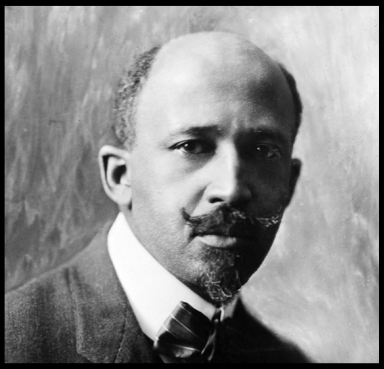
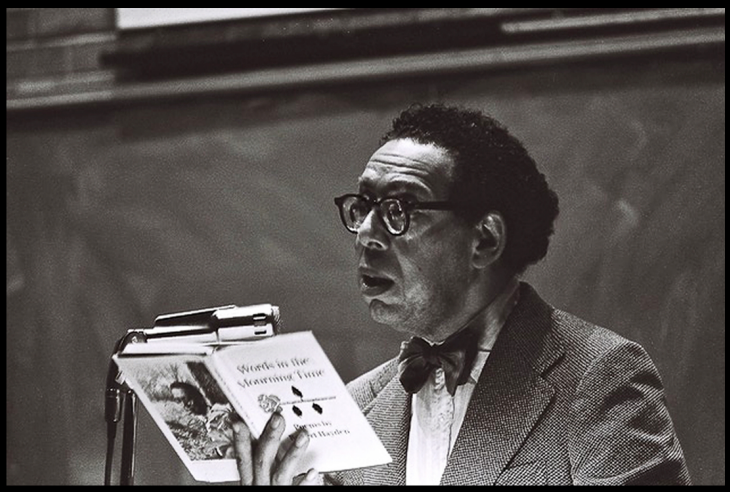


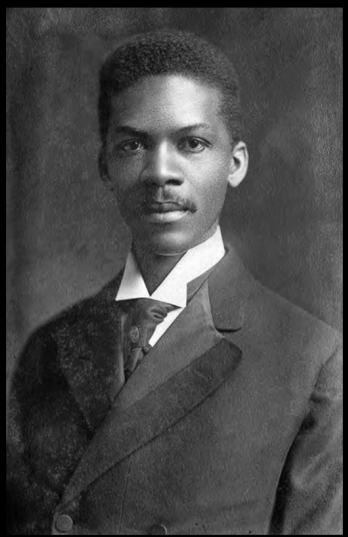
STUDIES IN THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS
VOLUME TWENTY-NINE

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH AND THE BLACK INTELLIGENTSIA

RACE, RELIGION, AND NATION

CHRISTOPHER BUCK





WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD W. THOMAS

The Bahá'í Faith and the Black Intelligentsia

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Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions
Volume Twenty-Nine

Anthony A. Lee, General Editor

The Bahá'í Faith and the Black Intelligentsia

RACE, RELIGION, AND NATION

KALIMAT PRESS

CHRISTOPHER BUCK

with an Introduction by
Richard W. Thomas

Kalimat Press
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Chapter 1: Christopher Buck, "The Bahá'í 'Pupil of the Eye' Metaphor: Promoting Ideal Race Relations in Jim Crow America," in *The Bahá'í Faith and African American History: Creating Racial and Religious Diversity*, ed. Loni Bramson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 1–41.

Chapter 2: Christopher Buck, "'Abdu'l-Bahá's 1912 Howard University Speech: A Civil War Myth for Interracial Emancipation," in *'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey West: The Course of Human Solidarity*, ed. Negar Mottahedeh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 111–43.

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Chapter 5: Christopher Buck, "Alain Locke on Race, Religion, and the Bahá'í Faith," in *The Bahá'í Faith and African American History: Creating Racial and Religious Diversity*, ed. Loni Bramson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 91–116.

