

## 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Race Unity

“... when a person becomes a Bahá'í, he gives up the past only in the sense that he is a part of this new and living Faith of God, and must seek to pattern himself, in act and thought along the lines laid down by Bahá'u'lláh. The fact that he is by origin a Jew or a Christian, a black man or a white man, is not important any more. but, as you say, lends colour and charm to the Bahá'í Community in that it demonstrates unity in diversity.”

12 March 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual Bahá'í, in *The Compilation of Compilations* vol. III

1) THE RACE RIOT IN SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, on August 14, 1908, changed forever the public agenda for colored<sup>1</sup> 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.”

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 n-----s 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.

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.<sup>2</sup> Du Bois had named ‘Abdu’l-Bahá one of *The Crisis*’s “Men of the Month” for May. 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

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<sup>1</sup> A note about the various terms to describe people of African descent in the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi : “Colored was the preferred term for black Americans until W.E.B. Du Bois, following the lead of Booker T. Washington, advocated for a switch to *Negro* in the 1920s. (Du Bois also used *black* in his writings, but it wasn't his term of choice.) Despite claims that *Negro* was a white-coined word intended to marginalize black people, Du Bois argued that the term was “etymologically and phonetically” preferable to *colored* or “various hyphenated circumlocutions.” Most importantly, the new terminology—chosen by black leaders themselves—symbolized a rising tide of black intellectual, artistic, and political assertiveness. (After achieving the shift in vocabulary, Du Bois spearheaded a letter-writing campaign to capitalize his preferred term. In 1930 the *New York Times Style Book* made the change.)”

[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/explainer/2010/01/when\\_did\\_the\\_word\\_negro\\_become\\_taboo.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2010/01/when_did_the_word_negro_become_taboo.html)

<sup>2</sup> see *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 111-113

columns with capitals wrapped in acanthus leaves surrounded the delegates in Corinthian Hall as they cast their secret ballots.

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 responded unanimously, and Louis Gregory became the ninth member.

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.

Later that evening 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave a public address to conclude the Fourth Annual Convention of the Bahá'í Temple Unity. The next day He laid the cornerstone for the Bahá'í House of Worship; after the stone was in place, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "*The temple is already built*"

Adapted from <http://239days.com/2012/04/30/the-fallout-from-a-city-in-flames/>

## Some Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Regarding Race

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2) Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity of the Bahá'í world wherein distinction of colour findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered. Praise be to God, the hearts of the friends are united and linked together, whether they be from the east or the west, from north or from south, whether they be German, French, Japanese, American, and whether they pertain to the white, the black, the red, the yellow or the brown race. Variations of colour, of land and of race are of no importance in the Bahá'í Faith; on the contrary, Bahá'í unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 112)

3) The faces of these are as the pupil of the eye<sup>3</sup>; although the pupil is created black, yet is it the source of light. I hope God will make these black ones the glory of the white ones and as the depositing of the lights of love of God. And I ask God to assist them in all circumstances, that they may be encompassed with the favors of their Loving Lord throughout centuries and ages.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá* v2, p. 292)

## 4) 23 April 1912 Talk at Howard University Washington, D.C.

Today I am most happy, for I see here a gathering of the servants of God. I see white and black sitting together. 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. God does not look at colors; He looks at the hearts. He whose heart is pure is better. He whose character is better is more pleasing. He who turns more to the Abhá Kingdom is more advanced.

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<sup>3</sup> "Bahá'u'lláh once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil you see the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the Spirit shines forth." ('Abdu'l-Bahá *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 68)

In the realm of existence colors are of no importance. Observe in the mineral kingdom colors are not the cause of discord. 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. Therefore, different colors constitute an adornment. In the same way, there are many colors in the realm of animals. Doves are of many colors; nevertheless, they live in utmost harmony. They never look at color; instead, they look at the species. How often white doves fly with black ones. In the same way, other birds and varicolored animals never look at color; they look at the species.

Now ponder this: Animals, despite the fact that they lack reason and understanding, do not make colors the cause of conflict. Why should man, who has reason, create conflict? This is wholly unworthy of him. Especially white and black are the descendants of the same Adam; they belong to one household. In origin they were one; they were the same color. Adam was of one color. Eve had one color. All humanity is descended from them. Therefore, in origin they are one. These colors developed later due to climates and regions; they have no significance whatsoever. Therefore, today I am very happy that white and black have gathered together in this meeting. I hope this coming together and harmony reaches such a degree that no distinctions shall remain between them, and they shall be together in the utmost harmony and love.

But I wish to say one thing in order that the blacks may become grateful to the whites and the whites become loving toward the blacks. If you go to Africa and see the blacks of Africa, you will realize how much progress you have made. Praise be to God! You are like the whites; there are no great distinctions left. But the blacks of Africa are treated as servants. The first proclamation of emancipation for the blacks was made by the whites of America. How they fought and sacrificed until they freed the blacks! Then it spread to other places. The blacks of Africa were in complete bondage, but your emancipation led to their freedom also—that is, the European states emulated the Americans, and the emancipation proclamation became universal. It was for your sake that the whites of America made such an effort. Were it not for this effort, universal emancipation would not have been proclaimed.

Therefore, you must be very grateful to the whites of America, and the whites must become very loving toward you so that you may progress in all human grades. Strive jointly to make extraordinary progress and mix together completely. In short, you must be very thankful to the whites who were the cause of your freedom in America. Had you not been freed, other blacks would not have been freed either. Now—praise be to God!—everyone is free and lives in tranquility. I pray that you attain to such a degree of good character and behavior that the names of black and white shall vanish. All shall be called human, just as the name for a flight of doves is dove. They are not called black and white. Likewise with other birds.

I hope that you attain to such a high degree—and this is impossible except through love. You must try to create love between yourselves; and this love does not come about unless you are grateful to the whites, and the whites are loving toward you, and endeavor to promote your advancement and enhance your honor. This will be the cause of love. Differences between black and white will be completely obliterated; indeed, ethnic and national differences will all disappear.

I am very happy to see you and thank God that this meeting is composed of people of both races and that both are gathered in perfect love and harmony. I hope this becomes the example of universal harmony and love until no title remains except that of humanity. Such a title demonstrates the perfection of the human world and is the cause of eternal glory and human happiness. I pray that you be with one another in utmost harmony and love and strive to enable each other to live in comfort.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 44)

**5) 23 April 1912 Talk to Bethel Literary Society Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church M Street, NW, Washington, D.C.**

As I stand here tonight and look upon this assembly, 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. Hearts are united. This just government makes such a meeting possible. You should thank God continually that you enjoy the security and protection of a government which furthers your development and rules with impartial equity and equality toward all, even as a father; for in the human world there is no greater blessing....

