

## Introduction: Who am I and what is *You and The World*?

Hi, my name is Ayanna Lemon and I am a ninth grader at [Science Leadership Academy](#). From the beginning of this quarter till the end of the academic year the entire ninth grade will be participating in a research project entitled *You and the World*. *You and the World* will consist of three blog posts, of which this is the first installment. The purpose of *You and the World* is to inform and educate people about an issue that affects your local, national, or global community - and to take action to improve the state of your issue.

My research topic is the [Baha'i Faith](#). I'd like to explore the different aspects and ideals of the religion, discuss misconceptions about it, and focus on generating awareness about the modern-day persecution of Baha'is (specifically in Iran and Egypt). Growing up in a Baha'i [community](#) I've had a unique vantage point from which I view Baha'i related issues. My grandmother works as a professor for the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an online university which caters to [Iranian Baha'is](#). If I had a quarter for every time someone asked me "You're a Baha'i? What's that?", I'd surely be rich by now. And, if no one knows what a Baha'i is, then *how could they possibly know* that over [700](#) Iranian Baha'is have been imprisoned (on crimes of religion) since 2005?.

### What is the Baha'i Faith?

*"With more than five million followers, who reside in virtually every nation on earth, it is the second-most widespread faith, surpassing every religion but Christianity in its geographic reach."*

~ The [Baha'i International Community's Official Website](#)

The [Baha'i Faith](#) is a small religious community which formed in Persia (Now Iran) during the early nineteenth century. Baha'is follow the teachings of [Bahá'u'lláh](#), born Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí, who they recognize to be the most recent in a line of prophets sent by God (including, but not limited to: Jesus Christ, Abraham, the Buddha, Krishna, and Muhammad). Baha'is believe that all major religions come from the same God, all people are created equal, science and religion must co-exist harmoniously and their ultimate goal is world unity.

### Why is the Baha'i Faith controversial?

Baha'is believe in something called the "[New World Order](#)", which is closely associated with conspiracy theories, secret societies and cults. The reality is, that when a Baha'i mentions the "[New World Order](#)", they are in fact referring to a plan for global unification (the oneness of religion, government and race, on a worldwide scale). A plan, generally endorsed by the [United Nations](#).

The Baha'i faith is extremely similar to Islam, the **big** difference being that Muslims believe that the Prophet [Muhammad](#) was to be the final messenger from God, whereas Baha'is recognize both the [Bab](#) and [Bahá'u'lláh](#) as prophets (both born many centuries after Muhammad). In Iran and Egypt (predominantly Islamic countries), at best the [Baha'i Faith](#) is considered a particularly **blasphemous** offshoot of Islam and their governments do not recognize the [Baha'i Faith](#) as a legitimate religion. Because of this, Iranian Baha'is are legally [persecuted](#) in a sly fashion, that is oftentimes **barbarous**. They have been stripped of their **basic human rights**; they are publically executed, banned from attaining higher education, and incarcerated (on crimes of *religion*). In Egypt a Baha'i cannot register for identity cards (no **hospitalization, voting or marriage**) or attend universities.

### More on the Persecution of Baha'is

All throughout Iran Baha'i homes are burned and ransacked, their families torn apart. In Egypt, if you want to vote for the next presidential election (and you're a Baha'i) you would have to deny your religious affiliation, something against your religion's laws, to even begin the application process. There are [2,000](#) known Baha'is living in Egypt, over 200,000 in Iran. These numbers may seem small, but these are not just numbers, they're human lives; these people are mothers, fathers, children, friends. **Numbers are more than just numbers, they're people and people are people, regardless of religion.**



Prospective billboard depicting 7 imprisoned Baha'i from Iran. To be set up in major cities around the world.

One story in particular has caught global attention. As of 2008, 7 Baha'i leaders have been imprisoned on crimes of "*espionage for Israel, insulting religious sanctities, and propaganda against the Islamic republic.*". To give some context: About 30 years ago, all types of Baha'i elected and appointed institutions were **banned**, so in place of the [Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly](#) the "Friends In Iran" was formed. The 7 were **all** of the elected "Friends", and during their time in office they had worked openly and (at times) **with** the Iranian government.

The Baha'i [holy land](#) is in Haifa, Israel and according to the Iranian government, that homage somehow amounts to espionage (this is ironic, considering that Muslims in Iran pray towards Mecca every day and yet they are not spies for Saudi Arabia). As far as the insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against Islam, the Baha'i Faith in it of itself is sacrilegious to Islam, therefore Baha'is are insulting and their teachings (could be interpreted as, though they are not) anti-Islam.

Despite pressure from the United Nations and protest around the world, the Iranian government has failed to release the 7 Baha'is from prison and it shows no real intention of doing so until 2028 when the 7 have lived out their sentence.

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