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p. 64, "'Abdu'l-Bahá in Philadelphia, June 1912, Bahá'í Media Bank." (See: https://media.bahai.org/detail/4872999/".)

p. 69, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, photo probably taken April 22, 1912. Source: National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

p. 100. W. E. B. Du Bois (Boston, 1907). Source: MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University Libraries, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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p. 274, Cover of Robert Hayden's last book, *American Journal* (Effendi Press, 1978; expanded edition published posthumously, Liveright, 1982)."

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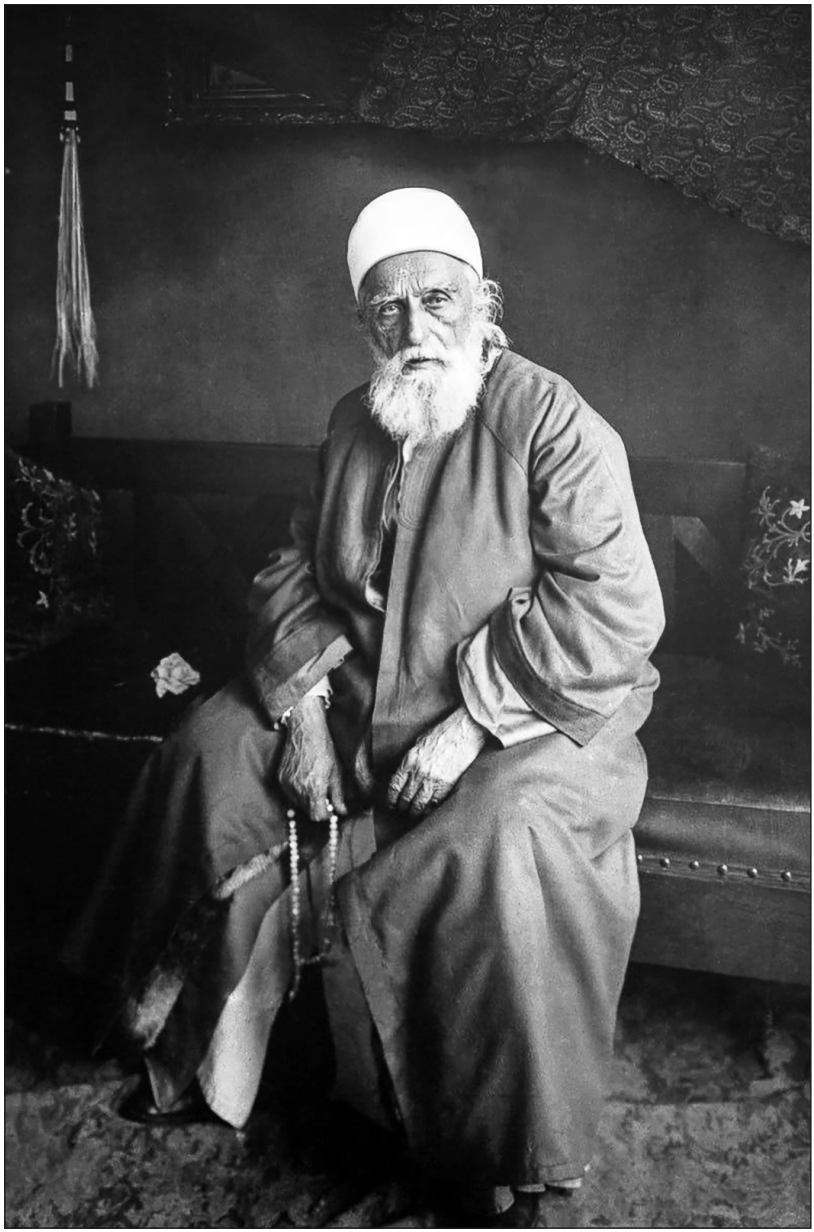

Portrait of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá taken in New York City (Dec. 2, 1912)
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Introduction

