans were capable of the greatest sacrifices, but feared that an abundance of affluence was now leading the nation to complacency.

“Observe how rarely human souls sacrifice their pleasure or comfort for others,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told an overflowing lecture hall at Green Acre in Eliot, Maine, on the evening of August 16. At Coronation Hall in Montreal, Canada, on September 5, he noted “how the greatest men in the world — whether among prophets or philosophers — all have forfeited their own comfort, have sacrificed their own pleasure for the well-being of humanity. They have sacrificed their own lives for the body politic. They have sacrificed their own wealth for that of the general welfare. They have forfeited their own honor for the honor of mankind.”



A bread line during the Great Depression. Photo taken by Margaret Bourke-White in 1937. (Life Magazine)

Poverty, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, would find no lasting solution in the United States without willing sacrifices by those with wealth and power. He spoke of the need for legislation to minimize the extremes of poverty and wealth, but rejected the socialist position of forced equality. “This voluntary sharing is greater than equality,” he said, “and consists in this, that man should not prefer himself to others, but rather should sacrifice his life and property for others.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted that giving to the poor should not be a burden on the them – that they not be embarrassed, nor lose dignity, nor somehow feel diminished by the experience.

On the evening of November 29, 1912, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney in New York, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discussed the meaning of Jesus Christ giving his life for humanity. “There is no doubt,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “that one who put forth such a claim as Christ announced would arouse the hostility of the world and be subjected to personal abuse.” But without having accepted that, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience, Jesus “would not have been able to guide a single soul.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then explained that human development consists in sacrificing of one’s lower nature in order to acquire the characteristic of our higher nature. “Man must sever himself from the influences of the world of matter, from the world of nature and its laws,” he explained,

defining this natural state as one of “ambition and avarice, of self-worship, egotism and passion.” In becoming fully human, he said, the individual “sacrifices the imperfections of nature for the sake of divine perfections,” — perfections which include characteristics such as justice, love, compassion, and generosity.

In a nation with a legacy of sacrifice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminded Americans it was still needed. He challenged them to see that their greatest sacrifices lay ahead.



NOVEMBER 29, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## **New York: The Melting Pot on the Hudson: 1912-2012**

By CAITLIN SHAYDA JONES | Published on November 29, 2012

A MAN DANGLED from a steel cable high above the city, struggling to fasten it in place. It would be used to hoist pieces of steel into the sky, constructing the Empire State Building. It was 1931, at the onset of the Great Depression. A photograph of the construction worker, taken by Lewis Hine, aptly represented a nation fighting to climb out of the steepest economic crisis it had ever seen.



Midtown Manhattan, from the 27th floor of River House, at 52nd Street and the East River, in December, 1931. Photo by Samuel H. Gottscho. (Shorpy.com)

From such a vantage point it was possible to see for miles in every direction: two and half miles northeast to the Hotel Ansonia, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá first lodged upon his arrival in America; a

few steps further east to Riverside Drive, where he had enjoyed many leisurely walks along the Hudson River; and, due south, the Church of the Ascension, the site of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s first public address in America. Somewhere in the faint cluster of buildings just this side of Little Italy, the Bowery Mission still stood, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had surprised the reporter Kate Carew by giving out hundreds of quarters to homeless men.



"Icarus Atop the Empire State Building," by Lewis Hine, circa 1930. A worker fastening steel cable to hold a derrick in place prior to lifting steel girders and other steel parts at the top of the skyscraper. (Underwood & Underwood)

As Lewis Hine clearly documented in his photography, the city was more than a skyline. People shaped the buildings and were in turn shaped by them. Upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival, one reporter heard him call New York a “beehive.” But the beehive was only just starting to hum. In the century after 1912, New York City would go on to become the cultural, commercial, and communications capital of the world.

The Great Migration, for instance, during which millions of African Americans flocked from the south to north, changed the cultural landscape of New York. Harlem became a center for black literature and art that promoted civil rights and social equality. *Opportunity: A Journey of Negro Life*, edited by Charles S. Johnson and *The Crisis*, edited by W.E. Du Bois, published many African American writers. The Harlem Renaissance, as the movement went on to be called, also attracted white Americans who were interested in sponsoring and collaborating with Harlem’s emerging talent.



The RMS Queen Mary enters the Hudson River past the New York City skyline in 1960. (nycvintageimages.com)

Throughout the century, racial unity was not just an issue between blacks and whites, but included all immigrants to America, many of whom were already struggling in underpaid factory jobs in 1912. They included thousands of Irish and Germans, followed by Russian Jews, Greeks, Poles, and Italians. Each group was met with suspicion, was thought of as un-American, and had to advance in the face of opposition. But it made America a testing ground for the racial and religious unity that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged. “In the creative plan there is no racial distinction and separation such as Frenchman, Englishman, American, German, Italian or Spaniard; all belong to one household,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said to the International Peace Forum in New York. “These boundaries and distinctions are human and artificial, not natural and original.”

