



The Century of Motion

By Robert Sockett

Published: September 18, 2012 | Last modified: July 14, 2013

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/09/18/the-century-of-motion/>

“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.

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.”

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 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.”

“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.”

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

Robert Sockett, “The Century of Motion,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, September 18, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/09/18/the-century-of-motion/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Socketk, Robert. “The Century of Motion.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Socketk. September 18, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/09/18/the-century-of-motion/>.

HOW TO CITE THE 239 Days in America WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Socketk, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.