



Friday Afternoon in the City

By Jonathan Menon

Published: April 12, 2012

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/04/11/abdul-baha-arrives-in-america/>

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.

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.

He 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 the reason ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had come to America.

“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. Most of them were Bahá’ís, people who accepted the teachings ‘Abdu’l-Bahá advocated.

“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.”

By way of illustration, ‘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 went on, “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 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 on August 7, 1948, and there she still rests, at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, still consumed in the afterglow of atomic radiation.

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 1th 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:

Jonathan Menon, “Friday Afternoon in the City,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, April 12, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/04/12/friday-afternoon-in-the-city/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan. “Friday Afternoon in the City.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. April 12, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/04/12/friday-afternoon-in-the-city/>.

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

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, 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.