Richard Thomas

When Christopher Buck, one of the most groundbreaking scholars of African American Bahá'í history, invited me to write an introduction to this book, I was both honored and humbled! We were colleagues at Michigan State University in the years 2000–2004. Chris had adopted my book, *Understanding Interracial Unity: A Study of U.S. Race Relations*, as a required text for his first American Thought & Language class (Fall semester, 2000). I was a faculty member in the Department of History and its Comparative Black History Program (CBHP). In September 2001, the CBHP sponsored a Comparative Black History Conference at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. The theme of the Conference was: "Diaspora Paradigms: New Scholarship in Comparative Black History." Professor Christopher Buck was the Chair and Commentator for the session, "Many Ways of Worship: Exploring the Diversity of the African American Religious Experience."

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In November 2005, I organized a talk and book signing for Buck, sponsored by the African American and African Studies Program. The title of Buck's talk was: "Alain Locke: Race Leader, Social Philosopher, Bahá'í Pluralist," and the book-signing celebrated his newly published book, *Alain Locke: Faith & Philosophy*. Buck's talk was not just a scholarly presentation on one of the twentieth century's great African American intellectuals, considered by many scholars as the "Father" (or "Dean") of the "Harlem Renaissance." Here, in this academic setting dedicated to African and African American teaching and research, Buck put forth the claim that not only was Locke a major African American intellectual, but he was also a Bahá'í! No doubt faculty and graduate students of the African American and African Program knew that Alain Locke was gay; but few knew that he was a Bahá'í and, based upon Buck's groundbreaking research and

presentation, Locke was actively involved in Bahá'í "race amity" initiatives.

As a Bahá'í and professor of history, I could not contain my excitement over the publication of Buck's book documenting Alain Locke's relationship to the Bahá'í Faith! Finally, I had in my hands a major scholarly contribution to both the history of African American Bahá'ís and African American religious history. A year later, Gwen Etter-Lewis and I co-authored the book, *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America, 1898–2000*. Like Buck, we were both "concerned about the lack of interest in African and African American Bahá'ís among scholars of African religious history." We wrote that *Lights of the Spirit* "is designed to fill the gap created by previous studies . . . to break new ground by investigating the role of Black people in a new religion that originated in the Middle East in the mid-nineteenth century and, within a few decades, had spread to all parts of the globe." Since then, Christopher Buck has led the charge in this ongoing scholarly campaign to vindicate and expand the field of African American Bahá'í history.

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This book by Christopher Buck represents years of pioneering and groundbreaking research in several scholarly fields, particularly, African American history and Bahá'í history. Each of the eight chapters explores and excavates historical gems that have laid hidden, or were largely ignored by some traditional scholars. Chapter One, "The Bahá'í 'Pupil of the Eye' Metaphor: Promoting Ideal Race Relations in Jim Crow America," ". . . focuses on a notable contribution to promoting ideal race relations in Jim Crow America by a new religion, which, though small in number, was socially significant in its concerted efforts to foster and advance harmony between races (primarily Black and white) at the time." This chapter resonated with me because I had written a chapter on the "Pupil of the Eye" in an edited book in 2006 where I focused on how the image of the Blacks as the ". . . pupil of the eye greatly enhances their pride and connection to a worldwide religious movement dedicated to the unification of all races, nations and religions."[1] Buck developed a more expansive treatment of the "pupil of the eye" by focusing on the "role that Bahá'u'lláh's 'pupil of the eye' metaphor played in Bahá'í efforts to promote ideal race relations, which, far from 'empty rhetoric,' was figurative public discourse aimed at countering racial prejudice—individually and interpersonally."

Buck fleshes out this focus by discussing the origins of the Bahá'í pupil of the eye metaphor as well as presenting seven letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá

to individuals containing pupil of the eye metaphors. Both the focus on the origins of the pupil of the eye metaphor and on ʻAbdu'l-Bahá's seven letters (referred to as "Tablets") represent solid contributions to the ongoing pupil of the eye scholarly discourse. The author continues with still another contribution to the discourse in the section on the historical context for the pupil of the eye "Tablets" in the Bahá'í Faith in the section, "Bahá'u'lláh's contributions to emancipation and abolition." Here he argues that the "pupil of the eye metaphor should be seen within the wider historical context of Bahá'í teachings on ideal race relations." He does this by analyzing Bahá'u'lláh's position on slavery which "clearly forbade trading in slaves."

