

“MOST GREAT RECONSTRUCTION”:  
THE BAHÁ’Í FAITH IN JIM CROW SOUTH CAROLINA, 1898-1965

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DEDICATION

To future generations of South Carolinians,  
with love and confidence

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

By the end of the twentieth century, the Bahá'í Faith was the largest non-Christian religion in South Carolina, and it was well known for its longstanding commitment to promoting racial harmony, interfaith dialogue, and the moral education of children and youth. Its message was simple and powerful: in the Orient in the middle of the nineteenth century, Christ had returned. His new name was Bahá'u'lláh, the “Glory of the Father,” and the transforming power of his Word would excise the cancers of prejudice and injustice from the broken body of humanity.

The religion owed much of its strength in the state to a series of campaigns from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, in which some twenty thousand people from all walks of life—from young white college students to elderly black former sharecroppers—had become Bahá'ís. However, the origins of South Carolina's robust Bahá'í movement lay not in the social upheavals of the 1960s, but in painstaking efforts to build an interracial faith community during the long decades of segregation and disfranchisement. In contrast to nearly every other religious organization in early-twentieth century South Carolina, the Bahá'ís developed an explicit policy of promoting racial integration at the local level. Facing ostracism, slander, and violence, they succeeded in attracting an astonishingly diverse membership. Focusing on the period from South Carolinians' first contacts with the faith in the late 1890s to the formal dissolution of the Jim Crow regime in the mid-1960s, this study posits the Bahá'í movement in South Carolina as a

significant, sustained, and deceptively subtle attack on the oppressive racial ideologies of the twentieth-century South and on the Protestant orthodoxy with which they were inextricably linked.

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## Introduction

“Some movements appear, manifest a brief period of activity, then discontinue. Others show forth a greater measure of growth and strength, but before attaining mature development, weaken, disintegrate and are lost in oblivion....

“There is still another kind of movement or cause which from a very small, inconspicuous beginning goes forward with sure and steady progress, gradually broadening and widening until it has assumed universal dimensions. The Bahá’í Movement is of this nature.”

—*Abdu’l-Bahá in Washington, D.C., April 22, 1912*

### I

I started to hear the stories shortly after I encountered the Bahá’í Faith.<sup>1</sup> During a series of growth campaigns from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, thousands of my fellow South Carolinians from all walks of life—from young white college students to elderly black former sharecroppers, from the foothills to the coast—had become Bahá’ís. Interracial teams of Bahá’í youth had fanned out across the state, talking with people on street corners and front porches, singing in folk and gospel styles, distributing literature, and conducting evening mass meetings in tents and rented halls. Their message was as simple as it was radical, and it was the same one that had attracted me: in the Orient in the middle of the nineteenth century, Christ had returned. His new name was

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<sup>1</sup> Among general introductions to Bahá’í history, theology, and community, two of the best are William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá’í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2003) and Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Bahá’í Faith* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Bahá'u'lláh, the “Glory of the Father,” and the transforming power of his Word would excise the cancers of prejudice and injustice from the broken body of humanity. They had found ready listeners, with the largest number of new believers among African Americans in rural areas. Old people and young, I heard from those who had been there, had dreamed dreams telling them that the Bahá'ís would come with a new message from God. Almost overnight, the South Carolina Bahá'í community had grown from some two hundred members in a handful of cities and towns to some twenty thousand in hundreds of localities. It was a modern-day Pentecost, a phenomenon the Bahá'ís in my Upstate city of Greenville called “entry by troops.” I was fascinated. As I met more Bahá'ís, particularly at the Louis Gregory Institute, a retreat center near the Lowcountry town of Hemingway, my father's family home, I asked everyone I could about the heady days of the 1970s.

The more I learned, the more I realized that the origins of South Carolina's Bahá'í community lay not in the 1960s or 1970s, or even in the 1950s, as some of the older Bahá'ís told me, but far earlier, at the turn of the twentieth century. The interracial fellowship that I saw in every Bahá'í gathering was not simply a by-product of the civil rights movement; it had been built, painstakingly, during the long decades of segregation and disfranchisement. Black and white South Carolina expatriates, I found, had first encountered the Bahá'í Faith in urban areas of the Northeast, Midwest, and Upper South in the late 1890s, shortly after the religion's arrival in the United States. The first Bahá'í traveling teachers and settlers had come to South Carolina beginning in 1910, as the new Jim Crow legal regime was tightening its grip on the social, economic, and political life of cities and states throughout the region. Over the course of more than half a century—

decades that witnessed two world wars, the Great Depression, the emergence of the Cold War, and an intensification of the black freedom movement—the Bahá'ís in South Carolina had struggled to create an interracial faith community within a racially segregated and religiously orthodox society. Decades before Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated the ideal of the “beloved community,” the Bahá'ís in South Carolina had gone farther than most of their Christian and Jewish fellows could contemplate towards interracial fellowship and social action. Here was a story, I thought, that needed to be told. Little did I know as a young high school student that I was not only exploring the heritage of my native state and my newfound faith, but setting the course of my career as an historian.

This dissertation is a first effort to reconstruct and analyze the early growth and development of the Bahá'í Faith in South Carolina. It offers an initial examination of some of the internal and external factors that affected the development of the religion in the state, from the first contacts in the 1890s to the formal dissolution of the Jim Crow regime in the mid-1960s. It suggests that the relatively speedy and robust growth of the Bahá'í Faith in South Carolina after 1965—the first such large-scale growth of the religion in the developed world—was the result of complex interactions inside and outside the movement. In one sense, the rapid expansion of a religion with a bold claim to fulfill Christian prophecies, a spiritually-based program for addressing social problems, and an optimistic vision of humanity's peaceful and unified future—coming as it did in the immediate wake of the civil rights revolution and as a welter of new religious movements signaled an unprecedented restructuring of American spiritual life—was not surprising. At the same time, it was six difficult decades of interracial community

building, initiated by the Bahá'ís themselves in response to the fundamental teachings of their faith and its international leadership, that prepared the South Carolina movement to take advantage of dramatic changes in the wider society.

From its first arrival in the South in 1898 and in South Carolina in 1910, the Bahá'í Faith represented a significant and sustained, spiritually-based and deceptively subtle challenge to the ideology and structures of white supremacy and to the Protestant orthodoxy with which they were inextricably linked. With few exceptions, Protestant churches in South Carolina during the first half of the twentieth century were strictly segregated, if not at the level of the denomination, then at the level of the local congregation. Interracial religious activity, while not unheard of, was limited, occasional, and usually structured so as not to upset regional mores of gender, class, and race. The state's small Catholic and Jewish congregations followed suit.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to nearly every other religious organization in South Carolina, the Bahá'ís explicitly promoted racial integration from the local level up. Called by the scriptures of their faith to “associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance,” they deliberately sought converts from diverse backgrounds, forging bonds of shared religious identity across traditional social boundaries.<sup>3</sup> In the emerging Bahá'í community, blacks and whites, men and women, rich and poor, rural and urban dwellers, natives, migrants from other states, and the foreign-born learned to worship, study, socialize, and manage their collective affairs together as equals. In particular, they sought to build grassroots

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<sup>2</sup> For a useful historical overview of various religious denominations in South Carolina and their specific relations to issues of race, see Charles H. Lippy, ed., *Religion in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, trans. Habib Taherzadeh, 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-sized ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 21.

community institutions that were part of the faith's "Administrative Order," a worldwide system intended gradually to reorganize social, economic, and political life—not just of the South or of the United States, but of the entire planet—around the spiritual principles of unity, justice, and collective decision-making. Their local councils, Bahá'ís in South Carolina believed, were among the foundation-stones of the emerging Kingdom of God on earth.

Numerically insignificant and apparently powerless during the period under review, the Bahá'ís' rejection of the racial and religious status quo nevertheless made them frequent targets of intimidation by neighbors, law enforcement agencies, and conservative Christian clergymen. They openly proclaimed their message through the mass media, public programs, and personal contacts, but segregation law and practice often forced them to conduct their community activities at night, in secret, or otherwise far removed from the gaze of the white public. They focused on building their own model of interracial fellowship (eventually securing legal protection for their activities), even as they sought to encourage or collaborate with other individuals and organizations, both religious and secular, who were working for civil rights. By the mid-1960s, as a combination of federal legislation, judicial rulings, and ad hoc arrangements at the state and local levels dismantled the Jim Crow regime, the tiny Bahá'í community already represented a cross-section of the state's population, and it extended its influence beyond its members to their friends and family members and other spiritual seekers. With the major legal barriers to interracial association removed, the Bahá'ís—and thousands of other South Carolinians—were ready for unprecedented growth of the religion. (South Carolina's dual school system, the last and largest vestige of segregation, fell during the

1970-1971 school year, also the most dramatic year of Bahá'í expansion in the state before or since.) By the turn of the twenty-first century, the Bahá'í movement in South Carolina boasted local organizations in some forty localities and members in more than a hundred more, a regional training center and community-service radio station near Hemingway, and a museum dedicated to its first traveling teacher and native son in the heart of historic Charleston.<sup>4</sup> Well known in South Carolina for its commitment to promoting racial harmony, interfaith dialogue, and the moral education of children and youth, as well as for the adherence of several prominent individuals, the Bahá'í Faith was the state's largest religious minority, and South Carolina's Bahá'í community was among the largest and strongest in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

## II

The Bahá'í Faith is a worldwide religious movement whose wide-ranging teachings relate to a variety of academic disciplines and contemporary concerns. Since the 1970s, a

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<sup>4</sup> The training center was the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute, founded in 1972 as an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. The radio station, Radio Bahá'í WLGI, began broadcasting from the Institute's campus in rural Georgetown County in 1985. Covering northeastern South Carolina and southeastern North Carolina, it was the only Bahá'í radio station in North America. Gustav Niebuhr, "Hemingway Journal: A Little Bit of a Change From Old-Time Religion," *New York Times*, 31 March 2000. The museum was the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Museum, the boyhood home of the state's first Bahá'í teacher. Renovated and opened to the public in 2003, it was the first museum in the city of Charleston dedicated to a single individual. Stephanie Harvin, "The Ripple Effect: Influencing the Tide of History," *Charleston (SC) Post and Courier*, 2 February 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Kristina Lee Knaus, "One Region, Many Faiths," *The State* (Columbia, SC), 5 September 2003, B8. By at least the early 1990s, South Carolina had fallen to second place in Bahá'í population, behind California, but it remained the highest per capita. The Bahá'í National Center listed 15,287 adult Bahá'ís living in South Carolina for the 2000-2001 Bahá'í administrative year. Steve Brisley, Operations Supervisor, Information Services Office, Bahá'í National Center, Wilmette, IL, telephone interview by author, 20 December 2001. Prominent South Carolinians to embrace the Bahá'í Faith included influential jazz trumpeter and Cheraw native John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie (1917-1993); physicist and astronaut Dr. Ronald E. McNair (1950-1986), a Lake City native who was the second African-American in space and died in the *Challenger* disaster; and award-winning Columbia television journalist and social activist Susan Audé (b. 1952). Likenesses of both Gillespie and McNair appear in the African-American Monument on the grounds of the South Carolina State House, dedicated in 2001; Audé was awarded the Order of the Palmetto, the state's highest civilian honor, in 2006.

new field of Bahá'í Studies has begun to take shape, with an international network of scholarly associations, annual conferences, and peer-reviewed journals; the publication of numerous articles and monographs by other academic journals and presses; and the creation of endowed chairs or Bahá'í Studies centers in a handful of universities around the world. In these venues, scholars of the Bahá'í Faith—members and non-members, often with impressive academic credentials—have attempted to explore the faith's teachings, history, and practices in the context of a variety of disciplines and methodologies. However, many mainstream academic presses and journals seem to have been most receptive to works treating the Bahá'í Faith as a subset of Middle Eastern Studies.<sup>6</sup> Authors that have assumed it as a social and religious phenomenon with its own conceptual categories and worthy of study in its own right have often resorted to publishing by official or independent Bahá'í presses and journals, where their work has unfortunately received smaller circulation and remained on the periphery of academic discourse.<sup>7</sup>

At least two facts seem to me to require new approaches to the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith. First, while they were born and reared as Muslims and pursued their ministries within Islamic societies, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) and his prophetic precursor, the Báb (1819-1844) clearly envisioned their religious system as a universal movement,

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<sup>6</sup> Among the best-known such works by historians are Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989) and Juan Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Bahai Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Notable recent exceptions to this trend are three works by sociologists: Michael McMullen, *The Bahá'í: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000), which focuses on the Bahá'í communities of greater Atlanta, Georgia; and Nader Saeidi, *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000) and *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008). The latter work by Saeidi is first in a new Bahá'í Studies series co-published with the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America.

designed for the whole of humanity rather than for any particular cultural or religious group. On the first night of his mission, the Báb called the kings of the world to carry his divinely-revealed verses “to the peoples of Turkey and of India, and beyond them ... to lands in both the East and the West.”<sup>8</sup> “The summons and the message which We gave,” Bahá’u’lláh pointedly affirmed, “were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only.... The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God’s Revelation.”<sup>9</sup> The conceptual dialogue with its Islamic parent culture that runs throughout the faith’s scriptures should not be allowed to obscure its consistent claim to be a new and independent world religion quite apart from Islam or any other historic religious system. The second fact springs from the first. A central theme of Bahá’í history has been the strong tendency towards geographic diffusion and the consequent enrollment of an ever-widening diversity of human beings as adherents of the faith, processes that accelerated markedly with the introduction of systematic growth campaigns in the mid-1930s. Fifty years later, nearly ninety percent of the world’s Bahá’ís lived in the “Third World,” with the highest concentrations in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, while Bahá’ís in the faith’s Islamic heartland constituted less than seven percent of the total.<sup>10</sup> By the last quarter of the twentieth century, then, the vast majority of the world’s Bahá’ís were not of Muslim background, and few if any saw their faith primarily in culturally or historically exclusive terms. Treating the Bahá’í Faith as a compartment of Middle Eastern Studies has, perhaps

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<sup>8</sup> The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, trans. Habib Taherzadeh (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 41-2.

<sup>9</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-sized ed. (Wilmette, IL.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983), 96.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Introduction*, 82-3.



inadvertently, overlooked essential aspects of the phenomenon, minimizing the creative genius of its founders and marginalizing the lived experiences and worldviews of most of its contemporary adherents. I have attempted here to avoid such reductionist errors.

By focusing on the early development of the movement in South Carolina, a state where it eventually gained among its largest and most influential followings in the Western world, this dissertation seeks to claim the Bahá'í Faith as an integral element of the modern history of the United States. In this respect it follows other works that have viewed the faith in the light of American religious and social history, particularly Gayle Morrison's pioneering biography of Louis Gregory, the son of South Carolina freedpeople who became one of the foremost national and international leaders of the Bahá'í Faith in the first half of the twentieth century, and Robert Stockman's work examining the development of the American Bahá'í movement from 1892 to 1921.<sup>11</sup> In particular, the dissertation attempts to relate the Bahá'í Faith to the historiography of race, religion, and social change in the post-Civil War South.

In both American and international context, the Bahá'í Faith has addressed itself to what W. E. B. Du Bois identified as the essential problem of the twentieth century, “the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in

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<sup>11</sup> Gayle Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982); Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*, vol. 1, *Origins, 1892-1900* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985) and *The Bahá'í Faith in America*, vol. 2, *Early Expansion, 1900-1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995). Stockman plans a third volume covering the period from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 1912 visit to North America until his passing in 1921. The larger project also includes Stockman's doctoral dissertation in American religious history, which explores some social, organizational, and theological aspects of the early development of a distinctly American Bahá'í movement. Robert H. Stockman, “The Bahá'í Faith and American Protestantism,” Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1990. Also invaluable to the study of Bahá'í history, particularly that of North America, are several volumes in the Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History series (1982-) by Kalimát Press, an independent Bahá'í publisher in Los Angeles.

Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>12</sup> At the heart of Bahá’í teaching and practice is Bahá’u’lláh’s vision, articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century and markedly different from any of the social and political philosophies of his day, of human unity and solidarity in a just global commonwealth that will transcend traditional barriers of race, class, nation, creed, and language. As this dissertation seeks to document, his followers in early twentieth-century America sought to eliminate the color line, not primarily by joining in frontal assaults on any of a number of unjust social, economic, and political institutions—which they believed were in advanced stages of collapse already, without any need for an extra push from a group as small as their own—but by pursuing the parallel but related and no less important path of erecting the framework of what they saw as a new, divinely-ordained social system destined ultimately to take the place of the tottering old one.

One would think that the boldness and intellectual innovation of Bahá’u’lláh’s program alone would be enough to commend the American Bahá’ís to the attention of contemporary historians, who have tended to be attracted to the radical (even if relatively obscure) in the nation’s past. Aside from its marginalization in Middle Eastern Studies, several factors seem to have kept the Bahá’í Faith nearly invisible to historians of religion and race in the United States. In its origins neither a Christian sect, nor a faith primarily of immigrants, nor a typical “new religious movement” that eschews contemporary social concerns, the Bahá’í Faith defies easy categorization. Ideologically and programmatically, as well, it does not fit neatly with the approaches of most other organizations that are concerned with racial justice. The social and theological

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<sup>12</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk*, with new intro. (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 9.

radicalism of the Bahá'í program is tempered by scriptural injunctions (against aggressive proselytizing, involvement in political controversy, disloyalty to the state, membership in parties, and civil disobedience, for example) which sometimes limited the ways Bahá'ís in the early twentieth century could engage with mainstream civil rights groups and contributed to a relatively reserved public image, then and now. The Bahá'ís' relatively small numbers during most of the century, their refusal to engage in traditional forms of protest, their manner of organization that militated against the emergence of charismatic individual leaders, even their consistent preference for building social capital rather than erecting local worship facilities—all may have helped further to disguise the religion's significance to many observers, including most historians.

This study is the beneficiary of a wealth of recent works in the history of race relations and religious experience in the modern South. By examining the social and intellectual history of the Bahá'í community of South Carolina, it contributes to a growing literature on the roles of interracial movements, of religious motivations and identities, and of the appeal of different visions of America's racial future, in the profound social transformations of the twentieth century. It follows important recent works that explore the promises and limitations of moments of interracial cooperation in the post-Reconstruction South.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to several of these, the dissertation focuses on an organization that sought to foster interracialism as a matter of spiritual principle (rather than primarily of economic or political reasoning). It thus joins other recent

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

works that have argued that the religious worldviews of black and white Southerners, and the various religious organizations through which many of them channeled their energies, are of central importance to understanding the struggle for (and against) racial justice.<sup>14</sup>

In particular, the study examines the difficulties resulting from the Bahá'ís' simultaneous transgression of regional racial, gender, and religious orthodoxies.<sup>15</sup> Here I particularly benefited from the insights of Daniel Letwin regarding interracial union activity among early Alabama coal miners and of Tracy K'Meyer regarding the interracial Christian communalism of Koinonia Farm in southwest Georgia. Letwin argues that what gave black and white Alabama miners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the “breathing room” to collaborate across racial lines was their adherence to key elements of white supremacy, including rejection of any charges of promoting social equality. Moreover, the single-gender nature of the job meant that interracial union organizing was less viscerally threatening to white male supremacy than if it had also crossed the gender line. K'Meyer notes that the Koinonians—all of them white Southern Baptists—won acceptance from local whites during the era of the New

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<sup>14</sup> Notable such works include Tracy K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997); David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Among biographies of major lay activists, one that is notable for explicitly placing religious motivation at the center of its analysis is Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> The Bahá'ís were certainly not the only such transgressors in the early-twentieth century South, but among religious groups they were probably among the most consistently interracial in character while being among the farthest from the Protestant mainstream. A useful comparison may be with the Pentecostal movement, which emerged, roughly contemporaneously with the Bahá'í Faith in the United States, from a racially diverse, millennialist revival in Los Angeles in 1906. As Pentecostalism spread in the South, however, it separated into black and white congregations (and denominations), some of which maintained occasional interracial contacts. See Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001); and Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Deal and the Second World War to the extent that they couched their activities in a traditional language of Christian community and responsibility and restricted their contact with blacks to agriculture extension services. As they engaged in public displays of social equality—including eating and worshipping together and sponsoring an integrated summer camp—opposition by local whites grew. The situation of early South Carolina Bahá'ís was even more precarious than that of the Alabama miners and the Koinonians. By openly advocating not only complete racial and gender equality but also what many regarded as religious heresy, they placed themselves entirely outside the pale of white male supremacy and its Protestant trappings, exposing themselves to attack from all sides.

The project also stands in dialogue with recent analyses that have emphasized the “nationalist” or “separatist” stream of African-American social and political consciousness at the expense of countervailing tendencies towards interracialism or “Americanism.”<sup>16</sup> One implication of Bahá'í social philosophy and American Bahá'í experience is to call into question a conception of African-American cultural, political, and economic nationalism or separatism as particularly “radical.” While the realization of black nationalist programs—through various emigrationist ventures, the establishment of all-black communities or political entities within the United States, or the adoption of African cultural and aesthetic models, for example—may well have entailed significant upset in American society, the ideas behind them were hardly innovative. Indeed, the incommensurability of different nations and races was a staple of nineteenth-century

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Waldo Martin, *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics and Postwar America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005).

social and political philosophy that cast a long shadow over African Americans and others around the world in the twentieth century. Requiring as it did a thorough redefinition of human nature and of human relationships as well as of institutions, the truly radical point of view, from the standpoint of prevailing thought in most of the twentieth century, was an insistence on the creation of a just multiracial society. In particular, I posit that the emphasis placed in the Bahá'í sacred writings and in the practice of the American Bahá'í community on social equality between blacks and whites (as distinct from a predominantly political or economic agenda) struck to the very ideological heart of the country's racialized caste system.

My research suggests that when black South Carolinians became Bahá'ís during the twentieth century, they were identifying themselves with precisely the radical notion of the oneness of humanity at the core of the Bahá'í teachings, with its rather clear implications in an American context of the social, economic, and political integration of blacks and whites within a spiritually transformed country. Perhaps even more significantly, white South Carolinians who may have otherwise had little interest in challenging the racial status quo often found themselves moved to do so, often at great personal risk, through their association with the Bahá'í Faith (a fact not lost on black believers, who took it as evidence of the religion's transforming power). Together, black and white Bahá'ís in South Carolina worked to forge a vibrant and durable interracial community that they held up as a model and pattern for the wider society. Indeed, for them the faith represented a worldwide revolution in human affairs. Charleston-born Louis Gregory, among the most prolific Bahá'í writers and traveling teachers in the first half of the twentieth century, employed an evocative analogy from an earlier generation

of American history to describe the global impact of the Bahá'í movement: “This Most Great Reconstruction which the majestic Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh brings to view, is not black or white or yellow or brown or red, yet all of these. It is the power of divine outpouring and endless perfections for mankind.” For Gregory and other South Carolina Bahá'ís, the faith was destined not simply to remake the South in the image of the North as in the wake of the Civil War, but to remake the whole planet in the image of Paradise.<sup>17</sup>

### III

Organized broadly chronologically, this study relies on local and national archival collections, periodicals, and oral interviews from inside and outside the Bahá'í community to produce a social, organizational, and intellectual history of the faith's initial development in South Carolina. Geographically, the project concentrates on the four urban areas—Augusta-North Augusta, Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville—where the faith sought to establish itself early in the century, with additional treatment of the rural areas around Florence and Beaufort that were to become critical to developments after 1965. For each area, I mine Bahá'í community membership lists, newsletters, and other official documents; oral interviews and personal correspondence of individual Bahá'ís and others; and U.S. Census data, city directories, newspaper accounts, and local histories. I uncover something of the social, economic, and religious background of Bahá'í members; their relationships with each other and with the larger society, especially the various phases of the civil rights movement; the methods by which

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<sup>17</sup> Louis G. Gregory, “A Gift to Race Enlightenment,” *World Order* 2, no. 1 (April 1936): 36-9, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 28-9.

Bahá'ís taught their religion to others and the content of their message; the processes by which Bahá'í institutions and community practices developed; and the motivations and aspirations of those who took part. As much as possible, I have attempted to let the Bahá'ís speak for themselves and for the religious movement with which they were associated.

Each chapter of the study seeks to situate South Carolina's Bahá'í movement in the context of simultaneous local, regional, national, and international developments both inside and outside the religion. Throughout I examine the interaction of South Carolina Bahá'ís with their faith's sacred scriptures and with the national and international leadership of the religion, particularly regarding interracial fellowship and the organization of the community, as well as with the changing social, economic, and political realities of the world around them. As Adam Fairclough has noted in reference to study of the civil rights movement, a state-level analysis provides the scope both to compare a collection of local movements with each other and to place them in regional and national contexts.<sup>18</sup> I have adopted a similar approach to the study of the Bahá'í Faith, but with one significant addition: the global context. Indeed, it is the addition of this supra-national perspective—the axis of Bahá'í philosophy and practice and its principal contribution to the spiritual and intellectual life of the world—that makes this dissertation more than the story of an obscure religion and its relation to the black freedom struggle in one small state of the Union. Rather, I have conceived of it as a case study, at a manageable scale of analysis, of what are arguably the most significant conceptual and structural changes in recent world history: the wholly unprecedented

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<sup>18</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), xl-xlii.



transition to an ideology of human oneness and global citizenship, and to a framework for global governance designed to reflect it in practice.

## Chapter 1

### First Contacts, 1898-1916

In early November 1910, a dignified but unassuming visitor returned to his native city of Charleston, South Carolina. The son of freed slaves, Louis G. Gregory had risen from a childhood of poverty, misfortune, and social upheaval to achieve a measure of success that few black men of his day could hope for. Gregory made his home in Washington, DC, the country's leading center of black cultural, political, and economic life.<sup>19</sup> In the prime of his life at thirty-six, he was a member of the capital city's black elite, with an undergraduate degree from Fisk University in Nashville and a law degree from Howard University in Washington. Gregory held a comfortable position in the Treasury Department and served as president of the Bethel Literary and Historical Society, among the oldest and most prestigious black organizations in the city. Until recently, he had considered himself a strong supporter of the Niagara Movement, formed by W. E. B. Du Bois and other race leaders in 1905 to press for full civil and political rights for African Americans. Quite unexpectedly, however, events over the previous three years had profoundly altered the young activist's approach to addressing America's social problems. Louis Gregory was returning to the city of his birth for neither business nor politics nor pleasure, but on a mission of a different order

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<sup>19</sup> For the importance of the "New Negro" movement in post-Reconstruction Washington, see the works of Wilson Jeremiah Moses, especially "The Lost World of the New Negro, 1895-1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the 'Renaissance,'" *Black American Literature Forum* 21, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1987): 61-84; *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

altogether. He was on fire with the spirit of a new religion, and he had undertaken a journey through the segregated South to spread its message among his own kith and kin.

### **Finding Fulfillment**

Gregory first heard of the Bahá'í Faith in late 1907, when a coworker at the Treasury Department, an elderly white Marylander of unreconstructed southern sympathies, insisted that he attend a meeting about the obscure but fascinating new movement.<sup>20</sup> Gregory was not inclined to investigate, for after “seeking, but not finding Truth,” he had “given up” on Christianity and religion in general as a means to solve the pressing issues of the day. He went to the meeting anyway to do his friend a favor. What he found there challenged his previous understanding of religion and ultimately changed his life's course.

Gregory arrived one “cold, blustery, extremely unpleasant night” at the address his friend had given him, a rented room in the Corcoran office building on 15<sup>th</sup> Street opposite the Treasury Department building where Gregory worked. Pauline Hannen, a white woman born in Washington and raised in Wilmington, North Carolina, was the host for the evening. She gave Gregory “an unusually cordial welcome” and proceeded to tell him that he “would hear something wonderful, though difficult,” a message that would afford him an opportunity similar to that which would have been his had he “lived on earth as a contemporary of Jesus Christ.” She also gave him three pieces of Bahá'í literature. The next to arrive was Lua Getsinger, a white Northerner and one of the first Americans to accept the new religion, whom Hannen introduced as “our teacher” for the evening. Just before the turn of the century, Getsinger had learned about the faith from Ibrahim George Kheiralla, the first

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<sup>20</sup> Louis G. Gregory, “Some Recollections of the Early Days of the Bahai Faith in Washington, D.C.,” TS, Louis G. Gregory Papers, National Bahá'í Archives of the United States, Wilmette, IL (hereafter cited as NBA), 1.

Bahá'í to reside in the United States. A Lebanese of Christian background and himself a recent Bahá'í convert, he had settled in Chicago, begun teaching the faith in a series of classes, and attracted more than a thousand people, mostly of evangelical Protestant backgrounds, to the faith in Chicago and other northern cities.<sup>21</sup> The last to arrive were two working-class African Americans, Nellie Gray and Millie York. They were among more than a dozen black Washingtonians who had recently joined the faith in meetings spearheaded by Hannen and her husband, Joseph, also a Southerner. Small as it was due to the inclement weather, the gathering was unusual in a city largely bound by hierarchies of race, class, and gender.

Getsinger gave a “brief but vivid” introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, with an account of the “appearances of the Bab and Baha'u'llah and of the great persecutions and martyrdoms in Persia.” The new religion, Gregory learned, traced its origins to the early nineteenth century, when religious revivals, millennial expectations, and reform movements stirred both Christian and Islamic countries from the United States to India. Emerging from the Bábí movement, the epicenter of a religious and social upheaval in Iran, Bahá'u'lláh, a nobleman by birth, had claimed to be the promised one of all the world's great religions.<sup>22</sup> In his writings addressed to Christian audiences, he had identified himself as the return of Christ in

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<sup>21</sup> For accounts of Kheiralla's career, see Peter Smith, “The American Bahá'í Community, 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1982), 85-99; and Stockman, *Origins*.

<sup>22</sup> Mírzá Husayn-Áli Núrí (1817-1892), oldest son of a prominent official in the court of Muhammad Shah, became known by the Arabic title *Bahá'u'lláh* (“Glory of God”). He was the most prominent follower of the Báb (“Gate”), Siyyid Áli-Muhammad of Shiraz (1819-1850) and leader of the Bábí community after the Báb's execution. In 1863 he proclaimed to be the Promised One whose imminent advent the Báb had foretold. The classic popular Bahá'í treatment of Biblical prophecy is William Sears, *Thief in the Night* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1961). The best scholarly biographies of the twin founders of the Bahá'í Faith are H. M. Balyuzi, *The Báb*, new ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973) and *Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980). For more recent comprehensive analyses of their major writings, see Saeidi, *Gate of the Heart* and *Logos and Civilization*.

the glory of the Father, come to establish the Kingdom of God on earth as prophesied in the Bible.<sup>23</sup> The central theme of his religion was the unification and pacification of the entire human race, and he had prescribed both spiritual requisites and practical means to establish a global commonwealth. He had spent his forty-year ministry imprisoned and exiled from place to place, persecuted for his radical teachings by the Sunni and Shiite Islamic clergy and the governments of Iran and the Ottoman Empire. His final exile was to the biblical Holy Land, the penal colony of ‘Akká on the plain of Sharon in northern Palestine, where he had passed away in 1892.<sup>24</sup> His son and appointed successor, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the living head of the faith, remained a prisoner there.<sup>25</sup>

Gregory was intrigued. He read the three books that Pauline Hannen had given him: an English translation of the Hidden Words, Bahá’u’lláh’s summary of the moral and spiritual essence of religion, and two introductory works by American Bahá’ís. He attended another Bahá’í meeting “among poor people” at the home of Gray and York, where Pauline Hannen was the teacher. Then the Hannens invited him to their home. For more than a year Gregory visited the Hannens on Sunday evenings, sometimes bringing black friends, to learn more about the Bahá’í Faith. “The light they unfolded was so wonderful,” he later recalled,

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<sup>23</sup> Major works of Bahá’u’lláh addressed to Christian audiences include the Most Holy Tablet, likely written for a Bahá’í from Syrian Christian background, and letters sent to Pope Pius IX, Queen Victoria, Emperor Napoleon III, and Czar Alexander II. See Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 7-17; and *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Centre, 2002), 54-96.

<sup>24</sup> See Isaiah 35:1-2.

<sup>25</sup> The best scholarly biography of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is H. M. Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971).

“that for about a year we sat in dumb amazement, listening to their patient, loving talks, not knowing whether to advance or retreat, yet held by supernal power.”<sup>26</sup>

In the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the frustrated young intellectual found a renewal of his personal faith. Gregory's “mental veils were cleared away” as the Hannens taught him the spiritual practices of the Bahá'í life, including obligatory prayer, meditation, study of the Bahá'í scriptures and an annual fast. “[T]he light of assurance mercifully appeared within,” he recalled, “when they taught me ... how to pray.”<sup>27</sup> Through his encounter with the Bahá'í Faith he developed “an entirely new conception of Christianity and of all religion, and with it,” he said, “my whole nature seems changed for the better.”<sup>28</sup>

For Gregory, the Bahá'í message represented a fulfillment of the Christian expectation of a reign of peace and justice on earth. “The appearance of Baha'u'llah,” Gregory testified,

is the direct fulfillment of the Lord's Prayer in the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of the Father. The Manifestation of the Father, Baha'u'llah, heralded by all the prophets, comes to unite the souls of His creatures. His Divine utterances reveal the means of harmony for all religions and all peoples.<sup>29</sup>

The coming of the Kingdom, however, would be different from the fantastic events described in popular Christianity.<sup>30</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's revelation constituted the promised “new heavens,”

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<sup>26</sup> Louis G. Gregory, *A Heavenly Vista: The Pilgrimage of Louis G. Gregory*. (Washington, DC: R. L. Pendleton, n.d., ca. 1912; Ferndale, MI: Alpha Services, 1997), [http://bahai-library.com/file.php?file=gregory\\_heavenly\\_vista](http://bahai-library.com/file.php?file=gregory_heavenly_vista).

<sup>27</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, *Heavenly Vista*.

<sup>30</sup> The notion of the Kingdom of God on earth is both a persistent concern in American Protestantism and an organizing principle of the Bahá'í Faith. The classic treatment is H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937). More recent works include Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1992); and James H. Moorhead, *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999). In terms of Protestant

and the “new earth” would take shape as the peoples and governments of the world put his teachings into practice:

Among the agencies He mentions as conducive to unity are cessation of war, a universal language, to be taught in all the schools of the world, a universal calendar, the education of all classes and of both sexes, religious tolerance and the reign of love. Encouragement is also given to commerce, the arts, science, agriculture and scientific discovery. The people are commanded to bring forth fruit upon the earth.<sup>31</sup>

As Pauline Hannen indicated at their first meeting, the Bahá'ís believed they were living at the dawn of a new world-faith, similar in circumstance to the earliest followers of Jesus Christ. Theirs, they felt, was the opportunity and the responsibility to lay the foundations of a new civilization that would take shape over the course of a thousand-year dispensation. For Louis Gregory the activist, here was a compelling vision for personal and societal regeneration. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings made clear that there was no place for racial prejudice or injustice in the Kingdom of God on earth, by implication putting America's racial problems in the perspective of profound spiritual and social changes destined to happen on a global scale. The impact of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings broadened and refined Gregory's social and political concerns and harmonized them with the deepest longings of his ancestral faith—the prophetic promise of a reign of justice and righteousness in the world.

Equally important in Gregory's conversion process, the Hannens introduced Gregory to the figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh appointed by him as “Center of

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typologies, Bahá'í thought contains elements of both pre- and postmillennialism (that is, whether Christ returns to himself inaugurate God's Kingdom on earth, or the efforts of Christians to spread the Gospel and improve the world prepare the Kingdom for his coming), but it differs radically from Protestant orthodoxy by placing the return of Christ in the past. In the Bahá'í conception, the realization of the Kingdom will result from the operation of spiritual forces released by the return of Christ (the appearance of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh) on the Bahá'í community, the world's political and religious leaders, and the masses of humanity over a historical period of at least one thousand years. For American Protestants who became Bahá'ís, then, a powerful motif of their religious heritage took on new, immediate, and revolutionary meaning.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the Covenant,” the head of the religion and authoritative interpreter of its sacred scriptures, after his passing.<sup>32</sup> Still a prisoner in Ottoman Palestine, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the living focal point for the faith of the Bahá’ís, who called him the “Master” or “Our Lord.” He guided and encouraged them through a steady stream of letters (called “tablets” from the Arabic *alwáh*) and, as conditions permitted, by welcoming pilgrims to the Bahá’í holy places in ‘Akká and its sister city of Haifa. In the words of one early American pilgrim, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was “the Example and Leader of all mankind in service, sacrifice, love and peace, fulfilling before all the Law of the Kingdom as declared by the Great Manifestation Baha’u’llah.”<sup>33</sup>

Early in 1909 the Hannens made their own pilgrimage to Palestine, and they mentioned Louis Gregory to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He encouraged them to continue teaching Gregory, predicting that he would become an enthusiastic believer. When they returned home in April, the Sunday evening visits resumed. “At length,” Gregory remembered, “as the lesson of humility took effect and every hope vanished save the Will of God, Abdu’l-Baha ... revealed himself.”<sup>34</sup> In June, Gregory became a “confirmed believer” and, in keeping with a practice among new American Bahá’ís begun by Ibrahim Kheiralla, he wrote a personal confession of faith and sent it to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In this context, the “Covenant” refers to the system of institutional relationships by which Bahá’u’lláh protected his religion from schism after his passing. Bahá’u’lláh appointed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as Center of the Covenant (*Markaz-i mitháq-i iláhi*) in passages in the Súriy-i-Ghusn (“Tablet of the Branch”), the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (“Most Holy Book”), and the Kitáb-i-Ahd (“Book of the Covenant”). See Bahá’u’lláh quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters*, 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), 135; *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993), ¶ 121, 174; and *Tablets Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 217-23. For an historical overview of the Covenant, see Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Thornton Chase, *In Galilee* (1908; Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1985), 71, quoted in Smith, “American Bahá’í Community,” 102.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory, *Heavenly Vista*.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 1. For the practice of writing “supplications” to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, see Smith, “American Bahá’í Community,” 105.



## Washington Origins

When Louis Gregory became a Bahá'í, the religion had only been in the United States a little more than a decade. The Washington Bahá'í community of which he became a part, while one of the largest and most successful such groups in the country, was still in a critical formative phase. Gregory came to play a decisive role in creating a fully integrated local Bahá'í community in Washington, the first city with a significant black Bahá'í population, setting a precedent that was crucial to the future of race relations in the American Bahá'í movement and to the faith's growth and development in the South in particular.

Washington was one of the early centers of Bahá'í activity in the United States. The first Bahá'í in the city was Charlotte Brittingham Dixon, a white, middle-class native of Princess Anne on Maryland's eastern shore. Her family was Episcopalian, but with evangelical leanings. Her father and grandfather had attended the revivals of the Millerites, who expected Christ's second coming in 1843-1844, and Dixon herself was strongly influenced by the Holiness movement in Methodism. After a period of intense spiritual search, she encountered the Bahá'í Faith in Chicago and attended Ibrahim Kheiralla's classes. Convinced that Bahá'u'lláh had come "to establish the glorious reign of Peace, and the *Millennium*," she became a Bahá'í in September 1897.<sup>36</sup> The next year, she returned to the east coast, teaching members of her extended family before settling in Washington. By late September 1899, there were seven believers in the capital city.<sup>37</sup> However, the faith gained its first substantial following in Washington chiefly through the efforts of a handful of new believers from the city's white elite. In 1900, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, one of the leading women of California, hosted Bahá'í meetings while visiting her Washington home.

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<sup>36</sup> Stockman, *Origins*, 118.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

The wealthy widow of U.S. Senator George Hearst and mother of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, she had become a Bahá'í in California two years before and financed the first party of American pilgrims to the Holy Land. In 1901, Alice Pike Barney, a successful painter whose husband was from a family of Ohio industrialists, and her daughter, Laura Clifford Barney, returned to Washington from Paris, where they had both become Bahá'ís. In 1903, another Washington expatriate, Charles Mason Remey, wealthy son of a U.S. Navy rear admiral, also came home from Paris as a Bahá'í. To these prominent believers was added Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygání, a professor of Islamic jurisprudence at Cairo's al-Azhar University. The foremost scholar of the Bahá'í Faith at the time, he was the most prominent in a series of Iranian teachers sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to consolidate the fledgling community of American Bahá'ís. From early 1902 to late 1904, he resided in Washington and lectured and wrote extensively there, making the Washington Bahá'ís perhaps the most knowledgeable in the country.<sup>38</sup> The community began to grow as the personal contacts of the believers drew hundreds of seekers to public meetings. By 1904, the Washington Bahá'ís were holding devotional gatherings every nineteen days, on the first day of each month of the Bahá'í calendar, a pattern established by the Chicago believers according to Bahá'u'lláh's admonition in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the "Most Holy Book" of his revelation.<sup>39</sup> The Washington community also became an early center of communication for

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<sup>38</sup> Mírzá Abu'l-Fazl's introductory work, *The Bahá'í Proofs*, was written and published during his stay in Washington. Containing biographies of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá; a summary of the faith's sacred writings; a description of its social teachings; and a series of five essays relating it to other religions, the book remains one of the most sophisticated expositions in Bahá'í secondary literature. Abu'l-Fazl Gulpaygání, *The Bahá'í Proofs* (1902; repr., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983). For a discussion of the work and of the impact of Mírzá Abu'l-Fazl's American sojourn, see Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 81-7.

<sup>39</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 137. Bahá'u'lláh enjoined his followers "to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means." *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶ 57. This provision is the origin of the Bahá'í institution of the Nineteen Day Feast.

the American Bahá'ís, publishing introductory pamphlets and compilations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablets in English translation and distributing them to believers in other cities.<sup>40</sup>

One of the new Washington believers was Pauline Knobloch Hannen. The only American-born child of Lutheran immigrants from Saxony, Hannen spent part of her childhood and youth in Wilmington, North Carolina. She became a Bahá'í in Washington in 1902, convinced that the new religion fulfilled the prophecies of the Bible, and was quickly followed by her husband, Joseph Hannen; his mother, Mary Alexander, a Virginia native; her mother, Amelia Knobloch; and her older sisters, Alma and Fanny Knobloch.<sup>41</sup> Pauline Hannen and her extended family were among the first white Americans to appreciate the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching of the oneness of humanity on the race problem in the United States and to translate that understanding into action. While at least two African Americans had become Bahá'ís in other cities before 1900, the Hannens and Knoblochs made the first concerted efforts in the country to teach the faith to blacks.<sup>42</sup> Pauline Hannen recalled that pondering a passage in the Hidden Words caused her to reconsider her prejudice against blacks, ingrained since her childhood in the racially divisive atmosphere of post-Reconstruction North Carolina:

O children of men! Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is

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<sup>40</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 220.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.<sup>43</sup>

Hannen resolved to share her faith with blacks, and she started with the ones she knew best, Carrie York, her washerwoman, and Pocahontas Pope, her sister's seamstress. Primarily through word of mouth, other African Americans investigated the faith. York and Pope both became Bahá'ís, and they held meetings in their own homes where white and Iranian Bahá'ís—including the Hannens and their family and occasional visitors from other cities—could teach their friends and families. By the middle of 1908, some fifteen black Washingtonians had embraced the faith.<sup>44</sup>

Whether they were aware of it or not, the Hannens and their allies were developing relationships with the largest and most influential urban black community in turn-of-the-century America. Of the American cities in which the Bahá'í Faith first spread, Washington had the largest proportion of black inhabitants, some thirty percent during the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup> Compared to most cities in the country, Washington had long been a haven of security and opportunity for African Americans, with a large and relatively prosperous free black community before the Civil War.<sup>46</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s, a rising tide of white violence and coercion radically curtailed blacks' social, economic, and political participation in the rest of the South, but the federal capital afforded protection from the horrors of lynching and the worst of discriminatory practices. A swelling population of black

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<sup>43</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), Arabic no. 68.

<sup>44</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 224-6.

<sup>45</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 200.

<sup>46</sup> Green, *Secret City*, 53.

newcomers, mostly from adjacent Virginia and Maryland, included skilled tradesmen and artisans shut out of whites-only labor organizations and teachers and professionals seeking more favorable working conditions. As black politicians across the region were pushed out of office, many fled to Washington in hopes of federal appointments or other employment.<sup>47</sup> Even after Congress revoked home rule in the District of Columbia in 1878, black Washingtonians maintained a voice in local politics, especially through the management of a large system of black public schools. Strong schools were mainly responsible for a large and steady increase in black literacy in the city, from approximately sixty percent in 1890 to eighty-three percent in 1910.<sup>48</sup> While economic progress in general did not keep pace with the rising black population, the school system, Howard University, and federal agencies provided black professionals with unparalleled opportunities.<sup>49</sup> Such a high concentration of well-educated, politically-active African Americans made Washington the intellectual capital of black America, with church-related organizations such as the Bethel Literary and Historical Association and the American Negro Academy leading the way.<sup>50</sup>

Though Washington in the first decade of the twentieth century was still a haven for blacks compared to the rest of the South, lines of racial segregation in the city were hardening on every side. Churches and schools were already separate, largely as a result of black initiative during and after the Civil War. A local civil rights act remained on the books, yet restaurants, hotels, and barber shops served only one race or the other, and black

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<sup>47</sup> Wilson J. Moses, "The Lost World of the New Negro, 1895-1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the 'Renaissance,'" *Black American Literature Forum*, 21, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1987): 65.

<sup>48</sup> Green, *Secret City*, 136, 162.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>50</sup> Moses, "Lost World," 67-72. For a treatment of the American Negro Academy, see Alfred A. Moss, *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

theatergoers were segregated in balconies.<sup>51</sup> In 1908, the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union forced black members to withdraw and form a separate group.<sup>52</sup> For several years beginning in 1907, bills to segregate the streetcar system in the District of Columbia came up in the House of Representatives.<sup>53</sup> The number of black employees in federal agencies and in city government declined, and segregated work spaces, washrooms, and dining facilities emerged in several federal offices—including the Treasury Department where Louis Gregory worked—between 1904 and 1909.<sup>54</sup> In the private social life of the city's middle and upper classes, segregation was virtually total. As one social worker observed in 1908, in Washington “[t]he better class of white and colored people know absolutely nothing of each other.”<sup>55</sup>

In the context of the city's increasingly rigid social segregation, the fact that even a few white Bahá'ís went out of their way to bring their faith to blacks is remarkable. The Hannens and a few other white Bahá'ís were willing to cross the increasingly rigid color line, participating in interracial gatherings in black neighborhoods and rented halls and, at even greater potential social cost to themselves, frequently entertaining black guests in their own homes. However, the initial growth of the Bahá'í Faith in black Washington was an initiative of only a handful of white believers, not of the whole group. The integrated meetings constituted something of a community within a community, as most of the other Bahá'ís remained unaware of or uninterested in the Hannens' activities.

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<sup>51</sup> Green, *Secret City*, 166.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-160, 163.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá sought to make teaching African Americans the policy of all the Washington believers, and explicitly requested that whites take the lead in establishing a fully integrated Bahá’í community. During Joseph and Pauline Hannen’s pilgrimage to Palestine in 1909, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged them to continue teaching African Americans, expressing the hope that it would be “the means of bringing about peace between the Blacks and the Whites.”<sup>56</sup> In Joseph Hannen’s words, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá directed that in order

to prove the validity of our Teachings and as a means of removing existing prejudices between the races, a Spiritual Assembly or meeting be held, preferably at the home of one of the white Bahais, in which both races should join.<sup>57</sup>

The Hannens apparently did not press the issue, however, until Louis Gregory began to share the faith with his peers in Washington’s black elite. Beginning in the fall of 1909, Gregory organized a series of well-attended lectures on the Bahá’í Faith before the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, and intimate weekly meetings for black inquirers continued in several homes. “As soon as I became a believer and began to teach . . .,” Gregory recalled,

my colored friends got on my back and began to press me with troublous questions. If this were a New religion which stood for unity, why were its devotees divided? Why did they not meet altogether in one place? Were the Baha’is not full of prejudice like other people?<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, other African American friends and associates discouraged Gregory from continuing his radical departure from religious tradition:

By far the majority of my friends thought I had become mentally unbalanced. One of my old teachers, a professor of international law and a very affectionate friend, almost wept over my departure from orthodoxy and with others warned me that I was

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<sup>56</sup> Pauline Hannen to Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, May 1909, Ahmad Sohrab Papers, NBA, quoted in Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, vol. 18 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>57</sup> Jos. H. Hannen, *Bahai News* 1, no. 1 (21 March 1910): 18-19, and Joseph H. Hannen, “Washington, D. C.,” *Bahai News* 1, no. 3 (28 April 1910): 19, both quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 5.

blasting all hopes of a career. The Washington Bee, a well-known colored newspaper, on one occasion gave me two columns of ridicule which remained unanswered. Others, knowing my controversial habits of the past said, ‘He must have religion since he does not answer that!’<sup>59</sup>

The Hannens arranged for Gregory to consult with the “Working Group,” the community’s fledgling executive committee of which Joseph Hannen was a member, about the integration of the community. No record remains of the meeting, but movement towards full inclusion proved to be slow. Many of the white Washington Bahá’is had come into the faith with a sincere love for Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or an attraction to one or more of their progressive social teachings. Few, however, had ever examined their inherited racial prejudice in the light of the religion’s cardinal principle of the oneness of humanity, and few appreciated the radical implications of that principle in the context of their own segregated city and country.

If the attitudes of some of the Washington believers fell short of the faith’s teachings on interracial unity, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left no doubt about Gregory’s own place in resolving the situation. His reply to Gregory’s declaration of faith arrived in November 1909, and it made clear that Gregory should play a major role in promoting social equality and the full integration of the community. “I hope,” he wrote,

that thou mayest become ... the means whereby the white and colored people shall close their eyes to racial differences and behold the reality of humanity, that is the universal unity which is the oneness of the kingdom of the human race .... Rely as much as thou canst on the True One, and be thou resigned to the Will of God, so that like unto a candle thou mayest be enkindled in the world of humanity and like unto a star thou mayest shine and gleam from the Horizon of Reality and become the cause of the guidance of both races.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Louis Gregory, translated 17 November 1909, Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, NBA, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 7.



Early in 1910, buoyed by such guidance, Gregory and the Hannens initiated a large integrated monthly gathering along the lines ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had earlier prescribed. Joseph Hannen reported for the first issue of the new national Bahá’í newsletter:

On the evening of March 6<sup>th</sup>, an important gathering assembled at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hannen, representing the joining in one meeting of the white and the colored Bahais and friends of this city.... This is the first [such] meeting ..., and is to be repeated monthly. There were present about 35 persons, one-third of whom were colored, and nearly all believers.<sup>61</sup>

He also announced the first partial step in integrating the Unity Feast, as the once-in-nineteen-days devotional program was called:

It is also planned that every fourth Unity Feast, beginning April 9, should be held in such manner that both races can join. This is a radical step in this part of the country, and is in reality making history.<sup>62</sup>

Such a compromise, however, fell short of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s expectations. Through correspondence and conversations with pilgrims, he continued to insist on complete integration of the Washington community’s activities, while for several years some of the white believers persistently misunderstood or ignored his instructions. But even in a partially-integrated state, the small Washington Bahá’í community already stood out from the city’s other organizations as a potential spiritual home for many diverse elements of the population—black and white; male and female; northern and southern; native-born and immigrant; working-class, middle-class, and elite; conservative and activist. For Louis Gregory, the fact that a handful of white Bahá’ís, whose own backgrounds and social positions would otherwise have made them unlikely radicals, had taken even a tentative lead in creating an interracial fellowship was enough to demonstrate the potentially transformative

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<sup>61</sup> *Bahai News* 1, no. 1 (21 March 1910): 18-9, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

power of the faith. In the fall of 1910, he set out to take its message to the southern heart of segregated America.

When Louis Gregory left the District of Columbia for points south, he was coming home to a region in dire need of transformation. Still reeling from the political and economic upheavals of the 1890s, the southern states were beset by an agricultural economy in precipitous decline; rapid and uneven industrialization; the brutal oppression of one-third of the region's population through political disfranchisement and increasingly rigid racial segregation; and a system of social control suffused with astonishing levels of legal and extralegal violence. The dominating ethos of the region was white male supremacy—hardly compatible with Bahá'u'lláh's concept of the oneness of humanity. Since the rise and rapid fall of the Populist movement of the 1890s, an alliance of conservative political and business leaders, buttressed in large part by black and white clergymen, held virtually uncontested sway in every state. For concerned Bahá'ís like Gregory and the Hannens, such conditions called out for application of Bahá'u'lláh's moral and social teachings. But they also meant that bringing his religion to the South would be a difficult, lonely, and potentially dangerous undertaking. Beyond Washington and Baltimore, the South remained virtually untouched by the faith. In 1910, there were only half a dozen believers and one small and isolated group south of the Potomac. Louis Gregory's journey was a major step forward in establishing the Bahá'í Faith in an enormous region. As a native Southerner and a member of the African-American elite, he took advantage of his social and professional connections to speak to hundreds of people in churches, schools, professional and fraternal organizations, and private homes in eight cities and towns, including Richmond, Virginia; Durham, Enfield, and Wilmington, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; and Macon, Georgia. Gregory's

trip was likely the first multi-state Bahá'í teaching trip in the region, and likely saw the earliest introduction of the faith to the Carolinas and Georgia.

## **Charleston**

In its heyday, Louis Gregory's hometown was an important city. As the main port of debarkation for African slaves in America, the leading export hub in the country during much of the antebellum period, the cultural capital of a Deep South cotton kingdom that spread as far as Texas, and the hotbed of the political agitation that led to secession and civil war, Charleston had been one of the major cities of the United States. But prosperity proved fleeting. Even before the Civil War, Charleston had lost ground in a national economy increasingly characterized by manufacturing, as the area's ruling class, enthralled to lucrative slave-grown export crops, eschewed diversification. In the aftermath of the war the city's position continued to slip, as the Carolina Lowcountry's agricultural system collapsed, railroads in the interior siphoned off commerce from the port, and municipal leadership, especially after the collapse of Reconstruction, proved ineffective. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Charleston was a city in manifest decline.<sup>63</sup>

For former slaves like Louis Gregory's parents, however, Charleston meant hope for a brighter future. As soon as Union forces entered the city in March 1865, freedmen and freedwomen from across the Lowcountry flocked to the city. They came for multiple reasons: to put distance between themselves and their former masters; for the security of numbers amid a rising tide of white violence; for opportunities for economic advancement,

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<sup>63</sup> Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) 425; Wilbert L. Jenkins, *Seizing the New Day: African Americans in Post-Civil War Charleston* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1998), xi-xii.

education, and community life that were nearly impossible on the farms and plantations; to seek loved ones separated through the vagaries of the internal slave trade; to feel the first flush of freedom. The city's sizeable black minority became a decisive majority for the first time in its history. In the decades after the war, blacks remained essential to the city's economic life, working as skilled and unskilled laborers, longshoremen and stevedores, businesspeople, and professionals. They worked to establish independent churches that, free from white control, served as indispensable hubs of social, economic, political, and educational life—most of which endured after the end of South Carolina's experiment with Reconstruction in 1877.<sup>64</sup>

Louis Gregory's parents, Ebenezer and Mary Elizabeth George, were among the migrants. They grew up as slaves in Darlington District, some 120 miles north of Charleston in the Pee Dee section of the state. Teenagers at Emancipation, they married and moved with Mary Elizabeth's mother, known in postwar records as Mary Bacot, to the city. There they were able to live and work in relative peace, Ebenezer as a blacksmith, and Mary Elizabeth as a seamstress. They had two children, Theodore and Louis, who became students in South Carolina's first system of free public education, set up under the new state constitution of 1868.<sup>65</sup> Like many other families, it was as much the miserable conditions in the postwar countryside as the opportunities of urban life that drew the Georges to Charleston. White insurgents, seeking to topple a Republican state government that rested on the votes of newly enfranchised black men, wreaked havoc among rural freedpeople, including Mary Elizabeth's family. Her natural father was her late former master, George Washington

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<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, *Seizing the New Day*, 160-1.

<sup>65</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 11-2, 15-6.

Dargan, a judge on South Carolina's highest court, but her mother's husband after emancipation was a former slave who worked as a blacksmith. When he achieved some success in business by himself, white paramilitaries in Darlington marked him as a threat; one night, a band of masked men called him out of his house and shot him dead.<sup>66</sup>

While the city offered protection from white violence, urban life was not easy for black migrants, who tended to suffer most from the city's economic woes. During the late 1880s and 1890s, they experienced a decline in real wages and had a hard time achieving economic security.<sup>67</sup> With a burgeoning population, housing in the city was inadequate and crowded, streets were unpaved and filled with garbage and animals, and drinking water was unclean.<sup>68</sup> Construction of a modern sewer system did not begin until 1909, and for decades it bypassed the poorest black neighborhoods.<sup>69</sup> In such an environment, contagious disease was rampant. One of the victims was Ebenezer George. In 1879 he died of tuberculosis, the leading killer of black Charlestonians, leaving his widow struggling to support two children.<sup>70</sup>

Even the forces of nature seemed bent on compounding Charleston's woes. In August 1885, when young Louis was eleven years old, a hurricane damaged or destroyed ninety percent of the houses in the city. Barely a year later, a major earthquake rocked the area, destroying some two thousand buildings and killing more than a hundred people. In

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>67</sup> Jenkins, *Seizing the New Day*, 160-1.

<sup>68</sup> Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 304-5.

<sup>69</sup> Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 351.

<sup>70</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 11; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 331.

1893 another major hurricane struck the South Carolina coast, damaging Charleston and devastating the Sea Islands south of the city. Some 2000 mostly black residents were drowned in the massive storm surge. In the wake of the storm, phosphate mining and processing, the area's major industry and the city's largest employer of African Americans, could not fully recover.<sup>71</sup> Natural disasters in part fueled a local building boom, and construction companies, many employing black carpenters and laborers, benefited. But compared to other New South cities of the late nineteenth century, Charleston languished. During the 1890s the city's population grew by a mere 1,000, while the nearby ports of Savannah and Jacksonville grew by some 10,000 each.<sup>72</sup>

The city's racial climate, as well, became increasingly poisonous during the 1890s. After the 1876 coup that brought down the state's Reconstruction regime, conservative white Democrats chipped away at black political rights. Finally, a new constitution in 1895 included franchise restrictions that all but completed the removal of African American men from the voting rolls, the jury box, and state and local elective offices. During the 1890s and 1900s, Charleston whites repeatedly blocked the appointment of blacks to federal posts in the city, the last chance for a few loyal Republicans to play a minor political role.<sup>73</sup> Disfranchisement opened the door to systematic racial segregation. In its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal" accommodations in Louisiana train coaches, and in its wake, cities and states across the South moved swiftly to codify the principle. The next year, when Charleston installed its first system of electric

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<sup>71</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 425-7.

<sup>72</sup> Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 309, 327.

<sup>73</sup> Idus A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 160-1.

streetcars, they operated on a segregated basis.<sup>74</sup> By the first decade of the twentieth century black teachers had been eliminated from the city's schools, and most public accommodations in the city were segregated.<sup>75</sup>

Race prejudice limited the impact of efforts to rebuild the city's economy. White Charlestonians with money routinely invested it in ventures that depended primarily on white laborers, from Upstate textile mills to Birmingham iron and steel companies.<sup>76</sup> Around the turn of the century, two attempts to bring cotton textile manufacturing to the city, both employing black workers, failed.<sup>77</sup> In the late 1890s, fresh with enthusiasm for overseas expansion after the Spanish-American War, a new group of young white businessmen attempted to revive the city's fortunes by holding a World's Fair. Held during the winter and spring of 1901-1902, the Interstate and West Indian Exposition drew far fewer visitors than planned. Unseasonably cold weather kept many out-of-state and foreign visitors away, but more than half the host city's population refused to attend. Charleston's blacks were incensed over the placement of a statue that depicted them only as menial laborers. When they requested it be moved from in front of the Negro Building, the white exposition officers promptly moved it to an even more prominent position on the grounds, and blacks in turn stayed away.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 448.

<sup>75</sup> Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 336.

<sup>76</sup> Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 160.

<sup>77</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 309.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

For young Louis Gregory, a major key to stability and prosperity in a largely hostile world was his stepfather. In 1881, after struggling for two years to support her children alone, Mary Elizabeth George married George Gregory, who adopted the boys and raised them as his own. Young Louis George became Louis George Gregory. His adopted father was a literate, freeborn Charleston native who worked as a carpenter, and his family had owned some property before the Civil War.<sup>79</sup> He was also a veteran of the Union army. When Confederate forces abandoned Charleston in mid-February 1865, the first Union soldiers to enter and occupy the city were African Americans. In their wake came Major Martin R. Delaney, a black abolitionist from Pennsylvania, commissioned by President Lincoln to raise two more regiments of black soldiers to augment Union forces in the city and the neighboring Sea Islands. George Gregory enlisted, serving for about a year in the 104<sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Infantry.<sup>80</sup> Military service had its benefits: stimulating contact with black and white men from other parts of the country; an informal political education; increased pride and self-confidence for having helped put down the slaveholders' rebellion; and stature within the African American community.<sup>81</sup> These qualities, along with literacy and relative financial security, George Gregory was able to bring to his new family. They owned a modest house in Radcliffeborough in the city's lower peninsula, in an area mostly

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<sup>79</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 13-4.

<sup>80</sup> National Park Service, "George Gregory," Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, <http://www.civilwar.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm>.

<sup>81</sup> The classic accounts of blacks in the Union armed forces during the Civil War are James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York: Random House, 1965) and Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966). More recently, Steven Hahn has focused on military service as a critical school of political education for freedmen. Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 89-102.



inhabited by freedpeople.<sup>82</sup> The boys continued their education at the city's only black school with a college-preparatory program, the missionary-run Avery Normal Institute.<sup>83</sup> Louis's mother died in 1891, just as he was finishing high school, and George Gregory remained a loving father. He was able to pay for Louis's first year of college at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, after which Louis paid his way by tailoring for other students and working summer jobs in Charleston. Between graduating from Fisk in 1896 and entering the law program at Howard University in 1900, Louis Gregory returned to Charleston and taught at Avery.<sup>84</sup>

When Gregory came home again in November 1910, it was to a community rich with family ties and professional connections. He was among his people, and he found plenty of friends, associates, and family members who were receptive to the message he had come to share. "Am just having the time of my life!" he wrote to Joseph Hannen from a relative's house on Coming Street. He had "numerous engagements to speak in churches, halls, and . . . parties" and to the Colored Ministerial Union. He reported a meeting with an Episcopal priest who, it turned out, already knew something of the Bahá'í Faith. The priest had attended sessions at Green Acre, a summer colony on the southern coast of Maine that attracted liberals and free-thinkers and was owned by a Bahá'í. There he had met and been favorably impressed with the Iranian Bahá'í scholar Mírzá 'Abu'l-Fadl, who lectured frequently at Green Acre during his American sojourn of 1901 to 1904. On November 8,

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<sup>82</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910), <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>83</sup> Avery was essential to the education of generations of black Charlestonians from the 1860s to the 1950s. A thorough history of the school and its community context is Edmund L. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations: Charleston's Avery Normal Institute* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

<sup>84</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 16-7.

Gregory was the featured speaker at a “Lecture and Musicale” at the Carpenters’ Hall. Gregory’s stepfather, a carpenter, was probably responsible for his son’s appearance at the local union’s meeting hall. Gregory was to have shared the podium with three ministers, but none of them showed up. Instead, Gregory “had the attentive audience to face alone, yet not alone, for the Spirit was powerful.” Altogether, he said, “[t]he whole city seems interested.”<sup>85</sup>

Gregory also shared the news of his meeting with some or all of Charleston’s six black lawyers.<sup>86</sup> Gregory was likely already well acquainted with his peers in the city. According to Gregory, all of the lawyers “seem[ed] favorable” to the Bahá’í message. One of them, Alonzo Twine, quickly identified himself as a believer:

One of them has accepted it, saying that he was particularly impressed with the explanation concerning “clouds.” He added that if Christ were to come thru the literal clouds, he certainly would be hidden from half the earth, in view of its roundness.<sup>87</sup>

Gregory’s reference to Bahá’í interpretations of biblical prophecies indicates that his discussion with the attorneys must have included not only the radical social teachings of the faith, but also its unorthodox theological teachings, such as the belief in Bahá’u’lláh as the return of Christ.

Gregory and Twine had remarkably similar backgrounds. Born three years apart—Gregory in 1874 and Twine in 1877—both men grew up after the fall of Reconstruction and

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<sup>85</sup> Louis G. Gregory to Joseph A. Hannen, 9 and 12 November 1910, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>86</sup> Of the 61 attorneys or law firms in the 1910 Charleston city directory, only five—J. B. Edwards, John A. Gaillard, Edward T. Smith, Daniel B. Summers, and Alonzo E. Twine—were listed as “colored.” *Walsh’s Charleston, South Carolina, City Directory* (Charleston: Walsh Directory Co., Inc., 1910), 642. Another black attorney, Thaddeus St. Mark Sasportas, lived in nearby Summerville in Dorchester County but handled cases in Charleston. W. Lewis Burke and William C. Hine, “The South Carolina State College School of Law,” in *Matthew J. Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy*, ed. W. Lewis Burke and Belinda F. Gergel (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>87</sup> Gregory to Hannen, 12 November 1910.

came of age in a period of steadily worsening race relations.<sup>88</sup> Alonzo Twine's father, Charles Twine, was probably born a slave in eastern North Carolina. During the Civil War, he served in the 21<sup>st</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Infantry, which took part in operations against Charleston during 1864 and was one of the regiments that occupied the city after the Confederate surrender.<sup>89</sup> After the war, he remained in Charleston and worked in a saw mill.<sup>90</sup> He married a South Carolina-born freedwoman named Phillipa, who worked as a nurse and housemaid.<sup>91</sup> The couple raised a family in a rented house on Montague Court, an enclave of freedpeople in the Harleston Village neighborhood, and they sent their children to school at Avery Institute, only a short walk down Bull Street. Sometimes they took in boarders for extra income.<sup>92</sup> The Twine and Gregory families had likely crossed paths well before Louis Gregory's visit in 1910. While Charles Twine and George Gregory had served in different army regiments, they may have known each other after the war as members of the carpenters' union, one of the strongest locals in the city's active labor movement.<sup>93</sup> The families lived only three blocks away from each other, and their children overlapped at

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<sup>88</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900), <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>89</sup> National Park Service, "Charles Twine," Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, <http://www.civilwar.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm>.

<sup>90</sup> *Thirteenth Census, 1910*.

<sup>91</sup> *Twelfth Census, 1900; Thirteenth Census, 1910*.

<sup>92</sup> *Thirteenth Census, 1910*.

<sup>93</sup> George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900*, rev. ed. (1952; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 137-40.

Avery Institute. In 1900, when Louis Gregory returned to Avery to teach, he probably had Joseph Twine, Alonzo's younger brother, in his eighth grade class.<sup>94</sup>

While it is unclear whether Alonzo Twine attended a law school or read law in the office of another attorney, he was certainly a part of black Charleston's aspiring professional class.<sup>95</sup> Admitted to the bar by the South Carolina Supreme Court in May 1899, Twine practiced law in Charleston from at least 1901.<sup>96</sup> He partnered with Eugene R. Hayne, another young black attorney who had attended law school at Allen University in Columbia, until 1903, when Hayne moved to New Jersey to practice law there.<sup>97</sup> For several years Twine partnered with Robert C. Brown, a black attorney some thirty years his senior, and from at least 1909 he practiced on his own, from an office on Church Street in a block of mostly black businesses.<sup>98</sup> He lost three minor criminal appeals before the state Supreme Court in 1909 and 1910.<sup>99</sup> Twine and his parents were members of Old Bethel Methodist Church on Calhoun Street, one of the oldest and most prestigious black congregations in the

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<sup>94</sup> "Catalogue of the Teachers and Pupils of Avery Normal Institute, Charleston, S.C.," June 1899, Avery School Memorabilia Collection, Avery Research Center for African-American History and Culture, College of Charleston, SC (hereafter cited as ARC).

<sup>95</sup> Oldfield notes that perhaps 40 percent of black lawyers acquired their training individually rather than through law schools. In Charleston, Robert C. Brown, Twine's partner, and Thaddeus St. Mark Sasportas both read law in the office of Samuel J. Lee, former Reconstruction lawmaker and the leading black attorney in the state prior to his death in 1895. John Oldfield, "The African American Bar in South Carolina," in *At Freedom's Door: African American Founding Fathers and Lawyers in South Carolina*, ed. James Lowell Underwood and W. Lewis Burke (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 117, 120-3.

<sup>96</sup> Oldfield, "African American Bar," 129; W. Lewis Burke and William C. Hine, "The South Carolina State College School of Law," in *Matthew J. Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy*, ed. W. Lewis Burke and Belinda F. Gergel (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>97</sup> Burke and Hine, "School of Law," 22.

<sup>98</sup> *Charleston City Directory*, 1910, 118-9.

<sup>99</sup> Burke and Hine, "School of Law," 22.

city and part of the northern branch of the Methodist church.<sup>100</sup> Twine served as one of the congregation's trustees.<sup>101</sup> Like many black professionals in South Carolina in the early twentieth century, Twine's educational, professional, and religious leadership did not always translate into financial success. In 1910, unmarried at age thirty-three, he lived at home with his parents, two younger adopted sisters, and a boarder.<sup>102</sup>

### **The Perils of Conversion**

When Louis Gregory embraced the Bahá'í Faith in the intellectual capital of black America, he experienced opposition and pity from his friends and associates and ridicule in the press. Alonzo Twine's circumstances were far worse: in the less cosmopolitan atmosphere of Charleston, his conversion led him down a road of isolation, incarceration, and death. In October 1911, almost a year after Gregory's visit, Twine was committed to the South Carolina Hospital for the Insane in Columbia. Shortly after his arrival, he was diagnosed with manic-depressive disorder, but, like most black patients in the facility, he apparently received little or no treatment for the disease. Twine survived three years in the abominable conditions of the asylum before succumbing to pellagra, a nutritional deficiency. According to the legal and medical record of Twine's confinement as well as public statements by his pastor, the cause of his illness was his becoming a Bahá'í. Clearly, he experienced painful opposition to his new religious beliefs and a profound sense of isolation that may well have

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<sup>100</sup> Begun in 1797 and completed in 1809, the Old Bethel building is the third oldest surviving church structure in Charleston. Originally home to a biracial congregation, the building was moved in 1852 and again 1880 to accommodate a growing rift between black and white members. SCDAH, "Old Bethel United Methodist Church," National Register Properties in South Carolina, <http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/charleston/S10817710089/index.htm>.

<sup>101</sup> I. E. Lowery, "Rev. I. E. Lowery's Column," *Southern Indicator* (Columbia, SC), 19 February 1921, 3.

<sup>102</sup> *Thirteenth Census, 1910*.

contributed to a mental breakdown. At the same time, Twine lived in the heart of a society with a long record of labeling troublesome blacks as insane. It is unclear whether or not Twine was actually mentally ill, but opposition by his former pastor and perhaps by his immediate family seems to have contributed directly to his institutionalization and death.

It is unclear exactly what circumstances led to Twine's confinement. When white doctors first examined him on October 2, 1911, he was being held at the city's Roper Hospital in a cell of the psychiatric ward, referred to locally as "the Black Hole of Calcutta."<sup>103</sup> "Patient stands at window," they reported, "and grips the iron bars and sings continually [,] Shine on bright star, Shine on [,] and then turns and curses as we walk in the room."<sup>104</sup> According to Phillipa Twine's testimony to the local probate court, her son's attack had come on suddenly the week before. Its cause, she indicated, was "religion." There had been "indications of [the] present attack of insanity" for some six months in the form of "religious obscension [obsession?]." She testified that the disease was exhibited as "religious excitement," that her son was suffering religious "delusions," and that he was "deranged" on the subject of "religion." In response to a series of questions, Phillipa Twine testified that her son had remained regular in his work and was not destructive of himself or others. Asked if he were "irritable, quarrelsome, or noisy," she indicated only that her son was "noisy." Nevertheless, the probate judge found Alonzo Twine a danger to society. He

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<sup>103</sup> Peter McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>104</sup> Twine may have been singing a Christmas carol, "Chime on, Shine on," by George Frederick Root (1820-1895), a popular New England composer. The hymn includes the refrains, "Shine on, shine on, O Star!" and "Shine on! shine on! bright star of his love!" Charles W. Wendte, *Heart and Voice: A Collection of Songs and Services for the Sunday School and the Home* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Co., 1909), 246, <http://books.google.com>.

signed a commitment order on October 5, and the next day Twine was transported by train to the state capital and admitted to the Hospital for the Insane.<sup>105</sup>

Even if Twine was of perfectly sound mind when he entered the hospital, a short time there certainly would have been enough to undo him. When it was founded in the 1820s as the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum, it was at the forefront of treatment for the mentally ill.<sup>106</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, however, it was a pesthole that did little more than warehouse broken men and women. A legislative investigation in 1909 documented overflowing toilets and wards crawling with lice and bedbugs, an inadequate and poorly trained staff that were quick to use violence and mechanical restraints to maintain order, and unwashed patients often wearing little more than rags.<sup>107</sup> Between 1890 and 1913, some fourteen percent of patients in the facility died each year, a far higher rate than at other institutions around the country.<sup>108</sup> The two leading causes of death across the hospital were tuberculosis and pellagra, a niacin deficiency resulting from overconsumption of corn.<sup>109</sup> In the South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, diets high in grits and bacon and almost devoid of vegetables or alternate protein sources led to widespread incidence of pellagra, especially in rural areas as the agricultural economy crumbled. In the state hospital, where patients subsisted on grits, cornbread, fatback, and coffee, pellagra was

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<sup>105</sup> "Alonzo Twine," South Carolina State Hospital Commitment Files, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia (hereafter cited as SCDAH).

<sup>106</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 289.

<sup>107</sup> McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 294-6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 284; Record of Deaths 1893-1979, South Carolina State Hospital Records, SCDAH.

first diagnosed in 1907, but the cause of the disease was yet unknown.<sup>110</sup> Untreated, the victims of the disease developed painful skin lesions; swelling of the mouth and tongue; abdominal swelling, vomiting, and diarrhea; mental deterioration and dementia; and, within four or five years, death.

For black patients in particular, the state hospital was a living hell. Alonzo Twine lived in the Parker Building, which housed black men in the segregated facility. Designed for 200 patients, it held some 330 in 1909. It was infested with vermin, and patients slept on straw on the floor of their cells. Between 1903 and 1908, more than a quarter of the patients in Parker died each year.<sup>111</sup> An assistant physician was appointed in 1905 specifically for black patients, but he did not reside on campus and spent only one to four hours a day at the hospital.<sup>112</sup> Even white patients complained that they seldom saw doctors; surviving records give no indication that black patients received psychological or medical treatment beyond a perfunctory examination upon their arrival.<sup>113</sup> The death rate for black patients was twice as high as for whites.<sup>114</sup> The labor of black patients kept the hospital running, at significant cost savings to South Carolina's taxpayers. Some eighty percent of black inmates were healthy enough to build new hospital buildings, maintain the extensive grounds, milk the cows, and do the laundry. Hospital administrators complained that with so many black patients

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<sup>110</sup> McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 284.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>112</sup> James Lawrence Thompson, *Of Shattered Minds*, ed. Anita Warick Roof (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Mental Health, 1989), 51.

<sup>113</sup> McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 287. The notes of Twine's initial examination are copied verbatim from the commitment papers with no additional observations. There are notes of one or two subsequent examinations for almost every white male patient; not a single black male appears to have had a subsequent examination. Personal History Book for Males, South Carolina State Hospital Records, SCDAH.

<sup>114</sup> McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 283.



working at menial tasks, it was hard to get the whites to do the same. Instead, white inmates were provided with minimal recreational opportunities.<sup>115</sup>

Since antebellum times, the subject of blacks' mental health had been intimately connected to social control in South Carolina. There was a long and well-documented history, on the one hand, of slaves suffering mental illness, mostly in conditions of neglect and isolation. On the other, slaves who exhibited too much self-confidence or independence—especially by running away—were often labeled as insane. In the early twentieth century, the Hospital for the Insane was one part of an ad hoc system of social control that minimized the threat of troublesome blacks to the state's white minority. For poor young men, the chief institutions of control were the state penitentiary and the county chain gangs, which housed vastly disproportionate numbers of blacks and worked them to death for public profit. Perhaps in the case of Alonzo Twine, the Hospital for the Insane functioned more like voluntary out-migration and forced exile, removing educated and self-confident men who could not hold their tongues in the midst of galling injustice.<sup>116</sup>

White supremacists found a willing, if perhaps unwitting, accomplice in Twine's former pastor at Old Bethel, Rev. I. E. Lowery. Driven to enforce religious orthodoxy, Lowery took away what was likely Twine's only solace in the oppressive and pestilential surroundings of the state hospital, reinforcing his profound isolation. When Lowery was transferred to a church in Columbia, he came to visit Twine in the state hospital. "The first time we called to see him," Lowery recalled,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 274-5.