Just as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken of the need for an international council with a mandate for peace, an early version of it emerged, making an unlikely neighborhood in New York City its headquarters. In 1912, down 43rd Street in Turtle Bay, slaughterhouses, packing sheds, cattle pens, and noisy railroad piers lined the banks of the East River. By the 1920s fashionable townhouses had taken over, and a large communal garden ran through the backyards of the homes on 48th and 49th Streets. When the United Nations was formed after World War II, its Modernist headquarters rose in Turtle Bay between 1949 and 1952, replacing six blocks of slaughterhouses. Today, on clear mornings, the sunrise reincarnates itself in the UN Secretariat’s glass facing, bathing the passersby on the East River in a wash of gold.



The United Nations Secretariat on the East River, at sunrise.  
([post-card-diary.blogspot.com](http://post-card-diary.blogspot.com))

“I am greatly pleased with the city of New York,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said on his first day in America, “Its harbor entrance, its piers, buildings and broad avenues are magnificent and beautiful.” But he had an admonition. “As New York has made such progress in material civilization, I hope that it may also advance spiritually. . . .” Spiritual civilization is not as easy to see as material. It requires perception and the ability to look beyond outward appearances, to the selfless acts of millions of people that are often forgotten by history.

But just as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had stood up for women’s emancipation as he pulled into New York harbor, seated an African American lawyer at the head of his table in Washington, argued for peace to an arms dealer, spent the week with a former convict, wiped away the tears of a reverend, met with children, servants, students, government officials and crowds in the thousands, he expended his energy to the utmost, planting the seeds of what he called a spiritual civilization. “This timely seed,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told an audience on April 12, “when planted in the hearts of the beloved of God, will be watered by showers of divine mercy and warmed by the sunshine of divine love. Its fruitage and flower shall be the solidarity of mankind, the perfection of justice and the praiseworthy attributes of heaven manifest in humanity.”



The moon rises behind the skyline of New York's Lower Manhattan and One World Trade Center as people stand along the Hudson River in Jersey City, New Jersey, October 1, 2012. (Reuters)

NOVEMBER 30, 1912

NEW YORK, NY

## **The Collapse of the Progressives: 1917-1920**

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on November 30, 2012

ACCORDING TO MOST scholars, the Progressive Era began in a flurry of public energy in or around 1890. After the Civil War a new social phenomenon — industrialization — transformed the fabric of American life. Huge corporations swallowed competitors and concentrated wealth in the hands of a few men, such as those named Morgan, Carnegie, and Rockefeller. Where the money flowed the politicians followed, extending the financial control the railroads and the banks had accumulated into the national corridors of power. Unregulated railroads raised their rates, farming incomes plummeted, living conditions in cities like New York deteriorated as rural Americans and European immigrants flocked to squalid factory jobs in swelling urban centers.



Children of striking millworkers from Lawrence, Massachusetts, marching in protest down Fifth Avenue in New York on February 17, 1912, in one of the largest labor actions of the Progressive Era. (Library of Congress)

Between 1890 and 1920, millions of Americans, calling themselves “progressives,” campaigned against child labor, for more representative government, against corporate control of the economy, for worker’s rights and women’s suffrage. “Progressivism,” historians Arthur Link and Richard McCormick wrote in their seminal 1983 book of the same title, “was the only reform movement ever experienced by the whole American nation.”

The Americans ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met in 1912 lived on the cresting heights of a decades-long wave of optimism generated by faith in the ability of new sciences — statistics, economics, sociology, and psychology prominent among them — to solve the injustices of the industrial age. The watershed election of that year incarnated a wide-ranging national debate about the future of America’s economic, social, and political structure. Within four years the major planks of the progressive movement had been enacted by Congress and the Democratic administration of Woodrow Wilson.





The first posed photo taken of President Wilson after his stroke in 1919. The stroke paralyzed him on his left side. His second wife, Edith, holds the paper still so he can sign it with one hand, June, 1920. (Library of Congress)

But then the unexpected happened.

On April 1, 1917, the day before he was to stand in front of Congress and ask for a declaration of war against Germany, President Wilson unburdened his heart to the editor of the *New York Tribune*. “Once lead this people into war,” he lamented, “and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fibre of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street.”

Although Wilson worried about open conflict, the truth was that rifts engendered by the war had already begun to spread. Anti-German sentiment had already ruptured the social fabric. Public information had metamorphosed into government propaganda. “Preparedness” had diverted reform energies into mobilizing the nation for armed struggle.

