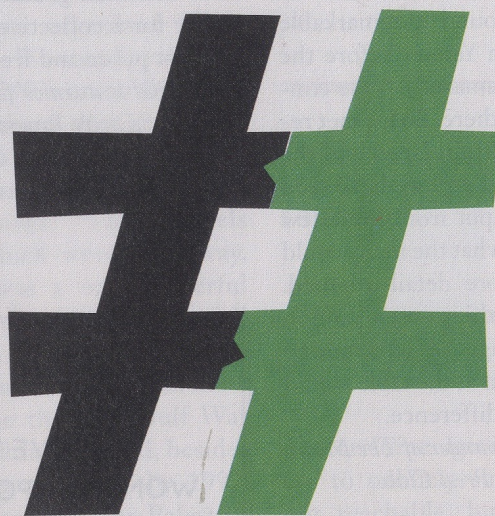


**HOW THE  
BLACK  
LIVES  
MATTER**



**& PALESTINIAN  
MOVEMENTS  
CONVERGED**

**BY ANNA ISAACS**

**IN AUGUST 2014, FERGUSON, MISSOURI ERUPTED IN PROTESTS AFTER THE DEATH OF MICHAEL BROWN, WHILE THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY, WAR RAGED IN ISRAEL AND GAZA. FROM THIS CONFLUENCE OF EVENTS EMERGED A NEW MOVEMENT OF BLACK—PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY.**

**HOW DID THIS ALLIANCE COME TO BE?  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT?  
AND WHERE DO AMERICAN JEWS FIT IN?**







**ON** a weeknight in November, more than 100 students press into a high-ceilinged room on the sixth floor of the University of Maryland's McKeldin Library in College Park. At the front of the room is a white projection screen; at one side, a table stocked with snacks; on the other, a duct-taped white banner, the name of the evening's event printed in a large stenciled font: "#PALESTINE2FERGUSON."

There's a call for quiet. Manar Dajani, co-president of the campus's chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, begins the evening. "*Inshallah*, we will all benefit from this event," Dajani, a senior dressed in a hijab and a sweatshirt with "Palestinian" written in Arabic across the front, tells the room—a diverse crowd that includes black, white, Muslim and Jewish students. She smiles and explains, "That means 'God willing.'"

Stragglers arrive; extra seats are formed into rows, and even more latecomers will be forced to stand. The lights dim, and a video recently released on YouTube begins to play on the projection screen. Entitled *When I See Them, I See Us*, it features activist-scholars Angela Davis and Cornel West, musician Lauryn Hill, actor Danny Glover, writer Alice Walker and dozens of other prominent activists, Palestinian and black. Narrators recite the title in rhythmic repetition as the activists hold up a series of slogan-bearing signs: "Racism is systemic. Its outbursts are not isolated incidents." "Your walls will never cage our freedom." "End state racism." "Gaza stands with Baltimore." Photos of dead Palestinian children alternate with photos of black victims of police shootings and scenes of Gaza rubble.

When the three-minute video ends—directing viewers to the website [blackpalestiniansolidarity.com](http://blackpalestiniansolidarity.com)—the room bursts into applause. Dajani introduces the guest speaker for the evening, Reverend Graylan Scott Hagler, the senior minister of the Plymouth Congregational United Church

of Christ in Washington, DC. From his temporary pulpit, Hagler weaves a web of parallels—the walls of a maximum-security prison in Massachusetts to Israel's separation barrier in the West Bank; property destruction in Baltimore in the wake of the death of Freddie Gray to the first and second intifadas. His voice frequently reaches sermon pitch, his audience full of nodding heads, murmurs of approval, snapping fingers, and calls of "Yes."

"It's not the same thing when we talk about what goes on in Palestine and what happens in the black community," he says. "But one thing that I've learned... in my 61 years of life is: The systems of oppression, they're always very similar to each other. They may be tweaked, they may be changed just a little bit, but we find out that the paradigm is the same, it looks the same, it feels the same, it is the same."

Hagler's argument is built in part on the concept of "intersectionality," a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to highlight the dual oppressions faced by black women—sexism and racism—and the feminist and anti-racism movements that failed to fully represent and advocate for them. The term has come into popular use to describe the ways that various systems of oppression intersect and overlap, encompassing other forms of discrimination such as homophobia and classism, and issues ranging from police brutality to colonialism. It has become a banner under which minority groups link up to fight what critics see as unrelated battles, but what activists see as iterations of the same struggle for justice.

Hagler nears his conclusion. "We need to respect and honor the dignity of all people," he says, and the applause lasts through his next sentence: "Sisters and brothers, black lives matter, Palestinian lives matter."

