

Letter to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás Coralie Franklin Cook

This previously unpublished letter was sent by Coralie Franklin Cook to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in March 1914.

Honored and dearly beloved Teacher:

Only a short time ago, after many months of waiting, I dared to send you a brief letter expressing my love for the Cause and telling you in what way your visit to this Institution had planted seed, which, already begins to grow and bear fruit. Writing a letter to you is like no other writing. No sooner do I take up the pen with that intention than I seem somehow, to be ushered into your very Presence. The pen is indeed only a medium and you yourself seem very near. Perhaps the subject I shall try to write upon is one of such import as to invoke your Presence. However that may be, you will know that I shall write no thoughtless word and shall try to be just and honest in every statement. It has seemed wise to my good friends Mr. and Mrs. Hannen and Mrs. Haney that I should write you concerning some aspects of the **Race Problem in its relation to the Bahá’í Cause here in America.**



MRS. CORALIE FRANKLIN COOK

We do not make the mistake of supposing that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not understand far more about this matter than any believer can possibly show him, but we do feel it fitting to put on record and into your hands certain facts as expressing the attitude of the colored people themselves concerning race prejudice. Since we are the ones whose progress it impedes and whose footsteps it hounds surely we must be better prepared to speak than those who view the situation ON THE OUTSIDE.

Race relationship, in the Southern States especially, but more or less thru out the country is in a deplorable condition. In many instances where friendship, mutual sympathy, and good will ought to exist, hostility and venom are manifested by the whites and are met by distrust and dislike on the part of the colored people. To cite the contributing causes which have led up to this direful situation—culminating recently in acts of certain public officials, leading toward segregation and discrimination among the employees of the federal government itself—would be to write a book. Chief among them however it is safe to say is the popular delusion called “social equality.”

By some strange phenomenon certain white people think or affect to think, that if a colored person shares in the ordinary privileges which pertain to comfort and convenience, or political or civic right that it means “**social equality**”—that is to say, if permitted to vote, to take part in civic festivities or parades, to ride in the same car, to attend the same public school or place of worship or to be buried in the same grave yard means “social equality.”

45 To any but a morbid mind or diseased mind this seems like unbelievable absurdity, which.
46 practically carried out, is making the position of the colored people almost unbearable and robbing
47 the American white people of any rightful claims to an exalted position among the nations of men,
48 because they are either active participants in, or silent witnesses of the gross injustice.

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50 And yet, as in the days of slavery, when certain heroics rose up against the iniquities of that awful
51 system and said, "These things must not and shall not be," so now the maligned and persecuted
52 black man is not without friends.

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54 New Abolitionists, who SEE the nation's peril as well as the black man's extremity, have banded
55 together to readjust the situation in ways becoming a Christian nation and a Democratic
56 Government. The Southern Sociological Congress which held its Second Annual Meeting in Atlanta,
57 Ga., last year considered "Six Great Questions," one of which was the Race Problem. It reported
58 that for three days 300 white and 100 black men and women in a spirit of perfect harmony and
59 helpfulness, discussed race relationship and reached a basis of agreement upon co-operative
60 investigation and action which is bound to result in material benefit to both races.

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62 Efforts on the part of the hot-headed demagogues to annul the amendments to the National
63 Constitution which conferred citizenship and the franchise upon the black man, have been met by
64 uncompromising opposition from some few members of both houses of Congress who have not yet
65 forgotten the Declaration of Independence nor that message handed down through the ages: "He
66 hath made of one blood all nations of men."

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68 No phase of the color question excites so much rancor and misrepresentation as the one of mixed
69 marriage. It is constantly made use of by all classes of whites from the Statesmen to the boot-black
70 and now includes some so-called Bahá'ís to arouse passion and strife and to flatter Saxon vanity. If
71 the whole truth were told, it must be said that many colored people are as strongly opposed to
72 inter-racial marriage as the whites who rant and tear continuously, the difference being that colored
73 people entertain no fear of whole-sale absorption as some whites apparently do. I use the word
74 absorption meaning that in the ratio of 4 to 1 must in time result in the racial identity of the smaller
75 group being lost in that of the larger. Former President Roosevelt has explained in a recent number
76 of The Outlook that this is the accepted mode of race adjustment in Brazil, South America, and is
77 provocative of no race friction whatever, but on the contrary establishes harmony and good will.

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79 So far as the matter of amalgamation goes here in the United States, it is settled past undoing. 250
80 years of domestic slavery with the female slave at the command of her master has bequeathed to
81 the country hundreds, yes thousands, of mixed bloods ranging in type from a dark rich brown skin
82 with curly hair to the perfect blond with golden hair and blue eyes all classed as negroes and all—if
83 known to have a drop of negro blood—subject to the same restrictions, insults, and persecutions.

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85 What is even more significant is just as you find the white skin, the fair hair bespeaking white blood
86 among the colored people you find the open nostril the full lips the large and melancholy eye
87 distributed among those who suppose themselves to be pure white. Surely "the Judgments of the
88 Lord are true and righteous altogether." This mixing of the two Races we are told is biologically
89 unfit, will degrade posterity and vitiate the noble Saxon blood. But even from such unholy alliance

90 came the great Fredrick Douglass, and our Gifted Du Bois is plainly of mixed blood, this same
91 admixture gave to France her Dumas, to Russia her Pushkin, while some go so far as to claim the
92 African strain courses through the blood of the Great Robert Browning and the early American
93 Patriot Alexander Hamilton.