How shall we utilize these gifts and expend these bounties? By directing our efforts toward the unification of the human race. We must use these powers in establishing the oneness of the world of humanity, appreciate these virtues by accomplishing the unity of whites and blacks, devote this divine intelligence to the perfecting of amity and accord among all branches of the human family so that under the protection and providence of God the East and West may hold each other's hands and become as lovers. Then will mankind be as one nation, one race and kind — as waves of one ocean. Although these waves may differ in form and shape, they are waves of the same sea. Flowers may be variegated in colors, but they are all flowers of one garden. Trees differ though they grow in the same orchard. All are nourished and quickened into life by the bounty of the same rain, all grow and develop by the heat and light of the one sun, all are refreshed and exhilarated by the same breeze that they may bring forth varied fruits. This is according to the creative wisdom. If all trees bore the same kind of fruit, it would cease to be delicious. In their never-ending variety man finds enjoyment instead of monotony.

And now as I look into your faces, I am reminded of trees varying in color and form but all bearing luscious and delectable fruits, fragrant and delightful to the inner and outer senses. The radiance and spirituality of this meeting is through the favor of God. Our hearts are uplifted in thankfulness to Him. Praise be to God! You are living upon the great continent of the West, enjoying the perfect liberty, security and peace of this just government. There is no cause for sorrow or unhappiness anywhere; every means of happiness and enjoyment is about you, for in this human world there is no greater blessing than liberty. You do not know. I, who for forty years have been a prisoner, do know. I do know the value and blessing of liberty. For you have been and are now living in freedom, and you have no fear of anybody. Is there a greater blessing than this? Freedom! Liberty! Security! These are the great bestowals of God. Therefore, praise ye God! I will now pray in your behalf. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 48- 51)

**6) Talk at Fourth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Handel Hall, Chicago, Illinois**

...Let us now discover more specifically how he is the image and likeness of God and what is the standard or criterion by which he can be measured and estimated. This standard can be no other than the divine virtues which are revealed in him. Therefore, every man imbued with divine qualities, who reflects heavenly moralities and perfections, who is the expression of ideal and praiseworthy attributes, is, verily, in the image and likeness of God. If a man possesses wealth, can we call him an image and likeness of God? Or is human honor and notoriety the criterion of divine nearness? Can we apply the test of racial color and say that man of a certain hue — white, black, brown, yellow, red—is the true image of his Creator? We must conclude that color is not the standard and estimate of judgment and that it is of no importance, for color is accidental in nature. The spirit and intelligence of man is essential, and that is the manifestation of divine virtues, the merciful bestowals of God, the eternal life and baptism through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, be it known that color or race is of no importance. He who is the image and

likeness of God, who is the manifestation of the bestowals of God, is acceptable at the threshold of God—whether his color be white, black or brown; it matters not. Man is not man simply because of bodily attributes. The standard of divine measure and judgment is his intelligence and spirit.

Therefore, let this be the only criterion and estimate, for this is the image and likeness of God. A man's heart may be pure and white though his outer skin be black; or his heart be dark and sinful though his racial color is white. The character and purity of the heart is of all importance. The heart illumined by the light of God is nearest and dearest to God, and inasmuch as God has endowed man with such favor that he is called the image of God, this is truly a supreme perfection of attainment, a divine station which is not to be sacrificed by the mere accident of color.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 69)

7) “...In Washington, too, we called a meeting of the blacks and whites. The attendance was very large, the blacks predominating. At our second gathering this was reversed, but at the third meeting we were unable to say which color predominated. These meetings were a great practical lesson upon the unity of colors and races in the Bahá'í teaching....

God maketh no distinction between the white and the black. If the hearts are pure both are acceptable unto Him. God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race. All colors are acceptable to Him, be they white, black, or yellow. Inasmuch as all were created in the image of God, we must bring ourselves to realize that all embody divine possibilities. If you go into a garden and find all the flowers alike in form, species and color, the effect is wearisome to the eye. The garden is more beautiful when the flowers are many-colored and different; the variety lends charm and adornment. In a flock of doves some are white, some black, red, blue; yet they make no distinction among themselves. All are doves no matter what the color.

This variety in forms and colorings which is manifest in all the kingdoms is according to creative wisdom and has a divine purpose. Nevertheless, whether the creatures be all alike or all different should not be the cause of strife and quarreling among them. Especially why should man find cause for discord in the color or race of his fellow creature? No educated or illumined mind will allow that this differentiation and discord should exist or that there is any ground for it. Therefore, the whites should be just and kind to the blacks, who in turn should reflect an equal measure of appreciation and gratitude. Then will the world become as one great garden of flowering humanity, variegated and multicolored, rivaling each other only in the virtues and graces which are spiritual.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 111-113)

**8) 10 November 1912 Talk at Home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hannen, Washington, D. C.**

“This is a beautiful assembly. I am very happy that white and black are together. This is the cause of my happiness, for you all are the servants of one God and, therefore, brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers. In the sight of God there is no distinction between whites and blacks; all are as one. Anyone whose heart is pure is dear to God—whether white or black, red or yellow. Among the animals colors exist. The doves are white, black, red, blue; but notwithstanding this diversity of color they flock together in unity, happiness and fellowship, making no distinction among themselves, for they are all doves. Man is intelligent and thoughtful, endowed with powers of mind. Why, then, should he be influenced by distinction of color or race, since all belong to one human family? There is no sheep which shuns another as if saying, "I am white, and you are black." They graze together in complete unity, live together in fellowship and happiness. 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?

