

contributions at only one moment in of which accrued to the benefit of the nation. You, too, seek to a wider ongoing conversation. Many render service to your homeland ren-der service to your homeland important voices and perspectives are and to contribute to a renewal of absent from this collection, but not civ-ization. They responded to all things can be accomplished in any the inhumanity of their enemies the given setting. This collection of essays with patience, calm, resignation, and thus constitutes an invitation for all relevant voices to contribute, over time, contentment, choosing to meet to this expanding conversation. deception with truthfulness and This conversation began when, on 9 cruelty with good will towards September 2007, the Universal House all. You, too, demonstrate such of Justice wrote a letter to Iranian noble qualities and, holding fast to these same principles, Bahá'í students deprived of access to you belie the slander purveyed against higher education in their country. In your Faith, evoking the admiration that letter, the House of Justice wrote: of the fair-minded. (*italics added*)

Recent events call to mind heart-rending episodes in the history of the Faith, of cruel deceptions since wrought against your forebears. It has been employed by the Universal House of Justice in many other letters. is only appropriate that you strive Over

10 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 30.3 2020

time, it has captured the imagination around which many Western liberal in-stitutions and practices are of growing numbers of people because constructed. According to this logic, human it is pregnant with meaning. This special issue of the Journal has emerged is essentially self-interested, so societal-ies should be organized in from conversations among one group

competitive ways that harness all that selfish energy of friends who have been exploring the meaning of this phrase, its relationship for the greater good. We see this logic to other concepts in prevailing dis- expressed in partisan political systems, adversarial legal systems, courses on social change, and its broad capitalist economies, grade-based education relevance to the exigencies of the age. systems, and even many contemporary In the reflections immediately be- forms of recreation and leisure. low, the collaborative process that led to this special issue is shared, to under- In my dissertation, I analyzed the score the value of this kind of collabo- social and ecological consequences rative inquiry. Some of the more salient of this “culture of contest.” My con- clusion, in short, was that when insights that emerged from this process most social institutions and practices are also shared. In the latter regard, it are organized as contests of physical, should be noted that constructive resil- po- litical, or economic power, they ience is neither an entirely new way of thinking about social change, nor is it lege the short-term material interests of those who enter the contests with a mere reiteration of previous concep- the most inherited power. This occurs at tions of social change. Rather, aspects of constructive resilience have been the expense of less powerful segments explored by a range of previous think- of society, and at the expense of future generations. The result is ers, and have been embodied in a range widespread social injustice and ecological of previous movements. What our col- ruin. lective inquiry has attempted to do is My dissertation also examined the to bring into focus some of these prior way these unjust and ruinous outcomes cause many people to arise in conceptions and illustrations, and as- protest. This is very understandable, and I resemble them into a more coherent pic- share

ture that expands our social imaginary. the underlying commitments to social justice and environmental stewardship that tend to animate such responses. Yet oppositional protests can The initial point of departure for my inadvertently replicate and reinforce the own study of constructive resilience tently replicate and reinforce the un- derlying logic of the culture of traces back to my doctoral defense just contest. For instance, oppositional over twenty years ago. My dissertation1 examined the competitive logic

From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence (George Ronald, 2004). 11

1 This dissertation was later published as *Beyond the Culture of Contest: The Constructive Imaginary*

social injustice can reinforce assumptions about the inherently competitive societies or conflictual nature of human beings, along with assumptions about the inevitability of interest group competition in the social sphere—which constitute suppositional foundations of the proven culture of contest. Hence the paradox of protest in a culture of contest.2 The culture of contest gives rise to myriad injustices, which in turn give rise to oppositional dissent, which in turn reinforces the underlying logic of the participatory culture of contest that gives rise to the social

competitive electoral processes emerged in Western liberal societies are inherently vulnerable to the corrupting influence of money, electoral competitions are to wage. This is a primary and responsible governance has so elusive in Western liberal democracy. One response to these democratic injustices is through other response is to begin new democratic electoral forms that are free from competition and

