

Featured Post

The Palestinian appropriation of black pain

We as black Americans need to stop letting people with no real interest in our well-being tell us how to behave toward our Jewish cousins

Jun 8, 2020 Joshua Washington



Israelis holds signs during a protest against the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd outside the US consulate in Tel Aviv on June 02 2020 (Miriam Alster/Flash90)

In the early 1980s, African-American professor of history at Stanford University, and director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, Clayborne Carson published a paper called "BLACKS and JEWS in the CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: The CASE of SNCC." In this paper, Carson gives much needed clarity on black-Jewish relations in the US, and what caused tensions to rise. Arguably the most visible turning point was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) publication of "The Palestine Problem," a paper that sent a very loud and clear message to their Jewish supporters and Jews

everywhere that so long as Jews supported a Jewish state, they were SNCC's enemies.

Carson's paper addresses this progression and gives crucial context to what otherwise seems like an abrupt shift in attitude. One thing Carson notes is the SNCC's biased investigation on the 1967 war. He writes:

“SNCC’s Central Committee meeting in the midst of Israel’s six-day victory over Arab forces in June 1967, requested that SNCC’s search and communications staff investigate the background of the conflict. Ethel Minor, editor of SNCC’s newsletter, volunteered for this task. She recalled that the committee wanted an “objective critique of the facts.” Minor was not impartial on the issue, however, for she had been close friends with Palestinian students during her college years and was acquainted with the urban black nationalist tradition through her involvement with the Nation of Islam. Minor never wrote a position paper, nor did SNCC ever conduct an extended discussion of the Middle Eastern dispute.”

Carson says further:

“In the SNCC Newsletter, she listed thirty-two ‘documented facts’ regarding ‘the Palestine Problem,’ including assertions that the Arab Israeli war was an effort to regain Palestinian land and that during the 1948 war, ‘Zionists conquered the Arab homes and land through terror, force, and massacres.’”

The newsletter was full of falsehoods; many of which have long been categorically refuted. At the very least, a real investigation would mention the fact that Arab leaders were largely responsible for Palestinians leaving their homes, as they rejected compromise and launched a war to destroy the Jewish State.



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It would at least mention that Mizrahi Jews only arrived in Eretz Israel because they were expelled from the Middle East and North African countries they had been living in for generations. It would at least mention that there was always a Jewish presence in the Levant, and the small Jewish population in British Mandate Palestine at the time suffered many massacres at the hands of the Arabs simply for existing and being Jewish.

It is very clear that Minor's newsletter (complete with antisemitic drawings) was biased at best, and intentionally libelous and delegitimizing at worst. One might ask, besides the bias of having some Palestinian friends, why would someone with as much gravitas as Ethel Minor go through such great lengths to provoke and defame Israel and the Jewish people? The answer to that question has many layers.

SNCC, along with the rest of the black community were coming face-to-face with their radical progeny, and the tension from that was increasing more and more. Even radical Black Panther, Stokely Carmichael in 1967 began distancing himself from SNCC until 1968 when he left the group altogether. Many staff members at SNCC advocated for SNCC to break ties with their white and Jewish donors, and change the vision of SNCC. The staff voted to declare that SNCC would henceforth be a "Human Rights Organization" that would "encourage and support the liberation struggles



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against colonization, racism, and economic exploitation around the world.”
Because of this change, SNCC felt that should apply to the Palestinians.

On March 25th, 1968, Just 10 days before Martin Luther King was murdered, he participated in the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly. When Rabbi Everett Gendler asked King about the black community’s growing animus toward Jews and Israel, Dr. King said this:

*“On the Middle East crisis, we have had various responses. The response of some of the so-called young militants again does not represent the position of the vast majority of Negroes. **There are some who are color-consumed and they see a kind of mystique in being colored, and anything non-colored is condemned. We do not follow that course in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and certainly most of the organizations in the civil rights movement do not follow that course.**”*

King then goes on to say the more famous quote in the Zionist world:

“I think it is necessary to say that what is basic and what is needed in the Middle East is peace. Peace for Israel is one thing. Peace for the Arab side of that world is another thing. Peace for Israel means security, and we must stand with all of our might to protect its right to exist, its territorial integrity. I see Israel, and never mind saying it, as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land almost can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security and that security must be a reality.”

