

waste its cities at the current moment. The name of this virulent disease is xenophobia. It is defined by Webster's as "fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or anything that is strange or foreign."⁵

Collins goes a little further "hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture."⁶

shunning, and hating of the "other." It has many strains which flare up and dominate some regions

1 Based on a webinar presentation at the Wilmette Institute, Dec. 6, 2020.

2 John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

3 Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1965).

4 Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956).

5 Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster), 1990.

6 Collins English Dictionary. 12th ed. (Glasgow: Collins), 2014.

for some time, are suppressed only to be replaced by a new strain. Currently the strains that are

dominating in America are racism, Hispanophobia, Islamophobia, with anti-Semitism lurking in the

corner. In Europe is the refugees and the newly arrived immigrants who are the current victims.

There are dozens of other strains. This virus is vicious, devious and insidious. It aims to divide and

conquer. It divides the victims and unites the oppressors.

Some Talking Points on Xenophobia

1. It is WRONG i.e., immoral and untruthful)

2. It is STUPID i.e., lacking in normal intelligence)

3. It is disease which is highly contagious, and insidious

A) It is irrational

B) It is bereft of logic

C) It encourages A and B to be argued to show that both are rational and logical

D) It is divisive in that it tends to divide the victims one against the other

E) It victimizes the victims by encouraging the victims to blame themselves for their

plight

F) It encourages the victims to suppress their "objectionable" traits and "pass for

white.”

G) It denies the spiritual reality of the oneness of mankind

H) It’s existence is a denial of the biological unity of mankind.

I) It helps to unite oppressors and tyrants.

J) It disrespects and distorts the culture of the “other”, and then rationalizes the argument.

K) It distorts and deforms language to facilitate its existence. For one example, the use

of lower case initial letter in a name of a nationality or ethnic group is considered

demeaning and disrespectful. But the use of “black” as another term for African

American is common, rather than the correct term “Black”. Another word “Racism”

could be argued is an oxymoron since there is but only one human race, and therefore

the only inhabitants who could be racists are Martians and Venusians.

Please remember points C and J of the above as they will assist in clarifying thinking on several subsequent points.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Xenophobia

When “Abdu'l-Bahá made His Western tour, in His first published talk given in Paris on October

16, 1911, He said in part:

When a man turns his face to God he finds sunshine everywhere. All men are his brothers. Let not conventionality cause you to seem cold and unsympathetic when you

meet strange people from other countries. Do not look at them as though you suspected

them of being evil-doers, thieves and boors. You think it necessary to be very careful,

not to expose yourselves to the risk of making acquaintance with such, possibly,

undesirable people.

I ask you not to think only of yourselves. Be kind to the strangers, whether come they

from Turkey, Japan, Persia, Russia, China or any other country in the world.

Help to make them feel at home; find out where they are staying, ask if you may render

them any service; try to make their lives a little happier.

In this way, even if, sometimes, what you at first suspected should be true, still go out of your way to be kind to them—this kindness will help them to become better.

After all, why should any foreign people be treated as strangers? Let those who meet you know, without your proclaiming the fact, that you are indeed a Bahá'í.⁷

This is one of His themes that He elucidated in many of the cities He visited in America. The list of peoples that He mentioned as victims of xenophobic acts is long and besides those already mentioned included the African Americans, the Jews, the Indians or First Nation peoples the Japanese, and others.

Not only did He talk about inclusivity, but He practised it. He went to the meeting places and the homes of the Black Americans, the Armenians, the Syrians, the Greeks, the Jews, the East Indians, the Japanese and other groups. We know the story with Louise Gregory at the Washington banquet.

But there are other lesser known stories, such as the meeting with the Black servants at the Parsons' boathouse in Dublin, New Hampshire, the visit to the home of Charles Tinsley, a Black servant from the Hearst estate who had broken his leg, the sudden change of hotels in Paris after a Black seeker had been refused entry, His sudden enthusiasm of meeting with the Greeks in a park in New

7 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (Wilme5e: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), pp. 5-6.

York City despite a very uncomfortable ride on the underground metro, His seeking out and

meeting under the Eiffel Tower, for the second time a crippled seller of post-cards confined to a

wheel chair, etc. The scattered notes of His travels indicate some of the strains of xenophobia that

'Abdu'l-Bahá confronted in His travels and they included: racism.