2 To the extent that new

injustices in the first place. forms such as this can attract people

The way to transcend this paradox, away from prevailing ones, growing I argued, is through a non-adversarial approach focused on the active participation from unjust social forms, which would eventually collapse construction of radically new institutions and practices organized around attrition. The culture of contest a more just logic.³ For instance, the thus be transcended, over time, through the construction of emancipatory social forms that supplant oppressive

2 See Michael Karlberg, “The Paradox of Protest in a Culture of Contest.” In my dissertation, I offered examples

3 A broadly similar argument was that illustrate this dynamic. advanced in the early twentieth century After I made this point, one of my examiners countered, “That may by Gandhi, in his booklet titled *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* under some favorable conditions, but (1941). This argument was echoed by surely it’s impossible under conditions Carl Boggs’ articulation of the concept of violent repression.” As we were prefigurative politics in his essay “Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and speaking, on the other side of the plan- the Dilemma of Power”; and this concept et, the Bahá’ís of Iran were patiently advancing constructive processes of prefiguration was later taken up to some degree within various feminist and New Left movements. Such ideas have more the sixth chapter of my most recent book, Constructing Social Reality (see recently been engaged by contemporary pages 180–188). social change theorists such as Majken Jul 4 For an illustration Sørensen (see “Constructive Resistance: of a proven electoral system that is entirely Conceptualizing and Mapping the Terrain,”) and Karuna Mantena (see “Gandhi partisanship and competition,

refer to Mi- and the Means-Ends Question in Politics”). Michael Karlberg, “Western Liberal Democ-

I engage this literature more directly in “Racism as New World Order?”
12 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 30.3 2020

social transformation under conditions of violent repression. But this story had never been told through the lens I articulated in my dissertation. After my defense, I realized the need to do that. As I began to write about this, I received a copy of the 9 September 2007 letter from the Universal House of Justice alluded to above. When I read the phrase constructive resilience, it crystallized in my mind precisely what I was trying to articulate. This phrase distills what it means to exercise transformative constructive agency under conditions of violent repression. So the phrase provided the organizing logic, and the title, for the article I was writing, which was subsequently published by the journal *Peace & Change*. Over the last four decades of relentless oppression, the Bahá’ís in Iran have remained forward-looking, dynamic, vibrant, and committed to serving Iranian society. They have refused to allow apprehension and anxiety to take hold or let any calamity perturb their hearts. They have drawn on the highest reservoirs of solidarity and

collab-
the topic. Insights generated from that
experience then informed several pre-
resilience,
sentations at other conferences. Soon
after, we planned an intensive weekend
seminar on this concept, in Washing-
trans-
ton, D.C., with a dozen people from as
many disciplines. Insights generated
and
from the D.C. seminar informed further
fair-minded
conference presentations and further
conversations among the four of us.
On 4 February 2018, the Universal
House of Justice wrote a letter to an
African

oration and responded to oppres-
sion with constructive
eschewing despair, surrender,
resentment, and hate and tran-
scending mere survival, to
form conditions of ignorance and
prejudice and win the respect
collaboration of their
countrymen. Those believers in
the United States who have la-
bored so persistently to promote
race unity, especially the

The Constructive Imaginary

American friends, should appre-
audi-
ciate in their own efforts over the
of
years the same expression of con-
Studies in
structive resilience, born of their
who
great love for Bahá'u'lláh, and see
special issue
in the recent turmoil opportunity
rather than obstacle.
a
journey of mutual learning character-
In the months following the arrival
inquiry,
of this letter, the four friends alluded to
spaces
above organized another seminar, held
on ex-
at the Highlander Research and Educa-
language,
tion Center in Appalachian Tennessee.
course,
Of the thirty participants who attended
widened
this seminar, the majority were African

nine-person panel for a plenary
ence at the 2019 annual conference
the Association for Bahá'í
Ottawa. It is those nine panelists
are the contributors to this
of the Journal.
The process alluded to above was
ized by ongoing consultative
the testing of ideas in diverse
with diverse groups, reflection
perience, and refinement of
concepts, and approaches. Of
this conversation has not yet
enough to embrace all relevant