Then Dr. King pivots and addresses peace for the Palestinians (Palestinian was still a relatively new term at this point, so many referred to them generally as “Arabs”):

*“On the other hand, we must see what peace for the Arabs means in a real sense of security on another level. Peace for the Arabs means the kind of economic security that they so desperately need. These nations, as you know, are part of that third world of hunger, of disease, of illiteracy. I think that as long as these conditions exist there will be tensions, there will be the endless quest to find scapegoats. **So there is a need for a Marshall Plan for the Middle East, where we lift those who are at the bottom of the economic ladder and bring them into the mainstream of economic security.**”*

When quoting anyone, the context is just as important as the quote itself. Dr. King said the aforementioned quotes after the 1967 war between Israel and three

neighboring Arab states. His quotes were made after SNCC published the baseless, biased, and belligerent newsletter. Dr. King's response was pro-Israel, pro-Arab, and pro-justice. It would seem that for an organization like SNCC to take such an anti-Israel stance would suggest they are the "color consumed" to whom King was referring—so caught up in the struggle against racism in the U.S., they viewed everything through the American racist lens whether it truly applied or not. Yes, these black militants ignored the atrocities carried out by the Palestinian Liberation Organization to their own people, and embraced Jew-hating, human rights abusing Yasser Arafat in the name of "justice." Dr. King said what he said in response to all of this.

In 1948, after World War II, the U.S. provided Western Europe with over \$15 billion in aid. That is what is called the Marshall Plan. This is what King was referring to when he said there is a need for a Marshall Plan for the Middle East.

Since 1949, the Palestinians have received enough aid for some 30 Marshall Plans. Even in the late 1960s, the PA had already received more than enough aid to climb up the economic ladder. One would think that a Human Rights Organization like SNCC would inquire about why little has changed for the Palestinians and where the money is going; especially if said organization has taken upon itself to wade into the Israeli/Palestinian issue.

From then to Andrew Young's controversial resignation, to Reverend Jesse Jackson's comradery with Yasser Arafat, and Bayard Rustin's warning to black leaders about the dangers of not condemning PLO terrorism, the black community became more and more split over the issue of Israel and the Jewish people.

Among the black civil rights leaders, those who are anti-Israel tend to see a similarity between their struggle and the Palestinian struggle. Beside the fact that the notion is absolutely false, it is intentional. Arab leaders have sought to hijack black narratives to legitimize their cause since the 60s. That is why Mahmoud Abbas refers to Israel as "racist," and compares it to the Jim Crow laws America used to have. Such a propaganda campaign is only effective amongst the "color consumed." If one is color consumed, all Israel's enemies have to do is to get them to see Israel as a country of white Europeans. Virtually nothing else has to be done; the color consumed will fill in the blanks with that very bias. It's why Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, calls Israel an "apartheid state," though nothing in Israel resembles apartheid. To the black South African with unresolved hurt and bitterness from apartheid, not much else needs to be said.

Fast-forward to the present day: the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) is one of the major partners of Black Lives Matter. In their policy platforms, they have an “invest-divest” section which, under “cut military expenditures,” it mentions Israel as a apartheid, genocidal regime that routinely arrest 4 year-old Palestinians. All lies, but they have taken their cue straight out of the SNCC playbook; a playbook, if one remembers, of out of unresearched and unverified libels and antisemitic stereotypes written by someone who had previous personal ties to Palestinians. From its beginning, BLM had an anti-Israel bias. From their earliest moments, “From Ferguson to Palestine” was a slogan taken up immediately following Michael Brown’s killing by officer Darren Wilson. The slogan read “From Ferguson to Palestine – Occupation is a Crime.” This feigned support is nothing more than a calculated effort by Palestinian leaders to divert attention away from how they are oppressing their people. And we know now that this is nothing new.