Islamophobia, ant-Semitism,

homophobia, Hibernophobia, the ugly American syndrome, Francophobia, ant-feminism.

Japanophobia, Germanophobia, Turkophobia, Italophobia, ethnic and racial stereotypes, disability discrimination, to name a few.

Press Coverage During ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Ministry.

There were four periods during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry when there was intense press coverage:

1896 associated with the assassination of the Shah of Persia;

1903 as a result of the intense and bloody persecutions of the Bahá’ís in Persia;

1911-1913 associated with the travels of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the West;

1921-1922 associated the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

We will be concentrating on the third period only.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s trip to America in 1912 was widely covered in the newspapers. His every

movement, talk and engagement was recorded with in about two thousand articles.

My friend Amín

Egea has done a remarkable presentation in his two volume *The Apostle of Peace: A Survey of*

References to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Western Press, published by George Ronald in 2018.

In the United States ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met a variety of minority communities.

Notable are His

engagements with the African Americans at Howard University and at the NAACP convention in

Chicago. These were well covered by the Black press, both local and national.

However, the story is

quite different with His meetings with some of the other groups.

The Armenians

On July 21st 1912 the Armenian Federation Society had a memorial service to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

was invited. But the only newspaper account we have is from the *New-York Tribune*⁸. Mahmúd

Zarqání reports that his talk was not recorded by the Persians⁹. Wonder what the Armenians

themselves wrote about the meeting? The Library of Congress lists twenty-eight Armenian

periodicals published in America in its collection, none of which have been digitalized.

The Syrians and Lebanese

He met with the Syrian community in Boston twice in May and July. Here we are dependent on the

English-language *Boston Herald*¹⁰ for a report but only for the second meeting. Since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

8 “Persians Hold Service,” *New-York Tribune* (New York) vol. 72 no. 23,990 (July 22, 1912), p. 12, col. 4.

9 Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd’s Diary* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), p. 175.

10 “Bahaist Leader Has Reception,” *The Boston Herald* (Boston) vol. 132 no. 24 (July 24, 1912), p. 5.

spoke in Arabic there was no translation and no recording, except in the Arabic press, for which we have no report. Although Amín does give us the reference as the periodical Al-Saih. It is available at the Library of Congress, but only on microfilm. Apparently this was a highly literate gathering with poets, writers and editors of the Syrian-American community. The Lebanese-American writer Khalil Gibran was a member of this society.

The Japanese

He had several meetings with the Japanese in California. He even gave His permission for articles to be published in the Japanese press¹¹. By the very fact that He gave His permission, He became an active partner in this endeavour. These are also missing from our collective knowledge.

The Jewish community

‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited three synagogues and there was some reporting in the daily local newspapers.

However, it would be interesting to see what the response was in the Yiddish press. Some of the American Yiddish newspapers have been digitalized and are available but not in America. No

articles from the English-language Jewish press have been found. However Ahmad Sohrab reports

that the reporting in the Arabic press of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s meeting at the synagogue in San Francisco

was of such a high quality that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá instructed that fifty packets of newspapers be made up

for His journey back to Egypt. Since these newspapers have not been digitalized the information is

not publicly available. Fortunately there was extensive recording of these talks in the Bahá’í journal

Star of the West (Chicago) which has been digitalized and is available though not by the Library of Congress.

To summarize: we have no or limited public access to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks to the Armenians, Jews,

Syrians and Japanese, solely on the grounds that the newspapers that published them are not

available. Besides the talks themselves the commentaries by the journalist and editors would also be

of interest especially in the Yiddish press.

Amín Egea states in his preface “much more research is yet to be conducted in American journals

and magazines, especially. . . in the many newspapers published by different

ethnic and cultural communities in the United States.”¹² As far as I am aware he is the first to acknowledge this gap in our collective history. Since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke about universal truths such as the oneness of mankind and illustrated their application, this is not only a loss to the Bahá’ís, but also to the nation as a whole.

A survey in the digitalized American newspapers readily accessible in national and state online

¹¹ Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, Mahmúd’s Diary, p. 304.