I had a servant who was black; his name was Isfandiyar. If a perfect man could be found in the world, that man was Isfandiyar. He was the essence of love, radiant with sanctity and perfection, luminous with light. Whenever I think of Isfandiyar, I am moved to tears, although he passed away fifty years ago. He was the faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh and was entrusted with His secrets. For this reason the Shah of Persia wanted him and inquired continually as to his whereabouts. Bahá'u'lláh was in prison, but the Shah had commanded many persons to find Isfandiyar. Perhaps more than one hundred officers were appointed to search for him. If they had succeeded in catching him, they would not have killed him at once. They would have cut his flesh into pieces to force him to tell them the secrets of Bahá'u'lláh. But Isfandiyar with the utmost dignity used to walk in the streets and bazaars. One day he came to us. My mother, my sister and myself lived in a house near a corner. Because our enemies frequently injured us, we were intending to go to a place where they did not know us. I was a child at that time. At midnight Isfandiyar came in. My mother said, "O Isfandiyar, there are a hundred policemen seeking for you. If they catch you, they will not kill you at once but will torture you with fire. They will cut off your fingers. They will cut off your ears. They will put out your eyes to force you to tell them the secrets of Bahá'u'lláh. Go away! Do not stay here." He said, "I cannot go because I owe money in the street and in the stores. How can I go? They will say that the servant of Bahá'u'lláh has bought and consumed the goods and supplies of the storekeepers without paying for them. Unless I pay all these obligations, I cannot go. But if they take me, never mind. If they punish me, there is no harm in that. If they kill me, do not be grieved. But to go away is impossible. I must remain until I pay all I owe. Then I will go."

For one month Isfandiyar went about in the streets and bazaars. He had things to sell, and from his earnings he gradually paid his creditors. In fact, they were not his debts but the debts of the court, for all our properties had been confiscated. Everything we had was taken away from us. The only things that remained were our debts. Isfandiyar paid them in full; not a single penny remained unpaid. Then he came to us, said good-bye and went away. Afterward Bahá'u'lláh was released from prison. We went to Baghdad, and Isfandiyar came there. He wanted to stay in the same home. Bahá'u'lláh, the Blessed Perfection, said to him, "When you fled away, there was a Persian minister who gave you shelter at a time when no one else could give you protection. Because he gave you shelter and protected you, you must be faithful to him. If he is satisfied to have you go, then come to us; but if he does not want you to go, do not leave him." His master said, "I do not want to be separated from Isfandiyar. Where can I find another like him, with such sincerity, such faithfulness, such character, such power? Where can I find one? O Isfandiyar! I am not willing that you should go, yet if you wish to go, let it be according to your own will." But because the Blessed Perfection had said, "You must be faithful," Isfandiyar stayed with his master until he died. He was a point of light. Although his color was black, yet his character was luminous; his mind was luminous; his face was luminous. Truly, he was a point of light.

Then it is evident that excellence does not depend upon color. Character is the true criterion of humanity. Anyone who possesses a good character, who has faith in God and is firm, whose actions are good, whose speech is good—that one is accepted at the threshold of God no matter what color he may be. In short—praise be to God!—you are the servants of God. The love of Bahá'u'lláh is in your hearts. Your souls are rejoicing in the glad tidings of Bahá'u'lláh. My hope is that the white and the black will be united in perfect love and fellowship, with complete unity and brotherhood. Associate with each other, think of each other, and be like a rose garden. Anyone who goes into a rose garden will see various roses, white, pink, yellow, red, all growing together and replete with adornment. Each one accentuates the beauty of the other. Were all of one color, the garden would be monotonous to the eye. If they were all white or yellow or red, the garden would lack variety and attractiveness; but when the colors are varied, white, pink, yellow, red, there will be the greatest beauty. Therefore, I hope that you will be like a rose garden. Although different in colors, yet—praise be to God!—you receive rays from the same sun. From one

cloud the rain is poured upon you. You are under the training of one Gardener, and this Gardener is kind to all. Therefore, you must manifest the utmost kindness towards each other, and you may rest assured that whenever you are united, the confirmations of the Kingdom of Abha will reach you, the heavenly favors will descend, the bounties of God will be bestowed, the Sun of Reality will shine, the cloud of mercy will pour its showers, and the breeze of divine generosity will waft its fragrances upon you.

I hope you will continue in unity and fellowship. How beautiful to see blacks and whites together! I hope, God willing, the day may come when I shall see the red men, the Indians, with you, also Japanese and others. Then there will be white roses, yellow roses, red roses, and a very wonderful rose garden will appear in the world.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 427)

9) Render thanks to the Lord that among that race thou art the first believer, <sup>4\*</sup> arisen to guide others. It is my hope that through the bounties and favours of the Abha Beauty thy countenance may be illumined, thy disposition pleasing, and thy fragrance diffused, that thine eyes may be seeing, thine ears attentive, thy tongue eloquent, thy heart filled with supreme glad-tidings, and thy soul refreshed by divine fragrances, so that thou mayest arise among that race and occupy thyself with the edification of the people, and become filled with light. Although the pupil of the eye is black, it is the source of light. Thou shalt likewise be. The disposition should be bright, not the appearance. Therefore, with supreme confidence and certitude, say: "O God! Make me a radiant light, a shining lamp, and a brilliant star, so that I may illumine the hearts with an effulgent ray from Thy Kingdom of Abhá...." I may illumine the hearts with an effulgent ray from Thy Kingdom of Abha...."

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Compilation of Compilations* vol II, p. 360)

10) O thou who art pure in heart, sanctified in spirit, peerless in character, beautiful in face! Thy photograph hath been received revealing thy physical frame in the utmost grace and the best appearance. Thou art dark in countenance and bright in character. Thou art like unto the pupil of the eye which is dark in colour, yet it is the fount of light and the revealer of the contingent world. I have not forgotten nor will I forget thee. I beseech God that He may graciously make thee the sign of His bounty amidst mankind, illumine thy face with the light of such blessings as are vouchsafed by the merciful Lord, single thee out for His love in this age which is distinguished among all the past ages and centuries.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 114)

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<sup>4</sup> \* This Tablet was addressed to one Mrs. Pocohontas in Washington....Additional information provided by the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States indicates that Mr. Louis Gregory, in a history of the Washington, D.C. Bahá’í community, mentions a black Bahá’í, Mrs. Pocohontas Pope, who is likely the same person. Mrs. Pope learned of the Bahá’í Faith through Alma and Fanny Knobloch and Joseph and Pauline Hannen. There is, at present no other information on Mrs. Pope.] (Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations* vol II, p. 360)

## Examples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Race Unity

*“Let them call to mind, fearlessly and determinedly, the example and conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá while in their midst. Let them remember His courage, His genuine love, His informal and indiscriminating fellowship, His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom. Let them revive and perpetuate the memory of those unforgettable and historic episodes and occasions on which He so strikingly demonstrated His keen sense of justice, His spontaneous sympathy for the downtrodden, His ever-abiding sense of the oneness of the human race, His overflowing love for its members, and His displeasure with those who dared to flout His wishes, to deride His methods, to challenge His principles, or to nullify His acts.”*

(Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 34)

### Calling to mind 'Abdu'l-Bahá while in our midst... \_\_\_\_\_

#### When the Blessed Perfection became the head of the family...

11) *“My grandfather had many colored maids and servants. When the Blessed Perfection<sup>5</sup> became the head of the family he liberated all of them, and gave them permission to leave or stay, but if they desired to remain it would, of course, be in a different manner. However, all of them, revelling in their new found freedom preferred to leave, except Esfandayar [sic], who remained in household and continued to serve us with proverbial faithfulness and chastity.”*

(Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, volume 9 (April 28, 1928), number 3, page 38)

#### The Black Rose

12) Towards the latter part of April, late one Sunday afternoon, I was again at the home where so many wonderful hours had been spent. It had become almost a habit, when the service at my church was over and dinner dispatched, to hasten in to New York and spend the rest of the day and evening at this home.