Notwithstanding the historical differences between slavery in Persia and the United States, as an African American Bahá'í and American historian, I was truly elated when I first learned that, after his father's death in 1839, Bahá'u'lláh had "freed his father's household slaves." But I was profoundly moved by Bahá'u'lláh's "antislavery" prayer probably written when he emancipated one of his inherited slaves.[2] Each line of this prayer reveals the deep humility of Bahá'u'lláh as he performs this historically sacred act before his God. Anyone familiar with the history of slavery over the centuries and throughout the world—and especially those of us who are the descendants of enslaved peoples—will find in this prayer of Bahá'u'lláh the healing balm spoken of in the tradition of the Hebrew Prophets. This prayer of Bahá'u'lláh in the moment of freeing his inherited Black slave will always occupy a sacred place in the hearts and souls of Bahá'ís of African descent!

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Buck concludes his discussion on "The Bahá'í 'Pupil of the Eye' Metaphor" by pointing out that "in public discourse . . . metaphors can serve important roles in human language and thought, including the influencing of social attitudes such as toward race relations . . ." ʻAbdu'l-Bahá employed this "positive racial rhetoric" as one of many effective strategies to "counter the prevailing negative stereotypes of Jim Crow America." Buck explains that although the pupil of the eye metaphor is a physical description, it was "essentially a spiritual image, . . . a way to spiritualize, and therefore humanize, through harmony, the issue of race." The author closes with a coupling of what I would consider the two core social values of the pupil of the eye metaphor: ". . . part and parcel of Bahá'í public discourse on ideal race relations, and in terms of Bahá'í self-identity itself [I would strongly

emphasize Black self-identity!] as a continuing effort to promote racial healing and ideal race relations and thereby help bridge the racial divide."

In today's racial climate, when anti-Black sentiments and practices still ravage the souls and bodies of African Americans, the pupil of the eye metaphor has the power to instill psychological and spiritual pride in countless wounded victims of racism. Most importantly, it enables African American Bahá'ís to internalize a transcendent Black Bahá'í identity as they engage in promoting racial unity. During the 1960s, my generation of African American Bahá'ís seized upon the pupil of the eye metaphor while many of us, as college students, pushed for African American history and participated in Black student movements. As Black Bahá'ís, we had the pupil of the eye metaphor to contribute to the "Black is beautiful" movement. One of the most current and effective examples of why the pupil of the eye metaphor is still important to African American Bahá'ís can be seen in the Pupil of the Eye Conferences first conceived by Barbara Talley in 2019. See "Pupil of the Eye Conference spotlights station, mission of Black Bahá'ís" (February 14, 2020), https://www.bahai.us/pupil-of-the-eye-conference-spotlights-station-missionof-black-bahais/.

Concerning Chapter 2, "'Abdul-Bahá's 1912 Howard University Speech: A Civil War Myth for Interracial Emancipation," the heart of this chapter is 'Abdul-Bahá's well-known speech at Howard University, in 1912. While other scholars have written about the speech drawing from firsthand reports of those present at the time, to my knowledge, Buck appears to be the first scholar to do a deep analytical dive into key historical aspects of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's speech.

Buck points out that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's speech "before faculty and students at Howard University's Rankin Chapel . . . which, given its message before an interracial audience in defiance of Jim Crow's social restrictions, was certainly noteworthy if not historic." Several African American newspapers covered the event and mentioned the speech. Perhaps the most sensitive topics of the speech—that have been and remain difficult for some African American Bahá'ís to relate to—are 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks on slavery, the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and their impact on Africans. For example, "Americans . . . took up arms, bore utmost hardships, braved utmost dangers . . . and finally their lives, in order that slaves might be free." African Americans "must never forget to be grateful and thankful to whites." 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells African Americans that if they "want to know

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really what great service the white race has rendered to you, go to Africa and study the conditions of your own race there."