¹² Amín Egea, *The Apostle of Peace: A Survey of References to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Western Press 1871-1921* (Oxford:

George Ronald, 2017), p. x.

archives (including three subscription sites) shows that for the year 1912 the number of articles

referencing the Bahá’í Faith in each of the following ethnic language and minority newspapers was:

Polish (1), German (1), Dutch (1), Czech (3), Irish (2), Japanese (English) (1), Jewish (2) and

African American (24). Of these the total from the Library of Congress *Chronicling America* is

seven. The number of foreign-language newspapers was estimated to be in excess of 1,300 in 1910.

When working on *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the West: A Biographical Guide*¹³ it was noticed that there was a

lack of articles concerning ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the immigrant press. Only two articles were found in

Polish and Dutch newspapers in all of the various sources available at that time. The assumption

was that the immigrant communities and their press were not interested in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. But this

was an error in judgement. Enough fragments of information have surfaced to show that there was a

keen interest not only in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to America, but in the Bahá’í Faith in general by the

immigrant and minority press, not only during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit, but during the entirety of His

ministry.

The library of libraries in the United States is the Library of Congress.

Though not a national

library, it has taken up that role as well as being a parliamentary library.

The importance of its role

in collecting and disseminating information and establishing standards in the library environment is

not to be underestimated. It is also a role model for many other national

institutions outside the United States. Its mission statement dated 2020 for conserving and digitalizing newspapers from the various and diverse ethnic communities in the United States stated: “The Library of Congress presents the cultural output of the United States in all its diversity. Our collections and the materials we present online speak for their creators, not for the Library or the United States government.”¹⁴

Two lists, dated 1920, visualizing with graphs and maps of the service provided in conserving and digitalizing for the public the ethnic newspapers are provided.¹⁵ The first list is of ethnic communities and the second of the various languages served represented in the digital collections of the Library of Congress in *Chronicling America*. The first list has obvious problems. The most glaring are the omissions especially important for the study of the Bahá’í Faith in America of many groups: Chinese, Armenians, Japanese, Dutch, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans, etc. A second list of languages exists on the search page. It varies

13 Jan Teofil Jasion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the West: a Biographical Guide of the People Associated with His Travel (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012).

14 <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/about/>

15 *Chronicling America Data Visualizations*.

https://www.loc.gov/ndnp/data-visualizations/#ethnic_map.

slightly by not having Hebrew and Tagalog. Also when searching for newspapers using this criteria results in some very odd results. Apparently there is a confusion between Dutch and German (Deutsch?).¹⁶

A third list of languages and ethnic groups exist on the page “Search U.S. Newspaper Directory,

1690-Present”¹⁷. This seems to be a list of all the languages represented in the Library of Congress

newspaper collection, and not just the digitalized titles. This lack of attention to what may seem to

the majority of users as unimportant, can be viewed by the people of minority backgrounds as a deliberate and demining act.

It should be noted that the United States is not the only country that displays these traits in its

national library digitalizing programmes. That is the trait of the suppression of newspapers from

immigrant and minority cultures. The same can be observed in Australia, with

their database called Trove, in Great Britain with the British Newspaper Archive, in France with the two databases Gallica and Retronews and in Austria with ANNO. These five nations have a rich national collection of digitalized newspapers in publicly accessible databases (though some charge a fee to access all of the services) and they also have a sophisticated and historical emigrant community. And they all practise cultural suppression of minority and emigrant communities. Another interesting point is that the Library of Congress along with three large commercial databases have digitalized thousands of newspapers from the United States and a few other countries. If we just concentrate on the American newspapers we find that the goal of these four databases is to present the cultural heritage of the nation. They have even spent money on the digitalization of newspapers from around twenty small towns with populations of less than a thousand and a few that no longer exist such as Sunbeam, Minnesota and White Pine, Colorado. But as we have seen these efforts have not been extended to the immigrant community. Furthermore, several of these immigrant newspapers have been digitalized and made available, but by foreign agencies. A Welsh newspaper from Utica, New York is at the National Library of Wales, two English-language Jewish newspapers are uniquely at the National Library of Israel, a Dutch newspaper from Paterson, New Jersey is at Delpher, the newspaper database of the Netherlands, and so forth.

The result of this as has been illustrated by using the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as an example is the loss, not only to the ethnic community, but to the nation as a whole of part of their history. How many stories, documents, events, speeches fundamental to the understanding of a nation's history

16 Chronicling America. Advanced Search.

https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/#tab=tab_advanced_search

17 Chronicling America. Search U.S. Newspaper Directory, 1690-Present.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/0tles/>

and development have been suppressed or permanently lost due to the misguided applications of false ethnic ideologies?