In 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had argued repeatedly that traditional social and political methods would prove insufficient to the challenges of unity that the modern age would soon present. “The bonds which hold together the body politic are not sufficient,” he said on October 7 in Oakland, “for how often it happens that people of the same nation wage civil war amongst themselves.”

“Another means of seeming unity,” he told a group in Chicago on September 16, “is the bond of political association, where governments and rulers have been allied for reasons of intercourse and mutual protection, but which agreement and union afterward became subject to change and

violent hatred even to the extreme of war and bloodshed.” In early March, 1917, just a month before America declared war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reiterated his point. Political institutions, he wrote, are “the matter and not the substance, accidental and not eternal — temporary and not everlasting. With the appearance of great revolutions and upheavals, all these collective centers are swept away.”



The nation awoke in shock on the morning of January 7, 1919, to read that Theodore Roosevelt had passed away in his sleep the night before, from a blood clot. He was only 60 years old. (New York Tribune)

In the upheaval of the Great War, the political unity that the progressives had tried to forge melted down. Idealists were alienated by the government’s suppression of civil liberties. The isolationists were outraged by Wilson involving America in Europe’s squabbles. The labor unions did not take kindly to the coercion of coal miners, failures to regulate railroads, and the government’s ambivalent attitude toward the strikes in 1919 and 1920. And a new generation of intellectuals and opinion makers, such as Walter Lippman, repudiated the optimistic bent of the earlier reformers. “In retrospect,” Link and McCormick wrote, “it is clear that progressives always had been too diverse to remain united in a cohesive national political organization.”

The failure of the Progressive Era, therefore, was fundamentally a failure of unity. “So long as progressive groups fought one another more fiercely than they fought their natural opposition,” Link and McCormick concluded, “such agreement was impossible. . . .”

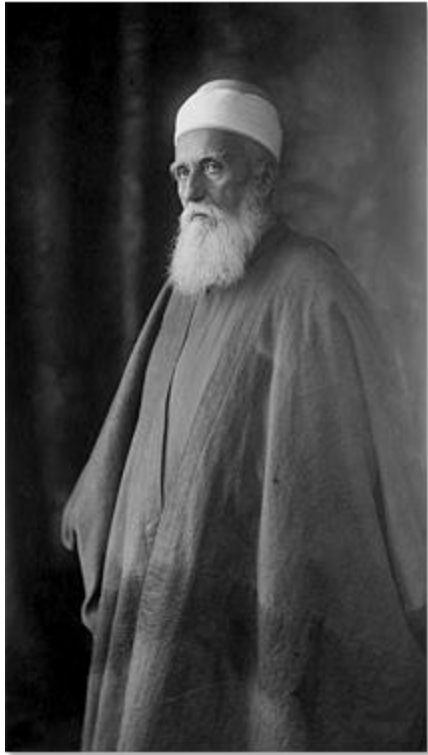
“What is real unity?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had asked a Unitarian congregation in Brooklyn on June 16th. “The unity which is productive of unlimited results,” he argued, “is first a unity of mankind.... For they all breathe the same atmosphere, all inhabit the same earth, all are sheltered beneath the same heaven, all receive effulgence from the same sun, all are under the protection of one God.”

DECEMBER 1, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## **Religion: The Driving Force Behind Human Civilization**

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on December 1, 2012

THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION in New York's Greenwich Village hosted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's first public talk in America. "Since my arrival in this country I find that material civilization has progressed greatly," he told them on April 14, 1912, "but spiritual civilization has been left behind." It was a message that resonated strongly with the congregation. The church was a leading force in America's Social Gospel movement, a cause born of a belief that Christians must be active agents in the world, devoted to such social justice issues as the alleviation of poverty, and the rights of exploited workers and minorities. Walter Rauschenbusch, its most prominent theologian, argued for "collective salvation." He contended that Jesus did not die as a substitute for original sin, but rather "to substitute love for selfishness as the basis for human society."



