



## On The Fourth Of July

By Caitlin Shayda Jones

Published: July 4, 2012

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/07/04/on-the-fourth-of-july/>

“TODAY WAS THE ANNIVERSARY of the Independence of the United States from England,” wrote Mahmúd in his chronicle of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s trip to America. “There were celebrations everywhere.”

Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, or Mahmúd for short, accompanied ‘Abdu’l-Bahá every step of the way. On July 4, 1912, Americans were celebrating Independence Day. Mahmúd was about to get his first taste of a good old-fashioned American celebration: a Fourth of July parade in New York.

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. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s 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.

Yet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá didn’t say yes to every invitation. In fact, he had an interesting way of managing his itinerary. 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.”

The fact that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had even made it to America was something of a miracle. Before the Young Turk Revolution in 1909, he was a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire. When the Turks finally released him, the imaginations of the Bahá’ís in America who wished to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began to stir. Yet it was some time before he finally agreed to the requests of the Americans to travel across the Atlantic. First, there were conditions that had to be met.

Bahá’í communities in America in 1912 were struggling with many of the same things the rest of America was struggling with. Committees in cities like Chicago had one group devoted to men, and another to women. Events in cities like Washington were divided along racial lines.

“In view of the differences among the friends and the lack of unity,” he informed them, “how can Abdu’l-Baha hasten to those parts? Is this possible?” It was a sobering message. If they wanted him to come, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated, 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, he decided that the conditions had been met, and departed from Alexandria, Egypt, en route to America.

As for the Fourth of July parade, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declined to attend. He sent Mahmúd and a few others in his place. Mahmúd describes how they were “received with great honor as representatives of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and were given seats near the mayor’s chair.” His description of the parade 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.”

Returning from the festivities, Mahmúd commented on “the excessive heat and crowds.” It seems his first American parade may have fallen short of expectations. Best, then, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made the decision to stay behind.

## 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:**

Caitlin Shayda Jones, “On the Fourth of July,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, July 4, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/07/04/on-the-fourth-of-july/>.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Jones, Caitlin Shayda. “On the Fourth of July.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. July 4, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/07/04/on-the-fourth-of-july/>.

### **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](mailto: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.