

You and the World

Hi, my name is Ayanna Lemon and I am a ninth grader at [Science Leadership Academy](#) (SLA). From the beginning of the first quarter until the end of the academic year, half the 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 second installment. To view my first blog post, [click here](#). 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.

The Baha'i Institute of Higher Education and Original Research

In the months since my first blog post, I've looked deeper into the denial of education to Iranian Baha'is within their homeland and [Baha'i Institute of Higher Education](#) (BIHE). During this time, for the "Original Research" portion of my *You and the World* project, I interviewed Dara Gay Shaw, Ed.D, a professor at the [BIHE](#) and a Baha'i of 43 years.

"The Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) was founded in 1987 in response to the Iranian government's continuing campaign to deny Iranian Bahá'ís access to higher education."... "Faced with unrelenting religious persecution involving a wide range of human rights violations, including systematic denial of access to higher education, BIHE developed several unique features which have become its defining strengths. Courses delivered at the outset by correspondence for security reasons are now provided on-line, using leading-edge communication technologies."

~From the [BIHE's Official Website](#)

The picture Dr. Shaw painted was of a **republic** where Baha'is, the largest non-islamic population in Iran, are openly persecuted for their pacifist faith, because it was

deemed heretical by the government. A land where, if you're a Baha'i, your home is stormed and your personal effects, including your only access to education, are ransacked by police and confiscated. She couldn't give me a lot of information on how [BIHE](#) is set up, for secrecy reasons, but it's my understanding that because all the servers are outside of Iran, the only real damage the government can do to [BIHE](#) is petty raids like the ones mentioned above - and **arrest** inland teachers.

To clear up any misunderstandings people may have, [BIHE](#) is not a religious school, it is a fully accredited University, which is recognized virtually everywhere **but** Iran. As Dr. Shaw explained it, there are over 1,000 applications to [BIHE](#) annually, and that the long-term goal for the University is to expand and have international campuses open to people of all faiths and religions (or people who have a lack of) - because the goal of the Baha'is isn't to convert the world, its just to get the word out.



Education Under Fire and Agents of Change

For my "Agent of Change" portion of my *You and the World* project I would like to host viewings of *Education Under Fire* at SLA (or at another location). *Education Under Fire* is a 30-minute documentary about the [BIHE](#) and the persecution of Baha'is in Iran. Due to the way most people absorb information these days, I believe that showing a **short movie** will be more effective in getting my message across than a guest speaker. You can see the preview [here](#).

A Real-Life Example: Before coming into contact with Dr. Shaw, I had scheduled an interview with a young Iranian Baha'i who had relocated to the Philadelphia area and is attending Temple University. Her name is Maaman Razaee, she is an alumni of [BIHE](#), and **she was imprisoned when she lived in Iran for "conducting a Bahá'í-inspired literacy program"**. Not trying to convert children into Baha'is, mind, because that is against Baha'i laws, no, teaching Baha'i principles (ie: honesty, the equality of sexes, compassion, etc.). As it turns out, the majority of

her family remains in Iran, and her father, Saeid Razaee, is still in prison on crimes of religion. That having been said, when it came time for our interview, **the experience of remembering** proved to be too painful, and we called off the arrangement. [This is](#) an artistic rendering (video) she made of one of her experiences. [This is](#) a play, which she co-wrote with Mark Perry, which depicts “*the growing undercurrent of anxiety in the lives of the Iranian Bahá’ís and their consequent striving to transcend their situation.*” You can learn more about Saeid Razaee’s story [here](#), in an interview with his sister-in-law, Azadeh Rohanian Perry, from Andrew Bowen’s book [Project Conversion](#).

Additional Notes and Feelings

With further research has come a greater understanding as to the extent of torment that the Baha’is suffer at the hands of their government. However, while I am horrified by the nefarious deeds of the Iranian government, I am in equal awe of the strength displayed by the Baha’i community as they persevere despite the odds and continue to practice their faith - sometimes at the expense of their lives.

While I know that Iran is an Islamic Republic, and therefore religion and law are intertwined (that interpretations of Islam are correct or not, is up for debate), I know very little else about the specific Iranian laws that allow the open persecution and discrimination against the Baha’is and would like to do further investigation on the matter.



For more information on the situation in Iran, please visit the Iran Press Watch’s [Website](#).

Please visit my [Annotated Bibliography](#)