For some students here, this is a relatively new association to consider—one they've watched flourish in recent months on social media. For others, it's a long-awaited public acknowledgment. Miranda Mlilo, a freshman from

Bethesda, Maryland, whose mother is Palestinian and whose father is from Zimbabwe, is thrilled that a conversation linking Palestinian activism to racial justice activism in America is taking place. "Throughout history, people who are oppressed do stand in solidarity with others who are oppressed," she says. "And now we live in a world where people who live on different sides of the world can actually connect with each other in a really easy way and find out what's going on. No one is stuck to their own movement anymore."

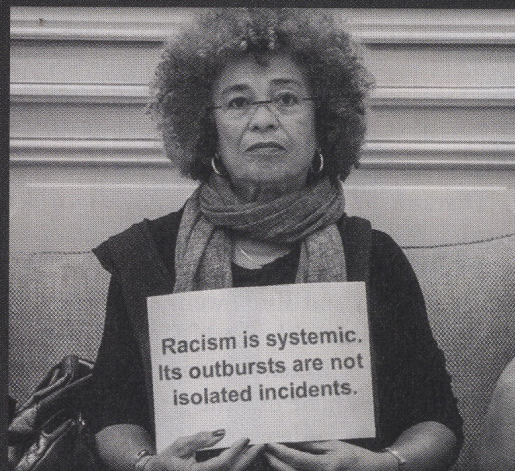
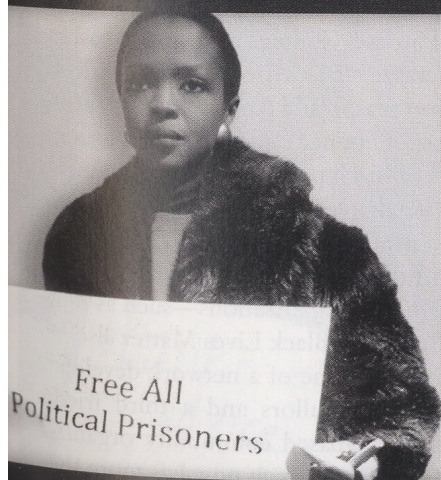
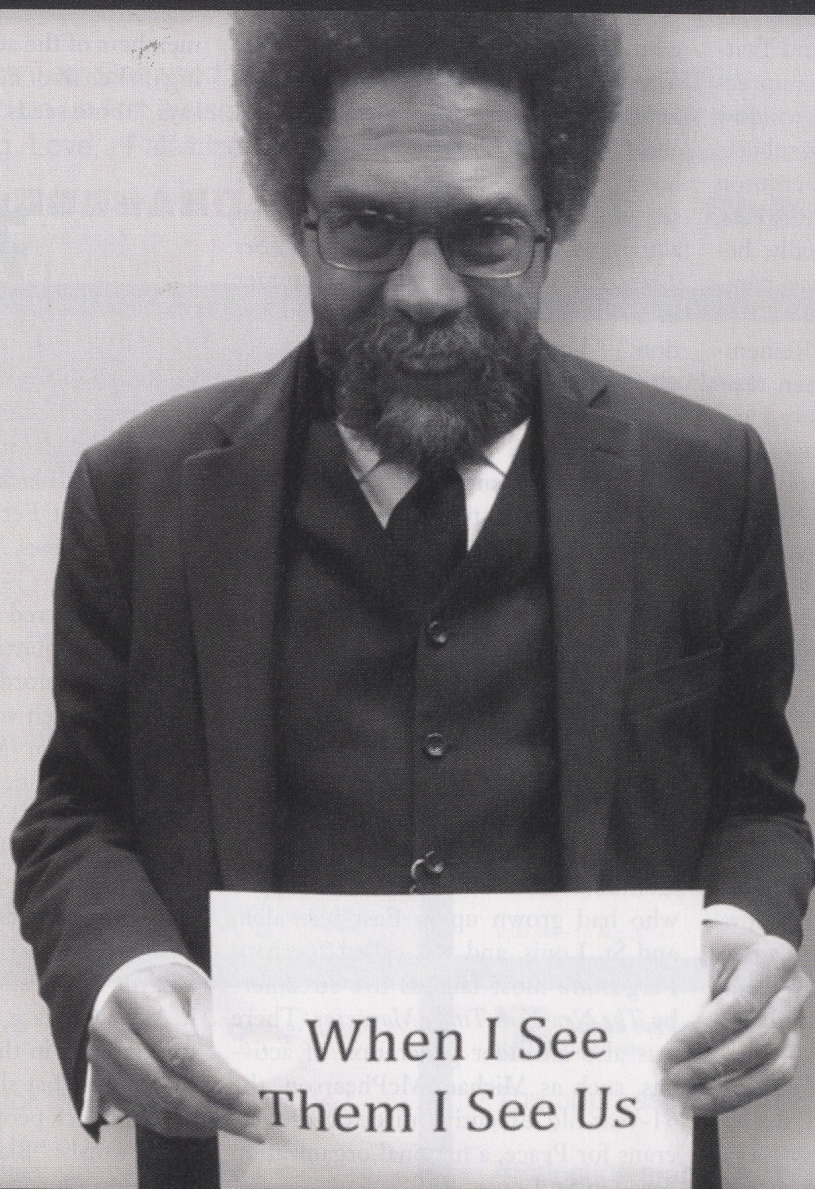