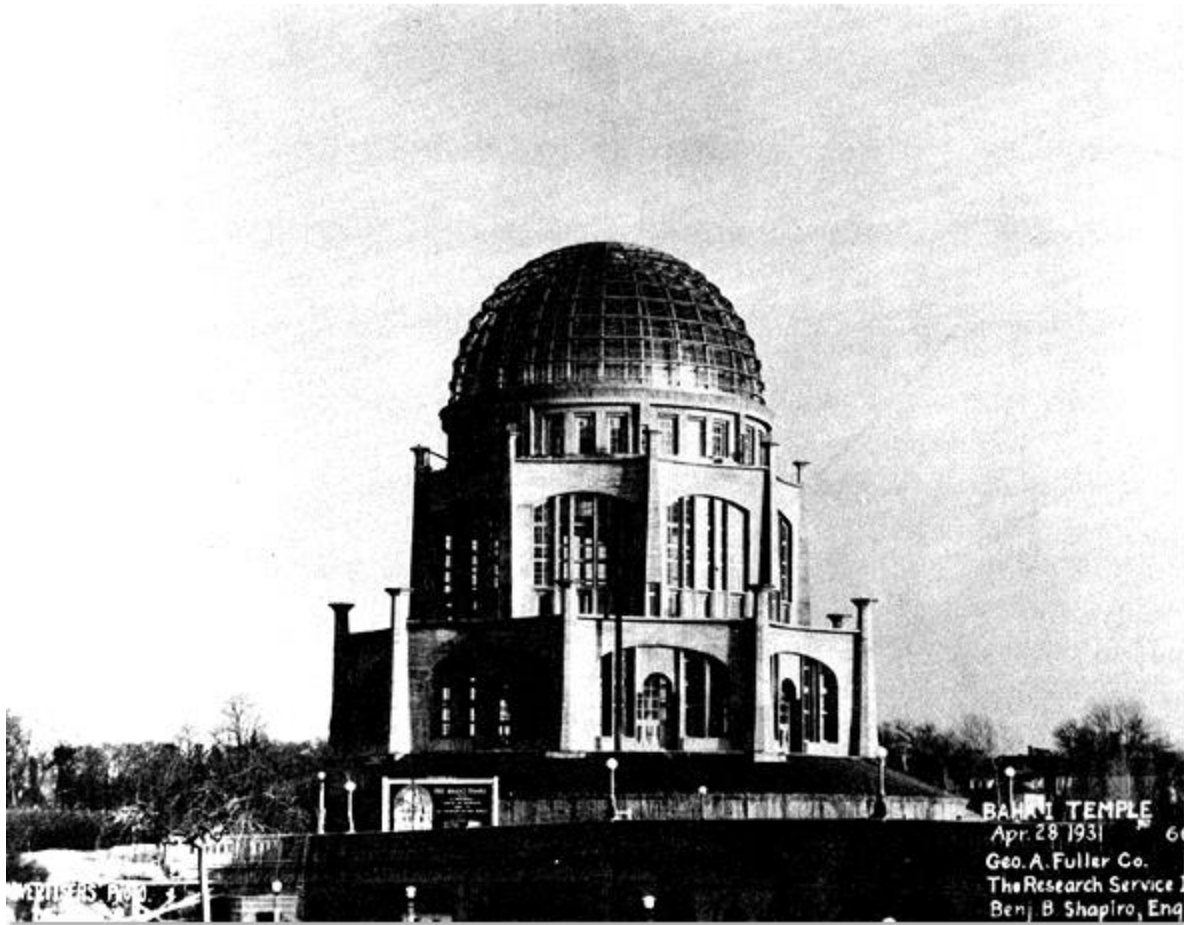
Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911.  
(National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The imperative of the modern age, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told the congregation, is to establish a just and peaceful society on a global scale. He noted that political power would never be equal to the task. Faith in racial or national identities would similarly fail. Nothing short of the power of religion, he said, could establish the motivational or ethical foundations needed for a unified world.

Two weeks later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Chicago laying the cornerstone for a temple to be built along the western shore of Lake Michigan. A crowd of four hundred joined him for the groundbreaking ceremony. The institution of the Bahá'í House of Worship, he told them, as defined by Bahá'u'lláh, was not only a place to pray, but the central edifice in a complex of buildings that would be devoted social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits. Thousands of them would be built around the world, he said, serving as a model of religion in the service of humankind.

During his first month in America, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also began an aggressive and sustained critique against religious traditionalism. "Consider the record of religious warfare," he told an audience in Eliot, Maine, "the battle between nations, the bloodshed and destruction in the name of religion." When he arrived in America, a war in Tripoli had just broken out. As he was leaving eight months later, the Balkans were under siege. To a congregation at the All Souls Unitarian Church in New York he said that "The greatest cause of human alienation has been religion." At

the Metropolitan Temple on Seventh Avenue at 14th Street he argued: “The counterfeit or imitation of true religion has adulterated human belief.”



The concrete and iron structural skeleton of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, in April, 1931.  
(Geo. A. Fuller Co./National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the leaders of religion to task, whom, he argued, had substituted the ethical and transformative power of religion with dogma, along with politicians who hijacked it in the interests of power and national aggrandizement. “Leaders of religion, in every age,” his father Bahá’u’lláh had written “have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp.” “Should the lamp of religion be obscured,” Bahá’u’lláh explained, “chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine.”