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I was standing alone at one of the windows looking out upon the street, when I was startled by seeing a large group of boys come rushing up the steps. There seemed twenty or thirty of them. And they were not what one would call representatives of the cultured class. In fact, they were a noisy and not too well-dressed lot of urchins, but spruce and clean as if for an event. They came up the steps with a stamping of feet and loud talk, and I heard them being ushered in and up the stairs.

I turned to Mrs. Kinney, who was standing near. "What is the meaning of all this?" I asked. "Oh, this is really the most surprising thing," she exclaimed, "I asked them to come today, but I hardly expected that they would."

It seemed that a few days before 'Abdu'l-Bahá had gone to the Bowery Mission to speak to several hundred of New York's wretched poor. As usual, with Him went a large group of the Persian and American friends, and it made a unique spectacle as this party of Orientals in flowing robes and strange head-gear made its way through the East Side. Not unnaturally, a number of boys gathered in their train and soon they became a little too vocal in their expression. As I remember, even some venturesome ones called names and threw sticks. As my Hostess told the story, she said: "I could not bear to hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá so treated and dropped behind the others for a moment to speak to them. In a few words, I told them Who He was; that He was a very Holy Man who had spent many years in exile and prison because of His

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<sup>5</sup> Bahá'u'lláh

love for Truth and for men, and that now He was on His way to speak to the poor men at the Bowery Mission."

"Can't we go too?" one who seemed to be the leader asked. I think that would be impossible, she told them, but if you come to my home next Sunday, and she gave them the address, I will arrange for you to see Him.

So here they were. We followed them up the stairs and into 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own room. I was just in time to see the last half dozen of the group entering the room. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was standing at the door and He greeted each boy as he came in; sometimes with a handclasp, sometimes with an arm around a shoulder, but always with such smiles and laughter it almost seemed that He was a boy with them. Certainly there was no suggestion of stiffness on their part, or awkwardness in their unaccustomed surroundings. 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 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.

This significant incident had given to the whole occasion a new complexion. The atmosphere of the room seemed now charged with subtle vibrations felt by every soul. The boys, while losing nothing of their ease and simplicity, were graver and more intent upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and I caught them glancing again and again at the colored boy with very thoughtful eyes. To the few of the friends in the room the scene brought visions of a new world in which every soul would be recognized and treated as a child of God. I thought: What would happen to New York if these boys could carry away such a keen remembrance of this experience that throughout their lives, whenever they encountered any representatives of the many races and colors to be found in that great city, they would think of them and treat them as "different colored flowers in the Garden of God. "The freedom from just this one prejudice in the minds and hearts of this score or more of souls would unquestionably bring happiness and freedom from rancor to thousands of hearts. How simple and easy to be kind, I thought, and how hardly we learn.

When His visitors had arrived, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent out for some candy and now it appeared, a great five- pound box of expensive mixed chocolates. It was unwrapped and 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked with it around the circle of boys, dipping His hand into the box and placing a large handful in the hands of each, with a word and smile for everyone. He then returned to the table at which He had been sitting, and laying down the box, which now had only a few pieces in it, He picked from it a long chocolate nougat; it was very black. He looked at it a moment and then around at the group of boys who were watching Him intently and expectantly. Without a word He walked across the room to where the colored boy was sitting, and, still without speaking, but with a humorously piercing glance that swept the group, laid the chocolate against the black cheek. His face was radiant as He laid His arm around the shoulder of the boy and that radiance seemed to fill the room. No words were necessary to convey His meaning, and there could be no doubt that all the boys caught it.

You see, He seemed to say, that he is not only a black flower, but also a black sweet. You eat black chocolates and find them good: perhaps you would find this black brother of yours good also if you once taste his sweetness. Again that awed hush fell upon the room. Again the boys all looked with real wonder at the colored boy as if they had never seen him before, which indeed was true. And as for the boy himself, upon whom all eyes were now fixed, he seemed perfectly unconscious of all but 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Upon Him his eyes were fastened with an adoring, blissful look such as I had never seen upon any face. For the moment he was transformed. The reality of his being had been brought to the surface and the angel he really was revealed.

(Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, p. 67-68)

### ***Where is Mr. Gregory?***

13) During the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the United States in 1912 a luncheon in His honor was given in Washington by Mirza Ali-Kuli Khan and Madame Khan, who were both Bahá'ís. Khan was at that time charge d'affaires of the Persian Legation in the capital city. Many noted people were invited, some of whom were members of the official and social life of Washington, as well as a few Bahá'ís. Just an hour before the luncheon 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent word to Louis Gregory that he might come to Him for the promised conference.

Louis arrived at the appointed time, and the conference went on and on; 'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed to want to prolong it. When luncheon was announced, 'Abdu'l-Bahá led the way and all followed Him into the dining room, except Louis. All were seated when suddenly 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood up, looked all around, and then said to Mirza Khan, *Where is Mr. Gregory? Bring Mr. Gregory!* There was nothing for Mirza Khan to do but find Mr. Gregory, who fortunately had not yet left the house, but was quietly waiting for a chance to do so. Finally Mr. Gregory came into the room with Mirza Khan.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who was really the Host (as He was wherever He was), had by this time rearranged the place setting and made room for Mr. Gregory, giving him the seat of honor at His right. He stated He was very pleased to have Mr. Gregory there, and then, in the most natural way as if nothing unusual had happened, proceeded to give a talk on the oneness of mankind.

(Agnes Parsons, <sup>6</sup>*Diary of Agnes Parsons*, pp 45-46)

### ***Give him this ten dollars***

14) After leaving Mrs. Wainwright we went to His [Abdu'l-Baha's] house, as the driver passed by mine, but He could not enter as the person having the key had not arrived. Dr. Fareed told Lee the coachman to drive about for 1/4 hour, and here the only inharmonious happening occurred. Lee said he had had no sleep and although he went on, it was done grudgingly. As there is only one more day, I will let him drive, as I don't want to complain of him, but this has been the only jarring note of the Visit.