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95 Surely such examples in no wise incite the alarming theory of race deterioration. Numerous
96 examples might be given where colored boys and girls in competition with whites outstrip the latter
97 amazingly. For example a fourteen year old colored girl has recently taken a prize for proficiency in
98 German over 107 white competitors, EIGHTEEN OF WHOM WERE OF GERMAN DESCENT.

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100 Nor do these instances in any way reflect upon the capacity of the full blooded negro. The Flower of
101 the French Army was defeated by the military genius of Haiti's black General, the most popular note
102 in American music today is given by a Negro Composer and no writer of verse of the present
103 generation has displayed finer poetic fire than Paul Laurence Dunbar. Intelligent colored people
104 have no craving for intermarriage, nor do they inveigh against it, they take the position that it is a
105 question for the two parties concerned to settle for themselves, with which no one has a right to
106 interfere and most of all do they deem it an outrage that in a free Republic laws should be enacted
107 prohibiting such legal union while concubinage between white men and black women goes
108 unpunished.

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110 Writers who oppose mixed marriages almost always assure the reader that there is a "natural
111 antipathy between the races," but is more than likely to follow up this statement by saying that
112 social equality must not be tolerated, because it inevitably leads to mixed marriage. To a normal
113 mind the query naturally suggests itself: "Why make laws to prevent a thing which an 'inherent
114 God-given instinct' has already provided against?" Knowledge of the progress of the colored people
115 during their fifty years of freedom has astounded the world and incited the envy and hatred of
116 those who prophesied their extinction and argued their inability to work for themselves.

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118 In the midst of unfriendly surroundings they have accumulated \$7,000,000,000 worth of property
119 raising a million and a half of dollars in the past year alone for educational work, coming out of
120 slavery with 95 percent of their whole number unable to read or write to say that number is
121 reduced to only 30 percent an advance surpassing that of the whites during the same period.

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123 Instead of this marvelous achievement appealing to all that is best and noblest in the whites it has
124 seemed to have a contrary effect. Laws are being passed in many sections compelling colored
125 people to live in segregated districts, where they have had handsome houses among white
126 residences these houses have been attacked, lives endangered, valuable property ruthlessly
127 destroyed, anonymous orders to vacate, if ignored, have even resulted in the use of dynamite and
128 total destruction of a house and its contents, the Law Courts offer no redress for the word of a black
129 man is not taken against that of a white man where Judge and Jury are all of the dominant class.
130 Back, back and evermore back! "Be ye hewers of wood and drawers of water" only! Come thus far
131 and no further! is the slogan dinned into his ears until the average person of color is almost a state
132 of desperation.

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134 Most naturally the afflicted one would turn and look to the followers of Christ for protection and

135 championship, but one by one they have given into the mandates of the Race Problem or Prejudice
136 that is enclosing the white race almost as much as the black, one by one various religious bodies
137 have departed from their original teachings. For a colored person to enter almost any white Church
138 in the City of Washington and attempt to share in its worship would be to virtually break up the
139 meeting.

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141 The Seventh Day Adventists who at one time were in perfect harmony and fellowship disgraced the
142 Cause of God and outraged the souls of men by finally dividing on racial lines, the same thing is true
143 of the Salvation Army. Where then is the black man to turn. The Bahá'í Cause is his last hope. If he
144 be asked to face a line of cleavage in it, his faith will be broken and not only HIS faith but the faith of
145 all those white persons who believe in a Divine teachings, worse than all to discriminate would be
146 to furnish the enemies of the Negro with new weapons both of offence and defiance for would they
147 not say, "See, we are right! Even the Bahá'ís could not hold out."

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149 Because the Race situation is so acute, because the colored people and their brave friends feel this
150 is the most crucial period in all the Nation's History, I pray God that no one who has ever embraced
151 the Faith will step aside to so contribute to the Nations' shame and so abandon the Cause. Let them
152 say like Luther, "Here I stand, God helping me I can do no other," like and heart sore, discouraged
153 with the Churches that close their doors to them, the silent pulpits that should thunder forth in
154 trumpet tones against the iniquities in the pews, it were strange indeed if the Bahá'í Teachings
155 wakened no response of great hope in the hearts of colored people.

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157 If the true believers only stand by the teachings though it requires superhuman courage, and live
158 the life it is only a question of time when every seeker after truth will be swept into Bahá'í
159 embrace! To falter, to let go one divinely approved Principle would be disastrous! No one could
160 then have faith for Truth is unalterable and cannot change. There are ministers filling hundreds of
161 pulpits today who dare not preach the Truths beating in their breasts for utterance! There are
162 hundreds of hungry souls who never enter the churches because of the hollow mockery they
163 find there. "They ask for bread and are given a stone." Every noble principle, every lofty ideal, every
164 rule of conduct in the Bahá'í Faith can be defended by passages of our own Bible, the Faith is
165 seeking followers at a time when it would seem as if the Universe itself were challenged to choose
166 between Peace and War, brotherhood and disunion, right and wrong. It is not plain to all that the
167 TEST is crucial and that the times are so momentous that what may seem for the present to put
168 back the Cause of Bahá'í may be in reality the one thing that will put world progress forward
169 immeasurably.

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171 My greetings and my prayer for your blessings, Coralie F. Cook