What adds insult to injury is that BLM does seek allyship from the Jewish community, so long as they are diametrically opposed to the Jewish state. Jewish people should not be expected to check their Zionism at the door in order to join arms with BLM. Jews should not be expected to do that, no more than a Kenyan should be expected to denounce Kenya, or a Brazilian be expected to denounce South America. Can black Americans even imagine joining a Filipino justice movement only to be asked to voice our denunciation of the civil rights movement in order to join? No. We would not. Imagine a justice movement for black South Africans that, despite having good people on the ground who may be unaware of the movement’s national positions, posited that slavery was voluntary, and that West Africans got on ships because they were excited to come to America and be worked to death. There is no scenario where a black American, upon finding this out, would be a part of such movement. It is mind boggling to fathom why anyone would expect anyone else to do the same.

I appreciate my Jewish brothers and sisters seeking to make inroads in the black community, as they have been making these attempts for decades, but regarding the issue of Black Lives Matter, whether the black members are aware or not, there needs to be a conversation about their national official position on Israel. Not only Israel, and not only BLM, but in any movement, it is simply a good principle to find out what the movement is about beyond the facade before committing to it. I personally have issues with many of the official M4BL stances. The vast majority of our values do not align, and so for me to join them would be for no other reason than they’re the loudest and everyone is doing it. Those are bad reasons, and the Jewish community should not fall into that trap. We have seen what happened to Jewish members of SNCC when SNCC decided to shift their stance on Israel and

Jews. It would not be wise to join a movement with antisemitism already as its bedrock.

The image is just one recent examples of Palestinians continuing to equate our struggles. Another image easily found on the internet is a painting of recently murdered George Floyd in a keffiyeh with a Palestinian flag behind him, depicting him as a Palestinian martyr. This is wrong on many accounts, as our struggle could not be any more different.



A cartoon comparing the killing of George Floyd to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

One of the biggest differences is terrorism. The Palestinian Authority encourages and incentivizes Palestinians to kill Jews. Palestinians who successfully kill Jews are awarded with a monthly stipend from the PA. Palestinians who commit suicide while killing Jews have a monthly stipend sent to their families. Palestinian children are trained to kill Jews by any means, including suicide bombing, and they are taught this through terrorist training camps and Hamas TV shows. Streets are named after Palestinians who commit suicide bombings if they kill enough Jews. As heightened as the black community has ever been, never have we as a people resorted to killing white people everywhere just because they are white. Never have we encouraged the death of our own children for our cause. Never have we ever produced television shows to teach our children how to kill white people. What the Palestinian Authority is engaged in is not a struggle against oppression; it is pure and simple Jew hatred, and Palestinian leaders will do anything they can to legitimize it including exploiting black pain to do so.

We as black Americans need to realize these attempts to deceive us. We need to stop allowing people who have no real interest in our well-being to tell us how to behave toward our Jewish cousins. Blacks and Jews have much more history that binds us than we could ever have with the likes of the PLO, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or Mahmoud Abbas. I will concede, however, that we do share a common struggle with the Palestinian people, and that is the struggle of many manipulative leaders who claim to be our saviors.

But that is a conversation for another time...

About the Author

Joshua is the Director of the Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel (IBSI) where he plans events and speaks. He's a composition graduate of the University of Pacific's Conservatory of Music. Joshua was formerly IBSI's Director of Special Events, and planned music performances featuring The Hebrew Project Artists (THP) across the country. Joshua is also a graduate of CUFI's 2016 Diversity Outreach Mentoring Endeavor (DOME), where he received training in Israel advocacy for diverse audiences. He was chosen to travel to Israel twice; once as part of CUFI's millennial outreach, Israel Collective, and again as part of a music performance with Victor Styrsky's Wild Branches & Friends. His other musical endeavors include writing for the Boston Pops, and music directing for other artists.