When I first read these segments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's speech they proved very difficult for me, both as a young African American Bahá'í in the turbulent racial climate of the 1960s, battling white racism, and later as a history professor teaching courses on African American history and race relations. I struggled to reconcile 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks with research and teaching covering slavery, the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and its impact on Africans. I was not eager to share 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks on these topics. I did not feel intellectually or spiritually equipped to explore the complexities of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá also had a far more important message for whites. They "must be very kind to those whom they have freed . . . . with justice and firmness, but also with perfect love." His message to whites challenged them to overcome a pervasive culture of anti-Black racism and violence that had dogged the lives of the children of those who were freed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá called whites to a much higher standard than their "granting" of freedom which was done after centuries of cruel slavery! He called upon them to be "kind" and show "perfect love" to these descendants of freed slaves, and to "endeavor to promote your advancement and enhance your honor." 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised Blacks how they should relate to whites. They "must try to create love between yourselves; and this love does not come about unless you are grateful to the whites, and the whites are loving toward you, and endeavor to promote your advancement and enhance your honor." Buck focuses squarely on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's message to the white members of his audience, with a clear mandate that the whites should strive to promote the advancement and enhance the honor of African Americans nationwide.

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Buck is to be congratulated for taking on the delicate task that eluded many of us for decades. As he explains, the speech has two parts: "(1) Homiletics, that is, in nature, color is a source of beauty, not division, and (2) Historical, that is, whites died for Blacks in the Civil War, and the Emancipation Proclamation had an international impact." Buck suggests that "in light of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation," 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressed that "America's example of freeing the slaves has been *a power for freedom* everywhere" (emphasis added).

Buck recognizes the delicate and sensitive nature of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks and how they might give the impression that slavery was a blessing.

"It would be tempting to read 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement on Africa as an argument that slavery served as a proverbial bridge to civilization." He offers further clarity by quoting Booker T. Washington, who wrote: "Slavery, with all its disadvantages, gave the Negro race, by way of recompense, one great consolation, namely the Christian religion and the hope and belief in a future life." Buck is quick to add that "Washington surely was not stating that slavery was good, but that the sole good that came out of slavery was Christianization. It is not that slavery itself was a bridge to civilization for benighted tribes in Africa, but that freedom from the slavery of ignorance is another form of emancipation."

Throughout the chapter, Buck develops these parts, pointing out, for example, that in considering 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks on the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation, "We should note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not a historian of American history, but rather used historical generalizations rhetorically in order to reinforce His theme of the need for interracial harmony."

Buck's methodology and analysis meant a lot to me by resolving some of my concerns as a Bahá'í and a historian of African American history and race relations. For decades, I felt obligated as a Bahá'í to suspend any *scholarly* judgment of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Howard University speech, especially, his message to African Americans to ". . . never forget to be grateful and thankful . . ." to white people! Yet I was teaching courses on the history of racism in the United States! At what point and in what way could I have told African American students in my history classes in the 1970s that their great grandparents should have been grateful to whites? So, for decades I ducked the topic in hopes that someday a new light would break through on the subject. Thankfully, Buck came up with a convincing methodology and analysis that resolved many of my concerns.

In Chapter 3: "The Interracial 'Bahá'í Movement' and the Black Intelligentsia: The Case of W. E. B. Du Bois," the author opens this chapter stating that: "In the first half of the twentieth century, the 'Bahá'í movement' impressed a significant number of the Black intelligentsia—including W. E. B. Du Bois." In 1910, Louis G. Gregory sent Du Bois a book on the Bahá'í religion. A year later, Du Bois might have heard a presentation from a letter written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and presented, in absentia, at the 1911 Universal Races Conference in London. In 1912, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke at the Fourth Annual Conference of the NAACP, Du Bois described the speech as

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‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Brooklyn, June 18, 1912.
Still from original silent film taken that day.