Another factor which might impact on the decision making for the preservation

and digitalization of newspapers is the newspapers themselves. That newspapers are not worth the bother. It might be that there is a view that still prevails that newspapers are not an important source of research. That they are just ephemera that have little long-term value.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF NEWSPAPERS

The trend seems to be in some circles of the academic world to minimize the value and use of newspapers in scholarly research, as reflected by an article published by the American History Association, by Prof. Jerry W. Knudson who wrote in 1998: "Not until John Bach McMaster's History of the People of the United States began publication in 1883 did any prominent historian in this country make copious use of newspaper quotations." He goes on to say "many historians have consulted newspapers since then . . . but few have recognized the wider significance of the role of the press in both reflecting and shaping society." At about the same time, or at least during the same decade as McMaster was writing, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in 1885 about the importance of newspapers as a primary and secondary sources of information. A statement which stands well ahead of contemporary thinking about the value of newspapers as can be seen by Knudsen's statement.

"In this day the mysteries of this earth are unfolded and visible before the eyes, and the pages of swiftly appearing newspapers are indeed the mirror of the world; they display the doings and actions of the different nations; they both illustrate them and cause them to be heard. Newspapers are as a mirror endowed with hearing, sight and speech; they are a wonderful phenomenon and a great matter."¹⁸

If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honored in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory. No pen can depict the loftiness of his station, neither can any tongue describe its splendor."¹⁹

Blessed, doubly blessed is . . . the pen that hath voiced His praise, the scroll that hath borne the

testimony of His writings. . .20

These quotations open up a wide scope of activity for future researchers.

18 Bahá'u'lláh, "Tarázát" in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Wilmeton: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), pp. 39-40)

19 Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawh-i-Salmán II", Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmeton: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 374, no. 154.

20 Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawh-i-Ard-i-Bá", Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 227-228.

Not only is the importance of the missing reports in the ethnic and minority presses mentioned above brought into a sharper focus. One could argue that the retrieval of such documents

concerning 'Abdu'l-Bahá verges on that of a sacred trust for Bahá'í scholars and researchers.

And what is the significance of those who wrote in defence of the Faith? In 1903 there were terrible

persecutions of the Bahá'ís in Persia. Over 130 American newspapers responded by publishing

articles. Most of the articles were obtained from wire-services. But many editors applied their own

headlines to these articles, some with uncanny insight:

"Pagans Kill and Torture." from the The Bay City Tribune in Michigan; or "Mobs in Persia Slay

Reformers." from the The San Francisco Call. Four articles were discovered where the editors were

calling for petitions to be organized and delivered to the Secretary of State.

These came from Yuma,

Arizona, New Orleans and Springfield, Massachusetts.

Not only were individual articles concerning the Faith on their own important, but also

their sheer number impressed the persecutors greatly. This is illustrated by this account from

Ahmad Sohrab as presented by Amín Egea:

"when He returned to London, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was invited to a dinner in His honor at the

Persian Legation; and the ambassador presented Him with a collection of clippings from Edinburgh

newspapers with articles about Him which were provided to the embassy by a clippings bureau."

I am sure that the Ottomans did the same and the information was sent to Istanbul.

Another role that these journalists and publishers did was to proclaim the Faith. It were

these articles that alerted hundreds of thousands of people around the globe to

the very existence of
a new divine messenger and a new message. These were deliberate actions by the
editors,
publishers, journalists to proclaim the Faith. The only reason they had for
including the word ‘Babi’
or ‘Babism’ in an article was but that somebody should read it.