...I had Mrs. Meredith dismiss Lee tonight, instead of tomorrow, as I did not want 'Abdu'l-Bahá to feel\* him after his behavior. ...

Monday, November 11<sup>th</sup> I went to the station in the car, and sent a motor for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He stopped here to say "good bye" to Jeffrey, and asked Mrs. Meredith where Lee was, and left \$10 which He insisted should be given to him!

Agnes Parsons, *Diary of Agnes Parsons*, p 138)

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<sup>6</sup> At the time Mrs. Parsons wrote her diary, Washington, D.C. was home to the most diverse Bahá'í community in North America: it had within its fold the largest group of African-Americans, and virtually all social classes, from the working poor to the social elite, were represented in it. As part of the American south, Washington, D.C. was also a city in which racial segregation was a fact of life, and it was on the issue of racial equality that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was most uncompromising during his visit to America. On one occasion, which is mentioned briefly in this diary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá shocked some of the white socialites present by insisting that Louis Gregory, an African-American Bahá'í and lawyer, be seated next to him at a society luncheon. In such a milieu, the Bahá'ís found it challenging to comply with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instruction that they should hold racially-integrated meetings. Even locating a public site for a community dinner honoring 'Abdu'l-Bahá proved difficult, since no hotels in the city would allow an integrated meeting.

Beneath the concern of Washington's upper classes to uphold long-standing social conventions regarding racial segregation were deep-rooted prejudices not easily overcome. Even Mrs. Parsons' husband once commented to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that he wished all the blacks would return to Africa, to which the Master wryly replied that such an exodus would have to begin with Wilber, the trusted butler of the Parsons household. While Mrs. Parsons herself would not have harbored such sentiments, having accepted the Bahá'í teaching on the oneness of humanity, her social position would have made it extremely difficult for her to accept African-Americans as persons with whom she could have social relations as equals, and it may also have made her reluctant to advocate racial integration, even within the Bahá'í community.

On this subject, the silences of this diary are perhaps more telling than what is recorded. For example, there is scarcely a mention of any of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks at the homes of Andrew Dyer and Joseph Hannen, both of which were sites of racially integrated meetings for the Washington, D.C. Bahá'í community, or at African-American venues, such as the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, presumably because Mrs. Parsons did not attend most of these events. Such activities were not part of the social world in which she lived. It is remarkable, then, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá subsequently chose Agnes Parsons to spearhead the Racial Amity campaign initiated by the Bahá'í community and as remarkable that she transcended her social milieu in order to carry out this mandate. (quoted from the Introduction by Sandr Hutchison written in 1995)

15) Two more incidents are reported by Mrs. Parsons:

[The Chants] said that their servants were all at the Church on Sunday and that the cook particularly wanted to know if she might come near after the luncheon and listen to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. After the rest which He took directly after luncheon we went on the terrace where hidden by a tree the Cook sat. A little later He asked the servants to come that He might speak to them which He did very beautifully shaking hands with all of them.

Mr. \_\_\_\_, a chauffer [sic.] to one spoke of his great interest in hearing Abdul Bahá. I asked if he would not like to meet Him, and he said 'Yes'; but seeing his motor at the door he thought it was impossible, but I said that I will explain that you cannot stay, and he followed me into the dining room where Abdul Bahá was sitting. When Abdul Bahá found he could not sit down, He rose, said just a few wonderful words to him of which he alone could have understood the import and taking from the fruit bowl a pear, He presented it to him, and saying, 'that, you must eat yourself.' What He said was something like this—'you must not be depressed for a great light will come to you.'

(Agnes Parson's Diary p. 114)

### **An important meeting was held today**

16) Owing to the prejudice and hatred that has existed between blacks and whites, it has been impossible for white people to invite black people to their homes. Therefore 'Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly encouraged the believers to promote fellowship and unity among these two races.

An important meeting was held today at the home of Mr Kinney. It was attended by many Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís and demonstrated a strong bond of unity between whites and blacks. The Master said that the East has always been the dawning place of light, that this gathering of blacks and whites is like the gathering of many colored flowers and that the variety of colors enhances the beauty of the garden and brings about the loveliness of each.

(Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 46)

### ***At the sight of such genuine love and attraction between the white and the black friends***

17) A second meeting was held that evening at the home of Mr and Mrs Andrew J. Dyer, a mixed race couple. Those present were in such unity and love that the Master remarked: *Before I arrived, I felt too tired to speak at this meeting but at the sight of such genuine love and attraction between the white and the black friends, I was so moved that I spoke with great love and likened this union of different colored races to a string of gleaming pearls and rubies.*

(Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 57)

### **Robert Turner**

18) Included in this party of pilgrims was Robert Turner, Mrs Hearst's Negro butler. He was destined to be the first of his race on the American continent to accept the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. One day as the Master sat with the pilgrims, He asked whether everybody was there, and then He noticed that the butler was absent. 'Where is Robert?' He enquired, and as soon as that simple, devoted man came into the room, 'Abdu'l-Bahá rose to His feet and greeted Him affectionately. He made Robert, a servant, sit down with the rest, and said: 'Robert, your Lord loves you. God gave you a black skin, but a heart white as snow.'

(H. M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá — *The Centre of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah*, p. 72)

### **The passing of Robert Turner**

19) Marzieh Gail writes: 'In the summer of 1909, I received from the Master a Tablet acknowledging my letter of June 22, in which I had reported the death of Robert Turner. This letter came to me while I was spending the summer in Carmel, California with my family.. This Tablet came in my name in "care of Mrs. Goodall, California". On the second page of the original Persian Tablet, the Master writes as follows:

*"As to Mr Robert (Turner), the news of his ascension saddened the hearts. He was in reality in the utmost sincerity. Glory be to God! What a shining candle was aflame in that black-colored lamp. Praise be to God that that lighted candle ascended from the earthly lamp to the Kingdom of Eternity and gleamed and became aflame in the Heavenly Assemblage. Praise be to God that you adorned his blessed finger with the ring bearing the inscription: 'Verily I originated from God and returned unto Him'..This too is a proof of his sincerity and that in his last breath, he breathed the Allah-u-Abha, whereby the hearts of those present were impressed.*

*"O Thou Creator! O Thou Forgiver! Glorify the precious Robert in Thy Kingdom and in the garden of the Paradise of Abhá. Bring him in[to] intimate association with the birds of the celestial meadow. O Thou Knowing God! Although that sinless one was black in color, like unto the black pupil of the eye, he was a source of shining light.*

*"O Thou forgiving Lord! Cause that longing one to attain Thy meeting and cause that thirsty one to drink the water of life in abundance. Thou art the Forgiver, the Pardoner, the Compassionate..."*

(Signed) Ayn-Ayn

(Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, p. 54)

### **"If the people see that one colored person has entered my hotel"**

20) The friends arranged a banquet in commemoration of the Day of the Covenant and the journey of the beloved of all hearts. Today many came to the Master with bouquets of flowers in their hands. The banquet was held in the ballroom of New York's Grand Northern Hotel. This evening's banquet was so grand that the hotel staff were curious to know about the Cause. They came to see the Master to ask about the banquet and why so many distinguished Americans were praising and glorifying a person from the East.