<sup>116</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 67-79.

he held in his hand a little pamphlet, and we asked him for it. He readily gave it to us, and we found it to be a book on the Bahai religion. We took it from him and brought it home, knowing that it was this that caused him to lose his mind.<sup>117</sup>

Alonzo Twine died on October 26, 1914, probably alone and completely demented in the last stages of pellagra. At his parents' request, Lowery brought the broken body back to Charleston for a funeral at Old Bethel.<sup>118</sup>

### **Southern Diffusion of the Bahá'í Faith**

The fate of Alonzo Twine, while particularly dramatic, was but one example of the challenges Bahá'ís faced as they sought to propagate their faith in the South. From the earliest days of the Bahá'í Faith in the United States, many of the believers seemed to sense a need for their new religion to spread geographically. Indeed, for such a numerically small community, they achieved a remarkable degree of dispersion in their first decade and a half. However, they were heavily influenced by social and economic factors that severely limited their penetration of the southern states, giving the faith a decidedly regional tilt.

In 1910, there were only about 1200 Bahá'ís in the country, but they lived in localities stretching from Boston to San Francisco.<sup>119</sup> As Thornton Chase, one of the first Chicago converts and a prominent teacher of the faith, observed in 1905, mobility “seems to be the *way* of this Cause.”<sup>120</sup> Indeed, mobility was increasingly the way of America as a whole. In part, the successful dispersion of the faith was due to the fact that it arrived in the

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<sup>117</sup> Lowery, “Column,” *The Southern Indicator*, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Arthur Hampson, “The Growth and Spread of the Baha'i Faith” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1980), 248.

<sup>120</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 230.

United States at a time of rapid industrialization and urbanization, when a burgeoning railroad network facilitated unprecedented movement of goods and people. Bahá'ís from the first community in Chicago, often prompted at least in part by family ties or employment opportunities in the new national economy, were able to travel or settle in other areas and teach. They quickly established the faith in urban areas of the Northeast and Midwest, with outposts on the West Coast beginning with a group in San Francisco.

In more than twenty larger towns or cities, the number of believers necessitated renting spaces for worship, study, and teaching activities and hence some form of local community organization.<sup>121</sup> While Ibrahim Kheiralla had seemed to favor the creation of an informal clerical class, by the turn of the twentieth century most local Bahá'í communities had organized themselves along lines typical of other clubs or organizations, with elected officers, a fund, and regular activities. Through a stream of tablets, interactions with pilgrims, and the dispatch of a series of knowledgeable Iranian teachers to the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá introduced distinctive principles of Bahá'í governance, encouraging the election of executive boards the members of which had corporate, but not individual, authority and which operated through consultation and consensus. While they differed from city to city in number of members, operating procedures, and even name, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated that each fledgling body was as a forerunner of the local House of Justice (*baytu'l-adi*) that Bahá'u'lláh had ordained in his writings as the governing body in every city and village.<sup>122</sup> In addition to the large, organized groups, there were some 150 localities with

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<sup>121</sup> In 1906, Bahá'í groups in more than twenty localities reported to the U. S. Bureau of the Census that they regularly rented public halls for activities, implying the existence at least of a community fund and a treasurer, and probably also a secretary for handling correspondence. Ibid., 229-31.

<sup>122</sup> See Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶30.

only one or two believers each, “and all these scattered souls,” Chase opined, “are kindling little fires all over the land.”<sup>123</sup> These isolated believers accounted for perhaps a third of the country’s Bahá’ís, and as there appeared to be no provision in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings for a national organization, ensuring their full participation was an important question for the movement.

If the industrial economy afforded the Bahá’ís opportunities to spread their religion, in certain respects it also constrained their movement. The faith remained a decisively urban and mostly northern phenomenon. It was largely confined to the densely populated, highly interconnected urban core of the Midwest and the Northeast. Even within these regions, the small towns and farms had few believers. One early experience illustrates the difficulty the Bahá’ís had establishing their faith in such areas, especially far distant from one of the early Bahá’í population centers. In 1897, a woman in the tiny town of Enterprise, Kansas, heard about the Bahá’í classes in Chicago and invited Ibrahim Kheiralla to come teach her family and friends. A dozen or more people became believers during and after Kheiralla’s visit, making Enterprise the second locality in the United States where Bahá’ís resided. Thornton Chase and perhaps some of the other Chicago Bahá’ís attempted to keep up correspondence, but no other teachers visited Enterprise. The new group was essentially alone with only beginners’ knowledge of the faith. Initial reaction to Kheiralla’s visit in the local and statewide press was negative and sarcastic, and the new converts, many of whom were from the town’s upper class, likely experienced a painful social rift with their church-going neighbors.<sup>124</sup> They never organized regular activities, even though they were all related or

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<sup>123</sup> Stockman, *Expansion*, 230.

<sup>124</sup> Duane L. Herrmann, “The Bahá’í Faith in Kansas,” in *Community Histories*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, vol. 6, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1992), 70-6, 79-80.

knew each other well, and many apparently lost interest over the next several years.<sup>125</sup> In other localities as in Enterprise, isolated believers may have been “kindling little fires,” but Chase knew that they were not having much success. “It seems an impossibility,” he admitted of such areas, “to establish an Assembly of any size.”<sup>126</sup>

If the Midwestern countryside was hard to consolidate, by 1910 the vast West and South had been virtually impossible even to penetrate. In the West, demography was largely responsible for the faith’s slow growth. Large areas of the region were still unsettled—Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma were still territories—and, reflecting patterns of the region’s population at large, few Bahá’ís lived outside of California. The South, too, was a mostly rural region, but compared to the West it was heavily populated and thickly laced with transportation and communication networks. Bahá’í teachers leaving Chicago and its daughter communities in the North would not have had problems of physical access to the region and its people. Rather, it was primarily social and cultural factors that inhibited the growth of the faith in the South. A comparative lack of employment opportunities; high rates of poverty, illiteracy, and disease in both urban and rural areas; an atmosphere of cultural and intellectual torpor; a widespread suspicion of outsiders; a dominant theology concerned more with personal salvation than social transformation; a crippling racial divide; and a leadership class that relied on violence and fear to maintain its hold on power—all made it difficult for Bahá’ís from the Northeast and the Midwest to penetrate the region.

Among the first generation of American Bahá’ís were quite a few southern expatriates. They and their families formed a small part of a widespread trend of emigration

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<sup>125</sup> Stockman, *Origins*, 105-9; Herrmann, “Kansas,” 77-8.

<sup>126</sup> Stockman, *Expansion*, 230.

from the South in the decades following the collapse of Reconstruction. Between 1880 and 1910, some 500,000 blacks and 1,200,000 whites left the troubled region. Many sought better farming opportunities. Whites generally headed for the Southern Plains and, after 1900, when cheap land in Texas and Oklahoma became harder to find, the Far West; blacks tended toward Kansas and Indiana. Many southern emigrants set their sights not on farms but on cities. Substantial numbers moved to such Midwestern and Northern urban centers as Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston—home to the country’s earliest Bahá’í communities.<sup>127</sup>

Many of the southern-born believers became active promoters of the faith in their adopted homes. The early Chicago community included Corinne Knight True, eldest daughter of an abolitionist minister and a Kentucky plantation heiress. Her father invested in Chicago real estate after the Civil War and moved the family there in the 1870s. After embracing the Bahá’í Faith in 1899, True became one of the early organizers of the Chicago community and the driving force behind a major project, inaugurated in 1909, to build the first Bahá’í temple in the western world.<sup>128</sup> Another early Chicago believer was South Carolina-born Julia Elizabeth Diggett, who became a Bahá’í in 1904. With True, she was a member of Chicago’s first “Women’s Assembly of Teaching,” and she traveled “from Coast to Coast and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes” to teach the faith.<sup>129</sup> Pearl Battee Doty, an

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<sup>127</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 12-13.

<sup>128</sup> For a biography of True, see Nathan Rutstein, *Corinne True: Faithful Handmaid of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987).

<sup>129</sup> *Star of the West* 10, no. 19 (2 March 1920): 346. The obituary, written by her daughter, states: “She taught from Coast to Coast and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes” and that she personally served ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on his visit to Chicago in 1912. She is likely the same person as Julia E. Diggett, who was elected to the Chicago Bahá’í “Women’s Assembly” in 1909. Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 322.

Ohio native with an alternative healing practice in Baltimore, became a Bahá'í in 1898, probably after taking Ibrahim Kheiralla's classes in New York City. By 1901, she had attracted some fifty Baltimoreans, mostly working-class and middle-class women, to the faith.<sup>130</sup> Charlotte Brittingham Dixon (b. 1852) became a Bahá'í in 1897 while visiting Chicago. Returning east, she taught the faith to family and friends in Princess Anne, her family home on Maryland's eastern shore, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore before settling in Washington. There, at the southern extremity of the country's urban-industrial core, a steady stream of Southerners encountered the faith, including the Hannen and Knobloch families and probably the majority of the blacks they taught. Another was Claudia Stuart Coles, who was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and moved to Washington, D. C., with her family during Reconstruction. She became a Bahá'í there sometime before 1907, the year she volunteered to serve on the "Working Committee," the Washington group's first executive body.<sup>131</sup> In the struggle over the inclusion of new black believers, Coles favored social equality and integration; when fellow Charlestonian Louis Gregory was leaving for his pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1911, she attended his going-away party and spoke in his honor.<sup>132</sup> Later she followed her daughter to Great Britain, where she was an active member of local and national executive bodies.<sup>133</sup>

All things being equal, such a talented pool of native Southerners could have constituted the vanguard of Bahá'í teachers traveling to the region. However, the same

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<sup>130</sup> Deb Clark, "The Bahá'ís of Baltimore, 1898-1990," in *Community Histories*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, vol. 6, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1992), 112-4.

<sup>131</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 222.

<sup>132</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 42.

<sup>133</sup> *Star of the West* 22, no. 4 (July 1931): 117.

factors that made it particularly difficult for Northeastern or Midwestern believers to venture south were the reasons the families of the southern-born Bahá'ís had fled in the first place. Outside of Baltimore and Washington, only a few Bahá'ís were able to make their homes in the South. Most of those who did certainly suffered geographic isolation from the mainstream of the American Bahá'í movement, and given the realities of life in the region, many likely faced a social isolation that made it difficult for them to teach. The earliest students of the faith in Chicago included two people from Virginia, one from Kentucky, and one from Georgia, but it is not clear if they became believers or remained connected to the faith after they returned to their homes. Margaret B. Peeke became a Bahá'í in Sandusky, Ohio, about 1899 and returned to her home in rural Cumberland County in eastern Tennessee. She died there in 1908, the only Bahá'í in the state. By the time of Gregory's 1910 trip, the faith had barely penetrated south of the Potomac. The four Bahá'ís in Virginia—one in Richmond and three in rural Fauquier County southeast of Washington—were essentially extensions of the Washington community. Two Bahá'ís lived in Florida, Alice D. Seely in Jacksonville and Mrs. Marvin Q. Arnold in the nearby resort village of Fernandina Beach. Anna Reinke, a young seamstress living on family land outside Austin, was the lone Bahá'í in Texas. Child of a German immigrant father and a native Texan mother, she had embraced the faith while visiting her sister in Washington, D. C.<sup>134</sup>

Other potential connections misfired. In Baltimore, Pearle Doty's husband, Henry "Harry" Archer Doty (b. 1874) was perhaps the first South Carolinian to encounter the Bahá'í Faith. A native of Charleston, Harry Doty was the son of a former Confederate cavalry officer and public school teacher. At the age of twenty he moved to Baltimore to

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<sup>134</sup> Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Austin, Texas, "Anna Reinke and the Early Years of the Bahá'í Faith in Austin," Austin Bahá'í Website, <http://www.austinbahai.org/?view=history>.



work in a laboratory. He met Pearle Battee at the boarding house where he was living, married her, and became a business partner with her and her father, Elisha Battee. In April 1896, the Dotys gave birth to a son, Henry Battee Doty.<sup>135</sup> Two years later, Pearle Doty accepted the Bahá'í Faith and began teaching it in Baltimore. Her interest in the new religion, however, coincided with the couple's separation. By 1900, Harry Doty was living in Charleston with his widowed mother (just a few blocks from Louis Gregory's family), while young Henry remained with his mother and grandfather in Baltimore.<sup>136</sup> Three years later, responding to a letter from the Baltimore community informing him of Pearle Doty's death, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed the hope that her son, as well as the boy's two living grandparents, would become Bahá'ís:

I hope her noble son may seek the Path wherein his mother walked, and may become better and more illustrious; nay, rather, the lights of his love may also take effect in his grandparents.<sup>137</sup>

However, there is no evidence that any member of Pearle Doty's extended family, whether in Ohio, Maryland, or South Carolina, maintained a connection to the Bahá'í Faith. Few of the people she attracted to the faith appear to have remained active Bahá'ís after her death.<sup>138</sup>

In 1910, the only Bahá'í group in the Deep South was in Fairhope, Alabama, a utopian community on Mobile Bay, where Paul Kingston Dealy, one of the early teachers of the faith in Chicago, and his family had lived for more than a decade. Born in New Brunswick to Irish immigrants, Dealy worked in shipping and railroad building before settling with his wife and children in Chicago. Largely self-educated, an ardent student of

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<sup>135</sup> Clark, "Baltimore," 112-4.

<sup>136</sup> *Twelfth Census, 1900*.

<sup>137</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1915), 444, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/tab-481.html#pg444>.

<sup>138</sup> Clark, "Baltimore," 114.

the Bible and a Populist party activist, Dealy was a proponent of the single-tax philosophy of American economic philosopher Henry George, whose magnum opus, *Progress and Poverty* (1879) proposed to promote economic democracy and productivity by abolishing all taxes except on the unimproved value of land. Dealy and his wife, Adelaide Stewart Dealy, attended Ibrahim Kheiralla's classes and embraced the Bahá'í Faith in early 1897.<sup>139</sup> He quickly became Kheiralla's chief assistant, teaching classes to new sets of seekers.<sup>140</sup> In 1898, only a year after becoming a Bahá'í, Paul Dealy moved to Fairhope, a settlement on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, recently chartered by the single-tax club in Des Moines, Iowa, to attempt to put George's philosophy into practice.<sup>141</sup> Dealy leased land and began to farm, and the next year his wife and their four sons arrived. They lost no time in teaching the faith to dozens of residents, black and white, in Fairhope and the county seat of Bay Minette, and for several years they maintained contact as best they could with the rest of the American Bahá'í movement.<sup>142</sup> Paul Dealy wrote a popular introduction to the Bahá'í Faith that went through several editions from 1902 to 1908; it was among the three books Pauline Hannen gave to Louis Gregory at his first Bahá'í meeting.<sup>143</sup> Several of the Dealys attended the landmark Bahá'í national convention in 1912 when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the guest of honor, and at least Adelaide had a profoundly moving and encouraging personal interaction with

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<sup>139</sup> Stockman, *Origins*, 86-8.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-4.

<sup>141</sup> For a history of the Fairhope colony, see Paul M. Gaston, *Man and Mission: E. B. Gaston and the Origins of the Fairhope Single Tax Colony* (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1993).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, *Origins*, 88.

<sup>143</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 96-9; Gregory, "Some Recollections," 2.

him.<sup>144</sup> Even in Fairhope, however, where a relatively liberal social environment promoted receptivity to the message of the faith and where Bahá'í settlers were exceptionally knowledgeable and committed, poverty and isolation seem to have inhibited the development of a strong local community. The colony itself was located on land that was too poor for farming, and for years the Dealys suffered financially along with their neighbors. At the same time, the Gulf Coast's relative distance from Chicago and Washington, the closest substantial Bahá'í communities, meant that it was hard for the Fairhope believers to travel, and Bahá'í visitors, who could have lent support to a struggling group, were rare. The Fairhope group did not follow the national trend of forming a local executive board with officers, a fund, and regular activities. The younger Dealys apparently did not remain believers, and most of the local converts appear to have drifted away from the faith.<sup>145</sup>

The experience of isolated believers from Fairhope to Charleston highlighted important problems for the nascent American Bahá'í movement. No matter the degree of sincerity and enthusiasm of the new believers, it was not clear how to nurture the faith and deepen the understanding of a few scattered individuals—perhaps only one or two in a city—who were so far away from the existing Bahá'í population centers. In a religion that specifically banned both clergy and paid missionaries, who had the responsibility for teaching and encouraging new believers and groups? When the only organization was at the local level, how could a regional or national consciousness be fostered and resources coordinated? Who would travel to teach the faith in new areas and strengthen new communities? Who would produce and distribute literature? Who would direct such efforts?

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<sup>144</sup> Paul K. Dealy was a delegate to the 1912 convention. *Star of the West* 3, no. 5 (5 June 1912): 2. At the same convention, "Mrs. Paul K. Dealy, of Fairhope, Ala., was called upon, after which a rising greeting to Alabama was given." *Star of the West* 3, no. 4 (17 May 1912): 32.

<sup>145</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 132-3.

Who would finance them? Such questions had arisen almost immediately after Ibrahim Kheiralla introduced the faith to Chicago in the mid-1890s. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the executive bodies in Chicago and Washington, and, to a lesser extent, New York, were attempting to foster communication and collaboration among local communities. Their first efforts were to circulate letters of supplication and loyalty, signed by every believer in the country, to be sent to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; these were followed by circular letters with news and information.<sup>146</sup> The Chicago community took the lead in publishing Bahá’í literature, and in 1902 it incorporated the Bahai Publishing Society.<sup>147</sup>

The first national Bahá’í organization was an outgrowth of efforts to build a temple (*mashriqu’l-adhkár*, “dawning-place of the mention of God”) in Chicago.<sup>148</sup> Inspired by a similar project in Russian Turkestan just outside the borders of Iran, a group of Chicago women asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahá if they, too, could build a temple. He assented, but insisted that all the believers in the country should work together for its construction.<sup>149</sup> In March 1909, delegates from most local groups attended the movement’s first national convention in

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>148</sup> The institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár was ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout all the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befitteth them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.” *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶31. Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specified the nature and scope of the institution, to be built in the heart of every city, town, and village: the central edifice, a nine-sided house of worship, dedicated to individual devotions and collective recitation of the sacred scriptures, surrounded by beautiful gardens and agencies of social, scientific, and educational service for the entire community.

<sup>149</sup> The temple initiative and its impact on the American Bahá’í community have been well documented. See Bruce Whitfield, *The Dawning-Place: The Building of a Temple, the Forging of the North American Bahá’í Community* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1984); R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, *Music, Devotions, and Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá’í History*, vol. 4 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1987), especially chapters 5 and 6; and Stockman, *Early Expansion*, chapters 20, 22, and 23.

Chicago. They decided to create a national organization, the Bahai Temple Unity, consisting of representatives of each local community in North America, with an Executive Board elected annually to oversee the organization's affairs.<sup>150</sup> In the first few years of its existence the Executive Board was primarily occupied with raising funds for and beginning construction of the temple, securing a large tract of land in Wilmette, a northern suburb of Chicago on Lake Michigan, and a distinctive design from Montreal architect Louis Bourgeois. As the movement's only national organization, the Executive Board grew in authority beyond the temple project. It quickly assumed responsibility for the Bahai Publishing Society, and it gradually began to coordinate teaching efforts across the country. But in late 1910, it was still a new and weak institution, with no experience and little administrative capacity to assist traveling teachers or maintain correspondence with isolated believers.<sup>151</sup>

In this context, Louis Gregory's first southern tour was an important step forward. As an initial foray into a large and difficult region of the country, the trip was an unqualified success. Gregory spoke to hundreds of people about the Bahá'í Faith and generally found a favorable response. According to Gregory's memoir, written decades later with the experience of a seasoned traveler and speaker, individuals became believers everywhere he went: "In every city, people were found who accepted the great Message, however crudely and abruptly given, and the spirit was powerful."<sup>152</sup> A summary of the trip in the national

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<sup>150</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 310-1.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 312-4.

<sup>152</sup> Gregory, "Some Recollections," 6.

newsletter included an assessment of the spiritual receptivity of African Americans and of prospects for the growth of the faith in the South:

Eight cities or towns were visited, and in the form of free public lectures the glad-tidings were heralded directly to about nine hundred souls. Indications are that the colored people of the south will be very deeply and vitally interested. The oppression of centuries having made many of them live very close to God, to them the Holy Spirit is a reality, and if the Message is presented with fragrance, their hearts respond and often yield.<sup>153</sup>

But the trip also highlighted the need for a more systematic approach to the expansion and consolidation of the religion. “Unfortunately,” Gregory noted in his memoir with poignant hindsight, “the system of follow-up work was not then developed.”<sup>154</sup> Indeed, without a systematic approach to deepening new believers, those Gregory had taught were more or less on their own, as the story of Alonzo Twine indicates. If a young and relatively unorganized Bahá’í movement failed to consolidate its foothold among the Midwestern radicals at Fairhope, how could it have put forth the herculean effort to establish a new community in Charleston—closer by rail to Washington but socially and culturally much farther from the Bahá’í mainstream? Gregory apparently left Twine with some Bahá’í literature and may have kept up correspondence with him for a time, but no Bahá’í teacher would visit South Carolina again for four years. In the heart of a society prone to eliminating young black men with new ideas, perhaps the existence of a group of Bahá’ís in Charleston would have prompted even swifter reaction. On the other hand, if even a few other members of Twine’s family, church, or profession had become believers with him and begun to think and act as a new community of faith, perhaps they could have afforded each other some measure of

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<sup>153</sup> “News Notes,” *Bahá’í News* 1, no. 18 (7 February 1911): 9.

<sup>154</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 6.

protection. Given his extreme isolation, it appears all the more remarkable that Twine stayed true to his new faith until the end.

### **Louis Gregory, Bahá'í Leader**

For Louis Gregory, the four years between his first teaching trip and the outbreak of World War One in Europe were a time of growth, change, and pain as he became more deeply committed to the Bahá'í Faith. Just months after returning from the Deep South, in February 1911, he was elected to fill a vacancy in the Washington community's Working Committee, marking the beginning of decades of leadership in the American Bahá'í movement. Gregory's election, by the believers in a local community that was still unsettled about how to include black members, made him the first person of African descent to serve on a Bahá'í administrative body in the United States. Just a year later, at the national convention of the Bahai Temple Unity in April 1912, he was elected to the organization's Executive Board. Although not reelected for several years, he was asked to serve in additional administrative capacities, including as a member of a committee to audit the Board's finances and a reporter on the proceedings of the annual convention.<sup>155</sup> Such tasks nurtured in him a strong regional and national perspective on the progress of the Bahá'í movement, exposed him to all segments of the community, and made him well-known to believers across the country—all factors that he brought to bear in subsequent teaching efforts.

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<sup>155</sup> Gregory's administrative duties were wide-ranging. He served for two years (1912 and 1918) on the Executive Board of the Bahai Temple Unity and for fourteen years (1922-1924, 1927-1932, and 1939-1946) on its successor institution, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. He was elected recording secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly and helped write its by-laws, and was appointed to the national Teaching Committee and the national Racial Amity Committee. He was also a frequent secretary, speaker, and reporter at the annual national convention. In 1951, in recognition of his long record of service and teaching, Shoghi Effendi posthumously appointed him a "Hand of the Cause of God," one of the special deputies of the Guardianship.

During 1911 and 1912, Gregory had a series of profound encounters with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that strengthened his bond with the center of the faith and cemented him in his life’s work of promoting interracial unity. From March to May of 1911, Gregory made a pilgrimage to the Bahá’í holy places in Palestine, stopping first to meet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Alexandria, Egypt. In the wake of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a political prisoner for fifty-five of his sixty-four years, was finally released from confinement and free to travel in the interests of his father’s faith. He first visited Egypt, where he recovered his health, introduced the faith to the liberal Arab press and to Muslim intellectuals at al-Azhar University, and received Gregory and other Bahá’í pilgrims en route to Haifa and ‘Akká. During several visits with Gregory, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá inquired about the racial divide in the United States and attitudes toward race among the Bahá’ís. He insisted that full acceptance of the Bahá’í teachings was the only real hope for unity between the races, and that there could be no hint of segregation within the Bahá’í community. He repeatedly encouraged the black and white believers to intermarry as proof of their freedom from prejudice. To reinforce the interracial and international ties among the believers, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sent Gregory to visit the tiny Bahá’í community in Germany on the return leg of his trip.<sup>156</sup>

Within the year, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá left Egypt for an extended journey to Europe and North America. From February to September 1912, he traveled by rail across the United States, addressing an astonishing number and variety of audiences, large and small, public and private. Press coverage was extensive as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warned that the world was on the brink of war and presented his father’s teachings as the remedy. His greatest impact,

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<sup>156</sup> See Morrison, *To Move the World*, ch. 5.



however, was on the Bahá'ís themselves. He encouraged them, answered their questions, and clarified their understanding of important concepts. He particularly stressed the importance of interracial unity and insisted that the Bahá'ís, who were as yet mostly white and northern, should spread the religion among all segments of society and in all parts of the country.<sup>157</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's public and private interactions during his visit both reinforced the Bahá'ís' commitment to building an interracial fellowship and significantly raised the profile of the faith among African Americans. Louis Gregory interacted closely with 'Abdu'l-Bahá during his two separate visits to Washington, where he addressed large mixed audiences at Rankin Chapel on the campus of Howard University, Gregory's alma mater, the Bethel Literary and Historical Society, of which Gregory was the president, at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, and several private homes. In his talks on these occasions 'Abdu'l-Bahá subverted contemporary American racial theory by boldly asserting the oneness of the human species and predicting that reconciliation between black and white Americans would have long-lasting international ramifications. He also turned American color imagery on its head, associating individual black believers with light and purity, extolling the beauty of mixed-race gatherings, and emphasizing the common spiritual reality of both blacks and whites: "In the clustered jewels of the races may the blacks be as

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<sup>157</sup> There are several published first-hand accounts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tour of North America: Mahmúd-i-Zaraqání, *Mahmúd's Diary: The Story of Mirzá Mahmúd-i-Zaraqání Chronicling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani with Shirley Macias (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997); Juliet Thompson, *Juliet Thompson's Diary*, with a preface by Marzieh Gail (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995); Agnes Parsons, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in America: Agnes Parsons' Diary*, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996). For a compilation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's public addresses during the trip, see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, comp. Howard MacNutt, 1921 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007). The most complete scholarly analysis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourses in North America is Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: 'Abdul-Bahá's Journey in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979).

sapphires and rubies and the whites as diamonds and pearls. The composite beauty of humanity will be witnessed in their unity and blending. How glorious the spectacle of real unity among mankind!”<sup>158</sup> As the guest of honor at a luncheon with some of Washington’s white elite, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá brushed aside race and class conventions by rearranging the place cards at the table and inviting Gregory to sit at his right hand. One witness recalled: “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.”<sup>159</sup> Gregory was also present with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Chicago, where he was a featured speaker at the fourth annual conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.<sup>160</sup>

There were also profound changes in Louis Gregory’s personal and professional life. To start with, Gregory found that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s advocacy of interracial marriage was more than theoretical. During Gregory’s pilgrimage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had encouraged a friendship between Gregory and English fellow-pilgrim Louisa Mathew, “a lady,” Gregory later recalled, “whose long range of accomplishments and great devotion to the Faith claimed admiration.”<sup>161</sup> Mathew, called Louise by her friends, was among the small group of Bahá’ís who accompanied ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to North America, where he gently suggested that the two should marry. In September 1912, while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was visiting the West Coast,

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<sup>158</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 57.

<sup>159</sup> Harlan F. Ober, “Louis G. Gregory,” in *The Bahá’í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 12, 1950-1954, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 668.

<sup>160</sup> “The Fourth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” *The Crisis* 4 (June 1912): 80. Louis Gregory attested that the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce invited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to speak in the city (likely the result of efforts by a lone white Bahá’í living there), but that an already full schedule prevented him from visiting the Deep South. See McMullen, *The Bahá’í*, 159.

<sup>161</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 6.

Gregory and Mathew were joined in the first interracial marriage in the American Bahá'í community. They took up residence together in Washington. Their marriage was legal there, but it was not always welcome as patterns of racial segregation became even more entrenched. In 1913, under the new administration of Woodrow Wilson, federal offices in Washington accelerated the workplace segregation of black and white employees, already underway in some departments. Large numbers of black employees resigned from the Treasury Department in protest; Gregory left to pursue a private law practice and a real estate business, neither of which proved particularly successful.<sup>162</sup>

It was not until November and December of 1915 that Gregory was able to make a second teaching trip to the South, spending about two weeks in Nashville and Atlanta. In Nashville, where he had been a college student, he cultivated professional and personal contacts, while in Atlanta, he worked closely with a young white believer who had moved there from Minneapolis and begun teaching blacks and whites.<sup>163</sup> By the time of this second trip, Gregory was a far more experienced believer than he had been five years before. Fresh from trying experiences in the Treasury Department and within the Washington Bahá'í community, he suffered no illusions about the difficulties of surmounting the racial divide. But he also brought with him a deeper understanding of the teachings of his religion, a closer relationship with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and a fulfilling new marriage that demonstrated the power of the faith to unify humanity.

Within the city's Bahá'í community, the Gregorlys found themselves in the middle of a renewed conflict over issues of race and class. According to explicit instructions from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, every Unity Feast—not just every fourth one—was open to all the believers.

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<sup>162</sup> See Morrison, *To Move the World*, ch. 7.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-4.

But meetings for inquirers, both public talks and home discussion groups, still presented a challenge. One group of black and white believers, encouraged by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s bold demonstrations of social equality during his visits to the city, wanted all meetings to be open to everyone. A small group of whites, insisting that “mixed meetings were the one serious obstacle to the growth of the Cause in this locality,” wanted to be able to have teaching meetings for whites only. A larger group of whites was unsure how to proceed. As Louise Gregory confided to another Washington believer, she and her husband often acted “the difficult part of peacemaker, explaining the difficulties of the white people to the colored & the point of view of the colored people to the white.”<sup>164</sup> Louis Gregory recalled the difficulties that arose within the young community:

Some of the friends, reading the command of Baha’u’llah which read: ‘Close your eyes to racial differences and welcome all with the light of oneness,’ interpreted it to mean that all barriers of race should be put aside in every meeting that was planned for teaching the Faith. Others knew the principle was wise and just, but felt that the time was not yet ripe for its application. One difficulty was finding places, either private or public, that were willing to welcome all races. In the same family, one or more members being Baha’i and the others not believers, the mixing of races would cause a family disturbance. Even where all the believers were free from prejudices some felt that it would upset inquirers after the truth if they were confronted too soon with signs of racial equality. One of the friends went so far as to state that some of the Baha’i principles would not be operative for a full thousand years! On the other hand, others were [insistent] that such principles should be upheld and applied even though the world should go to smash.<sup>165</sup>

In May 1914, one of the Washington Bahá’ís received a tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressing the situation. “I know about everything that is happening in Washington,” he wrote. “The sad, somber news is the difference between the white and the colored people.” He suggested the creation of three meetings for seekers, one for whites, one for blacks, and a mixed one for

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<sup>164</sup> Louise Gregory to Agnes Parsons, 21 December 1914, Agnes S. Parsons Papers, NBA, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 173.

<sup>165</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 4-5.

those who do not wish to bind themselves either way.” In the absence of unity among the believers, he said, “I can see no better solution to this problem.”<sup>166</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s letter failed immediately to create a consensus, and several separate meetings for inquirers threatened to degenerate into autonomous Bahá’í communities. Late in the year, when the Ottoman Empire entered the Great War on the side of the Central Powers, communication with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Palestine was cut off. Without further intervention from the head of the faith, the believers were left to resolve the crisis themselves. The impasse persisted until the spring of 1916, when the community decided to end the whites-only meeting and adopted a new policy. As Louis Gregory put it:

The decision was reached that meetings for teaching which were publicly advertised through the press should welcome and teach any who responded, regardless of race. On the other hand those holding private meetings for contacting and teaching their friends might use their own discretion about bringing the races together where such a step seemed premature.<sup>167</sup>

While unresolved feelings likely persisted after implementation of the new policy, the Washington Bahá’ís had passed through a severe test and come out firmly on the side of social equality and a fully integrated community. Their achievement, while seemingly modest from the perspective of the post-civil rights era, should not be underestimated. The Washington community was struggling with the extent of its public support for social equality between blacks and whites, at a time when public opinion and governmental policy were both heading in the direction of rigid separation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s vision, supported by those of his followers who understood his instructions and were willing to act on them, was to make the Washington community into an interracial fellowship without precedent in the

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<sup>166</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Edna Belmont, received 1 May 1914, Agnes S. Parsons Papers, NBA, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 75-6.

<sup>167</sup> Gregory, “Some Recollections,” 6.

United States, where black and white members interacted on terms of complete equality in study and teaching, worship, private social life, administration, and service to the wider society. Unlike other secular and religious organizations that maintained some interracial character, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s idea was not to unite autonomous black and white groups around a particular issue or project, but to create, in Bahá’u’lláh’s words, a “new race of men,” an all-embracing faith community that would provide a new model or framework for building social justice across lines of race, class, and gender. In this respect, Washington proved to be an important testing ground for the American Bahá’í movement. As a diverse urban center with a large black population, and as the seat of the federal government where Congressional authority ensured greater freedom for blacks than elsewhere in the South, Washington was perhaps an ideal location for the Bahá’ís’ first attempts at interracial community building. The Washington community made the first concerted attempts to teach the faith to African Americans, held the first integrated Feasts in the country, elected the first black man to a Bahá’í executive body, was home to the faith’s first interracial marriage, and united blacks and whites in the American Bahá’í movement’s first social and economic development initiatives—a Sunday school for children, a summer school in Colonial Beach, Virginia, and the Persian-American Educational Society, which sponsored health workers and teachers among the Bahá’ís of Iran.<sup>168</sup> Neither black nor white believers in Washington had any direct material benefits to gain from integration; indeed, there could be much to lose. They were venturing into uncomfortable, uncharted territory essentially out of devotion to the head of their religion, who insisted that interracial unity was a vital matter of spiritual principle. While sometimes halting and incomplete, their responses to the demands of their faith

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<sup>168</sup> Stockman, *Early Expansion*, 224, 226, 355-8.

resulted in a collective understanding of essential Bahá'í teachings and practices that set important precedents for the religion's expansion in the South.

## Chapter 2

### **The Divine Plan, the Great War & Progressive-Era Racial Politics, 1914-1921**

In Louis Gregory's home state and across the South, Bahá'í teachers in the early twentieth century faced a powerful regime of white supremacy that severely hampered the emergence of an interracial religious community. A patchwork of federal, state, and local laws and unwritten codes of interpersonal behavior that had begun to crystallize in the 1890s, the system of white supremacy incorporated class and gender hierarchies as well as persuasive religious justifications. In South Carolina, the system was largely complete by the mid-1910s, when the domestic effects of a new European war began to strain many of its practices and underlying assumptions. Economic dislocation and migration, persistent discrimination in the state's wartime mobilization efforts, the participation of thousands of young men in military service overseas, and the stirring rhetoric surrounding American participation in a war "to make the world safe for democracy"—all contributed to a new wave of protest by black Carolinians. Buffeted by many of the same forces and fearful of the stirrings among the state's black majority, whites responded with increased violence, part of a nationwide anti-black backlash in the immediate postwar years. The rising tide of violence in turn led white moderates in the state and region to spearhead the creation of a tentative new southern interracial movement.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> For a recent treatment of how South Carolina's politics of white supremacy thwarted efforts by both white and black Progressives, see Janet Hudson, *Entangled by White Supremacy: Reform in World War I-era South Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).



For Bahá'ís, the tumult of the war years seemed to create a heightened receptivity to their message. With a fresh mandate from 'Abdu'l-Bahá for teaching throughout North America, they worked with more urgency and better coordination than previously to spread the faith in the South, to promote its vision of interracial unity to broad national audiences, and to support the work of other emerging interracial organizations, in the South and across the country. In South Carolina, Louis Gregory and other teachers found many interested listeners. But some of the same factors that gave the incipient interracial movement a conservative cast—racial prejudice and demagoguery, the omnipresent threat of violence, and pervasive religious conservatism—hardened the state's soil against the growth of an indigenous Bahá'í movement.

### **Introducing the Divine Plan**

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war in Europe, teaching the faith was one of the dominant themes in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's relationship with the American Bahá'ís. Louis Gregory provides an example of the effects of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement and guidance in the life of one individual: Gregory's southern trips in 1910 and 1915, his visit to Germany in 1911, and his unflagging efforts to attract African Americans in Washington even as the believers there struggled over integration were all directly or indirectly the result of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promptings. More broadly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly emphasized the subject of teaching in countless tablets to individual believers, groups, and fledgling local executive bodies, and he frequently discussed it with American pilgrims, whose notes were often circulated widely upon their return.

In particular, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s 1912 tour provided a major impetus to the growth of the faith in the United States. In his public addresses, he articulated a compelling summary of the social and spiritual teachings of the faith and accelerated the Bahá’ís’ contact with liberal religious groups and progressive organizations. Extensive press coverage of his visit brought the faith to the attention of a much larger segment of the reading public. By closely observing their leader’s approach, many Bahá’ís gained greater proficiency in teaching, and through his encouragement, many individuals were inspired to make greater efforts of their own.<sup>170</sup> Between 1906 and 1916, the number of Bahá’ís in the United States more than doubled to nearly three thousand, with most of the increase occurring in the wake of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit. There were also “large numbers,” the Bahá’ís reported to the Census Bureau, “who attend Bahá’í meetings and are closely identified with the movement, but have not discontinued their connection with the churches.”<sup>171</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s repeated warnings of a coming world conflict gave the American Bahá’ís an even greater sense of urgency in spreading the faith. During his visit to California, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described Europe as “a storehouse of explosives ready for ignition,” with agitation in the Balkans the probable first spark.<sup>172</sup> In a talk at Stanford University, he associated the coming war with the apocalyptic vision of Christian scripture:

We are on the eve of the battle of Armageddon, referred to in the 16th chapter of Revelation. The time is two years hence, when only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe. The social unrest in all countries, the growing religious skepticism,

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<sup>170</sup> For a fuller discussion of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s encouragement of teaching, see Smith, “American Bahá’í Community,” 127-31.

<sup>171</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of 1916, quoted in Smith, “American Bahá’í Community,” 117.

<sup>172</sup> J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*, 5<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), 243-4.

antecedent to the millennium, are already here. Only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe as is prophesied in the verses of Daniel and in the Book of John.<sup>173</sup>

To a Montreal journalist he stated that war in Europe was a certainty:

All Europe is an armed camp. These warlike preparations will necessarily culminate in a great war. The very armaments themselves are productive of war. This great arsenal must go ablaze. There is nothing of the nature of prophecy about such a view .... [I]t is based on reasoning solely.<sup>174</sup>

In March 1914, the editors of *Star of the West*, the national Bahá'í magazine, echoed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's concern. They associated 1914, "the seventieth year of the Millennium" (i.e., since the Báb's declaration of his mission in 1844), with the seventieth year of the Christian era, when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews scattered. They said it would be a significant year in the "culmination of the old order of things," and humanity would be "swept by conflicting emotions and tend to go to extremes." The responsibility of the Bahá'ís, they held, was to teach:

In the midst of such crucial conditions the Bahais are called upon to proclaim the glad tidings of the Kingdom come on earth, and to manifest the characteristics of the people of the Most Great Peace. The Center of the Covenant, Abdu'l Baha, is calling souls to travel and spread the Message of the Kingdom far and wide. It is the spirit of the hour.<sup>175</sup>

Within months, Europe was engulfed in the Great War, and the dire predictions seemed to have materialized. The "spark" was the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in Sarajevo, which set in motion a complex system of military alliances. By August, the whole continent was "ablaze" with a conflict of awesome destructiveness that shocked the world.

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<sup>173</sup> Jean Masson, "The Bahai Movement—Is It the Coming Universal Religion," *Helena Daily Independent*, Feb. 2, 1919, quoted in *Star of the West* 10, no. 3 (28 April 1919): 33.

<sup>174</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Canada* (Forest, ON: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 1962), 51, quoted in [Universal House of Justice], *Century of Light* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 2001), 28.

<sup>175</sup> *Star of the West* 5, no. 1 (21 March 1914): 8.

In the United States, the government of President Woodrow Wilson attempted to maintain political neutrality, a difficult task as both the British and German navies began to target American civilian vessels in the North Sea. The outbreak of war initially dealt a blow to American exports that brought fears of a depression, and the American Bahá'ís felt the impact of the economic downturn. In early 1915, the convention of the Bahai Temple Unity approved a plan to finance part-time traveling teachers, but a lack of funds prevented its full implementation.<sup>176</sup> In the autumn, when Louis Gregory set out on his second teaching trip to the South, it was, like the first, at his own expense.<sup>177</sup> The economy recovered with the beginning of wartime production, but a far more devastating effect of the war on the American Bahá'ís was the virtual severing of communication with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. When the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers in the autumn of 1914, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's imprisonment was renewed. For a period of nearly four years, only a few letters found their way in or out of Haifa. Only after September 1918, when British forces took the city in the Battle of Megiddo, could the Bahá'ís communicate regularly with their leader.<sup>178</sup>

Given the circumstances, it was a welcome surprise when, in the summer of 1916, five believers received tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Bahá'ís in the northeastern, central, western, and southern regions of the United States and in Canada, respectively. They were immediately published in the September issue of *Star of the West* and quickly became known as the "Tablets of the Divine Plan." The tablets represented a further intervention by the head of the faith to accelerate the process of growth, calling the believers

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<sup>176</sup> Smith, "American Bahá'í Community," 132.

<sup>177</sup> For a discussion of Louis and Louisa Gregory's financial arrangements, see Morrison, *To Move the World*, 91-5.

<sup>178</sup> For an account of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Bahá'í holy places during World War One and a Bahá'í interpretation of the biblical battle of Armageddon, see Roderick Maude and Derwent Maude, *The Servant, the General, and Armageddon* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998).

in North America to spare no effort in spreading their religion to all parts of the continent. In each of the five tablets, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specifically named states and provinces with few or no Bahá’ís and directed teachers to travel to those parts to establish the faith. He mentioned some of the spiritual qualities that the teachers must have and promised them divine aid for their efforts. He also reminded the believers that he had urged them to action well before the outbreak of the world war; in the tablet to the western states he directed them to refer to his published talks on the subject so that they might “fully realize that *this is the time* for the diffusion of the fragrances.”<sup>179</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tablet for the South was sent care of Joseph Hannen in Washington. While addressed to “the friends and maid-servants of God in the Southern States,” for all practical purposes it was meant for the region’s two Bahá’í communities in Washington and Baltimore. Calling the believers “heralds of the Kingdom of God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assured them of divine assistance in the work of spreading the faith throughout the South. They would certainly need it: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specified that every state in the region would require attention, and he placed the burden of the work on the Washington community. “In the southern states of the United States,” he observed,

the friends are few, that is, in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Consequently, you must either go yourselves or send a number of blessed souls to those states, so that they may guide the people to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>180</sup>

The Washington community, by far the largest and best organized in the region and the one to which the tablet had been sent, was by default the base for such an undertaking. Joseph

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<sup>179</sup> *Star of the West* 7, no. 10 (8 September 1916): 89.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. The sixteen states referred to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are identical to the “Census South,” the southern region as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Hannen, the secretary of Washington's Working Committee, became the regional teaching coordinator, and within a few weeks of the tablets' publication, Louis Gregory and two other believers were on the road in the South.

Between late October and late December, Gregory visited fourteen of the sixteen southern states, including South Carolina, speaking mainly in churches, schools, and colleges. Back home in Washington, he reported that during the entire trip "probably more than fifteen thousand people were reached directly, most of them students, representing many sections and communities."<sup>181</sup> Receptivity to the message was high. "So slight was the opposition," Gregory wrote, "even in the ranks of the clergy, as to be not worthy of mention." In a Memphis meeting, for example, "over fifty persons, all in sight save one, after hearing the message and proofs, arose and said the Greatest Name."<sup>182</sup> "Without exception," Gregory added, "souls were found ready in cities where the message was given."<sup>183</sup> He said he would be returning to Charleston, South Carolina, "to deliver the Emancipation Day address, January 1. This will be an opportunity to tell them of real freedom."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Star of the West* 7, no. 17 (19 January 1917): 170.

<sup>182</sup> In Islamic tradition, the Qur'an contains ninety-nine names of God, while the "Greatest Name" of God remained hidden. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh wrote that the Greatest Name was *bahá'*, usually translated as "glory" or "splendor," the root of the prophetic title Bahá'u'lláh ("Glory of God") and of the proper name of the religion, the Bahá'í ("glorious") Faith. See Moojan Momen, *Islam and the Bahá'í Faith: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith for Muslims* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), 242. In the United States, Ibrahim Kheiralla's early presentation of the faith in a series of thirteen lessons culminated in disclosing to believers the Greatest Name of God, i.e. the identity of Bahá'u'lláh, a practice apparently echoed as late as 1916 in Gregory's talk in Memphis. See Stockman, *Origins*, 8-12.

<sup>183</sup> *Star of the West* 7, no. 16 (31 December 1916): 159.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

## **The Making of White Supremacy in South Carolina**

When Louis Gregory visited his home state in 1916 and 1917, he encountered a white supremacist regime at the height of its power. Born amidst profound social and economic changes after the collapse of Reconstruction, South Carolina's Jim Crow system was largely codified—in the form of a new constitution and enabling legislation at the state and local levels—between 1895 and 1915. Aimed at keeping political and economic control in the hands of the state's white elite, Jim Crow rested on twin pillars: the political disfranchisement of black men and the segregation of the races in public places. By the time of the Great War, with the system's most important legal provisions in place and a host of associated social practices firmly entrenched, South Carolina's black and white populations lived in largely separate worlds, their boundaries policed by pervasive violence. In such a stifling environment, interracial organizations were few and far between, advocating a moderation of the system's cruelest injustices rather than overt disagreement with its fundamental assumptions. In this context, the uncompromisingly radical interracialism of the Bahá'í teachings made the faith quite unusual and probably severely limited its opportunities for substantial growth.

The immediate background for South Carolina's white supremacist regime was the upheaval associated with rapid urbanization, industrialization, and rural decline. In the countryside, falling cotton prices, spiraling debts, and depleted and eroded soils drove hard-pressed farm families, white and black, to leave the land, while a rapid expansion of the railroad network and an explosion of industrial development encouraged them to settle in growing towns and cities. Beginning about 1880, cotton textile manufacturing emerged as the state's most important industry. Heeding the call of prominent opinion leaders in the

region for a “New South” of diversified agriculture and manufacturing that could compete with the industrializing North, local boosters in the Piedmont of the Carolinas and Georgia invested in textile mills as a sure means of economic development, civic improvement, and sustenance for impoverished rural folk (whites only, with few exceptions). The industry spawned dozens of new towns and greatly enlarged existing ones as companies built “villages” near the mills to house employees. Whole families migrated together, women and children forming the majority of mill workers, or “operatives.”

The leading edge of the state’s urban-industrial transformation, mill villages were also the locus of rising tensions of race, class, and gender that had far-reaching social and political impacts. In villages, former farm families found steady cash wages, decent housing, and far easier access to schools, churches, and social activities than in the ravaged countryside. But the transition was not always easy. At a practical level, overcrowding presented problems of sanitation and hygiene, and working conditions were often quite difficult. Men in particular felt an acute loss of personal autonomy as not only they, but also their wives and children, became wage earners, and as families were increasingly exposed to the influences of consumer culture and the mass media. For the state’s political elites, the rapid shift of so many white families from agriculture to industry was a mixed blessing. “Town people,” many of whom had fostered the development of the textile industry in the first place, came to see “mill people” as a potential threat to social order, whose interests as a class might differ markedly from those of the wealthy farmers and businessmen who, regardless of factional disputes within the Democratic Party, dominated local and state politics. Under the banner of the nationwide Progressive movement, South Carolina’s town



people campaigned to “clean up” the mill villages, while many operatives in turn resented what they perceived as meddling in their families’ affairs.<sup>185</sup>

While the rising textile industry provided a way out of rural poverty for whites in the Piedmont, most blacks remained poor, landless farm laborers, hit harder than whites by the region-wide agricultural downturn and, except for the grimmest jobs, effectively shut out of the textile mills. However, the number of black landowners across the state steadily increased during the 1880s and 1890s, and black literacy rates, while low overall, climbed as well. Blacks were a numerical majority in three-fourths of the state’s counties, and their presence in urban areas across the state was growing. In the larger towns, a proliferation of black churches, schools, colleges, businesses, and fraternal and benevolent societies providing a vibrant community life, and in Columbia and Charleston, blacks enjoyed substantially equal access to public accommodations such as street cars and theaters. While greatly reduced in numbers and influence by voting restrictions and gerrymandering during the 1880s, black voters still turned out at the polls, and a few continued to hold elected or appointed offices.<sup>186</sup> For whites in the midst of destabilizing social and economic change, evidences of black equality, prosperity, and continuing political influence after the collapse of Reconstruction were particularly galling. Indeed, as the urban-industrial transformation exposed increasing cleavages among white South Carolinians, the need to establish and defend white supremacy was one of the few points on which mill people, town people, and planter elites could all agree, and white men worked energetically to shore up their authority over their own wives and children and over African Americans.

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<sup>185</sup> The classic treatment of the social and political consequences of industrialization in South Carolina is David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

<sup>186</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 413-6.

Like others throughout the region, white South Carolinians in the late nineteenth century became increasingly preoccupied with what they perceived as an upsurge of black insolence, vice, and crime, especially sexual assault against white women. According to widely-held beliefs, during slavery, when the foundations of the region's racial hierarchy were secure, sexual assault by black men had been nonexistent; only during Reconstruction, when the natural order was temporarily reversed, did black men begin to desire social equality—informal mixing in public or private settings such as parties, churches, restaurants, theaters, or trains—with whites. According to popular wisdom, social equality had aroused in black men the desire for sexual equality, namely sexual access to white women—the ultimate challenge to white male supremacy. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, “social equality” had become a virtual euphemism for forced miscegenation between black men and white women. Borrowing from popular social Darwinist thought, whites believed that miscegenation would degrade the Anglo-Saxon race and undermine American civilization itself. Black men were increasingly portrayed as incapable of disciplining their carnal desires; in such a charged environment, virtually any transgression by a black man, regardless of the actual victim, could be construed as having sexual overtones.<sup>187</sup>

In this context of profound social, economic, and political dislocation, Benjamin Ryan Tillman, a prosperous Edgefield County farmer, emerged as the self-proclaimed defender of South Carolina's white rural folk and the principal architect of its Jim Crow regime. With the state's Farmers' Alliance as his base of support, he dominated the state's

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<sup>187</sup> Useful overviews of the concept of social equality and its relation to racial violence in the early twentieth century are Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York: Free Press, 1988), chapter 1; and Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 206-16. The classic treatment of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American racist ideology is George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. (1971; with new intro., Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

political culture from the late 1880s until his death in 1918.<sup>188</sup> In the lead up to elections in 1890, Tillman and his allies molded widespread agrarian discontent and white resentment of black advances into a potent political machine, wresting control of the Democratic Party from the Lowcountry planter elite that had long dominated the state. In desperation, the old guard appealed to the state's remaining black voters for support. Tillman handily won the governorship, but he retained one lesson from the election: as long as blacks could vote, they could potentially decide elections between Democratic factions and thus check the rule of the white minority. In 1895, after the legislature elected him to the U.S. Senate, Tillman called for a state constitutional convention in order to eliminate black political influence once and for all. Against the strenuous objections of a handful of black delegates, the new constitution included additional suffrage restrictions—a strict residency requirement, a poll tax, and a literacy test—that leaned most heavily on rural African Americans without directly running afoul of the Fifteenth Amendment. The new provisions worked; black voting declined precipitously beginning with the 1896 elections.<sup>189</sup>

But suffrage restrictions alone were not enough to completely neutralize black political influence. Violence, sponsored by or condoned by the state and supported by white leaders of thought, was needed to finish the job. In early 1898 in Lake City, a hamlet in

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<sup>188</sup> There is an impressive body of scholarship on the relationships among the agrarian revolt, black activism, and white supremacy. Two recent treatments of the region as a whole are Omar H. Ali, "Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1898" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2003), and Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. part 3. For the unique shape of the Populist movement in South Carolina, see William J. Gaboury, "George Washington Murray and the Fight for Political Democracy in South Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (July 1977): 258-69; Omar H. Ali, "Standing Guard at the Door of Liberty: Black Populism in South Carolina, 1886-1895," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 107, no. 3 (July 2006): 190-203; and Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman & the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>189</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 43.

Williamsburg County in the Pee Dee, local whites assassinated the black postmaster and burned down the post office.<sup>190</sup> On Election Day later that year in the Piedmont county of Greenwood, white mobs rampaged through the hamlet of Phoenix, leaving at least seven blacks and one white dead, after a local white Republican attempted to collect the signatures of black men who had been prevented from voting.<sup>191</sup> Nearly two years later, whites in coastal Georgetown County used a confrontation with local blacks as a pretext to bring down the state's last biracial local government, a "fusion" arrangement in which white Democrats and black and white Republicans divided the available offices. When some 1000 black citizens assembled around Georgetown's jail to defend a prominent black prisoner from a rumored lynching, the white mayor and sheriff appealed to the governor to send militia units from Sumter and Charleston. During several days of occupation, the state military arrested twenty local black leaders and raided a lodge hall suspected of containing a cache of weapons. True to a pledge by the white officials, the prisoner was not lynched. But fusion government in Georgetown—and black political participation in South Carolina—were as good as dead.<sup>192</sup> The year of the Georgetown violence, only 10,000 black men in the state, about a tenth of those eligible, were registered voters, and of these only 2000 or so dared to

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<sup>190</sup> For a summary of the Lake City incident in the context of increasing anti-black violence in the era of the Spanish-American War, see Piero Gleijeses, "African Americans and the War against Spain," in *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 320-45.

<sup>191</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 448.

<sup>192</sup> For accounts of the Georgetown violence, see Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 54-5; George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 481-4; and Tom Rubillo, *Trial and Error: The Case of John Brownfield and Race Relations in Georgetown, South Carolina* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2005).

go to the polls.<sup>193</sup> South Carolina's last black legislator, a representative from Georgetown County, left office two years later.<sup>194</sup>

With South Carolina's black citizens shut out of politics, whites of various class backgrounds united in an effort to segregate them in other aspects of public life. With thousands of black and white rural families crowding into towns and cities, the segregation movement focused on situations of close interpersonal contact in urban and industrial environments, for example, the very public stages of streetcar and sidewalk, elevator and restaurant, workroom and washroom. Where complete separation of the races was impractical, they sought to reinforce blacks' second-class status. In particular, segregation practices policed the behavior of black men, discouraging any expressions of their social equality with white men and minimizing opportunities for contact with white women.<sup>195</sup>

Often couched in the language of the nationwide Progressive movement, in which largely middle-class activists led efforts to bring order to burgeoning urban areas, segregation was accomplished through a patchwork of state laws and local ordinances, official and unofficial business practices, and unwritten codes of interpersonal behavior. South Carolina's Constitution of 1895 codified the state's nearly universal practice of segregating public schools—where otherwise black boys might sit next to white girls—and confirmed an earlier statutory prohibition of interracial marriage. An act in 1898 required segregated seating in railway cars; another in 1904 segregated steamboats and ferries. Municipal ordinances in Columbia in 1903 and Charleston in 1912 confirmed the segregation of urban

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<sup>193</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 445.

<sup>194</sup> Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 61.

<sup>195</sup> For the development of legal racial segregation in South Carolina, see Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 36-47; and Pauli Murray, ed., *States' Laws on Race and Color* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 406-19.

streetcars, already practiced by the streetcar companies. (All of these included exceptions only for black women attending whites as nurses or nannies.)<sup>196</sup> In 1905, the legislature prohibited fraternizing between black and white troops in the state militia. The next year, it required segregated dining facilities at train stations. In 1917, the state's railroad commission reinforced segregation at train stations by ordering companies under its jurisdiction "not to unload white and colored passengers at adjoining ends of their respective coaches."<sup>197</sup> In 1912, in response to violent clashes between white textile mill workers and poor blacks and an attempt by two black brothers to build a hotel on a prominent street, Greenville city officials mandated residential and commercial segregation by designating all-white and all-black blocks.<sup>198</sup>

An act in 1915 confirmed that in South Carolina, industrialization and white supremacy went hand in hand. The state's Factory Law mandated segregation in the state's cotton textile industry, where it was already widely practiced. According to the new law, companies could not allow black and white employees to work in the same room; to use the same doorways, pay windows, and stairways at the same time; or to use the same toilets, drinking water buckets, pails, dippers, and glasses at any time. Because production rooms were already full of white women and children, most textile employment was thus effectively closed to blacks. There were exceptions for firemen in the boiler rooms that powered the mills, floor scrubbers, and "carpenters, mechanics, and others engaged in the repair or erection of buildings"—the most obviously subordinate, most menial, and lowest-paying

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<sup>196</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 47.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>198</sup> Archie Vernon Huff, Jr., *Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 264-5.

jobs. With the Factory Law, the General Assembly made it clear that the state's leading industry—and the upward mobility it represented—were for whites only, and that blacks' primary place in the new order was in the fields and the kitchens.

While the rhetoric of South Carolina's Progressives appealed to reason, order, and good governance, the maintenance of white supremacy depended in fact on corruption and violence. The legal system provided one means of control, eliminating large numbers of young black men from free society. Laws regarding vagrancy, civil disorder, contracts, crop liens, and mortgages strongly disfavored blacks, and black men—mostly young, rural, poor, and marginally literate—were disproportionately convicted for misdemeanors and felonies and sentenced more harshly than their white counterparts. In 1910, for example, when African Americans made up fifty-five percent of the state's population, they numbered eighty percent of the convicts in the state penitentiary; ninety-three percent of those in county jails, workhouses, and chain gangs; eighty-five percent of those in municipal jails and workhouses; and one hundred percent of those sentenced to death. Prisoners were routinely subjected to inadequate food, shelter, and medical care, overwork, and brutal corporal punishment.<sup>199</sup> Legal violence alone was insufficient. At least sixty blacks—mostly men who demonstrated political or economic independence or violated racial mores—died at the hands of lynching mobs in the state between 1900 and 1915, and there were almost as many reported lynching attempts.<sup>200</sup>

One of South Carolina's most prominent and vocal advocates of lynching was Coleman Livingston Blease of Greenwood, an early and fervent Tillmanite who served as

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<sup>199</sup> Newby. *Black Carolinians*, 73.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

governor from 1911 to 1915 and was a perennial candidate for governor or U.S. senator thereafter. Drawing most of his support from dispossessed white farmers and textile operatives, Blease made his career exploiting the era's social tensions. He opposed various elements of the Progressive agenda—including compulsory education, vaccinations and health examinations for children, the use of white taxpayers' money to fund black schools, safety inspections of factories and textile mills, and laws to reduce the work week—because, he said, they all interfered with the rights of white husbands and fathers to direct their own families' affairs.<sup>201</sup> A vicious race baiter, Blease openly called white men of all class backgrounds to stand together against black assaults on their homes, their families, and their civilization. "The pure-blooded Caucasian," Blease asserted, "will always defend the virtue of our women, no matter what the cost.... If rape is committed, death must follow."<sup>202</sup> In October 1911 in the Anderson County mill town of Honea Path, a white mob led by a state legislator and a local newspaper editor lynched and dismembered Willis Jackson, a black youth accused of attacking a white girl. When the editors of *The State* called for an investigation, Blease retorted that the governor's office would never move against white citizens for "punishing that nigger brute." Rather, Blease said he would have gladly resigned as governor "and come to Honea Path and led the mob."<sup>203</sup>

For his part, Ben Tillman used his Senate seat to garner nationwide support for lynching, both in official Washington and as a favorite speaker on the Chautauqua circuit. In

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<sup>201</sup> As one historian has noted, for Blease, such regulations subverted the natural order, treating white men in the textile mills as a class of dependents alongside blacks, women, and children. Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 31.

<sup>202</sup> Coleman L. Blease, gubernatorial inaugural address, 1911, quoted in Simon, *Fabric of Defeat*, 32.

<sup>203</sup> *The Crisis* 3 (December 1911): 61, quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 296.



1907 he asked his Senate colleagues if they would support “the right to have a fair trial and be punished in the regular course of justice” for a black man who had raped a young white woman. Responding to his own question, he said:

So far as I am concerned, he has put himself outside the pale of the law, human and divine. He has sinned against the Holy Ghost. He has invaded the holy of holies. He has struck civilization a blow, the most deadly and cruel that the imagination can conceive. It is idle to reason about it; it is idle to preach about it. Our brains reel under the staggering blow, and hot blood surges to the heart. Civilization peels off us, any and all of us who are men; and we revert to the original savage type whose impulses under such circumstances have always been to ‘kill! kill! kill!’<sup>204</sup>

The inflammatory rhetoric of Blease and Tillman differed mainly in degree, not in kind, from that of other South Carolina white leaders at the state and local level. Most politicians, newspaper editors, prominent businessmen, and Christian clergymen either condoned the use of violence to maintain white supremacy or remained silent. Those who did speak out often expressed less concern for the black victims than for what extralegal violence might do to the moral fiber—and the reputation abroad—of white South Carolinians. In 1906, for example, Governor Duncan Clinch Heyward arrived on the scene of the impending lynching of Bob Davis, who was accused of assaulting two teenage girls, one black and one white, in Greenwood County. Heyward, perhaps the most refined of the state’s Progressive-era governors, said he agreed that Davis was a “black devil and fiend of hell,” but for the sake of “the supremacy and the majesty of the law,” he appealed to the mob to allow a proper trial. The mob listened respectfully, and decided to shoot Davis rather than burn him alive.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *Congressional Record*, 59<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 440-4, quoted in Whitfield, *Death in the Delta*, 4.

<sup>205</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 64-5.

## **Black Accommodation and the Politics of Racial Uplift**

In the face of disfranchisement, segregation, and overwhelming violence, black leaders in early-twentieth century South Carolina were hard pressed to do much more than hold their communities together. Many ministers and leading professionals followed the lead of Booker T. Washington, the charismatic founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the country's most prominent black spokesman between 1895 and his death in 1915. Washington articulated a doctrine of racial uplift that inculcated self-help, self-discipline, and the acquisition of middle-class values and property as moral and religious duties. In his writings and public addresses, he held that full citizenship and integration into American society were not universal rights, but privileges to be conferred by the more powerful race. Those responsible for blacks' degraded condition were blacks themselves. Rather than pursuing fruitless political agitation, a liberal education that held little relevance to the material needs of the race, or the "artificial forcing" of blacks into public or private social contact with whites—the greatest follies of the Reconstruction period—he held that blacks could only make themselves worthy of citizenship by practicing thrift, wisdom, and temperance, acquiring training in agriculture and manual trades, and building a strong economic foundation that would make them invaluable to their white neighbors.<sup>206</sup>

As rates of lynching rose dramatically across the region, Washington set a tone of tacitly accepting white justifications regarding the sexual crimes of black men and carefully

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<sup>206</sup> Booker T. Washington, Address at the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, May 22, 1900, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 5, 1899-1900, ed. Louis Harlan et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 530. The classic biography of Washington (in two parts) is Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) and *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). More recent treatments include Robert J. Norell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

disavowing any claim to social equality. “In all things that are purely social,” he famously reassured whites in his address to the Atlanta International and Cotton States Exposition in 1895, “we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” For blacks, he pointedly added: “The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.”<sup>207</sup> Speaking to a mixed audience at Charleston’s Emmanuel AME Church in 1909, Washington called social equality an “absurd notion” from the “foolish phase” when blacks were just emerging from slavery. Now, he told the whites present, blacks knew better:

Nowhere does the negro desire to intermingle in a social way with members of the white race, and especially is that so in the South. I think you will find that the more the negro is educated, the more he gets to understand himself and the world, the more he finds satisfaction in the company of his own people, the less he desires to force himself in any place that he is not wanted.<sup>208</sup>

In turn-of-the-century South Carolina, most black leaders seemed to take their cue from Washington. With the doors to voting and office holding essentially closed, the importance of churches in the nexus of black community institutions—as well as the leadership roles of black ministers—only grew in the early twentieth century. But in the face of overwhelming white power and violence, the position of ministers depended on their abandonment of black political and religious visions of the emancipation era. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Christianity of the slaves had pronounced messianic and millennial overtones, with clear implications for the organization of society: they expected a divine intervention, the “Day of Jubilo,” that would overturn an unjust order, punish their

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<sup>207</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (1901; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1919), 223-4.

<sup>208</sup> *Charleston (SC) News and Courier*, 20 March 1909, 5.

oppressors, and lead them into freedom.<sup>209</sup> After the Union victory, independent black churches in the former Confederacy became the vital centers of black community building and political organization. Congregations established Sunday schools and literacy classes; disseminated news; resolved disputes among members; assisted members with burial expenses or relief during illness; hosted speeches by Republican activists and meetings of the local Union League; and organized local labor protests. During the high tide of Reconstruction, black preachers and exhorters often became formal political leaders as well.

For African American Christians, there was no stark separation of reality into the secular and the spiritual. As a white lawyer from Barnwell County, South Carolina, reported during Reconstruction, “the great mass of our plantation hands” relished preaching, funerals, and political speeches—in no particular order. “They are of a very religious turn of mind,” he observed, “a superstitious people, and believe very strongly in the spiritual world . . . .” Referring to the Union League, the extensive network of grassroots Republican clubs, he added that “they are organized into leagues,” and “those leagues are opened by prayer, for the preachers are generally there, and they are counseled as they love their immortal souls to vote no other than the straight republican ticket.”<sup>210</sup> James L. Orr, a former South Carolina governor, could not say for sure that all the black politicians of his native Anderson County were preachers, but he did believe that “most of the preachers are politicians.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*, 47.

<sup>210</sup> *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, South Carolina, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 174, quoted in Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 234.

<sup>211</sup> *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States*, South Carolina, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 16, quoted in Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 234.

While the uplift ideology of the emancipation era never entirely disappeared from the rhetoric of the black church, the totality of white control and the vulnerability of black communities in the early twentieth century relegated it to a quiet spot on a back bench. Most black clergymen seem to have counseled an escapist response to injustice. As educator Benjamin Mays, who grew up in rural Greenwood County in the wake of the Phoenix riot, recalled:

I heard the Pastor of the church of my youth plead with the members of his congregation not to try to avenge the wrongs they suffered, but to take their burdens to the Lord in prayer. Especially did he do this when the racial situation was tense or when Negroes went to him for advice concerning some wrong inflicted upon them by their oppressors.... Members of the congregation screamed, shouted, and thanked God. They felt relieved and uplifted.... They had their faith in God renewed and they could stand it until the second Sunday in the next month when the experience ... was duplicated.<sup>212</sup>

If they directly addressed worldly concerns at all, many ministers preached a theology that grafted new notions of class advancement onto traditional Protestant doctrines such as original sin. They taught that many of the current problems facing blacks were of their own making, frequently condemned crime, lawlessness, drinking, and sexual immorality among blacks but seldom criticizing whites or the Jim Crow system they had created. Personal regeneration and uprightness coupled with economic striving, not confrontation with whites, were the keys to success and security for the whole race. In 1904, for example, the annual convention of South Carolina's black Baptists called their fellows "to lead orderly lives, to be law abiding citizens, to educate their children to remain on the farms instead of seeking the evils and pleasures of the cities, to be industrious and economical and to accumulate

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<sup>212</sup> Benjamin E. Mays, *The Negro's God as Reflected in His Literature* (New York, 1938), 26, quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 153.

property.”<sup>213</sup> If ministers did denounce lynching, they blamed black rapists. The same year, a committee of the South Carolina conference of the AME Church urged the state’s blacks to “deplore both lynching and the crime which sometimes provokes it, rid ourselves of the fiends, and help to promote better relations between the races.”<sup>214</sup>

In the twenty years before the First World War, South Carolina’s most prominent black leader was Rev. Richard Carroll of Columbia (ca. 1859-1929), an ardent exponent of the gospel of self-help. Carroll’s work set the tone for race relations in the state. He played the role of spokesman for black South Carolinians and chief mediator between them and the state’s white elite, who often compared him to Booker T. Washington. Like Washington, Carroll’s persuasive combination of Protestant orthodoxy and racial accommodation made him a bulwark, if partially unwitting and unwilling, of white supremacy.

Carroll’s life, like Washington’s, embodied the story of racial uplift. Born a slave in Barnwell County just before the Civil War, Carroll was a mulatto who never knew his father and whose mother died while he was still a child. He worked his way through school at Benedict Institute (later Benedict College) in Columbia, founded in 1878 by the American Baptist Home Mission Society, a northern group. After becoming a minister, he went to work for the Society as an itinerant missionary. His leadership extended to several areas of black community development. In 1899, with significant white financial support, he operated an industrial home for orphaned and wayward black children. In 1905, again with white backing, he started a newspaper, the *Southern Ploughman*, and in 1906, an employment agency in Columbia. The next year, he inaugurated a series of annual “race conferences” which, for more than a decade, would draw representatives of South Carolina’s

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<sup>213</sup> *News and Courier*, 15 December 1904, 15, quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 150-1.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 December 1904, 10, quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 151.

black elite to Columbia to hear black and white speakers discuss the amelioration of the “Negro problem.” Throughout his career, he was a frequent contributor to the state’s white newspapers, holding the ear of white South Carolina as no other black man. As Washington noted regarding Carroll,

there is no discounting the fact that he has tremendous influence with the white people of South Carolina. Papers like the Columbia State stand by him and believe him thoroughly.... When I was in South Carolina last I was surprised to see how he had the help and influence of mayors and state officials.<sup>215</sup>

Carroll and his allies, black and white, encouraged black South Carolinians to make the best of segregation by building up their own farms, businesses, and community institutions—and by staying clear of politics. “If voting antagonizes the white man,” Carroll wrote, “if voting will retard the progress of the race, then do not vote. Let the white man do the voting. Let us get the cash.”<sup>216</sup> In the face of overwhelming white supremacy, Carroll held that blacks should

ask and appeal to the stronger race for justice and an equal chance to make a living, and let us seek to become good American citizens, minding our own business at all times, avoiding the courts and friction with the white race.<sup>217</sup>

Carroll was also careful to publicly disavow any claim to social equality with whites. He explained racial violence as the result of socializing between poor black and white men:

The lawless element among white and colored are [sic] growing. On the Sabbath day the woods are full of gamblers of both races in and around all the large cities. Whiskey selling is carried to the very doors of the colored churches. Both races violate the law and nothing is done about it until trouble arises. Whenever there is conflict between the races, it is started by this element of colored and white lawbreakers, who practice “social equality” in the darkness. You can trace most of

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<sup>215</sup> Booker T. Washington to Oswald Garrison Villard, Aug. 9, 1910, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 10, 1909-1911, ed. Louis Harlan et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 364.

<sup>216</sup> *The State*, 3 April 1905, quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 179.

<sup>217</sup> *The State*, 16 September 1906, quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 179.

the race riots to the dens, dives, gambling places, and houses of ill-fame, where negroes and white men meet.<sup>218</sup>

In 1899, before the opening of his children's home, he appealed to whites in *The State*:

We do not ask you to put us in your homes, but to help us get homes. We do not ask to get into your church pews, but to help us build churches. We do not ask to get into your school houses, but want you to help us build schools. We do not want intermarriage with your race, but want you to help us produce women of our race. (They are all colors, and we are satisfied.) We do not ask you to let us run the government, but ask you to see that the government gives us justice. We do not ask you to give us "40 acres and a mule," but a chance to buy and time to pay.<sup>219</sup>

In advance of Carroll's first race conference in 1907, leaflets appeared in Columbia claiming that Booker T. Washington, the keynote speaker, "believes in and practices social equality, and that he walks with and eats with white ladies." From the conference podium, Carroll ridiculed such accusations, countering that the author only wanted to prejudice whites against the conference and damage its organizer.<sup>220</sup>

If Carroll was the most prominent exponent of racial uplift in early twentieth-century South Carolina, easily its most eloquent and prolific apologist was Alonzo Twine's former pastor, Rev. Irving E. Lowery (1850-1929). Born a slave near Lynchburg in Sumter County, as a boy Lowery worked as the personal servant and messenger of his master, John Frierson, a pious Methodist layman. A teenager at emancipation, Lowery attended a makeshift school near the plantation, becoming one of the thousands of freedpeople of all ages flocking to schools for the first time. He was also part of an upsurge in black church membership, as former slaves left white-controlled biracial churches to form their own congregations. Lowery became a Methodist, but, unlike his former master, he joined the Methodist

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<sup>218</sup> *The State*, 27 September 1906, quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 176-7.

<sup>219</sup> *The State*, 18 April 1899, quoted in John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 373.

<sup>220</sup> *News and Courier*, 25 January 1907.



Episcopal Church, the northern branch of Methodism. Possessed of greater material means than the independent black denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches, the northern Methodists sent missionaries and teachers among the freedpeople in large numbers and created a substantial branch among black Southerners.<sup>221</sup>

Lowery found new educational opportunities in a series of three schools sponsored by the northern Methodists. He went first to Baker Bible Institute, the church's new seminary for freedpeople in Charleston. Then he became the first student to enroll in Claflin University, which initially offered only grammar and normal school training (and merged with Baker in 1870), in Orangeburg. He finished his formal education at Wesleyan Academy, a college-preparatory school in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. After returning to South Carolina in 1874, he was stationed in a succession of churches in cities and towns across the state, including Summerville, Greenville, Charleston, Aiken, and Columbia.<sup>222</sup> He also became a prolific writer, at various times reporting for or editing at least five newspapers, black and white.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> In 1844, white southern Methodists split from their national denomination over the issue of slavery, forming the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. After emancipation, black Methodists left their former masters' congregations in droves to form separate, black-controlled congregations, which had their choice of new denominational affiliations. While most joined either the African Methodist Episcopal Church or its smaller counterpart, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, both independent black denominations with their origins in antebellum free black communities, others affiliated with the northern Methodists. William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 71-3.

<sup>222</sup> I. E. Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days, or A Story Based on Facts, with Brief Sketches of the Author by the Late Rev. J. Wofford White of the South Carolina Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church and An Appendix* (Columbia: The State Co. Printing, 1911), 15-28.

<sup>223</sup> *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), 4 January 1930. Lowery's obituary in the *Leader* notes he reported for the *Daily Record*, *The State*, and the *Palmetto Leader* in Columbia. He was also an editor of the *Watchman and Defender* in Timmonsville and wrote for the *Southern Indicator* in Columbia.

In addition to his newspaper career, in 1911 Lowery published a book that explained his racial and religious worldviews. Entitled *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days, or A Story Based on Facts ...*, the work combined autobiographical vignettes and journalistic essays in an exposition of racial uplift theology. The book, Lowery stated in his introduction, had two objectives. The first was to set the record straight regarding slavery. “Others,” he wrote, “have written of the evil side of those days, but the author felt it to be his mission to write of the better side.”<sup>224</sup> To that end, the bulk of the work was a series of vignettes depicting an idyllic life on the Frierson plantation, from the good bread and biscuits made by “Old Granny,” the cook, to the slaves’ practices at weddings, funerals, and Christmas. The closing vignette recounted the sad “breaking up” of the plantation at emancipation.