On October 12, at the Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá put religion to the test. He asked the congregation to help him consider the record of religion, to see whether it is “the animating impulse of all human advancement,” or “a detriment and a source of degradation to mankind.” They would go to the source — to the founders of religion — to “review the story of

Their lives, compare the conditions preceding Their appearance with those subsequent to Their departure.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá outlined the central events of Jewish history. He emphasized the four hundred years of slavery the Jews suffered at the hands of the Egyptians before Moses led them from captivity. “When a movement fundamentally religious makes a weak nation strong,” he argued, “changes a nondescript tribal people into a mighty and powerful civilization, rescues them from captivity and elevates them to sovereignty, transforms their ignorance into knowledge and endows them with an impetus of advancement in all degrees of development . . . it becomes evident that religion is the cause of man’s attainment to honor and sublimity.”



The august Temple Emanu-El at 450 Sutter Street in San Francisco, in 1867. Its bronze-plated Russian domes and golden spires dominated San Francisco’s skyline for forty years. (Library of Congress)

But even as religion transforms civilization, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued, it too must change. While its moral core remains the same throughout time, he explained, its social laws are designed for a



specific age. When stubbornly clung to, they become a source of irrationality and decay. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discussed how the religion of Moses had been renewed by Jesus, and again by Muhammad. Each time the pattern was the same: these founders of the great religions were born into decaying societies, and effected a wholesale transformation in their moral, cultural, educational, and economic character.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá argued repeatedly in America that nothing short of the unifying power of religion could generate global peace and justice in the modern age. His father, Bahá’u’lláh, had re-voiced religion’s eternal teachings, and brought the social guidance needed for an age in which the unification of the planet was within reach. Bahá’u’lláh had abolished the priesthood, challenged people to investigate truth independently from outside influences, urged them to banish all forms of superstition and prejudice, and affirmed that service to the entire human race was the highest form of worship.

DECEMBER 2, 1912

OP-ED

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Modern American History

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on December 2, 2012

DURING THE AMERICAN Bicentennial year, in 1976, the Smithsonian Institution produced a special exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery titled *Abroad in America: Visitors to the New Nation, 1776–1914*. The exhibit, composed of large portraits accompanied by short essays, profiled more than fifty of the most noteworthy visitors to the United States during the nation’s first century and a half.



Swami Vivekananda attended the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. (Vedanta Society of Northern California and Vedanta Society, Berkeley)

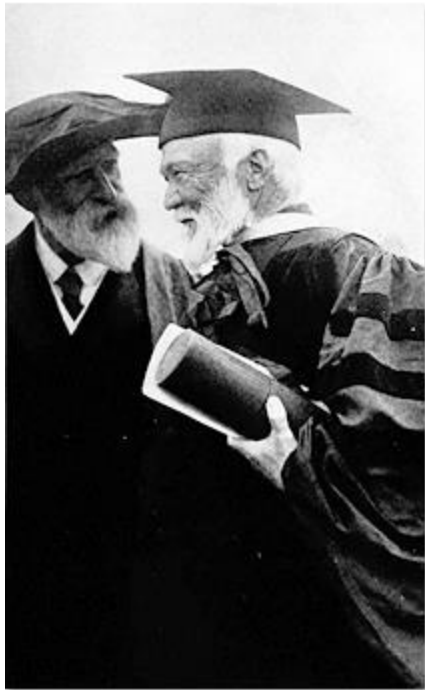
Some of them, such as José Martí of Cuba, or Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore from India, had lodged their places in history as intellectual leaders of anti-colonial political struggles. Others became known as national political leaders: Georges Clemençeau of France, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento of Argentina, and the first Japanese delegation to America. Still others were popular literary or artistic figures: Charles Dickens, Antonín Dvořák, Giacomo Puccini, John Butler Yeats. Some were noteworthy because of their illuminating analysis or commentary, such as Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville and the

Scot James Bryce, whose books *Democracy in America* and *The American Commonwealth*, respectively, have become seminal works in American political science. Others were compelling because of their disparaging opinions of the nation, sometimes to the point of comedy, such as Harriet Martineau and Frances Trollope.

With the exception of Bryce, who served as Britain's Ambassador to the United States from 1907 to 1913, none of these foreigners who traveled in America, I believe, have left more documentation about their visits than 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Yet in 1976 'Abdu'l-Bahá's portrait did not appear in the Smithsonian's exhibition. Around the world there are millions of people — from every country, language, and background — for whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example is central to their lives. But by American historians he appears to have been left out.

Why?

I believe the reasons have to do partly with the way historians approach their craft and partly with the way 'Abdu'l-Bahá's story has been told across the century.



James Bryce, left, with Andrew Carnegie.  
From Andrew Carnegie's Autobiography.  
(Project Gutenberg)

Historians of the Progressive Era have always been hard pressed to decide which figures during that watershed period in modern American history were worth examining. "This may seem to be a strange topic of debate," Arthur Link and Richard McCormick wrote in 1983, "but really it is not. Progressivism engaged many different groups of Americans, and each group of progressives naturally considered themselves to be the key

reformers and thought that their own programs were the most important ones.” Historians, likewise, “have succeeded in identifying *their* reformers only by defining progressivism narrowly, by excluding other reformers and reforms when they do not fall within some specific definition. . . .”

