



Everything in America Is “All Right!”

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THE FINAL LEG OF the voyage that carries the Hudson River south to the sea divides the New Jersey shoreline on its right from the island peninsula of Manhattan on its left. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat by the open window of his apartment on Riverside Drive, and looked out across the water to the steep igneous cliffs of the New Jersey Palisades, which run north from Staten Island like a gigantic wooden stockade set back from the shore.¹ He returned to New York this afternoon from Washington, DC. His friends had filled his rooms with flowers.²

The Hudson Apartment House is at 227 Riverside Drive, a boulevard on the western side of Manhattan that runs next to the river from 72nd Street to northern Harlem.³ It is a relatively quiet, upper-class neighborhood with a green strip of park that slopes dramatically to the water below.⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s friends will call this park “his garden,” because he will return to it again and again.⁵

Over the next two days ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is going to speak to a number of peace societies in the New York area,⁶ after which he will travel upstate to deliver a speech on the opening evening of the Eighteenth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration. It takes place every year at a resort in the Shawangunk Mountains, about ninety miles north of the city. Attending this conference is one of the main reasons

¹ Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983), 284, 282. That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sat in a position where the New Jersey Palisades would have intermittently caught his gaze follows Juliet Thompson who describes the apartment at 227 Riverside Drive as “overlooking the river. His flat is on one of the top stories, so that its windows frame the sky.” On this occasion, she says that “the windows were all open and a fresh breeze blew in,” that “the Master took a seat by the window,” and that his face was “silhouetted against the sky.”; “Geology & Ecology,” Palisades Interstate Park in New Jersey, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.njpalisades.org/geoEcology.html>.

² *Ibid.*, 282.

³ Robert H. Stockman, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing, 2012), 153; This building, at the southeast corner of Riverside Drive and West 95th Street, was replaced in 1930 by the grey brick multistory structure that stands there today. “227 Riverside Drive in Upper West Side: Sales, Rentals, Floorplans,” StreetEasy, Zillow Inc., accessed February 3, 2015, http://streeteasy.com/building/227-riverside-drive-new_york#tab_building_detail=1.

⁴ See Irving Underhill, *[Bird’s-eye view of Riverside Drive from 72nd St., New York City]*, photograph, ca. July 7, 1911, from *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*, TIFF file, accessed January 31, 2015, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b21060>.

⁵ Thompson, *Diary*, 300; “When He was tired during these days He would often go alone in the afternoon to the park near Riverside Drive.” Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Maḥmúd’s Diary: The Diary of Mirzá Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání Chronicling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey to America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), 103.

⁶ Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Maḥmúd’s Diary*, 89–91.

he came to America.⁷

The reflective atmosphere of the apartment has been broken by the arrival of guests. ‘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.”⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s flat is on one of the top floors of the building, and a breeze from the river wafts in.⁹ Tomorrow he will cross the river once again for a day trip to Montclair, New Jersey.¹⁰ Now that he has spent a month in America, his impression of us is forming. Americans have been “kind and pleasant,” “polite,” and “inquisitive,” he says. He finds them energetic, progressive, and full of potential.¹¹

As his audience listens, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells a story of the day before in Washington, when a Justice of the Supreme Court, accompanied by a DC politician, arrived to speak with him. The politician disputed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s position that throughout history religion has primarily been a cause of unity, rather than mainly a pretext for disagreement. Having convinced the politician, he noticed that the Justice had fallen silent. Concerned, he asked if the judge had found anything in the conversation objectionable. “Not at all! Not at all!” he replied, “It’s all right! It’s all right!”¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeats it over and over—“All right! All right!”—and sends a ripple of laughter through the room.¹³

“Wherever you go you hear it,” a *New York Times* reporter will hear him comment tomorrow in Montclair. “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.’”¹⁴

“I have never heard this expression used in any other country, and I believe that it reflects the optimism of this great country.”¹⁵

⁷ Wendell Phillips Dodge, “Abdul-Baha’s Arrival in America,” *Star of the West* 3, no. 3 (April 28, 1912): 3; Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd’s Diary*, 30.

⁸ “Talk Given by Abdul-Baha at 227 Riverside Drive, New York City, May 11, 1912,” *Star of the West* 3, no. 10 (September 8, 1912): 11.

⁹ Thompson, *Diary*, 282.

¹⁰ Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd’s Diary: The Diary of Mirzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání Chronicling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey to America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), 89–91;

¹¹ “They are most energetic and progressive. When you see a tree which is growing and developing, be hopeful of its outcome. It will blossom and bear fruit eventually.” “Talk Given by Abdul-Baha,” *Star of the West*, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd’s Diary*, 89; Thompson, *Diary*, 284.

¹⁴ “Baha Likes ‘All Right.’; Persian Prophet Thinks It Is Our Most Characteristic Expression,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1912, <http://nytimes.com/>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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