[the next day] A gathering of black Bahá'ís was held at the home of Mrs. Kinney. They had been invited by the New York Bahá'ís to attend the banquet of the Covenant but when the proprietor of the hotel heard about it, he was not pleased. The more the friends endeavored to persuade him, the more vehement was his refusal. He said, 'If the people see that one colored person has entered my hotel, no respectable person will ever set foot in it and my business will go to the winds.' Such is the depth of prejudice between blacks and whites. Since it was impossible to invite the black Bahá'ís to the banquet, the friends arranged today's feast for their black brothers. Many white women came forward to serve their black guests, showering them with love. The Master approved of this meeting very much and He said: *Today you have carried out the laws of the Blessed Beauty and have truly acted according to the teachings of the Supreme Pen. Behold what an influence and effect the words of Bahá'u'lláh have had upon the hearts, 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.*

The Master's words made a great impression. The meeting embodied the grandeur of the Covenant and demonstrated the power and influence of the Cause in uniting, in sincerity and love, two races of humanity.

(Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 405)

### **The next morning He made a visit to the humble home of one of the friends**

21) The only public address of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Berkeley was given the evening of October 9<sup>th</sup> at the High School Auditorium before a Large and representative gathering. The next morning, 'Abdu'l-Bahá made quite a different visit-not to one of the great universities, but to the humble home of one of the friends, Charles Tinsley, a colored man, who was confined to his bed on account of a broken leg. During this visit, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told a beautiful story of a ruler who trained the subject he loved best in order to fit him to hold the most

important place in his kingdom-told how he scourged him, and maimed him, and caused him all manner of sorrow and suffering that he might know for himself what these conditions were in reality, meanwhile assuring him that he loved him and that only through this training could he be fitted for the great place he had destined him to fill.

*The Star of the West*, III:12, pp. 9-10

### **The landlord complained...**

22) The landlord [of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house] had complained about the excessive comings and goings of the visitors, therefore the Master chose the house of Mr and Mrs Kinney for the gatherings of the friends. Friends and inquirers were also continuously coming and going to visit Him in His room. Today He moved from the house facing the Hudson River to Mrs Kinney's home. He had instructed us to rent a house for Him because the owner of the apartment hotel considered that the movement of so many diverse people was unusual and felt that the additional work and difficulty [for the staff] was too much. There had been so many people visiting from morning to night that the hotel management had been obliged to respond to incessant inquiries. However, when the staff saw the Master's great kindness as He left the hotel they became ashamed of their conduct and begged Him to stay longer, but He did not accept.

*Mahmud's Diary* pp. 104, 115

### **“Howard MacNutt can have as many colored friends to see him as want to...”**

23) Looking back, we see that Howard Mac Nutt had served the Bahá'í Faith from its earliest days in America for a total of twenty-six years, was serving when he died.

“How to write you ..., of the passing of that great soul and teacher, Howard MacNutt..” said John Grundy in a letter to Shahnaz Waite. John, with his wife Julia and Howard had undertaken to teach the Faith in a section of Miami called “Colored Town”, an area forbidden to whites by city authorities and the then very active Ku Klux Klan.

“Much work was laid out here to be done. Julia, Howard and myself arranged and spoke at many colored meetings, in churches, schools and homes; perhaps thousands of people have come to our meetings. *'Abdu'l-Bahá personally and strikingly instructed us that we must make every effort to help the colored man.*”

It was eight o'clock on the night of December 26, 1926, and the two men were scarcely a block from the meeting they were to address when a motorcyclist crashed into Howard....

John goes on to tell of an unexpected victory which resulted from Howard's dying: “During Howard's service we had many colored folk present. For the first time in history the doors of Combs' funeral home were opened to the colored man. It seems Combs knew Howard and when I approached him he said: ‘Howard MacNutt can have as many colored friends to see him as want to, and in future this door will never be closed to them...’ ”

(Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, p. 126)

### **Refuse to draw the color line**

24) *The Washington Bee* noted, on April 27, "Its [the Bahá'í Faith's] white devotees, even in this prejudice-ridden community, refuse to draw the color line. The informal meetings, held frequently in the fashionable mansions of the cultured society in Sheridan Circle, Dupont Circle, Connecticut and Massachusetts avenues, have been open to Negroes on terms of absolute equality."

(Alan Ward, *239 Days*, p. 37)

### **Interracial Marriage**

25) He then returned to the Hotel for a public meeting attended by some five hundred people, many of whom had to stand. Afterward, a number of them, including reporters, followed Him to His rooms and asked Him questions on various subjects, including intermarriage. This latter discussion caused front-page headlines the next day.

*The Cleveland News* article stated:

WED RACES? SURE. ...

*"Perfect results follow the marriage of black and white races. All men are the progeny of one. ... They are of different colors, but the color is nothing." —'Abdu'l-Bahá*

"I believe Abdul Baha is absolutely right. It is inevitable that all races will unite. Black and white and yellow will intermarry and make one perfect race. It is the only logical conclusion." —Mrs. C.M. Swingle.

*The Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported, "BAHAIST APPROVES UNIONS OF RACES: Persian Teacher Tells Cleveland Women Intermarriage Results Ideal." The article, which ran the length of the front page and concluded on page three with several column inches of photographs, stated:

Abdul Baha, a venerable Persian now touring America as leader of the Bahaist movement for a universal religion, declared last night for an amalgamation of the white and negro races by intermarriage. ...