ADDENDUM

FIRST NEWSPAPER ARTICLES TO MENTION THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í FAITHS PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES

1845-1921

CURRENT STATES

Alabama (Livingston) Journal	1885	The Livingston Semi-Weekly
Alaska (Juneau)	1918	The Alaska Daily Empire
Arizona (Tucson)	1885	Arizona Daily Star
Arkansas (Washington)	1851	Washington Telegraph
California (San Francisco)	1850	Daily Pacific News
Colorado (Saguache)	1884	Saguache Chronicle
Connecticut (Litchfield)	1850	The Litchfield Republican
Delaware (Wilmington)	1909	The Morning News
District of Columbia (Washington) Intelligencer	1846	Daily National
Florida (Pensacola)	1852	Pensacola Gazette
Georgia (Augusta; Savannah)	1852	Daily Chronicle & Sentinel
Hawaii (Honolulu)	1857	The Polynesian
Idaho (Idaho City)	1871	Idaho World
Illinois (Rockford)	1852	Rock River Democrat
Indiana (New Albany)	1850	New Albany Daily Ledger
Iowa (Burlington)	1846	Iowa Territorial Gazette and Advertiser
Kansas (Leavenworth)	1868	The Leavenworth Times
Kentucky (Louisville)	1846	Christian Observer
Louisiana (New Orleans)	1850	New-Orleans Weekly Delta
Maine (Augusta)	1846	Gospel Banner
Maryland (Baltimore)	1851	The Sun

Massachusetts (Boston)	1845	Boston Courier
Michigan (Ann Arbor)	1846	Michigan Argus
Minnesota (St. Paul)	1850	The Minnesota Pioneer
Mississippi (Vicksburg)	1850	Vicksburg Tri-Weekly Sentinel
Missouri (Fayette)	1846	Boon's Lick Times
Montana (Deer Lodge)	1890	The New North-West
Nebraska (Columbus)	1884	The Columbus Journal
Nevada (Reno)	1871	Nevada State Journal
New Hampshire (Keene)	1846	Newhampshire Sentinel
New Jersey (Newark)	1852	Newark Daily Advertiser
New Mexico (Albuquerque)	1896	Albuquerque Morning Democrat
New York (New York City)	1845	New-York Observer
North Carolina (Wilmington)	1850	Weekly Commercial
North Dakota (Bismark)	1890	The Bismark Daily Tribune
Ohio (Cleveland)	1850	The Cleveland Herald
Oklahoma (Muskogee)	1885	Indian Journal
Oregon (The Dalles)	1891	The Dalles Daily Chronicle
Pennsylvania (Philadelphia)	1846	Philadelphian
Rhode Island (Newport)	1852	Herald of the Times
South Carolina (Charleston)	1846	Southern Patriot
South Dakota (Elk Point)	1891	Union County Courier
Tennessee (Athens)	1853	The Athens Post
Texas (Galveston)	1851	The Civilian and Galveston Gazette
Utah (Salt Lake City)	1853	The Desseret News
Virginia (Alexandria)	1846	Alexandria Gazette
Washington (Spokane)	1891	The Spokane Daily Chronicle
West Virginia (Wheeling)	1852	Wheeling Daily Intelligencer
Wisconsin (Milwaukee)	1846	Milwaukee Sentinel
Wyoming (Sheridan)	1892	The Enterprise
CURRENT TERRITORIES		
Puerto Rico (San Juan)	1852	Gaceta del gobierno de

Puerto-Rico

Virgin Islands U.S. (St. Thomas) 1903 Lightbourn's Mail Notes

FORMER TERRITORY

Philippine Islands (Manila) 1913 Bulletin of the Philippine
Library

OLDEST DISCOVERED REFERENCES TO THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í FAITHS

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES IN NON-ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

1845-1921

Arabic	1912	Al-Hoda	New York City
Armenian	1916	Gotchnag	New York City
Czech	1911	Minnesotské Noviny	St. Paul, Minnesota
Dutch	1903	De Grondwet	Holland, Michigan
Esperanto	1913	Amerika Esperantiso	West Newton, Massachusetts
Finnish	1920	Uusi Kotimaa	New York Mills, Minnesota
French	1852	Le Courier de la Louisiane	New Orleans
German	1852	Der Lecha Patriot	Allentown, Pennsylvania
Hawaiian	1912	Nupepa Kuoka	Honolulu
Italian	1903	L'Italia	San Francisco, California
Lithuanian	1915	Lietuva	Chicago
Norwegian	1921	Minneapolis Tidende	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Polish	1896	Gazeta Polska w Chicago	Chicago
Slovenian	1921	Glas Svobode	Chicago
Spanish	1919	La Prensa	San Antonio, Texas
Swedish	1883	Gamla och Nya Hemlandet	Chicago
Welsh	1914	Y Drych	Utica, New York

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Jan Teofil Jasion

Châtenay-Malabry, France