Lowery’s second objective was to show blacks that “things are now taking a turn for the better” in the South.<sup>225</sup> The trouble with the majority of blacks, he opined, was that:

they look on the darker side of the picture too much. They read the daily papers and note the cases of lynchings, burnings, murders and the outrages committed on members of the race generally, and say the future of the negro in the South is dark, and is growing darker still.<sup>226</sup>

This analysis proved incomplete, Lowery argued, because the “best white people” and the newspapers were opposed to such violence. Accepting uncritically the popular white contention that rapes committed by black men against white women were the root cause of lynching, Lowery argued that because “the brutal offense against the purity of womanhood”

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<sup>224</sup> Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 10.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-4.

had decreased, so had anti-black violence.<sup>227</sup> As evidence of whites' goodwill, he noted plans by the United Confederate Veterans to erect a monument to loyal former slaves.<sup>228</sup>

In a lengthy appendix, "Signs of a Better Day for the Negro in the South," Lowery presented more evidence of what he considered whites' positive attitudes and concrete contributions to black welfare. The appendix consisted of a series of essays originally published in the *Columbia Daily Record*, a white newspaper, under such titles as "White Patrons of Negro Business Enterprises," "White Contributors toward the Building of Negro Churches," and "Current Incidents of Negro Industrial Achievements." One essay recounted a chance meeting in a railway station with South Carolina's newly-elected junior U.S. Senator, Ellison D. "Cotton Ed" Smith, a fellow Lynchburg native.<sup>229</sup> In Lowery's telling, the two had played together as boys—a doubtful claim, since Smith was fourteen years younger—and they fell into warm conversation as if they were young again. Smith assured Lowery: "The motto of the South today is: Every man, irrespective of race or color, shall have a chance in the race of life."<sup>230</sup> This statement, Lowery insisted,

should fill the negro with hope and with aspiration, for there is a better day ahead of him right here in the land that gave him birth. Only let him cease from crime; let him be industrious, and let him educate his children and the white people of the South will see to it that he shall have fair chance in the race of life.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>229</sup> Smith served in the U.S. Senate from 1909 until his death in 1944. He fought against the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment because he feared it would enfranchise black women as well as white, and in the 1930s he emerged as an opponent of the New Deal and of the Democratic party coalition that included northern African Americans. At the 1936 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Smith famously walked out of the hall when a black minister stood to give an invocation. Smith repeated the story many times afterwards: "And he started praying and I started walking. And as I . . . walked across that vast rotunda, it seemed to me that old John Calhoun leaned down from his mansion in the sky and whispered in my ear, 'You did right, Ed.'" See Edgar, *South Carolina*, 507.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

In another essay, “Friendly Expressions of Southern White People for the Negro,” Lowry quoted extensively from the published remarks of prominent white citizens, including Christian ministers, in support of racial uplift theology. In one excerpt, Henry Watterson, a newspaper editor from Louisville and a leading New South booster, defended the Tuskegee model of education to a New York audience. Watterson argued that while the Negro had made great progress since emancipation, he was “yet in a state of racial childhood. As he realizes this, the faster he will grow, the quicker he will learn, and the sooner he will reach his racial manhood.”<sup>232</sup> Blacks, Watterson counseled, should focus on acquiring the “habits of method and order; habits of tenacity and acquisition; habits of sustained industry and sobriety” without which they would not prosper.<sup>233</sup> And they should accept racial segregation as part of their Christian duty:

He is a foolish black man who thinks because the mirage of social equality, which would prove a curse rather than a blessing, is denied him, that the white man hates him.... No man should go where he is not wanted; true, self-respecting men dismiss the very thought of it, going their own way, hoeing their own row, and giving praise to God that their happiness is within themselves, and beyond the reach of any man, be he white or black, king or vassal.<sup>234</sup>

Lowery also quoted a sermon, entitled “Give the Negro the Gospel,” by Rev. Alexander Sprunt, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Charleston, as evidence of whites’ support for black education. Sprunt argued a theology of racial uplift as effectively as Washington, Carroll, or Lowery. He was careful to specify that “some forms of education may not be helpful” to blacks, and that he supported only the kind that would “elevate them, and make

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 173-4.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 174.

them the best of citizens,” namely, basic literacy and training for the manual trades.<sup>235</sup> Likewise, he continued, “some forms of religion are of no benefit to the negro”; the duty of white Christians was to give blacks a “pure religion” that would make them “most enlightened Christians.”<sup>236</sup> In Sprunt’s view, the Tuskegee model of education and traditional Protestantism were the keys to black advancement. By endorsing such comments, Lowery made clear his own beliefs that white supremacy was essentially benevolent, and that by learning the virtues of capitalism, eschewing social equality and citizenship rights, and holding fast to Protestant orthodoxy, blacks could indeed achieve progress within it.

Given the totality of white supremacy, other black Carolinians, including clergymen, school teachers, college professors, and businessmen, to adopt attitudes similar to those of Carroll and Lowery. In cities and towns across the state, black women were prominent in local racial uplift efforts. They worked both through denominational “women’s auxiliaries” and a network of secular women’s clubs, whose membership often overlapped. In 1909 the secular clubs organized the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs with the motto, “Lifting as We Climb.”<sup>237</sup> Regardless of black women’s leadership roles in local communities, it was black men who generally represented the interests of the race to the state’s white power-brokers. And they most often did so with marked deference. Like Benjamin Mays’ childhood pastor, who “accepted the system and made no effort to change it,” black leaders sought adjustments to the white supremacist industrial order rather than call

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 175-6.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 469. The best treatment of black women’s organizing at a regional and national level, focusing on the National Baptist Convention, is Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1993). For a study of Evans, see Darlene Clark Hine, “The Corporeal and Ocular Veil: Dr. Matilda A. Evans (1872-1935) and the Complexity of Southern History,” *Journal of Southern History* 70 (Feb. 2004): 3-34.

that order itself into question.<sup>238</sup> At best, they had to ply an uneasy course between accommodation and protest, choosing their issues and their language carefully. In 1910, for example, a group of prominent educators—including Thomas E. Miller, a former Reconstruction lawmaker and president of the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural, and Mechanical College in Orangeburg; N. J. Frederick, principal of Columbia’s only black high school; and Rev. W. D. Chappelle, the president of Allen University in Columbia—appealed to the South Carolina Department of Education for modest improvements in the state’s underfunded system of black schools. Moved by “a conservative spirit and judgment” and “guided by the purest of motives and highest conceptions,” they asked for more money for libraries and school buildings, more vocational education, additional summer schools for black teachers, and a black supervisor of rural schools who, they were careful to insist, would work “by permission, and under the control of the state superintendent.”<sup>239</sup>

Conciliatory rhetoric aside, the harsh realities of African-American life in Progressive-era South Carolina occasionally forced even Carroll to admit the ultimate ineffectiveness of his self-help theology. He was disillusioned with white South Carolinians’ opposition to voting rights even for qualified black men (such as himself), and he was alarmed at the lack of personal safety afforded blacks, high and low alike. Amid the welter of white violence, perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of the limits of racial uplift was the lynching of Anthony Crawford in 1916.<sup>240</sup> Born to slaves in the last year of the Civil

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<sup>238</sup> Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography*, rev. ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 16.

<sup>239</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 93.

<sup>240</sup> This summary of the events surrounding Crawford’s lynching is based on Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 309-12, and Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 15-6.

War, Crawford owned 427 acres of good farmland outside the town of Abbeville in South Carolina's lower Piedmont. As the head of a large family, the secretary of his local AME congregation, and a successful cotton farmer, Crawford embodied the racial uplift ideal. As one contemporary observer noted, "Anthony Crawford's life and character embodied everything that Booker T. Washington held to be virtuous in a Negro."<sup>241</sup> On Saturday morning, October 21, 1916, he came to town to sell his cotton and got into an argument with a white storeowner over the offering price. The sheriff arrested Crawford and took him to jail, where he was initially protected from a gathering white mob. Released on bail, he returned to the gin where his cotton was waiting, only to be attacked by the mob. Crawford resisted, crushing the skull of one assailant, but was beaten unconscious before the sheriff took him back into custody. When rumors circulated that Crawford might be removed from the county for his protection, the mob broke into the jail and kicked Crawford to death. Tying a rope around his neck, they dragged the corpse through the black sections of town, hung it from a tree at the county fairgrounds, and emptied some two hundred rounds of ammunition into the lifeless form. A meeting of white citizens ordered Crawford's family to leave town within three weeks, but "cooler heads" prevailed and the family remained. The county coroner's jury found that Crawford had died at the hands of parties unknown.

While some leading Progressives condemned the lynching, the editor of the Abbeville *Scimitar* probably came closer to capturing the mood across white South Carolina in his appeal to white solidarity and his justification of the mob's actions:

The "best people" of South Carolina know that when white men cease to whip, or kill negroes who become obnoxious, that they will take advantage of the laxity, and soon make this state untenable for whites of ALL kinds .... The point here made is, that no matter who actually killed Crawford, the responsibility for his death rests upon us

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<sup>241</sup> [Roy Nash], "The Lynching of Anthony Crawford," 1916, quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 309.

ALL ALIKE, and because of his own reckless course, due to chest inflation from wealth, it was inevitable and RACIALLY JUSTIFIABLE.<sup>242</sup>

For black Carolinians, the Crawford lynching made clear that no one, regardless of wealth, education, or moral uprightness, was safe—indeed, these often seemed to be the very reasons for white violence. “Our people,” Richard Carroll told the editor of *The State*, “are restless, more so now, than I have ever known them.”<sup>243</sup>

### **Wartime Unrest and Black Activism**

During the years of American involvement in the war in Europe, the Wilson administration’s rhetoric of unity on the home front and democracy, rule of law, and self-determination for subject peoples abroad seemed a world away from the poisonous racial climate in South Carolina. “Truth is,” the editor of *The State* confided to his diary just prior to the declaration of war, “the people of the South—and of the United States—have no idea of conceding to the negroes the full rights of American freedmen in this year of our Lord 1917.”<sup>244</sup> During the war years, the restlessness that Richard Carroll had identified in the wake of the Crawford lynching took the form of black out-migration, pressure to participate fully in the war effort, and establishing an organizational framework for political agitation.

African Americans fled the state in dramatic numbers when northern factories—prompted by a reduction in immigration from Europe, increased demand for industrial products to supply the belligerent nations, and mobilization of some three million men for

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<sup>242</sup> *Abbeville (SC) Scimitar*, 15 February 1917, quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 311.

<sup>243</sup> Richard Carroll to W. W. Ball, 9 November 1916, W. W. Ball Papers, Duke University Libraries, quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 311.

<sup>244</sup> W. W. Ball, *Diary 3, 1916-1918*, entry for 3 June 1917, W. W. Ball Papers, Duke University Libraries, quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 206.



military service—opened their doors to black laborers for the first time. Early in 1917, Charleston undertaker and activist Richard Mickey called the movement an “exodus” and predicted it would accelerate.<sup>245</sup> Indeed, the 1920 Census revealed that Charleston’s black population had declined by five percent during the previous decade; statewide it had declined four percent. Altogether some 75,000 black Carolinians had moved away.<sup>246</sup>

Most black leaders, newspapers, and civic groups in South Carolina came out strongly in support of the war effort, but white leaders generally rejected their overtures. In April 1917, Richard Carroll led a delegation of black leaders to meet with Governor Richard Manning. The governor assured the group that the war would not affect white supremacy in South Carolina. He turned down their offer to raise black troops—with black officers—for the state’s National Guard, suggesting instead that blacks could best help the war effort by staying on the farms. He disparaged those who were leaving for factory jobs in northern urban centers and offered a reward for the arrest and conviction of labor agents who were enticing blacks away from the state using, he said, false claims.<sup>247</sup> Nearly a year later, at Carroll’s annual race conference in March 1918, Manning warned that wartime cooperation between blacks and whites would not lead to social equality. “[I]t will not be tolerated by the southern whites,” he said, “and wouldn’t be good for the negroes.”<sup>248</sup>

When black men drafted into the U.S. Army began arriving at training camps set up throughout the South, they experienced both a strictly segregated military and local white communities hostile to their presence. Outside Spartanburg, a center of the textile industry in

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<sup>245</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 40.

<sup>246</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 193.

<sup>247</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 377.

<sup>248</sup> *The State*, 14 March 1918, quoted in Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 378.

the upper Piedmont, the new facility of Camp Wadsworth grew larger than the town itself. Tensions between local merchants and black troops from the 15<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment nearly led to rioting in the fall of 1917. The Army quickly sent the 15<sup>th</sup> to France to avoid further trouble.<sup>249</sup> By the time Erwin Harris, an eighteen-year-old white Bahá'í from New York City, arrived at Camp Wadsworth for training in early 1918, there were no black soldiers left there.<sup>250</sup> Discrimination in wartime employment was also widespread. In May 1918, the Navy Yard in North Charleston announced 600 jobs for women at a new clothing factory, specifying that “only white women” should apply.<sup>251</sup> In October, the Greenville city council considered a measure to force black women—but not white—to go to work in wartime industries.<sup>252</sup>

Even before U.S. entry into the war, black Carolinians' restlessness was expressing itself in new organizations with new demands, implicitly challenging Carroll and other self-appointed representatives to the white ruling class. Louis Gregory's Emancipation Day speech at Charleston's Morris Street Baptist Church on January 1, 1917, the keynote address in a day-long program that included a “grand parade” through the city, opened a year of increased activism and self-confidence among African Americans in South Carolina.<sup>253</sup> Just a month later, James Weldon Johnson, the new field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, arrived in South Carolina as part of his first southern

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<sup>249</sup> Fritz P. Hamer, “Seeds of Change: World War I, South Carolina, Impact and Contributions,” in *Forward Together: South Carolinians in the Great War*, ed. Fritz P. Hamer (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2007), 26-7.

<sup>250</sup> *Star of the West* 9, no. 19 (2 March 1919): 225-8.

<sup>251</sup> *News and Courier*, 5 April 1917 and 9 May 1917, quoted in Theodore Hemmingway, “Prelude to Change: Black Carolinians in the War Years, 1914-1920,” *Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 220.

<sup>252</sup> *Greenville (SC) Daily News*, 2, 9, and 22 October 1918, quoted in Hemmingway, “Prelude to Change,” 220.

<sup>253</sup> *News and Courier*, 31 December 1916.

organizing tour. Johnson's strategy was to connect the established institutions of racial uplift—churches, schools and colleges, fraternal organizations, and women's clubs—to the NAACP, in effect pushing Tuskegee-inspired community leaders towards a more activist agenda. By the time the United States entered the Great War in April, the NAACP included a new "Dixie District" or "Southern Empire," with branches established in Richmond, Norfolk, Atlanta, Athens, Savannah, Augusta, Tampa, and Jacksonville, as well as South Carolina's chief cities, Columbia and Charleston.<sup>254</sup> During the next five years, the new South Carolina branches would spearhead a wave of community activism the likes of which had not been seen in the state since Reconstruction, prompting a violent white crackdown.

In both the Columbia and Charleston branches, influential black laypeople took the lead, with ministers notably absent. In Columbia, members of the Capital Civic League, a men's group dedicated to securing black voting rights, essentially transformed their organization into a local branch of the NAACP.<sup>255</sup> Among its principal supporters were Butler Nance, an attorney, I. S. Leevy, an undertaker and Republican Party activist, and Nathaniel J. Frederick, a former high school principal, attorney, and journalist. During a long legal career, he represented black fraternal orders and the Victory Savings Bank; in the 1920s and 1930s, he was the South Carolina NAACP's principal attorney. During the 1910s he also edited the *Southern Indicator*, a black-owned newspaper in Columbia, and in 1925 he founded his own paper, the *Palmetto Leader*.<sup>256</sup> Like its predecessor organization, the branch's initial focus was voting rights. It formed a registration committee that taught

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<sup>254</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 20-26.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-1.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-8.

potential voters the skills they needed to meet the literacy and property requirements, and by July 1918 the number of black men registered in Richland County had risen to some 2200.<sup>257</sup>

Compared to the initial Columbia group, the organizers of the new branch in Charleston represented a broader coalition of black community institutions, including some of the city's leading black businessmen, professionals, and skilled craftsmen. Most had strong ties to Avery Institute and many to Louis Gregory. Among them were John McFall, a pharmacist; Richard and Edward Mickey, undertakers; Benjamin F. Cox, the first black principal of Avery Institute, and his wife, Jeanette, a prominent clubwoman; Susan Dart Butler, one of the founders of the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women's Clubs; and Eloise Harleston Jenkins, whose husband was Rev. Daniel J. Jenkins, a Baptist minister and founder of the Jenkins Orphanage for black children. Eloise Jenkins's brother, Edwin A. "Teddy" Harleston, was the branch's first president. Teddy Harleston graduated from Avery in 1900 and went on to study art at Atlanta University and the Museum of Fine Arts School in Boston. Leaving a promising career as a painter, he returned to Charleston to take over the family undertaking business.<sup>258</sup> Brother and sister were both students at Avery while Louis Gregory was a teacher there, and they recalled that he visited their home during his trips to the city.<sup>259</sup>

The Charleston branch's first initiative was a successful letter writing campaign to secure jobs for 250 black women at the new Navy Yard Clothing Factory, which had initially advertised positions for white women only. The initial success quickly earned the branch

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 34-7.

<sup>259</sup> "Catalogue of the Teachers and Pupils of Avery Normal Institute, Charleston, S.C.," June 1899, Avery School Memorabilia Collection, ARC; Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 253.

respect—as well as new dues-paying members—among the city’s black working class.<sup>260</sup> During 1918 and 1919, the branch took advantage of that support to force city officials to employ black teachers in black schools, where they had been virtually excluded since the 1880s. The branch held sixteen public meetings across the city in late 1917 and organized volunteers to collect some 25,000 signatures for a petition to the local school board. Rebuffed, they sought legislative action. Assisted by the Washington, D.C., and Columbia branches, a committee headed by Thomas E. Miller, former Reconstruction legislator and president of State College in Orangeburg, lobbied the General Assembly for a bill that exploited the logic of “separate but equal” to argue for an exclusion of white teachers from Charleston’s black public schools. Before the legislature voted on the bill, the Charleston commissioners capitulated. In the new school year that began in September 1918, all the teachers in the city’s black schools were black.<sup>261</sup>

The success of the school employment effort, and the cooperation between the Columbia and Charleston branches, encouraged new activism in other parts of the state. Between April 1918 and June 1919, new NAACP branches formed in Aiken, Anderson, Beaufort, Darlington, Florence, and Orangeburg.<sup>262</sup> Likely spurred by the growth of a bold new civil rights organization with an essentially secular approach, some of the state’s black ministers began to raise their voices as well. In February 1919, as the Charleston NAACP branch prepared to launch its own voting rights campaign, Bishop W. D. Chappelle, the president of Allen University, convened a statewide conference on black political

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<sup>260</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 40-1.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-4.

<sup>262</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 47-8.

participation. The participants committed to forming local voting clubs to help register new black voters and passed resolutions demanding a place for blacks on local school boards, the elimination of the disfranchisement provisions of the 1895 constitution, and equality in segregated public facilities. While most participants expressed their loyalty to the Republican Party, Chappelle predicted that with larger numbers registered, blacks could split factions of the Democratic Party and wield the balance of power in the state.<sup>263</sup> Later the same month, the return of the all-black 371<sup>st</sup> Regiment, which had distinguished itself in battle in France, to Camp Jackson outside Columbia provided another occasion to press political demands.<sup>264</sup> Parading through the streets of Columbia, the black soldiers received a hero's welcome from blacks and whites alike. At a program in their honor held at Benedict College, a succession of ministers called for wider political roles for black citizens. Dr. N. F. Haygood, minister of Sidney Park Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, called for a "man's place" for returning soldiers, including service on juries and as policemen. Echoing calls in *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP, Chappelle applied the Wilson administration's wartime rhetoric to the situation of blacks at home. "The war was fought for democracy," he said. "We want democracy in our own country."<sup>265</sup>

### **White Reactions**

In the face of wartime upheavals and increasingly bold black demands, white South Carolinians participated in a nationwide backlash against radicals of all stripes. In response

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 47; Hemmingway, "Prelude to Change," 221.

<sup>264</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 188-9.

<sup>265</sup> Hemmingway, "Prelude to Change," 222.

to an orgy of anti-black violence in the summer of 1919, others organized to promote fair treatment of African Americans within the Jim Crow system. Both reactions spurred the Bahá'ís to launch their first coordinated effort to affect public discourse in the United States and a reinvigorated teaching campaign.

During the war years, the service of nearly 400,000 black men in the U.S. military and the migration of more than half a million black Southerners to the North and Midwest to take industrial jobs previously held by whites heightened the racial fears of whites across the country.<sup>266</sup> A resurgent Ku Klux Klan, organized in Atlanta in 1915 and spreading rapidly to every state, decried the influence not only of blacks but of immigrants, Jews, and political radicals. Local “klaverns” attracted leading white citizens and law enforcement officers, and in a few Midwestern states the Klan became a potent political force. In 1917, white mobs lashed out at black communities and uniformed black soldiers in Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Texas.<sup>267</sup> When the war ended, the situation in cities became even more explosive, as wartime price controls and production contracts abruptly ceased, inflation spiked, and some three million demobilized servicemen came home looking for jobs. During 1919 alone, some four million workers across the country went out on strike, and factory owners and local authorities frequently responded with brutal suppression. At the same time, several isolated terrorist attacks, heightened fears of radical activity in the United States, already on the rise in the wake of the Russian Revolution. In such a climate of fear and resentment, U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and the new Federal Bureau of Investigation led efforts to crack down on Communists, socialists, anarchists, and African-American activists.

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<sup>266</sup> Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 147-8.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-1.

As the country demobilized, a new wave of violence, termed the “Red Summer of 1919” by James Weldon Johnson, targeted blacks across the country. The first incident began late on Saturday night, May 10, in a pool hall on Beaufain Street in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, when a group of white sailors stationed at the naval base in North Charleston had a verbal altercation with a group of unarmed black men.<sup>268</sup> The argument spilled onto the street, where white civilians joined the fray. The incident quickly swelled into a riot. The mob chased the black men down King and Meeting streets, two of the city’s main thoroughfares, and some of the sailors stole guns and ammunition from two shooting galleries. Spreading across downtown Charleston, white rioters shot indiscriminately into crowds of black people, pulled at least two black passengers from streetcars and beat and shot them, and ransacked a black-owned business. Black residents may have shot at white sailors as they retreated to North Charleston. By the time city police and naval authorities reacted, the violence had largely run its course. Three blacks had been killed, and perhaps forty injured. Rumors spread of more violence in other parts of the state, and every interracial incident brought fears of rioting.<sup>269</sup> During the rest of the summer and fall of 1919, two dozen other American cities and towns, more than half of them outside the South, erupted in anti-black riots. The deadliest outbreaks occurred in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and the rural area around Elaine, Arkansas, where black sharecroppers were attempting to form a union. Some seventy southern blacks, some still in military uniform, fell prey to lynch mobs during the year.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> This account of the Charleston riot is based on Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 50-1.

<sup>269</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 192; Hemmingway, “Prelude to Change,” 223.

<sup>270</sup> Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 151-6; John Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 47.



Mob action, unplanned and uncoordinated, was only the leading edge of white postwar reaction. Local and state governments across the South, allied with the new Klan and the FBI, launched a campaign of violence and intimidation to roll back the limited gains that blacks had made during the war years. The worst repression was in Texas, where state officials and local vigilantes reduced the state's thirty-three NAACP branches to seven in the space of two years.<sup>271</sup> In South Carolina, while most opposition took shape at the local level, the highest public officials inspired and condoned the campaign. James F. Byrnes, a fifth-term U.S. Representative from the Second District in western South Carolina, gave permission to act from the floor of Congress. In an August 1919 speech, he blamed the NAACP, the radical International Workers of the World, Russian Communists, and northern agitators for the bloody summer of violence:

I know the Negroes of my district do not seek to participate in politics. I know that if left alone they will continue contented, and I do not want these radical negro publications, whether supported by the I.W.W., the Bolsheviki of Russia, or the misguided theorist of the North, to be circulated among them, arousing the passions of the criminal class of Negroes, and resulting in injury to the law-abiding negro as well as to the white people of the South.<sup>272</sup>

Implicitly acknowledging the impact of the war on black activism, he assured his colleagues that white supremacy was strong: "The war has in no way changed the attitude of the white man toward the social and political equality of the negro ... because this is a white man's country, and will always remain a white man's country."<sup>273</sup>

In South Carolina, white citizens organized themselves to make good on Byrnes's assertions by promoting both general intimidation of the black population and

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<sup>271</sup> Steven A. Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921," *Journal of American History* 82 (March 1996): 1478-1504.

<sup>272</sup> *Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 4305, quoted in Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 57.

<sup>273</sup> *Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 4302-5, quoted in Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 56.

dismemberment of the network of local NAACP branches. The Klan spread, openly and confidently, to towns across the state, often with the explicit approval of local officials. In Spartanburg, for example, organizers staged an inaugural meeting on the steps of the county courthouse, and newspapers gave the meeting publicity.<sup>274</sup> In May, 1923, the mayor of Union, another Piedmont textile town, invited more than 200 Klansmen in full regalia to march down his town's main street. While explicitly disavowing "lawlessness," the Klan, in concert with local officials and newspaper editors, led a campaign that included intimidation, threats, and violence. In large newspaper ads explaining the purpose of the organization, Klan leaders trumpeted popular justifications of lynching. Attempting to project an image of righteous Christian men defending the sexual virtue of white women, the ads listed "the tenets of the Christian religion; white supremacy; ... protection of our pure womanhood; [and] preventing the causes of mob violence" among its founding principles. Congressman Byrnes echoed the same argument. In 1921, arguing against a federal anti-lynching bill, he assured his Congressional colleagues that "rape is responsible directly and indirectly for most of the lynching in America."<sup>275</sup> Between 1919 and 1927, at least fourteen black South Carolinians fell victim to lynch mobs, with five killed in 1921 alone.<sup>276</sup>

The Klan and its allies targeted NAACP leaders for elimination. After the Charleston riot, local branch president Teddy Harelston's life was repeatedly threatened, and membership in the Charleston and Columbia branches plummeted. Outside the state's two largest urban centers, the situation was even worse. In mid-1919 in the Upstate textile town

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<sup>274</sup> *News and Courier*, 21 January 1921.

<sup>275</sup> *Congressional Record*, 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 544, quoted in George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, History of the New South, vol. 10 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 170.

<sup>276</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 57.

of Anderson, the local newspaper editor waged a two-month war of words to silence NAACP branch president M. H. Gassaway, principal of the local black high school. When the written attacks failed to get Gassaway fired, the editor printed death threats. Gassaway and two other NAACP leaders fled for the North, and the branch folded.<sup>277</sup> By 1923, the branch in Aiken, James F. Byrnes's hometown, had ceased its activities.<sup>278</sup> The next year, the local Klan ordered the Florence branch to disband.<sup>279</sup> By mid-decade, the NAACP in South Carolina was an empty shell.

A very different outcome of the racial violence of 1919 was the emergence of a southern interracial movement. Already in the years before the war, some of the region's leading white Progressives had pioneered in the study of race relations through such organizations as the University Commission on Southern Race Questions and the YMCA. In the aftermath of the war, a group of black and white leaders met in Atlanta and at the YMCA's Blue Ridge retreat in North Carolina to establish what would become the Commission on Interracial Cooperation or "Interracial Commission." Under the leadership of Will W. Alexander, a white former Methodist minister and community organizer in Nashville, the Interracial Commission initially focused on the peaceful reintegration of returning black soldiers into their local communities, appointing one white man and one black man in each southern state to organize local leaders of both races to reduce racial tensions. Developing into a permanent organization, it spawned some eight hundred local,

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-4.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

county, and state committees across the region—some white, some black, and some biracial—that worked with differing degrees of success to address specific grievances.<sup>280</sup>

Lynching was a primary concern for the Interracial Commission and its regional network of affiliates. State and local committees frequently intervened to prevent violence, and the Georgia committee worked to secure indictments against accused lynchers and a handful of convictions.<sup>281</sup> The Interracial Commission's efforts complemented those of the national NAACP, which launched a concerted anti-lynching campaign in 1919. At the national conference to launch the campaign, the organization released a comprehensive report, *Thirty Years of Lynching, 1889-1918*, which challenged popular wisdom; less than one-sixth of lynching cases involved an accusation of rape or attempted rape. Armed with such data, the Interracial Commission's Division of Women's Work, formed at a conference of white Methodists at Blue Ridge in 1920, organized southern women, primarily white, to oppose lynching.<sup>282</sup>

Because most of the funding for the Interracial Commission came from church groups and philanthropists outside the South, it could afford to take a cautiously liberal approach to race relations. For all its opposition to lynching, debt peonage, and the Klan, however, the Interracial Commission was hardly a force for radical change in the region. While some of the organization's leaders believed that Jim Crow was unjust, neither they nor their northern

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<sup>280</sup> For an overview of the work of the Interracial Commission, see Julia Anne McDonough, "Men and Women of Good Will: A History of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919-1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1993).

<sup>281</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 179.

<sup>282</sup> For treatment of the Division of Women's Work and its successor organization, the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

benefactors sought to challenge the system's underlying assumptions. Rather, they sought to ameliorate conditions for blacks and promote fairness within the framework of "separate but equal." Maintenance of segregation was the key to whites' participation: as one leader admitted, "unless those forms of separation which are meant to safeguard the purity of the races are present, the majority of the white people flatly refuse to cooperate with the Negroes."<sup>283</sup>

In addition to its commitment to segregation, the Interracial Commission's orthodox Protestant credentials were another key to its limited successes. While officially secular, its regional and local leadership included large numbers of clergymen and prominent lay men and women, and it operated in concert with such organizations as the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations. The white Methodist leaders gathered at the 1920 Blue Ridge conference captured the sentiments of many when they asserted that "the real responsibility for the solution of inter-racial problems in the South rests directly upon the hearts and consciences of the Christian forces of our land." Such "Christian forces," however, must not be misunderstood as forces for social equality and racial integration. While expressing the need for fair treatment of blacks, the same group affirmed its "absolute loyal[ty] to the ... principle of racial integrity."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> T. J. Woolfer, Jr., *The Basis of Interracial Adjustment*, 240, quoted in Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 181.

<sup>284</sup> *An Appeal to the Christian People of the South Adopted by Church Leaders' Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 18-21, 1920* (n.p., n.d.), quoted in Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 181.

## **Completing the Divine Plan**

Within the Bahá'í community, the postwar violence and the emergence of a new southern interracial movement coincided with a new wave of teaching activity and an innovative effort to bring the faith's teachings on interracial unity to the attention of leaders of thought and the general public. Both developments were initiatives of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Louis Gregory played decisive roles in each. In early 1919, shortly after the conference of South Carolina's black leaders and the triumphal welcome for the 371<sup>st</sup>, Louis Gregory was back in the Carolinas teaching the faith. After a stay in Wilmington, Gregory made a two-week visit to "points in S. C.," using a relative's house in Charleston as his base of operations. In late April, some three weeks before his old neighborhood erupted in racial violence, he took a ship from Charleston to New York City for the eleventh annual Bahá'í convention, a gathering that would lend new momentum to teaching across the South.<sup>285</sup>

With some 600 believers from across the country in attendance, the 1919 convention was the largest such gathering in the movement's history. There, Ahmad Sohrab, a former member of the Washington community who had served as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's secretary during the war, presented the American Bahá'ís with all fourteen of the latter's "Tablets of the Divine Plan." To the five tablets that had reached the community in 1916, three additional ones written that year were now added, plus six more written in February and March 1917. Collectively, the tablets outlined a worldwide mission for the North American believers in the wake of the war. 'Abdu'l-Bahá called them to spread the faith not only in the United States and Canada, but throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and beyond them to the rest of the globe:

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<sup>285</sup> Louis G. Gregory to Joseph A. Hannen, 4 April 1919, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

[I]t is the hope of Abdul-Baha that just as ye are confirmed and assisted on the continent of America, ye may also be confirmed and assisted on other continents of the globe:—that is, ye may carry the fame of the Cause of God to the East and to the West and spread the glad-tidings of the appearance of the Kingdom of the Lord of Hosts throughout the five continents of the world.

When this divine call travels from the continent of America to Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the islands of the Pacific, the American believers shall be established on the throne of everlasting glory, the fame of their illumination and guidance shall reach to all regions and the renown of their greatness become worldwide.<sup>286</sup>

In addition to general exhortations, he specifically directed the American believers to travel to some 120 countries, territories, and islands.

The world war, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicated, was part of God’s plan for humanity. As the peoples of the world turned away from outworn institutions, and as governments took steps to implement, however unwittingly, elements of Bahá’u’lláh’s program for world order, the Bahá’ís would find new opportunities to teach their faith:

[T]his world consuming war has set such a conflagration to the hearts that no word can describe it. In all the countries of the world the longing for universal peace is taking possession of the consciousness of men. There is not a soul who does not yearn for concord and peace. A most wonderful state of receptivity is being realized. This is through the consummate wisdom of God, so that capacity may be created, the standard of the oneness of the world of humanity be upraised, and the fundamentals of universal peace and the divine principles be promoted in the East and the West.<sup>287</sup>

For the assembled Bahá’ís, current events seemed to confirm the mandate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had given them in the tablets. They noted that their own gathering, “discussing plans for spiritual union and harmony throughout the world,” was taking place at the same time as the Paris Peace Conference, where world leaders were “meeting to establish the new world conditions

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<sup>286</sup> *Star of the West* 10, no. 17 (19 January 1920): 307-8.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

politically, economically and socially.”<sup>288</sup> As Joseph Hannen observed in his report of the convention:

It is within the ready recollection of many of us, that the Bahai teachings were called “ahead of the times” and termed a dream philosophy, perhaps adapted to some future age of the world. And now, how rapidly “the times” have caught up with The Message, so that today men talk the world over in terms of internationalism and world unity, strange to their minds and tongues, but familiar to the Bahais.<sup>289</sup>

In addition to addressing the body of the believers in the United States and Canada, the new tablets included a second message to each geographic region. In his second tablet to the southern states, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observed that as the region’s moderate climate and physical beauty were conducive to the development of material civilization, so must the South excel in spiritual civilization. “[U]nquestionably,” he said, “the divine teachings must reveal themselves with a brighter effulgence ... and the fragrances of holiness be diffused with swiftness and rapidity.”<sup>290</sup> He urged his followers to action, lamenting the fact that “no adequate and befitting motion has been realized, and no great acclamation and acceleration has been witnessed” in the region since the introduction of the faith to the United States more than twenty years earlier. He pointed to the story of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the traditional Christian apostle to Armenia:

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Armenia was enveloped with impenetrable darkness. One blessed soul from among the disciples of Christ hastened to that part, and through his efforts, ere long that province became illumined.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> *Star of the West* 10, no. 4 (17 May 1919): 55.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> *Star of the West* 10, no. 6 (24 June 1919): 100-1.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.



Alluding to the problem of racial prejudice, he called on the Bahá'ís to put forth an effort similar to St. Gregory's to establish the oneness of humanity in the South, indicating that their achievement would have a transforming impact on the United States and the world:

With a firm resolution, a pure heart, a rejoiced spirit, and an eloquent tongue, engage your time in the promulgation of the divine principles; so that the oneness of the world of humanity may pitch her canopy in the apex of America and all the nations of the world may follow the divine policy. This is certain that the divine policy is justice and kindness toward all mankind.<sup>292</sup>

In response to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's mandate, the convention voted to create a national "Teaching Committee of Nineteen." Among the members were Joseph Hannen and Louis Gregory. Hannen stayed in Washington to coordinate the "Central Bureau" for the South, charged with distributing literature to seekers and libraries; publishing articles in the region's newspapers; identifying "all the liberal organizations, clubs and churches who would be willing to have Bahai lecturers"; coordinating teaching circuits and follow-up visits; promoting the establishment of regular study groups in "all the larger towns"; and keeping an index of all the believers in the region.<sup>293</sup> The number and range of itinerant teachers increased, and Hannen supported them by forwarding mail and financial contributions from other believers. Through the circulation of typewritten bulletins, the Teaching Committee sought to involve all the believers in the nationwide enterprise, not just the relative few who were able to travel, "but all who give what time they can in their own localities and who help in the way of contributing to the expenses of the teaching work."<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 101-2.

<sup>293</sup> *Star of the West* 10, no. 5 (5 June 1919): 88-9.

<sup>294</sup> *Teaching Bulletin*, no. 1 (19 November 1919): 1.

Louis Gregory returned to the field, resuming what would become a nearly three-year period of uninterrupted travel throughout the South. From 1919 to 1921, he crisscrossed the region, often in tandem with Roy Williams, an African-American believer from New York City.<sup>295</sup> Williams recalled that he and Gregory “taught together in 30 towns and cities in South Carolina” during the period, noting especially their engagements “in many churches in Greenville and Anderson Count[ies],” violence-prone areas with substantial black minorities in the heart of the Piedmont textile manufacturing belt.<sup>296</sup> Sometime during a nine-month period in 1919, Williams, a highly skilled carpenter, stayed in Charleston long enough to find temporary employment, perhaps with Louis Gregory’s father; he reported earning fifteen dollars to help finance his continued travels.<sup>297</sup> During the winter of 1920-1921, Gregory toured Georgia and the Carolinas on the last leg of his extended journey. From engagements in Atlanta he traveled to Augusta, Georgia, and its sister city of North Augusta, South Carolina, then to Columbia and Charleston, and finally through North Carolina before returning to Washington.<sup>298</sup>

While the Bahá’ís worked to increase the size and scope of their community, they also attempted to influence the growing public dialogue on race. Like many of their countrymen, American Bahá’ís were appalled at the racial violence of the Red Summer, and in several localities, especially Washington and Chicago, the outbreaks directly or indirectly

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<sup>295</sup> *Teaching Bulletin*, no. 2 (19 July 1920): 7-8.

<sup>296</sup> Evelyn Hardin, “Roy Williams: Teacher in Word and Deed,” *[South Carolina] Baha’i Bulletin* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 3.

<sup>297</sup> Roy Williams to Joseph A. Hannen, 10 November 1919, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>298</sup> Esther Segó, “The History of the Bahá’í Cause,” TS, Augusta Bahá’í Archives, Augusta, GA (hereafter cited as ABA), 1; *Bulletin “A” Issued by the Teaching Committee [Teaching Bulletin]*, n.d. [January 1921], 12; *Bulletin No. 10 Issued by the Teaching Committee of Nineteen [Teaching Bulletin]*, 15 March 1921, 9.

touched local Bahá'í communities. In the latter city, one Bahá'í home was firebombed, two members of another Bahá'í family were jailed briefly, and another believer, an Iranian physician named Zia Bagdadi, notably aided relief efforts in black neighborhoods. During the summer and fall, the Executive Board of the Bahai Temple Unity consulted about “the best means of promulgating and promoting [the] principle of human unity” and Louis Gregory and Harlan Ober, a white Bahá'í, discussed plans to hold “mass meetings” to bring blacks and whites of all classes together to alleviate racial tension.<sup>299</sup>

However, the initiative for an increased public role came from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Early in 1920, Agnes Parsons, a wealthy white Bahá'í from Washington, went on pilgrimage to Palestine. Parsons recounted that one evening at dinner, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned “quite out of the blue” to her and said ““I want you to arrange a convention in Washington for amity between the colored and the white.””<sup>300</sup> Though doubting her own ability to arrange such a gathering—she had never planned a large event and she had barely moved outside the elite circles of white Washington before becoming a Bahá'í in middle age—Parsons returned to the United States with a mission. Enlisting the help of friends both inside and outside of the Bahá'í community, Parsons worked for almost a year to develop an approach and plan the convention. One of her confidants, former Republican Senator from Minnesota Moses E. Clapp, suggested that the convention avoid protest over specific grievances or a tone of political polarization. ““Do not make a protest about anything,”” Parsons recalled him as

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<sup>299</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 129-32.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

saying. ““Lift the whole matter up into the spiritual realm and work for the creation of sentiment.””<sup>301</sup>

Louis Gregory agreed. In December 1920, after more than two years traveling to bring “the Glorious Message of the Kingdom to the oppressed and broken-hearted” across the South, he wrote to Parsons with his advice. While he said he was encouraged by the work of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, he was well aware of its limitations of scope and purpose:

There are many, many souls throughout the South today who are working and longing for a better day. But without the Light of Abhá [“Most Glorious,” a form of the Greatest Name] their efforts seem infantile and helpless. Even some members of the state inter-racial committee, earnest, thoughtful, hard-working men, have voiced to me despair.<sup>302</sup>

Rather than imitate the approach of the Interracial Commission, Gregory said that the Bahá’ís should involve a broader cross-section of the population, openly advocate integration and unity, and directly share the faith’s teachings on race:

If the Washington inter-racial congress is along these conventional lines I fear it will like the others, be fruitless. But if it be aflame with the Fire of Divine Love, the hearts will be powerfully influenced and the effect will be great in all the years to come.<sup>303</sup>

Rather than focus on alleviating the worst effects of racial discrimination, “Nothing short of a change of hearts will do,” he wrote. “Unless the speakers are able to make the power of love felt, the occasion will lose its chief value.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 137.

The Race Amity Convention, held over three days in May 1921 at Washington's First Congregational Church, was the first large interracial gathering since violence had torn the city apart less than two years before. The printed program stated the purpose of the gathering, calling "all the inhabitants of these United States" to participate in a new crusade to "establish amity between the white and colored people of our land." It succinctly placed the current effort in historical context, at the same time aligning the Bahá'ís with the legacy of emancipation: "Half a century ago in America slavery was abolished. Now there has arisen need for another great effort in order that prejudice may be overcome." Bahá'ís and prominent guests, black and white, served as session chairs, speakers, and artistic presenters. Diverse crowds of at least fifteen hundred people attended each of the evening sessions, and widespread newspaper coverage and advance distribution of some nineteen thousand of the printed programs in churches, stores, schools and other public places ensured an even larger indirect reach.<sup>305</sup>

While it is difficult to gauge the practical impact of an event focused on "the creation of sentiment" rather than specific action items, the Bahá'ís took the very fact of such a large and well publicized interracial event in the nation's capital—cutting across lines of political affiliation, religion, and class—as a victory. Gregory later pointed out that the convention spurred members of other Washington churches to start organizing interracial committees.<sup>306</sup> It also spurred Bahá'ís in other areas to organize their own conventions. During the rest of the 1920s and the 1930s, Race Amity Conventions and related activities were held in various cities of the Northeast, Midwest, and West. In the process, local Bahá'í communities

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 138-41.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 142.

collaborated with organizations such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the League of Women Voters and developed relationships with leading intellectuals and activists.<sup>307</sup> As a result of such explicit public efforts, the Bahá'í Faith became more widely known as an interracial movement. At the same time, the membership of local Bahá'í communities increasingly reflected the religion's interracial commitment. According to one survey, by the mid-1930s blacks were found in at least 33 local communities and comprised at least five percent of the American Bahá'í population. Compared to their percentage of the total national population, African Americans were underrepresented in the Bahá'í Faith, but compared only to the black population of the states where the faith was established—mostly outside the South where the majority of blacks lived—they were more nearly at par or overrepresented within the Bahá'í community.<sup>308</sup>

As a practical effort to influence public discourse on race in the United States, the conventions also helped the Bahá'ís forge links with the southern interracial movement. During the 1920s, Louis Gregory and other teachers in the South saw interracial workers as important contacts, both for the purpose of encouraging what they regarded as a positive development in the region and, potentially, for teaching the faith directly. In their efforts Gregory saw “the Hand of Divine Bounty, the emanation of which more and more links the living elements of humanity into a world-wide fellowship.” Suggesting that the “Bahai Spirit has revealed its Light to many hearts still unaware of its Name,” he recommended that other

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 144-52, 178-93.

<sup>308</sup> Richard Hollinger, “Introduction: Bahá'í Communities in the West, 1897-1992,” in *Community Histories, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, vol. 6, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1992), xxvii-xxviii. The survey in question, the “Bahá'í Historical Record Cards” collected in 1935 and 1936, may well have undercounted African-American Bahá'ís. The fullest discussion of the survey is found in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 203-9.

traveling teachers in the South approach these “servants of humanity,” the leaders of the indigenous interracial movement, as potentially receptive to the Bahá’í message.<sup>309</sup>

Gregory energetically publicized the efforts of the southern movement among the Bahá’ís, and of the Bahá’ís among southern interracial workers. During a visit to Columbia at the end of his 1919-1921 teaching trips, for example, Gregory spoke in several churches and schools sought out Josiah Morse, a professor of philosophy and psychology at the University of South Carolina. Morse, a Virginia-born Jew and an early supporter of the Interracial Commission, had arranged a conference of students from his own institution and its two nearby black counterparts, Benedict College and Allen University.<sup>310</sup> The effort presaged the establishment of an educational department of the Interracial Commission in 1922 and, beginning the following year, a variety of interracial forums for college students.<sup>311</sup> Gregory’s positive contact with Morse may have encouraged the latter’s interracial activities, which lasted well into the 1930s; it certainly disposed him to welcome other Bahá’í teachers to campus in subsequent years.

On several occasions Louis Gregory shared with Bahá’í audiences the example of Samuel Chiles Mitchell, a respected white southern educator, for whom an encounter with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during the latter’s visit to the United States provided decades’ worth of inspiration for his interracial work.<sup>312</sup> Born in Mississippi and raised in Texas, Mitchell was

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<sup>309</sup> *Star of the West* 13, no. 11 (February 1923): 305.

<sup>310</sup> *Teaching Bulletin*, no. 10 (15 March 1921): 9; *Star of the West* 13, no. 11 (February 1923): 305.

<sup>311</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 182-3. For Morse’s influence on one white student who went on to become a liberal activist, see Robert M. Randolph, “James McBride Dabbs: Spokesman for Racial Liberalism,” in *From the Old South to the New: Essays on the Transitional South*, Contributions in American History, no. 93, ed. Walter J. Fraser, Jr., and Winfred B. Moore, Jr. (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1981), 255.

<sup>312</sup> For a brief treatment of Mitchell’s personal and professional life, see Carlton’s introduction to the most important work of his son, Broadus Mitchell, who became a noted sociologist. Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of*

an ordained Baptist minister as well as a history professor, social reformer, and university administrator. In addition to serving as president of the University of South Carolina (1908-1913), the Medical College of Virginia (1913-1914), and Delaware College (1914-1920), he worked with various northern philanthropies dedicated to improving education for black and white southerners. In 1912, during his tenure at the University of South Carolina, Mitchell attended the annual Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in New York, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the special guest speaker.

The following year, Mitchell’s progressive attitude on black education provoked his most bitter professional experience. As a consultant to the Peabody Education Fund, he recommended that the organization focus its resources in South Carolina on the State College in Orangeburg. In response, the president of Winthrop College, the state’s college for white women in Rock Hill, appealed to Gov. Coleman Blease. The governor, eager to discredit his “elite” opponents, accused Mitchell of favoring the education of blacks over that of white women and insisted on an embarrassing legislative hearing. While both the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina and the state’s General Assembly vindicated Mitchell, he accepted a timely offer to head the Medical College of Virginia and never returned to South Carolina.<sup>313</sup>

According to Gregory, who visited and corresponded with Mitchell during the 1920s and 1930s, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talk on the oneness of humanity at Lake Mohonk had had a direct and lasting impact on Mitchell’s interracial work, causing him to resolve never to draw lines

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*Cotton Mills in the South* (1921; with new introduction by David Carlton, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), x-xvii.

<sup>313</sup> For an account of Mitchell’s clash with Blease, see Daniel W. Hollis, “Samuel Chiles Mitchell, Social Reformer in Blease’s South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 70, no. 1 (January 1969): 20-37.



of racial division between his fellow-men. Apparently alluding to Bahá'u'lláh's poetic title of 'Sun of Truth,' Gregory reported that "[t]he great horizon line which covers all mankind is sufficient for him." Since Lake Mohonk, Gregory said, Mitchell had repeated 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words "upon many platforms."<sup>314</sup>

### **Louis Gregory, I. E. Lowery, and Uplift Theology**

Another incident in early 1921 sheds light on the relationship between the Bahá'í teachings and elements of racial uplift theology and illustrates how conservative southern leaders may have recognized in the new faith—numerically insignificant as it was—a potential threat to their authority. One of Gregory's talks in Columbia garnered unprecedented press coverage for the faith in South Carolina. In the first documented public attack on the Bahá'í Faith by a South Carolina clergyman, prominent black Methodist minister, journalist, and racial uplift ideologue I. E. Lowery devoted an entire weekly column to a scathing denunciation of Louis Gregory and the religion he espoused.<sup>315</sup> The column appeared in at least two black newspapers, the *Watchman and Defender* of Timmonsville and the *Southern Indicator* of Columbia, the second of which was distributed statewide. While there is no evidence of a response by Gregory, further contact between him and Lowery, or continued public dialogue about the Bahá'í Faith in the state's press, the publication of the column may have brought the faith to the attention of a substantial portion of the state's black reading public for the first time.

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<sup>314</sup> *Star of the West* 20, no. 1 (April 1929): 9.

<sup>315</sup> Lowery, "Column." Lowery states that the column is a reprint of an editorial in *The Watchman and Defender*, a black newspaper located in Timmonsville in western Florence County and edited by Rev. H.C. Asbury. Lowery was a contributing editor of *The Watchman* as well as its Columbia agent. Copies of *The Watchman* from January and February 1921 have not survived.

According to Lowery, Louis Gregory spoke in the afternoon of January 30 at Sidney Park Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, an impressive Gothic revival structure on Blanding Street in downtown Columbia. The fashionable congregation had a history of outspokenness. It was founded in the 1880s when some six hundred members split from Bethel AME Church and affiliated themselves with the Colored Methodist Episcopal denomination, a black offshoot of the white southern Methodists.<sup>316</sup> Formed in an amicable separation in 1870 when the few remaining black members in the southern Methodist church withdrew, the CME church maintained cordial relationships with its parent denomination and generally acquiesced to white supremacy and eschewed politics. Its reputation for conservatism earned it the nicknames of “rebel church” and “old slavery church” from its more politically active sister denominations, the AME and AME Zion churches.<sup>317</sup> Sidney Park’s minister, the Rev. N. F. Haygood, perhaps something of an anomaly in his denomination, was an activist who had spoken up publicly for black political rights at Columbia’s welcome celebration for the 371<sup>st</sup> Regiment in 1919. With a concern for contemporary social problems, Haygood was exactly the kind of minister who would open his church to speakers from progressive causes, including the Bahá’í Faith. At Haygood’s invitation, Louis Gregory attended Sidney Park’s Sunday morning service and from the podium invited the congregation to his lecture, which would take place at the church that afternoon. Lowery was also a visitor at Sidney Park’s morning service (probably because January 30 fell on the fifth Sunday of the month, when kindred churches in an area often held joint services). Recognizing Gregory from his talks “on the Bahai Religion in some of the

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<sup>316</sup> SCDAH, “Sidney Park Christian Methodist Episcopal Church,” National Register Sites in South Carolina, <http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/richland/S10817740112/index.htm>.

<sup>317</sup> Montgomery, *Under Their Own*, 121-3, 238-40.

churches and halls” of Charleston more than a decade earlier, he decided to attend the afternoon talk.<sup>318</sup>

In his column, published three weeks later, Lowery condemned the Bahá’í Faith as unchristian and devoid of spirit. He called it “a head religion, and not a heart religion,” incorrectly but repeatedly referring to Gregory as “professor” and comparing him to Nicodemus, the Pharisee who, because of his attachment to his worldly learning, could not understand Jesus’ teaching of the second birth.<sup>319</sup> The Bahá’í Faith, Lowery said, was the same religion that Nicodemus followed, in other words, a sterile and legalistic form without divine inspiration. To underline his point, he listed the principles of the faith as Gregory taught them:

The Search for Truth; The Oneness of Humanity; The Unity of Religions; Religion and Science Agree; Equality of Men and Women; Abandonment of Prejudice; A Universal Language; Universal Education; Universal Peace; An International Tribunal; Solution of the Economic Problem; The Power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>320</sup>

While Lowery had no quarrel with such teachings, he asserted that they were not grounded in a personal belief in Jesus Christ:

The principles seem to be all right, but the Lord Jesus Christ is not recognized in them, and any religion that has no Christ in it, is not worthy of the attention of intelligent Christian people. And any attempt to teach, enforce and build up a religion without Christ will be an utter failure. The Bahai religion teaches love, but it is not the love that Christ taught. It is not the love that the Apostles taught. It is not the love that is promulgated by Christianity.<sup>321</sup>

To underline the danger of the Bahá’í Faith, Lowery recounted a cautionary tale.

Though he never mentioned the young man’s name, he was clearly telling the story of

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<sup>318</sup> Lowery, “Column.”

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.; John 3:1-21.

<sup>320</sup> Lowery, “Column.”

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

Alonzo Twine. Lowery recalled that some years earlier, when he was pastor of Old Bethel Methodist Church in Charleston, Gregory had spoken in the city, and that one of his congregants, a “brilliant young lawyer” who had grown up at Old Bethel, “took hold of this new religion, and tried to master it.” According to Lowery, as a result of his struggle to understand the Bahá’í Faith, the young man had “lost his mind” and been committed to the insane asylum in Columbia. When Lowery was transferred to a church in Columbia, the young man’s parents asked him to visit their son often. He took away the man’s Bahá’í literature, and finally took his body home for a church funeral. “This,” he dramatically concluded the story, “is what the Bahai religion did for a brillian[t] young lawyer.”<sup>322</sup>

Lowery’s primary argument was that, as attractive as the new religion might seem, and as eloquently as Gregory presented it, there was “no Christ in it.” As the Bahá’ís understood it, however, there was plenty of Christ in the Bahá’í Faith. Bahá’u’lláh was forthright in his identification with Christ’s return in the glory of the Father, and his writings, as well as the writings and recorded public addresses of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, abounded with biblical references, extensive interpretation of Christian prophecies and theological concepts, praise for the person and station of Jesus Christ, and explanations of the relationship between him and Bahá’u’lláh. Among American Bahá’ís, most of whom came from evangelical Protestant backgrounds, such claims and scriptural discussions were widely known and openly shared with friends and seekers. In particular, Louis Gregory’s published writings, letters, and talks indicate that he had studied extensively the relationship between Christianity and the Bahá’í Faith, was very conversant in the scriptures of both religions, and was able to explain the Bahá’í teachings in language that was familiar to Christian audiences. Gregory himself had become a Bahá’í because he believed it was an expression of precisely

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

“the love that Christ taught” and the fulfillment of Christian eschatology, and it would have been uncharacteristic of him not to have said so.

A short, unpublished essay, distributed by the Teaching Committee of Nineteen as part of its regular bulletin in early 1922, provides an indication of Gregory’s thinking at the time. Entitled “A Brief Answer to Questions on the Fulfillment of Some Bible Prophecies Concerning This Day,” the essay appears to have been prepared by Gregory for distribution to interested Christian seekers during his teaching trips, and it likely reflected some of the content of many of his talks. Gregory either included many of these arguments in his talk at Sidney Park or interacted personally with Lowery afterwards (or both), for the paper is clearly the source of the twelve principles Lowery quoted, down to the identical wording and capitalization. In the essay, Gregory asserted that “pride and arrogance,” attachment to worldly learning, and faulty interpretation of prophecies caused people to reject the “Messengers of God” from age to age.<sup>323</sup> He quoted from Jesus’ lengthy condemnation of the Jewish religious leaders who opposed him: “Ye search the Scriptures for out of them ye think ye have Eternal Life. These also testify of me.”<sup>324</sup> The same veils that caused the “scribes and Pharisees” to reject the Son of God, Gregory implicitly warned, might keep contemporary Christians from recognizing “BAHA’O’LLAH, His Greatest Manifestation, and ABDUL BAHA, the Servant of God and the Center of His Covenant” in the “Day of God,” the day of Christ’s “second appearance.”<sup>325</sup> Gregory mentioned twelve principles that Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá proclaimed for the “healing of the nations” and the

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<sup>323</sup> Louis G. Gregory, “A Brief Answer to Questions on the Fulfillment of Some Bible Prophecies Concerning This Day,” probably distributed with *Teaching Bulletin*, 19 June 1922, 1.

<sup>324</sup> John 5:39.

<sup>325</sup> Gregory, “Brief Answer,” 1.

“pacification of the world.”<sup>326</sup> Gregory’s discussion put the principles, a version of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s summary of the Bahá’í teachings in some of his talks in the United States, in the context of Christian millennial expectation, far from the legalism of which Lowery accused him.<sup>327</sup> He linked the twelve principles to the “new Jerusalem,” the city of God associated in Christian prophecy with Christ’s return. “If a man will accept it,” he said, “these twelve great principles are symbolized by the Tree, in the Book of Revelation, bearing twelve manner of fruits, and the leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations.”<sup>328</sup> In the remainder of the essay, Gregory treated some dozen additional Christian prophecies, explaining the meaning of Bahá’u’lláh’s title, the manner of his coming, the relationship between the “Son” and the “Father,” and the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In closing, he asserted that a pure-hearted Christian, investigating the prophecies of the Bible “in the light of the Bahai Revelation” would find “that the whole Bible was written for this great day of God, in which we are now living, and that all these prophecies ... are now fulfilled.”<sup>329</sup>

Even if Gregory mentioned only a few such ideas in his Sidney Park talk, it appears that Lowery deliberately misrepresented Gregory’s exposition of the Bahá’í teachings on Jesus and Christianity. Further, he strongly implied that Gregory had malevolent intentions. In his account, Lowery complimented Gregory for his “good, clear voice,” and called his oratory “really eloquent and forceful,” but he added that Gregory “displayed considerable

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> During his public addresses in the West in 1911-1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often explained some of the social and spiritual teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Following his visit, American Bahá’ís compiled the teachings he mentioned as “twelve universal principles” and reprinted them widely. See, for example, “Twelve Basic Bahai Principles,” *Star of the West* 11, no. 1 (21 March 1920): 4-5, and Louise R. Waite, “The Bahai Revelation,” *Star of the West* 12, no. 1 (21 March 1921): 9-13. For a brief discussion of the impact of the principles on the Bahá’ís’ teaching, see Smith, “The American Bahá’í Community,” 127-8.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. Cf. Rev. 22:2.

<sup>329</sup> Gregory, “Brief Answer,” 2-3.

sagacious judgment in the wording and presentation of his new doctrine” and “was shrewd enough to conceal his real purposes.”<sup>330</sup> By misrepresenting the Bahá’í Faith as devoid of spirit and anti-Christian, implying that Gregory had evil intent, and including the harrowing tale of Alonzo Twine, Lowery attempted to scare his readers away from the Bahá’í Faith.

Lowery may well have called into question Gregory’s integrity in order to conceal other aspects of the Bahá’í Faith that he found more troubling. For a racial accommodationist such as Lowery, who had made his career as an intermediary between his black constituents and the white elite, the Bahá’í teachings and practices on race may have highlighted some of the shortcomings of his own program. It is unknown how much Louis Gregory referred to race in his Sidney Park talk or subsequent discussions with the ministers in attendance, beyond the references to “The Oneness of Humanity” and “Abandonment of Prejudice.” Gregory may have discussed his interaction with Josiah Morse and the work of the southern interracial movement or the Bahá’í-sponsored Racial Amity Conferences, but relatively mild interracial contact of this sort would not have been enough to rankle Lowery. It is unlikely that Gregory mentioned publicly his own marriage to a white woman, an egregious violation of white supremacist racial mores. More likely is that Gregory mentioned ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s insistence on the social equality of the races during his North American sojourn or the integrated practice of the Washington Bahá’í community, either one of which shared more in common with the egalitarian rhetoric of the emancipation-era black church than with Lowery’s cautious version of racial uplift.

The rather pronounced anti-clericalism of the new religion may have been another problem for Lowery. Bahá’u’lláh’s extensive teachings on the spiritual sovereignty of the individual (summarized in Gregory’s list as “The Search for Truth”) included, in language

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<sup>330</sup> Lowery, “Column.”

remarkably like that of Jesus' rebuke of the Jewish sectarians, a strong condemnation of clerics who would arrogate spiritual authority to themselves. These teachings formed part of the usual framework for Gregory's presentations of the Bahá'í Faith to Christian audiences, and he referred to them in his essay. While Jesus' treatment of the subject accused clergymen of susceptibility to spiritual blindness, Lowery reversed the analogy to paint Gregory, a layman, not himself, as a latter-day Pharisee. His church-going readers would certainly have understood the intent of the accusation, but if they failed to recall the details of the original story, they might not have noticed Lowery's rhetorical sleight of hand.

Bahá'í anti-clericalism had practical implications. Bahá'u'lláh expressly prohibited the creation of a Bahá'í clergy, providing instead for elected, corporate leadership. By the early 1920s, under 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance, the fledgling Bahá'í executive bodies at the local and national levels in the United States had taken on many of the basic pastoral functions—protecting and propagating the faith, educating and nurturing the community, arbitrating disputes among members, and collecting and administering funds—traditionally associated with clergy. Even full- and part-time Bahá'í traveling teachers usually paid their own way, and held no official status in the body of believers. In the racial uplift theology shared by Lowery, Richard Carroll, and Booker T. Washington, material attainments and Christian moral development were closely intertwined, and upright, prosperous ministers were potent symbols (as well as arbiters) of the race's aspirations. Lowery may well have concluded that if the egalitarian Bahá'í system were to win over too many of his congregants, he risked losing his privileged status or even his livelihood. In the context of the rise of new centers of power inside and outside the black church, such as women's denominational auxiliaries and clubs and the NAACP, the democratic structure of the Bahá'í Faith (not to



mention its full inclusion of women in positions of leadership) might have appeared to Lowery as one more potential blow to the clerical class.

While Lowery may have seen in the Bahá'í Faith a potentially potent theological and social force—defying at once the orthodoxies of race, religion, class, and gender that lay at the heart of white supremacist ideology, his own version of racial uplift, and the position of ministers in the black community—the fact that (in Lowery's mind at least) the faith had destroyed Alonzo Twine, a promising young fruit of uplift theology, was alone enough to have ensured his negative public reaction to Gregory in 1921. His personal animus and his unusually conservative theology may have made his an extreme case; indeed, Haygood's invitation for Gregory to address his congregation indicates an entirely different kind of clerical response to the Bahá'í Faith. Across the United States and in many southern cities and towns, Bahá'í teachers found Christian ministers—black and white, and from traditionally liberal and conservative denominations—who were warm to their message. Many opened their pulpits to Bahá'í visitors, and a handful even became Bahá'ís and propagated their new faith openly (including Albert Vail, a white former Unitarian minister who was one of Louis Gregory's fellow-travelers during 1919-1921). As for the rank and file of black churchgoers, Lowery was at pains to downplay the impact of Gregory's talks on Columbia audiences: “[W]hile the people admired his oratory, they failed to accept his teaching. The impression he seemed to have made was short lived, and soon passed away. But there may be a few ... like the young lawyer referred to above, who will follow the professor.”<sup>331</sup> Judging by responses in other southern cities during Gregory's 1919-1921 tours, however, his presentation of the Bahá'í Faith—a new religion that was socially and theologically progressive, united black and white in intimate fellowship and common

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

purpose, and claimed to fulfill Christian expectation of the Kingdom of God on earth—would likely have been intriguing, if not deeply compelling, to at least a few of those in attendance at the Sidney Park talk. While he may have been out of step with progressive ministers such as Haygood and with the aspirations of an increasingly assertive African-American community, Lowery's opposition to Gregory and the Bahá'í Faith and his attempt to reinforce Protestant orthodoxy in his readers indicate some of the difficulties that conservative clergymen might face when confronted with the new religion.

## Chapter 3

### **Building Bahá'í Community in the Augusta Area, 1913-1937**

While the first person to introduce the Bahá'í Faith to South Carolina was a native son, the founder of the state's first Bahá'í community came from half a world away in the medieval city of Königsberg in East Prussia. A vocal instructor who immigrated to New York in 1895, Margaret Klebs became a Bahá'í in New England. Around 1911, she settled in the Augusta metropolitan area, a New South urban-industrial center straddling the Savannah River, the border between South Carolina and Georgia. Her move to the Augusta area was critical to the development of the Bahá'í Faith in the Deep South. With only a scattering of Bahá'ís in the region—one in Austin, two in Jacksonville, a struggling little group on Mobile Bay, and perhaps a handful of isolated new believers as a result of Louis Gregory's fall 1910 teaching trip—Klebs's presence in Augusta represented an additional outpost of the religion, a chance to build a new local community that could serve as a base of expansion into nearby areas. Remaining in Augusta until the end of her life a quarter century later, Klebs witnessed a period of dramatic changes in the American Bahá'í movement, as the final decade of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry gave way to a new period of administrative development under his immediate successor, Shoghi Effendi. By the mid-1930s, the Augusta-area Bahá'í community reflected many of the changes in the national movement. With a functioning local governing council, a regular schedule of activities, a dedicated meeting facility, and a growing roster of members, it was larger and better organized than most in the region.

Indeed, the work of Klebs and others in the Augusta area indicated a relatively high degree of receptivity to the faith not only among black Southerners, as Gregory had discovered, but among whites of differing class backgrounds as well. However, unlike the early Washington community, the Augusta-area Bahá'ís achieved at best only partial integration, highlighting the need for a fresh approach to teaching the faith in the South.

### **From Unified Germany to the United States**

Founded by the Teutonic Knights in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and capital of their monastic state, the Baltic Sea port city of Königsberg had been an important medieval trading center and seat of higher learning. During the Reformation it had been a stronghold of Lutheranism, and during the revolutions of the 1840s, of liberalism. When Margarethe Sophia Klebs was born in Königsberg in June 1862, it was a cosmopolitan provincial capital, a major stop on the new rail line connecting Berlin and St. Petersburg, and a major city of the Kingdom of Prussia, an industrializing, militaristic, and authoritarian state with grand ambitions in Europe.<sup>332</sup> During the years of Klebs's early childhood, her country was leading the fractious German-speaking states of north-central Europe toward economic and political unification. In January 1861, Prince Wilhelm Friedrich Ludwig of the House of Hohenzollern had succeeded his older brother as King Wilhelm I of Prussia. In September the following year, some three months after Klebs was born, the new king appointed as prime minister Otto von Bismarck, an ardent royalist and proponent of German unification. While Klebs was still a girl, Bismarck launched Prussia on a series of wars—with Denmark in 1863, Austria in 1866, and France in

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<sup>332</sup> Miriam Haney, "Margaret Klebs," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 8, 1938-1940, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (1942; repr., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 670; "Illness Fatal to Miss Klebs," *Augusta (GA) Chronicle*, 11 January 1939, 5.

1870—that proved the kingdom’s military and political power to the rest of the German-speaking states. In January 1871, as the Franco-Prussian War was ending in a humiliating defeat for France’s Emperor Napoleon III, the German princes and military leaders proclaimed Wilhelm I the “German Emperor,” heralding a new federal state along lines that Bismarck had traced. Bismarck himself became chancellor of the new German Empire.

As Margarethe Klebs grew to adulthood, the confident new Germany rose as a world power, with a booming population, rapid economic expansion and technological innovation, an outpouring of art and culture, and the acquisition of overseas colonies in Africa and the Pacific. The more fortunate among its citizens enjoyed unprecedented degrees of material prosperity. As part of a “distinguished and cultured” family in the Empire’s leading state, Klebs received an excellent education, studying piano and voice with some of the best teachers in Germany, France, and Italy.<sup>333</sup> One of her brothers, Ernest Klebs, became a prominent surgeon in Munich.<sup>334</sup> Their uncle Edwin Klebs, a bacteriologist, discovered the bacillus that causes diphtheria. In 1894, he left a prominent appointment in Switzerland and migrated to the United States, practicing at a sanatorium in Asheville, North Carolina before accepting a teaching position at Rush Medical College in Chicago.<sup>335</sup> Two years later Edwin’s son, their cousin Arnold Klebs, also a physician, followed his father to the United States, where he treated tuberculosis first at a sanatorium in Citronelle, Alabama and then in Chicago.<sup>336</sup> Possessed of self-confidence and an independent spirit, Margarethe Klebs made her own living in Europe as a vocalist and teacher. In 1895, unmarried at age 33, she, too,

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<sup>333</sup> Haney, “Margaret Klebs,” 670-1.

<sup>334</sup> “Illness Fatal to Miss Klebs,” *Augusta Chronicle*, 11 January 1939, 5.

<sup>335</sup> “Professor Edwin Klebs,” *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2760 (22 November 1913): 1413-4.

<sup>336</sup> Leona Baumgartner, “Arnold Carl Klebs, 1870-1943,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 14 (July 1943): 201-216.

left for the United States.<sup>337</sup> Settling in New York City, Klebs adopted an anglicized spelling of her first name, Margaret.

In her new country, Margaret Klebs continued to teach music, sometimes as a private instructor and sometimes in academic settings, and she often ventured far from New York. Around the turn of the century she held a position at the Presbyterian College for Women in Columbia, South Carolina (later merged with Queens College in Charlotte) and was a member of the Southern Educational Association.<sup>338</sup> At least by 1911, she was living and working among the wealthy Northerners who wintered at the luxury hotels, golf courses, and polo grounds of Aiken and North Augusta in western South Carolina and the neighboring city of Augusta, Georgia. And she was an early and regular patron of Green-Acre-on-the-Piscataqua, an unusual summer colony in southern Maine across the river from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Founded in 1890 as a resort hotel by Sarah J. Farmer, a daughter of New England transcendentalists, Green Acre received its name from poet John Greenleaf Whittier, a family friend and frequent guest. It was billed as a non-sectarian oasis for the comparative study of religion and philosophy, with speakers ranging from Swami Vivekananda to W.E.B. Du Bois. It attracted a diverse array of poets, artists, intellectuals, free-thinkers, and spiritual

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<sup>337</sup> Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, DC, <http://www.ancestry.com>.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1920), <http://www.ancestry.com>. Klebs and her other family members joined a wave of migrants from Germany to the United States that peaked at 1.3 million in the 1880s. Most of the migrants were rural dwellers and industrial workers displaced by Germany's rapid economic transformation, but some were members of the middle and upper classes who were dissatisfied with the regime's militarism and authoritarianism. Perhaps it helps explain the migration of Klebs and her relatives. See Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 66-9.

<sup>338</sup> Southern Educational Association, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Eleventh Annual Meeting Held at Columbia, S.C., December 26-29, 1901* (N.p.: Southern Education Association, 1902), 279.

seekers from Boston and New York and other cities of the Eastern Seaboard.<sup>339</sup> Margaret Klebs was right at home. She began to spend her summers in one of Green Acre's rustic cottages, teaching private students, arranging musical programs for the other guests, attending lectures, and enjoying the natural beauty of the riverside setting.

Green Acre also provided Klebs with her first encounter with the Bahá'í Faith. Early in 1900, faced with financial difficulties and ill health, Sarah Farmer took a cruise on the Mediterranean. On the ship she met two old friends who had become Bahá'ís and were on their way to Palestine to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and they encouraged her to join them. Farmer was transformed. "Heart too full for speech," she wrote in her diary the night of her first audience with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "—received by my Lord."<sup>340</sup> During the summer season after her return home, she taught a class on "The Persian Revelation" at Green Acre, and New England Bahá'ís soon began to frequent the resort.

One of Farmer's students was Margaret Klebs.<sup>341</sup> It is unclear whether Klebs identified herself as a Bahá'í as early as 1901, when she was working at Presbyterian College in Columbia, but she certainly did so by 1911, when she sent a contribution to the temple fund from North Augusta.<sup>342</sup> When 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to the United States the next year, Klebs was eager to meet him. In August, when he visited Green Acre, Klebs was among the

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<sup>339</sup> For a history of Green Acre, see Anne Gordon Atkinson et al., *Green Acre on the Piscataqua* (Eliot, ME: Green Acre Bahá'í School Council, 1991).

<sup>340</sup> Bahiyih Randall Winckler, "Sarah Jane Farmer 1847-1916," unpublished reference material in the Green Acre Archives, 5, quoted in Atkinson et al., *Green Acre*, 29.

<sup>341</sup> Haney, "Margaret Klebs," 671.

<sup>342</sup> The record of financial contributions to the Bahá'í Temple fund seems to place Klebs in North Augusta by 1911 or very early 1912. At the annual convention of the Bahai Temple Unity in April 1912, the Executive Board's financial secretary reported that during the previous administrative year (April 1911-April 1912), a contribution to the Temple fund had been received from North Augusta, South Carolina. Klebs is the only Bahá'í known to have been associated with the Augusta area about that time. "Record of the Fourth Annual Convention of Bahai Temple Unity," *Star of the West* 3, no. 5 (5 June 1912): 5.

five hundred people who joined him there.<sup>343</sup> During his week-long stay, he addressed the gathering about Bahá'í concepts of education and human development, predicted that the first Bahá'í university and the second Bahá'í temple in the United States would be built at Green Acre, and engaged in intimate conversation with many individuals. More than twenty years later, Margaret Klebs recalled fondly her time with “Him who walked with holy feet on the ground of our cherished Green Acre.” “Never to be forgotten,” she said, was the sight of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with Sarah Farmer, permanently disabled after a fall and unable to continue her life’s work, “driving slowly around the Green Acre fields. Blessed are we who could witness it.”<sup>344</sup>

Either at Green Acre in August or later in the fall during his second visit to Washington, D.C., Margaret Klebs had a personal interview with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which he directed her to return to the South to teach the faith.<sup>345</sup> By the winter of 1912-1913, Klebs was back in Aiken and North Augusta, and until the end of her life more than a quarter century later, she followed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s instructions.<sup>346</sup> She continued to spend the summers at Green Acre, where lectures, study groups, and interactions with other believers kept her connected to the main currents of American Bahá'í thought and practice. The remaining nine months, usually September to May, she spent in the Augusta area, teaching music to private students and classes, staging recitals and concerts to benefit local charities, and attempting to build a new Bahá'í community from scratch.

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<sup>343</sup> Atkinson et al., *Green Acre*, 47.

<sup>344</sup> Wargha [Margaret] Klebs to a commemorative gathering at Green Acre, 12 August 1935, Eliot Bahá'í Archives, Eliot, ME (hereafter cited as EBA).

<sup>345</sup> Daisy Jackson Moore, one of Klebs’s first Bahá'í students in the Augusta area, recalled that Klebs met with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Washington and that he directed her to move south. They may have met in Washington as well as at Green Acre. Daisy Jackson Moore, handwritten note to “George,” n. d., ABA.

<sup>346</sup> “Musical at Hampton Terrace,” *Augusta Chronicle*, 3 March 1912, 9.



Louis Gregory's fall 1910 teaching trip through the Carolinas and Georgia had indicated the potential receptivity of the region's people, especially African Americans, to the Bahá'í message. At the same time, it highlighted the limitations of an approach to teaching that relied on itinerant lecturers without some method of following up with interested individuals and groups. By pursuing her livelihood and making friends and acquaintances in the Augusta area, Klebs could come in contact with seekers and teach them individually, nurturing a new Bahá'í community on her own. She could also greatly enhance the effectiveness of visiting teachers by making arrangements, securing publicity in advance, and continuing to teach local people who expressed an interest in the faith.

### **Sister Cities on the Savannah**

When Margaret Klebs moved to the environs of Augusta, she was making her home in an old city that embodied all the contradictions of the New South. Located on the Savannah River at the fall line, the rocky shoals marking the transition from the Piedmont to the broad coastal plain, the area had been inhabited for at least four thousand years.<sup>347</sup> In the early decades of the Carolina colony, the Native settlement of Savannah Town on the east bank of the river was a center for the lucrative trade in Indian slaves and deerskins. When the new colony of Georgia was chartered in the 1730s, the river became the boundary between it and South Carolina, and the colony's governor sent an expedition to build a settlement at the fall line that would usurp the Carolinians' Indian trade. During the late colonial period, the new town

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<sup>347</sup> In excavations beginning in the 1850s, the oldest pottery in North America was unearthed at Stallings Island eight miles upstream from Augusta. For a treatment of the earliest human habitation of the area and the Stallings Island site, see Kenneth E. Sassaman, *Early Pottery in the Southeast: Tradition and Innovation in Cooking Technology* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993).

of Augusta prospered as a tobacco market for the expanding Georgia backcountry and adjacent areas of South Carolina.

After the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, the area's population boomed as cotton production replaced tobacco and African slavery expanded. Augusta became a center of the regional cotton trade, and entrepreneurship flourished. In 1819 Henry Shultz, an immigrant from Germany who already had a new wharf, a bridge across the river, a bank, and the first steamboat service to Savannah to his credit, decided to build a new city on the east bank of the river to rival Augusta. He laid out streets where his bridge crossed into South Carolina—not far from the site of Savannah Town—and called it Hamburg after his native city.<sup>348</sup>

Early in 1834, the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company began rail service between Hamburg and Charleston. At 136 miles, it was the longest railroad in the world.<sup>349</sup> Within a month, Augusta investors had organized a company to extend the line to Athens and beyond. In 1845, the Augusta Canal, which bypassed the rapids on the Savannah, opened. Spurred by these developments in transportation, several entrepreneurs established factories in the area. The Vacluse and Graniteville textile mills, located on the swiftly-flowing waters of Horse Creek on the South Carolina side of the river, made the area what one scholar has called “the cradle of southern industrialization.”<sup>350</sup> The railroad also brought the area's first tourist industry. In 1835 the town of Aiken, named for the president of the S.C. Canal and Railroad Company, was chartered along the line some fifteen miles east of

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<sup>348</sup> For treatments of Shultz, see Edward J. Cashin, *The Story of Augusta* (Augusta, GA: Richmond County Board of Education, 1980), 71-3; and Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), chapters 3 and 6.