*"All men," said Abdul Baha, "are progeny of one—Adam. They are of different color, but color is nothing. Men of all races are brothers. God is neither black nor white...."*

*"Perfect results follow the marriage of black and white races. In my own family in Persia was a negro slave who was freed. She married a white man and her children married white men. These children are now in my household. The results of the union were beautiful. They were wonderful—perfect."*

(Alan Ward, 239 Days, p. 60)

### **A Close Friendship**

26) 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived on Monday evening, April 29, His nineteenth day in America, and drove to the Plaza Hotel next to Lincoln Park. The phone was already ringing with calls from reporters requesting interview time. "*Tomorrow morning,*" 'Abdu'l-Bahá told them. To the friends in His hotel suite, He reported: "*In Washington we always had one thousand and two thousand hearers in large meetings. Day and night I had no rest. A close friendship has been created between the colored and white friends. They have become excellent believers. Even those, who have not become believers, have become much nearer. Notwithstanding all this, I like Chicago more, because the first voice of Bahá'u'lláh was raised from this city.*"

(Alan Ward, 239 Days, p. 47)

### **Because he had a black man in his home**

27) There exists among the whites in America a marked animosity for the blacks, who are held in such low esteem that the whites do not allow them to attend their public functions and think it beneath their dignity to mix with them in some of the public buildings and hotels. One day, Dr Zia Bagdadi invited Mr [Louis] Gregory, a black Bahá'í, to his home. When his landlord heard about this, he gave notice to Dr Bagdadi to vacate his residence because he had had a black man in his home. Although such prejudice was intense, the influence of the Cause of God and the power of God's Covenant is so great that in many cities in America hundreds of black and white Bahá'ís mingle together and associate with each other as brothers and sisters.

(Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 71)

### **Unity between the colored and whites will be an assurance of the world's peace**

28) On Tuesday morning, April 23, well over a thousand students, faculty members, administrators, and guests jammed Rankin Chapel when 'Abdu'l-Bahá presented His memorable address at Howard University. Mahmud noted, "here, as elsewhere, when both white and colored people were present, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed happiest." He was introduced by the President of the University as "the prophet of peace and the herald of love and prosperity." 'Abdu'l-Bahá dramatically proclaimed, "*the accomplishment of unity between the colored and whites will be an assurance of the world's peace.*" The ovation He received brought Him forward again to acknowledge it. The people surged outside and stood in two ranks on either side of Him as He passed by.

(Alan Ward, 239 Days, p. 40)

### ***God is not pleased***

29) It was a warm, springlike day on Tuesday, April 30, when Jane Addams welcomed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Hull House and introduced Him to an audience that far exceeded the auditorium's seating capacity of 750. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke on the unity of the races, saying, "*God is not pleased with, neither should any reasonable or intelligent man be willing to recognize inequality in the races because of this distinction [color].*" As 'Abdu'l-Bahá left Hull House, many children and unemployed men crowded around to meet Him; to each He gave coins. (Alan Ward, 239 Days, p. 48)

### **Meeting of colored and white**

30) "*In Washington, too, we called a meeting of the colored and white people. The attendance was very large, the colored people predominating. At our second gathering this was reversed but at the third meeting we were unable to say which color predominated. These meetings were a great practical lesson upon the unity of colors and races in the Bahá'í teaching.*" (Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in 239 Days, p. 65)

### **We need some great word that will bring brotherhood and love**

31) On Sunday, May 12, After prayer and tea 'Abdu'l-Bahá took the ferry to New Jersey and then caught a train for Montclair. The Reverend Edgar S. Wiers introduced Him to the congregation of Unity Church, saying:

We need some great impelling message of peace ...class is set against class. The employer and the employee, the capitalist and wage earner confront each other with hatred. .... Our own attitude of the white race toward the negro ...and the red men ...is anything but that which is indicated in our religion or any religion. .... We need some great word that will bring us to ...brotherhood, unity and love.

(Alan Ward, 239 Days, p. 65)

### **'Abdu'l-Bahá and the servants...**

32) ...it is essential for understanding `Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Dublin to realize that even though the only black people there were non-resident servants—were neither famous nor wealthy nor educated—still He met with them with exactly the same courtesy and attention He paid to their employers. This must be seen in the context of an America in which integration did not exist, and an American Bahá'í community where, for example, the Washington, D.C. community of which Mrs. Parsons was a member had only begun to integrate starting in March 1910.

In fact, the Washington, D.C. Bahá'í community was among the first in the United States to have a significant African-American membership. The Hannens, who also visited Dublin, were the first to seriously teach blacks, at first teaching the servants of Bahá'ís. The first educated and articulate African-American Bahá'í was Louis Gregory, a Washington lawyer, who became a Bahá'í in 1909.

At the time of the Dublin visit, all the Bahá'ís were abuzz with the news that Louis Gregory had agreed to `Abdu'l-Bahá's request that he marry Louise Matthews, a white English Bahá'í, in Washington. In view of the state of race relations in turn-of-the-century America, the news was absolutely astounding.

A meeting of all the black servants was organized for `Abdu'l-Bahá at Mrs. Parsons' boathouse, attended by 28 people. Mahmud describes it as follows:

A meeting for blacks was held near Lake Dublin [actually locally referred to as "Dublin Lake"]. At this gathering the Master delivered an eloquent address regarding unity and amity between blacks and whites. He spoke of the approaching wedding of Miss [Louisa] Matthew, a white woman, and Mr. [Louis] Gregory, a colored man, which is to take place shortly in Washington, DC. The white people in the audience were astonished to see the influence of the Cause and the blacks were pleased. Incidents like these are a little less than miracles; in fact `splitting the moon

in half' would be an easier accomplishment in the eyes of the Americans. This meeting was full of joy. (Philip Tussing, *Finishing the Work*)

**His eloquent and impressive talk thrilled His listeners.**

33) In addition to the visits of large numbers of people at the hotel both day and night, three large meetings were held, attended by almost three thousand people, all of whom were honored to see 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The first meeting was held at Hull House and was attended by both blacks and whites. The Master spoke on the subject of the unity and oneness of humanity; that God has given faculties and powers equally to all and that the different colors of humankind are like the various colors of the flowers of a garden, which increases the beauty and charm of the garden. His eloquent and impressive talk thrilled His listeners.

Another meeting held at Handel Hall especially to bring together the blacks and the whites. The Master offered a commentary on a verse from the Old Testament, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness': 'By "image and likeness"', He said, 'is meant human virtues and perfections and not the black or white color of the skin.' The Master's impressive talk transformed and deeply affected the gathering.