The lenses that American historians have trained on the Progressive Era have simply not been focused on a visitor such as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Even as he addressed the central dilemmas facing the American nation, he never engaged in political controversies. Although he offered a challenging view of world order, he never became associated with nationalistic movements who rewrote their own national histories to place their thinkers and leaders at the center of historical action.

American historians like Benjamin Parke De Witt, Richard Hofstadter, Robert Wiebe, John Higham, and Arthur Link weren’t looking for someone like an ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and so, when they looked back at the vast historical evidence from 1912, they never saw him.



A pencil portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by F. Soulé Campbell.  
(National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

We can see, I believe, an inverted process at work in authors who have chosen to write about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Since the early years of the century, they have almost all been Bahá’ís, whose primary concern was to communicate stories designed to edify the faith of other Bahá’ís, not to present ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as an integrated voice in a mainstream American narrative. Over the past couple of decades, or so, this has begun to change,

in the work of authors such as Robert Stockman and Gayle Morrison. An additional challenge has been that virtually all of the work produced about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been printed by Bahá’í publishing organizations, whose distribution outside Bahá’í circles is limited, instead of mainstream publishing houses.

Over the last eight months, we have attempted to establish a narrative about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that embeds him in the rich context of American life in 1912, told in a language crafted for a broad audience. We have sought to present ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as an original voice, who engaged Americans of all kinds in conversations about the way they understood themselves and their place in the world, instead of primarily as a religious figure for a particular community. We have found that this approach reveals ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s American discourse to have been far more nuanced and complex than we imagined. Paradoxically, understanding how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá engaged deeply with the specifics of America in 1912, and placing him in the detailed context of time and place, makes him more relevant — not less — to the challenges America faces today.

DECEMBER 3, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## Building a Community of Practice

By ROBERT SOCKETT AND JONATHAN MENON | Published on December 3, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ SPENT HIS last few days in New York in the neighborhood of Riverside Park on the Upper West Side. He took daily walks along the Hudson River, met the continuing stream of guests that arrived to see him almost every day, and had more intimate conversations with the Americans who were closest to him. These smaller gatherings served a special purpose for which he had also come to America.



Louis Gregory, an African American lawyer, was a willing partner in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assault on the color line in America. (National Bahá’í Archives, United States)

It was one thing to speak in broad terms about principles, map out prescriptions for international peace, and carry on a rhetorical battle against the modern ideologies of race, gender, militarism, social darwinism, and religious and class prejudice. It was something else entirely to put into practice Bahá’u’lláh’s complete vision for constructing a new global civilization. That task would be long and hard, it would demand daily struggle, and it

would require building a dedicated community of people who would commit themselves to that long-term goal. That's why, in smaller groups, and usually toward the end of his stays in each city, 'Abdu'l-Bahá focused special attention on the Americans around him who called themselves Bahá'ís.

In 1912, there were about 1,000 of them living in North America. Although a few were very wealthy, most of them came from the emerging middle-class; in some towns, such as Kenosha, Wisconsin, several members of the working class had become Bahá'ís. In New York, Bahá'ís often visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the home of Edward and Carrie Kinney, who leased an elegant house that occupied two-thirds of a long and narrow lot on the southeast corner of West End Avenue and West 98th Street, one block east of Riverside Drive and eight blocks north from the home of Mrs. Emery, to whose house at 273 West 90th Street 'Abdu'l-Bahá had moved for his final six nights. The Kinneys' ground floor rooms opened to create a single large space that could seat 250 or 300 people.



Corinne True was instrumental in erecting the Bahá'í House of Worship north of Chicago. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

The conversations 'Abdu'l-Bahá had with groups of Bahá'ís also touched on two subjects that he did not usually address in his engagements with the public. He spoke to them about the absolute priority of maintaining unity in a religious community that had abolished any form of priesthood. Every religion of the past had split into factions when one leader's interpretation of scripture conflicted with another's. Bahá'u'lláh had dealt with the challenging issue of religious authority by establishing what he called his



“Covenant.” Although individual Bahá’ís had to develop their own understanding of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings, they had no right to impose their own views on others. Instead, in his Will and Testament, Bahá’u’lláh had vested interpretive authority in just one person: his son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In place of nominating a special class of individuals to administer the community, Bahá’u’lláh had created elected bodies, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called “spiritual assemblies.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began to build this system of governance among the North American Bahá’ís.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also challenged them to spread their new religion beyond their own borders. “Teachers must continually travel to all parts of the continent, nay, rather, to all parts of the world,” he wrote to them in the middle of the war, on April 19, 1916, “but they must travel like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who journeyed throughout the cities of America.” That is, they must bear the costs themselves — not accepting money from any source outside the voluntary contributions of their own membership — and they must distinguish themselves by their deeds.