<sup>349</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 283. For an extended discussion of the S.C. Canal and Railroad Company, see Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South*, chapter 4.

<sup>350</sup> Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South*, 123.

Hamburg. With a mild climate and easy accessibility by rail from Charleston, Aiken soon began to attract wealthy visitors from the Lowcountry seeking relief from tuberculosis or from the heat of summer. Improvements in transportation, however, also became the undoing of Hamburg. The canal and a new railroad bridge connecting the South Carolina and Georgia sides of the river allowed farmers to bypass Hamburg and take their cotton directly to Augusta for marketing. Augusta continued to prosper, but by the 1850s Hamburg was virtually abandoned.

While fighting during the Civil War largely bypassed the Augusta area, the aftermath of the conflict brought decades of racial violence, as whites fought to maintain political and economic control over a substantial black population. In 1871, after two brief periods of military rule, conservatives in Georgia, where whites made up a slight majority, were able to oust the state's Republican regime at the ballot box. In South Carolina, where blacks outnumbered whites two to one, the task of white conservatives was much harder. In the lead-up to statewide elections in 1876, the town of Hamburg, repopulated by blacks in the wake of the war, became a pivotal flashpoint in the struggle between the Republican state government and an emerging conservative paramilitary movement. The Hamburg incident, during which a former Confederate general led hundreds of armed white men from both sides of the river in an assault on the town and its black militia, emboldened the most conservative wing of South Carolina's Democratic Party. Under the leadership of Martin W. Gary of neighboring Edgefield County, the "straight-outs," who opposed power-sharing or "fusion" with Republicans under reforming Governor Daniel H. Chamberlain, gained control of the state's Democratic Party machinery. They organized thousands of white men into paramilitary units to keep black voters away from the polls, unleashed a wave of intimidation

and violence that swept the state, and stuffed ballot boxes on Election Day.<sup>351</sup> Even such coordinated efforts, however, were not enough to ensure an outright victory for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, former Confederate general Wade Hampton. Two rival governments claimed victory in Columbia, and the state's disputed electoral votes (along with those from Florida and Louisiana, where Republican regimes faced similar stand-offs) left the country without a president-elect. Dealmakers in Washington awarded the disputed electoral votes to the Republican presidential candidate with an understanding that the last Republican strongholds in the South would return to Democratic control. In April 1877, the last federal troops left South Carolina, and the state's Republican government collapsed. The nation's venture in reconstructing the South was over, and the fate of black Southerners lay in the hands of their white neighbors.

For African Americans in the Augusta area, the demise of Reconstruction opened a new wave of violence and oppression. In the rural districts, corruption and manipulation of the legal system ensured the virtual re-enslavement of thousands of African Americans, mostly men, through debt peonage, county chain gangs, and, on the Georgia side of the border from 1868 to 1908, the brutal convict lease system.<sup>352</sup> For the rest, extralegal violence became a constant threat. Many migrated to Augusta in search of education, employment, and safety. By the first decade of the twentieth century, black Augusta boasted a number of churches, lodges, and mutual aid societies; two high schools, one public and one private; a Methodist-supported college; a nursing school; and a host of businesses. Black professionals

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<sup>351</sup> Armed confrontations followed in Charleston and Beaufort Counties and at Ellenton, another small settlement in Aiken County less than twenty miles from Hamburg. After the Ellenton incident, white paramilitaries executed some thirty to fifty black men, including a state legislator. Edgar, *South Carolina*, 403.

<sup>352</sup> For details of the forced labor system in South Carolina and Georgia after the Civil War, see Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 67-79, 129; and John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 72-89.

hailed the city's positive racial climate; in 1894 the editor of one of the city's black newspapers declared it "the garden spot of the country as far as the relations of the races go."<sup>353</sup> But the success of a small minority masked deteriorating conditions in the city's black working-class neighborhoods. In the Territories, or the "Terri," the sprawling slum south of Gwinnett Street, limited employment opportunities and a lack of city services spawned disease, crime, and drug use.<sup>354</sup> Nor were urban African Americans entirely immune from white violence. In the spring of 1900, a mob of white Augustans lynched William Wilson, a black painter accused of killing the son of a wealthy white cotton broker in a fight over a seat on a city streetcar. In the wake of the lynching, neighbors narrowly prevented another white mob from burning down the office of an outspoken black newspaper editor.<sup>355</sup>

Beginning in the 1880s, Augusta-area politicians played important roles in the farmers' revolt and the erection of the Jim Crow regime. Benjamin Ryan Tillman, who rode the wave of agrarian discontent to the governorship of South Carolina and engineered the state's disfranchisement constitution, was a native of Edgefield County who often trumpeted his participation in the 1876 violence at Hamburg. On the other side of the river, Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party leader Thomas E. Watson, a native of Thomson in McDuffie County, some thirty-five miles west of Augusta, represented the area in the U.S. House of Representatives. An early advocate of black-white political coalition, he turned increasingly hostile to African Americans after his run for the vice-presidency in 1896, when the Populists

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<sup>353</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 24 June 1894, quoted in Bobby J. Donaldson, "Standing on a Volcano: The Leadership of William Jefferson White," in *Paternalism in a Southern City: Race, Religion, and Gender in Augusta, Georgia*, ed. Edward J. Cashin and Glenn T. Askew (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 148.

<sup>354</sup> Donaldson, "Standing on a Volcano," 148-9.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-61.

went down to disastrous defeat nationally. Much as Tillman used his platform in the U.S. Senate to advance nationwide support for disfranchisement, segregation, and lynching, Watson disseminated his ideas through a national journal he published. His invective fueled multiple threads of reactionary politics in the early twentieth century, encompassing Negrophobia as well as opposition to new perceived threats to America and ranging from the local level to the national. It spurred the formation of an anti-Catholic faction of the local Democratic Party that controlled Augusta politics from the turn of the century until the 1940s; the Georgia disfranchisement movement, which by 1910 had decimated the ranks of black voters through the whites-only primary election system and literacy tests; and the anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and anti-radical sentiment that contributed to the lynching of Leo Frank in Atlanta in 1915 and the subsequent revival of the Ku Klux Klan as a broad-based national movement.<sup>356</sup>

The consolidation of white political control in the decades after Reconstruction coincided with the New South wave of industrialization. In the Augusta area and across the region, a new generation of ambitious young men became the most vigorous proponents of economic development. One young entrepreneur who embodied the New South spirit in Augusta—and whose family maintained a long association with the Bahá'í Faith after Margaret Klebs's arrival in the area—was James Urquhart Jackson. Born in 1856 to a family of small slaveholders, businessmen, and professionals, Jackson grew up on the family farm just outside Augusta. The large household included several members of the extended family and up to a dozen enslaved house servants and farm hands; after Emancipation, many of the

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<sup>356</sup> The classic treatment of Watson's career is C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (1938; New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

same African Americans apparently stayed on as free laborers.<sup>357</sup> James Jackson's extended family was part of the Augusta area's commercial elite both before and after the Civil War. One of his uncles, a general during the war, was an attorney, and another was president of a local bank and one of the area's first textile mills.<sup>358</sup> James's father, George Twiggs Jackson, a local militia leader during the war, was a stock and bond broker and the owner or director of a granite mill, a grain processor, two textile factories, and the Georgia Railroad and Banking Company.<sup>359</sup> The Jacksons were members of First Presbyterian Church on Telfair Street in Augusta, where Joseph R. Wilson, father of future U.S. president Thomas Woodrow Wilson, was pastor from 1858 to 1870. James Jackson and the younger Wilson were born in the same year and likely attended Sunday school together.<sup>360</sup>

When James U. Jackson graduated from the University of Georgia in 1876—the year of Wade Hampton's coup d'état across the river—it was only natural for him to return to the family home and go into business in Augusta. He partnered with his cousin and adopted brother, Marion Jackson Verdery, whose family's land bordered the Jackson farm, in a brokerage business. He soon became involved in the postwar railroad-building boom, eventually serving as an officer or founding director of several railroad companies. In 1888, he helped organize the Augusta National Exposition, an annual fair designed to draw visitors

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<sup>357</sup> Jeanne M. McDaniel, *North Augusta: James U. Jackson's Dream* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 19; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850), <http://www.ancestry.com>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860), <http://www.ancestry.com>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1880), <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>358</sup> McDaniel, *North Augusta*, 10.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-1.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

and boost the area's economy. The following year, Jackson invested in a new resort hotel, the Bon Air, on the sandy hills of Summerville just northwest of the city.<sup>361</sup>

James Jackson's crowning achievement, however, was the establishment of the garden suburb of North Augusta across the Savannah. The new town, embodying both New South prosperity and the best in contemporary urban design, would have no association with the black neighborhood of Hamburg. Surveying the slum on the flood plain near the river, Jackson planned his town for higher ground. In 1890 he purchased 5600 acres on the bluffs just northwest of Hamburg and, with tax incentives from Augusta's city council, built a new bridge across the river at 13<sup>th</sup> Street that would bypass Hamburg completely. Under no illusion about competing with Augusta for business, Jackson planned North Augusta primarily as a residential suburb. The Delaware civil engineering firm he hired produced an innovative town plan: manufacturing and businesses were concentrated on the floodplain and residences above, with parks and greenways that followed the natural contours of the land interspersed among otherwise regular city blocks. Along with modern design principles, the town embodied the ideology of the New South: its two squares, named Calhoun Place and Hampton Place, commemorated South Carolina's architects of secession and of Redemption, respectively, and its two main thoroughfares were named Carolina and Georgia avenues to symbolize the joining of the two states.<sup>362</sup>

The growth of North Augusta was part of James Jackson's broader vision for expanding the area's modern infrastructure and tourist industry. In 1897, Augusta's electric trolley system was extended to North Augusta, and with it, electric lights for the town. In 1902, Jackson formed a new company, the North Augusta Electric and Improvement

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 9-11, 19-23.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 47, 60-1.



Company, and bought the company that ran the Augusta trolleys. The combination created the first inter-urban electric railroad in the South, linking the resort hotels west of Augusta with North Augusta and Aiken, a distance of some twenty miles. In 1903 the Hampton Terrace, a new resort hotel financed by Jackson, opened for business. Built atop a hill overlooking North Augusta and also named for Wade Hampton, the five-story building had 300 guest rooms in two massive wings, with a ballroom, sunrooms, and other amusements around the entryway in the center. An 18-hole golf course, horseback riding, and a game preserve provided additional entertainment. For the next dozen years, many of the country's wealthiest and most powerful people—including Marshall Fields, Harvey Firestone, John D. Rockefeller, and William Howard Taft—spent their winters at the Hampton Terrace. Like North Augusta itself, Jackson's grand hotel symbolized the contradictions of the New South: simultaneously forward- and backward-looking, a whites-only island of leisure in a sea of sharecropping, debt, forced labor, low-wage industry, political corruption, and endemic violence.<sup>363</sup> It was an unusual location, to say the least, from which to proclaim the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humanity.

### **“Ere Long in that City”**

As a member of a wealthy German family with impressive training in European classical music, Margaret Klebs enjoyed an elite cultural status in the United States, but she lived simply, usually boarding in a home or renting a small apartment for the nine months each year she spent in the Augusta area. While her own circumstances were modest, early on Klebs began to make a mark on the artistic and civic life of the area, hosting several public performances of her students each year, often to raise funds for local charities. In early

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 51.

March 1912, for example, Klebs arranged a musical program at the Hampton Terrace attended by hotel guests as well as local residents. The evening featured twenty students performing solos and as a chorus and benefitted Augusta's YWCA.<sup>364</sup> In May 1913, Klebs's students from Augusta, North Augusta, and Aiken performed at the school auditorium in North Augusta to benefit both the school and a local Methodist church.<sup>365</sup>

Klebs's work necessarily put her in contact with the Augusta area's white middle- and upper-class residents—those most interested in and able to afford private voice instruction and most likely to attend performances of classical music—and those who aspired to such status, and it was primarily among this segment of the population that she initially attempted to share the Bahá'í message. Julia Moore, society editor at the *Augusta Herald*, became a friend of Klebs and a student of the faith. She readily publicized Bahá'í events and participated herself, apparently without identifying herself as a believer.<sup>366</sup> Frank Hulse, a small businessman in his early twenties with a wife and young child, was one of Klebs's students who investigated the faith.<sup>367</sup> Another student who became a Bahá'í was Mary Anne Bracey, a teenager whose father was a traveling salesman.<sup>368</sup> Robert Irvin, a music teacher himself who participated in Klebs's concerts as accompanist and performer, also became a believer. In his early thirties and single, he lived at home with his widowed mother, a widowed older brother who was an attorney, a younger brother who was city editor at the

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<sup>364</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 6 March 1912, 5.

<sup>365</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 4 May 1913, 9.

<sup>366</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930), <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>367</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1920), <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>368</sup> *Augusta City Directory, 1901* (Atlanta: Maloney Publishing Co., 1901), 219.

*Augusta Chronicle*, a younger sister who was a stenographer in a cotton warehouse, and his older brother's young son.<sup>369</sup> Another student who became a Bahá'í was a scion of Augusta's business elite on one side and of the coastal planter aristocracy on the other. Daisy King Jackson was the daughter of James U. Jackson and his second wife, Edith Barrington King of Savannah, herself the daughter of a prominent Presbyterian minister and, through her mother, a descendant of Georgia's colonial governor, merchant, and rice planter James Habersham.<sup>370</sup> Klebs's close association with the Jackson family began early and continued throughout the years of her residence in the area, providing a variety of openings for teaching and likely lending the Bahá'í Faith an air of legitimacy in the eyes of the general public.

While Margaret Klebs was able to teach the faith effectively on an individual basis and was comfortable organizing large events, she seems never to have considered herself a public speaker. To attract larger numbers of people to the faith and capitalize on her own teaching successes, she needed the assistance of other experienced believers. In 1914, Klebs invited Joseph Hannen of Washington to come to the Augusta area for a series of speaking engagements.<sup>371</sup> Hannen often traveled as far south as North Carolina as part of his work as a salesman of medical instruments, and Klebs may have paid for his trip from Charlotte or Asheville to Augusta and back.<sup>372</sup> Klebs arranged for him to speak in North Augusta and Aiken on at least three occasions. The first public meeting on the Bahá'í Faith in the area took place on the evening of March 8, 1914, at James U. Jackson's mansion in North

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<sup>369</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920.*

<sup>370</sup> McDaniel, *North Augusta*, 23; *Tenth Census, 1880.* For the Habersham family, see Frank Lambert, *James Habersham: Loyalty, Politics, and Commerce in Colonial Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

<sup>371</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1.

<sup>372</sup> Joseph H. Hannen to Margaret Klebs, 11 March 1916, 28 March 1916, and 12 May 1917, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

Augusta. The following evening, Hannen was on the program of a concert at the Hampton Terrace “for the benefit of Children’s Home and the Mashrak-el-Azkar,” the Bahá’í temple in Chicago.<sup>373</sup> Frank Hulse, Daisy Jackson, and another student, Mabel Rogers, performed two sets of selections with Robert Irvin and Klebs at the piano. Between sets, Hannen addressed the 200 guests about the faith.<sup>374</sup> Hannen also addressed students at the Schofield Normal and Industrial School in Aiken, one of the oldest and most respected schools for African Americans in South Carolina. Founded by the Freedman’s Bureau just after the Civil War, the school was named for its principal, a Pennsylvania Quaker named Martha Schofield, and had produced numerous African-American professionals, including physician Matilda Evans of Columbia. It was supported by local blacks as well as some influential white patrons, both Aiken natives and winter colony regulars.<sup>375</sup> Klebs had arranged the lecture through an association with John H. Landes, the school’s business manager.<sup>376</sup>

After returning to Washington, Joseph Hannen reported to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about his trip.<sup>377</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tablet in reply began by praising Hannen’s teaching efforts—particularly the “delivery of an eloquent talk,” probably the large gathering at the Hampton Terrace—and assuring him of divine assistance:

Thy detailed letter was received. It was the incarnation of pure joy for it contained the particulars of thy trip to Augusta, Georgia. It explained the delivery of an eloquent talk by thee; that thou hast summoned the people to the Kingdom of God

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<sup>373</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 8 March 1914, B2.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*; Segó, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 1.

<sup>375</sup> On Schofield, her school, and race relations in postbellum Aiken, see Katherine Smedley, *Martha Schofield and the Re-Education of the South, 1839-1916*, Studies in Women and Religion, vol. 24 (Lewiston, NY and Queenston, ON: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987).

<sup>376</sup> Segó, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 1; Smedley, *Martha Schofield*, 271.

<sup>377</sup> Hannen’s letter to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has not been located. Universal House of Justice, Department of the Secretariat, email to the author, 10 August 2009.

and hast spread the Divine Teachings. Consider how every soul who has arisen to serve the Word of God will be confirmed with the heavenly Cohorts. Therefore, be thou happy, because thou art assisted with such service.

And it continued with a prophecy about the future of the Augusta area:

Ere long in that city a great multitude shall enter in the Kingdom of God, the Flag of the oneness of the world of humanity will cast its shade over that state and the Song of the Supreme Concourse will be raised from its glens and dales. The fountain of the Water of Life will gush forth and the birds of the rose-garden of God will break into the rapturous songs of the glorification of the Kingdom of Holiness in the most wonderful melody. This trace will become eternal and will be continued throughout the future ages and cycles.<sup>378</sup>

Predicting the spiritual transformation of the area, including the growth of the Bahá'í community and the removal of racial prejudice, the letter was as much a confirmation of Klebs's move as it was of Hannen's brief visit, and it inspired her to continue her work in Augusta and North Augusta for another quarter century.

Over the next few years, the area's Bahá'í community grew slowly. In 1918, the circle of believers and seekers included at least half a dozen people in addition to Margaret Klebs. G. P. Talbot, a Virginia native, was the advertizing manager for one of the local newspapers.<sup>379</sup> His wife, Louise Biggar Talbot, born in North Carolina to an English father and a mother from Georgia, was a nurse.<sup>380</sup> Ann McKennie Verdery was a Georgia native whose husband, connected to the Jackson family through marriage and business, was a former railroad executive and president of the Warren Manufacturing Company, a textile mill in Horse Creek Valley.<sup>381</sup> Myrtis Tinsley, born in South Carolina to parents from Georgia,

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<sup>378</sup> "Tablet for Augusta, Georgia," 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Joseph Hannen, 18 April 1914, ABA.

<sup>379</sup> *Thirteenth Census*, 1910.

<sup>380</sup> *Twelfth Census*, 1900.

<sup>381</sup> *The Official Railway List: A Directory* (Chicago: Railway Purchasing Agent Co., 1884), 5, <http://books.google.com/books>; *Handbook of South Carolina: Resources, Institutions and Industries of the State* (Columbia: S.C. Dept. of Agriculture, Commerce, and Immigration, 1908), 455, <http://books.google.com/books>.

was one of Margaret Klebs's voice students.<sup>382</sup> Julia Moore continued to associate with the Bahá'ís.<sup>383</sup> Robert Irvin, among the first in the city to embrace the faith, had returned to Augusta after spending three years working for the YMCA in Chicago and in Europe. While in Chicago, he had taken part in local Bahá'í activities and been a frequent visitor to the home of Zia Bagdadi, one of the leaders of the national movement.<sup>384</sup> Two young and energetic believers, however, had moved away. Daisy Jackson married in 1915 and moved to Savannah, her husband's home, and Mary Anne Bracey moved with her family to Savannah, as well.<sup>385</sup> Around 1920, a new Bahá'í, Esther Sego, moved to Augusta. An Augusta native born to South Carolina parents, she had recently embraced the faith in Jacksonville, Florida, during a teaching trip there by Charles Mason Remey of Washington. She returned to Augusta with her husband, a school teacher and later principal, and became an active part of the small Bahá'í community.<sup>386</sup> The group was sufficiently organized to name delegates to the annual national convention and, perhaps, to help fund their travel. Participation in the convention, entailing meeting and consulting with believers from all parts of the country and electing the members of the Executive Board, surely helped consolidate the Bahá'í identity of those who attended. In 1919, Louise Talbot was the Augusta community's delegate to the convention, held in New York. The next year the convention

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<sup>382</sup> *Fifteenth Census*, 1930; *Augusta Chronicle*, 24 December 1916, 3 and 7 January 1917, B4.

<sup>383</sup> Except for Louise Biggar Talbot, who was away, the preceding individuals as well as Klebs sent contributions to the Persian-American Educational Society, a Washington-based Bahá'í charity. Margaret Klebs to Joseph Hannen, answered 8 April 1918, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>384</sup> Margaret Klebs to Alfred Lunt, 26 February 1920, Alfred E. Lunt Papers, NBA; Passport Applications, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, Washington, DC, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>385</sup> Sego, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1; McDaniel, *North Augusta*, 93-4; *Fourteenth Census*, 1920.

<sup>386</sup> Sego, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1; *Fourteenth Census*, 1920; *Fifteenth Census*, 1930; *Polk's Augusta (Richmond County, Georgia) City Directory*, 1937 (Richmond, VA: R. L. Polk, 1937), 598.

was again held in New York, and Robert Irvin was the delegate. Both years, Margaret Klebs served as alternate delegate and presumably attended the convention as well.<sup>387</sup>

Klebs continued to invite prominent Bahá'ís from other parts of the country to come to the Augusta area to speak. Among them were Charles Mason Remey and John Bassett, who came from Washington in 1918 and 1919. On one occasion, they spoke at the Jackson home in North Augusta, and on another at Klebs's music studio on Greene Street in Augusta.<sup>388</sup> About 1920, Jenabe Assadu'llah Fádil-i-Mazindarání, a Persian Bahá'í scholar whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent on a tour of the United States, visited the area, speaking to an interested audience of "about sixty-five of the outstanding colored men" at Augusta's black YMCA, led by prominent minister Charles T. Walker. Accompanied by Esther Segó, Jenabe Fádil spoke about the elimination of prejudices and distributed Bahá'í literature. "There were tears in their eyes as he left," Segó recalled.<sup>389</sup> In April 1921, Martha Root, a journalist from Pennsylvania who would become the most widely-traveled lecturer in the Bahá'í world community, visited Augusta as part of a southern tour that had just included a visit to share the faith with socialist leader Eugene V. Debs in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. In Augusta, she gave three talks.<sup>390</sup> One was at the home of Esther Segó, and another was at the home of Nellie F. Baird, a sister of Louise Biggar Talbot, and her husband, a small businessman.<sup>391</sup> Root's main impact may have been on the small group of Bahá'ís rather than

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<sup>387</sup> *Star of the West* 10, no. 18 (7 February 1920): 331; *Star of the West* 11, no. 11 (27 September 1920): 174.

<sup>388</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1; *Augusta Chronicle*, 31 March 1919, 3.

<sup>389</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1

<sup>390</sup> M. R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 128.

<sup>391</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 1; *Fifteenth Census, 1930*.

seekers. Sego recalled that her visit increased “the enthusiasm and faith in the hearts of her hearers.”<sup>392</sup> Other Bahá’ís stopped in the area on their way to winter homes in Florida.<sup>393</sup>

Small as the group was, the local believers pursued their own teaching efforts and publicity in the local press. Sometimes they were rather bold in their outreach. In January 1917, the *Augusta Chronicle* noted that Margaret Klebs, Louise Talbot, and Julia Moore had called on politician and ideologue Thomas E. Watson at his estate outside Thomson. Guests for the day of Watson, his wife, Georgia Durham Watson, and his secretary and magazine editor, Alice Louise Lytle, the Bahá’ís presumably asked for the meeting in order to teach them the faith.<sup>394</sup> From time to time they were also able to ensure that national and international news of the faith was printed in the local newspapers. In June 1915, for example, the *Chronicle* noted that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “the leader of the worldwide Bahai movement for the unifying of all humanity in stronger social and religious ties,” had sent a personal representative to the religious congresses at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.<sup>395</sup> In April 1917, it announced the opening of the Bahá’í national convention in Boston as one of “Today’s Events,” along with the postponement of a trade dinner in Chicago and a meeting of the Intercollegiate Association of Amateur Athletics in Philadelphia.<sup>396</sup> Such “routine” coverage conveyed the message that the faith was a normal, nonthreatening part of the life of Augusta, the nation, and the world—no small feat for a foreign, radical, non-Christian religion in the heartland of the new Ku Klux Klan.

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<sup>392</sup> Sego, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 1.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>394</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 16 January 1917, 3.

<sup>395</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 12 June 1915, 10.

<sup>396</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 28 April 1917, 4.



According to Margaret Klebs, even opposition from local clergy was an indication of the community's growing influence in the area. "The interest in the Bahá'í Cause," she told delegates to the 1925 national convention, "has been manifested in a most wonderful way. Every year it is increasing, and perhaps the best proof that the Cause has been spreading is that from the various churches the Bahá'í movement has been denounced."<sup>397</sup> While Klebs's comments provide little indication of the specific nature or motivation of the criticism in the Augusta churches, they suggest that I.E. Lowery's rhetorical attack on the Bahá'í Faith in Columbia may not have been an isolated incident.

### **Formative Age**

On November 28, 1921, the secretary of the Bahai Temple Unity's Executive Board received a brief telegram that would have far-reaching effects on the believers in the Augusta area and across the United States. Signed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sister, Bahíyyih Khánum, it read simply: "His Holiness Abdu-Baha ascended to Abha Kingdom."<sup>398</sup> Over the next several months, it became clear to the American Bahá'ís that with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, their faith was entering a new stage of its development. Under the leadership of his successor, Shoghi Effendi, in little more than a decade the American movement grew from a loose association of local groups into a closely-knit national community pursuing systematic plans for expansion of the faith.

The devastating news of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death was quickly disseminated to Bahá'í communities across the country, and the next several issues of *Star of the West* were filled

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<sup>397</sup> "Seventeenth Annual Convention [1925]," TS, Office of the Secretary, National Convention Files, NBA, 63.

<sup>398</sup> *Star of the West* 12, no. 15 (12 December 1921): 245. "Abhá [Most Glorious] Kingdom," in Bahá'í terminology, usually denotes the afterlife.

with letters from members of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s household and American pilgrims explaining the nature of his brief illness, photographs of his remarkable funeral in Haifa, and extracts from his tablets and addresses meant to strengthen the solidarity of the believers in their grief. “If you should receive news in America that I have been thrown into the sea or carried away to an unknown place,” read one passage, from a talk to pilgrims in 1905, when he was still under threat from the Ottoman government, “if you should receive word that I have been tortured and killed—change not, grieve not; nay, rather, be more firm, be more rejoiced, and let your steadfastness grow and increase. For our meeting-place is the Kingdom of God.... [B]e firm, whether I am in this world or not.”<sup>399</sup>

Such assurances notwithstanding, mourning was mixed with anxiety as Bahá’ís in the United States and elsewhere wondered who would lead them. News arrived slowly. On December 22, a second telegram from Bahíyyih Khánum stated that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had “left full instructions in His Will and Testament” for the organization of the faith after his passing.<sup>400</sup> A third message, dated January 16, 1922 and printed on the first page of the subsequent issue of *Star of the West*, conveyed the first indications of his plans for a dual succession: “In will, Shoghi Effendi appointed Guardian of Cause and Head of House of Justice. Inform American friends.” Above the text was a photograph of a young, olive-skinned man with large, round eyes and a short moustache, wearing a black fez and Middle Eastern garments. A caption read, “Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, Grandson of His Holiness

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<sup>399</sup> *Star of the West* 12, no. 16 (31 December 1921): 254.

<sup>400</sup> *Star of the West* 12, no. 19 (2 March 1922): 303.

Abdul-Baha, Guardian of the Bahai Cause and Head of the House of Justice.”<sup>401</sup> Two institutions, then, one hereditary and one elected, would guide the faith after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The American Bahá’ís were familiar with the idea of the House of Justice. In several of Bahá’u’lláh’s tablets he described an international institution that would be the supreme body of the Kingdom of God on earth: “The men of God’s House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.”<sup>402</sup> And as early as the turn of the century, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had sometimes used the term to refer to their local executive boards. During his 1912 visit to North America, he had discussed in some detail the roles of the local Houses of Justice and of the Universal House of Justice in Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for a new global political-economy:

He has ordained and established the [local] House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.<sup>403</sup>

Unlike the House of Justice, the institution of the “Guardian of the Cause” (*váliyü’l-amru’lláh*), while based on the principle of hereditary succession that Bahá’u’lláh had also mentioned in his writings, was entirely new.<sup>404</sup> Even Shoghi Effendi, the holder of the new

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<sup>401</sup> *Star of the West* 12, no. 17 (19 January 1922): 258.

<sup>402</sup> *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, 26-7.

<sup>403</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 455.

<sup>404</sup> See, for example, Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, ¶ 42, 121, 174; *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, 221-2.

office, was surprised.<sup>405</sup> At age twenty-four, Shoghi Effendi was the oldest among the children of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s four daughters, and he had served as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s primary English secretary during his youth. At the time of his grandfather’s death, Shoghi Effendi was studying English and the humanities at Oxford University, and public reading of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s will (and thus transmission of complete details to the Bahá’ís around the world) was delayed until after his return to Haifa in late December. He later confided that as the oldest grandson, he thought that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá might have given him the task of convening a gathering to elect the Universal House of Justice.<sup>406</sup> Instead, the will appointed him “the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God,” to whom all the relatives of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and the body of the believers must turn. After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he was “the Interpreter of the Word of God,” charged with resolving questions of doctrine and ensuring the integrity of the faith’s scriptures.<sup>407</sup> Further, he was “the sacred head and the distinguished member for life” of the Universal House of Justice, which had the power to legislate on matters not explicitly covered in the sacred scriptures.<sup>408</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had extended Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant into the future through two institutions, both of which were assured of divine guidance:

The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty [Bahá’u’lláh], under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One [the Báb] (may my life be offered up for them

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<sup>405</sup> While Shoghi Rabbani used his family name in interactions with the public, within the Bahá’í community he was always referred to by his first name and the Turkish title “Effendi,” equivalent to the English “Sir” or “Mister.” His wife, Rúhíyyih Rabbani (an American-Canadian née Mary Maxwell), was known within the community as Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum (“Madam Rúhíyyih, the Maidservant of Bahá”).

<sup>406</sup> Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oakham, England: Bahá’í Publishing, 2000), 42-3.

<sup>407</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990), 11.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God ....<sup>409</sup>

The twin institutions, operating in concert, would protect the faith from schism and ensure its worldwide development.

On January 22, Shoghi Effendi sent his first brief message to the American Bahá'ís, expressing gratitude for their “unswerving loyalty and noble resolve.”<sup>410</sup> In the Bahá'í New Year (March 21) 1922 issue of *Star of the West*, under the banner “Resurrection,” Shoghi Effendi's first general letter to the American community gave some indication of the intellectual and spiritual qualities he would bring to his new office. Noting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's premonition of his passing and quoting a tablet regarding the sure growth of the faith, Shoghi Effendi asked:

With such assuring utterances and the unmistakable evidences of his sure and clear knowledge that his own end was nigh, is there any reason why the followers of his Faith, the world over, should be perturbed? Are not the prayers he revealed for us sufficient source of inspiration to every worker in his Cause? Have not his instructions paved before us the broad and straight path of teaching? Will not his now doubly effective power of grace sustain us, strengthen us and confirm us in our work for him? Ours is the duty to strive, by day and night, to fulfill our own obligations and then trust in his guidance and never failing grace.<sup>411</sup>

Most of the American Bahá'ís had never met Shoghi Effendi. However, they were relieved that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had left a clear authority in the faith, and most quickly transferred their intense feelings of personal loyalty to his young successor. A handful of experienced believers eased the transition. Emogene Hoagg, one of the earliest American believers and the first native Californian to become a Bahá'í, had been studying Farsi in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's household before his passing. She helped translate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's last tablet to the

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>410</sup> *Star of the West* 12, no. 18 (7 February 1922): 273.

<sup>411</sup> *Star of the West* 13, no. 1 (21 March 1922): 17.

American Bahá'ís, which appeared in *Star of the West*, and addressed letters to friends in the United States about his Will and Testament and the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian. “How wonderfully the Beloved provided for the protection of the Cause...,” she wrote to one member of the Executive Board. “Let us pray that the friends in America will arise with strength and goodwill to obey and to serve.”<sup>412</sup> Louis Gregory had met Shoghi Effendi, “a youth of about fifteen, keenly intelligent, diligent in his work, all reverence and devotion to the Master,” during his 1911 pilgrimage.<sup>413</sup> He wholeheartedly embraced the new institution of the Guardianship, and during his teaching circuits, he was instrumental in counseling the Bahá'ís to do the same.<sup>414</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's first concern was establishment of the Universal House of Justice. In his will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's had specified that the international body should be formed through “universal suffrage” of the believers in a staged election process: a new institution, called the secondary or national House of Justice, should be formed “in all countries, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one.”<sup>415</sup> In March 1922, Shoghi Effendi invited a group of respected and well-informed Bahá'ís from the United States, Europe, Iran, and India to Haifa to discuss preparations for elections.<sup>416</sup> However, the consultation revealed a bleak picture of the worldwide movement's chances of fulfilling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions any time soon. There were only a few dozen rudimentary local executive bodies—the practical prerequisites for establishing national

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>413</sup> Gregory, “Recollections,” 6.

<sup>414</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 114-6; Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 50-1.

<sup>415</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, 14.

<sup>416</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 55-56, 247.

ones—in the United States, and little more than a handful in the Middle East. Each functioned largely autonomously, with little consistency between them in such essential matters such as number of members, voting procedures, mode of operation, and name. The only body anywhere in the world that approximated a secondary House of Justice was the Executive Board of the Bahai Temple Unity in the United States, a relatively weak institution that only existed to carry out the decisions of the annual national convention.

Without the necessary structure of local and national bodies, election of the Universal House of Justice according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s instructions was impossible; without a pool of believers experienced in administering the affairs of the community, Shoghi Effendi concluded that it was also simply impractical. As one American pilgrim who was visiting Palestine at the time of the consultation put it succinctly in a letter home: “It seems that before the Universal House can be established the Local and National Houses of Justice must be functioning in those countries where there are Bahá’ís.”<sup>417</sup> A preliminary stage of administrative development, then, faced believers around the world. Shoghi Effendi sent his consultants home to Germany, Britain, France, and the United States to inform their respective communities of the task of forming local and national bodies—following ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s usage, he settled on the temporary title of “Spiritual Assemblies” to avoid any appearance that the Bahá’ís were attempting to usurp civil governments—in anticipation of the election of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>418</sup> (Those invited from India and Iran arrived too late for the consultations but received similar instructions.)<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid., *Priceless Pearl*, 56.

<sup>418</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Bahá’í Publishing Society, 1909), 6, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TAB/tab-12.html#pg6>.

<sup>419</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 56.

Roy Wilhelm and Mountfort Mills, both members of the Executive Board, were to report the results of the Haifa meeting to the annual convention in the United States, held in April in Chicago. A lengthy letter from Shoghi Effendi, forwarded to all the local communities in the country shortly before the convention, reinforced “the necessity of having a local Spiritual Assembly in every locality where the number of adult declared believers exceed nine, and of making provisions for the indirect election of a Body that shall adequately represent the interest of all the friends and Assemblies throughout the American Continent.”<sup>420</sup> In lieu of the previous ad hoc system of autonomous groups and committees, Shoghi Effendi said the elected national body should directly supervise such national matters as publications and periodicals, teaching, the temple project, archives, membership, and “the racial question in relation to the Cause” by appointing committees responsible to it.<sup>421</sup>

The convention, the first held since the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was an important moment in the movement’s transition to Shoghi Effendi’s leadership. The testimonials of those who had just returned from Haifa helped cement the loyalty of the delegates to their new Guardian. Mountfort Mills spoke passionately:

All the complex problems of the great statesmen of the world are as child’s play in comparison with the great problems of this youth, before whom are the problems of the entire world.... No one can form any conception of his difficulties, which are overwhelming.... He is indeed young in face, form and manner, yet his heart is the center of the world today. The character and spirit divine scintillate from him today. He alone can today save the world and make true civilization.<sup>422</sup>

The convention responded promptly to Shoghi Effendi’s written and verbal instructions. As Louis Gregory put it in his report of the proceedings, “It became apparent to all that the time

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<sup>420</sup> *Star of the West* 13, no 4 (17 May 1922): 84.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



of the organization of the Divine Kingdom on earth has come and is in process, not according to human limitations, but in harmony with Supreme Wisdom.”<sup>423</sup> The convention discontinued the Executive Board, replacing it with a new nine-member body, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, the name suggested by Shoghi Effendi, and dissolving its committee in charge of publishing *Star of the West* in favor of a new board appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly.<sup>424</sup> By December, Shoghi Effendi could write of his satisfaction with the steps the new body had taken to “consolidate the foundations of the Movement in America,” especially by “centralizing the work” in its own hands and “distributing it to the various committees” it had appointed, for the temple project, publishing and literature review, teaching, and children’s education.<sup>425</sup> It was the beginning of an intensive period of administrative development that would last more than a decade.

From 1922 to the middle of the 1930s, Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá’ís of the United States wove together the strands of a distinctive Bahá’í system of governance that served as a model for developments in other countries. In their writings, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had delineated its founding principles, among them the spiritual nobility of all participants; the fundamental unity of the body politic; obedience to and love of individuals for their institutions; avoidance of schism, partisanship, or special interests; collaborative, non-adversarial decision-making; the importance of consensus and concerted action; and the essential role of such spiritual qualities as selflessness, humility, and courtesy. Specific

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>425</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922-1932*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1995), 28-9.

practices and procedures, however, had to be worked out by the Bahá'ís themselves. Generally, Shoghi Effendi refrained from insisting on procedural matters, deferring the establishment of definite rules to the legislative authority of the Universal House of Justice. In the mean time, he preferred to allow the community and its institutions to experiment in the light of principle and attempt to reach their own conclusions about best practices. Through extensive correspondence with institutions and individuals and through personal interaction with pilgrims (essentially the same tools that had been at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's disposal), Shoghi Effendi kept abreast of every development, providing encouragement, raising questions, referring to relevant principles, or gently directing as necessary.

With Shoghi Effendi's guidance, the American community tackled a variety of issues, some of them rather complex. The beginning of the administrative year was set at the Festival of Ridván (April 21-May 2), the anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's public declaration of his mission in 1863, with all Local Spiritual Assemblies as well as the National Spiritual Assembly elected then. The movement's annual convention, a tradition since 1909, evolved into the Bahá'í National Convention, an institution in its own right which met during the Ridván Festival to elect the new National Spiritual Assembly and provide it with counsel about the affairs of the faith around the country. Delegates to the National Convention were reapportioned based on the population of local Bahá'í communities, necessitating the creation of uniform criteria and a formal process for enrolling as a member of the faith and maintaining reliable lists of believers. Voting procedures at the National Convention were refined to ensure the full freedom of the electors, including eliminating the practice of nominations and adopting plurality, rather than majority, voting for the nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly. With the consolidation of national committees, a single

national budget was introduced, along with methods for ensuring adequate regular financial support for the National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies; to ensure the independence of the movement from special interests and underline the devotional nature of giving, financial contributions could only come from members of the faith. The Green Acre summer school, previously under the direction of a private board of trustees, gradually came under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly, and two additional summer school campuses, in Davidson, Michigan, and Geyserville, California, were acquired. National and local constitutions and by-laws were adopted, and the National Spiritual Assembly and strong Local Spiritual Assemblies were incorporated. Systems of communication were developed among the National Spiritual Assembly, the Local Spiritual Assemblies, and the body of the believers, promoting a general atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Members of institutions, national and local, learned in practice about consultative decision-making, pioneering a new political language of moderation, collaboration, and dignity and establishing norms and procedures for cases of disagreement. The practice of the Nineteen Day Feast at the grassroots of the movement was refined as the National Assembly encouraged local groups to hold the Feast regularly and to add a period of community consultation and information-sharing to its devotional and social portions.<sup>426</sup>

As challenging and time-consuming as it was to build the system outlined in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s will, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly reminded the members of the National Spiritual Assembly and the entire community that its fundamental purpose was to harmonize the

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<sup>426</sup> For discussion of the relationship between Shoghi Effendi and the American community in the development of the Bahá’í administrative system, see Loni Bramson, “The Plans of Unified Action: A Survey,” in *Bahá’is in the West*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, vol. 14, ed. Peter Smith (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2004), 154-197; Loni Bramson-Lerche, “Some Aspects of the Development of the Bahá’í Administrative Order in America, 1922-1936,” in *Studies in Bábí and Bahá’í History*, vol. 1, ed. Momen, 254-300; and Arash Abizadeh, “Democratic Elections without Campaigns?: Normative Foundations of National Bahá’í Elections,” *World Order*, 37, no. 1 (2005): 7-49.

efforts of the Bahá'ís and to canalize the transformative spiritual powers inherent in their faith. In the “World Order Letters,” a series of seven lengthy letters written between 1929 and 1936, and a host of shorter communications, he explained that the “Administrative Order” that the Bahá'ís were constructing was not simply a system for the organization of one tiny religious faction among many in the world, but the “nucleus” and “pattern” of the “New World Order” brought by the promised one of all the scriptures of the past, the structural basis of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>427</sup> With the death of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he said, the faith had passed to a “stage of transition,” a “Formative Period” or “Iron Age,” in which its worldwide institutions would be built.<sup>428</sup> Specifically, the local and national Spiritual Assemblies constituted the “bedrock” of the Universal House of Justice, which Bahá'u'lláh had named as the supreme organ of the global commonwealth that would emerge in humanity’s “Golden Age.”<sup>429</sup> Not until they functioned “vigorously and harmoniously” could that body be brought into being, ushering in a new period of “universal recognition and world achievements” for the faith.<sup>430</sup> For individuals raised in a political culture characterized by skepticism of government and intense partisanship and which often seemed to prize the unfettered right of individual self-expression above all else, it was perhaps only the vision of Bahá'u'lláh’s ultimate purpose for humanity that enabled them to create an alternative system with distinctly Bahá'í characteristics.

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<sup>427</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-size ed. (1938; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991).

<sup>428</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, 42; Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (1944; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 324.

<sup>429</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, 63, 111; Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 324.

<sup>430</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, 63.

While Shoghi Effendi's part in the process could often seem gentle and indirect, he concerned himself with the workings of each part in the new system, including every national committee and local community, particularly early in the process of administrative development. In his December 1922 letter to the National Spiritual Assembly, for example, he asked that the Local Spiritual Assemblies communicate not only with their national body, but directly with him. He requested "to receive as soon as possible from every local assembly a detailed and official report on their spiritual activities, the character and organization of their respective assemblies, accounts of their public and private gatherings, of the actual position of the Cause in their province, and of their plans and arrangements for the future."<sup>431</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's presence was felt even among the tiny group of Bahá'ís in the Augusta area. In January 1923, he wrote collectively to them and to thirty other local communities in North America—from Santa Rosa, California and Bisbee, Arizona to Ithaca, New York and St. John's, New Brunswick—whose numbers were not large enough to form a Local Spiritual Assembly. The letter is exemplary of his style of leadership for its care and specificity; its elevated language; its messages of encouragement, urgency, and confidence in the abilities of the believers and in the power of divine assistance; and its reliance on passages of scripture for inspiration and reflection. Listing each city and town by name, Shoghi Effendi encouraged the small groups of believers to rely on the heavenly forces at their disposal, persevere in teaching the faith, and remain focused on the long-term goal of the regeneration of the world. He said that although their numbers were "small and limited," through the "Celestial Potency bequeathed" to them by the departed 'Abdu'l-Bahá, each "small company" would "expand and wield such power and influence as no earthly power

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 30.

can ever hope for or attain.” The faith, he said, quoting words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was at the “beginning of its growth,” but the powers within it would “gradually appear and be made manifest.” It marched inexorably forward according to the will of God, “lead[ing] humanity to its glorious destiny.” In the midst of widespread pessimism about the state of the world, he said the duty of each Bahá’í was to “arise with greater confidence than ever before, endeavoring to clear the mists of hate and prejudice that have dimmed the vision of mankind and, relying upon these assuring words of [‘Abdu’l-Bahá], point out to a weary world the Way of True Salvation.” Finally, he enumerated specific goals for each locality: “I very eagerly await the news of the progress of the Movement in your cities and shall be grateful and delighted to hear that you have reinforced your numbers, extended your activities, established a centre and founded a Spiritual Assembly that shall direct and co-ordinate your efforts for the promotion of the Cause.”<sup>432</sup> Through letters such as these, Shoghi Effendi sought to stimulate the grassroots of the American community and to impart a sense of shared responsibility for the development of the religion’s institutions. In effect, he was letting the small circle of believers in Augusta and the other localities know that the head of their faith knew who they were, loved them, and had great expectations for them.

### **Teaching Methods**

As Bramson has noted, the development of the Bahá’í administrative structure during the 1920s and 1930s included certain elements of centralization and standardization, such as improving the religious education of members and new converts, increasing the national

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<sup>432</sup> *Star of the West* 14, no. 2 (May 1923): 48. During the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, the term “center” was used in two senses in the Bahá’í community, referring on the one hand (as here) to an organized group of believers, and on the other (usually capitalized) to a room or building dedicated to the group’s community functions.

community's financial strength, and, through two "Plans of Unified Action" (1926-1928 and 1931-1934), introducing the element of collective planning for the religion's growth. In the essential work of teaching the faith, however, the period was characterized more by decentralization, with the net effect of developing new teaching methods and involving a larger number of Bahá'ís in carrying them out. These new approaches to teaching had an impact on the Augusta area, enabling the community to grow more steadily than before and, by the mid-1930s, to elect the first Local Spiritual Assembly anywhere in the Carolinas and Georgia.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies tried a variety of approaches to stimulating, organizing, and carrying out teaching activities. Throughout the period, the National Assembly charged its National Teaching Committee, heir to the Committee of Nineteen formed in response to the Tablets of the Divine Plan, with coordinating teaching around the country. During much of the period, the National Teaching Committee included an executive chairman and five regional chairmen (corresponding to the five regions in the Tablets of the Divine Plan), each responsible for arranging teaching conferences, public meetings, and circuits by traveling teachers. At the same time, the first Plan of Unified Action called for local communities to take the lead in teaching. The National Assembly asked Local Spiritual Assemblies to appoint local teaching committees to organize similar efforts in each community.<sup>433</sup> By the late 1920s, the National Teaching Committee was focusing on assisting the Local Spiritual Assemblies with "extension teaching projects" in which believers from an established locality systematically visited a nearby city or town to establish a new community there. It was also trying to encourage the

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<sup>433</sup> Bramson, "Plans of Unified Action," 161.

three summer schools and the Local Spiritual Assemblies to train more Bahá'ís as teachers.<sup>434</sup>

The onset of the Great Depression spurred further decentralization of teaching by necessitating that a larger number of Bahá'ís at the local level take on responsibility for propagation of the faith. In the midst of unprecedented financial straits, with the completion of the temple project commanding the lion's share of the movement's national budget, the National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies could not fund traveling teachers and large public meetings (the Race Amity Conventions initiated at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's request and, from 1925 to 1928, a similar series called the World Unity Conferences) to the extent that they had before. In the context of the Depression, if the faith was to gain new adherents, it would depend on the initiative of the grassroots of the community.

Crucial to the decentralization of teaching was the thought and influence of Leroy Ioas, a member of the National Teaching Committee beginning in 1932 and its chairman for fourteen years. Ioas, whose German immigrant parents had embraced the faith in Chicago in 1898, was a railway manager by profession, and he brought energy, efficiency, and vision to the work of the committee. He championed a method of teaching he termed the "fireside meeting," or simply "fireside" (a name perhaps influenced by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats," regular radio addresses, inaugurated in March 1933, in which he explained to the public government responses to Depression). In a fireside meeting, a Bahá'í invited prospective seekers to his or her home, showed warm hospitality, and shared the faith in a conversational fashion.

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<sup>434</sup> National Teaching Committee, 1935 Annual Report, quoted in Roger Dahl, "Three Teaching Methods Used during North America's First Seven Year Plan," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5, no. 3 (1993), 3.



Ioas believed that the fireside would enable every Bahá'í to become a teacher, increase the pool of interested contacts in each locality, and broaden the audience for other forms of teaching, such as lectures. Traveling lecturers had tended to receive the most attention in Bahá'í publications, perhaps contributing to a sense among some in the community that only good public speakers could be considered teachers of the faith. “We sincerely hope to have you here to speak on the Bahai Cause later in the spring,” Louise Talbott of Augusta had written to Joseph Hannen in 1917. “We try in a quiet way to interest people, but are poor talkers generally in large gatherings.”<sup>435</sup> For Ioas, such a dependence on skilled public speakers not only artificially limited the pool of teachers in the community, but it ran contrary to the call in Bahá'u'lláh's writings for every believer, not a specific class of ministers or missionaries, to teach the faith. It also missed the point that most of the growth of the faith in the United States—as in the cases of Washington and Augusta—had been as a result of the kind of intimate, home-based teaching of friends, family members, and neighbors that he was now calling the fireside. Writing for the National Teaching Committee in a 1936 bulletin, Ioas outlined the advantages of the method:

The fireside method of teaching is the simplest and most important kind of teaching because it is within the ability of every Bahá'í. Statistics show that more people are attracted to the Faith by this means than by all the public meetings held by all the Assemblies in a year. It is simple because each one works with his own friends and acquaintances in the friendly atmosphere of his own home, sharing with them as much of the Precious Gift as he possesses. And it is important because it provides opportunity for teaching services for those who cannot do public platform work.... Everyone responds to hospitality and the hospitality of the Bahá'í home which is permeated with the Holy Spirit has an almost mysterious effect upon the guest. In such an atmosphere the conversation sooner or later turns to spiritual matters, and thus the opportunity for teaching is afforded.... These fireside meetings should never be large. The small gathering is more effective because it is always easier to establish a point of contact with one or two individuals than with a group of widely varied interests and backgrounds, and this point of contact must be reached before any

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<sup>435</sup> Margaret Klebs and Louise Talbott to Joseph Hannen, answered 20 March 1917, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

teaching can begin.... There should be a number of these intimate, conversational gatherings during which the individual may ask those questions which are uppermost in his mind. When they have been answered to the satisfaction of the inquirer, then the foundation should be laid for an orderly study of the Faith in a study class which will instruct him “in what manner the Religion of God hath been founded and what its object is.”<sup>436</sup>

The study classes mentioned by Ioas were another long-standing teaching method that was to some extent formalized in the 1920s and 1930s. The National Teaching Committee reported that most local communities had some type of study class, “a versatile and effective medium of teaching,” by 1932:

Probably very few study groups are of the same type. They are large and small, public and private, for inquirers, new believers and confirmed Bahá'ís of long standing. They are usually based on one or more of the study outlines distributed by the National Bahá'í Study Committee or upon some Bahá'í book. They have resulted in a deeper knowledge of the teachings, the development of active workers and teachers, and many new believers.<sup>437</sup>

As part of its efforts to define Bahá'í membership and ensure integrity of the faith's teachings, the National Spiritual Assembly's policy, at least from 1935 on, was that seekers' initial education on the fundamentals of the faith should happen before their enrollment in the community. Study classes, then, became an important route for cultivating new believers.<sup>438</sup>

Across the country, the number of firesides and study classes increased during the 1930s. Combined with a more widespread observance of the Nineteen Day Feast and Holy Days and, in some localities, activities for children and youth, they made for a more robust local Bahá'í organization and a broader reach into the life of the community at large. In some areas, they received a boost from or were started as a result of visits by traveling

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<sup>436</sup> National Teaching Committee, “Teaching the Bahá'í Faith,” 1936, quoted in Dahl, “Three Teaching Methods,” 4.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>438</sup> Dahl, “Three Teaching Methods,” 4-5.

teachers, who could often reach a wider audience through public talks and then channel the most interested to regular firesides and study groups.<sup>439</sup> A handful of American believers specialized in what they called “teaching campaigns,” visiting one city for a week or more to give a well-planned series of public lectures that culminated in the formation of a study group.<sup>440</sup>

### **Charleston, Columbia, Orangeburg, and Sumter**

During the 1920s and 1930s, national developments in teaching and administration were reflected in the activities of Bahá’ís in the Augusta area and other localities in South Carolina. However, the absence of long-term settlers outside of Augusta and North Augusta meant that the gains elsewhere were mostly short-lived. Experiences of Bahá’í visitors in several South Carolina localities during the period provide an instructive counterpoint to the relatively robust growth of the Augusta-area community.

In the two decades after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Louis Gregory continued unabated his travels through the South and other parts of the country, and he adapted his long-standing practices to new developments in teaching and administration. For example, in December 1931 he helped start a Bahá’í study class during a brief visit to Atlanta, and in the winter and spring of 1934, he resided for several months in Nashville, where he taught a study class on the Fisk University campus, confirmed six new believers, and enabled the community to elect its first Local Spiritual Assembly.<sup>441</sup> He tried similar methods in South Carolina. During a fall 1924 tour of Virginia, the Carolinas, Alabama, and Tennessee,

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 5-10.

<sup>441</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 191, 242-3.

Gregory spent twelve days in Sumter, South Carolina, a town some sixty miles east of Columbia. He reported speaking to about five hundred students at Morris College, founded in 1908 by South Carolina's black Baptists, and to some 1400 students at Lincoln Public School. He also spoke at an African Methodist Episcopal church, two white Baptist churches, and a Presbyterian school. A report of his visit stated that there were enough "deeply interested" people in Sumter to form a "small reading circle," but it is unclear whether a group ever actually formed.<sup>442</sup>

From Sumter, Gregory returned to his hometown of Charleston. However, unlike Sumter, for some reason he did not recommend the creation of a study group there, despite evidence of receptivity to the faith. In the space of eight days, Gregory gave talks in five churches, six schools, and two "small interested groups."<sup>443</sup> It was probably also during his 1924 visit to Charleston that Gregory called at the home of Clarence W. Westendorff. A white South Carolina native, Westendorff was a former automobile salesman who owned a gas station on St. Philip Street, just two blocks from Gregory's childhood home.<sup>444</sup> He lived two more blocks east on Wentworth Street with his wife and five children and several boarders.<sup>445</sup> While it is unclear how Westendorff first came to his attention, Gregory had written to him about the faith and included a Bahá'í text. The National Teaching Committee's regional chairwoman for the southern states recounted the story to the 1925 national convention:

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<sup>442</sup> "News of the Cause," *Bahai News Letter*, no. 4 (April 1925), 4.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>444</sup> *Walsh's 1925-1926 Charleston, South Carolina, City Directory* (Charleston: Southern Printing & Publishing Co., 1925), 505.

<sup>445</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920.*

Mr. Gregory had written to this name and he went to the address and asked if any Bahais lived there, and a voice responded, “Yes, I got the letter, and I am a Bahai.” He had been given the Word and had set forth immediately to spread the teachings that the little book taught him, and he said: “This is the best thing in the world.” He began to preach on the street corners, until finally the mayor sent for him. He said the mayor said it was not permissible for him to preach on the main street. He was imprisoned several times. He said he told them, “When I was among you as a Christian, you let me alone; but now I am rising you put me in jail.” It was for the sake of his children that he stopped this propaganda in the streets of Charleston. It seems they began to be persecuted in the streets, and then our good friend Gregory advised him not to work in that way, not so melodramatic.<sup>446</sup>

In contrast to the plight of Alonzo Twine, the administrative development of the American Bahá’í community meant that Clarence Westendorff did not remain completely isolated in his new belief. After Gregory’s visit, he was apparently listed as a Bahá’í and began to receive the national newsletter. However, there was still no local community—indeed, no other single believer—with whom he could associate and form bonds.

Indeed, Louis Gregory visited Charleston at least two more times in the next several years, but still no local Bahá’í community emerged. One trip was unplanned. In October 1929, Louis Gregory was called to Charleston for the funeral of his beloved stepfather, George Gregory. The elder Gregory, aged just shy of eighty-seven years, had died after being accidentally struck by a truck before dawn one morning.<sup>447</sup> He had long been a supporter of his son’s work for the Bahá’í Faith and of his marriage. “I am glad to hear from you all your travels,” he had written early in 1914. “You seem to be going all over the Country .... I hope you may live long to do good for the Master.... God bless you and wife. I am praying for you both.”<sup>448</sup> After the funeral, Louis Gregory said that “more of the spirit and understanding [of the Bahá’í Faith] had penetrated him than his son had dared to hope

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<sup>446</sup> “Seventeenth Annual Convention [1925],” 61-2.

<sup>447</sup> George Gregory, South Carolina Death Records, SCDAAH.

<sup>448</sup> George Gregory to Louis G. Gregory, 20 Jan. 1914, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

for in one so advanced in years.” He had taken a “deep interest in the Cause, distributed the literature” to friends in Charleston, and helped to arrange meetings during his son’s visits. The funeral itself gave an indication of George Gregory’s standing in the community and the extensive social network he apparently drew on to promote the faith. About a thousand people, both black and white, attended, and seven clergymen took part in the service. The Mickey Funeral Home, owned by local NAACP founders Richard and Edward Mickey, handled the arrangements. Louis Gregory read Bahá’í prayers as part of the program.<sup>449</sup> Only a year and a half after his stepfather’s death, in early 1931, Louis Gregory returned to Charleston as part of an extended trip through Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. He spoke at five churches, a Catholic high school, and the Book Lovers’ Club, a black women’s literary and service society.<sup>450</sup> Still, however, there was no indication of an opening to start a study class in the city.

Also in 1931, the National Spiritual Assembly’s Racial Amity Committee began sending interracial teams on teaching tours to southern colleges and schools. Shoghi Effendi had suggested the idea some time before. Perhaps encouraged by growing evidence of racial liberalism and student activism on the region’s college campuses, brought on in part by the social and economic dislocation of the Great Depression, the committee consulted with Will W. Alexander of Atlanta, a founder of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Alexander assured the committee that the participants in such a plan “would meet with many agreeable surprises,” and the committee solicited volunteers at the next national

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<sup>449</sup> “Teaching Work of Mr. Gregory,” *Baha’i News Letter*, no. 38 (February 1930), 8; Gregory, South Carolina Death Records.

<sup>450</sup> “Annual Committee Reports, 1930-31: Teaching,” *Baha’i News*, no. 51 (Apr. 1931), 4.

convention.<sup>451</sup> The first team to make a trip consisted of Chauncey Northern of New York City and Philip Marangella of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Northern, a twenty-seven-year-old black man whose family had migrated north from Hampton, Virginia, was a professional singer. He lived at home on the edge of Harlem with his parents, six siblings, his wife, and a sister-in-law.<sup>452</sup> Marangella's family had migrated from their village in the Potenza region of southern Italy to New York when he was an infant.<sup>453</sup> Married and the father of two children at age 36, he was an accountant and an amateur poet who frequently contributed to artistic programs at Green Acre.<sup>454</sup> The two developed a presentation of the Bahá'í teachings using song, poetry, and speech and traveled by car together in the autumn of 1931, first to Washington and Baltimore and then through Virginia and the Carolinas.

In Richmond, they were “happily received” by Samuel C. Mitchell, professor of history at the University of Richmond and former president of the University of South Carolina, who had heard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speak at the Lake Mohonk conference in 1912.<sup>455</sup> In Columbia, Northern and Marangella spoke at the University of South Carolina “through the courtesy of Professors in ethics and educational philosophy.”<sup>456</sup> They also met Josiah Morse, chair of the Department of Psychology and Philosophy, whom Louis Gregory had met a decade earlier and who had promoted interracial student exchanges. Morse's colleagues and

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<sup>451</sup> In *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 7, 1936-1938, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. 1939; repr., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 664; “The Heart of Dixie: Teaching Amity in the South,” *Bahá'í News*, no. 58 (January 1932), 2-3.

<sup>452</sup> *Fifteenth Census, 1930*.

<sup>453</sup> World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>454</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Portsmouth Herald*, 21 August 1930 and 17 September 1930.

<sup>455</sup> “Heart of Dixie,” 2-3.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

students respected him as “a pioneer in the field of racial relationships in the South” and as a person who was concerned with “the oppressed, underprivileged and neglected classes of Society.”<sup>457</sup> The university’s student newspaper, usually silent on racial issues, carried no news of the activities of Northern and Marangella. But about the time of their visit it did report public remarks by Morse that closely resembled Bahá’í teachings. The “campus philosopher” told his ethics class:

Justice is represented as blindfolded. She has no regard for race, relation, or wealth. The world today is being weighed and I am afraid it will be found wanting. We have come to a turning point in the history of man. The time has come for the young people to think clearly and put an end to these age-old hatreds or there will be an end to mankind. It is up to you to think broadly and put an end to patriotism that carries a chip on its shoulder all the time! Put an end to hatred—national, religious, and racial!<sup>458</sup>

Also in Columbia, Marangella and Northern spoke at two black institutions, Benedict College and Allen University, founded by the state’s African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1870. Located on adjacent campuses in the heart of Columbia’s main black commercial and residential neighborhood, Allen and Benedict had likely received Louis Gregory and Roy Williams during their 1919-1921 teaching trips through the region.

In Orangeburg, Northern and Marangella visited two more black institutions, Claflin University and the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural, and Mechanical College (known as “State College”), chartered by the South Carolina General Assembly in 1896 following adoption of the state’s Jim Crow constitution. Like Allen and Benedict in Columbia, they were located on adjacent campuses that formed the cultural and intellectual hub of black

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<sup>457</sup> *The Gamecock* (University of South Carolina, Columbia) 25, no. 8 (5 November 1931), 1; Memorial resolution for Josiah Morse, n.d. [1946], Samuel M. Derrick Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia (hereafter cited as SCL).

<sup>458</sup> *The Gamecock* 25, no. 8 (5 November 1931), 2.



Orangeburg.<sup>459</sup> The duo found receptive audiences of “theologians and students” in Orangeburg, and several of their listeners recalled “previous visits of other teachers of the Bahá’í Cause,” probably Gregory and Williams. A dean at one of the colleges said he would start a Bahá’í study group “as soon as literature was received for it.”<sup>460</sup> As in Sumter, it is unclear whether the national movement responded to the opportunity.

### **Teaching and Community Development in Augusta**

Unlike Charleston, Columbia, Orangeburg, and Sumter, the Augusta area had a small group of resident believers, at least a few of whom were relatively well deepened in the Bahá’í teachings and connected to the mainstream of the American movement. They pursued their own means of spreading the faith locally, often advertizing their activities in the press. Margaret Klebs hosted firesides at her studio, and she met new people to teach when she started music classes in nearby small towns, including Waynesboro, the seat of Burke County, Georgia, some 30 miles from Augusta, and Johnston, South Carolina, a black-majority town in Edgefield County some twenty-five miles from North Augusta.<sup>461</sup> Esther Sego met people through participation in several local choirs.<sup>462</sup>

The local Bahá’ís were able to capitalize on the assistance of traveling teachers by inviting their own contacts to lectures, securing venues and advance publicity, arranging smaller meetings in homes, and following up when the visitors had departed. Lorol Schopflochler visited Augusta in April 1933. A Bahá’í from Montreal whose husband, a

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<sup>459</sup> Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 260-4.

<sup>460</sup> “Heart of Dixie,” 2-3.

<sup>461</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 31 January 1926, B3; 8 November 1927, 3; 13 November 1927; and 29 May 1928, 8.

<sup>462</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 21 June 1928, 3; 27 April 1930, A6; and 4 June 1934, 2.

wealthy industrialist, was a member of the National Spiritual Assembly, Schopflocher had travelled widely around the world, combining work for the League of Nations Union with Bahá'í teaching.<sup>463</sup> Back in North America, she often visited Bahá'í communities giving lectures accompanied by moving pictures of her world travels. In 1933, the presentation from her most recent world tour included scenes of California and Hawaii, war-torn Manchuria, Burma, other sites in Europe and Asia, and the Bahá'í World Center in Palestine. A "large and appreciative audience," including many who responded to advance advertizing and whom the local believers had not invited personally, came to Augusta's YMCA for the evening's program, which included songs by Margaret Klebs and one of her students as well as Schopflocher's movie.<sup>464</sup>

Another traveling teacher, Stanwood Cobb, visited the Augusta area in 1934 to conduct a "teaching campaign." Cobb, a child of New England intellectuals with degrees from Dartmouth College and Harvard Divinity School, was the founding director of the Chevy Chase Country Day School in suburban Washington and a leader of the Progressive Education Association. He had become a Bahá'í at Green Acre in 1906, met 'Abdu'l-Bahá five times in Palestine and the United States, and served as an editor of *Star of the West* and its successor magazine, *World Order*, and as a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Washington.<sup>465</sup> Cobb was traveling under the auspices of the National Teaching Committee, and Leroy Ioas asked Margaret Klebs and the other Bahá'ís and seekers in the Augusta area to arrange venues for him. Ioas suggested that "Women's Clubs, Educational Societies,

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<sup>463</sup> Will. C. van den Hoonaard, "Siegfried Schopflocher," draft article for the Bahá'í Encyclopedia project, <http://bahai-library.com/encyclopedia/schopflocher.html>.

<sup>464</sup> Segó, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 2; *Augusta Chronicle*, 22 April 1933, 5.

<sup>465</sup> "Stanwood Cobb," in *The Bahá'í World: An International Record*, vol. 18, 1979-1983, comp. Universal House of Justice (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1986), 814-7.

Liberal Churches, Luncheon Clubs, etc. are all interested in and appreciate a lecture on the Universal Principles of the new world order.”<sup>466</sup> Cobb gave at least seven public lectures during his stay in late March and early April. His topics were wide ranging, reflecting both his own interest and background and a desire among many American Bahá’ís, heightened during the Great Depression, to relate the teachings of the faith to contemporary social issues. They included “Constantinople Days,” an allusion to his time as a college professor in Turkey and his writings presenting Islam to Western audiences; “Education in the Future Baha’i State;” “The Unity of Science and Religion;” “A Planned Society,” relating to the world order of Bahá’u’lláh; and “The New Deal in Washington,” certainly a timely topic but unusual given the insistence of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi that the Bahá’ís avoid any appearance of political partisanship. In North Augusta, he spoke at the high school auditorium to the PTA and the local American Legion. In Augusta, he spoke at the YMCA and in the auditorium of the Georgia Power Company building.<sup>467</sup>

After the Georgia Power meeting, “well attended by many teachers and Theosophists, as well as representatives of various clubs and organizations,” the Bahá’ís invited some of the guests who were “more than casually interested” to join a study group.<sup>468</sup> Esther Sego and Daisy Jackson Moore, who had returned to North Augusta from Savannah, were the only experienced believers in the group. The other participants were a virtual cross-section of the Augusta area’s white middle and working classes, including its relatively large immigrant

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<sup>466</sup> Leroy Ioas to Margaret Klebs, 6 February 1934, Leroy Ioas Papers, NBA.

<sup>467</sup> Sego, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 2; “Stanwood Cobb, Eminent Baha’i Lecturer to Speak Here Tuesday,” *Augusta Chronicle*, 25 March 1934, 14.

<sup>468</sup> Marie Frain, “Baha’i History of Augusta, Georgia,” TS, ABA, 1.

population.<sup>469</sup> They met at the home of Marie Kershaw, the city's only female physician, on Carolina Avenue in North Augusta.<sup>470</sup> Kershaw had attended Cobb's lectures at the prompting of friends of hers, William and Christine Bidwell, who had just moved to the area from Miami and were staying at her house until they could get settled. He was a Tennessee native and a naturopathic physician, and she was from a farm near Pendleton in South Carolina's upper Piedmont. The Bidwells had recently become Bahá'ís in Miami, the southernmost outpost of the faith in the United States.<sup>471</sup> New believers who had studied the faith little, they joined the group along with Kershaw. Mary Biggar Andrews had also encountered the faith before. Her sister, Louise Biggar Talbott, who had moved away to New York, had been one of the early believers in the Augusta area, and she may have attended the talk by traveling teacher Martha Root at the home of another sister, Nellie Baird, in 1921. A recent widow and the mother of two teenage girls, she ran an antique business.<sup>472</sup>

There were other professionals besides Marie Kershaw and William Bidwell. Josephine MacDonald was an attorney. A South Carolina native, she was married to another attorney and the mother of teenaged children. They lived on Gwinnett Street south of Augusta's central business district.<sup>473</sup> Elkin Vogt, a physician, was an instructor at the University of Georgia Medical School. Born and raised in Atlanta, he was a son of immigrants from Alsace-Lorraine and Germany and had come to Augusta as a student. At

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<sup>469</sup> Sego, "History of the Baha'i Cause," 2.

<sup>470</sup> *Polk's Augusta (Richmond County, Georgia) City Directory, 1938* (Richmond, Va.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1938), 878-9.

<sup>471</sup> W. T. Bidwell, "Memories," TS, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA, 1; *Twelfth Census, 1900; Fifteenth Census, 1930*.

<sup>472</sup> *Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 33.

<sup>473</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920*.

age thirty, he and his wife, Dorothea, were just starting a family.<sup>474</sup> Both joined the study group. Anna Krogius, an immigrant from Finland, was single at age fifty-six. A massage therapist, she lived on Heard Lane in the Summerville neighborhood west of downtown.<sup>475</sup>

Others in the group were lower-middle class or working class. Sophie Wallace, a Georgia native, was a housewife with two children at home. Her husband was a locomotive engineer. They lived on Greene Street in downtown Augusta.<sup>476</sup> Ailene Fletcher, a Georgia native, was a widow with two teenage children. She ran a beauty salon out of her home on Broad Street, a few blocks from Sophie Wallace. Her nineteen-year-old son Clay also joined the study group.<sup>477</sup> Vivian Hoffman, age twenty-three and a Georgia native, lived at home on Reynolds Street downtown with her father, an automobile machinist, and her mother, a housewife. She worked as a secretary in an eyeglass store.<sup>478</sup> Claire Glover, in her mid-thirties and single, lived in a rural district outside North Augusta and worked as a clerk for the Post Office in Augusta.<sup>479</sup> Morgan Barton, a machinist for the Georgia Railroad and a Georgia native, lived on Martintown Road outside North Augusta in a working-class neighborhood. His father had migrated south from New York and his mother was a South

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<sup>474</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937, 549.*

<sup>475</sup> List of aliens, *SS Stockholm* sailing from Gothenburg, Sweden, 10 January 1920; List of US citizens, *SS Kosciuszko* sailing from Copenhagen, 8 October 1930, both in Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, 1897-1957, microfilm, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Washington, DC, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>476</sup> *Fifteenth Census, 1930.*

<sup>477</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Augusta City Directory, 1937, 191.*

<sup>478</sup> *Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937, 263.*

<sup>479</sup> *Augusta City Directory, 1937, 214.*

Carolinian born to German immigrants. In his mid-thirties, he was married and the father of two young children.<sup>480</sup>

Several members of the study group evidently identified themselves as Bahá'ís immediately; by the Ridván Festival at the end of April, less than a month after Cobb's lectures, the group expected to elect a Local Spiritual Assembly. The National Spiritual Assembly, however, apparently concerned at most of the participants' inexperience, informed them in a letter that, as one participant recalled, they "would have to stay a Study Group for a whole year in order to be deepened in the Teachings." Over the next year, between fifteen and twenty-three believers and seekers met each Wednesday night at Marie Kershaw's house in North Augusta.<sup>481</sup> Their topics of study, including progressive revelation, the life of Bahá'u'lláh, and health and healing, were reported in the local press, usually with extensive, factual coverage or a complete reproduction of the lesson.<sup>482</sup> After a year of such study, the National Spiritual Assembly recognized the group's participants as Bahá'ís and gave permission to form a Local Spiritual Assembly. In April 1935, the community met at Kershaw's home for the election. Two of the members were veteran Bahá'ís, and seven were new. Five members lived in North Augusta, and four in Augusta. The cross-border body was the first Bahá'í administrative institution in either South Carolina or Georgia.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937, 51.*

<sup>481</sup> Frain, "Baha'i History," 1.

<sup>482</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 27 May 1934, 15; 8 October 1934, 2; 26 November 1934, 8; 1 April 1935, 2; and 16 September 1935, 2.

<sup>483</sup> Frain, "Baha'i History," 1. The local Spiritual Assemblies of Atlanta, Georgia, and Greenville, South Carolina, were not elected until almost the end of the decade.

Notably absent from the study class and the Local Assembly was Margaret Klebs, the founder of the community and its most experienced believer. Apparently Klebs was uncomfortable with the direction the class had taken, because she attempted to organize her own group on Friday evenings.<sup>484</sup> Perhaps she questioned the group’s grounding in the teachings, or perhaps she felt sidelined or unappreciated as the community grew. The formation of the study group and the election of the first Local Assembly certainly coincided with a period of declining mental and physical health and financial insecurity for Klebs that limited her involvement in community activities, regardless of her personal feelings. One of the newer believers recalled that “Miss Klebs did not associate with our group,” but the divide was not total.<sup>485</sup> In April 1935, just before the election, Klebs fell and broke her hip, an injury that necessitated a long convalescence.<sup>486</sup> Members of the community, including Esther Segó and Marie Kershaw, attempted to take care of her at home and solicited financial contributions from her other Bahá’í friends around the country.<sup>487</sup> In 1936, Klebs suffered again from a “trying and serious illness” and spent many weeks in the hospital.<sup>488</sup> She rallied by the end of the year, preparing a Thanksgiving concert in appreciation for the doctors and nurses who cared for her and announcing the opening of a “Baha’i Reading Room” on Telfair Street—even though the community had already opened a Bahá’í Center on 13<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Minutes of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Eliot, Maine, 30 September 1934; and “Baha’u’llah Group,” newspaper clipping, n.d., both in EBA.

<sup>485</sup> Bidwell, “Memories,” 1.

<sup>486</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 1 April 1935, 4, and 2 April 1935, 5.

<sup>487</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Eliot, Maine, 25 June 1935 and 16 August 1935; and Esther B. Segó to Louise Thompson, 15 August 1935, all in EBA.

<sup>488</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 2 December 1936, 4.

Street.<sup>489</sup> During the summer of 1938, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Eliot, Maine tried to care for Klebs as local residents and Green Acre guests complained about her increasingly erratic and disruptive behavior.<sup>490</sup> She returned to the Augusta area the following fall, and died of pneumonia in January 1939. The Local Assembly conducted the funeral service, the Eliot Bahá'ís paid for flowers, and Daisy Jackson Moore's mother donated a family cemetery plot in North Augusta for her burial.<sup>491</sup>

Despite the discomfort Margaret Klebs may have had with the study group, it proved an effective means of attracting seekers and confirming new believers in the faith. Meeting consistently over the course of several years, the participants ranged over Bahá'í introductory texts, works of scripture, and the stories of the faith's apostolic age. The class was a venue not only for participants to familiarize themselves with the history and teachings of the faith, but also to form bonds of friendship and shared identity. It was also a regular activity to which new seekers could be easily invited. According to one participant, between 1934 and 1938, the class completed courses on *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, a widely-used introductory text; *Bahá'í Administration*, a compilation of letters of Shoghi Effendi; *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, Bahá'u'lláh's exposition of the prophecies of the Bible and the Qur'án; *Some Answered Questions*, compiled from a series of table talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, mostly on Christian topics; *Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas*, a three-volume compilation; and *The*

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<sup>489</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 18 November 1936, A10, and 2 December 1936, 4.

<sup>490</sup> Minutes of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Eliot, Maine, 1, 5, and 6 June and 5 July 1938, EBA.

<sup>491</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 11 January 1939, 5 and 12 January 1939, 2; Moore, Handwritten note to "George," ABA.