Chapter 1

The Bahá'í "Pupil of the Eye" Metaphor: Promoting Ideal Race Relations in Jim Crow America

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This chapter focuses on a notable contribution to promoting ideal race relations in Jim Crow America by a new religion, which, though small in number, was socially significant in its concerted efforts to foster and advance harmony between the races (primarily black and white at the time). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "race relations" (q.v. "race, n. 6," compounds) as "the interactions and degree of concord between racial groups within a particular area." Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, the term "ideal race relations" is conceived as "socially amicable, reciprocal, and ameliorative interactions and an optimal degree of concord between racial groups within a particular area."

The Bahá'í religion (today known as the "Bahá'í Faith") was brought to the United States during the Jim Crow era of forced legal segregation under the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) "separate but equal" doctrine.[1] During this time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was keenly alive to the racial problem in America, which he saw firsthand in 1912 during his speaking tour in the United States and Canada.[2] "Bahá'u'lláh," 'Abdu'l-Bahá recalled, "once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth."[3] This chapter, therefore, focuses on the role that Bahá'u'lláh's "pupil of the eye" metaphor played in Bahá'í efforts to promote ideal race relations, which, far from being "empty rhetoric," was figurative public discourse aimed at countering racial prejudice—individually and interpersonally.

The Bahá'í message of interracial harmony attracted the notice of the American Black intelligentsia, which has been discussed in previous studies.[4] As a further contribution to the literature, this chapter is the first published survey of the Bahá'í pupil of the eye texts and reported statements that, all told, have so powerfully and definitively shaped and steeled the self-identity and group identity of African American Bahá'ís. The texts, though few, are poignant and, given their historical context in Jim Crow America, offered a remarkable and effective psychological antidote to the prevailing racial stereotypes of that era.

The chapter continues from where a previous study, on the same theme, left off. Richard W. Thomas, Professor Emeritus of History, Michigan State University, in 2006, published "African-Americans and the Making of the American Bahá'í Community,"[5] later republished in a Palgrave Macmillan multi-author work that same year.[6] In "The 'Pupil of the Eye': African-Americans and the Making of the American Bahá'í Community," Thomas notes the impact of the Bahá'í pupil of the eye racial metaphor on the spiritual self-identity of African American Bahá'ís, down to the present:

> The Bahá'í teachings on the spiritual qualities of Black people and their role in the growth and expansion of the Bahá'í Faith contributed to the formation of a new racial identity among Black Bahá'ís throughout the Bahá'í world. The "pupil of the eye" became the spiritual image which not only united Blacks in their service to their Faith, but also provided Bahá'ís of other racial and cultural backgrounds with a new way of looking at their Black coreligionists. Freed from the traditional anti-Black racist stereotypes, Bahá'ís could move forward in building a truly united multiracial religious community.[7]

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After discussing the origin of the Bahá'í pupil of the eye metaphor, this chapter presents seven pupil of the eye tablets (letters by 'Abdu'l-Bahá):[8] (1) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Sarah Farmer (1902); (2) Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Alma S. Knobloch (1906); (3) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Pocahontas Pope (1906); (4) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Robert Turner (c. 1909); (5) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Ali-Kuli Khan (1909, regarding Robert Turner); (6) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Louise Washington (1910); and (7) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to George A. Anderson (1914). Biographical highlights of the recipients of these tablets are offered. These pupil of the eye tablets are then placed within the wider context in Bahá'í history: first, within Bahá'u'lláh's contributions to emancipation

and abolition, and then by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's public statements on ideal race relations.

