

From the Editor



THERE ARE TWO CONSTANTS in the era of Trump. One is the overtly racist prejudice of the U.S. president and his circle, and their cynical and shameless appeal to the bigotry and white supremacist proclivities of a key segment of their electoral base. The other is hostility to the Palestinians and sympathy for the most extreme tenets of the expansionist and exclusivist settler-security-industrial complex that currently dominates Israeli politics and society. In keeping with the views of another crucial segment of their electoral base, composed of fervently pro-Israel evangelical Christians, this hostility is also linked to their desire for generous campaign financing from megadonors with similar proclivities.

This special issue of the *Journal*, focused on the renewal of Black-Palestinian transnational solidarity (BPTS), includes reflections on aspects of these two constants, specifically, past and present initiatives to build solidarity between some of the communities targeted by the men and women currently in power in Washington. It also features two commentaries that critique the Trump plan to effectively dismantle the Palestine cause.

Engaged Palestinian intellectuals such as Ghassan Kanafani long maintained that the struggle for Palestine was only one of several global anti-colonial and anti-imperial efforts, and that solidarity with others facing similar challenges was imperative. This understanding has faded over the past couple of decades, as the Palestine Liberation Organization turned away from progressive politics, opting to view the United States as an “honest broker” in their struggle. This was followed by the Palestinian Authority’s adoption of neoliberalism as a panacea for the problems of Palestine. The manifest failure of this approach to achieve liberation, combined with renewed grassroots activism and fresh thinking by a younger generation that is rediscovering some of these since-forgotten verities, has revived an understanding of the colonial nature of the challenge facing the Palestinians and an interest in linkages with others who find themselves in similar predicaments.

A corresponding understanding of the unity of anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles existed among Black intellectuals, starting with W. E. B. Du Bois, faded at the height of the Cold War, and was revived by Black nationalists and other African American progressives in the 1960s and 1970s. More recently, as the Black Lives Matter movement and other grassroots organizations have launched campaigns to address unceasing, murderous police brutality, many in their ranks have recognized that there are important global parallels to the Black struggle for justice and equality in the United States. Renewed interest in solidarity between Palestinians and Palestinian Americans, on the one hand, and African Americans, on the other, has been one of the results of these twin revivals.

This special issue of the *Journal*, curated by Noura Erakat and Marc Lamont Hill, focuses on precisely such a renewal of BPTS and is comprised of two articles, a pair of essays, and a roundtable featuring five participants. In their introduction, Erakat and Hill not only frame the discussion but also chart new avenues for both intellectual and political engagement around these issues.

The term “renewal” is important since, as several of the contributors underline, BPTS has deep roots on both sides of this equation. Maha Nassar points out in her article that as early as the 1930s, Palestinian writers linked the racial oppression of Blacks in the United States with struggles

for decolonization, while Russell Rickford's essay points to the early appreciation by U.S. Black activists and intellectuals of the importance of the Palestinian national movement's revival post-1967.

Together with other contributors, Taurean J. Webb highlights obstacles to BPTS, including the legacy of the Jewish-Black alliance during the U.S. civil rights struggle, predicated in part on what he calls an Afro-Christian reading of the Exodus narrative, which prompted sympathy with Zionism and excluded Palestinians from consideration as the casualties of colonialism and racism. That legacy and worldview have translated into enormous pressure being exerted on Black leaders to ensure that they avoid any criticism of Israel or overt expressions of support for the Palestinians. Rickford notes the emergence of a new imaginary that saw Palestinians and African Americans as compatriots, while Webb traces how the Black radical tradition encompasses the means to transcend the conventional proto-Zionist Afro-Christian narrative, making it possible to see the realities of oppression in Palestine. In his essay, Robin D. G. Kelley looks back at the first wave of BPTS from the perspective of three recent moments when Black public intellectuals came out as advocates of Palestinian rights, only to meet intense pushback. He goes on to sketch the broader international context that has made possible practices of solidarity, both past and present.

This issue also includes incisive essays by Khaled Elgindy and Paul R. Pillar that examine critically the outlines of the Trump plan for Palestine, the political components of which are yet to be released. Both authors conclude that the economic tranche of the plan, which was unveiled to great fanfare in Bahrain, is carefully tailored to fit the desiderata of the right-wing Israeli government of close Trump ally Benjamin Netanyahu. It is already apparent that what the U.S. president has called the deal of the century is aimed at stifling Palestinian political demands. Thus, asked what rights Palestinians deserve, Trump administration Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt would not specify, confining himself to saying, "Rights is a big word."*

Pillar stresses the obtuseness of a plan premised on economics that does not even mention, let alone address, the Israeli-imposed obstacles to Palestinian economic well-being, while Elgindy affirms that in order to confront this joint U.S.-Israeli offensive effectively, the Palestinians must put their house in order and devise a new, more effective strategy. While Palestine continues to drift in the absence of such a political transformation, this special issue lays out how Palestinians and U.S. Blacks can learn from and support one another in their respective struggles.

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* Jason Greenblatt, "Why Trump Thinks This Is the Moment to Resolve Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," interview by Judy Woodruff, *PBS NewsHour*, 17 July 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-trump-thinks-this-is-the-moment-to-resolve-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.