*Dawnbreakers*, Shoghi Effendi's translation of a lengthy history of the birth and rise of the faith in Iran.<sup>492</sup>

Late in 1936, an experienced Bahá'í family moved to Augusta from Chicago. Zia Bagdadi initially visited the area as a traveling teacher. Of Iranian background but born and raised in the Arab world of Lebanon and Palestine, Bagdadi had been a part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's retinue during his 1911-1912 visits to the West, a member of the Executive Board of Bahai Temple Unity, a champion of the temple project, and editor of the Farsi section of *Star of the West*.<sup>493</sup> A physician, he was one of the most active teachers of African Americans in the Chicago Bahá'í community. In August 1936 he made a two-week visit to Augusta, speaking on one occasion to a local women's luncheon club about the role of women in establishing world peace.<sup>494</sup> Members of the Augusta-area community persuaded Bagdadi to move. He returned later in the fall with his wife, Zeenat, who had grown up in the household of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, and their young daughter.<sup>495</sup> The Bagdadis and the Local Assembly agreed to jointly rent a building on 13<sup>th</sup> Street in the heart of downtown Augusta which would serve as the community's Bahá'í Center, Bagdadi's professional office, and a residence for him and his family. Soon the new Center filled with activities, the Nineteen Day Feast, Holy Day observances, meetings of the Local Assembly, study group every Wednesday night, lecture series, and informal dinners. One believer recalled that the

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<sup>492</sup> Frain, "Baha'i History," 1.

<sup>493</sup> Zia M. Bagdadi, Passport Applications, January 2, 1906-March 31, 1925, microfilm, General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, Washington, DC, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

<sup>494</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, 21 August 1936, 5.

<sup>495</sup> Zeenat Bagdadi, Passport Applications, January 2, 1906-March 31, 1925, microfilm, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives, Washington, DC, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

Bagdadis “baked delicious chicken” and served Persian rice dishes. Other meetings, including firesides and Esperanto classes, took place in the homes of believers and seekers.<sup>496</sup>

By 1937, the community numbered more than thirty members and a network of friends and seekers perhaps at least as large. Many of the new believers were friends, neighbors, and family members of the original study circle participants, and many accepted the faith through the teaching of Zia Bagdadi. Vivian Hoffman’s mother, Emma B. Hoffman, a housewife, became a Bahá’í.<sup>497</sup> So did Pawnee Barton, Morgan Barton’s wife. Effird Lynch, a young clerk at a bakery and delicatessen, was Josephine MacDonald’s next-door neighbor in Augusta.<sup>498</sup> Carlton Sample, age thirty-five and single, had taken singing lessons from Margaret Klebs. A draftsman at the Lombard Iron Works, he lived in North Augusta.<sup>499</sup> The personal connections of some of the other new believers are less clear. George Stevens Frain, age thirty-seven and single, lived on West Avenue in North Augusta and owned a radio repair shop on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Augusta.<sup>500</sup> Ruth Johnson and Martina S. Wise, both widows, shared a house down the street from Frain on West Avenue. Wise, a radiologist, was an immigrant from Germany.<sup>501</sup> Donald Radford had grown up in Keysville in rural Burke County south of Augusta, where his father ran a hardware store. Age twenty-two and single, he was the membership secretary at Augusta’s YMCA, where he also lived.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Sego, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 2; Frain, “Baha’i History,” 1-2.

<sup>497</sup> Sego, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 2.

<sup>498</sup> *Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 345.

<sup>499</sup> *Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 471; *Augusta Chronicle*, 17 December 1933, 12.

<sup>500</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 195.

<sup>501</sup> *Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 301, 596.

<sup>502</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 442.

Mabelle Cartledge was a bookkeeper at the J.B. White & Company department store downtown.<sup>503</sup>

At least two members of the Augusta community were African Americans. Della Scott lived on Gwinnett Street a few blocks from Josephine MacDonald and Effird Lynch, but her personal connection with the Bahá'í Faith was from a different source. Marie Kershaw identified Scott as Esther Segó's "old nurse."<sup>504</sup> Although Scott was only eight years older than Segó, the age difference was enough that when Scott was a young teenager she could indeed have served as a babysitter for Segó. By the late 1930s, Scott was married with grown children, only one of whom was still at home. Her husband, Joseph Scott, was a railroad porter. They lived on a mostly black, mostly working-class block; a few of their neighbors were black professionals.<sup>505</sup> Kershaw recalled that Segó had introduced Scott to the faith and that she "often carried the Message to her and took a few Friends in order to have Prayers and Readings."<sup>506</sup> Another black believer was Fannie Gadson Toombs. A widow, she had three grown children, one from her first husband and two from her second. She owned her own home on Camille Street in Bethlehem, one of Augusta's principal black neighborhoods on land formerly owned in part by the Jackson family. Toombs had worked as a domestic servant, but she was also a midwife.<sup>507</sup> It is unclear how she learned of the faith and became a Bahá'í.

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<sup>503</sup> *Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 112.

<sup>504</sup> Frain, "Baha'i History," 2.

<sup>505</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930; Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 478.

<sup>506</sup> Frain, "Baha'i History," 2.

<sup>507</sup> *Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 539.

It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which Della Scott and Fannie Toombs participated in the activities of the local Bahá'í community. When Toombs died about 1939, her passing was noted in the "In Memoriam" section of *The Bahá'í World*, a volume compiled and published by the National Spiritual Assembly, indicating that she was officially enrolled as a believer and that she probably received newsletters and other mail from the national movement.<sup>508</sup> Marie Kershaw's recollections of the relationship between Esther Segó and Della Scott may shed light on the situation. Kershaw indicated that at least a few other white Bahá'ís in addition to Segó knew Scott and visited her house for devotional or study meetings, but in an otherwise rather detailed account of the community's activities she gave no indication that Scott ever came to the Bahá'í Center or at the homes of white believers.

The most that can be assumed is that by 1937 the Augusta Bahá'í community was only "partially-integrated." Beginning at least with the visit of Joseph Hannen and Margaret Klebs to the Schofield School in 1914, white Bahá'ís believers had made attempts to teach the faith to African Americans, but apparently inconsistently and with little tangible result. White believers visited the small number of black believers in their homes for purposes of religious practice, but blacks were functionally excluded from the other activities of the community. That is, individual whites were relatively free to discreetly cross lines of residential segregation by visiting the homes of African Americans whom they knew, but the same freedom did not apply in reverse. Both black and white Bahá'ís could face adverse social, economic, or even physical consequences if blacks visited white homes in any capacity other than that of servant. Even the sight of black and white Bahá'ís worshipping or

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<sup>508</sup> *Bahá'í World*, vol. 8, 1938-1940, 683. Toombs was listed in the 1937 and 1938 Augusta city directories, but not in the 1940 edition.

socializing together in the Bahá'í Center, a private establishment in the city's central business district, could have brought unwelcome attention. Like Washington in the first decade of the century, the Augusta community could not be characterized as truly interracial, but essentially as a white community with a few black members. Unlike Washington, however, Augusta had no figure like the Hannens and Knoblochs to champion teaching among African Americans and insist on their full integration. In the absence of such a champion, it was easy for white Bahá'ís to remain complacent, and interaction among white and black believers in the Augusta area thus seems not to have contravened regional racial norms.

In less than a year that he lived in the Augusta area, Zia Bagdadi, previously one of the most energetic proponents of interracialism in the Chicago Bahá'í community, seems to have spearheaded new efforts to attract African Americans, with mixed results.<sup>509</sup> Based on contacts by Daisy Jackson Moore, he went with Marie Kershaw and Mabelle Cartledge to Savannah to teach, speaking at Georgia State College (formerly Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth) and befriending Augustus Harris, a prominent black physician, and his wife.<sup>510</sup> Closer to home, he spoke to “several hundred” people at one of Augusta's black Methodist churches.<sup>511</sup>

Bagdadi also pursued an interesting opening among working-class African Americans in North Augusta at the home of Marie Kershaw's washerwoman. Kershaw recalled that

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<sup>509</sup> After the Chicago race riot in the summer of 1919, Bagdadi was among few whites who brought relief supplies into affected black neighborhoods. Among the most active Bahá'ís in Chicago in outreach to African-Americans, he had taught Robert S. Abbott, founding publisher of the *Chicago Defender*, one of the country's most influential black newspapers. After years of association with the Chicago community, Abbott publicly declared his faith in 1934. Mark Perry, “Robert S. Abbott and the *Chicago Defender*: A Door to the Masses,” *Michigan Chronicle*, 10 October 1995, <http://www.uga.edu/bahai/News/101095.html>.

<sup>510</sup> Frain, “Baha'i History,” 1-2; A. B. Caldwell, *History of the American Negro, Georgia Edition*, vol. 2 (Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell Publishing Co., 1920), 90-2, <http://books.google.com/books>.

<sup>511</sup> Frain, “Baha'i History,” 2.

things started quite well: “Zia made Thursday evening talks to first a handful of colored friends ..., then to a houseful, then to a house and porch and yard full, and then to a tremendous gathering.” The meetings ended abruptly, however. Kershaw believed that the problem was the police. “Evidently the authorities were displeased with such large groups of colored people gathering,” she wrote, “because after this the house became dark and closed to us.”<sup>512</sup> Whether the change was the result of police action, other opposition from local whites, pressures from conservative power-brokers within the African-American community, or some combination thereof, the incident illustrates some of the external limitations faced by southern Bahá’ís when they attempted to enlarge and diversify their membership. While the dearth of African-American believers and of sustained teaching among blacks in the Augusta area were probably at least in part the result of attitudes among the white Bahá’ís, it was not entirely so. The guardians of white supremacy seemed to ignore the Bahá’í community as long as it remained numerically small, culturally marginal, geographically circumscribed—and functionally mono-racial. On the other hand, outspokenness on the part of individuals such as Alonzo Twine and Clarence Westendorff in Charleston, or hints that the faith had mass appeal across racial lines, as in the meetings at the home of the North Augusta washerwoman, brought swift reaction. When Zia Bagdadi died suddenly in April 1937, barely six months after arriving in Augusta, the community lost its one potential champion of teaching African Americans.<sup>513</sup> In a subsequent telegram, Shoghi Effendi praised Bagdadi’s

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<sup>512</sup> Frain, “Baha’i History,” 2.

<sup>513</sup> After his death, Bagdadi’s wife and daughter soon left for Palestine, and Marie Kershaw moved her home and professional office to the Bahá’í Center in order to maintain it. Sego, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 2; Frain, “Baha’i History,” 3; *Augusta City Directory, 1937*, 318.

“exemplary faith, audacity, unquestioning loyalty, [and] indefatigable exertions ....”<sup>514</sup> After the crackdown in North Augusta, however, no other believer arose to take his place.

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<sup>514</sup> Quoted in Segó, “History of the Baha’i Cause,” 2.

## Chapter 4

### **The Great Depression, the Second World War & the First Seven Year Plan, 1935-1945**

During the decade ending in 1945, developments within the Bahá'í community often contrasted sharply with events in the world at large. Amidst a global economic downturn of unprecedented proportions and the most destructive war the world had ever known, the Bahá'í Faith emerged larger, stronger, and more broadly based than before. By the mid-1930s, the dire effects of the Great Depression on the religion's financial resources notwithstanding, Shoghi Effendi judged that the Administrative Order in North America was effective enough for the community to return to a focus on the global mandate for teaching in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan. With Shoghi Effendi's encouragement and guidance, the Bahá'ís in the United States and Canada conducted a seven-year campaign of expansion into entirely new territory, establishing outposts of the faith throughout Latin America. At the same time, they broadened its geographic scope at home with new communities in every state and province of North America, including notable expansion in the South.

In South Carolina, the campaign left the religion with a firmer footing and a broader following. Believers settled in the state's three largest population centers of Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville, and Bahá'í groups emerged in the latter two cities. By the centennial of the faith's birth in 1944, a celebration held while the war still raged across Europe and Asia, black and white Bahá'ís from South Carolina could stand with their



brethren from throughout North and South America and rightly claim to represent a cross-section of the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Beneath the dome of their gleaming new temple in Chicago—a proud symbol of the faith erected at great cost during a decade of extraordinary scarcity—they were poised to extend their reach to the broken Old World as soon as the guns fell silent.

Such advances, however, had not come easily. The campaign's focus on expansion in South Carolina and other southern states had raised important questions for a faith that professed to be interracial. A quarter century after Louis Gregory's first teaching trip through the Deep South, with hard-won community building experience in a few southern cities, the national Bahá'í movement had faced the daunting task of founding new interracial communities in multiple localities at once. In this effort the Bahá'ís faced similar challenges to those of other southern liberal and radical organizations—Highlander Folk School, the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, the Communist Party, and labor unions, to name a few—that were emerging amid the social and economic experimentation of the New Deal era. Like the Bahá'ís, these organizations were essentially opposed to segregation and disfranchisement, but circumstances compelled them to function within the constraints of a racial caste system that made substantive interracial contacts very difficult to achieve and maintain. In particular, they faced the dilemma of how to pursue a forthrightly interracial agenda while maintaining at least a modicum of white southern participation. By 1945 the Bahá'í movement had indeed taken root in more than one South Carolina locality and had established an interracial identity—but only barely. The experiences of the Bahá'ís in South Carolina, part of the national movement's effort to develop and pursue a workable approach to expansion in the South, illustrated not only the structural challenges faced by any would-

be interracial organization but also the extent to which individual believers' attitudes and understandings could help or hinder the development of nascent interracial communities.

### **Systematic Action amidst Global Crisis**

In the mid-1930s, Shoghi Effendi began to describe a new stage in the development of the Bahá'í Faith, a "phase of concentrated teaching activity" that would result in the establishment of the Administrative Order throughout the world.<sup>515</sup> In a cablegram to the National Convention in 1935, he called on the delegates and the incoming National Spiritual Assembly "to deliberate on measures required to stimulate all local communities and groups to lend [their] immediate, unprecedented impetus to teaching activities throughout [the] United States and Canada."<sup>516</sup> The next year, reminding the Convention of the "historic appeal voiced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in [the] Tablets of the Divine Plan," he set before the participants a compelling vision of geographic expansion that would culminate in 1944, the centenary of the faith's birth that marked the Báb's declaration of his prophetic mission to his first disciple in Shiraz. "Would to God," he pleaded,

every State within [the] American Republic and every Republic in [the] American continent might ere [the] termination of this glorious century embrace the light of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh and establish [the] structural basis of His World Order.<sup>517</sup>

In a follow-up letter to the newly-elected National Spiritual Assembly less than a month later, he called again for "fresh conquests and unprecedented triumphs in the teaching field

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<sup>515</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, 1932-1946* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947), 6-7. See also Robert Stockman, "United States of America," draft article for the Bahá'í Encyclopedia project, <http://bahai-library.com/encyclopedia/usa.html>.

<sup>516</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 4.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

within the United States and beyond its confines.”<sup>518</sup> He restated the original geographic scope of the project in the Western Hemisphere, and added the idea of extending the plan to Europe:

Its supreme immediate objective should be the permanent establishment of at least one center in every state of the American Republic and in every Republic of the American continent not yet enlisted under the banner of His Faith. Its ramifications should gradually be extended to the European continent, and its scope should be made to include those countries, such as the Baltic States, Poland, Greece, Spain and Portugal, where no avowed believer has established any definite residence.<sup>519</sup>

It was no small task to which Shoghi Effendi was calling the American community (even when systematic expansion into Europe was postponed for a future phase of the project). In North America, the Bahá'ís were still heavily concentrated in the eastern urban core, with twenty-six states of the United States and seven provinces of Canada—huge swaths of the continent encompassing most of the South, the Great Plains, the mountain West, Alaska, and the Far North—having a few scattered believers or none at all. In the vast territories south of the Rio Grande, barely half a dozen Bahá'ís had ever even set foot. The task before them, Shoghi Effendi acknowledged, was “gigantic,” and he stressed the need both for effective leadership by the national executive body and for the complete support of the community:

A systematic, carefully conceived, and well-established plan should be devised, rigorously pursued and continuously extended. Initiated by the National representatives of the American believers, the vanguard and standard-bearers of the radiant army of Bahá'u'lláh, this plan should receive the wholehearted, the sustained and ever-increasing support, both moral and financial, of the entire body of His followers in that continent.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

Clearly, to extend the reach of the faith so broadly and so quickly would dwarf all previous expansion efforts and tax the resources and commitment of the movement in America.

Shoghi Effendi's call struck an unmistakable note of urgency. In a January 1936 letter, he predicted that the new teaching campaign would synchronize with "a period of deepening gloom, of universal impotence, of ever-increasing destitution and wide-spread disillusionment in the fortunes of a declining age."<sup>521</sup> As the faith's first century drew to a close, he said in his cablegram to the 1936 National Convention, humanity as a whole was "entering [the] outer fringes [of the] most perilous stage [of] its existence."<sup>522</sup> "The present opportunity," he wrote a few months later, "is unutterably precious. It may not recur again."<sup>523</sup>

Few observers could have disagreed with his gloomy assessment. As the American Bahá'ís gathered for their annual convention in the spring of 1936, the global economy was in a shambles and the international political order erected after the Great War was rapidly collapsing. Virtually every country, rich and poor, was reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. Cities around the world, especially those most dependent on heavy industry, were hit hard, and rural areas dependent on agriculture, mining, and logging suffered even more. As manufacturers in the wealthiest countries curtailed their orders for raw materials, the prices of such commodities as coffee, cotton, rubber, and tin—the lifeline of colonial economies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia—had collapsed. International trade was down sharply, and many countries were attempting to protect their own economies by increasing import duties. In the United States, hitherto the world's industrial powerhouse, the crisis in

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 7.

agriculture, manufacturing, and finance had brought massive unemployment, widespread hunger, and the dislocation of countless families. In the South, the country's hardest-hit region, more than one-third of the banks had failed or been forced into mergers, and manufacturing had declined by half. Natural disasters compounded the misery in rural areas, where the agricultural economy was already wrecked from falling cotton prices, and thousands of desperate farming families were fleeing the region in search of work and sustenance. As state and local governments faced bankruptcy and local charities foundered, only massive spending by New Deal agencies mitigated the suffering.

The worldwide political impacts of the Great Depression were no more encouraging. Indeed, for the Bahá'ís, the breakdown of international order seemed to indicate that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prediction of a second global conflict, voiced shortly after the Versailles agreements that had ended the Great War, was quickly coming true. Quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements made more than a decade before, Shoghi Effendi summarized the deepening crisis:

Neither the provisions of the so-called Settlement which the victorious Powers have sought to impose, nor the machinery of an institution which America's illustrious and far-seeing President had conceived, have proved, either in conception or practice, adequate instruments to ensure the integrity of the Order they had striven to establish. "The ills from which the world now suffers," wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá in January, 1920, "will multiply; the gloom which envelops it will deepen. The Balkans will remain discontented. Its restlessness will increase. The vanquished Powers will continue to agitate. They will resort to every measure that may rekindle the flame of war. Movements, newly-born and world-wide in their range, will exert their utmost effort for the advancement of their designs. The Movement of the Left will acquire great importance. Its influence will spread."<sup>524</sup>

Events in country after country seemed to bear out this analysis. In Europe, Asia, and Latin America, fascism and military dictatorship were on the rise, and several aggressively expansionist regimes were severely destabilizing the fragile world order. In Japan, a

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<sup>524</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 30.

militarist government seemed bent on dismembering its neighbor China. In 1931 and 1932, it had invaded Manchuria in China's rich northeast and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo. In response to criticism by the League of Nations, Japan had simply withdrawn from membership. Without any further pretense of legal constraint, the Japanese military in Manchukuo was freely exploiting the civil war between Chinese communists and nationalists and forming client states in additional provinces. In 1935, Italy's fascist regime had begun a brutal invasion of Ethiopia, using chemical weapons and massive aerial bombardment to subdue a fellow-member of the League of Nations. The League had imposed sanctions—in itself a remarkable departure in the realm of international law—but Italy remained undeterred. And in Germany, crippled by massive reparations payments after the Great War, the National Socialist movement was promising to restore the country's honor by rebuilding its military, expanding its borders, and eliminating supposedly unworthy populations from its midst. In 1935, the Nazi regime had begun a massive military buildup and promulgated the Nuremberg laws, designed to strip Jews of their German citizenship. The following March, emboldened by Italy's success in Ethiopia, the German military had reoccupied the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles—and, like Italy, received only token condemnation from the League of Nations.

Against such a chaotic background, the National Spiritual Assembly acted quickly on Shoghi Effendi's advice about a new teaching campaign. Following the 1936 National Convention, it created ten Regional Teaching Committees in the United States and Canada, established a special teaching fund of \$30,000, and appointed an Inter-America Committee to

coordinate expansion into Latin America.<sup>525</sup> During the year, nine individuals made teaching trips of various lengths to Mexico, the Caribbean, and several countries in South America. Another dozen moved to cities in New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Saskatchewan, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming—all of them territories with few or no Bahá'ís.<sup>526</sup> That fall, moved by a further appeal from Shoghi Effendi for the American believers to “intensify their teaching work a thousand fold and extend its ramifications beyond the confines of their native land,” Louis and Louise Gregory spent three months in Haiti, attracting a sizeable group of seekers, many of them young people, to firesides and a study group. The Gregorys intended to stay longer, but opposition by Haitian government officials to the spread of the faith forced their early return.<sup>527</sup>

### **The Seven Year Plan**

In the spring of 1937, following further consultations with Shoghi Effendi, the National Spiritual Assembly formally launched a Seven Year Plan for the American community. Its twin objectives were completion of the exterior ornamentation of the temple in Wilmette and establishment of the faith throughout North and South America and the Caribbean. “No triumph,” Shoghi Effendi cabled to that year’s National Convention, “can more befittingly signalize [the] termination of [the] first century of [the] Bahá’í era than accomplishment of

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<sup>525</sup> Gareta Busey, “Uniting the Americas,” in *The Bahá’í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 9, 1940-1944, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada (1945; repr., Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 187.

<sup>526</sup> Leroy Ioas, “Teaching in North America,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 9, 1940-1944, 215-6.

<sup>527</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 7; Morrison, *To Move the World*, 250-1.

this twofold task.”<sup>528</sup> The ambitious goals would necessitate both a major financial commitment and a significant redistribution of the Bahá’í population.

The Plan’s first and more straightforward objective—completion of the temple’s exterior—was the latest step in an undertaking with important symbolic and practical consequences. Initiated nearly thirty years earlier, during the movement’s infancy in America, the temple project was of a scale and complexity, and the anticipated result of such a grandeur and beauty, as to make it more like the construction of a medieval cathedral than of a neighborhood church. On the eve of the Plan, the temple’s massive concrete-and-steel superstructure, erected at great cost during the worst years of the Great Depression, stood complete, but far from lovely, on the shore of Lake Michigan. The next phase of the project—to implement the architect’s vision for the building’s outer ornamentation, an intricate fretwork interlaced with sacred symbols of the world’s great religions—was unfinished. Work on the ornamentation had already involved serious technical challenges and a significant new outlay of scarce funds. A committee had worked for nine years to identify a building material both light enough to accommodate the unusual design and durable enough to withstand the elements. A Washington firm proposed the use of exposed-aggregate architectural concrete, a new method that would clad the temple in a glittering white layer of crushed quartz. Between 1932 and 1935, the firm fabricated and installed the ornamentation of the dome and clerestory levels—until, buffeted by the depression, the Bahá’í community’s funds ran dry. Work on the gallery story, the main story, and the nineteen steps encircling the whole structure had yet to begin. The estimated total cost of the remaining work was \$350,000 (over \$5,000,000 in 2007 dollars), a hefty sum for a national organization of fewer than 3000 members.

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<sup>528</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 8.



For the American Bahá'ís, few of whom were wealthy even before the economic collapse, completion of their national house of worship was not just a point of collective pride, but a matter of spiritual devotion and community solidarity that they sensed from the beginning would aid in the growth of the movement. Contributing money toward the temple was an expression of commitment to their faith and of love for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who had approved the project and laid the building's cornerstone during his 1912 visit. They saw the temple, the first of its kind outside the Islamic heartland, as evidence not only of the faith's worldwide spread, but of their new religious identity as American Bahá'ís. From an organizational perspective, the project had provided the initial impulse for the formation of a national coordinating body, and the Bahá'ís saw it as tangible evidence that they could work together as a national movement and achieve practical results. Perhaps it was for these reasons that Shoghi Effendi repeatedly linked progress of the temple project with the growth of the community. For instance, in a cablegram of October 1935 acknowledging the completion of the temple's superstructure, Shoghi Effendi remarked on the "forces" which this step was "fast releasing in the heart of a sorely tried continent." Foreshadowing his explicit call to action of the following spring, he said that a "new hour" had thus struck in the history of the faith and urged "nation-wide, systematic, sustained efforts in [the] teaching field" that would channel those forces into expansion and consolidation of the community.<sup>529</sup> Several months later, he underlined the connection between the development of the Bahá'í administrative system, the progress of the temple work, and the new thrust in teaching:

Now that the administrative organs of a firmly established Faith are vigorously and harmoniously functioning, and now that the Symbol of its invincible might is lending unprecedented impetus to its spread, an effort unexampled in its scope and sustained

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<sup>529</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 5-6.

vitality is urgently required so that the moving spirit of its Founder may permeate and transform the lives of the countless multitudes that hunger for its teachings.<sup>530</sup>

It was this second objective of the Plan—expanding the geographic reach of the community into virtually every territory of the Western Hemisphere—that would prove the more difficult. Based on some three decades’ experience of expansion efforts within the United States and Canada, it was clear to Shoghi Effendi and the National Spiritual Assembly that establishing so many new local communities so far distant from the movement’s American heartland would require a major shift of the Bahá’í population and a more active engagement by the rank and file of the community. As Leroy Ioas, at the time a member of both the National Spiritual Assembly and the National Teaching Committee, recalled, the movement’s leaders knew that “the previous methods of extending the Faith into new areas by itinerant teachers, lecturers and limited follow-up were not sufficiently effective, but that the only method whereby lasting results could be achieved was through the settlement plan.”<sup>531</sup> During the course of the Plan, individuals or families from the established localities volunteered to leave their homes and take up residence as “pioneers” of the faith in each of the “virgin territories” of North and South America. Like Margaret Klebs in the Augusta area, they would seek to integrate themselves into the life of their new localities through work, school, and other activities, come in contact with receptive individuals, and build new Bahá’í communities through firesides and study groups. Ideally, each pioneer would find employment or be otherwise self-supporting, but many required monetary assistance from the community. Traveling teachers continued to circulate, but they would focus on visiting areas where pioneers had settled, reinforcing the local efforts by

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<sup>530</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 6.

<sup>531</sup> Ioas, “Teaching in North America,” 202.

offering public lectures and generating press coverage. In contrast to the relative handful of believers who had acted as traveling teachers before, the magnitude of the goals meant that far larger numbers would need to be engaged in some form of teaching—settling in or traveling to new areas or strengthening the base of the movement in long-established localities—and in the necessary fundraising effort to finance both the teaching and temple work.<sup>532</sup>

An initial survey by the National Teaching Committee indicated that expansion in the South would figure prominently in the Seven Year Plan. Some three decades after the faith's arrival on the Potomac and at Mobile Bay, the South accounted for nearly half of the Plan's twenty-six virgin territories in North America. The relatively robust early development of the Augusta-area community had been the exception rather than the rule in the region. In 1937, only six cities south of Washington—Nashville, Memphis, Tuskegee, Miami, and St. Augustine in addition to Augusta—had enough Bahá'ís to form a Local Spiritual Assembly, and several of these only barely. Of the sixteen southern states that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had addressed in the Tablets of the Divine Plan, seven contained only a few isolated Bahá'ís and five had none at all.<sup>533</sup>

Aside from the logistical challenges of deploying pioneers and traveling teachers and building strong new communities in the region's twelve goal states, the Plan heralded significant cultural and demographic change for the Bahá'ís, as a national movement that was still mostly white, northern, and urban sought to establish new local communities in the heartland of black America. While they were already well represented at the local level—at

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<sup>532</sup> Ioas, "Teaching in North America," 200-2; Dahl, "Three Teaching Methods," 3-4.

<sup>533</sup> National Teaching Committee, "Annual Report, May 1937-April 1938," National Teaching Committee Records, NBA.

least in comparison to their proportion of the population in the northern and western states where most Bahá'ís lived—the concentrated push southward represented an opportunity to attract unprecedented numbers of African Americans to the faith. Even after the acceleration of migration during the war years, in the 1930s more than three-fourths of African Americans resided in the South, and they were a far more significant presence there than in any other region of the country. One in four Southerners was black, compared to one in ten people in both the Northeast and the Midwest and only one in a hundred in the West. The three states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, which together represented only seven percent of the total national population, accounted for more than twenty percent of African Americans. South Carolina alone, with barely more than one percent of all Americans, was home to more than six percent of the country's blacks.<sup>534</sup> If Louis Gregory's assessment of black Southerners' spiritual receptivity remained true, then prosecution of the Plan seemed likely to increase the racial diversity of the national movement, enabling it thereby to reflect more fully the bedrock principle of the oneness of humanity.

As the movement turned southward, it had important experiences to draw on. Since the turn of the century, local communities, including in a handful of southern cities and towns, had been working to foster interracial fellowship within their own ranks. Through the Race Amity Conferences and similar local initiatives, the Bahá'ís had created public spaces to speak out against prejudice and segregation in concert with other organizations. And beginning with Louis Gregory's 1910 trip, he and other teachers had established and nurtured positive contacts with progressive individuals and groups, white and black, across the South.

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<sup>534</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States*, Working Paper Series no. 56 (Washington, DC: Population Division, US Census Bureau, 2002), Appendix A-10, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/twps0056.html>.

On the other hand, despite the movement's early record on race, few of its members were prepared for the challenges of building interracial communities in the South. The same black demographic strength that made the region important to the Bahá'í movement had provoked the country's most energetic white responses, with a codification and enforcement of racial separatism more rigid, pervasive, and violent than anything most of them had so far been forced to face. During the 1930s, despite a growing chorus of protest from inside and outside the South, Jim Crow still held a firm grip across the region, and the forces of racial and religious orthodoxy often responded brutally to dissent. The southern campaign would require the national community to confront some of the ugliest realities of American racism, and on a far larger scale than it had ever attempted: the same challenges that the early Washington and Augusta groups had faced would now be repeated simultaneously in multiple localities, over at least a seven-year period of sustained community-building that would directly involve a substantial portion of the movement's existing members.

### **New Footholds in South Carolina**

When the Seven Year Plan began, South Carolina was counted as a "virgin territory" with no local Bahá'í community. Aside from the half dozen or so Bahá'ís in the South Carolina suburbs of Augusta, who were counted as a part of that community, only a few resident South Carolinians had ever affiliated themselves with the faith, mostly as a result of early visits by Louis Gregory and others. Widely scattered and isolated from the mainstream of the American Bahá'í movement, by the mid-1930s they had all lost contact with the community, lost interest, or died.

Not surprisingly, the Augusta-area community provided an initial base for the new effort to expand in South Carolina. In the early months of the Plan, Christine Bidwell and Marie Kershaw from North Augusta visited nearby Aiken, where Margaret Klebs had first arrived a quarter-century earlier, “to see about opening that town.” They located a hotel where they could rent a room for speakers, and found that the local newspaper would publicize meetings.<sup>535</sup> About the same time, other Bahá’ís, mostly financially independent white women from outside the South, began to spend their winters in South Carolina. In 1936-1937, two women, Amelie Bodmer and May Fisher, traveled the state in a trailer, visiting “several cities” and making “good Bahai contacts.”<sup>536</sup> In December 1937, another pair, Emogene Hoagg and Agnes O’Neill, arrived in Charleston and spent the rest of the winter there.<sup>537</sup> In 1938-1939, Louise Thompson from Maine took their place in Charleston and “followed up the interest which had been established” the year before.<sup>538</sup> In February and March 1939, Charles Mason Remey from Washington, D.C., made a teaching trip to several localities in the state.<sup>539</sup>

That fall, Emogene Hoagg, one of the most prominent and respected early believers in the United States, returned to Charleston. After learning of the faith in 1898 from Phoebe Hearst, she had become an active traveling teacher and administrator in North America and

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<sup>535</sup> Christine Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, n.d. [1936], Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>536</sup> National Teaching Committee, “Annual Report, May 1937-April 1938,” National Teaching Committee Records, NBA.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, *Annual Bahá’í Reports Presented to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1938-1939* (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1939), 10. While this pattern continued sporadically during the 1940s and 1950s, a Bahá’í community did not emerge in Charleston until the mid-1960s.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 12.

Europe, notably by making a 6,000-mile trip through Alaska and Canada in 1919 and 1920 and working for the International Bahá'í Bureau, the worldwide community's liaison to the League of Nations, in Geneva from 1928 to 1935.<sup>540</sup> After the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, she had been one of the believers with whom Shoghi Effendi had consulted about an early election of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>541</sup> A woman with no family commitments (her husband had died in 1918 and they had no children), during the Seven Year Plan Hoagg put herself at the disposal of the National Teaching Committee and traveled extensively to help fulfill pioneering goals in North America and the Caribbean. Late in 1939, after traveling through the Midwest, Hoagg suggested to the National Teaching Committee that she go to Charleston. The committee accepted her offer, sending \$100 for train travel expenses, a stock of books for distribution to interested seekers, and a list of believers and "contacts" from previous teachers in South Carolina. Regarding the list, the Committee's secretary, Charlotte Linfoot, wrote: "I am inclined to think that most of these contacts are pretty cold if not completely frozen by this time."<sup>542</sup>

One of the listed believers was Charles Westendorff, whom Louis Gregory had taught more than a decade before. The National Teaching Committee had corresponded with him over the years, and Linfoot suggested that Hoagg visit to see if he would formally register as a member of the faith and participate in a study group. But years of isolation from the rest of the American Bahá'í community had evidently left Westendorff with little connection to an evolving movement. "Really it was a circus!" Hoagg exclaimed in a report of her visit:

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<sup>540</sup> Ella Goodall Cooper, "Henrietta Emogene Martin Hoagg, 1869-1945," *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 10, 1944-1946, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (1949; repr., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), 520-6; Emogene Hoagg, "Letter from Haifa in the Mourning Time," *World Order* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1971-72): 34-37.

<sup>541</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 55-56, 247.

<sup>542</sup> Charlotte Linfoot to Emogene Hoagg, 5 January 1940, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

I said we had heard he had accepted the Baha'i Faith. He immediately said that he did not confine himself to any organization, nor would he sign a card; that a few people up "there" could make laws, but it was not necessary to follow them; that he loved Jesus and felt that he could teach people more easily through the Christian teachings.... [H]e talks incessantly and to be able to say something I had to take hold of his arm and actually said, "Just wait a moment I want to say something." Then I explained that it was not a few "up North," but that we had a Guardian of the Faith etc. etc. This seemed to be something he had not heard about.... I invited him to a study class, and he said he did not have to study, as he received his knowledge direct."<sup>543</sup>

Hoagg said that Westendorff's neighbors and family regarded him as "erratic," and he had a reputation for both kindness and dishonesty. His son, she said, "laughs at him because he talks so much." Hoagg recommended that he not be retained as a member of the faith: "That he accepts Baha'u'llah in a certain way, may be true, but that he has [no] conception of His real station, or knows anything about the Master or the Guardian, or the Administration, is also true."<sup>544</sup>

Other teaching activities were more promising. Mrs. Walpole, Hoagg's landlady at the beginning of her stay in Charleston, arranged for her to speak at a meeting of the King's Daughters, a women's Christian service organization. "All Charlestonians," Hoagg noted with satisfaction. "They were so pleased that I am asked to speak again the second Tuesday of April." A positive contact with a Unitarian minister led to a meeting with his church's Women's Alliance. And she spoke to a gathering of friends at the home of the city's black librarian. "Two people are much interested, and another is reading what she can get—sometimes from the Library." Despite the disappointment with Westendorff, she said that a year of teaching "may bring forth some real fruits" and result in a new community of

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<sup>543</sup> Emogene Hoagg to Charlotte Linfoot, 22 March 1940, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.



believers.<sup>545</sup> But Hoagg did not stay in Charleston. Requested by the Inter-America Committee to go to Havana, Cuba, she left South Carolina around the beginning of November, 1940.<sup>546</sup> Louise Thompson promptly returned to Charleston with her sister, Emma Thompson, and the two moved into Hoagg's apartment. They continued teaching Mrs. Walpole and her husband, and tried to start a study group.<sup>547</sup>

Bahá'ís also moved to the capital city of Columbia. In late 1938, Maud Mickle, a white woman who, like the Thompson sisters, had settled near Green Acre in Maine, and her friend Alta Wheeler, also white and a nurse, brought Mickle's ill and invalid sister, Jennie Mickle, to spend the winter in the mild climate of Columbia. One of the people they met was Louella Moore, a white North Augusta native. She had learned of the faith there before moving with her family to Columbia, and she had kept in touch with her Bahá'í friends in the Augusta area.<sup>548</sup> After studying with Mickle and Wheeler, she was ready to join.<sup>549</sup> In early 1939, Moore wrote to the National Teaching Committee to express her belief in the Bahá'í Faith and request enrollment as a member, likely the first person in the state to do so since the introduction of the procedure.<sup>550</sup>

In addition to their relationship with Moore and her family, Maud Mickle and Alta Wheeler focused on teaching the faith among Columbia's large African-American

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Horace Holley to Emogene Hoagg, 28 October 1940, and Philip Marangella to Emogene Hoagg, 8 November 1940, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>547</sup> Louise Thompson to Emogene Hoagg, 28 November 1940, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>548</sup> Jessie Dixon Entzminger and Louise Moore Montgomery, taped interview by Doris Morris, n.d., Columbia Bahá'í Archives, Columbia, SC (hereafter cited as CBA).

<sup>549</sup> Christine Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, 27 January 1937, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>550</sup> National Teaching Committee to Louella Moore, 17 April 1939, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

population, an endeavor for which Mickle, at least, had some preparation. A decade earlier, Mickle and another white woman, Leonora Holsapple-Armstrong, had been among the first American pioneers in Latin America, settling in Salvador de Bahia, the capital city of Afro-Brazilian culture on that country's northeastern coast. The two had worked in health care in the city's vast slums and taught the faith to the people they met. After Mickle's Brazilian experience, reaching out to African Americans in Columbia probably came quite naturally.<sup>551</sup> One black woman Mickle and Wheeler met was interested enough in the faith to ask her landlady if they could come to the house to tell more. The landlady, Pearl Dixon, was the widow of an African Methodist Episcopal minister in the rural community of Killian northeast of Columbia. After her husband's death she had moved with her family to the city, settling by 1939 in a house on Richland Street where she rented rooms to boarders.<sup>552</sup> A member of Sidney Park Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, where Louis Gregory had spoken some eighteen years before, Dixon approved of the Bahá'í meeting in her home and invited some of her own friends and family. Dixon and her daughter, Jessie Dixon Entzminger, were among the most interested of the listeners. Dixon embraced the faith immediately, but Entzminger was more hesitant. As she later recalled: "I had never heard tell of the Bahá'í Faith. It sounded like a funny name."<sup>553</sup>

At Dixon's invitation, Wheeler began leading a study group in the home, and after six months, Entzminger became a Bahá'í as well. At least a few local whites also attended the class. In late 1940, Louella Moore's adult daughter, Louise Moore Montgomery, was

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<sup>551</sup> Leonora Holsapple, "Some Experiences Among the Poor in Brazil," *Star of the West* 18 (April 1927): 220-2.

<sup>552</sup> Jackie Yasin, personal conversation with author; *Hill's Columbia (Richland County, S.C.) City Directory*, vol. 10, 1939 (Richmond, VA: Hill Directory Co., 1939), 575.

<sup>553</sup> Entzminger and Montgomery interview.

“interested but not confirmed” in the faith.<sup>554</sup> She continued to study and worship with the Bahá’í community for nearly a decade before declaring her faith at Dixon’s house.<sup>555</sup> The tiny community also met at the house that the Mickle sisters and Wheeler shared. When the Thompson sisters visited Columbia in November 1940, they attended a Holy Day observance there “with Maud & Alta, Mrs. Moore (white) and the 2 colored believers came.” According to Louise Thompson, the white pioneers could have black visitors in their home because they did not share it with anyone else: “They are able to have this mixed meeting as they have a cottage or 5-room bungalow all to themselves and no one the wiser.”<sup>556</sup>

Over the next few years, African American traveling teachers also visited Columbia to assist the small group. One was Zenobia Dorsey of Scranton, Pennsylvania. During her visit from November 1941 to January 1942, she gave a series of talks to the Waverly Friendship Club, a women’s social and service organization in the middle-class black neighborhood surrounding Allen University and Benedict College. Three of the club’s members became Bahá’ís.<sup>557</sup> Dorsey came back to Columbia in the spring of 1943, and three people she taught joined the ongoing study class at the Dixon home.<sup>558</sup> In the early spring of 1942, Louis Gregory made a stop in Columbia as part of his lecture tour of black schools and colleges in West Virginia, Virginia, and the Carolinas. He spoke at Benedict and Allen; at Booker T. Washington High School, the city’s only high school for African-Americans,

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<sup>554</sup> Louise Thompson to Emogene Hoagg, 28 November 1940, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>555</sup> Entzminger and Montgomery interview; *Baha’i Regional Bulletin* [*Regional Teaching Bulletin*] no. 1 (October-December 1949), 3.

<sup>556</sup> Thompson to Hoagg, 28 November 1940.

<sup>557</sup> “News of the Bahá’í Friends of N. C., S. C. and So. Ga.,” December 1941, CBA; National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, *Annual Bahá’í Reports Presented to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1941-1942* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1942), 32.

<sup>558</sup> *Regional Teaching Bulletin*, no. 9 (1 April 1943): 2.

located near the University of South Carolina campus in the working-class black neighborhood of Wheeler Hill; and to a meeting of the Palmetto Medical Association, the statewide professional organization of black physicians.<sup>559</sup> The community also used the local press, both black and white, to advertize its aims and activities. In the spring and fall of 1940, for example, the *Palmetto Leader*, a black newspaper, carried stories about the Bahá'í house of worship in Illinois under the titles “The Universal House of Worship” and “World’s Most Beautiful Temple.”<sup>560</sup> One pointed out that the crystalline quartz for the exterior ornamentation was mined in Spartanburg County. In December 1940, the *Columbia Record*, a white paper, carried a similar item.<sup>561</sup> In March, 1942, the society section of *The State* reported a celebration of Bahá'í New Year at the home of Mickle and Wheeler that drew visitors from Augusta and Charleston.<sup>562</sup>

The Augusta-area community was the initial source of pioneers to Greenville in South Carolina’s upper Piedmont. In the spring of 1938, just days after returning from the National Convention in Chicago, William and Christine Bidwell moved from North Augusta to pursue a business opportunity in Greenville, the capital of the regional textile industry, located near Christine’s family home of Pendleton in neighboring Anderson County. The couple took over operations at the Chick Springs Sanitarium six miles east of Greenville in the small community of Taylors. The health retreat center had been closed since the death of its

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<sup>559</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, *Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1942-1943* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1943), 28.

<sup>560</sup> “The Universal House of Worship,” *The Palmetto Leader*, 6 March 1940; “Traveling Around America,” *The Palmetto Leader*, 30 November 1940, clippings, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>561</sup> “House of Worship Model Here,” *The Columbia Record*, 20 December 1940, clipping, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>562</sup> “Baha’i Community Observes New Year,” *The State*, 24 March 1942, clipping, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

founder five years before, and the Bidwells went into partnership with a woman from Miami to reopen the facility.<sup>563</sup> William, a chiropractor and naturopathic physician who specialized in healing through diet, saw patients, and Christine oversaw the kitchen. They “hope[d] to interest friends in the teachings and soon have a study group,” and Christine dreamed of the facility becoming a “Baha’i School for the South.”<sup>564</sup> But the business venture was unsuccessful; by the onset of winter the Bidwells had paid out the partner and moved to downtown Greenville, where they were to remain for nearly two decades. Their new house on North Main Street had space for an office, and William Bidwell began to see patients there.

Soon they did make contacts for teaching. In early December 1938, William wrote a friend: “Last night I had three wonderful souls listening to the story of the Bab, Baha’u’llah and Abdul Baha until 11:30 and were they interested.” Another “wonderful soul” was attracted to the new faith but seemed unable to leave her Baptist church. She said that “she was afraid to believe and afraid not to believe.”<sup>565</sup> In the spring of 1939, William Bidwell noted that one seeker, likely the same woman, was still visiting their house to discuss the faith. As a public school teacher, he said, she was “working under a system where she cannot come out openly” as a Bahá’í. He counseled her “to go ahead and develop herself to the fullest extent” in her individual practice of the faith and assured her that “her opportunity would come” for public expression of her belief.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Christine Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, 11 May 1938, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> W. T. Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, 11 December 1938 and Monday 24<sup>th</sup> [early 1939], Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>566</sup> W. T. Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> [early 1939], Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

### **Formulating a Regional Racial Policy**

Like the other fledgling groups that emerged in the South during the Seven Year Plan, the Bahá'ís in Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston faced the challenge of spreading their faith and building functional interracial communities in the midst of an oppressive and segregated society. Morrison has noted that as the movement established a presence across the South in the late 1930s and 1940s, the difficulties of fostering interracial fellowship in Washington a generation before were repeated, to varying degrees, in many localities at once.<sup>567</sup> Closer to home, efforts to build an interracial Bahá'í movement in Augusta had been partial and sporadic. Many of the questions remained the same, even as specific local circumstances differed. How could the Bahá'ís practice their faith's cardinal teaching of the oneness of humanity in a society that was segregated by tradition and by law? Since Bahá'u'lláh enjoined his followers to strictly obey civil authorities, Bahá'ís in the South had little choice but to abide by segregation as far as local and state statutes mandated, while seeking spaces within the system—such as private homes as in the case of Columbia—where black and white members could meet together regularly for worship and other community activities.

There were also questions of methodology. To whom should the pioneers and traveling teachers—most of whom would be white and middle-class—initially address themselves in their new localities? Should they focus on liberal-minded whites, seeking conversions among the power-brokers of southern society who would then be able to afford black believers some measure of protection? Or should they first teach educated blacks, who over the years of efforts by traveling teachers like Louis Gregory had shown a great deal of interest in the faith, and approach the rest of the society through them? How much should the Bahá'ís—many of whom, at least in the early stages of the Plan, would be from other

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<sup>567</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 258.

parts of the country—challenge local conventions and push the limits of acceptable behavior? How could they teach their faith to blacks without alienating the majority of whites or even suffering ostracism? But if they coddled white prejudices, how could they avoid becoming just another Jim Crow church? If they brought blacks and whites together indiscriminately—especially in large numbers—how could they avoid provoking social and economic reprisals, or violence, against themselves and their seekers? Perhaps most importantly given previous experience, would enough white Bahá'ís risk discomfort and opposition to champion the issue?

A national policy for teaching in the South began to emerge late in 1936, when the National Spiritual Assembly made plans to visit the fledgling Bahá'í community of Nashville. The visit came as part of a decision by the National Assembly to hold its meetings in different parts of the country “to provide occasions for the holding of Regional Conferences with the friends, as well as public meetings for promoting the Faith.”<sup>568</sup> The first such visit took place in San Francisco in November 1936, and the next was planned for Nashville, where a new community was in need of encouragement, the following January.

Two years prior, Louis Gregory had spent several months in Nashville, forming and nurturing a Bahá'í study group through contacts at Fisk University. Several black women had embraced the faith, augmenting what he described as a “tiny group of believers, six southern whites and one colored,” that already existed in the city. The small community had elected Nashville’s first Local Spiritual Assembly in April 1935.<sup>569</sup> A visit by the national body was likely to reinforce the group through an influx of experienced teachers and the

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<sup>568</sup> “Meetings of the N.S.A.,” *Bahá'í News*, no. 103 (Oct. 1936), 2.

<sup>569</sup> Louis G. Gregory to Edith M. Chapman, Edith M. Chapman Papers, NBA, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 243.

holding of public meetings that could generate press coverage. However, at least some members of the National Assembly—few of whom had any significant experience teaching in the South—apparently questioned the advisability of holding interracial public gatherings, because the body addressed a letter to Shoghi Effendi asking for his advice.

Replying through his secretary, Shoghi Effendi heartily approved the Nashville visit, saying it would “greatly encourage the believers in that center,” and he strongly endorsed the holding of interracial meetings:

The holding of public meetings in that city should be avoided only in case it would lead to grave and very serious results. Slight local criticisms and unpopularity should not act as a deterrent. The issue [of racial segregation] should be met squarely and courageously ....<sup>570</sup>

Bolstered by Shoghi Effendi’s advice, a member of the Regional Teaching Committee arranged to hold several integrated gatherings, one at Fisk, two at an exclusive hotel, and two in private homes, during the National Assembly’s visit.<sup>571</sup> Particularly noteworthy were the mixed meetings at the Hermitage Hotel, the premier social venue in the city, where the management relaxed its strict segregation policy and admitted blacks at the Bahá’ís’ request. As one black Nashville believer recalled, it was at least “a foot in the door” of segregation in a citadel of the city’s white high society.<sup>572</sup>

In addition to his specific thoughts about the Nashville visit, Shoghi Effendi’s letter also contained advice that appeared to suggest a general approach to teaching in the region. Likely based on his extensive correspondence with Louis Gregory and other experienced

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<sup>570</sup> “Letters from the Guardian,” *Bahá’i News*, no. 103 (October 1936), 1.

<sup>571</sup> “Public Meetings in Nashville,” *Bahá’i News*, no. 105 (February 1937), 2.

<sup>572</sup> Albert James, memories of Louis Gregory tape, recorded 4 January 1981, NBA, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 259.



traveling teachers, his guidance became the basis for an explicit national policy for teaching in the South:

[A]n effort should be made to attract at first the most cultured element among the colored, and through them establish contact with the white and the masses. Such individuals and groups, whether white or colored, who are relatively free from racial prejudice, should be approached, separately if necessary, and an endeavor should be made to bring them together eventually, not only on formal occasions and for specific purposes, but in intimate social gatherings, in private homes as well as in formally recognized Bahá'í centers.<sup>573</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's advice, intended to assist the Bahá'ís to establish viable interracial communities in the midst of pervasive segregation, seems to reflect a rather subtle analysis not only of the complex racial and class dynamics of the region, but also of the needs and capacities of the national Bahá'í community as a whole and of the individual pioneers and traveling teachers who would be at the forefront of the effort. He suggested a pragmatic, long-range approach that would enable the Bahá'ís to establish the foundations of interracial local communities as quickly and effectively as possible while protecting them somewhat from possible suspicion, social ostracism, or violent reaction.

Shoghi Effendi took the complete integration of the Bahá'í community itself, "in intimate social gatherings, in private homes as well as in formally recognized Bahá'í centers," as a given. But his comments indicate an acknowledgement that, depending on local conditions, blacks and whites might have to be approached separately in the initial stages of teaching. Even if local or state laws did not prohibit interracial mingling in private homes or in Bahá'í-owned buildings, social pressure from ministers, employers, and family members and the ever-present danger of white supremacist violence could make even interested individuals who were "relatively free from racial prejudice" wary of mixed gatherings. Identification with the new faith required a measure of courage—involving as it

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<sup>573</sup> "Letters from the Guardian," *Bahá'í News*, no. 103 (October 1936), 1.

did a simultaneous rejection of both white male supremacy and traditional Protestantism. Yet it was precisely the individual spiritual commitment and strong group solidarity associated with religious community—factors that necessarily took time to cultivate—that would enable new believers to withstand the opposition that would inevitably come. By not insisting on interracial gatherings at the outset, Bahá'í teachers could nurture seekers of varying backgrounds and temperaments into full acceptance of essential Bahá'í teachings while perhaps postponing a head-on confrontation with the upholders of orthodoxy.

Shoghi Effendi's advice also seems to have taken into account the class dynamics both of the region and of the national Bahá'í movement. By the mid-1930s, there was ample evidence that interracial cooperation among the southern working class tended to provoke brutal suppression, while that which was initiated by the “respectable” class of blacks and whites was often tolerated. As Louis Gregory's interactions with I. E. Lowery and Alonzo Twine suggested, “the most cultured element among the colored” in a given locality would surely contain its defenders of the status quo, but it was also likely to include individuals who would be sympathetic to the faith and willing to use their familiarity with local conditions to help the Bahá'ís gain an entrée into the community. “[T]hrough them,” the teachers could “establish contact” with racially progressive individuals among the white leadership class and with receptive audiences among the “masses” of blacks and whites, perhaps avoiding dangerous missteps in the process. At the same time, the black middle class was probably the element of a given local population with whom the pioneers and traveling teachers—mostly well-educated, non-southern whites—could communicate most freely and effectively about the challenging message of the faith.

After the Nashville visit, the National Spiritual Assembly sought Shoghi Effendi's approval of a policy for teaching in the South that distinguished, in effect, between what was expected of seekers and of confirmed believers. A local community's internal functions—the Nineteen Day Feast and Holy Day observances, voting for and membership on the Local Spiritual Assembly, and social, educational, and devotional gatherings—had to be conducted on an integrated basis, but teaching activities such as firesides, study classes, and publicly-advertized lectures could be conducted separately for black and white seekers if local conditions seemed to require it. Shoghi Effendi wrote to approve the policy as a practical measure to teach “the two races in the South without the slightest discrimination.” He reiterated the objective that blacks and whites “should be ultimately brought together, and be urged to associate with the utmost unity and fellowship, and be given full and equal opportunity to participate in the conduct of the teaching as well as administrative activities of the Faith.”<sup>574</sup> The National Assembly shared the new policy, including Shoghi Effendi's second letter, at the National Convention in April and in the June issue of *Bahá'í News*.<sup>575</sup>

### ***The Advent of Divine Justice***

A renewed impetus to interracial community-building and a major clarification of the aims of the faith came in December 1938 with a lengthy letter from Shoghi Effendi to the North American community. Subsequently published as a book under the title *The Advent of Divine Justice*, the letter emphasized the need for full engagement on the issue of race by every member and every institution. Its overall theme was the spiritual prerequisites and practical means for successful completion of the Seven Year Plan. Set against the backdrop

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<sup>574</sup> “Letters from the Guardian (to the National Spiritual Assembly),” *Bahá'í News*, no. 108 (June 1937), 1-2.

<sup>575</sup> “Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention,” *Bahá'í News*, no. 108 (June 1937), 3.

of a “world, torn with conflicting passions, and perilously disintegrating from within” and the consequent restrictions imposed on the Bahá’ís in Germany, the Soviet Union, Iran, and Palestine, Shoghi Effendi’s letter not only focused the attention of the North American believers on the twin goals of the Plan, but, like his earlier World Order letters, it broadened their social and world-historical vision of the community’s mission at home and across the globe.<sup>576</sup>

While the bulk of the letter consisted of instructions and encouragement regarding the teaching campaign in the Western Hemisphere, essential to Shoghi Effendi’s thesis was a sophisticated arraignment of certain aspects of American society and of their harmful effects on the Bahá’í movement in the United States. Shoghi Effendi argued that “an excessive and binding materialism” had “unfortunately engendered within” the American nation severe racial prejudice, laxity in personal morality, and political corruption.<sup>577</sup> In this context, Shoghi Effendi called on the American believers to eliminate these tendencies from the movement—and eventually from the nation itself.

The lengthiest portion of this critique of American society was a frank discussion of the problem of lingering racial prejudice among the Bahá’ís. Shoghi Effendi called it “the most vital and challenging issue confronting the Bahá’í community at the present stage of its evolution.”<sup>578</sup> Citing a series of unequivocal passages from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and giving specific instructions to both white and black believers, he argued that not only the success of the Seven Year Plan but ultimately the destiny of the American

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<sup>576</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-sized ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990), 3-5.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-4.

nation depended on the extent to which the Bahá'ís built “an interracial fellowship completely purged from the curse of racial prejudice ....”<sup>579</sup> Discrimination against any racial minority, Shoghi Effendi wrote, was contrary to the spirit and purpose of the faith, and there could be no “division or cleavage within its ranks.” He particularly emphasized the need for the black and white believers to demonstrate complete equality, “in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits.”<sup>580</sup> Moreover, they should promote interracial fellowship everywhere, both in their own community and in their daily interactions with others. “Freedom from racial prejudice...,” he wrote,

should be consistently demonstrated in every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Bahá'í community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized groups, committees and Assemblies. It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá'í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies.<sup>581</sup>

In particular, he noted, it should be the “keynote” of the policy of the National Spiritual Assembly, which must “set the example” and “facilitate the application of such a vital principle” in the life of the community.<sup>582</sup>

With specific reference to the governance of the community, Shoghi Effendi formalized a policy meant to increase the participation of minority groups at all levels. In cases of ties in elections for Assemblies or delegates, or when the qualifications for committee appointments were otherwise equal, he stated that “priority should unhesitatingly

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 36-7.

be accorded the party representing the minority.” Every local community, he wrote, “should so arrange its affairs” that its institutions, “be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these diverse elements, racial or otherwise, as possible.” Such a policy, he suggested, would both encourage those from groups that were underrepresented in the religion and demonstrate to the public the universality of its appeal.<sup>583</sup>

By forcefully renewing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s insistence on complete social and political equality within the movement and, as far as opportunities allowed, in their normal social, economic, and educational activities outside the Bahá’í community, Shoghi Effendi called the Bahá’ís to a purposeful, consistent, and daily exertion that would assault one of the dominant ideologies of their society:

Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them.<sup>584</sup>

The implications for the southern campaign of the Plan were clear: Shoghi Effendi was asking the Bahá’ís to demonstrate, across the segregated South, the power of the faith to attract both blacks and whites and unite them in diverse local communities. No individual Bahá’í was exempt, whatever his or her background or personal inclinations; no state could be considered outside their field of action, however strong its upholders of orthodoxy. And the National Spiritual Assembly had responsibility to ensure the project’s success.

An important element in understanding Shoghi Effendi’s critique of American society and his vision of the role of the Bahá’í movement within it is the assumption—laced

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<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 40.

throughout the sacred scriptures of the faith and widely understood among the American Bahá'ís by the early twentieth century—of the primacy of spiritual forces in social change. Bahá'u'lláh held that the ultimate source of social cohesion and the advancement of civilization was the progressive revelation of spiritual reality by the Manifestations of God and the generative potency their successive appearances had released into the world. In some of his most significant tablets, Bahá'u'lláh indicated that the emerging era of global unity required a more mature conception of the relationship between religion and social welfare. In an exemplary passage, he wrote: “That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith.”<sup>585</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá echoed the theme in his tablets and in his public addresses in the West. “Material civilization,” he wrote, “is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit ....”<sup>586</sup>

To these concepts, already current among his audience, Shoghi Effendi applied historical language to assist the Bahá'ís to appreciate the specific role and priorities of the American community and its relationship to the nation of which it formed a part. The Manifestations of God, he noted, had all appeared amidst peoples who were “either fast declining, or had already touched the lowest depths of moral and spiritual degradation.”<sup>587</sup> Each one of them had given birth to a new community of faith distinguished by high morals

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<sup>585</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, H176. Versions of the statement were published in Bahá'í treatments of social issues during the Depression era. Cf. *The Bahá'í Magazine* (formerly *Star of the West*) 23, no. 8 (November 1932), 245, and vol. 25, no. 7 (October 1934), 199.

<sup>586</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), 227.22. The entire letter, dated December 17, 1919, was first published in *Star of the West* 11, no. 8 (1 August 1920), 123-134.

<sup>587</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, 17.

and social cohesion, “and with it as a lever ha[d] lifted the entire human race to a higher and nobler plane of life and conduct.”<sup>588</sup> The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh had appeared within the wreckage of the Persian Empire, he argued, not because of “any racial superiority, political capacity, or spiritual virtue” which it possessed, “but rather as a direct consequence of its crying needs, its lamentable degeneracy, and irremediable perversity ....”<sup>589</sup> For similar reasons, Bahá’u’lláh and particularly ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had specified the United States to be the “cradle” and the “standard-bearer” of the future global order:

It is precisely by reason of the patent evils which, notwithstanding its other admittedly great characteristics and achievements, an excessive and binding materialism has unfortunately engendered within it that the Author of their Faith and the Center of His Covenant have singled it out to become the standard-bearer of the New World Order envisaged in their writings.<sup>590</sup>

Shoghi Effendi said that by raising up a spiritually vibrant new community “from the midst of a people, immersed in a sea of materialism, a prey to one of the most virulent and long-standing forms of racial prejudice, and notorious for its political corruption, lawlessness and laxity in moral standards,” Bahá’u’lláh would demonstrate his “almighty power” to a “heedless generation” and would “lay a firm foundation for the country’s future role in ushering in the Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh.”<sup>591</sup>

Before the community could bring the teachings of the faith to bear in a significant way on the life of the nation, however, it had to reflect them more fully itself. He noted that the Bahá’ís were “[i]ncapable as yet, in view of the restricted size of their community and the limited influence it now wields, of producing any marked effect on the great mass of their

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.



countrymen.” First they should work to “regenerate the inward life of their own community” by developing a non-adversarial system of group governance; new standards of sexual morality, gender relations, and marriage and family life; and a strong interracial fellowship.<sup>592</sup> Such a focus constituted the key to success in the community’s immediate objectives, the “bedrock on which the security of all teaching plans, Temple projects, and financial schemes, must ultimately rest.”<sup>593</sup> And over the long term, as the movement grew in size, resources, and spiritual vibrancy across the United States, the experience gained would enable “future generations” of Bahá’ís to “assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their nation.”<sup>594</sup>

In the meantime, Shoghi Effendi made clear that the religion could not simply follow the lead of others in its work for interracial unity. “Let neither [black nor white Bahá’ís],” he wrote, “think that they can wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favorable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith.” Indeed, during the era of the New Deal, a growing chorus of local, state, and regional organizations across the South—from the Communist Party, labor unions, and New Deal agencies to Southern Baptist student groups, women’s associations, and the NAACP—were working across lines of race and class and calling for a new reconstruction of the region.<sup>595</sup> Shoghi Effendi implied, however, that the Bahá’ís would have to chart their

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 20, 41.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>595</sup> For excellent treatments of activism in the South during the 1930s and 1940s, see Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*; Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). For similar work on

own path and make a distinctive contribution to the cause of racial justice. This guidance likely stemmed in part from a concern that the movement not dissipate its limited energy and resources before its own internal coherence was firmly established.

In addition, there were important differences, at the levels of both ideology and practical implementation, between the Bahá'í community and other advocates of reform in the South. First, the era of the Great Depression and the Second World War saw African-American activists focusing increased attention on achieving civil rights within and through the Democratic Party. Second, particularly as left-leaning organizations united behind the New Deal in the “Popular Front” of the late 1930s and 1940s, Communist activists and Marxian theories in general exercised a significant influence on the outlook and programs of civil rights and labor organizations. Neither development was completely compatible with the Bahá'í teachings. In view of Bahá'u'lláh's writings on the primacy of spiritual forces in social change, both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi specifically rejected Marxian economic determinism as an inadequate theoretical framework and impractical in application.<sup>596</sup> Similarly, based on the principle of the oneness of humanity, they counseled the Bahá'ís to avoid the petty loyalties and manipulation inherent in political parties and class antagonism—not to mention the use of violence, subversion, or civil disobedience as political tools.<sup>597</sup> While the Bahá'ís could wholeheartedly support the broad goals of full civil rights

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South Carolina, see Jack Irby Hayes, Jr., *South Carolina and the New Deal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) and Lau, *Democracy Rising*.

<sup>596</sup> For explorations of the relationship between the Bahá'í Faith and contemporary economic systems, see [Glen Eyford, ed.], *The Bahá'í Faith and Marxism: Proceedings of a Conference Held January 1986* (Ottawa, ON: Bahá'í Studies Publications, 1987) and Farhad Rassekh, “The Bahá'í Faith and the Market Economy,” *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (Sept.-Dec. 2001): 31-61.

<sup>597</sup> For an excellent treatment of the philosophical underpinnings of the “New World Order” in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, see Saeidi, *Logos and Civilization*. For an explanation of the Bahá'í approach to politics, see Udo

and economic justice, their primary objective was neither agitation for reform within the existing order nor its overthrow. Shoghi Effendi maintained that the main task of the Bahá'í community was to broaden the foundations of the new system envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh, a system that represented, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the “highest aims” of the peoples of the world—of whatever religion, nation, or political faction—for justice, freedom, and equality.<sup>598</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's letter had immediate and far-reaching effects on the American Bahá'ís. The National Spiritual Assembly took a more active leadership role in promoting interracial unity by a variety of means, including appointing a new Race Unity Committee and providing ample time at the 1939 National Convention for discussion of the letter. At that convention, described by one participant as “unified and more mature” than in the past, Louis Gregory was reelected to the National Spiritual Assembly after several years without a black member of the body; the Assembly subsequently elected Gregory its first recording secretary.<sup>599</sup> The five-member Race Unity Committee included both Louis Gregory and Dorothy Beecher Baker, who also served as vice-chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly. A white Ohioan descended from the abolitionist Beecher family of New England, Baker was well-respected among the Bahá'ís and had already emerged as a champion of racial justice within the community. Together, she and Gregory coordinated a renewed “southern college project” beginning in 1940 that sent black and white teachers to some 160 colleges in the region, lecturing “before chapels, assemblies, classrooms, and student clubs”

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Schaefer, Ulrich Gollmer, and Nicola Towfigh, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).

<sup>598</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 227.27-30.

<sup>599</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 271-2.

on the oneness of humanity, presenting Bahá'í books to libraries, and distributing pamphlets to students and professors.<sup>600</sup> As a result of Shoghi Effendi's letter and the National Assembly's strong endorsement, the 1940s witnessed a new wave of national and local efforts similar to the race amity activities of the 1920s and early 1930s, including a wide variety of conferences, courses, exhibits, and interracial dinners and social activities across the country. At the same time, the American community made its first concerted efforts to teach the faith to Native Americans, Chinese Americans, and, significantly in the context of wartime prejudices in the United States, Japanese Americans.

The prosecution of the Plan, and particularly the southern campaign, provided ample opportunities to test and refine the interracial character of the American Bahá'í movement. The first major challenge to the National Spiritual Assembly's southern strategy and Shoghi Effendi's instructions came in Atlanta in 1940, when the racial conservatism of a group of white believers nearly succeeded in creating an all-white local community. The National Assembly's intervention in the crisis set a strong precedent for the development of the faith in the South, including nearby South Carolina.

Previously, Atlanta had been a bright spot in the region. As early as 1914, a succession of resident Bahá'ís and traveling teachers, both black and white, had taught the faith among all segments of the city's population. By the late 1930s, there was a small local community that included both black and white members. They met together regularly for Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days and, according to the national policy, they often held separate teaching meetings for white and black inquirers. Difficulties only arose late in 1939, when Orcella Rexford, a traveling health and nutrition lecturer who combined her professional engagements with teaching campaigns, visited Atlanta and attracted a new group

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<sup>600</sup> Dorothy Baker, "The Bahá'í Faith in the Colleges," in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 9, 1940-1944, 773-4.

of seekers—all of them white—to a study group led by Terah Smith, a local white believer and secretary of the Regional Teaching Committee. Five of the seekers became Bahá'ís. However, the new converts were apparently only dimly aware that the faith was an interracial movement and, indeed, that there were already black believers in the city. At Ridván 1940, when a Local Spiritual Assembly was elected for the first time, all the members were white; it is unclear if the black Bahá'ís were even invited to participate in the election.<sup>601</sup>

One white couple from among the older group of believers, Raymond and Estelle Lindsey, decided to press the issue of race in the community by initiating a series of integrated firesides in their home. They invited their black neighbors, as well as the black and white Bahá'ís, for dinner and discussion of the faith. Afterwards, other white Bahá'ís protested, and Terah Smith asked the Lindseys not to have any more integrated meetings. At the same time, the new Local Assembly did not act on the request of a black seeker, Essie Robinson, to be enrolled in the Bahá'í community.<sup>602</sup> By the fall of 1940, it was clear to the National Spiritual Assembly that the conservatism of the new white believers—and evidently at least one of the veteran teachers in the community, as well—was compromising the integrity of the southern teaching policy in one of the region's leading cities.

To remedy the situation, the National Assembly arranged to visit Atlanta in November 1940. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was Louis Gregory and Dorothy Baker who formed the National Assembly's advance team. Gregory was the first member to arrive. When he went to a meeting with the community that had been arranged for that evening, only a portion of the believers—those favorable to integration—showed up. The next night, when

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<sup>601</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 83-4, 103, 191; McMullen, *The Bahá'í*, 158-60.

<sup>602</sup> The situation is summarized in McMullen, *The Bahá'í*, 161-2.

Dorothy Baker arrived and called a meeting with her and Gregory, everyone came. Baker took the lead in the discussion. “Every single individual,” according to one account, “was given an opportunity to express himself.”<sup>603</sup> Yet Baker left no room for vacillation. Calling attention to the fact that Essie Robertson was waiting to be enrolled in the faith, she “made it clear that the Baha’i Community could never restrict anyone because of color. . . .”<sup>604</sup> She insisted that interracial unity was a matter of spiritual principle and an article of their faith, and that there could be only one, integrated community in Atlanta. Any white person who could not fully embrace the ideal and the practice of interracial fellowship was welcome to leave the faith. Additional gatherings held after the arrival of the other members of the National Assembly reinforced Baker’s message. At the Biltmore Hotel, a prestigious venue that promoters dubbed “the South’s Supreme Hotel,” the audience for a major public meeting included a large number of blacks.<sup>605</sup> A subsequent regional teaching conference drew some thirty Bahá’ís—black and white, pioneers and recent converts—from six southeastern states, and their deliberations included means by which to reach the white, black, and Jewish populations.

Altogether, the message to the Atlanta community was clear, and a few whites indeed “ceased attending Baha’i Assembly and Feast meetings.”<sup>606</sup> For the rest of the group, however, the National Assembly’s visit cemented the interracial character of the movement.

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<sup>603</sup> Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Atlanta, Georgia, Inc., “Early Bahá’í History of Atlanta, Georgia,” TS, NBA, 24-25, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 282.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> National Park Service, “Atlanta Biltmore Hotel and Biltmore Apartments,” Atlanta: A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary website, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/atlanta/text.htm#bil>.

<sup>606</sup> Spiritual Assembly of Atlanta, “Early Bahá’í History,” 24-25, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 282-3.

At the next meeting of the Local Assembly, Essie Robertson was enrolled in the community, and her home quickly became a center of activity. The following Ridván, Robertson was elected to the Local Assembly, and the body remained integrated for the rest of the decade. By the end of the 1940s, the community had built and occupied its first Bahá'í Center a block off Auburn Avenue in the heart of Atlanta's black business district—a modest, two-story structure, but an important statement of the community's commitment to teaching African Americans.<sup>607</sup>

Beyond Atlanta, the National Assembly's firm stance made clear to Bahá'ís across the South that the goal of its 1937 policy on teaching in the region was nothing less than fully integrated local communities. A letter from Shoghi Effendi (writing through his secretary), published subsequently in *Bahá'í News*, underlined the regional implications of the Atlanta incident, and reinforced his insistence on black participation in local Bahá'í governance:

The Guardian is very pleased to learn of the success that has attended the sessions at Atlanta and the removal of the disagreement within the community of that city and the work achieved by the regional conference and the public meeting open to both races. A special effort, he feels, should now be made to lay a foundation of unity between the white and colored Bahá'ís and weld the groups [across the South] into communities capable of forming Assemblies representative of both races.<sup>608</sup>

The message was not lost on William and Christine Bidwell, who came from Greenville for the events. Writing to Emogene Hoagg on the defeat of the segregationists at the “great meeting,” William Bidwell reported with apparent satisfaction that “some of the Georgia cracker[s] could not take being in the same room with the colored brethren.”<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> McMullen, *The Bahá'í*, 162-5. The building was still in use as a Bahá'í Center in 2010.

<sup>608</sup> Shoghi Effendi, “Excerpts from Letter from the Guardian,” *Bahá'í News*, no. 145 (June 1941), 3, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 284.

<sup>609</sup> William Bidwell to Emogene Hoagg, letter fragment, [November 1940], H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

## **Activism and Suppression in Depression-Era Greenville**

In December 1938, William Bidwell wrote to a friend that a white Baptist seeker in Greenville was “afraid to believe and afraid not to believe” in the Bahá’í Faith.<sup>610</sup> Indeed, the previous decade had left people in the Greenville area with plenty to fear. In contrast to the situation in Atlanta and a few of the other fledgling communities in the South, the initial barrier to the growth of the faith in Greenville seems to have been not lingering racial conservatism on the part of some of the pioneers, but a local history of brutal suppression of racial and religious heterodoxy.

As in other cotton-dependent areas in the South, the Great Depression in the Upstate of South Carolina began not with the 1929 stock market crash but nearly a full decade earlier, as cotton prices spiraled downward and the boll weevil devastated crops. During the decade of the 1920s, half of the state’s counties lost population; in the eight-month period after the disastrous cotton harvest of 1922, some 50,000 black farm families, mostly from the Piedmont, left the state for good.<sup>611</sup> The sharp decline of the rural economy and the hope of jobs in the city’s textile industry made Greenville a magnet for poor whites from the surrounding farms and small towns. After 1929, the nationwide economic downturn began to affect the cotton mills, and urban workers as well were hit hard. For the area’s black residents, barred from all but the most menial jobs in the textile mills, there was even less incentive to stay in Greenville; their percentage of the total population declined during the

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<sup>610</sup> W. T. Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> [early 1939], Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>611</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 485.



1920s and 1930s to less than 40 percent, as thousands sought opportunities in the cities of the North and West.<sup>612</sup>

For those who remained in Greenville, the gravity of the economic crisis and, after 1933, the work and relief programs of the New Deal, began to alter traditional patterns of dependency. New Deal agencies largely bypassed the small town bankers, county officials, and powerful landlords—traditionally the sole sources of employment and credit—encouraging mill operatives and landless farm laborers in Greenville and across the Carolina Piedmont to press for better wages and working conditions.<sup>613</sup> Other initiatives for change came from the area’s educated elite, encouraged by the New Deal’s spirit of social and economic experimentation. But by the time the Bidwells arrived, every major effort for a decade to promote social and economic justice and interracial cooperation had ended in abject failure, either sabotaged by officials the state’s largest and most influential Christian denomination and their political friends, or violently suppressed by the coordinated efforts of local police and the Ku Klux Klan.

Protests by Greenville workers, particularly when blacks and whites attempted to cooperate, were violently suppressed. In 1929 and again in 1931, the Communist-led National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) struck against the “stretch-out” (the use of fewer workers for increased production). In 1929, a female NTWU organizer was abducted and beaten by hooded men.<sup>614</sup> In 1931, the NTWU organized an Unemployed Council made up of jobless whites and blacks, which staged a series of biracial marches and made repeated

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<sup>612</sup> Joseph Turpin Drake, “The Negro in Greenville, South Carolina,” M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1940, 2.

<sup>613</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 510, 513.

<sup>614</sup> Huff, *Greenville*, 302-5.

appeals to the local Red Cross and the city council for relief. Klan members, often with police officers standing by, attended city council meetings to intimidate the workers' representatives, raided the organization's headquarters, broke up clandestine meetings in houses, and beat up black and white members. In 1936, organizers for the Workers Alliance, a union for employees of the federally-funded Works Progress Administration (WPA), came to Greenville and set up segregated locals. Leaders of the two groups, however, worked closely together, and white union members accompanied black members as they attempted to register to vote. In response, police raided houses looking for Communist literature and arrested black and white members.<sup>615</sup>

In 1938 and 1939, similar methods defeated an ambitious voting rights campaign launched by the Greenville branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While black residents' grievances were many, the incident that sparked the campaign was the city council's rejection of a plan by the local housing authority to replace dilapidated houses in black neighborhoods with new low-cost construction.<sup>616</sup> In response to the defeat, the NAACP launched a campaign to register six thousand African-American voters in time for municipal elections in September 1939. Approximately 250 African Americans succeeded in registering before violence and intimidation crushed the campaign. The Ku Klux Klan copied the names of registrants, beat up organizers and innocent bystanders during night rides in black neighborhoods in Greenville and smaller towns in the county, and denounced the campaign in the press as a Communist plot. Campaign leaders were fired from their jobs and some were jailed by police. Tensions ran

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<sup>615</sup> Edwin D. Hoffman, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina, 1930-1939," *The Journal of Negro History*, 44, no. 4 (October 1959): 362.