voices
 American, and the preceding passage
 Indige-
 was one of the focal points of our dis-
 illuminate the
 cussions. How can the constructive
 resilience in
 resilience of African Americans be
 ini-
 articulated in ways that illuminate this
 carried its
 powerful concept and illustrate its uni-
 no in-
 versal relevance? And where can we
 have
 see other expressions of constructive
 resilience that further illuminate our
 provide an
 understanding?
 insights
 Immediately following the High-
 far,
 lander seminar, a workshop was offered
 we hope
 in Atlanta at the annual conference
 further
 of the Association for Bahá'í Stud-
 ies, and approximately one hundred
 insights, we've
 people attended. Some months later,
 academic
 another weekend gathering was held
 jour-
 in Washington, D.C., with nine partic-
 that it's
 ipants who had attended the previous
 people
 D.C. or Highlander seminars and had
 resilience
 expressed an interest in further engage-
 arguments.
 ment. That latter gathering in D.C. led
 an
 to other academic presentations, along
 recognizing
 with the development of two univer-
 intuition and in-

and perspectives. For instance,
 nous voices will further
 concept of constructive
 powerful ways. Nonetheless, this
 tial conversation has already
 participants to a place at which
 dividual, journeying alone, could
 arrived.
 The essays collected here
 opportunity to share a range of
 and reflections that have arisen, so
 on this path. By sharing these,
 to inspire others to contribute
 on this path of learning.
 In sharing our initial
 adopted a less formal, less
 style than is typical of academic
 nals. We've come to appreciate
 rarely possible to "persuade"
 of the value of constructive
 through formal academic
 Though constructive resilience is
 eminently rational concept,
 this requires a degree of

sity courses. Those same nine participants were also invited to serve on a resilience speaks intellect.

14

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 30.3 2020

In keeping with this approach, I'm also dispensing, in this introductory essay, with the convention of summarizing each subsequent essay. The essays speak for themselves. Instead, I was asked by my peers to share some of my personal insights into constructive resilience, which have emerged along this path of learning. have shaped our social imaginary when it comes to how people can struggle for For me, the concept of constructive resilience expands what social theorists call our "social imaginary"—our ability to imagine and enact new possibilities in the pursuit of social change. Imagination is a way of knowing. Our imaginations are informed, in part, by the stories we hear, including stories about who we are and how we got here. At my doctoral defense, my examiner had never heard the story I later what

spiration. Constructive as much to the heart as the

rights movement, or the Arab Spring.

Though the means of struggle differ between the first and second of stories, the storylines are important ways. In both sets of a population that considers itself pressed in some way engages its sary directly in a confrontation to victory or defeat. Such stories

change. This does not mean the stance of these stories is

They reflect the experiences

less revolutionaries and of whom deserve our respect and

ration. But these dominant

displace other stories we could

about other ways people have

gled for social change, thereby

our conception of what such struggles have looked like in the past and

learned to tell about the Bahá'ís in Iran. they might look like in the future.

Nor, it seems, had she heard any other stories of radical constructive agency coupled with resilience under conditions of violent repression. So, those helps

possibilities lay outside the boundaries of her social imaginary. theorists of

Stories of social change have seldom been told in ways that bring agency is constructive resilience into focus. social

Consider the many stories that tend to be focused on disrupting or dismantling an unjust

Think, for instance, of the American and French revolutions, the Haitian revolution, or the Bolshevik and Maoist revolutions. We also hear many stories of nonviolent resistance. Think, for instance, of the struggle for independence in India, or the U.S. civil

“Decolonizing Civil Resistance.”