The Master then went to a third meeting, addressing some two thousand people at the Convention of the Bahá'í Temple Unity held at the spacious Drill Hall. (Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 71)

***Asked why I sought to cultivate love between the whites and the colored***

34) Many people came to entreat Him to speak to various organizations, but He refused most of them because of lack of time. Referring to previous meetings, He told one gathering, "*Some took exception with me and asked why I sought to cultivate love between the whites and the colored.*" (Alan Ward, *239 Days*, p. 144)

***I am very happy that the whites and colored are together.***

35) On Sunday the entire day was occupied with interview after interview, until He went to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Hannen, 1252 Eighth Street, N.W., for a meeting. He looked at the interracial gathering and said: *This is a beautiful assembly. I am very happy that the whites and colored are together. This is the cause of my happiness, for you all are the servants of one God and therefore brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers. In the sight of God there is no distinction between white and colored; all are as one. Anyone whose heart is pure is dear to God whether white or colored, red or yellow.* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 425)

**'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed happiest when both colored and white people were present**

36) Joseph Hannen notes that 'This was a most notable occasion, and here, as everywhere when both white and colored people were present, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed happiest. The address was received with breathless attention . . . (Star of the West, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 7). (Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 462)

**One of the rooms will be dedicated to 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

37) Dr. H. II. Proctor, Congregational minister from Brooklyn, gave a stirring account of the work of his colored congregation in building a church, to be opened in the fall, in which many sects and denominations will worship.

One of the rooms in this edifice will be dedicated to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A feature that contributed an element of true loveliness to the meeting was the music furnished by one of the village choirs. Due to some inadvertence the organ, which was to have been delivered by truck to the Log Cabin, failed to come, so the church members carried it several blocks in order to contribute the music for the occasion.

(*Baha'i World*, Volume 2, p. 264)

### **The first race amity convention**

38) During the period immediately following the great war when communications were reopened with the Orient, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said to an American pilgrim at Haifa in 1920, Mrs. Agnes S. Parsons of Washington, DC., "*I want you to arrange in Washington a convention for unity between the white and colored people.*" A detail which He added to this laconic instruction was, "*Of course you must have people to help you.*"

Thus came about the first convention for amity between the white and colored races in America and so far as we know, the world. It gathered at Washington, D. C., May 19 to 21, 1921. It received a great spiritual confirmation and was very successful. Various units cooperated in this fine service; foremost among whom were Mrs. Parsons and her associates. Great was her responsibility.

Nineteen ladies from the social life of the city gave the prestige of their names as patrons. The Congress of the nation was represented in Senator Samuel Shortridge of California, Hon. Martin B. Madden and Hon. Theodore Burton as speakers, while the venerable ex-Senator Moses F. Clapp, was a valuable counselor and friend. Other speakers were Mr. C. Lee Cook, a white business man of the South, Dr. Alain Locke of Howard University, Mr. Alfred W. Martin of New York's Ethical Culture Society, Mr. William H. Randall of Boston, Messrs. Mountfort Mills and Howard MacNutt, Mirza Ahmad Sohrab and Jinab-i-Fadl-i-Mazindarani of Persia. Mrs. Coralie F. Cook made a beautiful presentation of the poems of Negro poets at one of the sessions. Thus colored and white, East and West, Orient and Occident were represented...

(*Baha'i World*, Volume 2, p. 281)

### **Blood will flow...**

39) Dr. Baghdadi, after a year's absence, arrived back in the United States in October 1920; he had much to tell the American Bahá'ís. ... On the question of racial harmony, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had reminded Dr. Baghdadi of His statement, when in America, that blood would flow if nothing were done to establish harmony between the black and the white.

(H. M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá — The Centre of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah*, p. 444-5)

### **Returned in time for a private interview...**

40) After luncheon I had persuaded Him to go at once for a rest, but He suddenly remembered an engagement, and went off, returning just in time for a private interview with a colored clergyman.

(Agnes Parsons, *Agnes Parsons' Diary* p 130)

### ***I wish him to become as radiant as the shining sun.***

41) "I can never forget the day in Washington when 'Abdu'l-Bahá called on the Ambassador of Turkey. He was sitting near the window watching the men and women in the street. At the time a young negro, as black as coal, passed by. '*Did you see that young negro?*' He asked. 'Yes' I answered. '*I declare by Bahá'u'lláh that I wish him to become as radiant as the shining sun.*' This example will show you how 'Abdu'l-Bahá is anxious, and how he is working day and night—so that all mankind may advance daily along the degrees of spiritual and intellectual activities, ever marching upward."

(Ahmad Sohrab, *'Abdu'l-Baha in Egypt*, p. 367)

### **He had been horrified by the prejudice against the Negroes**

42) He had been horrified in Washington by the prejudice against the Negroes. "*What does it matter,*" He asked, "*if the skin of a man is black, white, yellow, pink, or green? In this respect the animals show more intelligence than man. Black sheep and white sheep, white doves and blue do not quarrel because of difference of colour.*"

(Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*)

***I liken you to the pupil of the eye***

43) "How many are the colored believers?" asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As accurately as possible, an estimate was made of the number of those who had heard and accepted the Glad Tidings. He responded: "*The Cause will advance among them. There are many good souls among them, and such people are my friends. You must continue to teach. Do you remember My Tablet to you?*" Gladly I announced that it was committed to memory. "*I liken you to the pupil of the eye. You are black and it is black, yet it becomes the focus of light.*"

(Louis Gregory, Louis G. Gregory Pilgrim Notes)

**He gave them a name...**

44) A number of people met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the morning. He spoke to them about divine knowledge and the spiritual stations which lead to eternal life—the ultimate goal of human existence. A black youth was there, to whom the Master gave the name 'Mubarak' ['happy'], and to a black woman He gave the name 'Khush Ghadam' [a person who brings good fortune, welcome news, good omen]. He spoke to them about the importance of harmony between the white and black races of America and described the various meetings attended by both blacks and whites and the talks given at them which dealt with this question.

(Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary*, p. 157)

***The colored people must attend all the unity meetings...***

45) 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked if, in view of the difficulties in the way of interracial unity for all meetings, the colored friends should organize separately to observe the nineteen-day unity meetings. "*The colored people must attend all the unity meetings. There must be no distinctions. All are equal. If you have any influence to get the races to intermarry, it will be very valuable. Such unions will beget very strong and beautiful children. If you wish I will reveal a Tablet in regard to the wiping out of racial differences.*" This was not the first time He had spoken of this matter and with emphasis. I thanked Him.

(Louis Gregory, Louis G. Gregory Pilgrim Notes)