<sup>616</sup> Drake, "Negro in Greenville," 205.

high as armed black men patrolled their neighborhoods on the lookout for the Klan. One resident said that if the vigilantes had located any Klansmen, “there would have been a race riot in Greenville that would have made previous Southern race riots look like interracial good will meetings.” Only thirty-four of the registered black voters cast ballots in the municipal election, while white voters, stirred by Klan propaganda, turned out in larger-than-normal numbers.<sup>617</sup>

Even members of the area’s white elite risked retribution if their efforts on behalf of blacks passed from traditional paternalism to substantive advocacy and interracial cooperation. A case in point is the Greenville County Council for Community Development, a New Deal-inspired cooperative agency that ran afoul of the area’s Baptist clergy. The organization’s founder, Bennette Eugene Geer, was a prominent local textile executive and the president of Furman University, a Baptist men’s college in downtown Greenville. Inspired by the work of such activist educators as Frank Porter Graham and Howard Odum of the University of North Carolina and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation’s General Education Board, Geer envisioned the Council as a cooperative venture among Furman, the city, local schools and libraries, charitable organizations, and state and federal agencies to channel the spirit and resources of the New Deal into a wide range of community development projects. Beginning in 1936, it initiated projects in health, education, housing, recreation, and environmental stewardship among the area’s black and white residents. The Council’s advocacy for African Americans and its support of interracial cooperation, while far from radical, were substantive. Working with the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration and the Phillis Wheatley Center, a local black agency, the Council sponsored

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 178-9, 205-7; Huff, *Greenville*, 356-8.

a local Committee on Interracial Cooperation, offered continuing education courses for black schoolteachers, and conducted a comprehensive study of Greenville County's black schools.

The Council also carried out the research on which the local housing authority based its application for federal funds for slum clearance. While the Council sought to distance itself from the resulting voting rights campaign of the local NAACP, in the eyes of many prominent whites, the organization was going too far in support of black demands. In particular, the Council's work contributed to a growing perception among conservative Baptist leaders that Furman University was becoming a citadel of biblical modernism, social-gospel liberalism, and interracial mixing. As the controversy over slum clearance put the Council in the middle of the area's divisive racial politics, Furman professors clashed with trustees and local Baptist ministers when a visiting speaker encouraged students to deemphasize study of doctrine and focus on applying the Christian faith to social conditions. (It mattered little that the speaker was a Baptist minister himself and the son of a former president of the university.) The trustees fired one professor over the matter, and Geer was forced to resign as president.<sup>618</sup> He remained the head of the Council, but, deprived of a home at the university, the organization folded the next year.<sup>619</sup> The demise of the Council and the suppression of the area's labor movement and NAACP branch made it clear that Greenville, dubbed by its boosters as the progressive "Textile Capital of the South," was in reality a dangerous place for blacks or whites—together or separately, and regardless of their class background—to challenge the rule of the city's business and political elite and their

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<sup>618</sup> Huff, *Greenville*, 363-4.

<sup>619</sup> Alfred S. Reid, "The Greenville County Council for Community Development: Furman and Greenville in Partnership in the 1930s," in *Proceedings and Papers of the Greenville County Historical Association*, vol. 6, ed. Albert N. Sanders (Greenville: Greenville County Historical Association, 1981), 78-88.

powerful allies in the Baptist ministry.<sup>620</sup>

### **Reinforcements, but Few Recruits**

In such an oppressive local climate, it is perhaps not surprising that the Bahá'í Faith was slow to gain converts in Greenville. The activism of the Depression decade showed that southern racial and religious orthodoxies had powerful defenders in Greenville, and to become a Bahá'í necessarily involved transgressing both sets of mores simultaneously. White supremacist reaction to the area's incipient labor and civil rights movements seems to have created a climate of fear that reinforced the conservative tendencies of some of the pioneers, strained relationships within the struggling young community, and slowed early expansion efforts.

Two years after their arrival, the Bidwells remained the only Bahá'ís in the city, and the prospects of establishing a local community by the end of the Seven Year Plan looked bleak. While the Bidwells worked to build their business and nurture a few seekers, it was a challenge to remain connected to the wider Bahá'í community. William Bidwell maintained that he had informed the National Spiritual Assembly of their move to Greenville in 1938. Yet when Shoghi Effendi cabled to the American Bahá'ís in January 1939 calling for “nine holy souls” to settle in the nine remaining virgin states and provinces in North America, South Carolina was still included in the list.<sup>621</sup> The Bidwells wrote to the secretary of the National Teaching Committee asking to be put on the national mailing list of isolated believers, and they wrote directly to Shoghi Effendi to tell him they had moved to South

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<sup>620</sup> For a good discussion of activism and violence in late-1930s Greenville, see Lau, *Democracy Rising*, chapter 3.

<sup>621</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 16.

Carolina. Shoghi Effendi informed the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bidwells' move, but not in time for them to be listed as pioneers in the body's annual report in April 1939. Horace Holley, the secretary of the National Assembly, wrote to the couple that month: "The members of the National Spiritual Assembly have been very pleased to receive a letter from Shoghi Effendi reporting that you have settled in South Carolina as Baha'i pioneers. Both the Teaching Committee and the N. S. A. will be more than happy to extend all possible cooperation in your important work." But William Bidwell still felt slighted. "Holley knew," he noted, "that I was at Chick Springs last year."<sup>622</sup> If the national administration seemed remote and inefficient, the Augusta-area community was completely unhelpful. Bidwell complained to a friend: "The Augusta crowd asked that we keep our membership there but they have forgotten we are living and never mail us a news letter." Even their personal practice of the faith was adversely impacted by being outside a local community. "We do not know when the fast begins," Bidwell noted, "and I wrote today asking."<sup>623</sup>

By early 1940, the Bidwells felt isolated and dispirited, and their efforts to teach their religion in Greenville had yielded few tangible results. To remedy the situation, the National Teaching Committee and its newly established branch, the Regional Teaching Committee for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, directed a succession of new pioneers and traveling teachers to Greenville. Most of the new arrivals were single or widowed white women from the established communities in the North and West; later, following the onset of war, some women whose husbands were away in military service were also able to move as pioneers. At least one of the new arrivals, Amelie Bodmer, had taught the faith in South

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<sup>622</sup> W. T. Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> [early 1939], Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

<sup>623</sup> W. T. Bidwell to Alma Knobloch, 6 March 1939, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA.

Carolina before. By late 1940, nine Bahá'ís were residing in Greenville, and a Local Spiritual Assembly was formed.

During the same year, Shoghi Effendi reiterated that all Local Assemblies should conform to civil boundaries.<sup>624</sup> In other words, the jurisdiction of each Local Assembly—and thus the voting membership of each local Bahá'í community—had to correspond to the corporate limits of one city or town rather than encompass a number of adjoining suburbs or unincorporated rural areas. In some metropolitan areas, the new policy resulted in the dissolution of Local Assemblies, as two or more localities, hitherto functioning as one Bahá'í community, found themselves without the requisite nine adult believers. In the Augusta area, however, the immediate result was the opposite: there were enough Bahá'ís living in both Augusta and North Augusta for each to have its own Local Assembly. With Local Assemblies in both Greenville and North Augusta, then, it appeared that the Seven Year Plan goal for South Carolina had been doubly fulfilled. However, the gains in both areas were short-lived. In Greenville, several pioneers were unable to remain. Within a few months, the number of Bahá'ís there had dwindled to six and the Local Spiritual Assembly was dissolved.<sup>625</sup> Late in 1940, when Louise Thompson visited the Augusta area for a meeting of the Regional Teaching Committee, she reported: “The N. & S. Augusta Assemblies are not

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<sup>624</sup> Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í News*, no. 102 (August 1936): 2; *Bahá'í News*, no. 132 (January 1940): 4.

<sup>625</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, *Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1940-1941* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1941), 19.

very cooperative and need help.”<sup>626</sup> By early 1943, the number of believers in Augusta and North Augusta had each fallen below nine and their Local Assemblies were dissolved, too.<sup>627</sup>

In 1942, with the end of the Seven Year Plan less than two years away, a new wave of settlers arrived in Greenville in response to instructions from Shoghi Effendi. That year, he modified the expansion goal for North America from simply having “a nucleus of believers in every State and Province” to establishing at least one Local Spiritual Assembly in each territory.<sup>628</sup> The change required herculean efforts: as the experiences in Greenville and the Augustas showed, establishing and maintaining a Local Assembly was extraordinarily difficult without steady growth in membership. As Leroy Ioas of the National Teaching Committee recalled, “What in the past had been a matter of sporadic effort now compelled primary and complete concentration.”<sup>629</sup> The Regional Teaching Committees led the effort by selecting a goal city in each virgin area and sending additional pioneers and visiting teachers. For South Carolina, the committee selected Greenville. Among those who responded to the new call for pioneers was Grace Wilder, a single young white woman from Los Angeles, who left for Greenville right after a summer program at the Geyserville Bahá’í School in northern California.<sup>630</sup> Shortly after her arrival, Wilder met and befriended Virginia Ford, a white Greenville native who soon became the first Bahá’í convert in the city. Ford’s study of the Bahá’í scriptures and involvement in community activities appear to have

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<sup>626</sup> Louise Thompson to Emogene Hoagg, 28 November 1940, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>627</sup> “Assembly Roll,” North Augusta, SC, 1941-1942, Local Spiritual Assembly Records, NBA; National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1942-1943*, 22.

<sup>628</sup> Ioas, “Teaching in North America,” 207.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> Grace M. Wilder to John and Louise Bosch, 20 September [1942], John and Louise Bosch Papers, NBA.



been haphazard. For some time after joining the religion, she did not know that Bahá'ís believed Bahá'u'lláh to be the return of Christ. With her husband overseas in the military, Ford was alone to take care of their young daughter; she found it uncomfortable to attend Bahá'í meetings because some of the other members did not like children.<sup>631</sup>

In the fall of 1942, the Regional Teaching Committee held a “Teaching Conference” in Greenville, one of a series of similar efforts across the country to train more individuals as competent and confident teachers of the faith. Twenty Bahá'ís and sixteen seekers, including residents of the Carolinas and Georgia and two traveling teachers from outside the region, attended the weekend conference. According to the Regional Committee’s newsletter, an important feature of the conference was the “first inter-racial public meeting” on the Bahá'í Faith in South Carolina, an “outstanding precedent” for the state. Eva Lee Flack and Adrienne Ellis, single young African-American women from California who were pioneers in Greensboro, the goal city for North Carolina, provided a “musical contribution” to the program. It is unclear in what kind of venue the conference was held or whether there were any other African Americans in attendance.<sup>632</sup>

More pioneers, mostly white, came to Greenville in 1943: Adline Lohse and her young daughter came from Washington, D.C.; Luda Dabrowski from Larchmont, New York; Villa Vaughn from New York City; Virginia Camelon from Illinois; and Emogene Hoagg, recently returned from Cuba.<sup>633</sup> While all hoped to help reestablish the Local Assembly, not

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<sup>631</sup> Ford deduced that that Bahá'u'lláh was the return of Christ from her individual study after becoming a Bahá'í. Ali-Kuli Khan, a prominent Washington Bahá'í, confirmed her conclusion during his 1945 visit to Greenville. Virginia Ford, audio cassette of interview by Elmer Kenneally, 1989, Greenville Bahá'í Archives, Greenville, SC (hereafter cited as GBA).

<sup>632</sup> *Regional Teaching Bulletin*, no. 5 (1 December 1942), 1.

<sup>633</sup> Adline Lohse to Alma Knobloch, 17 June 1943, Hannen-Knobloch Family Papers, NBA; *Regional Teaching Bulletin*, no. 11 (1 June 1943): 1; National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada,

all were able to stay permanently. Late in June, the Regional Teaching Committee organized another Teaching Conference in Greenville. Fifteen Bahá'ís, including a visiting teacher, Charles Mason Remey from Washington, D.C., and four seekers attended. The topics of study during the conference were “Prophecies Fulfilled” the “Dawnbreakers,” and “Living the Bahá'í Life.”<sup>634</sup> Carolyn Glazener, a white Greenville woman who had been studying the religion with the Bidwells for some time, became a Bahá'í during the conference, only the second convert in four years.<sup>635</sup> By the fall, three more pioneers had been added to the Greenville group. Viola Bower came from New York City, and Roy and Bernice Williams, also long-time New Yorkers, came from Rocky Mount, North Carolina, where they had recently settled. With the arrival of the Williamses, Greenville received its first black pioneers. And they seemed particularly well suited to attracting local African Americans to the faith. Roy Williams was already somewhat familiar with the area; more than twenty years earlier, during the course of his extended visit to the state, he and Louis Gregory had spoken on the faith “in many churches in Greenville and Anderson Count[ies].”<sup>636</sup> Further, the Williamses’ social and economic background made it likely that they could stay in Greenville indefinitely. Roy Williams was a master woodworker, and he opened a shop for fine furniture restoration where he catered to a mostly white clientele. Bernice Williams, an experienced public school teacher, secured a job teaching English and French at Sterling

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*Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1943-1944* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1944), 38.

<sup>634</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1943-1944*, 38.

<sup>635</sup> Lohse to Knobloch, 17 June 1943; National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1943-1944*, 38; Emogene Hoagg to Leroy Ioas, 4 October 1943, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA. Lohse’s letter says that one of the Bidwells’ contacts is ready to become a Bahá'í, the Annual Report states that one person was “confirmed” as a believer at the summer conference, and Hoagg’s letter refers to Glazener as “the new Bahá'í here.”

<sup>636</sup> Hardin, “Roy Williams,” 3.

High School, the county's only high school for African Americans.<sup>637</sup> While both were to some extent dependent on whites for their livelihood and may therefore have needed to remain circumspect about their radical religious and racial beliefs, each enjoyed a position of respect in a black community that was painfully short on professionals, and each had ample opportunity to serve and befriend large numbers of people in their new locality.<sup>638</sup> In November 1943, with the membership of the Greenville Bahá'í community at least nine again, the Local Spiritual Assembly was reformed. With the Williamses as members, it reflected the community's newly interracial character.

### **Racial Politics in Wartime**

If the New Deal had strained traditional patterns of economic dependency and encouraged agricultural and industrial workers to press their concerns, mobilization for a new global war brought even more thoroughgoing change to South Carolina—trends which, continuing after the war, opened new opportunities for growth of the state's Bahá'í movement. In Greenville alone, a new Army air field opened, and two local companies, Daniel Construction and Poe Hardware and Supply, won lucrative federal contracts. Employment opportunities seemed to multiply overnight, with textile mills operating around the clock and wages for farm laborers rising.<sup>639</sup> Statewide, nearly 200,000 men and women served in the military during the war. For thousands more who stayed at home (including the more than one half of eligible black men and one third of eligible white men who were rejected because of illiteracy or ill health),

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]* no. 38 (October 1946), 3; Drake, "Negro in Greenville," 43.

<sup>639</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 513; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 124.

war industries brought steady work and good wages. In Charleston, for example, the Navy Yard went from 6,000 employees in 1941 to 28,000 in 1943, while other war industries in the area employed an additional 72,000 workers.<sup>640</sup> For South Carolinians, the war meant the end of the Great Depression, an acceleration of urbanization and industrialization, an unprecedented level of federal government involvement in daily life and livelihoods, and often a sense of broadened personal horizons and expectations.

For African Americans in particular, the war provided a new impetus to activism, and the organization that led and embodied their struggle was a revived and expanded NAACP. Its chief architect was Levi Byrd, a poorly-educated, self-employed plumber in Cheraw, the seat of Chesterfield County in the upper Pee Dee. Between 1933 and 1939, he organized a largely underground branch of the NAACP in Cheraw, a town little different from those where branches had folded in the face of opposition in the 1920s. During the summer of the Greenville voting rights effort, Byrd began writing to the other remaining branches in South Carolina to urge the creation of a statewide conference of the association.<sup>641</sup> In the fall, as Klan violence descended on blacks in Greenville, the branches there and in Charleston, Columbia, Florence, Georgetown, and Sumter sent representatives to an organizational meeting at Benedict College in Columbia.<sup>642</sup> The new state conference immediately endorsed both the Greenville campaign and the national organization's call for an end to segregation and disfranchisement. Its first two statewide initiatives were a legal campaign to secure equal pay for black teachers and creation of an alternative black political party to

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<sup>640</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 513. For a recent treatment of the wartime transformation of Charleston, see Fritz P. Hamer, *Charleston Reborn: A Southern City, Its Navy Yard, and World War II* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2005).

<sup>641</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 117.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

press for voting rights. While the twin campaigns represented only a partial struggle against segregation and disfranchisement—the salary equalization campaign did not contemplate the dismantling of the state’s dual school system and an all-black party was at best a stepping-stone to full and equitable political participation—they were notable for their energy, for their tentative successes, and for the foundation they laid for continued activism in the post-war period.

The campaign to equalize pay between black and white teachers began in 1943 with a class-action case representing black teachers in Charleston. Thurgood Marshall and Harold Boulware, head of the state conference’s Committee on Legal Redress, argued before Judge J. Waties Waring of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of South Carolina that a discrepancy in salary between black and white teachers violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Waring, scion of a prominent white Charleston family and an unlikely advocate of racial justice, upheld the plaintiffs’ claims, and the Charleston school district agreed to a consent decree to phase in equal salaries. The state government attempted to subvert the ruling, but in 1945 Waring ruled in a second case that Richland County, too, had to equalize teachers’ salaries.<sup>643</sup>

A simultaneous effort to secure voting rights focused on gaining access to the machinery of the state’s Democratic Party. In South Carolina as across the country, the impact of the New Deal and the perception that the Roosevelt administration was more responsive than its Republican predecessors to their needs caused blacks increasingly to identify with the national Democratic Party. In 22 of South Carolina’s 46 counties, blacks still constituted a majority of the population, and NAACP leaders believed they had the

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 129-30.

potential to become an important force in state politics. But white Democrats, equally conscious of blacks' potential strength, fought energetically to exclude them. "The white people of this state have successfully run this government for generations," Gov. Olin D. Johnston told a reporter in 1942, "and ... we intend to run it as we have in the past."<sup>644</sup>

In early April 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a case from Texas that party primary elections were an integral part of the electoral process and therefore could not exclude African Americans without violating the Fifteenth Amendment. While South Carolina's U.S. senators, Burnet Maybank and Ellison D. "Cotton Ed" Smith, led opposition in Congress, Gov. Johnston called the General Assembly into extraordinary session to protect the state's Democratic primary from the implications of the ruling. Over the course of six days, in an unprecedented feat of legislative efficiency, the legislature removed every reference to primary elections from the state code and passed 147 new laws designed to make them completely private affairs.<sup>645</sup> If legal measures were not enough, Johnston told the lawmakers, "we South Carolinians will use the necessary methods to retain this white supremacy in our primaries and to safeguard the homes and happiness of our people."<sup>646</sup>

On the opening day of the special session, the *Lighthouse and Informer* of Columbia, the unofficial mouthpiece of the state conference of the NAACP, announced the creation of the South Carolina Colored Democratic Party—a name quickly changed to the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP). The new party intended to contest the validity of the state's white party at the Democratic National Convention that summer and to run candidates in the

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<sup>644</sup> AP clipping (1943), Papers of the NAACP, II-B, 209, quoted in Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 158.

<sup>645</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 516.

<sup>646</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 134-5.

November elections. At its first statewide convention, held on May 24, 1944 in the Masonic Temple in Columbia, Rev. James Hinton, president of the state conference of the NAACP, compared the state's Jim Crow regime to Hitler's Germany and invoked black wartime service as a claim to full citizenship rights. "Black boys are dying on the battlefields," he said, "and these South Carolina demagogues meet in extra sessions to further disfranchise what we are fighting for."<sup>647</sup>

By the end of July, when PDP delegates appeared before the credentials subcommittee of the national Democratic Party to challenge the state's white regulars for seating at the convention, they claimed some 45,000 black members across South Carolina.<sup>648</sup> But supporters of the regular party were unmoved, smearing the PDP as the work of "Communists or Northern agitators."<sup>649</sup> The subcommittee ruled against the PDP on technicalities, but at home the party nominated Osceola McKaine, a left-leaning activist from Sumter, to run against Gov. Olin Johnston for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by "Cotton Ed" Smith. The first black South Carolinian to run for statewide office since Reconstruction, McKaine lauded the progressive forces unleashed by the New Deal and the war. But those forces still had little sway at South Carolina polling places, where voter fraud, including intimidation by police and withholding ballots from black voters, marred the November elections.<sup>650</sup>

While the state's political elite fought to defend Jim Crow, other white South Carolinians, moved by the perversity of the Nazi regime's racial theories and the upheavals

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>648</sup> Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 170.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 189-91.

of wartime, began to openly criticize the system. In July 1942, for example, Rev. Claude Evans, a young assistant minister at Columbia's Washington St. United Methodist Church, delivered a sermon called "This Conflict of Race," startling not only the church's congregation but an audience on local radio. In retaliation, the church's board of stewards voted overwhelmingly to bar him from preaching.<sup>651</sup> The state's prohibition on servicemen voting absentee, a measure designed to prevent black soldiers from regaining the franchise through the back door, was particularly galling to young whites. In 1944 a soldier named Albert D. Hutto railed against the policy in a letter to the editor of *The State*, laying the blame on racial paranoia: "It seems to me that the average South Carolinian is so afraid that the negro will get ahead that he is willing to sacrifice his own rights just to make sure that the negro won't have any."<sup>652</sup> Though hardly constituting a sea-change in white public opinion, such incidents indicate that at least a few more white South Carolinians were awakening to the injustice of the state's racial system.

### **Race in the Greenville Community**

While African-American activists in South Carolina pursued the somewhat paradoxical course of forming an all-black political party in order to achieve interracial democracy, a handful of Bahá'ís in Greenville continued their own efforts to build an interracial faith community. Hampered by a local climate of fear, the practical constraints of segregation, and the conservative "traditions, tastes, and habits" of some of their own members, they often found themselves frustrated.

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<sup>651</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 513.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.



One measure of the community's attempt to foster interracial fellowship was its effort to establish a basic pattern of activities for both Bahá'ís and seekers. Black and white believers alike participated in the Nineteen Day Feast, the annual election of the Local Spiritual Assembly, and the Local Assembly's regular meetings, all of which were generally held in the homes of the Bahá'ís on a rotating basis. The whites had little trouble visiting the Williamses' home, an apartment in the back of Roy's furniture shop in a black neighborhood, but when the Williamses came to the Bidwells' house, for instance, they were careful to enter through the office door in the back so as not to arouse the suspicion of the Bidwells' white neighbors.<sup>653</sup>

In their outreach to the public, the Greenville Bahá'ís experimented with both separate and mixed gatherings. Beginning in 1944, they announced regular firesides in the local newspapers using language that would arouse a minimum of suspicion among conservative whites. Separate meetings for white and black seekers were held at the Bidwell and Williams homes, respectively. A typical announcement in the "City News Briefs" section of the *Greenville News* read:

BAHA'IS TO MEET. "Springtime in the World" will be the subject of Mrs. Adline Lohse's talk at the Greenville Baha'i meeting this afternoon at 3:30 o'clock at 800 North Main Street. Mrs. Wm. Bidwell will be the chairman for the afternoon. A Baha'i meeting for colored people will be held at 4:30 at 17 Madison Street.<sup>654</sup>

They also looked for public venues where they could hold integrated gatherings. In 1945, the community rented space in a downtown office building for use as a Bahá'í Center, but the cost likely being too much for the small group to bear, use of the room was short-lived.<sup>655</sup> In

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<sup>653</sup> Elmer Kenneally, "Fifty Years of the Bahá'í Faith in Greenville, SC, 1939-1989," TS, GBA, 4.

<sup>654</sup> *Greenville News*, 26 March 1944, 12.

<sup>655</sup> *Baha'i Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 31 (November 1945): 2.

1947, Virginia Ford, pioneer Gertrude Gewertz, and traveling teacher Ali-Kuli Khan, a prominent Iranian-American Bahá'í and former diplomat, visited Mayor J. Kenneth Cass to discuss other options for holding public interracial meetings. Cass said that the only public place where blacks and whites could meet together was in the city council chambers, which he offered for use by the Bahá'ís. Ford recalled that after a first integrated meeting, with Khan as the speaker and Mayor Cass in attendance, they used the chambers “a number of times” without having to mention race at all in their advertizing.<sup>656</sup>

While they were able to hold private and, eventually, public integrated activities, it appears that internal disagreements over racial policy prevented the Greenville Bahá'ís from making a concerted and sustained effort to teach their faith to local African Americans. While the economic position and social connections of the Williamses must have presented many opportunities to share the Bahá'í message, it appears likely that the attitudes of some of the white Bahá'ís may have dampened the enthusiasm of black inquirers, or even made the Williamses wary of inviting African Americans to investigate the religion. At least one influential pioneer was uncomfortable with holding integrated meetings, even among the Bahá'ís. Her opposition surely contributed to the community's relative caution in reaching out to blacks; moreover, disunity over racial policy may have carried over into other areas and prevented the tiny community from attracting many new members at all.

Late in 1943, a month before the reestablishment of Greenville's Local Spiritual Assembly, Emogene Hoagg expressed her views on race and teaching in a lengthy letter to Leroy Ioas, the chairman of the National Teaching Committee.<sup>657</sup> Hoagg argued that the

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<sup>656</sup> Kenneally, “Fifty Years,” 5

<sup>657</sup> Emogene Hoagg to Leroy Ioas, 4 October 1943, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

Greenville Bahá'ís should follow the practice of the Bahá'ís in St. Augustine, Florida, who had essentially created separate communities for the black and white members. In St. Augustine, Hoagg wrote, the “white members go to the colored nineteen day Feasts [sic], but the colored never go to the other meetings.” She argued for extreme caution in pressing Bahá'í racial views among a highly prejudiced white population: “We simply cannot introduce the Cause here by breaking away from all their customs and inborn ideas. Shoghi Effendi knows this. The Cause suffers a setback in so doing, and the believers are classified as revolutionists.”<sup>658</sup>

Hoagg's letter indicates that several other pioneers, especially Grace Wilder and Luda Dabrowski, were more forceful in their defiance of Jim Crow, and in their contempt for southern white racism. According to Hoagg, indiscreet comments by Dabrowski and Wilder had aroused the scrutiny of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and raised the specter of Communism, already a common charge against any southern organization pursuing an interracial agenda:

Mrs. Glazener, the new Bahá'í here, has been told by the F. B. I. that they have been getting information regarding Grace Wilder from the time she left California.... One suspicion is that Grace is a communist. She constantly has criticized the people here saying: “People must be changed here,” etc. This attitude is not received without comment, nor is it good judgment to criticize in this way.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid. Locally and regionally, white supremacist activists and law enforcement agencies frequently equated any type of interracial organization with Communist attempts to overthrow southern civilization. While such rhetoric became more widespread in the context of the Cold War, it was employed in South Carolina as early as World War One. For a recent study of the post-World War Two southern red scare, see Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004). For the impact of red baiting on a secular interracial organization, see Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense*, especially chapter 3.

Hoagg accused another outsider, Ruth Moffett of Chicago, who had spoken at the teaching conference in the fall of 1942, of driving away prospective middle- and upper-class white converts and compounding the problem with federal law enforcement:

Here in Greenville where there were quite a number studying and interested, they were entirely upset by Mrs. Moffett[’s] enthusiasm and bad judgment .... This is a serious difficulty to be met now as these people are actively opposed. One has gone so far as to report to the F. B. I. that we Baha’is hold “secret meetings” here at 800 [N. Main St., the home of the Bidwells] every Tuesday evening. These “meetings” are a class that we are having and are quite freely spoken of.<sup>660</sup>

Nor were white Bahá’ís the only culprits. According to Hoagg, Eva Flack McAllister, recently married young African-American pioneer in Greensboro, was causing a stir in the small community there “by insisting there should be equality between colored and white in every way.” The main problem with this approach, Hoagg continued, was that it “had prevented many of the better class” of whites in Greensboro “from investigating the teachings and caused no end of criticism.” She asked that the National Teaching Committee not allow McAllister to come to Greenville as a traveling teacher, as “great confusion and trouble would follow” if McAllister and Dabrowski were allowed to join forces and insist upon “social equality.”<sup>661</sup>

Hoagg’s comments seem to echo those of some other white traveling teachers active in the South during the 1940s, and her invocation of the Guardianship to defend her own cautious approach indicated that at least some in the movement still had not come to terms with a national policy, suggested and approved by the head of the faith, that insisted on social equality and on teaching both black and white Southerners. As Dahl has noted, another active teacher, Mabel Ives, expressed views similar to Hoagg’s in a 1941 letter to Shoghi

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

Effendi.<sup>662</sup> Ives shared impressions of her 1939 visit to Memphis, Tennessee, to help establish a Local Spiritual Assembly there. She said that strong racial prejudice in Memphis had hampered both teaching activities and efforts to build an interracial local community. Her view was that the faith should not be taught to blacks in large numbers until a sizeable group of whites became Bahá'ís, so that they could either change southern society or, through their numbers, offer protection to black Bahá'ís. Ives received the following reply on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1942:

Regarding the whole manner of teaching the Faith in the South: The Guardian feels that, although the greatest consideration should be shown the feelings of white people in the South whom we are teaching, under no circumstances should we discriminate in their favor, consider them more valuable to the Cause than their Negro fellow-southerners, or single them out to be taught the Message first.... The Negro and white races should be offered, simultaneously, on a basis of equality, the Message of Bahá'u'lláh....

This does not mean that we should go against the laws of the state, pursue a radical course which will stir up trouble, and cause misunderstanding. On the contrary, the Guardian feels that, where no other course is open, the two races should be taught separately until they are fully conscious of the implications of being a Bahá'í, and then be confirmed and admitted to voting membership. Once, however, this has happened, they cannot shun each other's company, and feel the Cause to be like other Faiths in the South, with separate white and black compartments.<sup>663</sup>

Ives replied to Shoghi Effendi that she would follow his advice and forward copies of the letter to other teachers in the South, and in March 1943, pertinent excerpts of the letter were printed in *Bahá'í News*.<sup>664</sup> One way or another, then, Emogene Hoagg certainly knew of Shoghi Effendi's latest advice on the matter before she wrote to Leroy Ioas in October. It seems, however, to have had little effect on her attitude towards the situation in Greenville.

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<sup>662</sup> Dahl, "Three Teaching Methods," 1-15.

<sup>663</sup> *Bahá'í News*, no. 161 (March, 1943): 2.

<sup>664</sup> Dahl, "Three Teaching Methods," 8.

The success of the Seven Year Plan in the South depended on the commitment of white Bahá'ís in particular to maintain integrated meetings for members and to fully support a vigorous program of teaching both blacks and whites. Further, Shoghi Effendi insisted that social and political equality of the races within the Bahá'í community was a prerequisite for the movement's growth and development. But concern about how local whites and federal law enforcement perceived them prevented the Greenville Bahá'ís from fully carrying out the policies of the national and international leadership of their religion. As a respected senior member of the faith in the United States, Hoagg's strong views surely had an impact on the community. Perhaps she, Glazener, and the Bidwells, all of whom were native to or had lived previously in the area, were more conscious of its recent history of violence against interracial and civil rights groups than the other Bahá'ís and wise to counsel a cautious approach. But at a moment when black activists were demonstrating increasing courage in their challenge to Jim Crow and a growing minority of whites seemed more open to change, a more unified and focused Bahá'í community in Greenville could certainly have reached out more energetically to African Americans. Significantly, in areas where pioneers and traveling teachers were following all parts of the national policy for the southern campaign—in Nashville, Atlanta, Greensboro, and Columbia, for example, which all faced similar obstacles as Greenville—a steady trickle of new black and white believers were indeed joining the faith and confident and viable interracial communities were emerging.

### **Culmination**

By early 1944, the exterior ornamentation of the house of worship in Wilmette was complete, and Local Spiritual Assemblies had been established in fifteen Latin American cities. In

March, with the formation of three remaining Local Spiritual Assemblies in Canada, the final expansion goal of the Seven Year Plan was met: the faith's administrative system included every state of the United States, every province of Canada, and every republic of Latin America. Accomplishment of the goals had required broad participation by the rank and file of the community. During the course of the Plan, nearly three hundred individuals—more than ten percent of the North American community at the outset of the Plan—had moved to become pioneers at home and abroad, and more than three hundred had served as members of Regional Teaching Committees within North America.<sup>665</sup> During the last year of the Plan alone, more than one hundred individuals had served as itinerant teachers in North America.<sup>666</sup> Bahá'í membership in the United States and Canada had nearly doubled in seven years to approximately 4800 people, and these from a much broader diversity of social, economic, and racial backgrounds than before.<sup>667</sup> In April 1944, Shoghi Effendi announced that the North American Bahá'ís had achieved “total victory” in their prosecution of the Plan.<sup>668</sup>

Late in May, the National Spiritual Assembly hosted a special “All-America Convention,” held at the temple in Wilmette and the Stevens Hotel in Chicago, to mark both the centenary of the faith's birth and the successful completion of the Plan. Honorary delegates from Latin America and some 1600 believers from the United States and Canada—fully one-third of the movement's members in North America—attended the proceedings,

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<sup>665</sup> Marion Holley, “The Growth of the American Bahá'í Community to 1944,” in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 10, 1944-1946, 161.

<sup>666</sup> Ioas, “Teaching in North America,” 213.

<sup>667</sup> Stockman, “United States of America,” 6.

<sup>668</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 69.

remarkable achievements in themselves given wartime travel restrictions. They gathered for a week of devotional programs, artistic performances, consultations, and inspirational speeches. The convention concluded on May 25 with a banquet in a ballroom of the Stevens, the largest hotel in the city and among the largest in the world; the banquet was thoroughly integrated, with men and women of different racial and national backgrounds sitting together at the various tables. Speakers for the evening's program, broadcast over a local Chicago radio station, pointed to the week's proceedings as evidence of the power of the faith to unite the human race.<sup>669</sup> One speaker, an American pioneer to Panama named Alfred Osborne, noted the diversity of the participants and hailed "the highest type of democracy" at work in the convention proceedings. While certainly unaware of the formation of the Progressive Democratic Party in South Carolina the day before, his comments contrasted the Bahá'í administration with the shortcomings of mainstream politics:

Every delegate, regardless of his education, social status, color or nationality, had the right and the privilege of contributing to the deliberations of the Convention. And each contribution was given consideration regardless of its source. Here was an assembly composed of delegates motivated not by sectional interests, not seeking the favors of their constituents, not previously instructed as to their voting, their attitudes or their decisions; not concerned with their own locality; but delegates working for the welfare of the whole world community.<sup>670</sup>

The convention, he said, indicated "that human nature can change, that new social values can deliberately be created; that in fact, the new world is already in existence in the world-wide Bahá'í family...." And, looking to the end of the global war, he held up the Bahá'í community as a source of "great joy and hope to a world weighed down with grave social

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<sup>669</sup> "Bahá'í Anniversary Banquet, Hotel Stevens, Chicago, May 25, 1944," in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 10, 1944-1946, photographs between 172-3.

<sup>670</sup> "Bahá'í Centenary Banquet Radio Program," in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 10, 1944-1946, 175-6.



problems and serious post-war adjustments.”<sup>671</sup> Louis Gregory, a member of the convention planning committee, reveled in the size and diversity of the gathering, evidence of the community’s transformation in the more than three decades since his first encounter with it. In his convention report, he paid tribute to the faith’s departed heroes in Iran and America, “the Dawn-Breakers of the East and the Trail-Blazers of the West, whose deeds and traces laid an imperishable foundation for this triumph.”<sup>672</sup>

In view of the long-term development of the Bahá’í Faith, the presence at the centenary convention of black and white Bahá’ís from the Deep South was almost as significant as that of the representatives from Latin America. For seven years, as blacks in South Carolina and other southern states agitated for political inclusion and most whites struggled to keep them disfranchised, small groups of Bahá’ís had been erecting the structure of their own brand of interracial democracy. The national Bahá’í movement had struggled to establish itself in a region whose ruling caste strenuously opposed anything resembling its animating teaching of the oneness of humanity. While some local communities lagged behind others in their interracial character, the aggregate result of the effort was a closely connected regional network of black and white believers, with fledgling local institutions that included and represented both races in towns from the Carolinas to Texas. To the southern Bahá’ís, the title of the “All-America Convention” might have referred as much to their own participation as to that of their Latin fellow-believers.

For Louella Moore, who had recently moved from Columbia to Charleston, where her husband was serving in the Army Air Force, the convention was an opportunity to expand

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>672</sup> Louis G. Gregory, “The Historic Thirty-Sixth Convention,” *Bahá’í News*, no. 170 (September 1944): 1, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 300.

her horizons beyond the tiny community of Bahá'ís in the Carolinas and Georgia. She renewed old acquaintances and made new ones, sharing lodging with her Columbia friends Maude Mickle and Alta Wheeler, and meeting other believers from across the country and across the Western Hemisphere. For the first time she saw in person the gleaming exterior of the house of worship, toward the construction of which she had contributed. "Sure enjoyed seeing the Temple," she wrote to her husband in Charleston on a special centenary post card featuring a picture of the completed structure.<sup>673</sup> Among the items she brought home were a booklet prepared by Shoghi Effendi, "A World Survey of the Bahá'í Faith, 1844-1944," and a large photograph of all the convention participants. The booklet outlined the religion's geographic spread and diversity of membership, including lists of countries and territories opened to the faith, cities and towns with Local Spiritual Assemblies, and languages in which Bahá'í literature had been published. The photograph, picturing some 1600 believers of European, African, Latin American, Asian, and Middle Eastern heritage standing proudly on the steps of their national temple, gave visible expression to the unity and diversity that the movement claimed as its essential strength.<sup>674</sup>

For Roy and Bernice Williams, even an unexpected courtesy on the long train trip to Chicago seemed to demonstrate the spirit of change at work in the Bahá'í community and in the world at large. When they proceeded from their sleeping car to the dining car, waiters escorted them to a separate, curtained section for blacks. Observing the scene, a young white couple seated nearby asked to join them. The two couples effectively turned the segregated section into an integrated private dining room: they drew the curtains closed and "had a

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<sup>673</sup> Louella Moore to Edward Moore, postcard, 24 May 1944, in possession of the author.

<sup>674</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *A World Survey of the Bahá'í Faith, 1844-1944* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1944); 1944 convention photograph, in possession of the author.

delightful time” sharing a meal together.<sup>675</sup> In a certain sense, the incident mirrored the experience of the Bahá’ís in the southern campaign of the Seven Year Plan. While their task was far from finished, they had attempted to build a new kind of community within, but not a part of, the Jim Crow order. In so doing, they had managed to turn normally segregated spaces across the region—from Greenville’s city hall to a Chicago-bound dining car—into arenas for interracial spiritual fellowship.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> Hardin, “Roy Williams,” 3.

<sup>676</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, blacks organized to protest the segregation of passenger trains and streetcars. Kelley has argued that, later joined by buses, they remained important public “theaters” of spontaneous resistance by black working-class people during the rest of the Jim Crow era. See Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 75-112.

## Chapter 5

### Post-war Opportunities & Cold War Challenges, 1944-1953

As the world began to recover from six years of horrific warfare, the Bahá'í movement in the South sought to grow in a region facing unprecedented social, economic, and political change. In South Carolina and other states, white veterans returned from the war ready to take limited steps to improve governance and education, while black veterans contemplated far more thoroughgoing reforms. During the post-war decade, South Carolina's civil rights movement grew in size and confidence, while the seeds of a new grassroots movement—adamantly pro-segregation and anti-Communist—were planted among the state's whites. For the state's Bahá'ís, the period was essentially one of consolidation. In the context of a second Seven Year Plan and building on previous expansion efforts in Greenville and Columbia, they attempted to establish and maintain Local Spiritual Assemblies, use the mass media to address contemporary concerns and attract public attention, and increase the size and diversity of the community. While their interracial activities made them continued targets of occasional intimidation and violence, by the end of the period they had also achieved, with a Greenville city council decision, the first official acknowledgement of their distinctively interracial community identity and practices.

For South Carolina's Bahá'ís, the dramatic changes at home and abroad and the growth of their own movement were related. In 1946, Shoghi Effendi predicted that the second century of the Bahá'í Faith would witness an acceleration of two distinct but

interrelated processes: “a tremendous deployment and a notable consolidation of the forces working towards the world-wide development” of the Bahá’í Administrative Order; and the “first stirrings” of the new global political order, the “Lesser Peace” called for in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. In the former process, the American Bahá’í community would in many ways set the pattern, and in the latter, the government of the United States would play a preponderating role.<sup>677</sup> Significantly, issues of race, power, and justice came to the fore as each process unfolded. For the American Bahá’ís, broadening and strengthening the interracial character of their community continued to prove critical to their domestic and international plans for growth. For the government the United States, the persistent denial of equality to African Americans, particularly in states like South Carolina, became a cause of increasing internal instability and a serious liability in its claim to global moral leadership.

### **South Carolina and Civil Rights in Post-War America**

In South Carolina, the demographic and economic shifts alone were enough to distinguish the post-war decade. Long-term changes in agriculture that had begun during the New Deal continued during and after the war. The size of farm holdings grew, mechanization and rural electrification spread, and the state’s traditional cotton monoculture gave way to a new diversity of crops, including peanuts, soybeans, livestock, fruits and vegetables, and timber.<sup>678</sup> In the Pee Dee, tobacco culture boomed with the wartime demand for cigarettes, which hardly diminished in peacetime; by 1955 tobacco had supplanted cotton as the state’s

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<sup>677</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 97.

<sup>678</sup> Charles F. Kovacik and John J. Winberry, *South Carolina: A Geography* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), 162-75, 187-8.

most valuable crop.<sup>679</sup> While farm incomes rose across the state, the mechanization and centralization of agriculture meant fewer opportunities for tenants and sharecroppers. The flight from the countryside to urban areas—or, in the case of black farm families in particular, out of the state and region altogether—accelerated after the war. During the decade of the 1950s, some 150,000 South Carolina farm families moved to cities; across the state, rural communities declined as schools, churches, and post offices closed.<sup>680</sup> Between 1950 and 1970, nearly half a million South Carolinians moved out of the state entirely, eclipsing the significant population loss during the twenty years surrounding the Great Depression.<sup>681</sup>

South Carolina's wartime industrial boom continued virtually unabated with the emergence of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and federal spending again led the way. The presumed threat of Soviet missile attack encouraged the scattering of military bases around the country, and South Carolina, like other southern states, benefitted disproportionately. The sprawling facilities of Fort Jackson in Columbia and the Navy Yard in Charleston, as well as multiple smaller installations in Greenville, Sumter, and Beaufort counties, contributed significantly to local economies through government spending, in-migration from other states and regions, and the growth of ancillary services. Beginning in 1950, the superpowers' nuclear arms race came home to some of South Carolina's poorest counties. Constructed by the DuPont Corporation and operated by the federal Atomic Energy Commission, the Savannah River Site produced plutonium and uranium for use in the country's growing nuclear arsenal. Large tracts of farmland in Aiken,

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<sup>679</sup> Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina*, 163.

<sup>680</sup> Edgar, "South Carolina," 530.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

Allendale, and Barnwell counties and the entire town of Ellenton, infamous for its race riot during the 1876 election season, were condemned and destroyed to make way for the enormous quasi-military facility, but it brought millions of dollars and thousands of new residents to the Aiken and North Augusta area.<sup>682</sup> Private corporations, seeking low wages and non-union workers for their own operations, followed the defense contractors into South Carolina. During the 1950s and 1960s, the state's textile industry expanded with massive investment from outside companies and the establishment of new plants producing synthetic fibers. Across the broad coastal plain, the lumber, plywood and paper industries boomed, and tourism, particularly to the state's beaches and to Charleston's historic core, became increasingly important.<sup>683</sup>

In South Carolina and across the region, the large number of men and women who had served in the U.S. armed forces returned home changed, and they sought to change their state in turn. Training and fighting around the globe brought nearly 200,000 young South Carolinians, black and white, into contact with new people and new ideas. Veterans came home with money in their pockets, newfound skills under their belts, more confidence in their own abilities, and, having worked as part of the military, more exposure to centralized planning and authority. They came home wanting honest elections, responsible local government, and better economic opportunities. Thousands took advantage of the GI Bill to attend college or vocational schools—enrollment at the University of South Carolina, for

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<sup>682</sup> For an account of the impact of the Savannah River Site's construction on the area, see Louise Cassels, *Unexpected Exodus: How the Cold War Displaced One Southern Town* (1971; with new introduction by Kari Frederickson, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>683</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 531-5.

example, nearly doubled, with more veterans on campus in 1948 than there had been students in 1945—or to secure loans to buy houses, businesses, and farms.<sup>684</sup>

In 1946, a group of reform-minded young veterans took over key positions in state government. J. Strom Thurmond of Edgefield County, a former state senator and judge and a decorated war hero, won the governorship calling for “a progressive outlook, a progressive program, a progressive leadership.” “We must face the future,” he proclaimed, “with confidence and with enthusiasm.” Other young veterans won election to the General Assembly from counties across the state and attacked the so-called “Barnwell ring” of rural county politicians who controlled the legislature.<sup>685</sup> One of them, C. Bruce Littlejohn of Spartanburg County, became Speaker of the House. Under Thurmond and his legislative allies, the General Assembly passed laws to modernize the state’s ports, prisons, and schools, and voters approved constitutional amendments abolishing the poll tax and allowing divorce.<sup>686</sup>

While a limited spirit of reform stirred white South Carolinians in the aftermath of war, black veterans returned ready for more comprehensive changes. Though forced into second-class status within the military, they, too, had fought a war couched in the rhetoric of liberty and justice and opposition to Nazi racial theories, and their experiences had raised expectations of progress at home. As before and during the war, the focus of black activism remained access to the ballot and expanded economic and educational opportunities. However, in the post-war years the institutional basis for their efforts broadened and

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<sup>684</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 516-7.

<sup>685</sup> W. D. Workman, Jr., “The Ring That Isn’t,” in *Perspectives in South Carolina History: The First 300 Years*, ed. Ernest M. Lander, Jr. and Robert K. Ackerman (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 392-407.

<sup>686</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 517-8.



expanded considerably, provoking energetic reactions by the guardians of Jim Crow on the one hand, and attracting a few white allies—sometimes in unexpected quarters—on the other.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, a series of violent incidents highlighted the persistently precarious position of blacks in South Carolina as well as tentative changes in attitude among some whites. Two cases received national attention. In February 1946, Isaac Woodard, an African-American veteran from Winnsboro, was permanently disabled while in police custody. Still in uniform after receiving an honorable discharge, he was on his way home to Winnsboro by bus when the white driver ejected him for requesting to use the restroom and turned him over to police in Batesburg, a town in Lexington County near Columbia. In jail overnight, police beat and tortured Woodard, leaving him with partial amnesia and irreversible blindness. Reaction around the country to Woodard's case was swift. At the request of NAACP executive director Walter White, President Truman ordered the Justice Department to investigate.<sup>687</sup> After a trial in U.S. District Court that was marred by improprieties by both the U.S. Attorney and the defense, a jury of white South Carolinians deliberated less than thirty minutes only to find the accused police officers not guilty.<sup>688</sup>

Less than four months after the acquittal of Woodard's assailants, state and local officials reacted quite differently to a new case. In February 1947, Willie Earle, a young black man charged with the murder of a white taxi driver in Greenville, was shot, beaten, and stabbed to death by a white mob while being held in jail.<sup>689</sup> In an important departure, new

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<sup>687</sup> *The Crisis* 53, no. 9 (September 1946): 276.

<sup>688</sup> Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day*, 363.

<sup>689</sup> An excellent assessment of the legal dimensions of the Willie Earle lynching and accounting of black and white public reaction is William Gravelly, "The Civil Right Not to Be Lynched: State Law, Government, and Citizen Response to the Killing of Willie Earle (1947)," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century*, ed. Winfred B. Moore, Jr. and Orville Vernon Burton (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 93-118.

governor J. Strom Thurmond ordered a vigorous prosecution of those responsible for Earle's death. In May, after a highly publicized trial that *Time* magazine called the "biggest lynching trial the South had ever known," a Greenville jury acquitted the defendants.<sup>690</sup> Many prominent whites were incensed. The presiding judge, J. Robert Martin, was so disappointed that he left the courtroom without thanking the jury; prominent whites in Greenville and elsewhere reacted with disgust.<sup>691</sup> While the white elite were certainly motivated in no small part by a concern for the effects of racial violence on the area's reputation as a progressive manufacturing center, the fact that local, state, and federal officials had worked so strenuously for justice in the case, that the mob's actions had been openly aired in court and the national media, and that so many local whites were dismayed at the trial's outcome, indicates the degree to which more than a decade of depression and war had eroded South Carolina's racial status quo. The Earle lynching was the last one recorded in the state.<sup>692</sup>

A sense of the possibilities of the post-war era came from Charleston, where organizations of the Popular Front continued to press for coalitions between black and white workers. During the winter of 1945 and 1946, workers at American Tobacco Company's cigar plant in Charleston who were members of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural & Allied Workers Union (FTA), a group with strong Communist ties affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, went out on strike for better pay and working conditions. Most were black women, but they were joined by a large group of their white women coworkers. Charleston police constantly harassed the strikers, and the *News and Courier* published the

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<sup>690</sup> "South Carolina: Trial by Jury," *Time*, 26 May 1947.

<sup>691</sup> Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 373.

<sup>692</sup> Stephen O'Neill, "Memory, History, and the Desegregation of Greenville, South Carolina," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Moore and Burton, 288.

names of union leaders and meeting places. On the picket lines the women sang “We Shall Overcome,” a protest song that they had adapted from one of the area’s traditional African-American spirituals. The same winter, the union sponsored a “New South Lecture Series” that attracted an impressive cross-section of Charleston’s population to consider a sweeping regional reform agenda. Held at black churches, the series featured several of the leading lights of the southern New Deal and attracted hundreds, including black and white industrial workers, small businesspeople, teachers, and ministers. For Karl Korstad, a white Minnesotan working for the Army at a local hospital, who organized the series with his wife, a native Charlestonian, the interracial cooperation at work in both the strike and the lectures was evidence of the new spirit unleashed by the war:

There is a strong progressive element in the South, an element which is attempting to better labor conditions, to improve the educational and economic and social and political conditions of the poor whites and the Negro. The people of the South, like any other people, once they have been given the facts and the opportunity to understand their economic and political plight, will make the right decision.<sup>693</sup>

While the Charleston labor movement experimented with limited interracial outreach, the state NAACP and its de facto political arm, the PDP, were continuing their campaign to secure black participation in South Carolina’s Democratic Party primaries. In the summer of 1946, George Elmore, a light-skinned black taxi driver in Columbia and secretary of the Richland County PDP, managed to register to vote by masking his racial identity from the local registrar. When he and other blacks attempted to vote in the August primary, however, Democratic Party officials turned them away.<sup>694</sup> In response, the state conference filed a class action suit in U.S. District Court to open up the party primary. On June 12, 1947, Judge

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<sup>693</sup> Karl Korstad, “Introduction to ‘New South,’” (n.d.), in possession of the author, quoted in Robert R. Korstad, “Could History Repeat Itself?: The Prospects for a Second Reconstruction in Post-World War II South Carolina,” in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Moore and Burton, 254.

<sup>694</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 175-6.

J. Waties Waring, who had already sided with the NAACP in its teacher pay equalization campaign, found that the Democratic Party, acting as effective agent of the state, had improperly excluded blacks from voting. Rejecting the legislature's insistence that party primaries were now private affairs, he wrote that "private clubs and business organizations do not vote and elect a President of the United States, and the Senators and members of the House of Representatives of our national congress." He pointedly added: "It is time for S.C. to rejoin the Union. It is time to fall in step with the other states and to adopt the American way of conducting elections."<sup>695</sup> The following summer, after the party attempted to circumvent the ruling, Waring issued an injunction forcing it to open its registration books to all, and in August, some 35,000 black South Carolinians voted in the Democratic primary.<sup>696</sup>

At the same time that the state conference of the NAACP was pursuing its fight to bring down the white primary, it aggressively pursued expansion of the organization into every corner of the state. As the first executive secretary of the state conference, Eugene A. R. Montgomery, a young veteran from Orangeburg, traveled thousands of miles organizing new branches and recruiting new members.<sup>697</sup> The growth was impressive. In 1946, there were 49 branches in South Carolina, and by 1951 there were at least 84. Membership increased as well, reaching a peak of more than 14,000 in 1948. Activists recalled that the work of the association reached thousands more than official records suggested:

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 177-8.

<sup>696</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 519-20.

<sup>697</sup> Montgomery's youngest son from his second marriage, Bennett Montgomery, became a member of the Bahá'í Faith in the 1990s while living in Boston. The younger Montgomery and his wife, also a Bahá'í, were friends of the author in Columbia, South Carolina.

sharecroppers and tenants, vulnerable to eviction by their landlords, were involved in the branches without placing their names on membership rolls or petitions.<sup>698</sup>

For the state's white Democrats, the growing political strength of African Americans was cause for serious concern. While the successes of the NAACP at home were disturbing enough, national events seemed to confirm a growing sense that the Democratic Party was slipping from their control. Already during the 1930s and 1940s, black voters in northern cities had become an important constituency in the New Deal coalition, and in 1944, labor and civil rights leaders had succeeded in blocking the nomination of South Carolinian James F. Byrnes, a leader of the conservative southern wing of the party, as Franklin Roosevelt's vice-presidential running mate. In the months before the 1948 elections, President Harry Truman, seeking a full term of his own, proposed a civil rights agenda that included creating a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, ending poll taxes, and making lynching a federal crime. In advance of that year's Democratic National Convention, Strom Thurmond led the defeat of the PDP's second attempt to unseat South Carolina's white regulars. But during the convention, delegates adopted a strong civil rights plank. When Minneapolis mayor Hubert Humphrey urged the party to "get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights," Thurmond led other southern delegates in a walkout.

Convening the next week in Birmingham, the defectors founded the States' Rights Democratic Party. Known as the "Dixiecrats," they nominated Thurmond for president and Mississippi governor Fielding Wright for vice-president. On the campaign trail, Thurmond generally avoided overtly racist remarks, but he made clear that he thought the states, not the federal government, should decide questions of civil rights. "There's not enough troops in

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<sup>698</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 183-6.

the Army,” Thurmond told the Birmingham meeting, “to force the southern people to break down segregation and admit the Negro race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our schools and into our houses.”<sup>699</sup> Though they failed to take the presidency from Truman, the Dixiecrats made an impressive showing for an upstart third party. In Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, they took control of the state party machinery, and in the November elections, the Dixiecrat ticket carried those states plus an additional electoral vote from Tennessee.<sup>700</sup> While the Popular Front activists in Charleston might have been correct in identifying a “progressive element” among white South Carolinians, the strength of the Dixiecrat revolt indicated that in the face of an increasingly insistent black population, many whites would go to great lengths—even sacrificing traditional party loyalties—to maintain white supremacy.

### **A “Respite” and a New Plan**

For South Carolina’s tiny Bahá’í movement, the postwar upsurge in black activism and the range of white responses it evoked—from sympathy to visceral opposition—were all part of the unfolding of a new global order. Early in the Second World War, Shoghi Effendi had put the conflict and its long-term consequences in perspective for the American Bahá’ís. The war, he wrote, was nothing less than a “direct continuation” of the first global conflict earlier in the century, the latest stage of the “most great convulsion envisaged by the Prophets from Isaiah to Bahá’u’lláh, cataclysmic in violence, planetary in range,” and resulting essentially

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<sup>699</sup> Quoted in Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson, *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), 117. For an audio clip of the speech, see <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=865900>.

<sup>700</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 521.

from the rejection by the monarchs of Europe and the Near East of Bahá'u'lláh's summons to collective security.<sup>701</sup> The Bahá'ís should view the conflict as an “essential pre-requisite to world unification.”<sup>702</sup> The fires of war, Shoghi Effendi said, were welding “the limbs of humanity into one single organism.”<sup>703</sup> Though devastating in its immediate impact, the conflagration would inevitably “release world-shaking, world-shaping forces” that would “throw down the barriers” that hindered the emergence of the future global civilization envisioned in the sacred writings of the faith.<sup>704</sup> In particular, he said, the entry of the United States into the war would have a far-reaching impact, providing the means for its “effective and decisive participation” in the “future reconstruction of human society.”<sup>705</sup>

A survey of world events in the immediate aftermath of the war indicated that the political ground had indeed shifted dramatically. Led by the United States, whose Congress had rejected ratification of the League of Nations only a generation before, world political leaders of widely divergent philosophies and temperaments created a new, stronger, more broadly based international organization, the United Nations, and endowed it with peacekeeping functions that had been denied the League. A full realization of the Nazi regime's genocidal campaigns prompted unprecedented developments in conceptions of human rights and international law: the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and at the Nuremberg Trials, for the first time leaders of a sovereign state were put on public trial before an international court and convicted of crimes against

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<sup>701</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 46, 53.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*

humanity. A renewed sense of the economic interdependence of the world's countries led to the establishment of a series of international economic institutions, which began to give serious attention to issues of justice in the global distribution of wealth and resources. At the same time, empires that had survived the previous world war began to totter in the face of newly invigorated independence movements in Africa and Asia. While each of these developments was fraught with setbacks and shortcomings, particularly as the severe rift between the United States and the Soviet Union handicapped the United Nations system, significant barriers to global order that had withstood both the Great War and the Great Depression seemed to be rapidly falling away. Viewed in this perspective, Bahá'ís in the southern United States could be certain that, despite the intransigence of the system's defenders, the demise of Jim Crow was only a matter of time.

For the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, the end of the war meant a renewal of their domestic and international teaching campaign. As the fighting drew to a close in the spring and summer of 1945, American Bahá'ís provided material relief and organizational assistance to the battered Bahá'í communities of Germany and Burma, both of which had suffered persecution by wartime regimes.<sup>706</sup> Beyond these special projects, Shoghi Effendi instructed them in the tasks that lay immediately ahead in preparation for the launching of the second stage of their worldwide mission. During 1944-1945, the "first year of the second Bahá'í century," he told them to increase the number of pioneers in North America and Latin America; foster the development of new and existing Local Assemblies and groups; produce new literature in Spanish and Portuguese for the Latin American campaign; and, using the media and special events, proclaim the faith to "the masses of the population" of "all races and classes" as well as to "leaders of public thought." Consolidating the foundations of the

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<sup>706</sup> "Current Bahá'í Activities," in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 10 (1944-1946), 18-30, 67-8.



newly-expanded community and broadening its reach to the general public, he indicated, constituted an “indispensable prelude” to the launching of an even more ambitious teaching plan in Europe “soon after the termination of the world conflict.”<sup>707</sup>

The National Spiritual Assembly and its agencies pursued all the lines of action that Shoghi Effendi recommended, gaining important experience in public relations in particular. When the founding conference of the United Nations was set for San Francisco, the National Spiritual Assembly took advantage of the opportunity to present the Bahá’í teachings. In advance of the conference the body addressed a letter of encouragement to President Truman. After quoting words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from his 1912 visit to the United States about the country’s future role in establishing world peace, they wrote: “May the dire needs of humanity be met by the creation of a new world order through the efforts of the forthcoming conference in San Francisco under your leadership.”<sup>708</sup> In April 1945, in conjunction with the conference itself, the San Francisco community and a special committee of the National Spiritual Assembly collaborated on a wide range of programs, including a symposium and banquet for members of the international diplomatic corps and a thirteen-week series of local radio broadcasts on the theme “Foundations of Universal Peace.” Building on this experience, during the remainder of the year local communities in twenty-five states and six provinces, among them Atlanta, participated in a campaign of radio broadcasts that reached an estimated audience of nine million people with information about the faith.<sup>709</sup>

Shoghi Effendi was generally quick to praise the accomplishments of the North American Bahá’ís during the Seven Year Plan, but his assessment of the movement’s

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<sup>707</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 73.

<sup>708</sup> “Current Bahá’í Activities,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 10 (1944-1946), 92.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-2.

foundations on the home front and in Latin America—and of the demands that unfolding world events would place on its members—was realistic. In an August 1944 letter, he indicated that while the end of the war would open before the believers in the United States and Canada “fields of service of tremendous fertility and undreamed-of magnitude,” they would find themselves unable to take advantage of such opportunities unless the “considerable and exacting work” of consolidating the communities in the Western Hemisphere was far enough advanced.<sup>710</sup>

As fledgling groups of believers worked to establish new Local Assemblies in several more Latin American cities, an even more difficult task presented itself, that of strengthening the many new local communities within North America. Between the launching of the Seven Year Plan and the end of the war, the geographic spread of the faith had grown from 94 Local Assemblies and groups in 30 states and provinces to 472 such localities in 60 states and provinces plus the territories of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico—a fivefold increase in eight years.<sup>711</sup> However, most of the new local communities were quite small, and many were largely dependent on the presence of home-front pioneers. The existence of many new Local Assemblies was tenuous, as deaths, military transfers, and moves for economic or family reasons could quickly reduce a community’s membership below nine adults. Even where it was possible to maintain the Local Assembly, such smallness of numbers meant that disharmony or personality conflict among only two or three believers could severely hamper the functioning and growth of the entire group. To attempt to address such issues, from 1942 to 1946 the National Spiritual Assembly appointed a Committee on Assembly Development made up entirely of members of the national body. The initial members were Dorothy Baker,

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<sup>710</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 74.

<sup>711</sup> “Current Bahá’í Activities,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 10 (1944-1946), 76.

Amelia Collins, and Louis Gregory, who served as the committee's secretary for two years. In addition to frequent correspondence with Local Assemblies, the members of the committee made personal visits to counsel communities in need of assistance.<sup>712</sup>

One such struggling Local Assembly was that of Greenville, South Carolina. First formed late in 1940 and soon dissolved as pioneers had been forced to leave, the body had been reestablished in November 1943. Its new members—Christine Bidwell, William Bidwell, Viola Bower, Luda Dabrowski, Emogene Hoagg, Adline Lohse, Grace Wilder, Bernice Williams, and Roy Williams—together reflected both strengths and weaknesses in the young community. The only two resident believers not elected to the body were the two Greenville natives, Virginia Ford and Carolyn Glazener. Ford may not have known enough about the faith's administration to want to participate in the election, and Glazener, upset by her encounter with the FBI, may have purposely kept her distance. Except for the Bidwells, both native Southerners, all the members of the Local Assembly were thus transplants from the North and West. In terms of race and gender, the body was as diverse as it could be given the small size of the group. The only two men in the community, one white and one black, were both members. Of the remaining seven, six were white women and one was a black woman.<sup>713</sup> The body's officers, elected by plurality vote of its members, were William Bidwell, chairman; Luda Dabrowski, vice-chairman; Adline Lohse, secretary; and Christine Bidwell, treasurer. Thus, with a majority of seven from outside the region, the two native Southerners on the Local Assembly had each been elected officers. With a majority of seven women, one of the men had been elected chairman. The community's only two African

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<sup>712</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 297.

<sup>713</sup> "Assembly Roll," Greenville, SC, 1943-1944, Local Spiritual Assembly Records, NBA.

Americans served on the body, but neither had been elected as an officer. And the only two local converts apparently remained outside the decision-making process entirely.

Beyond its demographic shortcomings, the factors that limited the effectiveness of the Local Assembly had to do with differences of personality and approach. As Emogene Hoagg revealed in her letter to Leroy Ioas just before the arrival of the Williamses, the Greenville Bahá'ís were severely divided in their understanding of how to teach the faith in a racially segregated city. Hoagg and, she intimated, “four others of the group” preferred extreme caution in teaching African Americans, and she accused Dabrowski and Wilder of “bad judgment” by practicing social equality.<sup>714</sup> Such disagreements certainly continued after the Williamses arrived and the Local Assembly was reformed. Further complicating the situation was a conflict between William Bidwell and Roy Williams that seems to have had nothing to do with race. As one Bahá'í who worked closely with both men in later years recalled, the two loved each other like brothers, and they fought like brothers. Williams accused Bidwell, the alternative healer, of mixing bizarre scientific theories with the pure teachings of the faith. Bidwell accused Williams, who had seen ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in person in 1912 and received two tablets from him, of being too attached to him and not enough to Shoghi Effendi. The men argued frequently and sometimes avoided each other.<sup>715</sup>

By early 1944, the community was paralyzed. The chairman of the Local Assembly, William Bidwell, was attempting to dictate when meetings would be held, and Roy Williams was refusing to attend and asking the National Teaching Committee to be sent to another goal city. Circumventing the normal process of consultation within the Local Assembly,

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<sup>714</sup> Hoagg to Ioas, 4 October 1943.

<sup>715</sup> Melvin Abercrombie, personal conversation with author.

Emogene Hoagg reported the matter directly to Horace Holley, the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly.<sup>716</sup> By the fall, several pioneers—Bower, Lohse, Wilder, and Hoagg herself, who was back in Charleston—had left Greenville. Although at least one more pioneer was expected to arrive and one of the Greenville natives, Carolyn Glazener, was now “coming along fine” in deepening her understanding of the faith, disagreement over how to fill the vacancies on the Local Assembly—whether to select other members of the community or wait for new pioneers sent by the National Teaching Committee—brought the work of the body to a standstill.<sup>717</sup> Horace Holley, recognizing that the Greenville community was “going through a real ordeal,” referred the matter to the national Committee for Assembly Development with the hope that it could send a representative to Greenville to “try and take hold of the situation.”<sup>718</sup> Louis Gregory, who often combined his regular teaching trips with visits to struggling communities on behalf of the committee, came to Greenville during his winter 1944-1945 travels through five southern states. He met with the communities in Columbia and the Augusta area, and in Greenville he likely took the opportunity to counsel the members of the Local Assembly.<sup>719</sup> The rifts remained unhealed, however, and the constant fluctuation of pioneers—departure of those unable to stay, followed by insufficient replacements—left the Greenville community unstable and sometimes unable to focus on growth.

At Ridván 1946, after a “two-year respite” since the end of the previous plan, Shoghi Effendi called the North American Bahá’ís to the second stage in their international teaching

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<sup>716</sup> Horace Holley to Emogene Hoagg, 7 April 1944, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>717</sup> Christine Bidwell to Emogene Hoagg, 23 October 1944, H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, NBA.

<sup>718</sup> Holley to Hoagg, 7 April 1944.

<sup>719</sup> Morrison, *To Move the World*, 297.

program. The struggles in such new communities as Greenville since the launching of the previous plan played an important part in the formulation of new goals. In a cable to the 1946 national convention Shoghi Effendi outlined the four main objectives that built on those of the previous plan and of the interim period. First was “consolidation of victories already won throughout the Americas,” including the establishment of additional new local communities and a “bolder proclamation of the Faith to the masses” through the media and other means. Second was the completion of the interior ornamentation of the house of worship in Wilmette, so that it could be dedicated for public use by the end of the Plan. Third was development of the administrative structure of the faith in the Western Hemisphere through the formation of three new National Spiritual Assemblies, a separate one for Canada and one each for Central America (including Mexico and the Caribbean) and South America. The latter bodies, actually regional rather than national in scope, would be preliminary to the eventual formation, as the base of Local Assemblies grew, of a separate National Assembly in each Latin American country. Finally, the international teaching campaign would be extended from the New World to the “war-torn, spiritually famished European continent.”<sup>720</sup> The new Seven Year Plan would end, like the first, with a major anniversary celebration, this time in 1952-1953, the centenary of the “‘Year Nine’, the year [1269 of the Islamic calendar] which alike marked the termination of the Bábí Dispensation, and signaled the birth of Bahá’u’lláh’s prophetic Mission” in the Black Pit, a dungeon in Tehran.<sup>721</sup>

Shoghi Effendi had anticipated including several European countries early in the first Seven Year Plan, but apparently had judged the work in the Americas to be demanding

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<sup>720</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 88.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

enough on its own and postponed the European project. In the intervening years, totalitarian regimes and devastating warfare had decimated the Bahá'í movement there. The British community was left intact during the war, and those in Germany and France reconstituted themselves once the conflict was over. But throughout the rest of the continent, the widely scattered small groups and individuals that had existed before the war were dead, dispersed, or, in the case of those in the zones of Soviet occupation, too isolated and oppressed to undertake systematic teaching activities of their own.<sup>722</sup> Now, with the continent in ruins and the political divisions among the Allies deepening, Shoghi Effendi called for the establishment of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies in eight countries where Americans could easily settle and where religion was not being officially suppressed: Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.<sup>723</sup> In a cablegram six weeks later, he added Luxemburg and Switzerland to the list.<sup>724</sup> To coordinate the new effort, the National Spiritual Assembly formed a European Teaching Committee, which quickly began to dispatch pioneers to the “Ten Goal Countries.” Drawing on the

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<sup>722</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 403.

<sup>723</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 88.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. Notably absent were the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that were occupied by the Soviet Union, several of which, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, had had resident Bahá'ís before the war. Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, 403. Two principal factors made it impossible to reestablish the faith there in the wake of the conflict: the hostility of the Soviet regime and its new client states toward all forms of religion, which had already resulted in the dismemberment and dissolution of Bahá'í communities within the Soviet Union and prevented the Bahá'ís in eastern Germany from participating in the reconstituted movement in western Germany; and the growing mistrust between the Soviet Union and the United States, which made virtually unthinkable the settlement of American pioneers within the Soviet orbit. For a brief account of the movement in areas of Soviet control, see Graham Hassall, “Notes on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths in Russia and Its Territories,” *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5, no.3 (1993): 41-80, 86.

diverse national origins represented within the American community, the committee prioritized sending pioneers who were natives of the countries in which they were to serve.<sup>725</sup>

Before the end of the Plan, Shoghi Effendi initiated another stage of the faith's worldwide diffusion. In 1951, he called the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles to lead a "two year plan" to establish the faith in selected territories in Africa.<sup>726</sup> While Bahá'u'lláh himself had briefly touched the Mediterranean shores of the continent during the course of his exile to Palestine and the faith was well established in Egypt and Sudan, few Bahá'ís had established residence in the rest of North Africa or the vast portion of the continent south of the Sahara. Facing serious restrictions on travel imposed by colonial regimes, the British National Assembly coordinated the settlement of pioneers from Great Britain and four other national communities—Egypt and Sudan, India and Burma, Iran, and the United States—in twenty-five "States and Dependencies" throughout Africa, a prelude, Shoghi Effendi indicated, to future teaching plans that would involve the cooperation of all the world's National Spiritual Assemblies.<sup>727</sup>

### **The Second Seven Year Plan in South Carolina**

In June 1946, in a short cablegram followed by a lengthy inspirational letter, Shoghi Effendi elaborated on the new Plan's domestic goals, reiterating that the number of localities where

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<sup>725</sup> Horace Holley, "International Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities in the East and West," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 11, 1946-1950, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950), 50.

<sup>726</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles* (Oakham, England: Bahá'í Publishing, 1981), 256-7.

<sup>727</sup> Graham Hassall, "References to Africa in the Bahá'í Writings," Bahá'í Library Online, [http://www.bahai-library.org/file.php?file=hassall\\_africa\\_bahai\\_writings](http://www.bahai-library.org/file.php?file=hassall_africa_bahai_writings); "International Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities," *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. 12, 1950-1954, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956), 52-3.



Bahá'ís resided should continue to increase. “Particular care should be constantly exercised,” he instructed, “to enable the groups scattered throughout the length and breadth of the states and provinces of the United States and Canada to attain Assembly status,” and to gradually develop in their functioning.<sup>728</sup> He recommended that the National Teaching Committee focus on helping the thirty groups with six or more members to “speedily attain Assembly status,” so that the number of such bodies on the North American home front would reach 175 before the end of the second year of the Plan. “Attainment of this immediate objective,” he noted, would not only strengthen the administrative foundations of the movement at home, but would “challenge and galvanize” the Inter-America and European Teaching Committees in their work abroad.<sup>729</sup>

At the end of the summer of 1946, the Regional Teaching Committee of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina announced in its newsletter “WHAT THE SEVEN YEAR PLAN MEANS TO OUR REGION.” First, the committee called for the establishment of a Local Assembly in Columbia, the only city in the three-state region where there was a group of six believers, by Ridván 1947, noting that “three new Baha’is or three Baha’i settlers” would therefore be needed in Columbia “almost at once.” Second, a Local Assembly was to be reestablished in North Augusta, where there was a group of five, by Ridván 1948. Third, the new Local Assembly in Greenville needed the “full support and aid” of the regional community; two new pioneers for Greenville had already been identified. Fourth, the committee called for an immediate doubling of the region’s contributions to the national fund over the previous year. Finally, the committee said, each individual would

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<sup>728</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 93.

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

have to “stand by on the home front,” teaching the faith in his or her locality with a “renewed spirit of dedication.”<sup>730</sup>

The expansion goals for Columbia, North Augusta, and Greenville proved to be quite interconnected in execution. As in the previous plan, traveling teachers from outside the state or region tended to cover multiple localities in a circuit, such that several communities in rapid succession often found themselves with more activity, more publicity, and more seekers than usual. As the Bahá’í population of the Carolinas and Georgia rose slowly during the 1940s and 1950s, however, believers from within the three states also traveled more frequently to support each other’s teaching and deepening activities. In August 1946, for example, Roy and Bernice Williams from Greenville spent a long weekend in Greensboro, North Carolina visiting “in some of the Baha’i homes,” giving two talks at the city’s Bahá’í Center, and sharing news of the recent trip of Agnes Alexander, a prominent teacher from Hawaii, to other cities in the region.<sup>731</sup> The following November, when traveling teacher Marjorie McCormick visited the region, five Bahá’ís from Augusta and North Augusta came to Columbia to attend a public meeting there.<sup>732</sup> During 1946 and 1947, Annie Romer, a new pioneer in Greenville, travelled each week to Columbia and occasionally to Augusta and North Augusta to assist with teaching activities.<sup>733</sup> Meetings of the Regional Teaching Committee itself generally rotated around the three states, and the

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<sup>730</sup> *Baha’i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 37 (August-September 1946): 1.

<sup>731</sup> *Baha’i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 38 (October 1946): 2.

<sup>732</sup> *Baha’i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 39 (November 1946): 3-4.

<sup>733</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, *Annual Bahá’í Reports Presented to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada for the Year 1946-1947* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1947), 48; *Baha’i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 42 (March 1947): 2.

members often met with the local believers and seekers and assisted with public meetings.<sup>734</sup> Progress in the South Carolina localities was also linked as a limited number of pioneers sometimes moved from one city to another according to the priorities of the regional Plan. In October 1946, Josie Pinson, a pioneer who settled first in Charleston, which was not a goal city, relocated to Greenville.<sup>735</sup> In 1947 or 1948, Annie Romer moved from Greenville to Columbia to help establish the Local Assembly there.<sup>736</sup>

### **Columbia**

For the small group of believers in Columbia, the increased attention during the second Seven Year Plan led to an expanded membership, an improvement in local community life and teaching activities, and the formation of a Local Spiritual Assembly. While the Columbia group was affected by many of the same social and economic factors that kept the Greenville community small—the transience of some pioneers and of those employed by the military, and the difficulties imposed by racial and religious orthodoxy—the believers in Columbia, beginning with Louis Gregory’s early teaching trips and the efforts of pioneers Maude Mickle and Alta Wheeler over nearly a decade, had much more consistently worked to spread the faith among the area’s substantial black population. They also appear not to have been subject to serious personality conflicts. The result was more growth and a more solidly interracial group of believers and seekers. Significantly, the community included not a majority of white pioneers from outside the region, but of local black converts, many of whom were already connected with each other through familial or social ties. There was also

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<sup>734</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1946-1947*, 48.

<sup>735</sup> *Baha’i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 39 (November 1946): 3.

<sup>736</sup> *Baha’i Regional Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 1 (October-December 1949): 2.

at least one family of native white South Carolinians. Louella Moore's husband, Edward, became a Bahá'í sometime in the 1940s. They moved outside the city to Irmo in Lexington County after the war, but they continued to participate in community activities in Columbia. Their grown daughter, Louise Montgomery, attended study classes and other gatherings long before she declared her faith, at a Nineteen-Day Feast in the home of black believer Pearl Dixon, in late 1949.<sup>737</sup>

The community life and outreach efforts of the Columbia group indicated a continuing commitment to reaching both white and black seekers. Nineteen Day Feasts, Holy Day observances, and firesides were held not only in the homes of members, but also of seekers. The center of community activities was Waverly, the relatively prosperous African-American neighborhood surrounding the campuses of Benedict College and Allen University, where most of the black believers and seekers lived. In the summer of 1946, for example, Esther Sego came from Augusta and met with seven white and four black believers and one seeker at the home of one of the black Bahá'ís, Celia Glenn, a dressmaker and beauty shop owner, on Oak Street five blocks south of Allen.<sup>738</sup> Another "meeting for our Negro non-Baha'i friends" took place at the home of Lutie McKim, who had been studying the faith for some years, on the Benedict College campus, where her husband was superintendent of buildings and grounds. McKim's sister-in-law from Baltimore attended, as did two Benedict students from West Africa, two white pioneers, and a black believer who was also a Benedict student.<sup>739</sup>

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<sup>737</sup> *Baha'i Regional Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 1 (Oct.-Dec. 1949): 3.