In 1921, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away, his own Will and Testament gave instructions for the continuation of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, and for electing governing bodies at the local, national, and international levels. North American Bahá’ís dispersed around the world to build them. Today Bahá’ís reside in more than 100,000 cities, towns, and villages around the world. More than 10,000 spiritual assemblies are elected every year, operating in over 200 countries.



'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of Bahá'ís at Lincoln Park in Chicago on May 5, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, Unites States)

DECEMBER 4, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## At Home in America

By ROBERT SOCKETT | Published on December 4, 2012

BEFORE HE EVEN stepped off the ship, reporter Wendell Phillips Dodge had tried to peg him as a “Wise Man Out of the East.” Nixola Greeley-Smith, a columnist for the New York World, joked about his “regulation prophet’s whiskers,” adding to a chorus of early coverage that struggled to come to terms with the “exotic Easterner” in their midst. Yet quite quickly, America’s press realized that there was much more to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The *Evening Mail*’s editorial page commented on “the strange anomaly of an oriental mystic who believes in woman suffrage and modern development,” noting that he was “as much at home on Broadway, in New York, as he was in the lonely cell at Acre.”



A street festival in New York's Little Italy in 1912. (Library of Congress)

On his second day in America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was whizzing over the Williamsburg Bridge from Manhattan to Brooklyn, then back again, taking in the rush hour traffic and the teeming masses, and telling one reporter that he was “beautifully tired.” It is unclear how long ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

originally planned to stay in America, but after repeatedly extending his trip, he wound up staying 239 days. During this time he would travel the breadth of the nation, deliver over 400 public addresses, converse with thousands more in more intimate gatherings, grant hundreds of personal interviews, and receive coverage in more than 350 newspaper articles. Far from being an outsider looking in on American life, he succeeded in placing himself at the center of virtually all of the nation's raging debates.

“The modern suffragette is fighting for what must be,” he said while still aboard the SS *Cedric* in New York Harbor. “The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting — force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.”



The Williamsburg Bridge over the East River, connecting Manhattan and Brooklyn. (Detroit Publishing Company)

In New York, prominent clergymen such as Percy Stickney Grant, a leading force in the Social Gospel movement, sought out ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and asked him to address their congregations. He shared their concern with social justice issues, and called on Americans to devote their time and means to helping the poor. In New York he also received invitations from peace advocates, and became a regular fixture in a network of leaders who shaped the movement in America, culminating in a major address at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration.

In Washington, DC, it was the city's elite that sought 'Abdu'l-Bahá out: members of the House of Representatives, of the Senate, and of the Cabinet; Justices of the Supreme Court; officials of foreign embassies; and men of science such as Alexander Graham Bell and Admiral Robert Peary. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá had more pressing issues to attend to in the nation's capital. On April 23, he stood beside Louis Gregory, an African American lawyer and close personal friend, before 1,600 students, faculty, and guests at the nation's leading black university — Howard University — and began a systematic assault on the nation's color line that would last through to the end of his time in America. One week later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to address their Fourth Annual Conference in Chicago.

At Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, on October 8, 'Abdu'l-Bahá rejected the idea of “survival of the fittest,” and the notion that aggression is intrinsic to human nature. Over the next two months he would offer Americans a more complex model of human nature, defining human beings by the capacities that differentiate us from animals, asserting our free will, and affirming our ability to consciously choose to serve one another altruistically.



'Abdu'l-Bahá entering Grand Central Station in New York in 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

“Having traveled from coast to coast,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá said in Cincinnati on November 5, the day of the presidential election, “I find the United States of America vast and progressive, the government just and equitable, the nation noble and independent.” During his time here, he reached across political, religious, racial, class, and gender lines to engage Americans in a conversation about their collective future. He praised “the optimism of this great country,” and the “quick perception, intelligence and understanding,” of the American people. “They are not content to stand still,” he said.

On his final night in America, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to the Theosophical Society in New York. He argued that the universe had a purpose — perhaps the type of talk Americans had expected of him when he first arrived. Then he told them that narrow religious dogma had no place in the



modern age, and that humankind must transcend its lower nature, mired in jealousy, hypocrisy, greed, and injustice, and cultivate a world of justice, sincerity, faithfulness, and mercy. And then he said goodbye.