Origin of the Bahá'í Pupil of the Eye Metaphor: Bahá'u'lláh's Statements (pre-1893)

What was the origin of the Bahá'í pupil of the eye racial metaphor? When was it first coined, and by whom? There is good evidence that traces this dignifying racial trope back to Bahá'u'lláh. In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a lengthy letter dated December 25, 1938, written to the Bahá'ís of North America, Shoghi Effendi documents the following reported statements by Bahá'u'lláh on the issue of race:

> "O ye discerning ones!" Bahá'u'lláh has written, "Verily, the words which have descended from the heaven of the Will of God are the source of unity and harmony for the world. Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness." "We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations," He proclaims "that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled." "Bahá'u'lláh hath said," writes 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them." "Bahá'u'lláh," 'Abdu'l-Bahá moreover has said, "once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth."[9]

To better understand how African Americans likely understood and appreciated Bahá'u'lláh's pupil of the eye simile and its metaphorical implications, these insights by linguist Christina Alm-Arvius may well apply in stating that "the qualities that are foregrounded in a metaphorical application are comparatively often attitudinal rather than factually descriptive. So the meaning features that dominate in many metaphors seem merely connotative."[10] Obviously, there is little resemblance between a person of African descent and the pupil of an eye, except for the "black"

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color that is a shared feature. Alm-Arvius speaks of a "metaphorical relaxation" that takes place when "peripheral meaning qualities in the source" are cognitively understood as a reflex of metaphorical competence (i.e., ability to "decode" figurative language).[11]

Alm-Arvius claims that "metaphorisation is an imaginative widening or generalisation of the semantic contents of some word(s) or longer stretch(es) of language use."[12] She further explains that such meaning is a "type of figurative extension" that "involves the suppression of ordinarily quite central characteristics in the source contents," thereby resulting in "a live, transparent [obvious] metaphor that spans both the basic, literal understanding and the metaphorical generalisation at the same time."[13] Here, the pupil of the eye involves a "metaphorical widening,"[14] whereby not only is the color (i.e., appearance) of the pupil significant, but, even more importantly, also its visual function.

Bahá'u'lláh's pupil of the eye image creates associative links of perceived similarity between the source—the black color of the pupil ("surrounded by the white" [race])—and the metaphor target, "the colored peoples." The transfer of qualities of sight (i.e., insight into the human condition) from the source image (pupil of the eye) to African Americans in the Jim Crow context by way of "reflected meaning"[15] was an effective rhetorical strategy then, and remains so today in the eyes of African American Bahá'ís, as Richard W. Thomas has pointed out. The pupil of the eye metaphor was expressive and rich in associative potential.

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To put Bahá'u'lláh's reported statement in historical context, 'Abdu'l-Bahá recalled it in remarks at a gathering of Theosophists in London in September, 1911:

> A coloured man man from South Africa who was visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, said that even now no white people really cared very much for the black man.
>
> 'Abdu'l-Bahá replies: Compare the present time and the feeling towards the coloured people now, with the state of feeling two or three hundred years ago, and see how much better it is at present. In a short time the relationship between the coloured and white people will still further improve, and bye and bye no difference will be felt between them. White doves and purple doves exist, but both kinds are doves.
>
> Bahá'u'lláh once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil you see

> the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the Spirit shines forth.
>
> In the sight of God colour makes no difference at all. He looks at the hearts of men. That which God desires from men is the heart. A black man with a good character is far superior to a white man with a character that is less good.[16]

The fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was responding to a question posed by a Black South African demonstrates that Bahá'u'lláh's pupil of the eye metaphor applies to all peoples of African descent in general, and not only to African Americans in particular. This is the source that historians point to in support of the proposition that the pupil of the eye metaphor originates with Bahá'u'lláh himself. Here, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reported a statement sometime prior to May 29, 1892, the date of Bahá'u'lláh's death.