<sup>738</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 36 (July 1946): 4; *Hill's Columbia (Richland County, S.C.) City Directory*, vol. 13, 1942 (Richmond: Hill Directory Co., 1942), 528.

<sup>739</sup> "Columbia Baha'i Group—Publicity Report," n.d., CBA; *Columbia City Directory 1942*, 568.

Several traveling teachers came to Columbia during the opening phase of the Plan, and the topics of their public lectures reflected the national community's focus, building on its recent experience using the mass media, on addressing some of the broad social concerns in postwar America. The community continued to advertize its activities in both the local black and white press, and they had some success broadcasting the teachings of the faith on the radio. In November 1946, Margery McCormick, the secretary of the National Teaching Committee and an agriculture extension agent from Illinois, visited Columbia during a tour of several cities in the region. In the Palmetto Room of the Wade Hampton Hotel, a prominent landmark on Main Street across from the State House, she delivered a lecture entitled "Security for a Failing World," an appropriate theme in the context of the emerging Cold War, to an audience of Bahá'ís from Columbia and Augusta and several inquirers. Notices in *The State* and the *Columbia Record*, both white papers, stated that McCormick had "traveled in Europe, Africa and the Near East and was in Europe when World War II broke out."<sup>740</sup> McCormick also spoke about the Bahá'í teachings for fifteen minutes over radio station WKIX and met individually with seekers.<sup>741</sup>

In March 1947, Ruth Moffett of Chicago conducted a four-week teaching campaign in Columbia. She gave a series of lectures in private homes, on the campus of the University of South Carolina, and at the Wade Hampton Hotel on a range of topics including "The Emerging New World Order," "What Hope in the United Nations Charter?," "The World's Beautiful Temple Architecture," and "New Keys to Bible Prophecy Fulfilled in This Day." Press notices identified her as a world traveler, as well, and as an accredited observer from

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<sup>740</sup> *The Columbia Record*, 30 October 30 and 1 November 1946, clippings, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>741</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 39 (November 1946): 4.

Washington University in St. Louis to the founding conference of the United Nations.<sup>742</sup> In December, Dr. Glen R. Shook, a professor of physics and director of the observatory at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, visited several cities in the region. His lecture in Columbia, entitled “Science and Revelation,” was held at the city’s Chamber of Commerce building on Lady Street a block from the capitol. A favorable account in the *Columbia Record* noted: “In view of the world crisis, the speaker said that it was absolutely necessary that scientists and religionists work together and that people think more clearly as to values.... For many years the idea of a universal religion has been a vital element in Dr. Shook’s research and writing and he quoted the Baha’i Faith as containing great truths for the establishment of world peace and unity.”<sup>743</sup>

Despite the rather energetic teaching efforts of the Columbia community, there were still not enough believers to form the Local Assembly at Ridván 1947. One of the local believers, Celia Glenn, had passed away during the previous administrative year, and another, Wilhelmina Daniels, may have already moved to Union.<sup>744</sup> While Ruth Moffett’s teaching campaign, conducted just before Ridván in March, “attracted four souls to the Faith, who wish[ed] to continue studying,” it did not immediately result in any new members.<sup>745</sup> The region’s primary goal for the second Seven Year Plan was accomplished late, at least by 1949, and only then by shifting several pioneers from Greenville to Columbia.<sup>746</sup> By 1950,

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<sup>742</sup> *The Columbia Record*, 8 March 1947; *The Gamecock*, 11 March 1947; and *The State*, 23 March 1947, all clippings, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>743</sup> *The Columbia Record*, 1 January 1948, clippings, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>744</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1946-1947*, 48.

<sup>745</sup> *Ibid.*; South Carolina State Voting List, 1950, CBA.

<sup>746</sup> Records from 1947-48 are incomplete, but a Local Spiritual Assembly was clearly in existence by 1949. William Bidwell stated that the Columbia Assembly was formed by “splitting” the one in Greenville. *Regional*

there were still just enough resident believers, all of them women, to maintain the Local Assembly. In another respect, however, the community was stronger than others in the state. Only three of the members—Alice Dudley, Eugenie Meyer, and Josie Pinson—were pioneers. The rest—Della Clark, Pearl Dixon, Alice Dudley, Henrietta Dukes, Jessie Entzminger, Eunice Grant Long, and Annie Mae Robinson—were black Columbians, several of whom had been associated with the faith for at least a decade.<sup>747</sup>

### **Greenville**

The regional movement's efforts to strengthen the local community in Greenville were less successful. There was a flurry of activity early in the Plan. In June 1946, Marjorie Ullrich of Oak Park, Illinois visited the region with her two young daughters and another youth. In Greenville, she spoke on "Outstanding Episodes from the Life of Baha'u'llah" at the home of the Williamses and on "God's Call to the Nations" at the home of the Bidwells, with ten seekers attending the latter meeting. A third meeting was held at the home of the Savages, "interested friends" of the Bidwells.<sup>748</sup> In the fall, William Bidwell began teaching a class on *The Dawn-Breakers*, also at the home of the Savages, with other seekers participating.<sup>749</sup> The next month, Agnes Alexander of Honolulu visited as part of her tour of the region, accompanied by Emma Lawrence, a pioneer in Charleston. Alexander arranged for interviews with the head of the city's powerful ministerial union and, with his approval, the

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*Baha'i Bulletin for North and South Carolina [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 1 (October-December 1949): 3; Bidwell, "Memories," 1.

<sup>747</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1950, CBA.

<sup>748</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 36 (July 1946): 3.

<sup>749</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 38 (October 1946): 3.

editor of the *Greenville News* and the manager of local radio station WFBC. These contacts resulted in a story in the newspaper and, later in August, the community's first radio broadcast, entitled "Pattern for Future Society."<sup>750</sup> In November, the visit of Marjorie McCormick, secretary of the National Teaching Committee, included a meeting with the members of the Local Assembly, an informal dinner fireside with twelve "interested friends," and an advertized public meeting on a "World Safe for Humanity" with another twelve seekers. "Six new contacts were made through these two [teaching] meetings," the Regional Committee reported, and the study class continued, but apparently no new declarations of faith resulted.<sup>751</sup>

More teaching efforts followed in subsequent years—in December 1948 the community held a weekly study class and a weekly fireside and planned to start a monthly public meeting—but pioneers continued to be the majority of the members.<sup>752</sup> After a lapse in 1945, for six years in a row, from 1946 to 1951, there were enough resident Bahá'ís at Ridván to maintain the Local Spiritual Assembly. In 1947, Virginia Ford left with her husband for military posts in Columbus, Georgia, and Japan, and in 1952 the Local Assembly lapsed again.<sup>753</sup> Lonely and dispirited, William and Christine Bidwell bought a farm outside of town in 1954. When Ford returned permanently to Greenville two years later, only four Bahá'ís remained in the city.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 36 (July 1946): 3; *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 37 (August-September 1946): 2.

<sup>751</sup> *Baha'i News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 39 (November 1946): 3.

<sup>752</sup> *Regional Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, December 1948, 3.

<sup>753</sup> National Bahá'í Archives to the author, 22 April 1995.

<sup>754</sup> Kenneally, "Fifty Years," 7.



In the post-war years, as South Carolina's civil rights movement grew and began to register additional breaches in the Jim Crow system, the tiny groups of Bahá'ís around the state still had to be discreet about how they brought blacks and whites together for teaching, worship, and other community functions. Jessie Entzminger recalled an incident from the early years of the second Seven-Year Plan in Columbia. She and her mother, Pearl Dixon, went to a Nineteen-Day Feast at the home of the recently married Marie Kershaw Frain, who had moved from North Augusta to Columbia for a job at the veterans' hospital near Fort Jackson. Frain's neighbors called the police, who came to the house and ordered the black Bahá'ís to leave. After that, Entzminger said, the Columbia community held all their meetings at black members' homes, where neighbors and police were less concerned about the presence of a few whites, or in rented halls.<sup>755</sup> In Greenville, Virginia Ford's house was attacked by the Ku Klux Klan after African-American Bahá'ís visited. One witness was a white child whose grandparents lived on the same street. Gail Fassy Black recalled the incident:

[G]oing to visit my grandparents on Maco Terrace and seeing a cross burning in the front yard of Virginia's house two doors away, and the windows of her house knocked out, I was very disturbed. I asked my grandmother why they were burning a cross there. She said, "They have black people visiting there and the Ku Klux Klan doesn't like it."<sup>756</sup>

More than a decade later, when she embraced the faith in Ford's home, it was with a clear understanding of the risks of being part of an interracial faith community.

While their interracial activities made Bahá'ís around the state targets of intimidation and occasional violence, the Greenville group set an important precedent by securing an

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<sup>755</sup> Entzminger and Montgomery, interview.

<sup>756</sup> Kenneally, "Fifty Years," 14-15.

initial measure of legal protection. In early 1953, just before the end of the Plan, Roy Williams appeared before the Greenville city council to ask for a formal acknowledgement of the local community's interracial character and protection of its activities. The council decided that interracial religious gatherings were not contrary to city ordinance and that "as a religious organization," the Bahá'í community "could not be interfered with in the process of its meetings because of the guarantee of freedom of worship."<sup>757</sup> The decision did not end the Greenville community's difficulties, but likely formed the basis for their efforts less than a decade later to secure legal recognition of the religion by state officials.

### **Louis Gregory's Final Years**

Notably absent from the South during the second Seven-Year Plan was the region's ablest and most experienced traveling teacher, Louis Gregory. After his trip through Georgia and the Carolinas in the winter of 1944-1945, Gregory had to curtail his teaching and administrative work as his own health and that of his wife, Louise, began to decline. In December 1948, after returning from a short plane trip to Kansas City to assist at the funeral of a Bahá'í friend, Gregory suffered a stroke. Though he recovered quickly, thereafter he stayed close to the couple's home, a modest cottage near Green Acre in Maine. In addition to caring for Louise, he focused his attention on several writing projects, teaching classes at Green Acre, hosting firesides, and maintaining his voluminous correspondence. He remained vitally interested in South Carolina until the end of his life, seeking out ways to spread the teachings of the faith there even from a distance.

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<sup>757</sup> "Greenville, S.C. Group Wins Right to Hold Non-Segregated Meetings," *Bahá'í News*, no. 266 (April 1953): 8.

In January 1949, barely a month after his stroke, Louis Gregory wrote to the postmaster at Darlington, South Carolina—apparently without revealing his own racial identity—to request information on the Dargan family, his white kinfolks in Darlington. The postmaster forwarded the letter to George E. Dargan, a local attorney and son of a four-term Congressman, who wrote a lengthy reply to Gregory including birth, marriage, and death records from the family Bible.<sup>758</sup> From the information that Dargan supplied, Gregory would have discovered that the two of them were second cousins—their grandfathers were brothers. Gregory wrote again, this time enclosing “papers” that apparently indicated either the nature of his familial relationship, the Bahá’í views on race, or both. “I think,” Dargan averred in a curt second reply, “that the promotion of harmonious relations between the white and colored people of the South has been greatly retarded by political demagogues and agitators, both North and South.”<sup>759</sup>

Surely on Dargan’s list of “political demagogues and agitators” disrupting race relations in South Carolina were U.S. District Court Judge J. Waties Waring and his wife, Elizabeth Avery Waring, with whom Gregory corresponded in 1950. Waring’s troubles began in 1945, when he had scandalized himself among Charleston’s upper crust by divorcing his first wife, a well-to-do Charleston native, and marrying Elizabeth Avery Hoffman, a twice-divorced woman from Connecticut and an outspoken racial liberal. Rumors flew that they entertained African-American guests in their home. In the wake of Waring’s decisions equalizing teachers’ salaries and striking down the white primary, their

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<sup>758</sup> Dargan’s father was George William Dargan (1841-1898), a former Confederate soldier, attorney, and Redeemer politician. He served as state representative (1877-1880), as solicitor of the Fourth Judicial Circuit of South Carolina (1880-1883), and U.S. representative from the Sixth District of South Carolina (1883-1891). Yates Snowden and H. G. Cutler, ed., *History of South Carolina*, vol. 5 (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1920), 87, <http://books.google.com/book>.

<sup>759</sup> George E. Dargan to Louis G. Gregory, 26 February 1949, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

relationships with white Charleston deteriorated. The final break came in January 1950, when Elizabeth Waring spoke to a mixed gathering at the city's black YWCA. She exhorted African Americans to take and use the civil rights that were already rightfully theirs and castigated conservative southern whites as "a sick, confused and decadent people," "full of pride and complacency, introverted, morally weak and low."<sup>760</sup> The comments were too much for the city's white elite to bear. "I walk from my house to the courthouse every morning," Waties Waring told a reporter from a national magazine. "I pass many former friends, many of them men and women I grew up with. There is no friendly greeting, not even a sign of recognition. They look straight ahead or, if they see me in time, cross over to the other side of the street. About the only white people who speak to me are lawyers—and they do so only because they can't afford not to speak to the judge."<sup>761</sup>

Louis Gregory wrote to Judge Waring twice in 1950, once in the spring and once in the fall, apparently expressing encouragement and enclosing Bahá'í literature both times. "Mrs. Waring and I deeply appreciate the literature you have sent us and your very kind message," Waring replied to Gregory's first letter. "We are indeed happy since we feel sure that we are on the right road, and communications like yours convince us that that is true."<sup>762</sup> To Gregory's second letter he replied: "It is very heartening to receive letters from decent thinking people like yourself, and Mrs. Waring and I appreciate your kind words about us."<sup>763</sup> Gregory forwarded the correspondence to the National Spiritual Assembly,

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<sup>760</sup> "South Carolina: Marching Through Charleston," *Time*, 30 January 1950, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,856480,00.html>.

<sup>761</sup> "'Disowned' by Dixie," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 January 1951, clipping, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>762</sup> J. Waties Waring to Louis G. Gregory, 26 April 1950, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>763</sup> J. Waties Waring to Louis G. Gregory, 20 November 1950, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

apparently suggesting that the body address its own words of encouragement to the judge and to other whites who were taking a stand for racial justice.<sup>764</sup> In March 1951, the National Assembly wrote to Waring to commend him for “the spiritual nature of [his] decisions concerning race,” sending him three Bahá’í books that they hoped would “confirm [his] own convictions.”<sup>765</sup> Gregory lived just long enough to see Waring’s most significant contribution to the civil rights movement, his May 1951 dissenting opinion in a landmark school desegregation case from rural Clarendon County, but not the couple’s flight the following year from ostracism in Charleston to the safety of New York City.

In late July 1951, Louis Gregory passed away suddenly at his home in Eliot. A cable from Shoghi Effendi a few days later attested to Gregory’s decades of service to the faith, posthumously lifting him to the highest office (aside from the Guardianship itself) in the Bahá’í community and placing his contributions in global and historical context:

Profoundly deplore grievous loss of dearly beloved, noble-minded, golden-hearted Louis Gregory, pride and example to the Negro adherents of the Faith. Keenly feel loss of one so loved, admired and trusted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Deserves rank of first Hand of the Cause of his race. Rising Bahá’í generation in African continent will glory in his memory and emulate his example. Advise hold memorial gathering in Temple in token recognition of his unique position, outstanding services.<sup>766</sup>

The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God to which Shoghi Effendi referred had been created by Bahá’u’lláh, who appointed four prominent Iranian Bahá’ís to assist him in stimulating teaching and the development of communities in the Middle East. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued to direct the activities of these four and referred to at least four more individuals, also Iranians, as Hands of the Cause after their deaths. In addition, in his Will and Testament

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<sup>764</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States to Louis G. Gregory, 26 March 1951, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>765</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States to Judge Waties Waring, 26 March 1951, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>766</sup> “Messages from the Guardian,” *Bahá’í News*, no. 247 (September 1951): 1.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá outlined the responsibilities of the Hands and gave the Guardian of the faith the responsibility to appoint them and direct their activities. For some thirty years, however, Shoghi Effendi did not take steps to develop this institution, concentrating instead on the establishment and development of local and national executive bodies. However, during this period he continued ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s practice of naming Hands of the Cause posthumously, conferring the title on ten men and women from a variety of national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, seven of them prior to Gregory’s death. Only afterwards, beginning in December 1951, did Shoghi Effendi appoint living Hands and assign them specific tasks. While the living Hands of the Cause worked according to Shoghi Effendi’s instructions, those who, like Gregory, were appointed posthumously had distinguished themselves in service to the faith largely through their own initiative.<sup>767</sup>

In addition to honoring Louis Gregory’s spiritual station, Shoghi Effendi’s cablegram also suggested a strong connection with the African continent. Gregory’s practical links to Africa—his own racial heritage and his brief visit to Egypt during the course of his 1911 pilgrimage—were rather indirect. But Shoghi Effendi’s assessment makes sense in light of the Bahá’í writings on racial unity and long-range developments within the faith and in the world at large. In his talks and writings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had repeatedly linked the achievement of interracial unity in the United States with the establishment of world peace. “When the racial elements of the American nation unite in actual fellowship and accord,” he had told a mixed gathering in Washington during his 1912 visit, “the lights of the oneness of humanity will shine, the day of eternal glory and bliss will dawn, the spirit of God

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<sup>767</sup> Eunice Braun et al., “Hands of the Cause of God,” Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project, <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org>.

encompass, and the divine favors descend.... This is the sign of the Most Great Peace....”<sup>768</sup>

Such predictions seemed to take on some practical significance in the wake of World War One with the development of an international Pan-African movement and after World War Two with the acceleration of the civil rights movement in the United States and the anti-colonial movement in Africa. At both moments, activists and theorists explicitly linked black people’s struggles for justice on both sides of the Atlantic, and at both moments, initiatives of the worldwide Bahá’í community—the Race Amity Conferences in the first instance, and the first systematic plan to establish the faith across the African continent in the second—sought to apply the faith’s teachings to emerging opportunities.

In the context of these trends, clear to Shoghi Effendi or any other astute observer by the early 1950s, Louis Gregory’s “unique position” in the development of a solidly interracial Bahá’í movement in the United States—and his intellectual and spiritual influence, indirect but no less significant, on the tenor and focus of African-American aspirations in the early twentieth century—were enough to connect him to the future of independent Africa and to the nascent Bahá’í communities there. Louis Gregory did not live to see the complete dismantling of the Jim Crow regime, the political independence of the African colonies and their accession to the United Nations as equal members, or the influx of large numbers of people in Africa and the African Diaspora into the Bahá’í Faith—phenomena which he and the successive heads of the faith certainly saw as interrelated and which seemed to proceed with such rapidity during the quarter century after he died. But at the end of his life he was certain that positive change was both inevitable and imminent. In the concluding chapter of “Racial Unity,” a manuscript he finished shortly before his passing, he wrote:

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<sup>768</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 57.

Light is everywhere breaking for the oppressed peoples of the earth. Deep shadows prove the intensity of the light. The interests of no groups or classes will be overlooked or forgotten... . Assuming that the victims of injustice will continue their struggle, no human might can long debar them from the long sought goal. Earth and air, fire and water, the stars in their courses, the high tide of destiny, and the Will of divine Providence are all arrayed against the forces of oppression.<sup>769</sup>

The “[r]ising Bahá’í generation in [the] African continent,” the first fruits of an Africa Campaign that involved the settlement of black and white American pioneers who were themselves a testimony to Louis Gregory’s “outstanding services,” would “glory in his memory and emulate his example,” not only as one of the most distinguished teachers and administrators of the faith, but as a radical activist of African descent who had recognized in its program for the reconstruction of the world the “highest aims” of his people for justice and peace.<sup>770</sup>

### **“Brilliant Victories”**

By late 1951, as the second Seven Year Plan was entering its final months, it was clear that the worldwide Bahá’í community had reached a new stage in its geographic diffusion and administrative consolidation. In a November 1951 cable, Shoghi Effendi called for the holding of four intercontinental conferences, in Kampala, Chicago, Stockholm, and New Delhi, between February and October 1953. The conferences, he said, would serve a triple purpose in the history, identity, and growth of the faith. They would commemorate the “Great Jubilee,” the centenary of the beginning of Bahá’u’lláh’s prophetic mission in a subterranean dungeon in Tehran. They would provide a “demonstration of Bahá’í solidarity of unprecedented scope and intensity” befitting the emerging stage in the religion’s

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<sup>769</sup> Louis G. Gregory, “Racial Unity,” chapter 28, “Conclusion,” TS, Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

<sup>770</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections*, 227.27-30.



worldwide development. And they would enable the believers around the world to “adopt effectual measures” for the inauguration of a third Seven Year Plan, running from 1956 to 1963. Unlike the first and second plans, which had been primarily the work of the American community, the third would involve all the National Spiritual Assemblies and “embrace all the continents of the earth.” Its ambitious goal would be the diffusion of the faith to all of the remaining countries and territories of the globe, what Shoghi Effendi called “the world establishment of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, as prophesied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and envisioned by Daniel,” in time for the celebration of the “Most Great Jubilee” marking Bahá’u’lláh’s formal assumption of the prophetic office in Baghdad.<sup>771</sup>

In a cablegram of March 1952, Shoghi Effendi lauded the “brilliant victories won in the course of the second Seven Year Plan.”<sup>772</sup> Indeed, progress had been made on several fronts. In the Americas, there was a wider base of Local Spiritual Assemblies, and the formation of three new National Spiritual Assemblies—that of Canada in 1948 and those of Central America and South America in 1951—meant that the faith’s administrative order embraced the whole hemisphere. By April 1952, Shoghi Effendi could announce the completion of the interior ornamentation of the American community’s house of worship at Wilmette and the initiation of landscaping in preparation for the building’s dedication for public worship.<sup>773</sup> In Central and Western Europe, new Local Assemblies were functioning in each of the ten goal countries. The rapid growth of the faith in Italy moved Shoghi Effendi to call for the formation, at Ridván 1953, of an additional National Spiritual

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<sup>771</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World, 1950-1957* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), 16-7. Cf. Daniel 12:12.

<sup>772</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages, 1950-1957*, 23.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Assembly for that country and Switzerland, bringing to twelve the total number of such “pillars of the future House of Justice” in the world.<sup>774</sup> At the faith’s World Center in Haifa and ‘Akká, a related step towards the establishment of the Universal House of Justice was the formation, in 1951, of the International Bahá’í Council, a secretariat which Shoghi Effendi called the “forerunner” of that institution. He charged the Council primarily with establishing relations with the new state of Israel and assisting him with completion of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, a project scheduled for completion in time for the 1953 celebration.<sup>775</sup>

Even more stunning in Shoghi Effendi’s estimation than the development of the faith in Latin America and Europe had been its initial growth in Africa, an aspect of the second Seven Year Plan not even contemplated at the outset. In April 1952, he enumerated the “first fruits” of the two-year Africa Campaign: the “settlement of Persian, American, British, Egyptian and Portuguese pioneers in Liberia, North Rhodesia, Angola, Libya, Spanish Morocco and Mozambique” and the inauguration of “teaching classes, public meetings and firesides” in each of those areas; “the enrollment of several native Africans” into the faith; the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies in Kampala, Uganda, and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika; and the purchase of a Bahá’í Center in Kampala.<sup>776</sup> The following January he announced to the worldwide community that in a little more than a year, more than 200 Africans from some 16 ethnic groups had become Bahá’ís in Kampala and the surrounding rural districts.<sup>777</sup> He anticipated the early establishment in Africa of several regional-level

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<sup>774</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>777</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, 290.

National Spiritual Assemblies like those already functioning in Central and South America.<sup>778</sup>

Paralleling the development of the faith's local and national elected bodies, Shoghi Effendi formalized the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God. In December 1951 he took the “long inevitably deferred step” of appointing an initial contingent of twelve Hands—including Louis Gregory's longtime associates Dorothy Baker, Horace Holley, Leroy Ioas, and Charles Mason Remey—whom he assigned to serve at the Bahá'í World Center and in Asia, Europe, and the Americas.<sup>779</sup> Three months later, in February 1952, he appointed an additional contingent of seven Hands, including residents of Africa and Australia, bringing the total number to nineteen. He assigned the Hands with responsibility for “the propagation and preservation of the unity of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh” and noted that they were “destined” eventually to direct institutions “paralleling those revolving around the Universal House of Justice.” Later in 1952, he brought into being the first such institution by asking the Hands of the Cause residing on each continent to appoint Auxiliary Boards whose members, acting “as their adjuncts or deputies,” would systematically visit Bahá'í communities to assist them in carrying out the teaching plans.<sup>780</sup>

Within the United States, the record of the second Seven Year Plan was mixed, as the imperatives of international pioneering and completion of the temple had an adverse impact on the other home front goals. The initial drive to raise the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies, from 123 in 1945 to 175 in 1948, had been accomplished, but only with great

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<sup>778</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages, 1950-1957*, 21.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

difficulty.<sup>781</sup> In February 1948, at the “eleventh hour,” Shoghi Effendi had been “moved to plead . . . that the rank and file of the community, particularly the members in the long-established leading strongholds of the Faith—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington—issue forth” from their homes and settle in the goal cities.<sup>782</sup> The 175 Local Assemblies were formed on schedule less than three months later, but by the end of 1951, the number had fallen again as members of those bodies left the country as pioneers to Latin America, Europe, and Africa. In November 1951, Shoghi Effendi expressed his disappointment that the “constant broadening and the steady reinforcement of this internal administrative structure” had been “allowed to fall into abeyance” and been “eclipsed” by the community’s successful deployment of international pioneers.<sup>783</sup> When the Plan ended in the spring of 1953, there were organized groups in some 600 localities across the country, nearly double the total from 1945. But there were only 171 Local Assemblies, an increase of less than 50 during the same period and four short of the goal.<sup>784</sup>

In the same message of November 1951, Shoghi Effendi also lamented the “accumulating deficit” in the national fund.<sup>785</sup> Skyrocketing construction costs in the postwar economic boom had increased the budget for the interior ornamentation and landscaping of the house of worship, prompting Shoghi Effendi to order drastic cost-saving measures during 1949 and 1950, including suspension of publications, public relations

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<sup>781</sup> Holley, “Current Bahá’í Activities,” *Bahá’í World*, vol. 11, 1946-1950, 38.

<sup>782</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*. (1965; Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997), 45.

<sup>783</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 102.

<sup>784</sup> Horace Holley “International Survey of Current Bahá’í Activities,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 10, 1944-1946, 77; “Bahá’í Directory, 1953-1954,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 12, 1950-1954, 721-43.

<sup>785</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 102.

efforts, and programs at the three summer school campuses in California, Maine, and Michigan.<sup>786</sup> In part to compensate for the school closings, the National Spiritual Assembly had initiated the “Bahá’í Institute,” a decentralized program of study conferences held around the country for the “self-education” of communities “by mutual participation . . .”<sup>787</sup>

In South Carolina, even though it had been adversely affected by the same national trends, the Bahá’í movement was more widespread, more diverse, and more confident in 1953 than it had been at the end of the previous plan. In terms of the geographic spread of the faith, new communities were functioning far from the environs of Augusta. In addition to North Augusta and Aiken County, there were groups of believers in Columbia and Greenville with their own community activities and efforts at expansion and consolidation. The only major shortcoming in this regard was Charleston, the state’s largest and most important city, where, despite being the scene of relatively vibrant black and interracial activism and of the first mention of the faith in South Carolina, a succession of relatively short-term pioneers had been unable to raise a Bahá’í community. Elsewhere, the faith was making some tentative forays into rural and small-town South Carolina. During the second half of the 1940s, a transplant from the Atlanta community had resided in Bennettsville in the Pee Dee.<sup>788</sup> In 1950, one believer resided in Walterboro in the Lowcountry and another in Union in the Piedmont.<sup>789</sup> Three years later, there were isolated Bahá’ís in Allendale, Clemson, and Orangeburg.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>786</sup> Allen B. McDaniel and Paul E. Haney, “Interior Ornamentation of the Bahá’í House of Worship,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 12, 1950-1954, 536; “Landscape Plan of the Bahá’í House of Worship by Hilbert Dahl,” in *Bahá’í World*, vol. 12, 1950-1954, 540; Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, 405-6.

<sup>787</sup> Holley, “Current Bahá’í Activities,” *Bahá’í World*, vol. 11, 1946-1950, 44-5.

<sup>788</sup> *Bahá’í News Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 36 (July 1946): 3.

<sup>789</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1950, CBA.

The size and diversity of the movement had grown along with geographic expansion. By the end of the Plan there were more than thirty Bahá'ís in the state. While pioneers had been instrumental in the expansion of the faith, some two-thirds of the believers in 1953 were natives or longtime residents who had encountered the faith locally. Dozens more, perhaps, participated in local Bahá'í worship, study, and social activities without having joined the religion. The community included both black and white members, in rough proportion to the racial composition of the state as a whole, and they ranged in occupational and social background from black domestic workers in Columbia to, in at least the case of Daisy Moore in North Augusta, a well-to-do scion of the antebellum elite. Beyond the circle of individual believers' family members, neighbors, and coworkers, there was significant experience in several localities in contacting local government officials and leaders of thought, as well as in using radio, newspapers, and public meetings to bring the history and tenets of the faith to the attention of a wider audience.

In stark contrast to the situation when Alonzo Twine had embraced the faith in 1910, the Bahá'í administrative system in 1953 effectively connected the Bahá'ís in South Carolina to each other and to a wider faith community at the regional, national, and international levels. During the course of the first and second Seven Year Plans, Local Spiritual Assemblies had been established in North Augusta, Greenville, and Columbia, although, as in other states, maintaining the necessary numbers had been a constant challenge. By Ridván 1953, even the new Columbia body had lapsed as pioneers departed for new posts in the United States or abroad—Alice Dudley to Washington, D.C.; Eugenie Meyer to Switzerland;

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<sup>790</sup> “Bahá'í Directory, 1953-1954,” in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 12, 1950-1954, 734.

Josie Pinson to Union, South Carolina; and Annie Romer to New Orleans—contributing to the shortfall in the national goal for new Local Assembly formation.<sup>791</sup>

Especially important given the struggle to build an administrative base at the local level, a regional committee structure gave the movement coherence, fostered a sense of shared mission and identity across state boundaries, and channeled human and financial resources to various localities relatively efficiently. In 1950, for example, a member of the Regional Teaching Committee from North Augusta conducted the National Spiritual Assembly's first "Bahá'í Institute" program on the Covenant for the Aiken County and Columbia communities, and a visiting teacher from New York did the same for Greenville.<sup>792</sup> Regardless of whether a group was large enough to have a Local Spiritual Assembly, regional and national newsletters kept each individual informed of news and events close to home and around the world. And every believer could participate in the process of electing the National Spiritual Assembly. Beginning in 1944, when Shoghi Effendi instructed that delegates to the National Convention be apportioned by state and not just by localities with Local Assemblies, the believers in South Carolina had gathered each fall to elect their delegate. Together with Local Assembly elections, the state convention formed an arena of religious governance that, despite its limitations of size, united people across lines of race, class, and gender in ways that most other organizations in the state, religious or secular, could barely imagine. Small and limited in resources as it was, still tenuous in both its legal and administrative foundations, and alternately disregarded or persecuted by most of those

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<sup>791</sup> Ibid.; Alice Dudley, "Unfinished Journey," TS, in possession of the author; South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris; *Bahá'í Regional Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, no. 1 (October-December 1949): 3; "In Memoriam," in *The Bahá'í World: An International Record*, vol. 14, 1963-1968, comp. Universal House of Justice (Haifa, Israel: Universal House of Justice, 1974), 375-7; Eugenie Meyer to Mr. and Mrs. Edward Moore, postcards, 20 November 1960 and 2 December 1962, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>792</sup> *Regional Teaching Committee Bulletin [Regional Teaching Bulletin]*, December 1950, 1.

few who were even aware of its existence, an indigenous Bahá'í movement that was both coherent and distinctively diverse had established itself in South Carolina during two successive plans of systematic growth.



## Chapter 6

### **Broadening the Base Statewide, 1950-1965**

In April 1963, when sixteen-year-old Richard Abercrombie arrived in London, England, for the Bahá'í World Congress, it was the first time he had made more than a short car trip from his home in Greenville, South Carolina. Indeed, much had changed in his life since he first heard of the Bahá'í Faith less than two years before. In the scriptures of his new religion he found answers to spiritual questions that the ministers at the Baptist church where he had grown up were unwilling or unable to answer. His circle of friends had widened. There was the white family who defied Jim Crow segregation to befriend him and other black youth and introduce them to the Bahá'í Faith, and the feisty black woman from California—a sister of former boxing heavyweight champion Joe Louis, she was quick to point out—who visited Greenville and converted his father through her exposition of Biblical prophecy. The whole family had become Bahá'ís, and at least ten of his school friends had followed suit. Then there was the travelling. He had gone to Augusta, the closest city with a Bahá'í administrative council, to be formally enrolled in the religion. Several times already he had gone to St. Helena Island at the southern tip of South Carolina, where black and white Bahá'ís from several southeastern states gathered twice a year for a week of study and fellowship at the historic campus of Penn Center, founded as a school for freedpeople after

the Civil War and lately used as a retreat center by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his colleagues in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.<sup>793</sup>

Now Abercrombie was making the biggest trip of his life, to the Bahá'í World Congress in London. Seven thousand Bahá'ís from seventy countries gathered for the event to mark the successful completion of a ten-year worldwide expansion program and the establishment, on the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's public announcement of his prophetic mission, of the Universal House of Justice called for in his writings. When Abercrombie entered Royal Albert Hall, the premier convention venue in London, on the first day of the Congress, the sight of the participants stunned him. People from every corner of the globe, many of them in the traditional dress of their culture, met and greeted each other as brothers and sisters. The African participants particularly impressed Abercrombie, a black American teenager coming of age amid the civil rights movement. He noticed the great variety of language, dress, and physical features among them, from the tall and slender Ethiopians to the Pygmies from the rain forests of the Congo. He had grown up thinking of Africa as one big country, but now, among the African Bahá'ís he met, he saw for the first time a glimpse of the continent's diversity.<sup>794</sup>

For Abercrombie and the other participants, the five days of the World Congress provided a foretaste of the peaceful global civilization that was both the central theme and the goal of their religion—an emerging phenomenon at once worldwide and grand in scope and intensely local and personal in the lives of its protagonists. One speaker at the gathering,

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<sup>793</sup> James Richard Abercrombie, interview by author, Greenville, SC, 7 December 2003. For King's relationship with Penn, see J. Tracy Power, *I Will Not Be Silent and I Will Be Heard: Martin Luther King, Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Penn Center*, Topics in African American History 2 (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1993).

<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

an indigenous man from the highlands of Bolivia, said: “I am not a literate man, and I am very happy to be here to see my brothers from all over the world.... We want unity and love for the whole world....”<sup>795</sup> Another, speaking of how he would describe the Congress on his return to his native Philippines, said: “When I go back to the villages I can tell them that I saw the garden of God!”<sup>796</sup> Richard Abercrombie recalled: “Seeing all these people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, the beauty of these diverse people coming together for one purpose, I knew it could happen all over the world. It wasn’t just in Greenville, South Carolina; this was a *world* community.” “I already knew that,” he added, “but at the World Congress I saw it.”<sup>797</sup>

Richard Abercrombie’s presence at the London Congress testified to the development—concurrently with an increasingly assertive black freedom struggle within the United States and a paralyzing Cold War with the Soviet Union—of a Bahá’í movement in South Carolina with a larger, more diverse, and more youthful membership, a stronger institutional and legal basis, and an orientation that sought increasingly to influence the course of social change in the state. During much of the 1950s, in the context of a new campaign by South Carolina’s political leaders and a grassroots segregationist movement to destroy the NAACP, the interracialism of the Bahá’ís seemed more dangerous than usual, and the statewide community could do little more than hold itself together. However, as the civil rights movement began to register more gains at home and across the region, South Carolina’s political and business elite sought increasingly to ease the transition to desegregation. As the legal, social, and economic risks—both to blacks and whites—of

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<sup>795</sup> *Bahá’í World*, vol. 14, 1963-1968, 72.

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>797</sup> Abercrombie interview.

identifying with an interracial movement began to soften, the Bahá'ís became more bold in their public outreach and more open about the interracial character of their community, and more South Carolinians seemed inclined to associate with or become members of the Bahá'í movement. By the middle of the 1960s, as the global framework of the Bahá'í Administrative Order stood completed and the Jim Crow regime crumbled, South Carolina's Bahá'í community began to prepare for rapid growth of their faith in cities and rural areas in all parts of the state.

### ***Briggs, Brown, and “Massive Resistance” in South Carolina***

In the evening of his life, Louis Gregory had predicted intensification both of the African-American civil rights movement and of opposition to it. “Deep shadows,” he observed, “prove the intensity of the light.”<sup>798</sup> In South Carolina, events in the 1950s seemed to bear out Gregory's statement. As the state's NAACP led the country in a concerted attack on segregation in public schools, South Carolina's white political leaders and a new grassroots movement opposed to civil rights attempted to destroy the organization and ruin its supporters. The direct effect was to force the state's civil rights movement into a temporary retreat during the second half of the decade; indirectly, the renewed climate of fear stifled the growth of the Bahá'í community until a new group of pioneers arrived in 1956 and 1957.

On May 28, 1951, less than two months before Louis Gregory's death, black parents and students from Summerton, a small town in Clarendon County in the lower Pee Dee,

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<sup>798</sup> Gregory, “Racial Unity,” Louis G. Gregory Papers, NBA.

finally had their day in federal court in Charleston.<sup>799</sup> It was the culmination of a process begun nearly four years earlier in the summer of 1947, when AME minister Rev. Joseph Armstrong De Laine had begun organizing black families in the Summerton area to press for improvements in the local education system. Their first efforts had focused on forcing local school districts to provide bus transportation for their children as they did for white children. Rebuffed at every turn by white officials and suffering severe economic reprisals, they had filed suit in U.S. District Court in May 1950 to force Clarendon County School District 22 to provide equal school facilities for black children. But the judge, J. Waties Waring, had instructed the plaintiffs' attorneys to re-file the case so as to directly challenge the provision for separate schools in South Carolina's constitution of 1895. By extension, the case would also call into question the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision permitting "separate but equal" public accommodations for blacks and whites, the legal justification for the entire national system of racial segregation. Because the new case challenged the state constitution, it would be heard not before Waring alone, but before a three-judge panel. Two of the three judges were likely to rule against the plaintiffs, ensuring an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In late May 1951, a year after filing the original suit, *Briggs v. Elliott* was heard before Chief Judge John Parker, Judge George Bell Timmerman, and Waring. The plaintiffs, joined by African-American sympathizers from across South Carolina and other states, crowded into an overflowing Charleston courtroom. The plaintiffs' attorneys, Thurgood Marshall and Harold Boulware, argued that schools for blacks in District 22 were not just

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<sup>799</sup> This account of the Clarendon County case is based on Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Random House, 1977); and Benjamin F. Hornsby, *Stepping Stone to the Supreme Court: Clarendon County, South Carolina* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1992).

segregated, but inferior to their white counterparts. The defense attorneys, Robert Figg, Jr. of Charleston and S. Emory Rogers of Summerton, did not contest the inferiority of the black schools, but asked only that the state be given more time to improve facilities.

As expected, the two-to-one decision ordered equalization of the schools, not desegregation. Waring's dissenting opinion, however, proved the most significant result of the case. In his scathing denunciation of segregation in education, Waring ridiculed the logic of racialism and called for immediate equal treatment of African-American citizens. "I am of the opinion," he wrote,

that all of the legal guideposts, expert testimony, common sense and reason point unerringly to the conclusion that the system of segregation in education adopted and practiced in the state of South Carolina must go and must go now. Segregation is *per se* inequality.<sup>800</sup>

It was a landmark opinion, the first of its kind in the country by a federal judge.<sup>801</sup>

For most of South Carolina's white leaders, however, there was no question of abandoning segregation. Reaction to the *Briggs* case was swift. Even before the decision, the General Assembly had begun a massive "school equalization" program designed to forestall desegregation of the schools. The brainchild of Gov. James F. Byrnes, who had served in all three branches of the federal government before returning to South Carolina and running for governor, the massive building plan used proceeds from a new sales tax and a large bond issue in an effort to improve facilities across the state and bring black schools up to par with white schools.<sup>802</sup> "It is our duty," Byrnes had told legislators soon after taking office, "to provide for the races substantial equality in school facilities. We should do it

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<sup>800</sup> Quoted in Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 366.

<sup>801</sup> David W. Southern, "Beyond Jim Crow Liberalism: Judge Waring's Fight against Segregation in South Carolina, 1942-52," *The Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 3 (Autumn 1981): 219-20.

<sup>802</sup> Rebekah Dobrasko, "Upholding 'Separate but Equal': South Carolina's School Equalization Program, 1951-1955," M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 2005, 5-11.

because it is right. For me, that is sufficient reason.” But Byrnes’s appeal was cold political calculation: with challenges to the separate but equal doctrine underway in Clarendon County and in several other states, he hoped that equalization would forestall desegregation. “If any person wants an additional reason,” he had pointedly added, “I say it is wise.” Over the next four years, more than 800 schools, mostly antiquated one- and two-room buildings, were closed and replaced with state-of-the-art new facilities costing some \$124 million, an enormous sum for an impoverished state.<sup>803</sup> Some two-thirds of the money went to black schools, even though black children were only forty percent of the school population.<sup>804</sup> For African American students as well as for many rural whites, it was more attention from the state of South Carolina than they had ever received.<sup>805</sup>

Increased education funding, however, was not the government’s only weapon in the fight to maintain the racial status quo. The same year that it approved the school building campaign, the General Assembly formed a special committee to recommend measures to avoid desegregation. Among the results of its work were a successful statewide referendum to delete the constitutional requirement for state-supported public schools and passage of a new statute withholding state money from any school to which a student was transferred by court order—measures that seemed to contradict the campaign to “modernize” the state’s school system and revealed its true purpose.

When the NAACP appealed *Briggs v. Elliott* to the U.S. Supreme Court, Gov. Byrnes used public and private means to influence the outcome, hiring one of the country’s best appellate lawyers to defend the state and discussing the case with members of the Supreme

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<sup>803</sup> Dobrasko, “Upholding ‘Separate but Equal,’” 35.

<sup>804</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 523.

<sup>805</sup> Dobrasko, “Upholding ‘Separate but Equal,’” 23-9.

Court with whom he had served as well as with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican to whom he had thrown his political support in the 1952 elections.<sup>806</sup> Despite Byrnes's best efforts, the Supreme Court's unanimous decision, announced May 17, 1954, overturned segregation in public education and, by implication, in all other aspects of public life. In reversing *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Court used language derived in part from Waring's dissenting opinion in the *Briggs* case: "In the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."<sup>807</sup>

Reaction among South Carolina whites was swift. The "Committee of 52," a statewide group of white business, political, and religious leaders, published a statement calling for maintenance of separate schools at all costs in order to preserve "domestic tranquility." Adopting the language of John C. Calhoun in the Nullification Controversy of the 1830s—a rhetorical and political precursor to the Civil War—the committee asked the state government to "interpose" itself between the federal courts and local school districts.<sup>808</sup> The editor of the *Greenville News* called the *Brown* decision "an insult to the intelligence of White people," while Bob Jones, Sr., the head of Greenville's fundamentalist Bob Jones University, said that racial intermingling was contrary to the will of God and that every effort to create "one world and one race outside the body of Christ has been of the devil."<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> Some evidence suggests that Byrnes even used his influence with the justices to ensure that a Kansas case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, appeared on the docket ahead of South Carolina's *Briggs*, which came first both alphabetically and chronologically in the group of five similar cases that the court planned to hear together. See Edgar, *South Carolina*, 522.

<sup>807</sup> Quoted in Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 782.

<sup>808</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 524.

<sup>809</sup> *Greenville News*, 18 May 1954; 2 June 1955; 5 March 1956; 18 September 1960, quoted in Huff, *Greenville*, 401-2.



Jones's comments in particular heralded the emergence of a new grassroots movement in which popular anti-Communist, anti-secular, and anti-civil rights sentiments coalesced and took on institutional form. The movement's spearhead was a network of Citizens' Councils, formed across the Deep South in the wake of the *Brown* decision to challenge the Supreme Court's authority and defend segregation. In the context of the Cold War rivalry with an expansionist, nuclear-armed Soviet Union and of a nationwide red scare, the defenders of segregation attempted to harness widespread fears by discrediting the civil rights movement as a Kremlin-inspired threat to American democracy. They smeared any individual or organization who questioned Jim Crow, leftist or not, as advocating atheism, Communism, and miscegenation.<sup>810</sup>

The Citizens' Councils spread quickly in South Carolina after the *Brown* decision. By the summer 1956, the organization's membership in the state had swelled to some 40,000 people, with its most active support in Midlands and Lowcountry counties with large black populations—the same areas that had voted overwhelmingly for Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat ticket in 1948.<sup>811</sup> Like their counterparts in other states, South Carolina's Citizens' Councils worked closely but informally with an interlocking network of federal, state, and local government agencies, including the FBI and the State Law Enforcement Division; local and state political bosses; conservative newspapers; ministers of various denominations; and professional anti-Communist activists.<sup>812</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 4-7.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-8; Edgar, *South Carolina*, 525.

<sup>812</sup> Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 113-6.

While the Citizens' Councils claimed to represent the "respectable" majority of the white community and disavowed any use of violence, their energetic campaign to uphold white supremacy emboldened the Ku Klux Klan, which reasserted itself in the wake of the *Brown* decision. Across the state, segregationist organizers and vigilantes put to extensive use the tools of propaganda, economic pressure, intimidation, and violence against civil rights activists and virtually anyone, black or white, who favored compliance with the Supreme Court's ruling. In Clarendon County, black petitioners in the *Briggs* case faced a new round of reprisals, including denial of credit, firing from jobs, and threats of physical violence; Harry Briggs, the Navy veteran whose name headed the list, and J. A. DeLaine, the minister who had organized the campaign, both fled the state. In black-majority Orangeburg County, when black parents petitioned the local school board for an immediate end to segregation in accordance with *Brown*, the local Citizens' Council turned white economic power against the petitioners and the NAACP branch, and state law enforcement investigated the "subversive activities" of State College students and faculty members.<sup>813</sup>

Dissent was even silenced in the state's white universities and press. Jack O'Dowd, editor of the *Florence Morning News*, while no racial liberal, advised his readers to accept *Brown* as the law of the land. After suffering threats and attempts to force his car off the road, he conceded defeat and moved to Chicago. In Columbia, Chester Travelstead, dean of the School of Education at the University of South Carolina, wrote to newly-elected governor George Bell Timmerman, already known as the most conservative member of the three-judge

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<sup>813</sup> For an account of black protest and white opposition in Orangeburg during the 1950s, see John W. White, "The White Citizens' Councils of Orangeburg County, South Carolina," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Moore and Burton, 261-73.

panel that had heard *Briggs v. Elliott*, criticizing him for opposing the Supreme Court's ruling. Timmerman quickly made sure that Travelstead lost his job.<sup>814</sup>

As they had during and after each of the world wars, South Carolina's senior politicians set the tone and encouraged their constituents to act in the wake of the *Brown* decision. Now in the U.S. Senate, Strom Thurmond wrote the first draft of the "Southern Manifesto," a document signed by a majority of southern Congressional delegations and calling for "massive resistance" to the Supreme Court's authority, while his political base at home and in other Deep South states became the foundation of the Citizens' Councils and the regional anti-Communist movement. South Carolina's senior senator, former governor Olin D. Johnston, worked closely with James Eastland of Mississippi, one of the Senate's most vituperative segregationists and chairman of its Internal Security Subcommittee, which investigated alleged Communist activities in the United States.<sup>815</sup> In the House of Representatives, W. J. B. Dorn of South Carolina's Second District warned his colleagues about a Kremlin plot to divide America over race and thereby bring about a Communist revolution.<sup>816</sup>

Within the state, the executive and legislative branches of government and their allies worked closely together in a campaign to dismantle the NAACP. In 1956, during a legislative session that one white journalist dubbed the "Segregation Session," the General Assembly passed a resolution requesting that the U.S. Justice Department investigate the state NAACP as a "subversive organization" that pursued an agenda "contrary to the

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<sup>814</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 527.

<sup>815</sup> Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 67.

<sup>816</sup> Dorn to P. M. Archibald, 28 October 1957, William Jennings Bryan Dorn Papers, SCL, quoted in Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 71.

principles upon which the economic and social life of our state rests” and posed a “danger to our way of life.” It also passed a law barring members of the organization from employment in local, county, or state government. The next year, Governor Timmerman and Attorney General T.C. Callison supported the firing of members of the Allen University and Benedict College faculties for alleged Communist ties, and in 1958, the General Assembly created a Committee to Investigate Communist Activities.<sup>817</sup> Altogether, the measures chilled any activist spirit among black public school teachers and the faculty and staff of the state’s public and private black colleges, hitherto among the NAACP’s strongest supporters. At the same time, informal tactics targeted the organization’s leaders. In 1957, the energetic and capable Modjeska Simkins was ousted from her role as secretary of the state conference after the *Charleston News and Courier* smeared her for alleged Communist sympathies. The next year James Hinton, having suffered an attack on his house and behind-the-scenes pressure from powerful whites, resigned as conference president.<sup>818</sup> The measures had their intended effect. Between 1955 and 1957 the number of branches in the state fell from eighty-four to thirty-one, and membership from more than 8,000 to just over 2,000.<sup>819</sup> At a time when the organization would otherwise have been capitalizing on its legal victories to mobilize a broader attack on segregation and disfranchisement, it was instead forced to contract and grew largely silent.

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<sup>817</sup> Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare*, 113-4.

<sup>818</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 210-1.

<sup>819</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

## The World Crusade

In South Carolina, with the civil rights movement in retreat and the white masses mobilized to oppose any attempt at integration, the state's Bahá'ís sought simply to hold their ground. From a global perspective, however, already by October 1952, when the Holy Year commemorating the centenary of the first stirrings of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation began, the results of the second Seven Year Plan had convinced Shoghi Effendi to immediately begin the next stage in the growth of the Bahá'í Faith. Instead of the projected third Seven Year Plan set to start in 1956 after a "brief respite of three years," the world's twelve National Spiritual Assemblies would jointly prosecute a Ten Year Plan starting with the conferences already scheduled for 1953 in Kampala, Chicago, Stockholm, and New Delhi.<sup>820</sup>

In a cable at the start of the Holy Year, Shoghi Effendi announced the launching of a "fate-laden, soul-stirring, decade-long, world-embracing Spiritual Crusade" that aimed at the "immediate extension of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual dominion as well as the eventual establishment of the structure of His administrative order in all remaining Sovereign States, Principal Dependencies ... scattered over the surface of the entire planet." He called the Bahá'ís around the world essentially to leap over what otherwise might have been several stages of the religion's development, "to achieve in a single decade feats eclipsing in totality the achievements which in the course of the eleven preceding decades illuminated the annals of Bahá'í pioneering."<sup>821</sup>

The specific goals of the ten-year endeavor fell into four broad categories: "development of the institutions at the World Center of the Faith in the Holy Land;" consolidation of the twelve territories with National Spiritual Assemblies, "destined to serve

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<sup>820</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, 88.

<sup>821</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages, 1950-1957*, 40.

as administrative bases for the operations of the twelve National Plans;” consolidation of all the other countries and territories where Bahá’ís resided; and “the opening of the remaining chief virgin territories on the planet” through the settlement of pioneers. The Plan’s culmination would come at Ridván 1963, the centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration of his prophetic mission to the followers of the Báb in Baghdad. Two consecutive events would mark the occasion. First, the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies then in existence would constitute an International Convention at the World Center in Haifa and elect the first Universal House of Justice. Shortly thereafter, before the end of the Ridván Festival, the newly-elected members of that body and believers from around the world would gather in Baghdad for a World Congress to celebrate the completion of the Ten Year Plan and the establishment of the crowning unit of the faith’s Administrative Order.

The new Plan, which Shoghi Effendi acknowledged was “at once arduous, audacious, challenging, unprecedented in scope and character,” staggered the imagination of the Bahá’ís. Some 250 territories around the world would require pioneers. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies would be more than quadrupled with the formation of 48 new national or regional bodies, and national headquarters, publishing trusts, sites for future temples, and other properties would have to be acquired. Bahá’í literature would have to be translated and published in an additional 91 languages. Two new houses of worship would be built, one in Tehran, Iran, and the other in Frankfurt, Germany, and at the World Center, major projects would include improvements to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and construction of the International Bahá’í Archives, the first of a series of administrative buildings Shoghi Effendi envisioned on the side of Mount Carmel.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 41-3.

The lion's share of the work went to the Bahá'ís of the United States, the "envied custodians" of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan.<sup>823</sup> In his message to the National Convention in 1953—part of more than a week of activities associated with the Intercontinental Conference and the dedication of the Wilmette temple for public worship—Shoghi Effendi assigned the community a series of twenty-four tasks. In the international arena, they were asked to open or consolidate thirteen territories in Africa, fourteen in Asia, eighteen in Europe, and seven in the Americas through the settlement of pioneers; assist or supervise the establishment of thirty-six new National Spiritual Assemblies; insure the legal incorporation of fourteen of the new bodies; assist with the acquisition of all their national headquarters and of land for future temples in Stockholm, Rome, Panama City, and Johannesburg; and translate Bahá'í literature into twenty minority languages of Europe and the Americas. Within the United States, the goals were less exotic, perhaps, but no less daunting: complete the landscaping around the temple; establish a publishing trust; initiate the community's first systematic teaching among Native Americans; continue and expand the public relations campaign through the press and radio; and nearly double the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies from 171 to 300.<sup>824</sup>

For some thirty Bahá'ís in South Carolina, the goals must have seemed daunting indeed. They had built a community that represented much of the state's diversity and established a basic administrative structure in the state, but the gains so far had required herculean efforts and been difficult to sustain. Often during the previous two plans, the international goals of the faith had even seemed to compromise local development as capable pioneers were diverted elsewhere. Now the outlook was even dimmer, since unlike the last two plans, which had occurred amidst a general expansion of civil rights activism in South

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<sup>823</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 120.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-9.

Carolina, the new plan would have to be carried out in the midst of a statewide conservative backlash against the secular movement that most fully embodied the faith's central teachings.

### **The Crusade, the Cold War, and Race in America**

As he had since the early years of his ministry, early in the Ten Year Plan Shoghi Effendi attempted to explain both contemporary social and political trends and the immediate tasks of the American Bahá'í community in the light of his vision for the long-term development of human society. In particular, he set the black freedom struggle and the work of the Plan in the context of a global shift in the balance of power between subject peoples and their oppressors. As it tore down more barriers to the unification of humanity, this shift, he predicted, would create unprecedented opportunities for the growth of the faith within the United States and around the world.

The Ten Year Plan unfolded during a period of deepening crisis for the United States abroad and at home. As the Plan began, the Korean War was drawing to a close and the anti-Communist campaign of Joseph McCarthy in the U.S. Senate was at its height. The decade following the armistice in Korea was the darkest in the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union. The phenomena of political assassinations, overt and covert military interventions, and proxy warfare between allies of the rival superpowers became commonplace on all continents, evidenced by U.S.-sponsored coups in Iran and Guatemala in 1953, the Suez Crisis and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and the deepening conflict in Vietnam after the failure of the 1954 Geneva Accords. The nuclear arms race quickened as new technologies put the possibility of unprecedented destruction within the grasp of the superpowers and several of their allies. Following the Soviets' launching of *Sputnik*, the world's first artificial



satellite, in 1957, the arms race moved into space. The world probably came closest to nuclear annihilation towards the end of the Plan when, in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union faced off over the positioning of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba.

Within the United States, a “culture of conformity” took hold of the postwar generation. Bolstered by the mass media—including the new phenomenon of television—and by federal government policy, the trend was characterized by unprecedented prosperity and an explosion of consumer goods; an increasing suburbanization of the population; a resurgence of religious practice in general and of evangelical Protestantism in particular; and political conservatism. At the same time, social commentators and political leaders pointed to an increase in juvenile delinquency and the rise of iconoclastic movements in art, literature, and music—epitomized by the raging of the Beat poets and the unabashed sexuality of rock and roll—as evidence that the culture of conformity was leaving many Americans, particularly the young, profoundly discontented. Most significantly, an increasingly broad-based and assertive civil rights movement and the widespread opposition and violence that it provoked mocked postwar perceptions of prosperity and stability and, in the context of the Cold War, embarrassed the federal government’s efforts to secure the allegiance of black and brown peoples in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

For Shoghi Effendi, such conditions lent fresh urgency to the prosecution of the Ten Year Plan. He sent a special messenger to the Plan’s inaugural conference in the United States to remind the American community of the continuing, critical importance of broadening and strengthening their interracial fellowship. In May 1953, when Dorothy Baker, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly and Hand of the Cause of God, addressed the Intercontinental Conference in Chicago, she was fresh from a pilgrimage to the

World Center and from participation in the first of the four conferences in Uganda. Before some 2300 believers from across North and South America, Baker recounted the emphatic instructions she had received from Shoghi Effendi during her pilgrimage:

He said one driving thing over and over—that if we did not meet the challenging requirement of raising to a vast number the believers of the Negro race, disasters would result. And second, that it was now time for us to arise and teach the Indians of this country. In fact he went so far as to say on two occasions that this dual task is the most important teaching work on American shores today.”<sup>825</sup>

Urging those in attendance to commit to teaching the faith in African American and Native American communities at home, Baker recalled Shoghi Effendi’s colorful comments about ‘Alí Nakhjavání and Philip Hainsworth, young pioneers to Uganda from Iran and Great Britain, respectively, who had been instrumental in establishing the faith in the villages around Kampala:

[T]hey lived with the Teso people; they ate the food of the Teso people; they slept on straw mats or leaves, or whatever it is that you sleep on among the Teso people. The rain falls on your head and salamanders drop in your tea, if there is tea. And they stayed! And they did not say, “Conditions do not warrant it because these people eat herbs and things that would just kill us.” They stayed! Is there an ‘Alí Nakhjavání, then, in America? At the present, no. I mean, up to the present. Is there a Philip Hainsworth? Up to the present, no.”<sup>826</sup>

The Plan, Baker said, was occurring at a moment of profound change at home and abroad, which the Bahá’ís must understand and welcome:

Now the dark-skinned people, he said, would have an upsurge that is both spiritual and social. The spiritual upsurge will rapidly bring them great gifts because this is an act of God and it was so intended. And all the world’s prejudiced forces will not hold it back one hair’s breadth. The Bahá’ís will glorify it and understand it. The social repercussions of race suppressions around the world will increase at the same time, and frightened, the world’s forces will see that the dark skinned peoples are really

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<sup>825</sup> Dorothy Baker, address recorded at All-America Conference, Chicago, 3-6 May 1953, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 292.

<sup>826</sup> Dorothy Baker, address at All-America Conference, quoted in Dorothy Freeman Gilstrap, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1999), 410-1.

rising to the top—a cream that has latent gifts only to be brought out by Divine bounties. Where do the Bahá'ís stand in this? Again and again he pointed out that the Bahá'ís must be in the vanguard of finding them and giving them the base. For the social repercussions will at times become dreadful, if we do not, and we shall be judged by God.

I thought that I was rather a fanatic on the race question, at least a strong liberal, but I sat judged by my Guardian, and I knew it. My sights were lifted immeasurably and I saw the vistas of these social repercussions, coming because of our spiritual negligence through the years, and I saw the Indian tribes dotted around this continent unredeemed, waiting—waiting for an 'Alí Nakhjavání. Are the African friends going to have to come and awaken us for the dark skinned races in our midst?

...

God grant that we may raise up our heroes who will dedicate their lives to the Indians, to the great dark skinned races, to the Eskimos, to the Negro peoples so brilliant, so promising in our national life. Which one will be our 'Alí Nakhjavání?<sup>827</sup>

In July 1953, only three months after the inauguration of the Plan, Shoghi Effendi wrote a lengthy letter to the American believers in which he elaborated on the relationship between the “upsurge” to which Baker had referred and the worldwide development of the Bahá'í Faith. The Plan, he predicted, must “awaken the select and gather the spiritually hungry amongst the peoples of the world;” “create an awareness” of the religion among the cultural, intellectual, and political elites of every country; carry it “to regions so remote, so backward, so inhospitable that neither the light of Christianity or Islam has, after the revolution of centuries, as yet penetrated;” and complete the “structural basis” of its global Administrative Order, which would eventually “assemble beneath its sheltering shadow peoples of every race, tongue, creed, color and nation.”<sup>828</sup> In Shoghi Effendi's vision, the Plan opened the way for new stages in the faith's worldwide development extending decades or centuries into the future. Delineating those stages, he wrote that the enlistment of “fresh recruits” around the globe in the “slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts”

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<sup>827</sup> Dorothy Baker, address at All-America Conference, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 292-3, and Gilstrap, *From Copper to Gold*, 411.

<sup>828</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 114.

would presage a period of rapid growth to which Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had both referred in their writings: “the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world.”<sup>829</sup> The phenomenon of entry by troops, in turn, would be a “prelude” to more momentous world events, “possibly catastrophic in nature,” that would bring “a mass conversion of these same nations and races” to the Bahá'í Faith—a phenomenon of world-historical proportions that would “suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>830</sup>

As in previous plans, Shoghi Effendi connected the teaching efforts of the American Bahá'ís to their own spiritual welfare and to the immediate destiny of their country. In July 1954, barely a year into the Ten Year Plan and just two months after the Supreme Court's announcement of the *Brown* decision, Shoghi Effendi addressed another major letter, entitled “American Bahá'ís in the Time of World Peril,” to the believers in the United States. Echoing themes he had raised since the early years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi insisted that the United States was passing through a serious moral, spiritual, and political crisis, “which to a superficial observer [was] liable to be dangerously underestimated.”<sup>831</sup>

The root of the crisis, he asserted, was “crass materialism.” Implicitly pointing out the hollowness of the culture of conformity, Shoghi Effendi described materialism as an approach to life that placed “excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being,

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<sup>829</sup> Ibid., 117. For earlier references, see Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons*, 1.270 and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 3 (New York: Baha'i Publishing Committee, 1916), 681. The phrase is borrowed from “The Help,” the short final sura of the Qur'án: “In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful! When the Help of God and the victory arrive, and thou seest men entering the religion of God by troops; then utter the praise of thy Lord, implore His pardon; for He loveth to turn in mercy.” Qur'án, trans. J. M. Rodwell, 110:1-3.

<sup>830</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 117.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid., 124.

forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society.”<sup>832</sup> The phenomenon, he noted, was not uniquely American. Without referring directly to the country’s visceral anti-Communism, he wrote that materialism was an “evil” which “all those within the capitalist system” shared with their “sworn enemies” in the Communist countries, and which was rapidly infecting the rest of the world like a cancer in the wake of the Second World War.<sup>833</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, he reminded his readers, had clearly denounced materialism in his writings and predicted its consequences, comparing it to a “devouring flame” that would precipitate “dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men.” Indeed, the most recent war had been only the latest stage in the “global havoc” which a wayward humanity seemed destined to suffer.<sup>834</sup> Shoghi Effendi pointed to the nuclear arms race, the burden of continued military spending, and the victory of the Communists in the Chinese civil war as factors that had “contributed ... to the deterioration of a situation which, if not remedied, is bound to involve the American nation in a catastrophe of undreamed-of dimensions and of untold consequences ....”<sup>835</sup>

In the context of the Cold War, Shoghi Effendi argued that persistent racial problems posed a threat to the security and integrity of the nation. Unlike southern ideologues, however, who blamed black activists and Communist infiltrators for upsetting the country’s race relations, Shoghi Effendi placed the onus of change squarely on the shoulders of the masses of white Americans and their government. In his view, the twin keys to averting even

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<sup>832</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid., 125-6.

more severe racial violence—which the Soviet Union would surely seek to exploit—were a fundamental shift in the consciousness of white America accompanied by decisive structural change. The “governed and governors alike” had neglected the “supreme, the inescapable and urgent duty” of “remedying, while there is yet time, through a revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen, a situation which, if allowed to drift, will, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cause the streets of American cities to run with blood ....”<sup>836</sup>

The difficulties that threatened the United States from inside and out, including the challenge of establishing racial justice, were to Shoghi Effendi part of the divine plan for the unification of the human race. By dealing successfully with such tests, the country would “find itself purged of its anachronistic conceptions, and prepared to play a preponderating role, as foretold by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the hoisting of the standard of the Lesser Peace, in the unification of mankind, and in the establishment of a world federal government on this planet.” These “fiery tribulations” would not only “firmly weld the American nation to its sister nations in both hemispheres,” but would cleanse it of the “accumulated dross which ingrained racial prejudice, rampant materialism, widespread ungodliness and moral laxity have combined, in the course of successive generations, to produce ....”<sup>837</sup>

The implications for the prosecution of the Ten Year Plan were serious. The American Bahá’í movement could not expect, Shoghi Effendi said, “at this critical juncture in the fortunes of a struggling, perilously situated, spiritually moribund nation, to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from

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<sup>836</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid., 126-7.

the evils that stain its character.”<sup>838</sup> The spiritual “primacy” with which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had invested the American community by the Tablets of the Divine Plan could “lose its vital power and driving force” through the “neglect and apathy” of the believers.<sup>839</sup> In contrast to the sad state of the nation of which they formed a part, the American Bahá’ís must remain focused, consecrate themselves to “every single objective” of the Plan, and make sacrifices for its completion.<sup>840</sup>

In the first year of the Plan, the formidable international goals assigned to the American community had elicited an immediate and overwhelming response. One hundred fifty-seven believers had left the country as pioneers, including five members of the National Spiritual Assembly who had resigned their posts and been replaced in a by-election. By the end of the second year, another 125 would settle abroad.<sup>841</sup> However, as in the second Seven Year Plan, the multiplication of Local Spiritual Assemblies within the United States was receiving less attention. Shoghi Effendi advised that the international pioneering effort must be “increased, doubled, nay trebled” at home, “particularly in the goal cities, where hitherto the work has stagnated ....” Noting the concentration of believers in the leading urban centers, “where, owing to the tempo and the distractions of city life, the progress of the Faith has been retarded,” he called for the New York and Chicago communities to lead a “veritable exodus” to the goal cities. “Indeed,” he added emphatically, “so grave are the exigencies of the present hour, and so critical the political position of the country, that were a bare fifteen

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<sup>838</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid.

<sup>841</sup> “International Survey of Current Bahá’í Activities,” in *The Bahá’í World: An International Record*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, comp. Universal House of Justice (Haifa, Israel: Universal House of Justice, 1970), 270.

adult Bahá'ís to be left in each of these cities, over which unsuspected dangers are hanging, it would still be regarded as adequate” to maintain their Local Spiritual Assemblies—among the oldest and strongest in the country.<sup>842</sup>

The response of the American Bahá'ís to Shoghi Effendi's appeal was slow. Two years later, in a letter of July 1956, he again called them to the “revitalization” of their own national community and the “broadening and consolidation of its foundations.” He wrote that a “far greater proportion of the avowed supporters of the Faith” must arise to teach an “infinitely greater number” of new believers, increase the number of new localities through an unprecedented flow of home-front pioneers, and accelerate the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies “while safeguarding those already in existence.”<sup>843</sup> Barely a year later, he repeated his call that the American movement be “spiritually reinvigorated, administratively expanded, and materially replenished.” “The flame of devotion,” he wrote, “... must, in whatever way possible, be fanned and continually fed throughout the entire area of the Union, in every state from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboards, in every locality where Bahá'ís reside, in every heart throbbing with the love of Bahá'u'lláh.” Repeating the message of his previous letters and of Dorothy Baker's address at the outset of the Plan, he wrote that the same spirit that had sent so many pioneers around the world must be “recaptured” at home in order to combat the “militant racialism, political corruption, unbridled capitalism, wide-spread lawlessness and gross immorality” that were proliferating “with ominous swiftness” throughout their country.<sup>844</sup>

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<sup>842</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, 128.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-8.

<sup>844</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.



The lukewarm response of the community to the home-front goals and the rising tide of white opposition to the *Brown* decision prompted Shoghi Effendi to scrap the earlier national policy on teaching in the South. A spate of letters in 1957 directed the Bahá'ís to refocus their attention on teaching African Americans, particularly in the South. Shoghi Effendi implied that while the previous policy that permitted teaching blacks and whites separately had been just in principle, the complacency of white Bahá'ís had rendered it ineffectual, evidenced by the fact that too few people of either race had become believers:

The attitude toward teaching the Faith in the southern states of the United States must be entirely changed. For years, in the hope of attracting the white people, in order to “go easy” with them and not offend their sensibilities, a compromise has been made in the teaching work throughout the South. The results have been practically nil. The white people have not responded, worth mentioning, to the Faith, and the colored people have been hurt and also have not responded.<sup>845</sup>

If most southern whites, embracing militant racial conservatism, proved unresponsive to the Bahá'í message, the believers should focus instead on teaching blacks:

He feels it is time that the Bahá'ís stopped worrying entirely about the white element in a community, and that they should concentrate on showing the negro element that this is a Faith which produces full equality and which loves and wants minorities.<sup>846</sup>

In the face of white retrenchment, Shoghi Effendi renewed his call to practice complete social equality, with all its possible ramifications:

The [white] Bahá'ís should welcome the Negroes to their homes, make every effort to teach them, associate with them, even marry them if they want to. We must remember that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself united in Bahá'í marriage a colored and a white believer. He could do no more.<sup>847</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary) to Bahá'í Inter-Racial Teaching Committee, Dorothy Frey, chairman, 27 May 1957, Letters of Shoghi Effendi, NBA, quoted in Morrison, *To Move the World*, 294.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid.

The encouragement of interracial marriage stood in stark contrast to the mood of white America. Interracial marriage remained illegal in twenty-four of the forty-eight states, and since the *Brown* decision, the Citizens' Councils and their allies had consistently equated school desegregation with interracial sex. The arguments of white parents, clergymen, Citizens' Councils, and politicians across the South mixed contemporary anti-Communism with traditional regional rhetoric involving defense of Protestant orthodoxy, defiance of unjust federal government authority, and protection of the sexual purity of white girls from black predators. In the words of one Citizens' Council report, "the malignant powers of mongrelization, communism, and atheism" were conspiring to destroy the United States through school desegregation. "Racial intermarriage," it warned, "has already begun in the North and unless stopped will spread to the South."<sup>848</sup> In September 1957, when South Carolina Gov. George Bell Timmerman learned that President Eisenhower was preparing to send soldiers of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to protect nine black students who had enrolled in Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, he told a local reporter that if the President was directing parents "to mix the children of Arkansas against their will, he is attempting to set himself up as a dictator and this action may be taken as further evidence of an effort to Communize America."<sup>849</sup>

Shoghi Effendi took the Little Rock crisis as a reason for more boldness. In one letter, published in the November 1957 issue of *Bahá'í News*, Shoghi Effendi urged the American Bahá'ís, particularly in the South, not to be surpassed by other organizations:

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<sup>848</sup> Robert Patterson, annual report to the Mississippi Association of Citizens' Councils, 1956, quoted in Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 73.

<sup>849</sup> *The State*, 24 September 1957, quoted in Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., *A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 205.

They should be courageous in their racial stand, particularly as so many non-Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'í organizations are showing marked courage at this time, when the decisions of the Supreme Court are being so hotly contested in the South. The friends must remember that the cardinal principle of their Faith is the Oneness of Mankind. This places an obligation on them far surpassing the obligation which Christian charity and brotherly love places upon the Christians. They should demonstrate this spirit of oneness constantly and courageously in the South.<sup>850</sup>

He expected the Bahá'ís to put their faith's "cardinal principle" into practice not only by supporting the necessary structural changes in society, but by practicing social equality in their own community and personal relations and focusing their teaching efforts on African Americans. He acknowledged that such a course might well result in the emergence of local Bahá'í communities that were mostly or completely black, an outcome he explicitly welcomed. He wrote that the faith should be representative of the local population: "In a great many places in the South, the majority of the population is still Negro. This should be reflected in the Bahá'í Community, fearlessly."<sup>851</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's encouragement of all-black local communities added another challenge for a movement that was already having trouble meeting its domestic expansion goals, implicitly directing the settlement of more pioneers in the towns and farms of the southern Black Belt, where opportunities for outsiders were most limited and Citizens' Councils were most powerful. In South Carolina, where the black population had fallen under fifty percent during the decade of the 1920s, African Americans remained the majority in twenty-one of the state's forty-six counties, most of them rural areas in the Midlands and the Coastal Plain. These did not include the four urban counties—Aiken, Charleston,

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<sup>850</sup> Shoghi Effendi (through his secretary), *Bahá'í News*, no. 321 (November 1957), insert, quoted in Bonnie J. Taylor, ed., *The Pupil of the Eye: African Americans in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra Publications, 1998), 158.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*

Greenville, and Richland—where most Bahá’í activity had been concentrated for the last forty years.<sup>852</sup> To apply Shoghi Effendi’s advice in South Carolina would mean a level of systematic exertion and focused redistribution of the Bahá’í population not unlike the first efforts to establish footholds across the region during the previous two plans—with perhaps a greater degree of cultural adjustment as believers from urban areas shifted their attention to the world of the countryside.

### **Revitalization in Greenville**

In South Carolina, the “revitalization” of the American home front that Shoghi Effendi had called for began during the second half of the Ten Year Plan, with the arrival of an energetic new group of pioneers and traveling teachers, a renewal of growth in some of the existing communities and the establishment of new ones, and the emergence of more native South Carolinians as capable teachers and administrators of the faith. In Greenville, the change began in 1956, when Richard and Joy Benson, a young white couple from Michigan, moved to town. Joy Benson was from a Bahá’í family. Her father, born a Muslim in Iran, embraced the faith after immigrating to the United States, along with her mother, a white American. She had recently graduated from medical school at the University of Michigan, and her husband, of Christian background and investigating the Bahá’í Faith, had just graduated from law school there. Joy had attended the Intercontinental Conference in Chicago in 1953 and been moved by Dorothy Baker’s appeal for Bahá’ís to dedicate themselves to teaching among African Americans, and when the time came to apply for her medical residency, she looked at programs in South Carolina. Richard already had some experience in the state,

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<sup>852</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 526.

having served in the Navy in Charleston. They visited with Bahá'ís in Greenville, Columbia, Charleston, and North Augusta before she decided to apply at Greenville General Hospital.<sup>853</sup>

In 1956, when the Bensons moved to Greenville, only a few Bahá'ís—Roy and Bernice Williams, white pioneers Grace von der Heydt and Martha Fettig, Carolyn Glazener, and Virginia Ford, who had recently returned from her husband's military service overseas—remained in the city. Carolyn Glazener was estranged from the community, and Roy and Bernice Williams moved to neighboring Anderson County shortly after the Bensons arrived. Early in 1957, Richard Benson became a Bahá'í, making a functional group of five. Additional pioneers came to Greenville around the same time. Pearl Easterbrook and Zoe Meyer, retired schoolteachers from Illinois who were teaching in the South, arrived. Cleo Linsday, a white Bahá'í from Atlanta who, with her husband, had taken a stand for integration of the community in the 1940s, and Thelma Allison, a black Atlanta Bahá'í who had been taught the faith by Louis Gregory in Nashville, came as well. With nine believers residing in the city, the Local Spiritual Assembly was reestablished at Ridván.<sup>854</sup> One of the pioneers befriended a local white woman, Dorothy Thomas Buchanan, and her mother, Dorothy L. Thomas, who both became Bahá'ís. Joy Benson's parents, John and Junie Faily, came to Greenville to live with them.<sup>855</sup> And Thelma Allison's grown son, Bill, joined his mother there. But the departure of several pioneers meant that it was often a struggle to keep nine people to maintain the Local Assembly. Virginia Ford recalled that “every year from January to March there would be a search for believers to hold the LSA.”<sup>856</sup>

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<sup>853</sup> Joy F. Benson, interview by author, Columbia, SC, 19 October 2004.