The Constructive Imaginary

pursuit of social change. But the means under the by which these ends are pursued differ. these

The distinction between constructive agency and contentious agency need not be laden with value judgments. “Con-

campaigns constructive” is not a synonym for “good” Indeed, these in this context and “contentious” is not a endowed the Af-

To understand the implications, it

to contrast constructive forms of

cy with contentious forms of agency—a distinction that other

social change have also made.⁵ In the simplest terms, constructive

focused on building a more just

order. Contentious agency is

on disrupting or dismantling an

social order. Both forms of agency

be motivated by commitments to social justice and by the

5 See, for instance, Sean

and Stellan Vintagen,

15

have entailed heroic struggle

most oppressive conditions, and

protagonists have contributed as much to the empowerment of African

icans as have contentious

of nonviolent resistance.

constructive struggles

synonym for “bad.” Both forms of agency may be needed in the broader scheme of things. Yet, this distinction enables us to notice forms of struggle that otherwise go unnoticed; to see protagonists who otherwise go unseen; to tell stories that otherwise go untold; to imagine futures that otherwise go unpursued. For instance, the story I learned in school about the struggle for racial justice in the United States is the story of nonviolent protests and civil disobedience that culminated in the 1960s. It’s a remarkable story that needs to be told, with countless heroes who deserve our admiration. More recently, the Movement for Black Lives is being told as the next chapter in this story of nonviolent resistance, with a new generation of heroes who clearly deserve our admiration.

While these stories need to be told, so too do the stories of countless African Americans who have struggled in examples of re-

rican American community with of the material, social, and tional resources that made of nonviolent resistance Likewise, the stories about nous struggles for justice that circulate most widely on this tend to be stories such as the standoff of American Indian Movement activists at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973; or the armed Mohawk activists in Oka, Quebec, 1990; or nonviolent protests pipeline construction through nous lands in North Dakota and Columbia in recent years. In stories rarely circulate about ways Indigenous Nations across continent are, at various paces, structing new systems of law, education, health care, and ral resource management.⁷ In many

6 For two excellent cent scholarship on African

construct elements of a more just social order. Those elements include schools and colleges, churches and hospitals, Economic businesses and banks, economic co-operatives and associations of mutual Resis-aid, along with entirely new patterns of community life, new cultural forms, and Jody new artistic expressions—all of which value Black lives. These endeavors a Stronger Canada; Paul Boyer, *Capturing* 16 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 30.3 2020

structive agency, see Jessica bhard, *Collective Courage: A African American Cooperative Thought and Practice*; and Monica Freedom Farmers: *Agricultural tance and the Black Freedom* 7 Refer, for example, to Wilson-Raybould, *From Where I Rebuilding Indigenous Nations for*

cases, these constructive and resilient sustained expressions of collective agency are based on spiritual principles and tra-African ditional practices that were assault-encountered ed under colonialism, survived, and destruc-are now being adapted to new social dis-conditions. strict in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the mas- In sum, stories of constructive re- destruction, silience—among Indigenous peoples, prosperous town within the African diaspora, and among massa-many other marginalized populations – broadly, the have been widely ignored until quite recently. Stories of this nature now postbellum need to be widely told, to enrich our in-

an essential characteristic of movements for social change.⁸ The constructive struggle of Americans has repeatedly such repression, as in the 1929 tion of the prosperous Greenwood sacre of its residents; or the two years later, of the of Rosewood, Florida, and the cre of its residents. More resurgence of organized racism fol- lowing the brief period of Reconstruction—a resurgence that

understand of the past and present, and Klan, included the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, to expand the horizon of possibility in the systematic disenfranchisement of the future. Black voters, the passing of Jim Crow segregation laws, and the spread of lynching as a form of intimidation and social control—is an expression of this same dynamic. One insight we gain from such stories is that radical constructive agency in the face of oppression, just like contentious agency in the face of oppression, African American community, we can appreciate the profound resilience that is frequently met by acute acts of violent repression. This should not be surprising. When people work to construct elements of a more just social order, those who benefit from the old order will notice. Among those who benefit from the status quo, remarkably, some will experience a moral awakening and support the cause of justice. Others will attempt to defend the status quo by repressing the struggle for change—even when that struggle is pursued through entirely constructive means. In the face of such repression, resilience is radical