“[I] have traveled to all the large cities,” he said, “speaking before various assemblages, proclaiming to them the oneness of the world of humanity, summoning all to union, harmony and oneness. I have indeed received the greatest kindness from the American people. I look upon them as a noble nation, capable of every perfection.” Tomorrow, he would leave for Europe. “My happiness is great,” he told them. “I shall never forget you.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá's neighborhood along the Hudson River near Riverside Park in New York. Photograph from October, 1910. (Detroit Publishing Company)

DECEMBER 5, 1912  
NEW YORK, NY

## ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Says Farewell to America

By JONATHAN MENON | Published on December 5, 2012

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ STEPPED OUT of his cabin on the Promenade Deck and set off down the corridor toward the ship’s bow. He and his party swept through the main foyer — bustling with passengers preparing for departure — up a flight of stairs to the Boat Deck, and then into the first-class lounge on the top of the ship. It was already overflowing when he reached it. More than 100 people had boarded the liner on this Thursday morning, December 5, 1912, to capture a final moment with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá before he set sail for Liverpool.



The RMS Baltic, a sister ship of the Celtic, moored at the White Star Line piers on the Hudson River near West 23rd Street, circa 1904. (Detroit Publishing Company)

The SS *Celtic*, a 21,000-ton steamship of the White Star Line, lay moored along her port side at her pier on the Hudson River near West 23rd Street. She was 700 feet long — nineteen feet and one inch longer than her sister, the *Cedric*, which had delivered ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to New York 238 days earlier. Two buff-colored funnels rose amidships, capped in black, and the *Celtic*’s dark iron hull reached down beneath the pier out of sight to the cold December waters below. Someone handed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a large bunch of red American Beauty roses when he entered the lounge at eleven o’clock. This light and cheery space, forty feet wide and almost as long, was the ship’s primary indoor gathering place. Visitors filled the three-sided nooks along the walls, which were formed by dark leather seats built in securely under the windows. Others perched on the soft barrel-shaped chairs in the middle of the room; they were upholstered in tapestry and set around heavy, ornately carved tables where passengers might play cards or enjoy an after-dinner cup of coffee during their long overseas voyages.



'Abdu'l-Bahá, in his white turban, on the boat deck of the RMS Celtic, just before the ship pulled out from the pier on Thursday, December 5, 1912. (National Bahá'í Archives, United States)

'Abdu'l-Bahá moved among the tables, speaking a few final words to this person and then to that, offering to some of them a rose. As the top of the hour approached he stood and began to speak in his deep resonant Persian, the sentences translated into English, one by one, as he intoned them.

“The earth is one native land, one home; and all mankind are the children of one Father,” he said. “God has created them, and they are the recipients of His compassion. Therefore, if anyone offends another, he offends God. It is the wish of our heavenly Father that every heart should rejoice and be filled with happiness, that we should live together in felicity and joy. The obstacle to human happiness is racial or religious prejudice, the competitive struggle for existence and inhumanity toward each other.”

Soft sounds of sobbing unsettled the surrounding silence.

“Until man reaches this high station,” 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, “the world of humanity shall not find rest, and eternal felicity shall not be attained. But if man lives up to these divine commandments, this world of earth shall be transformed into the world of heaven, and this material sphere shall be converted into a paradise of glory. It is my hope that you may become successful in this high calling so that like brilliant lamps you may cast light upon the world of humanity and quicken and stir the body of existence like unto a spirit of life. This is eternal glory. This is everlasting felicity. This is immortal life. This is heavenly attainment. This is being created in the image and likeness of God.”





Another of the Celtic's sister ships, the Adriatic, steaming south on the Hudson River past lower Manhattan shortly after leaving its pier, circa 1913. (Gjenvick-Gjenvik Archives)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then took a seat in the corner of the room, and the guests gathered round, continuing to converse until the moment finally came for them to disembark. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá walked out along the side of the Boat Deck. He leaned on the railing with his right arm and looked down at the crowd gazing back at him. When the clock struck noon, the *Celtic*’s engines began to hum. The great ship began to move slowly astern, the crowd on the pier tracking ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s white turban as the vessel pulled slowly backward into the flowing waters of the Hudson. Once the ship had cleared the dock, the pilot turned his wheel to the right, then reversed the engines and steamed south with the current, past the rising skyscrapers of downtown.

Back on April 11, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had first steamed up the Hudson, he had called the towers of lower Manhattan “the minarets of Western World commerce and industry.” Now, as the crowd on the dock faded into the distance, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could see that the new Woolworth Building, still under construction at Park Place and Broadway, had superseded them, climbing sixty stories to top out at 792 feet. A few minutes later the ship skirted the immigrant landing station at Ellis Island, and steamed past the green copper cladding of the massive statue that stood guard over the bay.

Within thirty minutes the SS *Celtic* had traversed the upper bay, slipped the three-mile route of the Narrows, passed the breakwater at the southern tip of Long Island, and pushed out over a smooth sea, bound for Liverpool and the Old World.



The path of the Celtic. Looking south on New York Harbor, from an aerial photograph taken on January 27, 1965. The Statue of Liberty is visible near the middle of the picture. (NYC Municipal Archives)