<sup>854</sup> Kenneally, “Fifty Years,” 7-8.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

From virtually the moment they arrived in Greenville, Richard and Joy Benson faced ostracism and intimidation for their unorthodox racial and religious views. Their first confrontation with the city's white elite came when Richard interviewed at the prestigious Haynsworth law firm, where Clement Furman Haynsworth, Jr., whose great-grandfather had founded Furman University, was senior partner. The interview went well and Richard was given an appointment time to return and sign a contract. Before leaving, however, he asked to use the office telephone to call his wife at the home where the couple was staying. The receptionist said she would dial and asked for the name. When he replied that they were staying with Grace von der Heydt, it became apparent that everyone in the office knew the Bensons' host as a Bahá'í and a proponent of racial equality. When Richard returned to sign his contract, he waited for two hours while no one in the office spoke to him. He left only to find that every law firm he applied to in town turned him down. The next year, President Eisenhower appointed Haynsworth to the federal bench.<sup>857</sup>

Richard Benson, on the other hand, struggled to practice law on his own in a city where he had been blacklisted; to make ends meet he worked part-time in real estate. With a down payment from Joy's parents, the couple bought a large house on Overbrook Circle in a fashionable neighborhood near downtown. While the city council had already acknowledged the Bahá'ís' right to hold interracial meetings, that fact did not stop individual whites and the

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<sup>857</sup> In 1957, Clement F. Haynsworth, Jr. (1912-1989), a Democrat who had supported Eisenhower in 1956, was appointed to the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, where he served for 32 years. In 1969, President Nixon nominated Haynsworth to the U.S. Supreme Court. The nomination was defeated by a coalition of labor and civil rights groups who pointed to his history of rulings unfavorable to their interests. "Judge Clement Haynsworth," *Time*, 29 August 1969, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901281,00.html>; Alfonso A. Narvaez, "Clement Haynsworth Dies at 77; Lost Struggle for High Court Seat," *New York Times*, 23 November 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/23/obituaries/clement-haynsworth-dies-at-77-lost-struggle-for-high-court-seat.html?pagewanted=1>. In 2009, Haynsworth's firm, Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd, employed four African American attorneys out of a total of approximately 140. "Diversity," Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd website, <http://www.hsblawfirm.com/profile.php?AboutusID=8>.

city's police force from targeting the community. As soon as they began hosting integrated Bahá'í gatherings, the Bensons began to receive threatening phone calls. Rumors circulated among their neighbors that Joy Benson was an Indian princess, that the NAACP had bought their house for them, and that the couple was running a gambling ring. Neighbors yelled vulgar remarks at the Bensons and their black guests. The children of one family chased the Benson children out of their yard. Another neighbor was P. Bradley Murrah, an attorney and state senator who had defended his cousin in the Willie Earle lynching trial in 1947. Murrah organized a petition to the General Assembly alleging that the Bensons were Communists and illicit race-mixers.<sup>858</sup> The police frequently staked out the house during Bahá'í meetings, shining lights on the front door as visitors departed and recording license plate numbers of the cars outside, and more than once Richard Benson went to the police station to explain that the Bahá'ís were not Communists.<sup>859</sup>

While Richard Benson struggled to support a growing family in a hostile environment, his mother-in-law, Junie Faily, began making connections with black Greenvillians. She decided to attend a black church to get to know people, and one of the teenage girls she met began babysitting the Benson children from time to time. In 1960, the Bensons hosted a birthday party for her, attended by a few Bahá'ís and ten to fifteen black youth, students at Sterling High School. Before the party started, one of the guests, a white Bahá'í from Asheville, North Carolina, named William Tucker, gave a short talk about the faith.

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<sup>858</sup> Benson interview.

<sup>859</sup> Kenneally, "Fifty Years," 9.

Richard Abercrombie, one of the young people in attendance, was not impressed with the party or the talk. Mixing socially with white people was strange enough, but the thought that a southern white man had anything worthwhile to tell black people about religion was ridiculous. When a school friend invited him to a fireside a few months later, he decided not to attend. But the night of the meeting, when he was in the middle of a dress rehearsal for a school play, he felt a strong compulsion to go. He ran to where the meeting was being held, the home of the Shumates, another black family Junie Failey had befriended, nearby on Anderson Road. The speaker was Eulalia Barrow Bobo, an African-American woman from California and a sister of Joe Louis Barrow, the former world heavyweight boxing champion. Raised a Baptist in Mississippi and Detroit, she had become a Bahá'í in 1954 as a result of a mystical vision, and now she had come south to teach the faith among African Americans.<sup>860</sup> When Abercrombie arrived, Bobo had already begun her presentation on the Bahá'í concept of religious history—the progressive revelation of God's will to humanity by a succession of divine messengers including Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and, most recently, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Abercrombie was intrigued. When he asked questions about Biblical prophecies, Bobo's answers were unlike anything the pastor at his Baptist church had ever said. Abercrombie recalled: "I was dying to ask questions about things that had bothered me, like the return of Christ, His returning in the clouds, and the dead rising from the grave. I couldn't accept what I had previously been taught ...." While Bobo was speaking Abercrombie remembered that he had promised to return to the dress rehearsal. "I ran back to school," he recalled, "and found that everyone had left, including

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<sup>860</sup> Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, "Radiant Lights: African-American Women and the Advancement of the Bahá'í Faith in the U.S.," in *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America, 1898-2000*, ed. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Richard Thomas (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), 55-6.



the janitor. I turned around and ran all the way back to the Sumates' to have further discussion with Eulalia. She explained about the clouds of doubt and materialism and about the spiritually dead being born again." When he went home that night, he told his parents what he had heard about the Bahá'í Faith, and said he "knew it was the truth."<sup>861</sup>

Charles and Lillie Abercrombie, staunch Baptists, wanted to investigate the strange-sounding religion that seemed to be winning over their son. Lillie Abercrombie recalled: "Ricky kept going to Bahá'í meetings, would come home and tell us what had transpired, and we would be up until 3 a.m. talking about it. Ricky just changed when he heard about the Faith, so I had to find out just what it was." Ricky invited Joy Benson and Eulalia Bobo to the house. "I could talk to Joy," Lillie Abercrombie recalled. "She was a mild mannered, loving person, but Eulalia was too much for me. Charles couldn't talk to Joy; he would just chew her up. But he couldn't chew Eulalia up. She was too tough."<sup>862</sup>

Charles Abercrombie, a building contractor and church deacon, admitted, "Jacob wrestled with an angel all night long, [but] I wrestled with something worse than that, Eulalia Bobo."<sup>863</sup> After about three weeks of late-night discussions in which Bobo explained the claims of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh based on the Bible, Charles became a Bahá'í. Soon his family, as well, began to suffer for their association with the faith. Charles recalled: "We had an advertisement in the newspaper that a Bahá'í meeting would be held here. When that happened, the contracts I had to build houses were just cut off. People said that they had someone else who could do it cheaper." The Abercrombies took Charles's unemployment as

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<sup>861</sup> Kenneally, "Fifty Years," 9.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid.*

a chance to travel to teach the faith.<sup>864</sup> They visited a son in college in Tennessee and went from there to Detroit where Lillie's mother lived. They arranged for a fireside at her mother's home, but the local speaker they had called did not come. Charles recalled: "Two young Bahá'ís there said that they couldn't handle a crowd of that size, so I said to Lillie, 'We can handle it.'" They gave the presentation, and Lillie's mother, niece, and nephew became Bahá'ís. Within the year, most of the rest of the family, including all their children and two of Charles's brothers, had embraced the faith.<sup>865</sup> It was the first time in South Carolina that a whole extended family had become Bahá'ís.

Back in Greenville, Charles Abercrombie made income from a piece of farmland outside of town, and his contracts returned slowly. The local police monitored Bahá'í meetings at the Abercrombies' house on Rebecca Street in the working-class Nicholtown neighborhood. "The police kept close watch and harassed the youngsters," recalled Lillie Abercrombie. "They wanted to know what we were drinking and what we were selling. After about a year, things began to change for the better. Instead of harassing our young people, the police started protecting [them]. Ricky would talk to bus drivers and taxi drivers and give them literature. Ricky invited the officers to come into our meetings, but no one did." She added: "Of course we had both the whites and the blacks down on us. Because the blacks thought we were bringing trouble into their neighborhood, they didn't like us either."<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>865</sup> Abercrombie interview.

<sup>866</sup> Kenneally, "Fifty Years," 12.

Despite opposition from blacks and whites, the community continued to grow. Several more young African Americans, mostly school friends of the Abercrombie children who were attending a Bible study conducted by the Bahá'ís, became believers in 1961 and 1962. At least one new Bahá'í was from a mill village background. Luther B. Silver was a white Spartanburg County native who, along with thousands of other white rural folk, had abandoned farming in the 1920s and moved to Greenville in search of work in the textile industry.<sup>867</sup> His whole family had worked at Dunean Mill, one of the string of textile factories that encircled the city.<sup>868</sup> In September 1962, at the age of 73, he addressed a letter to the members of West Greenville Baptist Church to resign his membership. Since meeting Bahá'ís late the previous year, he wrote, he had been “very forcibly impressed with the teachings and practice of this Faith and decided to join in with them and help promote [it].”<sup>869</sup> Later, other members of Silver’s family became Bahá'ís.<sup>870</sup> Almost overnight, the decades-long problem of having enough believers to maintain the Local Spiritual Assembly seemed solved. In 1962, there were even enough outside the city limits to form the first Local Assembly of Greenville County.<sup>871</sup> By 1963, there were some thirty adult Bahá'ís in the Greenville area, and at least a dozen more youth and children.<sup>872</sup>

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<sup>867</sup> *Fourteenth Census, 1920; Fifteenth Census, 1930.*

<sup>868</sup> *Hill's Greenville (Greenville Co.) City Directory, 1945* (Richmond, VA: Hill Directory Co., 1945), 470.

<sup>869</sup> Luther B. Silver to the members of West Greenville Baptist Church, 26 Sep. 1962, private collection of Joy F. Benson; Kenneally, “Fifty Years,” 14-15.

<sup>870</sup> Feast of Ridvan report, 1966, private collection of Joy F. Benson.

<sup>871</sup> “Bahá'í Directory 1962-1963,” in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 1040.

<sup>872</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

## **Reentering the Pee Dee**

In late 1956, Jordan and Annette Young, brand-new Bahá'ís and recent graduates of Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa, consulted with their Bahá'í friends at the school about where they might move to open a practice. They learned that there were not many chiropractors in South Carolina, and not many Bahá'ís, either. In January 1957, they arrived with their three-month-old son in the town of Florence, the center of the Pee Dee region of eastern South Carolina. While believers had previously resided in Charleston and several smaller Lowcountry localities, their move began the first significant penetration of the Bahá'í Faith into the state's rural Black Belt.

Jordan Young came from a family of Polish and English Jews in Springfield, Massachusetts. Inquisitive about religion from a young age, by the time he shipped off for the Korean War, Young had concluded that there was one God, that there should be only one religion, and that all the clergy of the different faiths “should stop begging money off of poor people and get jobs.” He first heard of the Bahá'í Faith from a black fellow-soldier in a troop carrier on the Pacific Ocean, when both were slumped over the rails suffering from seasickness. After his return to the United States and his decision to enter Palmer, he seriously investigated the religion. Eventually he brought his girlfriend to an introductory meeting at the home of a Bahá'í faculty member. Annette McNeely, a white Thomaston, Georgia, native, was just finishing her studies at Palmer and had had few experiences to challenge her Baptist upbringing. That night, the speaker's first words to the assembled guests were, “The sound of my voice is Gabriel's trumpet to you.” She then proceeded to

use Bible verses to prove that Bahá'u'lláh was the return of Christ. She had McNeely's undivided attention.<sup>873</sup>

When the couple decided to marry, they knew that the only way to keep peace in his family would be for McNeely to convert to Judaism. When they were first married in a civil ceremony, she was Baptist and he was Jewish. By the time she had completed the conversion process and they could have a Jewish ceremony, he had become a Bahá'í. In October 1956, not long after the second ceremony, Annette McNeely Young became a Bahá'í. The following January, days after Jordan Young's graduation, they arrived in Florence.<sup>874</sup>

When the Youngs opened their office in March 1957, they hoped to defy racial segregation by having both black and white patients use the building's only entrance. Instead, only white patients came. To have any black patients at all, they had to cut another door in the back and install one of the ubiquitous symbols of Jim Crow, a "colored entrance in rear" sign. However, they maintained only one waiting room, and they used the two treatment rooms interchangeably for black and white patients. To make quality health care available to all, they decided to put a box on the wall with a sign that asked people to pay what their conscience dictated rather than charging a set fee. Their practice quickly went from dozens of patients to hundreds. One man charged black motel workers a dollar to drive them to Florence from Myrtle Beach, sixty miles away in Horry County, for treatment.<sup>875</sup> Jordan Young often used humor to diffuse tense situations. Once a flustered white patient

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<sup>873</sup> Jordan and Annette Young, interview by author, Easley, SC, 25 September 2003.

<sup>874</sup> Young interview.

<sup>875</sup> Ibid.

pulled him aside and whispered, “Dr. Young, there’s niggers in the waiting room!” Young replied, “You’re a Christian, aren’t you? Well, then you know there’s only one God, one salvation, one baptism, one heaven, one hell—and one waiting room!”<sup>876</sup>

The Youngs gradually began to invite some of their patients back to the office in the evenings to learn about the Bahá’í Faith. Jordan Young recalled that black patients were reluctant to visit their home for fear of negative consequences—not for themselves, they said, but for the Youngs. The office was a safer gathering-place, and there was a steady trickle of interested listeners over the next few years.<sup>877</sup> Several of the Youngs’ black patients from Florence and Myrtle Beach, as well as their white receptionist and her husband, became Bahá’ís. About the same time, another Bahá’í couple moved to Lake City in the southern part of Florence County. Lee Grimsley, a white Lake City native, and his wife, Genelle, from nearby Georgetown County, had also become Bahá’ís while he was a student at Palmer College.<sup>878</sup> In April 1962, there were enough Bahá’ís in the area to form the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Florence County. Of its nine members, six were white and three were black, and five were recent local converts.<sup>879</sup> The next year, there were ten adult Bahá’ís in the city of Florence, nine in Florence County, and four in Horry County. Of the twenty-

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<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid.

<sup>878</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>839</sup> “Bahá’í Directory 1962-1963,” in *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 1040; South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

three, seventeen were working-class African-Americans.<sup>880</sup> When the Local Spiritual Assembly of Florence was formed in 1964, all of its members were black.<sup>881</sup>

### **Seasonal Schools and the Frogmore Community**

During the Ten Year Plan, a new element of Bahá'í community life cemented the believers in South Carolina more closely with a regional movement. Beginning with the Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine, “summer schools” had emerged in various locations around the country as programs to deepen participants’ knowledge of the faith, to train them to be more confident and competent teachers, and provide an experience of Bahá'í community life and social interaction. Additional summer school properties were acquired in Michigan and California, but during the 1950s more regional summer schools began in rented facilities, usually lasting for a long weekend or a week. In some areas, winter schools were added. During the second year of the Plan, Bahá'ís in the southeastern states began long-weekend summer conferences at Blue Ridge Assembly at Black Mountain, North Carolina, fifteen miles east of Asheville. Founded in 1912 by lay Protestants as a religious education center for the YMCA, by the 1950s the facility was virtually unique in the Carolinas for allowing interracial groups to stay overnight. At the 1955 conference, more than one hundred Bahá'ís and friends attended, of whom at least thirteen were African American. Blacks and whites shared dormitory and dining spaces, study sessions and recreation—including the facility’s swimming pool—and relaxed in the rocking chairs on the grand front porch of Robert E. Lee Hall. Paul Haney, the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly and a recently appointed

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<sup>880</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>881</sup> Young interview.

Hand of the Cause of God, was the conference's special guest; other presentations covered such topics as youth in the faith, international pioneering, and teaching racial minorities.<sup>882</sup>

In 1960, the conference moved to Penn Community Center at Frogmore on St. Helena Island, one of the Sea Islands at the southern tip of South Carolina. The facility had an important place in the region's history. Founded as a school for former slaves in 1862, shortly after Union forces captured the islands around Beaufort, it was the oldest survivor of the "Port Royal Experiment," the mixture of government and private initiatives carried out on the occupied islands during the war that served as a precursor to Reconstruction. It had closed as a school in 1948 but reopened shortly thereafter as Penn Community Services Center, a social and economic development agency serving the Gullah people of the area. Located on an isolated island with a majority black population, Penn Center was farther from the gaze of the white public than Blue Ridge and an ideal facility for a racially diverse Bahá'í community. Also in 1960, increased demand led to the creation of an annual winter school during the Christmas holiday in addition to the summer school. With two gatherings of believers and seekers each year from 1960 to 1965, Penn Center became an important rallying point for the Bahá'í movement in the Southeast.<sup>883</sup>

Indeed, the change in venue coincided with other changes in the regional movement. Beginning around 1960, new members of the Area Teaching Committee of the South Atlantic States (the successor of the Regional Teaching Committee, serving Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina), including Richard and Joy Benson and Martha Fettig of Greenville and

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<sup>882</sup> Group photograph and "3<sup>rd</sup> Blue Ridge Conference" brochure, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>883</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, *Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States for the Year 1961-1962* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1962), 14.



Lee and Genelle Grimlsey of Lake City, brought new energy to the teaching work in the area.<sup>884</sup> Among the most visible results was an increase in the rate of growth. In the 1959-1960 administrative year, seven adults and youth became Bahá'ís in the entire three-state region.<sup>885</sup> The next year, the total was fifteen. In 1961-1962, the number tripled to 36 adults and nine youth.<sup>886</sup> There were more qualitative shifts, as well. The committee actively encouraged teaching among African Americans and youth, conducting a survey of local communities' outreach efforts to blacks and holding several youth conferences each year.<sup>887</sup> In Greenville and Columbia, Bahá'ís began weekly spiritual education classes that included their own children and children of friends and neighbors.<sup>888</sup> As more African Americans and young people became involved in Bahá'í activities, music took on added importance in the community's collective life. Several believers composed original words and music or set prayers and passages from the Bahá'í writings to music. According to the committee, the new emphasis on music "had a great effect on reaching many hearts and providing great inspiration in many meetings." They added: "In Georgia and South Carolina, there is scarcely a meeting now without the singing of truly appropriate songs."<sup>889</sup>

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<sup>884</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, *Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States for the Year 1959-1960* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1960), 14; National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1961-1962*, 13; National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, *Annual Bahá'í Reports Presented to the Bahá'ís of the United States for the Year 1962-1963* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1963), 13.

<sup>885</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1959-1960*, 15.

<sup>886</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1961-1962*, 14.

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-4; National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1962-1963*, 13.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*; Entzminger and Montgomery interview.

<sup>889</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1962-1963*, 14.

An unexpected result of the change in location to Penn Center was the emergence of a local community on St. Helena Island. After their first use of the facility, members of the Area Teaching Committee sensed a receptivity to the Bahá'í message on the island and adopted it as their own "extension teaching project."<sup>890</sup> During the 1961-1962 winter school session, they arranged for Eulalia Barrow Bobo to speak "from the pulpit of a local Baptist church on Emancipation Day, Jan. 1, 1962." The result was a "wide distribution of literature among the islanders and firesides in the home of one of the Frogmore residents." Among the four people to embrace the faith during the session was Viola Chapman, an islander and retired Dean of Women at Hampton Institute in Virginia, likely the first native Gullah-speaker to embrace the Bahá'í Faith in South Carolina since Alonzo Twine in 1910.<sup>891</sup> Reporting to the National Spiritual Assembly at Ridván 1962, the committee expected more declarations of faith in the area and went so far as to suggest that "the spark of mass enrollment in the South may well be ignited in this locality."<sup>892</sup> Several more islanders did become Bahá'ís during 1962, and a white North Augusta believer, Helen Glover Michaels, moved to Frogmore as a pioneer. At Ridván 1963, there were enough Bahá'ís on the island to form a Local Spiritual Assembly.<sup>893</sup> When a ninth islander became a Bahá'í, Michaels, who was terminally ill with cancer, stepped down from the body and returned to North

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<sup>890</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, *Annual Reports, 1961-1962*, 14.

<sup>891</sup> Ibid.

<sup>892</sup> Ibid.

<sup>893</sup> "Bahá'í Directory 1962-1963," in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 1040.

Augusta.<sup>894</sup> At Ridván 1964, Frogmore, like Florence, had a Local Assembly made up entirely of African Americans.<sup>895</sup>

### **Civil Rights Movement at High Tide**

In South Carolina and across the South, the ten years of the World Crusade witnessed, as Shoghi Effendi had anticipated, an unprecedented “upsurge” of people of African descent. Faced with public demonstrations, accelerating legal challenges, and pressure from the NAACP and other organizations from within the state—and, eventually, the glare of national press coverage and intervention by various agencies of the federal government—South Carolina’s white elite had first closed ranks to oppose black demands. But as challenges at home mounted and violence gripped other states, they negotiated to desegregate key institutions with a minimum of chaos and economic upset, all the while attempting to maintain a veneer of order and dignity. While it took until the end of the 1960s for the public school system, South Carolina’s largest segregated institution, to fall, by the middle of the decade the grassroots regional movement had achieved, in the form of landmark federal legislation, the formal dissolution of the Jim Crow regime.

While white reaction to the *Brown* decision in the mid-1950s temporarily quieted most black protest, it did not take long for activists to begin to regroup, rebuild their organizational structures, and consider new strategies. Between 1957 and 1959, James T. McCain, president of the Sumter County branch of the NAACP, organized nine chapters of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a Chicago-based organization inspired by

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<sup>894</sup> Area Teaching Committee Bulletin, no. 4 (June 1963), 2; South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

<sup>895</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris.

Mohandas K. Gandhi's program of nonviolent direct action, in South Carolina.<sup>896</sup> The first major direct-action protest in the state, a collaboration between CORE and the NAACP, whose local membership and leadership frequently overlapped, followed an early 1959 incident at the Greenville airport in which a black civilian employee of the Air Force was forcibly removed from the white waiting room. On Emancipation Day, January 1, 1960, after an unsuccessful lawsuit before U.S. District Court judge and former governor George Bell Timmerman, some 250 protesters marched from Springfield Baptist Church to the airport. Representatives of the NAACP and CORE presented a petition to the airport authority calling for an end to the "stigma, the inconvenience, and the stupidity of racial segregation." A little more than a year later, in February 1961, the plaintiff won his case on appeal, and the airport was desegregated by court order.<sup>897</sup> It was the beginning of a new phase of direct-action protest across the state.

A month after the march to the Greenville airport, black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, staged the first "sit-ins" to demand equal service at lunch counters in downtown stores. Less than two weeks later, CORE organized students from Friendship Junior College for a sit-in campaign in downtown Rock Hill, South Carolina. In March, students from State College organized sit-ins in the Kress Department Store in Orangeburg, prompting local police to attack with water hoses and tear gas and arrest four hundred students. The next day, the *New York Times* carried a front-page story of the violence in Orangeburg, including a picture of the wet and battered protesters held in a

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<sup>896</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 217-8.

<sup>897</sup> O'Neill, "Memory, History, and Desegregation," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Moore and Burton, 289.

makeshift outdoor stockade.<sup>898</sup> In the next few weeks, high school and college students staged similar demonstrations in Charleston, Columbia, Denmark, Greenville, Manning, Spartanburg, and Sumter.<sup>899</sup> In Greenville, students from Sterling High School staged “study-ins” at the city’s main library and “skate-ins” at a whites-only skating rink operated by the Parks and Recreation Department, resulting in several arrests and lawsuits to overturn segregation in the city.<sup>900</sup> By year’s end, some 70,000 black students—and a few white allies—had staged similar demonstrations in every southern state.<sup>901</sup>

In the spring of 1961, as the sit-in movement continued across the region, CORE’s national office planned a two week “Freedom Ride” designed to test local compliance with a 1960 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that mandated desegregation of interstate travel facilities. Two interracial groups of riders would leave Washington and arrive in New Orleans on May 17, the seventh anniversary of the *Brown* decision, passing through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi on their way.<sup>902</sup> The first violence of the ride came in the textile town of Rock Hill, South Carolina, already tense from an active sit-in movement, when a white mob attacked the group in the bus station.<sup>903</sup> In Winnsboro, a black-majority town with a powerful Citizens’ Council, two riders, one black and one white, were arrested at the bus station lunch counter and narrowly escaped lynching. At Sumter, the riders were

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<sup>898</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 536-7; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 217.

<sup>899</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 536; R. Scott Baker, “Schooling and White Supremacy: The African American Struggle for Educational Equality and Access in South Carolina, 1945-1970,” in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Moore and Burton, 309.

<sup>900</sup> O’Neill, “Memory, History, and Desegregation,” 289-90.

<sup>901</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 217.

<sup>902</sup> Raymond Arsenault, “Five Days in May: Freedom Riding in the Carolinas,” in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Moore and Burton, 201-4.

<sup>903</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-11.

joined by three Morris College students who had helped lead sit-ins since the formation of a campus chapter of CORE in March 1960.<sup>904</sup> After a short rest, the riders continued to Augusta, and the short South Carolina phase of the ride was over.

But the state's white politicians spoke of the Freedom Ride, coming in the midst of sit-ins across the state, as little less than an invasion. Strom Thurmond, the junior U.S. senator, denounced the riders as "outside agitators," part of a Communist conspiracy to subvert the "Southern way of life." His colleague Olin Johnston issued a public letter to his constituents asserting that "the Freedom Riders are part of the cold war propaganda program of the Communists," who should not be "allowed to prey upon the religious, racial and social differences of our people."<sup>905</sup> When one of the Morris College freedom riders returned to Sumter after the harrowing last leg of the ride, he was abducted by white men, taken to a clearing in the woods, stripped, and threatened with castration as the letters KKK were carved into his chest and legs. He asked the Justice Department to investigate, but Governor Ernest F. Hollings dismissed the allegations as "a hoax."<sup>906</sup>

Other white leaders sought a more pragmatic approach. On July 1, 1961, at the annual Watermelon Festival in Hampton, Charles Daniel, a Greenville construction magnate and member of State Development Board, made a speech entitled "South Carolina's Economic Challenge," popularly known as the "Watermelon Speech." After referring to strict new antidiscrimination measures in federal contracts with the state's textile companies, he said:

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<sup>904</sup> Ibid., 212-4.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid., 217-8.

The desegregation issue cannot continue to be hidden behind the door. This situation cannot be settled at the lunch counter and bus station levels. We must handle this ourselves, more realistically than heretofore; or it will be forced upon us in the harshest way. Either we act on our own terms, or we forfeit the right to act.<sup>907</sup>

In the words of one Greenville textile executive, the speech “gave the blessing of the establishment to desegregation.”<sup>908</sup> It signaled a new willingness on the part of the state’s business elite—probably motivated in no small part by economic self-interest—to work with black organizations and white elected officials to achieve desegregation with a minimum of disruption.

The next year, white business, civic, and religious leaders in Greenville and Columbia each formed an interracial committee to quietly negotiate an end to segregation in their respective business districts. But progress there and in other localities was slow. On June 5, 1963, the state conference of the NAACP published a list of nine demands for an end to discriminatory practices and announced that eight cities—Charleston, Columbia, Florence, Greenville, Orangeburg, Rock Hill, Spartanburg, and Sumter—would be targets of massive protests. Responses differed with local circumstances. In Florence, Greenville, Rock Hill, and Spartanburg, the threat of demonstrations was enough, and white and black leaders quickly reached desegregation agreements. Other cities, including Anderson, Beaufort, Greenwood, and Newberry, acted to end downtown segregation even though they had not been named. Demonstrations forced white leaders in Columbia to the table, but in Charleston, protests descended into violence before city officials responded. In Orangeburg,

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<sup>907</sup> O’Neill, “Memory, History, and Desegregation,” 290-1.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

black and white leaders had little contact with each other, and the situation remained tense and unresolved.<sup>909</sup>

The South Carolina demonstrations followed a similar campaign to desegregate downtown Birmingham, Alabama. On May 2 and 3, 1963, Birmingham police unloosed dogs and fire hoses on demonstrators, including hundreds of school children, as the nation watched on television. Spurred by the Birmingham violence, in June the Kennedy administration sent a major civil rights bill to Congress that would end segregation and discrimination in public facilities, education, employment, voting, and government agencies. In August, a quarter of a million people, representing an interracial coalition of civil rights and labor organizations, gathered on the National Mall in Washington to press for passage of the bill. As pressure mounted around the region, violence increased. The same day President Kennedy introduced the civil rights bill, Medgar Evers, field secretary of the Mississippi NAACP, was shot to death at his home in Jackson. In November, while visiting Dallas in an effort to shore up support among southern whites hostile to civil rights, Kennedy himself was gunned down. The Civil Rights Act passed in July 1964. By then, most cities and towns in South Carolina had at least taken initial steps to end segregation in their business districts, and several had formally repealed their segregation ordinances.<sup>910</sup>

Concerted efforts to desegregate the state's downtowns coincided with a successful campaign in higher education. Here, too, white officials were concerned above all with avoiding violence that would embarrass the state and drive away investors. In January 1962, Harvey Gantt, a black Charleston native, applied for admission to Clemson College. Governor Hollings, who had been elected as a staunch segregationist, worked behind the

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<sup>909</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 540.

<sup>910</sup> Huff, *Greenville*, 404; Edgar, *South Carolina*, 540.



scenes to prepare for Gantt's enrollment, especially after violence erupted in the fall over the admission of the first black student at the University of Mississippi. On January 9, 1963, as Gantt's case came before the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, Hollings made his farewell address to the General Assembly. "As we meet," he said, "South Carolina is running out of courts. If and when every legal remedy has been exhausted, this General Assembly must make clear South Carolina's choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men.... This should be done with dignity. It must be done with law and order." The state's business leaders pledged support. On January 16, the court ruled to admit Gantt, and he enrolled a week later without incident. The following fall the University of South Carolina admitted its first black students since Reconstruction. By May 1965, all of the state's white public colleges and half of its white private colleges had admitted black students or agreed to do so.<sup>911</sup>

While white leaders acquiesced in the desegregation of business establishments and colleges and universities, they fought the longest to maintain the state's dual public school system. In 1963, U.S. District Court Judge J. Robert Martin, the same judge who had tried the Willie Earle lynching case in 1947, ordered the public schools in Charleston and Greenville to desegregate. Both districts complied only minimally.<sup>912</sup> In April 1964, Martin issued a consent decree approving the Greenville board's new plan for the "enrollment, assignment, and transfer of pupils without regard to race, creed, or color." The plan, known as "freedom-of-choice," placed the burden of integration on black families and, like Charleston's scheme to limit black enrollment based on test scores, resulted in only token

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<sup>911</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 538-9.

<sup>912</sup> Baker, "Schooling and White Supremacy," 309-10.

integration. In Richland County, a similar freedom-of-choice plan was somewhat more successful; by 1966, some 1,250 black students attended formerly all-white schools.<sup>913</sup>

While the Civil Rights Act included a provision intended to prohibit discrimination in voter registration, it did not eliminate the poll tax or address the use of intimidation and violence against black potential voters. Civil rights organizations across the South pushed for new a new, stronger voting rights law, culminating in the Selma to Montgomery marches in Alabama in March 1965. On “Bloody Sunday,” March 7, state and local police attacked some 600 marchers with billy clubs, cattle prods, and tear gas as they left Selma. Images of the bloodied demonstrators appeared on television and in newspapers around the country and around the world. On March 15, the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, presented a voting rights bill to Congress. His speech before the body signaled the strongest public support by the federal government for the rights of African Americans since Reconstruction. “Even if we pass this bill,” Johnson said,

the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause, too, because it is not just Negroes but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.<sup>914</sup>

In his unmistakable Texas accent, he closed the speech with the words of the South Carolina spiritual that had become an anthem of the civil rights movement: “And we shall overcome.”<sup>915</sup> In August, Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965. As a legal and social system sanctioned by the federal government, Jim Crow was no more.

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<sup>913</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 427.

<sup>914</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, Special Message to Congress, 15 March 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650315.asp>.

<sup>915</sup> *Ibid.*

The effect in South Carolina was immediate. Federal marshals enforced the Voting Rights Act in several counties of the state, and CORE immediately registered 37,000 additional black voters in 24 counties. In the elections of 1966, as a resurgent Republican Party fielded candidates for statewide office for the first time in the twentieth century, African Americans provided the margin of victory for Democrats in the races for Congress and the governorship.<sup>916</sup> Two years later, South Carolina's delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago included twelve blacks, and it was the only one from the Deep South not to have its credentials challenged.<sup>917</sup> By the end of the decade, black registered voters were more than a quarter of the state's electorate.<sup>918</sup>

### **Civil Rights and the Greenville Bahá'í Community**

As the Bahá'í community in Greenville grew during the early 1960s, its members took steps to secure legal protection for their activities, project a more openly interracial public image, and lend support to local civil rights initiatives. The legal measures, undertaken in response to goals of the Ten Year Plan, gave the community more security than it had ever enjoyed. Richard Benson approached Rex L. Carter, a fellow Greenville attorney and Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives, about securing state recognition for the Bahá'í marriage ceremony. Carter wrote to the Attorney General, Daniel McLeod, who issued an opinion in April 1961 that officers of a Local Spiritual Assembly were authorized to perform marriages. Citing the By-laws of the Greenville Local Assembly and case law from South Carolina and other states, the opinion stated that the relevant section of the state's code,

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<sup>916</sup> Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 219.

<sup>917</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina*, 541.

<sup>918</sup> *Ibid.*; Kovacik and Winberry, *South Carolina: A Geography*, 154.

which provided for “Only ministers of the Gospel or accepted Jewish Rabbis” to perform marriages, extended “to any person authorized by a religious faith to conduct a marriage ceremony in accordance with the tenets of such faith.” “It is the opinion of this office,” McLeod wrote, “that those persons authorized by the Baha’i Faith to perform marriage ceremonies are ‘ministers of the Gospel’ within the meaning of the marriage statutes of South Carolina and such persons may validly perform marriages in this State.”<sup>919</sup> In September 1962, the nine members of the Local Assembly—Wiley B. Allison, Joy F. Benson, Richard Benson, Katherine Faily, John N. Faily, Martha Fettig, Luther B. Silver, Dorothy Thomas, and Grace von der Heydt—secured incorporation as “The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of Greenville, South Carolina, Inc.”<sup>920</sup> The two legal actions gave the movement in South Carolina its first recognition by the state government.

Encouraged alike by their religion’s national and international leaders and by the serious blows that a surging civil rights campaign was dealing to the Jim Crow regime both locally and nationally, the larger, more diverse, and legally protected Bahá’í community in Greenville became more confident in upholding social equality in their public and private activities, more creative in their outreach efforts, and more vocal in their support for the mainstream civil rights movement. The Bahá’is hosted interracial picnics, study groups, and Holy Day services and invited their friends, classmates, coworkers, and family members.<sup>921</sup>

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<sup>919</sup> David R. McLeod to Rex L Carter, facsimile of letter, in *Bahá’i World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 692. The South Carolina Bahá’í movement’s first interracial marriage, on St. Helena Island, came in 1968, a year after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Loving v. Virginia* nullified state anti-miscegenation statutes. Lynn Markovich Bryant, “*I’m Black and I’m Proud*,” *wished the white girl* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2002), 1; Karen Blair, “Lines Were Clearly Drawn for Woman Growing Up in Biracial Family,” *The Herald*, 20 July 2003.

<sup>920</sup> “Certificate of Incorporation of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of Greenville, South Carolina, U.S.A.,” facsimile of original, in *Bahá’i World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 654; Benson interview.

<sup>921</sup> Miscellaneous programs, invitations, flyers, and photographs, private collection of Joy F. Benson.

They organized programs for Human Rights Day and United Nations Day—uncommon occurrences in a city whose powerful religious leaders were highly suspicious of internationalism—and the speakers included not only local and visiting Bahá’ís, but local attorneys, civil rights workers, teachers, and students. In December 1958, for example, they observed Human Rights Day at the Phillis Wheatley Center, the black community center in Nicholtown. On the program were Matthew Perry of Spartanburg, the new head of the state NAACP’s legal committee, and Laura Townes, a local white Quaker and sister-in-law of Charles Townes, the Greenville native who invented the laser.<sup>922</sup> The December 1964 observance took place at the Citizens & Southern National Bank on Camperdown Way, and the speakers were Robert Anderson, a Sterling High School graduate and one of the three African Americans who had integrated the University of South Carolina the previous semester, and Hattie Smith, a colleague of Bernice Williams at Sterling.<sup>923</sup>

In September 1964, the community invited Matthew Perry to speak at a “Spiritual Singing Convention” at Greenville Memorial Auditorium, the city’s premier concert venue. Thirty-five area musical groups participated, and other speakers included Asheville Bahá’í William Tucker and Rev. James Bevel from Atlanta, a prominent leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Advertizing named John Bolt Culbertson, a prominent local white lawyer with ties to both civil rights and labor organizations, as the “sponsor” of the event.<sup>924</sup>

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<sup>922</sup> *Greenville Piedmont*, 11 and 13 December 1958, clippings, private collection of Joy F. Benson..

<sup>923</sup> *Greenville Piedmont*, 11 December 1964, clipping, private collection of Joy F. Benson.; Henry H. Lesesne, *A History of the University of South Carolina, 1940-2000* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002) 143-50.

<sup>924</sup> Miscellaneous programs, invitations, flyers, and photographs, private collection of Joy F. Benson.

In addition to regular notices of their activities, the community frequently placed large informative pieces about the origins and purposes of the faith in local newspapers. Among them were such bold headlines as “BAHA’U’LLAH, The Promised One of All Ages,” “5,000,000 Baha’is Believe BAHA’U’LLAH Is Christ’s Return,” “Why Should I Become a Baha’i?” and “Do You Know in What Day You Are Living?” Each included explanatory text, attractive graphics, and local contact information.<sup>925</sup> In advance of the 1964 Human Rights Day program Luther Silver addressed a letter to the editor of the *Greenville News*. He called for the United States to uphold the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a spirit of “brotherhood and human dignity” at home and abroad. “No nation, great or small,” the retired mill worker asserted, “can for long keep from becoming entangled in this web of international association which the hand of Divine Providence is weaving.”<sup>926</sup>

During 1963 and 1964, the community took a stand for desegregation of public facilities when city officials, responding to litigation that would mandate the integration of the state park system, moved to permanently close Greenville’s public swimming pools. In 1961, groups of African Americans had been denied entry to Myrtle Beach and Sesquicentennial State Parks, and NAACP attorney Matthew Perry had filed suit on their behalf to end discrimination in the park system. In April 1963, federal judge J. Robert Martin, citing a recent Supreme Court decision, ruled that the state had sixty days to desegregate the state parks. In response, the General Assembly’s special committee to defend segregation and Attorney General Daniel McLeod recommended that the Forestry

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<sup>925</sup> Miscellaneous newspaper clippings, private collection of Joy F. Benson.

<sup>926</sup> “Letters to the Editor,” *Greenville News*, 6 December 1964, clipping, private collection of Joy F. Benson.

Commission close all the parks.<sup>927</sup> Fearing the implications of the ruling for city parks, Greenville's city council followed suit, closing the swimming pool for whites in Cleveland Park and the one for blacks in Green Forest Park. City officials insisted that the closings were for maintenance, but the city zoo requested permission to house six sea lions at the Cleveland Park facility. Greenville Bahá'ís joined the public outcry against the pool closings, citing the need for more recreation facilities for area youth, not fewer, and recommending to city officials that both facilities be integrated and opened the next year on a trial basis. At a public hearing at City Hall, Bernice Williams told aldermen: "We all know why the pools were not opened this year and it is a shame that for this reason we must sacrifice wholesome pleasures for our children for the sake of a few sea lions."<sup>928</sup>

In addition to Robert Anderson at the University of South Carolina, another Sterling High School graduate associated with the Bahá'í community became intimately involved in the desegregation of the state's institutions of higher education. In 1965, Joseph Vaughn became the first black resident undergraduate student at Furman University in Greenville. At Sterling, Vaughn had been a student leader. He spoke fluent French, thanks to teacher Bernice Williams, and "had a cosmopolitan outlook that left fellow students with the impression that he had studied abroad."<sup>929</sup> Dean of students Francis Bonner and incoming university president Gordon Blackwell, proponents of integration, recruited Vaughn to Furman. They had encouraged the university's board of trustees to integrate the student body, but the executive board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, the university's

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<sup>927</sup> Robert J. Moore, "The Civil Rights Advocate," in *Matthew J. Perry*, ed. Burke and Gergel, 161-2.

<sup>928</sup> "Aldermen Hear Opposition To Greenville's 'Pool Zoo,'" *The Greenville Piedmont*, 17 October 1963; "Council Faces Pool Question," *The Greenville News*, 10 August 1964, 4, both clippings, private collection of Joy F. Benson.

<sup>929</sup> David Shi, "Joe Vaughn Fought His Own Crusade," *Greenville News*, 10 February 2002.

parent institution, asked that no action be taken until after the Convention's annual meeting in November 1964. In the mean time, Bonner arranged for Vaughn to enroll at Johnson C. Smith University, a black institution in Charlotte. When the Convention met, it narrowly reversed Furman's new policy. At an emergency meeting, the university's board of trustees, all Baptists appointed by the Convention, defied the Convention by reaffirming their earlier decision to integrate. In February 1965, Vaughn and three black graduate students were admitted. The following year, Vaughn became a Bahá'í.<sup>930</sup>

## Upsurge

During the period of the Ten Year Plan, the process that Shoghi Effendi had termed the social and political "upsurge" of the dark-skinned peoples became apparent in the United States and around the world. The process of decolonization, which had gained momentum immediately following the Second World War, picked up significant speed. In 1954, after nearly a decade of fighting, France recognized the independence of Vietnam, while rebels in its colony of Algeria launched their own war of liberation. In 1957, Great Britain recognized the independence of Malaysia and of Ghana, the latter move launching a new wave of decolonization across Africa. In 1960, the "Year of Africa," seventeen African colonies gained their independence from France, Great Britain, Belgium, and Italy; by 1965, fewer than a dozen territories on the continent remained under colonial rule. The host of new African and Asian states changed the global balance of power as members of the United Nations, readily contributing some of their best and brightest to an emerging global civil

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<sup>930</sup> Alfred Sandlin Reid, *Furman University: Toward a New Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), 199; Shi, "Joe Vaughn;" Joe Vaughn, "Why I Am a Baha'i, Not a Christian," *Furman Paladin*, 10 February 1967, clipping, private collection of Joy F. Benson; Feast of Ridvan report, 1966, private collection of Joy F. Benson.



service and engaging in critical debate about the nature of international political and economic arrangements that primarily benefitted their former rulers and other western countries.

The United States was hardly immune to the impact of global trends. It granted independence to the Philippines in 1947 and self-government to Puerto Rico in 1952, and its last major colonial territories, Alaska and Hawaii, joined the union as states in 1959. Even before the Korean War ended in stalemate, the United States found itself implicated in the conflict in Indochina; after the partition of Vietnam in 1954, successive presidential administrations committed more resources to a conflict they perceived as vital to the containment of Communism. Within the country, the black freedom struggle reached its crest in the first half of the 1960s. The direct participation of hundreds of whites from across the country in civil rights activities in the South and media coverage of the southern movement—and of its violent detractors—contributed to a measure of the “revolutionary change in the concept and attitude of the average white American toward his Negro fellow citizen” that Shoghi Effendi had called for. Championed by a white southern President, the civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965—the first serious attempt by the federal government in nearly a century to make good on the promises of Reconstruction—heralded a major reconception of American citizenship and nationhood. From the point of view of the American Bahá’ís, one of the major structural barriers to the realization of the oneness of humanity—and to their own ability to grow and function as an interracial movement—had fallen.

During the same period, the Bahá’í Faith went far towards vindicating its claim to be a world religion, embodying a measure of the spiritual upsurge that Shoghi Effendi had

predicted would accompany the social and political rise of the dark-skinned peoples. Shoghi Effendi himself did not live to see the fruit of his life's work. On November 4, 1957, at the mid-point of the World Crusade he had conceived and directed, he died unexpectedly in London from complications of influenza. He had named no successor to the Guardianship. In the months before his death, however, he had taken additional steps to develop the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God. In June 1957, he had added to their role of encouraging the teaching work the "primary obligation to watch over and insure protection to the Bahá'í world community." In October, he had appointed a third contingent of eight Hands, including a native Ugandan, raising their number to twenty-seven, and designated them as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth." In the same message, he had also called for the holding of five intercontinental conferences in 1958 to deliberate on the completion of the Plan and appointed a Hand as his personal representative to each. The Hands of the Cause, acting on Shoghi Effendi's instructions and the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's will and testament, assumed temporary leadership of the faith, guiding the worldwide community toward completion of the Ten Year Plan and making preparations for the formation of the Universal House of Justice. The five intercontinental conferences became venues for the believers to come to terms with the death of Shoghi Effendi and to rededicate themselves to the work of the faith. Despite what could have been a devastating leadership crisis, they met or surpassed virtually all of the Plan's goals.<sup>931</sup>

During the decade of the Plan, the number of countries, territories, and major islands opened to the faith more than doubled to 259, and members of hundreds of indigenous groups across the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans

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<sup>931</sup> For a documentary account of the interregnum under the Hands of the Cause, see Rúhíyyih Rabbani, ed., *The Ministry of the Custodians, 1957-1963* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992).

became Bahá'ís. Scores of new Local Spiritual Assemblies and forty-four new National Spiritual Assemblies were formed. To varying degrees, these institutions acquired legal entity, national and local headquarters, investment properties, cemeteries, sites for future temples, recognition of Bahá'í marriages and Holy Days, publishing facilities, and literature in appropriate languages—surpassing most of the associated numerical goals of the Plan.

In some countries, persecution of the faith severely constrained the functioning of communities. In 1958, the Intercontinental Conference planned for Jakarta, Indonesia—one of the five called for by Shoghi Effendi at the mid-point of the Plan—had to be moved to Singapore because of government opposition.<sup>932</sup> Pioneering goals in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe remained largely unfulfilled, and in 1962 the Soviet government demolished the remains of the world's first Bahá'í temple in Turkmenistan. In Iran, a campaign by Shiite clerics and military leaders in the wake of a 1953 coup resulted in the destruction of the national Bahá'í headquarters, desecration of Bahá'í cemeteries and holy sites, and the rape, murder, or dismissal from employment of individual believers and families across the country. The orgy of violence scuttled plans for the erection of a house of worship in Tehran, but in its stead Shoghi Effendi called for two temples, one in Kampala, Uganda, and another in Sydney, Australia, to be built. By the end of the Plan, these two symbols of the faith's rise in Africa and the Pacific were completed, and the other temple originally called for, outside Frankfurt in the heart of a divided Germany, was nearly finished.<sup>933</sup>

Beyond the explicit numerical goals of the Plan, a development of far-reaching importance for the worldwide community was an acceleration of the process of entry by troops mentioned by Shoghi Effendi in 1953. From initial experiments in Uganda during the

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<sup>932</sup> Marion Hofman, "Five Intercontinental Conferences, 1958," in *Bahá'í World*, vol.13, 1954-1963, 331-2.

<sup>933</sup> "The Completion of the Bahá'í World Crusade, 1953-1963," *Bahá'í World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 459-69.

Africa Campaign that preceded the Plan, teaching projects aimed at bringing the faith to rural villagers spread to countries around the world. A survey of such efforts indicated encouraging initial results, especially in Africa and Asia. In Congo alone, some 20,000 people became Bahá'ís during the Plan. In Cameroon, hundreds of new believers formed 54 Local Spiritual Assemblies in villages throughout the country. Even in tiny Mauritius off the East African coast, the faith grew from a lone pioneer in 1953 to a network of 19 groups and 16 Local Spiritual Assemblies ten years later. In Indonesia, hundreds of people on the isolated Mentawai Islands became Bahá'ís and started seven primary schools for village children. On the main island of Java, the faith spread from eight localities to 97 during one year of the Plan. Similar growth occurred in Vietnam, the Philippines, Sarawak, and Brunei. In South Korea, 2000 people became Bahá'ís during the last four months of the Plan. The most dramatic growth occurred in India. Beginning in 1961 with a teaching conference in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, campaigns of village teaching raised the number of believers in the country from 850 to 87,000 and the number of Local Assemblies from 58 to 675.<sup>934</sup>

Similar changes were also apparent in the Americas, where growth was fastest among indigenous peoples and in rural areas. By the end of the Plan, most of the Bahá'ís in Latin America were Indians. In the highlands of Bolivia, teaching among native peoples proceeded rapidly beginning in 1956, when two Indian brothers stopped to inquire about the faith in the Bahá'í Center in La Paz. By the end of the Plan, the Bolivian community had swelled to approximately 8000 believers, and similar growth was beginning in Panama, Haiti, and Brazil. Even in Canada, natives representing 11 tribes made up a quarter of the

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<sup>934</sup> Ibid.

national community by the end of the Plan.<sup>935</sup> A long-term shift in worldwide Bahá'í membership had begun during the decade that would soon tip the scales away from Iran and North America and towards the global south, away from major urban areas and towards small towns and villages.<sup>936</sup>

In the United States, new growth was occurring in several areas. Members of 35 Native American tribes, including the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek in the Southeast, became Bahá'ís during the Plan.<sup>937</sup> In South Carolina and Georgia in particular, African Americans in cities, small towns, and rural areas showed signs of high receptivity to the faith. Across the country, the community was growing at its fastest rate since the 1890s. By 1963, membership was more than 10,000, with some 1200 enrollments each year.<sup>938</sup> About a third of the new believers were young people ages 15 to 20, and various activities for children and youth, including Bahá'í associations on college and university campuses, became widespread.<sup>939</sup> And after a slow start, the administrative goals of the Plan were exceeded. At Ridván 1963, there were 331 Local Spiritual Assemblies in the United States, of which 111 were incorporated—well above the goals of 300 and 100, respectively. In Alaska, the growth of the movement prompted Shoghi Effendi to call for the establishment of a separate National Spiritual Assembly for the territory in 1957, the first time such a body had been created in a political subdivision of a country.<sup>940</sup>

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<sup>935</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>936</sup> Moojan Momen, “Learning from History,” *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2, no. 2 (1989): 58-9.

<sup>937</sup> “Completion of the Bahá'í World Crusade,” 467.

<sup>938</sup> Stockman, “United States of America,” 6.

<sup>939</sup> Ibid.; “Bahá'í Youth Activities, April 1954-April 1963,” in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 768-75.

<sup>940</sup> “Current Bahá'í Activities,” in *Bahá'í World*, vol. 13, 1954-1963, 270-2.

In South Carolina, the Bahá'í Faith had grown both quantitatively and qualitatively. In ten years the state's population of adult believers had more than doubled to nearly eighty adults and probably as many children and youth. They resided in 17 localities, from cities to hamlets. At the end of the Plan there were four Local Spiritual Assemblies, in Greenville, Greenville County, Florence County, and Frogmore; one of these had achieved incorporation as well as secured statewide recognition for the Bahá'í marriage ceremony.<sup>941</sup> Renewed efforts to teach the faith to African Americans, including the working class and the middle class, young and old, rural and urban dwellers, had met with initial success in several localities. At the end of the Plan, African Americans accounted for at least half of the statewide community, surpassing their proportion of the general population. And they had begun to bring aspects of their rich cultural and religious heritage with them into the Bahá'í movement, as families and friends studied and embraced the faith as groups and the practice of congregational singing, planned and spontaneous, became widespread. The statewide community ended the Plan still numerically quite small in relation to the state's population, but with a more vibrant interracial fellowship than ever and a stronger legal and administrative basis for further growth.

Altogether, the experience in the state seemed to vindicate Louis Gregory's assessment, made some six decades earlier, of the spiritual receptivity of African Americans and Shoghi Effendi's more recent insistence on bringing the faith to them in larger numbers. Lillie Abercrombie recalled that William Bidwell, observing the revitalization of the Greenville Bahá'í community during the early 1960s, recognized the wisdom in Shoghi Effendi's analysis. Bidwell admitted that his priority all along had been reaching the white

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<sup>941</sup> South Carolina State Voting List, 1963, private collection of Richard and Doris Morris. The Columbia-area group had dwindled to seven members.

population, since “the whites were the ones doing bad things and the ones who needed to be taught. So that’s what I tried to do, but with little result. Now, as I look back ... I wish I had tried to teach more blacks. If I had, maybe things would have been different.”<sup>942</sup> Perhaps the most important lesson of the decade in South Carolina was that when the community made outreach to African Americans the priority, open-minded whites would be attracted to the faith in larger numbers, as well. Given the growth that was apparent across the United States and in other countries, by the end of the Plan the Bahá’ís in South Carolina were beginning to conceive of themselves as part of a mass movement in the making.

The crowning achievement of the Ten Year Plan was the election of the Universal House of Justice, the highest organ of the faith ordained in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. On April 21, 1963, the one hundredth anniversary of Bahá’u’lláh’s arrival in the Garden of Ridván in Baghdad, at an International Convention held in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house in Haifa, the ballots of the members of the world’s 56 National Spiritual Assemblies brought the Universal House of Justice into being. Representing the choice of a cross-section of the human race voting in local and national conventions, it was likely the first global democratic election. A week later more than 6000 believers, new and old—including Richard Abercrombie, Joy Benson, and Martha Fettig of Greenville and Lee and Genelle Grimsley of Lake City—assembled in London for the Bahá’í World Congress, considerable political instability and opposition to the faith in Iraq having made Baghdad an impractical location.

The South Carolinians were astonished at the human diversity represented in the Congress, a living testimony to the worldwide community’s success in the Ten Year Plan. And when the nine members of the Universal House of Justice were presented to the

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<sup>942</sup> Lillie Abercrombie, interview by Frances Worthington, Greenville, SC, October 2003, TS in author’s possession.

gathering, they could not help but notice that one of them was a black Southerner. Amoz Everett Gibson, whose parents had become Bahá'ís in Washington, D.C., in 1912, was a veteran of the Second World War, a public school teacher, a pioneer to the Navajo Reservation, and, until the election the previous week in Haifa, one of two black members of the National Spiritual Assembly. His membership on the Universal House of Justice underscored the accomplishment of the American Bahá'ís, particularly in the South. Before the passage of major civil rights legislation in the United States, black and white Bahá'ís in South Carolina and other southern states had participated freely in their faith's unique governance system as both voters and candidates, as members of Local Spiritual Assemblies, as delegates to the National Convention, and as members of the National Spiritual Assembly and finally of the Universal House of Justice. By the time Jim Crow fell, they had built a vibrant religious community through which they attempted to transcend their country's traditional boundaries of gender, class, and race and become citizens of the world.



## Epilogue

### The Bahá'í Faith as Mass Movement

(Oh well I) woke up this mornin' with my mind (my mind it was) —  
set on Bahá'u'lláh.  
(Oh well I) woke up this mornin' with my mind (my mind it was) —  
set on Bahá'u'lláh.  
(Oh well I) woke up this mornin' with my mind (my mind it was) —  
set on Bahá'u'lláh.  
(Yá Bahá'-) Yá Bahá' - (Yá Bahá'-) Yá Bahá' -  
Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!<sup>943</sup>

—Southern Bahá'í teaching song, ca. 1970,  
adapted from a freedom song,  
adapted from a traditional spiritual

By the time the civil rights movement reached its apogee in the mid-1960s, the Bahá'ís in South Carolina had already laid the foundations of the state's first truly interracial religious community. Growing against all odds in a hostile environment, it had emerged as a coherent movement with branches in several cities and smaller towns and an unusually diverse body of members. More than any other religious group in the state, it embodied the ideal of the “beloved community” that Martin Luther King, Jr., articulated as the ultimate goal of the civil rights movement: the vision, rooted in Christian millennial expectation, of a spiritualized polity characterized by justice, love, and the “total interrelatedness” of all

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<sup>943</sup> “O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious,” a form of the Greatest Name used as an invocation.

people.<sup>944</sup> Their small numbers, however, severely limited the ability of the Bahá'ís in South Carolina and elsewhere to promote the wholesale transformation of society anticipated in their sacred scriptures, and for which enlightened contemporary leaders like King were increasingly calling. Some six months after its first election, the Universal House of Justice wrote that in order for the worldwide Bahá'í community to “extend its influence into all strata of society,” it must “grow rapidly in size.”<sup>945</sup>

While the successive heads of the faith and many among its members had long anticipated a widespread response to its message, little in the previous half century of collective experience in South Carolina—or, indeed, anywhere else in the country—had prepared the Bahá'ís for the successes and challenges that would come in the wake of Jim Crow's demise. As the Universal House of Justice continued Shoghi Effendi's pattern of global teaching plans, beginning with a Nine Year Plan (1964-1973), and as formal racial barriers faded across the South, imperatives within the Bahá'í community met heightened social and spiritual concerns in American society at large. The result was an explosive growth in membership, centered in South Carolina—and, to a lesser extent, other states of the Deep South—that permanently altered the character, organization, and aspirations of the Bahá'í movement in the United States.

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<sup>944</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 128. For treatments of the “beloved community,” see Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), esp. chapter 6, and James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), esp. chapter 8.

<sup>945</sup> Universal House of Justice to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the World, October 1963, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, comp. Geoffrey W. Marks (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), 6.6.

## **Rapid Expansion**

Between 1963 and 1968, the Bahá'í population of the United States grew by nearly one third, from 11,000 to nearly 18,000. Most of the new believers were teenagers and young adults, and college campuses became centers of Bahá'í activity.<sup>946</sup> At the same time, developments in South Carolina and several other southern states seemed to indicate that additional growth was beginning in other quarters. In the rural areas around Florence, Jordan Young's black and white patients arranged for him to speak on the message of "Bahá'u'lláh of Persia" to large audiences in local churches.<sup>947</sup> In Florence, Greenville, and Charleston—where a new community was finally emerging with the settlement of new pioneers—the Bahá'ís hosted large "interracial picnics" for their families and friends.<sup>948</sup> In 1967 and 1968, inspired by Shoghi Effendi's advice from a decade before, two Auxiliary Board members recruited black and white Bahá'í families to settle as home-front pioneers in small towns of the southern Black Belt, including Winnsboro, South Carolina; Dawson, Georgia; and Canton, Mississippi.<sup>949</sup> In 1969, the National Spiritual Assembly appointed a new Deep South Committee to focus attention on the opportunities that seemed to be opening in the South. Early in 1970, American Bahá'ís read the news that dozens of people were enrolling in the faith at firesides in Dawson; in Bogalusa, Louisiana; and in Adams Run, a rural community in Charleston County, South Carolina—an entirely unprecedented development for a national

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<sup>946</sup> Hollinger, "Introduction: Bahá'í Communities," xxx; Hampson, "Growth and Spread," 233.

<sup>947</sup> Young interview. Jordan Young said he adopted the locution, uncommon in the American Bahá'í community, for his talks in churches as an equivalent to "Jesus of Nazareth," a title used frequently among Protestants in reference to the historical Jesus.

<sup>948</sup> Kahn, Sandra Santolucito, "Encounter of Two Myths: Bahá'í and Christian in the Rural American South—A Study in Transmythicization" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1977), 243-4.

<sup>949</sup> Jack McCants to Elizabeth Martin, 18 May 2006, copy in possession of the author; Elizabeth Martin, interview by author, Columbia, SC, 5 April 2003.

movement used to declarations of faith by individuals, not whole families and social networks.<sup>950</sup> Encouraged by the Hands of the Cause of God and the National Assembly and coordinated by the Deep South Committee, an emboldened cadre of mostly young Bahá'ís in the region developed a new teaching program that borrowed elements of the language, music, and organizing strategies of the civil rights movement and the emerging youth culture.<sup>951</sup> During the winter of 1970-1971, the Deep South Committee organized a three-month regional teaching campaign, designed to take advantage of the winter school holiday, to test the new approach.

The South Carolina phase of the campaign was by far the most successful. Based in Dillon in the upper Pee Dee, it brought together Bahá'ís resident in the state with young traveling teachers from across the country. Fanning out to other towns each morning according to planned itineraries, the teams shared the message of the faith wherever they found listeners; according to one colorful report, they talked with people “[i]n laundromats, restaurants, night-clubs, on the streets, in yards, in the rain, in the mud, in the snow.”<sup>952</sup> With those who were interested they shared prayers from the Bahá'í scriptures or left copies of the “*Ebony* reprint,” a large, full-color booklet based on an article on the faith from the popular African-American magazine.<sup>953</sup> Often they enrolled new believers on the spot:

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<sup>950</sup> *American Bahá'í* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 1, 4; vol. 1, no. 3 (March 1970): 1, 11; vol. 1, no. 4 (April 1970): 1, 4.

<sup>951</sup> *American Bahá'í*, special edition (October 1970), 1-3.

<sup>952</sup> “Carolina Story,” *American Bahá'í*, February 1971, 4.

<sup>953</sup> [Lerone Bennett, Jr.], “Bahá'í: A Way of Life for Millions,” *Ebony* 20, no. 6 (April 1965): 48-56; booklet of the same name in possession of the author. The article, originally published under a cover story on the death of Nat King Cole, had already brought the Bahá'í Faith to the attention of African Americans around the United States. The author, Lerone Bennett, Jr., was a well-known journalist and author of popular works of African-American history. The photographer, Lacey Crawford, and his wife became Bahá'ís as a result of his work on the story, settling in Winnsboro, South Carolina, as pioneers in 1968 and serving subsequently at the Bahá'í World Center. Personal conversation with Ethel Crawford, Columbia, SC.

One lady looked out her window and saw two Bahá'ís singing. She opened the door and yelled to them that if it was their music she heard she wanted them to come and sing for her. She insisted that they come inside her house and “set awhile.” Next moment all her children were becoming Bahá'ís. A few days later some more of us visited her again and she gave us all the warmest welcome. We talked awhile and then spent most of the time with her in prayer—each child, with the exception of one who was just too shy, read from the prayer book....<sup>954</sup>

At evening mass meetings in rented halls, they made more in-depth presentations, in word and song, to new Bahá'ís and their friends and family members, often with active participation from the audience. According to a report of one meeting:

During the night almost all of the 80 people there became Bahá'ís and those who'd already declared experienced their first deepening class.... [S]ome of the audience joined us up front. Some of them sang for us, and we parted only after all forming a big unity circle and sharing prayers for unity and thanksgiving.<sup>955</sup>

At the midpoint of the traumatic first year of mandatory statewide school desegregation in South Carolina, as disenchantment with the civil rights movement set in among many blacks and whites around the country and the competing rhetorics of black power and white conservatism dominated the national political discourse, the teams of young Bahá'ís taught that God had sent a new Messenger to unite the human race. In rural hamlets, urban working-class neighborhoods, and college campuses across the state, they found that the goal of a racially integrated, spiritually revived society still held wide currency. Even before the close of the campaign, the Universal House of Justice announced to the worldwide community the enrollment of 8000 new believers in South Carolina. The process of entry by troops, it cabled, was “rapidly accelerating” in the United States.<sup>956</sup>

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<sup>954</sup> “Carolina Story,” *American Bahá'í*, February 1971, 4.

<sup>955</sup> Ibid.

<sup>956</sup> Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 31 January 1972, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), 65.

Almost overnight, the Bahá'í Faith in South Carolina had gone from a tiny community in a handful of localities to a mass movement with members in every county.<sup>957</sup> In 1970, there were eight Local Spiritual Assemblies in South Carolina; the next year, after the winter project, there were 108, more than any other state in the country.<sup>958</sup> By the middle of 1972, some 20,000 people—mostly African Americans, but hundreds of Native Americans and European Americans as well—had become Bahá'ís in South Carolina.<sup>959</sup> By the end of the Nine-Year Plan in 1973, the number of Bahá'ís in the United States had grown to 60,000, up from 11,000 at the outset; fully one-third of the national community resided in South Carolina.<sup>960</sup> As the pages of national Bahá'í publications filled with stories and photographs of the southern campaign and South Carolina notices dominated the “In Memoriam” and “Directory Changes” sections, it became clear that the geographic center of the American movement had shifted dramatically. Confident proponents of teaching in the South went so far as to predict that South Carolina would eventually become “the first all-Bahá'í state in the country.”<sup>961</sup>

Teachers on the ground in South Carolina, however, were already coming to terms with the difficulties of sustaining such rapid growth. Reinforced by a stream of home-front pioneers and traveling teachers—many of them young adults and new Bahá'ís themselves—they set about the difficult business of establishing Bahá'í community structures and practices in dozens of localities scattered across the state. The relative remoteness of many

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<sup>957</sup> Hampson, “Growth and Spread” 281.

<sup>958</sup> *American Bahá'í*, May 1971, 4-5.

<sup>959</sup> Kahn, “Encounter of Two Myths,” 262.

<sup>960</sup> Robert Stockman, “U.S. Bahá'í Community Membership: 1894-1996,” *The American Bahá'í*, 23 November 1996, 27.

<sup>961</sup> “Operation ‘Gabriel,’” *American Bahá'í*, January 1972, 3.

of the new believers from the handful of established Bahá'í communities, and the acute poverty and limited literacy that many of them faced, made for serious logistical challenges. The Universal House of Justice urged perseverance, creativity, and unity, encouraging the entire national community, “newly enrolled and believers of long standing, to . . . continue unabated their efforts to reach the waiting souls, while simultaneously consolidating the hard-won victories.” It said the successful techniques of the southern campaign should be immediately applied to reach racial minorities in other parts of the country, including Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos.<sup>962</sup> Subsequent projects did enroll smaller numbers of new believers in other regions, but the swelling membership in South Carolina and elsewhere severely tested the capacity of the national administration to maintain unity of vision in an increasingly diverse community and to marshal the necessary resources, human and financial, to support continued growth.<sup>963</sup> Even with support from the national movement, it quickly became apparent that further expansion in South Carolina—or, indeed, simply maintaining the community at its new, larger size—would largely depend on building the capacity of believers within the state as teachers and administrators.

Almost immediately, the National Spiritual Assembly appointed a state teaching committee for South Carolina with a full-time coordinator and, following reapportionment of delegates to the National Convention as a result of the movement's growth in the South and elsewhere, a district teaching committee in each of the state's new electoral units.<sup>964</sup> At the same time, several of the campaign's leaders in the Pee Dee asked the National Spiritual

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<sup>962</sup> Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 14 February 1972, *National Bahá'í Review*, no. 51 (March 1972): 1, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973*, 85.

<sup>963</sup> For a discussion of the increasing diversity of the American Bahá'í community in the 1960s and 1970s, see Hampson, “Growth and Spread,” 344-50.

<sup>964</sup> *American Bahá'í*, September 1971, 2; May 1971, 3; and August 1971, 6-7.

Assembly to establish a “teaching institute,” called for by the Universal House of Justice to train new teachers of the faith in areas of large-scale growth, and a radio station to reach new believers in isolated rural areas.<sup>965</sup> In Georgetown County near Hemingway, a white couple, former Pentecostal ministers who had led most of their congregation into the faith, sold a large tract of family land to the National Spiritual Assembly to establish such a facility.<sup>966</sup> Inaugurated in October 1972 and named for the South Carolina movement’s most prominent native son, the Louis G. Gregory Bahá’í Institute became a hub of activity in the state and region.<sup>967</sup> Over the next quarter-century, the Institute and the state and district teaching committees, collaborating with other agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly and with the Auxiliary Board members, experimented with a variety of approaches to teaching, training, and community development—including the holding of weekend, five-day, and nine-day study courses, covering many aspects of individual and collective Bahá’í life, at the Hemingway campus and elsewhere in the state; the deployment of teachers for home deepening visits in hundreds of localities; and the holding of regular children’s classes and summer camps for children and youth. Attempting to reach new believers of all ages and varying educational levels, they developed new publications and audio-visual materials, and they frequently made use of the arts, including drama, singing, and puppetry, in expansion and consolidation activities. In periodic campaigns of expansion and consolidation, the size and geographic scope of the movement continued to grow, but more slowly; by the end of the 1970s there were Bahá’ís in some 440 towns and hamlets in South Carolina, with more than

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<sup>965</sup> Young interview.

<sup>966</sup> Ibid.

<sup>967</sup> “Louis G. Gregory Institute Dedication and Special Deepening Conference,” *American Bahá’í*, November 1972, 1-3; *Bahá’í News* no. 501 (December 1972): 7.



180 Local Spiritual Assemblies and regular firesides and classes for children and adults in many localities.<sup>968</sup>

A new burst of rapid growth took place in the mid-1980s. Encouraged by members of the Continental Board of Counselors, an institution created in 1968 by the Universal House of Justice to extend into the future the functions of the Hands of the Cause of God appointed by Shoghi Effendi, a statewide teaching campaign during 1985 and 1986 resulted in some 2500 new enrolments, the settlement of new home-front pioneers in several localities, and initial use of an innovative curriculum—developed by Bahá'ís in Colombia and used increasingly throughout Latin America—for training new believers as teachers.<sup>969</sup> The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the state rose to some 275.<sup>970</sup> Also in 1985, following a national fundraising campaign, the Institute inaugurated the contemplated radio station, which began broadcasting to a large section of eastern South Carolina and southeastern North Carolina.<sup>971</sup> The following fall, it launched an annual regional arts festival on the Hemingway campus. To mark the occasion, famed jazz trumpeter John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie, a native of nearby Cheraw who had become a Bahá'í in Los Angeles in 1968, performed with his band and held music workshops at schools in the Pee Dee area.<sup>972</sup>

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<sup>968</sup> *American Bahá'í*, March 1979, 7. For a sampling of local Bahá'í communities in South Carolina, see *South Carolina Bahá'í Bulletin* 3, [no. 1] (April 1973), 4; vol. 3, no. 6 (Fall/Winter 1974), 7-8; vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 1975), 4.

<sup>969</sup> *South Carolina Bahá'í*, Winter 1985-1986, 1, 4; Spring 1986, 2-4.

<sup>970</sup> *South Carolina Bahá'í*, Spring 1986, 1.

<sup>971</sup> *American Bahá'í*, May 1985, 1.

<sup>972</sup> *American Bahá'í*, November 1986, 1.

## Decline and Revival

Despite the brief renewal of interest in large-scale growth, the general mood of the national Bahá'í movement during the 1980s and 1990s was one of disenchantment with the process, which had turned out to be harder and more complicated than anyone had imagined in the heady days of 1970 and early 1971. The overall rate of growth slowed, and the community increasingly devoted its attention and resources to other matters, including developing Sunday schools for Bahá'í children in urban areas, integrating thousands of Iranian Bahá'í refugees fleeing the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and using the mass media to broadcast the faith's teachings.<sup>973</sup> As the focus of the national movement shifted, teaching activities and Bahá'í community life waned across South Carolina. The Bahá'í population of rural localities in particular began a slow decline as youth and adults pursued other interests, moved away in search of education or employment, or died, leaving younger generations with little or no Bahá'í identity.

The South Carolina experience was not unique. In several countries, the difficulties of sustaining large-scale growth led Bahá'í communities to “turn back to more familiar activities and more accessible publics.”<sup>974</sup> In the mid-1990s, based on some thirty years' worth of trial and error in the Deep South and other parts of the world, the Universal House of Justice launched the worldwide Bahá'í community on what it promised would be a concerted, decades-long effort to develop the human resources and institutional capacity needed for sustained growth of the religion. Recasting familiar features of Bahá'í collective life and creating entirely new ones, it introduced the elements of the new strategy in a

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<sup>973</sup> Peter Smith, “The Bahá'í Faith in the West: A Survey,” in *Bahá'ís in the West*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, vol. 14, ed. Peter Smith (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2004), 24-6.

<sup>974</sup> [Universal House of Justice], *Century of Light*, 101.

succession of global plans that began in 1996. Noting that previous efforts to raise human resources for teaching had “resulted in only a relatively small band of active supporters of the Cause,” the Universal House of Justice said that the centerpiece of the strategy would be a new global network of “training institutes.”<sup>975</sup> In contrast to the previous approach of the Louis Gregory Institute, in which participants travelled to the Hemingway campus for most programs, the House of Justice described the training institute not as a facility, but as an organizational structure that would offer courses in many locations, thus minimizing costs and maximizing access. Also in contrast to the South Carolina approach, in which the various programs held by the Institute often seemed disconnected from each other, the new system offered a logical sequence of courses with a clear purpose: helping participants develop “the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number of people—adults, youth and children.”<sup>976</sup> With an initial focus on training youth to conduct devotional meetings, home deepening visits, and children’s classes in their own localities, the new system would be the key to revitalizing large-scale growth in countries and regions that had experienced it before, as well as introducing it in new areas. As local communities increased in size and complexity and Local Spiritual Assemblies grew in executive capacity, the Bahá’ís would be able to initiate programs of social and economic development to benefit the entire population.<sup>977</sup>

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<sup>975</sup> Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors, 26 December 1995, in [Universal House of Justice], *The Four Year Plan: Messages of the Universal House of Justice* (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra Publications, 1996), 7.

<sup>976</sup> Ibid.

<sup>977</sup> Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors, 9 January 2001, in [Universal House of Justice], *The Five Year Plan, 2001-2006: Messages of the Universal House of Justice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra Publications, 2003), 36-7.

During a Four-Year Plan (1996-2000), some 300 national or regional training institutes around the world began to function, and most quickly adopted the curriculum from Colombia that had first been used in South Carolina more than a decade before. In the United States, the National Spiritual Assembly created a number of training institutes along the lines of the new model, including one for South Carolina. The board of directors of the new South Carolina institute began to offer courses in several locations in the state, while the campus of the Louis Gregory Institute devolved to a Bahá'í community center, with sporadic programs aimed primarily at the area around Hemingway. In 2002, the three training institutes serving North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia were merged into a single entity, the Carolinas and Georgia Regional Training Institute, with one board and a full-time executive director.

Additional structural changes came with the introduction, in several large and populous national communities, of Regional Bahá'í Councils, a new administrative institution between the local and national levels. In 1997, the Universal House of Justice called for the election of four nine-member Regional Councils in the United States (one for each region outlined in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan) by the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. The Councils quickly assumed supervision of the training institutes in their respective regions. During a Twelve Month Plan (2000-2001) and a Five Year Plan (2001-2006), the Universal House of Justice introduced another new element, the concept of the "geographic cluster." It directed each National Spiritual Assembly to divide its territory into a number of clusters according to basic social, economic, and demographic patterns, for example, a group of nearby towns and villages or a large city and its suburbs. The House of Justice indicated that the work of the training institutes and the execution of

teaching plans would henceforth take place primarily at the level of the clusters, which it described as “seedbeds of expansion” on a manageable scale.<sup>978</sup> The principal focus of each National Assembly would be to develop the capacity of Bahá’í communities in cluster after cluster to initiate and sustain their own programs of growth.

According to the new framework, the Regional Bahá’í Council of the Southern States divided the Carolinas and Georgia into some ninety geographic clusters. By 2002, the Carolinas and Georgia Institute was conducting training programs in more than sixty of these; with more than 2000 people in the region having taken at least one course in the sequence, the number of devotional meetings and children’s classes was beginning to rise in several areas. The Council judged four clusters, including the Columbia metropolitan area in South Carolina, to be sufficiently strong to launch intensive programs of growth. Organized in three-month cycles of expansion and consolidation, the growth was miniscule compared to that of the early 1970s—measured in the dozens rather than the thousands. However, early evidence indicated that new believers were integrating more seamlessly than before into a vibrant community life and, through participation in the courses of the training institute, arising as confident teachers themselves.

Based on the experiences of the first few advanced clusters, the Universal House of Justice called for the establishment of at least 1500 intensive programs of growth around the world during a second Five Year Plan (2006-2011). In the Carolinas and Georgia, the Regional Council initially identified some twenty clusters, including ten lying all or partly in South Carolina, that could initiate such growth during the Plan. Early in 2006, the National Spiritual Assembly decided to place the campus of the Louis Gregory Institute under the direction of the Regional Council. The Council in turn quickly integrated the property into

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<sup>978</sup> Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’is of the World, Ridván 2003, in *Five Year Plan*, 69.

the new training institute structure for the Carolinas and Georgia, retaining the older name for the whole organization. The impact of the new Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute on plans for growth was immediate. Beginning in the summer of 2006, a series of youth training seminars held at the Hemingway campus and in additional locations throughout the three-state region brought a new generation, many of them African Americans whose parents and grandparents had become Bahá'ís in the campaigns of the 1970s, into the forefront of the movement. In cluster after cluster, young people took the lead in teaching teams, and a burst of creative activity—epitomized by songs composed spontaneously during the seminars that set passages from the sacred writings to music—energized community life.

By 2008 and 2009, membership growth in the country as a whole had returned to the level of the mid-1980s.<sup>979</sup> This time, however, the new believers—most of them African American, Latino, and immigrant families—were spread rather evenly in clusters across the United States rather than concentrated in South Carolina, and the growth showed no signs of abating. As the American Bahá'í movement entered the centennial year of Louis Gregory's first southern teaching trip, it seemed that the growth campaigns of the 1970s for which he had presciently laid the groundwork were beginning to bear new fruit in his home state and beyond.

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<sup>979</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, *Ridván 2009 Annual Report* (N.p. [Wilmette, IL]: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2009), 3.

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