Education: Envisioning and Building the resilience 8 For a discussion of First Tribal Colleges; and Clint Carroll, in nonviolent movements, see Kurt Roots of Our Renewal: Ethnobotany and Schock, “The Practice and Study of Civil Resistance.” Cherokee Environmental Governance. Resistance.” The Constructive Imaginary 17

constructive agency required powerful forms of resilience. Bahá'í assemblies at local, national, and international levels. Bahá'í elections, in which voters have true freedom of choice, are entirely free of competition and its trappings of partisanship, money, ego, and self-interest. In Iran, women and men have served side by side on elected assemblies despite cultural prohibitions against such a practice, even as Blacks and Whites did in the U.S. South under Jim Crow segregation or in South Africa under apartheid, and as members of all castes do in cultures that perpetuate the caste system. This principle of a new social order derived from this recognition. Toward this end, administrative order has frequently been attacked, and it has been rarely dismantled by some repressive governments, including the current Iranian regime. Nonetheless, globally, the transformation of hearts and minds the project of constructing a more just and as well as the transformation of social norms and structures. They seek coherence between the means and ends of social change. They adopt a long-term eventually viable model of governance continues undeterred. And when conditions change in Iran, which they will, Bahá'ís will resume this aspect of their constructive work in that country. perseverance in a multi-generational struggle. They have faith in humanity's Bahá'ís continue to channel their energies into long-term capacity for justice. They

oth-
employ a conception of power rooted er aspects of their constructive
work.
in capacity building and focused on the Or consider the experience that
application of spiritual principles to prompted the 2007 letter from the
Uni-
systematic processes of social transfor- versal House of Justice quoted near
mation. They recognize that efforts to the beginning of this essay. In
recent
pursue meaningful social change will decades, Bahá'ís have been
denied
often be met by hostility and repres- access to higher education in Iran
as
sion, and they accept that the pursuit part of the current regime's
policy to
of change thus requires sacrifice and block the progress of the communi-
resilience. ty. In response, Bahá'ís
constructed a
For instance, the Bahá'í communi- decentralized university, the
Bahá'í
ty has been constructing a radical new Institute for Higher Education
(BIHE),
18 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 30.3 2020

in Bahá'í homes and offices across will of the oppressed to
advance the
the country. BIHE now offers over struggle. This is a
well-understood
one thousand distinct courses within principle in the theory and
practice
five associate degree programs, eigh- of nonviolent social change,
purpose-
teen baccalaureate degree programs, fully applied in campaigns of civil
and fifteen graduate degree programs disobedience.⁹
ranging across the arts and sciences. Radical constructive struggles,
on
Faculty, staff, and students are occa- the other hand, don't seek to
publicly
sionally arrested and imprisoned, and provoke moral dilemmas of this
kind.
university materials are confiscated in Yet similar outcomes can still
result.
raids. But the Iranian regime has been When constructive struggles are met
unable to destroy BIHE because of its with repression, this too can
attract the
decentralized and resilient nature. The moral sympathies and support of
previ-

regime is also unable to marshal any third moral or legal argument in support of its efforts to destroy the university because of BIHE's purely peaceful and clearly constructive nature. This is yet another expression of constructive resilience. These stories are recounted not to valorize the struggles of any given people relative to the struggles of others, but to bring to light new insights in ways that expand our social imaginary. Another of these insights emerges as we Bahá'ís return to a comparison of constructive and contentious agency. Contentious nonviolent tactics, Cause—such as civil disobedience in the face of unjust laws, are intended, in part, to set up a moral dilemma within a population. In the face of the dilemma, those who benefit from unjust laws must choose to either support or repress the movement for justice. When repression occurs, it often attracts the moral sympathies and support of previously complacent bystanders and third parties, while galvanizing the

ously complacent bystanders and parties while galvanizing the will of those engaged in the struggle. This principle is illustrated by the Bahá'í community in Iran, which has encountered a genocidal campaign in a resilient manner, giving rise to a global movement attracting the support of an ever-expanding cross-section of humanity now engaged in radical constructive work in every country. Every wave of repression have encountered in Iran has tended to increase awareness of, sympathy for, and interest in the Bahá'í Cause—both within Iran and around the world. For instance, in recent decades, as Iranian authorities have increasingly desperate measures to repress Bahá'ís, the wider population of Iran has become increasingly willing to defend Bahá'ís and attracted to the Faith. Indeed, far

Iranians are now identifying as Bahá'ís
movements are
than at any time in the history of that
knowledge is
country, even though becoming a
through
Bahá'í is now considered by the regime
training, which
to be a crime of apostacy punishable by
creative ini-
death.¹⁰ As a result of these dynamics,
framework of
many Bahá'ís in Iran have been gal-
body of ac-
vanized to new heights of consecrated
has been
action.