For historical purposes, although the reported statements may not be 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words verbatim as no Persian original has been found, the historical gist is nevertheless regarded as reliable. Furthermore, it was widely distributed at the time, first by the British publication, and then through its publication in the United States with the Bahá'í Publishing Society of Chicago in 1921. In 1953, Shoghi Effendi stated this directly, in the African context: "I am reminded, on this historic occasion, of the significant words uttered by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who as attested by the Center of the Covenant ['Abdu'l-Bahá], in His Writings, 'compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye,' through which 'the light of the spirit shineth forth.'"[17]

As for the statement, "Bahá'u'lláh once compared the coloured people to the black pupil of the eye" in which is seen "the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the Spirit shines forth,"[18] a more familiar example is readily available. The English etymology for pupil is parallel to that of Arabic and Persian. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), "pupil, n. 2" derives from the Middle French, *pupille*, for the "opening in the iris through which light passes into the eye." The OED entry further explains, "its etymon classical Latin *pūpilla* in same sense, transferred use of *pūpilla*, female child, also doll (feminine form corresponding to *pūpillus*), so called on account of the small reflected image seen when looking into someone's pupil." Here, "the small reflected image seen when looking into someone's pupil" as explained in the OED parallels Bahá'u'lláh's reported statement that in "the black pupil of the

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eye" is seen "the reflection of that which is before it."[19] What is "reflected" is not only the collective image of people of African descent, but also their legacy of oppression, first under slavery, and then, after abolition, of the after-effects of slavery, from violent racism to subtle racist attitudes, or "polite prejudice." In other words, the racially ennobling pupil of the eye metaphor rhetorically affirms the unique perspective of peoples of African descent in the historical experience of slavery and colonialism that they collectively suffered. While a rhetorical analysis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourses on race awaits a full study, a natural place to begin is his pupil of the eye metaphor found in seven tablets to American (mostly African American) Bahá'ís, examined in roughly chronological order.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Sarah Farmer (1902)

Sarah Jane Farmer (1844–1916) is best known as the founder of the Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine.[20] Such was the magnitude of her contributions to the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in the United States that she was posthumously named by Shoghi Effendi as one of the nineteen "Disciples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."[21] Farmer received several tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, mostly in Arabic, among which is the first of the several pupil of the eye tablets surveyed in this chapter. The pertinent extract from this tablet is:

> As to (Robert, Alice) and (Louise), verily the faces of these [the members of the black race] are as the pupil of the eye; although the pupil is created black, yet it is the source of light. I hope God will make these black ones the glory of the white ones and as the wellspring of the light of love of God. And I ask God to assist them under all circumstances, that they may be encompassed with the favors of their Loving Lord throughout centuries and ages.[22]

Both in the originally published translation[23] and in the more recent translation[24] when first published, the three bracketed names were deleted. They conspicuously appear in digital scans of the original manuscript translation: "Robert, Alice and Louise."[25] Instead of the names, the bracketed information, "[the members of the black race]," was inserted in the translation when first published. These three names may well refer to the following early African American Bahá'ís: Robert Turner, Alice Ashton, and Louise Washington. The identification of Alice Ashton seems quite

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This book by Christopher Buck represents years of pioneering and groundbreaking research in several scholarly fields, particularly, African American history and Bahá'í history. Each of the eight chapters explores and excavates historical gems that have laid hidden, or were largely ignored by some traditional scholars. . . .

For those readers who have followed the remarkable scholarly journey of Christopher Buck into what was until recently an uncharted field of African American Bahá'í history, this book of previously published works represents a major contribution to the evolving field of African American Bahá'í history. For close to twenty-five years... Buck has continued to contribute to the still fledgling field.... As he points out in his chapter, "The Bahá'í Race Amity Movement and the Black Intelligentsia in Jim Crow America: Alain Locke and Robert S. Abbott": "Notwithstanding the absence of a definitive history of African American Bahá'ís, important work has been done on the 'Race Amity' movement, which is surely the most significant aspect of African American Bahá'í history during the Jim Crow era . . . ." There can be no doubt that this book will contribute to that eventual "definitive history of African American Bahá'ís."

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