All these processes could be seen,
for instance, when leaders of the U.S.
Another insight that emerges as we
adapt-
compare constructive and contentious
nonviolent
approaches to transformative change
strug-
is the essential role that learning and
the U.S.
training play in both. Among nonvio-
new
lent resistance scholars and activists,
correspond-
it is now well understood that contem-
movement
porary movements can learn from past
processes are
movements, even as they generate new
myriad
knowledge and insight within their
resistance,
own social contexts, which can in turn
literature
contribute back to the collective store
promulgated

well understood that
most effective when such
imparted to their participants
systematic forms of
mobilize people to take
tiatives within a shared
activism. Again, a growing
ademic and activist literature
examining this theme.¹²

Civil Rights Movement began
ing insights from Gandhi's
movement in India to their own
gles, even as protagonists of
struggle continued generating
insights while developing
ing systems for training
participants. Today, such
playing out globally through
movements of nonviolent
linked to a growing body of
on nonviolent praxis,

of knowledge that future movements through centers of nonviolent training are able to draw on. Indeed, there is that are multiplying in formal and in- formal spaces and online an entire academic field now focused settings. The radical constructive agency of the worldwide Bahá'í with activist journals and websites de- community is advancing through a parallel voted to this theme.¹¹ In addition, it is dynamic that intersects with these other process- 10 For evidence of these claims, refer es. Drawing on a century and a half again to Karlberg, "Constructive Resilience." of its own experience, as well as on 11 Refer, for instance, to Maria Is- 12 Refer, for example, abel Casas-Cortés, Michal Osterweil, and to Larry Isaac, Daniel Cornfield, Dennis Dana Powell, "Blurring Boundaries: Rec- Lawson, and Jonathan Coley, Dickerson, James Schools' and Dialogical ognizing Knowledge-Practices in the Study violent Praxis: Nashville "Movement of Social Movements"; and Laurence Cox, Southern Civil Rights Diffusion of Non- Workshops in the Wave of Inspiration for Sociology?" See Mark Engler and Paul Engler, "Movements Making Knowledge: A New Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Workshops in the Southern Civil Rights Is Shap- ing the Twenty-First Century. and about Social Movements. 20 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 30.3 2020

accumulated bodies of knowledge and articulated independently, shortly after that gathering, by Michelle experience beyond the Bahá'í commu- Alexander, a prominent voice in the U.S. nity, Bahá'ís have developed a network struggle for racial justice. In a New York Times of training institutes in every region opinion piece titled "We Are Not of the world that prepare and mobi- the

lize people to take creative initiatives the role within a shared framework of activism. This decentralized system makes “Resistance is a available an accumulating global body can be of experiential knowledge, even as its prevent local participants continually contribute new insights to that growing body

Elaborating of knowledge. In addition, Bahá’ís are increasingly drawing on this body of knowledge as they participate in, and contribute insights to, wider discourses American on social change. ing an unwanted reality. To the contrary, the struggle for human Yet another insight worth noting is the way stories of constructive resilience continue imbue the concept of “resistance” with the new meaning. Within the narrative of contentious agency, resistance is what heroes movement activists engage in, in response to oppressive social forces. But and within the narrative of constructive agency, resistance is what the constructive movement encounters from those defending the status quo. In other times words, within the latter stories, creative movements for a more just social order are the streams and rivers of historical progress. Those who try to obstruct blood.” such currents of progress constitute the resistance—like obstinate stones in the

Resistance,” she acknowledges of resistance in struggles for tice, but she cautions, reactive state of mind. While it necessary for survival and to catastrophic harm, it can also to set our sights too low.” on this theme, she explains: Those of us who are committed to the radical evolution of democracy are not merely resisting freedom and dignity extends back centuries and is likely to for generations to come. In words of Vincent Harding, one of the great yet lesser-known of the Black freedom struggle, the long, continuous yearning reaching toward freedom flows throughout history “like a sometimes powerful, tumultuous, and roiling with life; at other meandering and turgid, covered with the ice and snow of seemingly endless winters, all too streaked and running with Harding was speaking about Black movements for liberation

in

path of a river.

America, but the metaphor

applies

This insight emerged through conversations on constructive resilience at the Highlander Center, alluded to above. The same insight was

equally well to the global struggle for human dignity and freedom. (Alexander)

The Constructive Imaginary

21

“Every leap forward for American men

her husband, like so many White

democracy,” she continues, “has been member

of his generation, was a closet

traceable to the revolutionary river, not the resistance.” “Another world is faith

of the Ku Klux Klan.

But Bina Mae was a woman of

possible,” she concludes, “but we can’t centered on

whose reading of the Bible

achieve it through resistance alone.” enacting the

living a virtuous life and

social-justice gospel. She sent her husband packing. She opened her home

These social dynamics alluded to by Michelle Alexander, above, derive from basic expressions of the human bus

to Black residents of her town. When she traveled south of the Mason-Dixon line, she rode in the back of the

spirit. The aspiration to contribute folk.

to express solidarity with Black

constructively to the betterment of the world is one of those. So, too, is the quality of resilience in the face of adversity. And we can see both manifest in myriad ways, in countless individuals past and present. In this sense, woman.

These were not popular things for a White woman to do at that time. She likely paid a price. Given her hard-scrabble background and the many challenges she faced throughout her life, she was clearly a resilient

while constructive resilience can be a characteristic of entire movements, it is also a quality of the individuals who advance those movements. Thus, the her-

Bina Mae helped raise my mother and imparted these values to her. When my mother came of age during the turbulent 1960s, she aligned

her-story of constructive resilience is also Antiwar

self with the Civil Rights and

the story of individuals.

Movements. While pregnant with me

I grew up hearing a story about my great-grandmother, Bina Mae Collins, Bahá’í

in the late sixties, she began attending meetings to learn about the

who was born and raised in Springfield,

Faith, which she embraced and told

her
 Illinois, in the 1890s. Her father was a coal miner with eleven children, so she
 this, Bina Mae remembered
 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to Chicago half a century
 did not come from a family of means. before,
 She had little formal education. Given in 1912. Bina Mae must have read an
 that Illinois had only abolished slavery article at the time, in an Illinois
 news-
 in 1848, she saw the ongoing violent paper, about His visit.
 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings about the oneness of
 racism of her times, including a lynch- human-
 human-
 ing she witnessed as a child and the ity resonated with her to the extent
 she
 1908 massacre of Springfield’s Black would remember His visit so many
 de-
 residents. She married a man who cades later.
 turned out to be a compulsive gambler Bina Mae also helped care for me
 and, as a result, she struggled to raise when I was young. She passed away
 her own daughters in conditions of when I was six, and she figures in
 some
 ongoing poverty. She also learned that of my earliest memories. The stories
 22 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 30.3 2020

my mother told about her shaped my Boggs, Carl. “Revolutionary
 Process, Political Strategy, and the
 social imaginary. Along with her re- Di-
 silience, Bina Mae tried to contribute lemma of Power.” Theory
 and Society, vol. 4, 1977, pp.
 constructively, in the ways she could, 359–
 393.
 to bending the moral arc of the uni- Boyer, Paul. Capturing Education:
 verse toward justice. Her story helped Envisioning and Building
 shape my early imagination about who First Tribal Colleges.
 the Kootenai College P, 2015.
 I was and what I could do. The stories Carroll, Clint. Roots of Our
 Salish Ethnobotany and Cherokee
 of nonviolent social movements I later Environmental Governance.
 heard, including my mother’s support U of Minnesota P, 2015.
 Renewal: Casas-Cortés, Maria Isabel, Michal
 for those causes, further expanded my
 imagination, enabling me to envision
 what was possible through organized
 collective struggle. The stories of rad-

Os-
 ical constructive agency I have since
 “Blur-
 sought out have further expanded my
 Recognizing
 imagination, enabling me to envision
 other means of organized collective
 Movements.”
 struggle.
 vol.
 If we hope, one day, to transcend
 the culture of contest that has been im-
 posed by Western modernity—a cul-
 Resis-
 ture that has inflicted untold suffering
 In-
 on humanity and is now liquidating the
 2,
 environmental security of future gener-
 ations—it seems to me that we need to
 find, tell, and become protagonists in
 many more stories of radical construc-
 Sociology?”
 tive agency and resilience. To build a
 2014,
 new world, we need to expand our con-
 structive imaginary.
 Is an Uprising: How Nonvi-
 olent Revolt Is Shaping the
 W C
 Books, 2016.
 Alexander, Michelle. “We Are Not the
 Collective
 Resistance.” *The New York*
Times, 21 Sept. 2018. [nytimes.
 com /2018/0 9/21/o pi n ion /
 sunday/resistance-kavana-
 ugh-trump-protest.html.](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/21/opinion/sunday/resistance-kavanaugh-trump-protest.html)
 The Constructive Imaginary
 terweil, and Dana Powell.
 ring Boundaries:
 Knowledge-Practices in the
 Study of Social
 Anthropological Quarterly,
 8, no. 1, 2008, pp. 17–58.
 Chabot, Sean and Stellan Vintagen,
 “Decolonizing Civil
 tance.” *Mobilization: An
 ternational Quarterly*, vol.
 no. 4, 2015, pp. 517–532.
 Cox, Laurence. “Movements Making
 Knowledge: A New Wave of
 Inspiration for
 Sociology, vol. 48, no. 5,
 pp. 954–971.
 Engler, Mark and Paul Engler. *This
 Twenty-First Century*. Nation
 Books, 2016.
 Gordon Nembhard, Jessica.
 Courage: A History of Afri-
 can American Cooperative
 Economic Thought and Prac-
 tice. Pennsylvania State UP,
 2014.
 23
 Isaac, Larry et al. ““Movement Schools’ and Dialogical Diffusion of
 Nonviolent
 Praxis: Nashville Workshops in the Southern Civil Rights Movement.”
*Nonviolent Conflict and Resistance: Research in Social Movements, Con-
 flicts and Change*, vol. 34, 2012, pp. 155–184.
 Karlberg, Michael. *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutu-
 alism in an Age of Interdependence*. George Ronald, 2004.

———. *Constructing Social Reality: An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Reality*. Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America, 2020.

———. "Constructive Resilience: The Bahá'í Response to Oppression." *Peace & Change*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2010, pp. 222–257.

———. "The Paradox of Protest in a Culture of Contest." *Peace & Change*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, pp. 319–347.

———. "Western Liberal Democracy as New World Order?" *The Bahá'í World: 2005–2006*, edited by Robert Weinberg, Bahá'í World Center Publications, 2007, pp. 133–156.

Mantena, Karuna. "Gandhi and the Means-Ends Question in Politics," *Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science*, no. 46. <https://www.ias.edu/sites/default/files/sss/papers/paper46.pdf>

Schock, Kurt. "The Practice and Study of Civil Resistance." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2013, pp. 277–290.

Sharp, Gene. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Porter Sargent, 1973.

Sørensen, Majken Jul. "Constructive Resistance: Conceptualizing and Mapping the Terrain," *Journal of Resistance Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, pp. 49–78.

The Universal House of Justice. To the Bahá'í students deprived of access to higher education in Iran, letter dated 9 Sept. 2007. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20070909_001/1#018930558

———. To an individual, letter dated 4 Feb. 2018.

White, Monica. *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*. U of North Carolina P, 2018.

Wilson-Raybould, Jody. *From Where I Stand: Rebuilding Indigenous Nations for a Stronger Canada*. U of British Columbia P, 2019.

— The Constructive Imaginary (Used by permission of the curator)