**FIFTEEN** months earlier—on the night of August 9, 2014—urgent cease-fire negotiations are underway in Cairo. It's just over a month into Operation Protective Edge, Israel's Gaza offensive launched in response to a barrage of Hamas rocket fire—a reaction to an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) crackdown in the West Bank that followed the murder of three Israeli teens. By the incursion's end, 72 Israelis and more than 2,200 Palestinians will be dead.

Six thousand four hundred miles away, it's nearly noon in Ferguson, Missouri. An 18-year-old black high school graduate named Michael Brown has just entered a convenience store on West Florissant Avenue. Minutes later, he leaves with some stolen cigarillos. Not long after, there's an altercation on nearby Canfield Drive that ends with a white police officer named Darren Wilson firing 12 rounds from his gun. Brown, who was unarmed, is dead.

The outrage is immediate. Local students and activists soon arrive in Ferguson to protest, followed in subsequent days and weeks by hundreds more from around the country. The nation and then the world watch on screens of all sizes as demonstrators and riot gear-clad police clash. But in the wake of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CORNEL WEST, NOURA ERAKAT, ANGELA DAVIS & LAURYN HILL**



movement, it is social media—and Twitter in particular—that offer an unprecedented real-time, interactive window onto the streets of this St. Louis suburb.

As Twitter mentions of #Ferguson begin to spike, another stream of tweets, a few dozen circulated repeatedly, begins to pour in—words of advice, commiseration and solidarity.

“Solidarity with #Ferguson. Remember to not touch your face when tear-gassed or put water on it. Instead use milk or coke!” tweets Palestinian student Mariam Barghouti on August 13.

“Dear #Ferguson. The Tear Gas used against you was probably tested on us first by Israel. No worries, Stay Strong. Love, #Palestine,” writes Rajai Abukhalil, a physician in the West Bank, that same day.

“Where I come from, what some call ‘rioting’ we call an uprising #Ferguson #Gaza #Palestine #intifada,” declares @gawawia.

Vivid images make the rounds. One juxtaposes two photos: a black man and a Palestinian, both poised to lob billowing tear gas canisters. In another, a man holds a sign: “The Palestinian people know what it means to be shot while unarmed because of your ethnicity.”

Activists on the ground in Ferguson respond in gratitude. Cherrell Brown, a New York-based community organizer, tweets a photo of a black man in Ferguson holding a Palestinian flag on August 16, adding “from #ferguson to #palestine with love” and “We see you.” Johnetta Elzie, now a prominent organizer with the activist group We The Protesters, then a 25-year-old St. Louisan on the ground, tweets, “Milk really does work for tear gas. Thank you #Palestine for the tip #Ferguson.” Later, Tara Thompson, a co-founder of the St. Louis area-based Hands Up United, a group founded in the wake of Brown’s death, would tell the website Electronic Intifada, “Palestinians were the first to reach out, sharing ways to protect Ferguson protesters from tear gas.”

Ferguson had the world’s attention, and it wasn’t long before messages of black-Palestinian solidarity reverberat-

ed in cities across the country, surfacing in signs and chants at demonstrations in Seattle, DC, Houston, Chicago, Miami and Columbus, Ohio. Robin D.G. Kelley, a professor of history at the University of California at Los Angeles and an activist who is featured in the *When I See Them, I See Us* video, calls the summer of 2014 “the perfect storm of mobilization.” “These twin crises—the attacks on Gaza and solidarity around that, and then the Ferguson uprising—together dominated the news waves,” he says. “And that was enough for activists on both sides of the struggle to make really, really clear connections between state violence and occupation and race.”

In St. Louis, a hub of racial justice activism, these connections had already been made. Some eight miles from Ferguson, the city was home to a small but dedicated group of Palestinian activists, including the Oman-born and Jordan-raised Suhad Khatib, a leading organizer for the St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), and Bassem Masri, who had grown up in East Jerusalem and St. Louis, and was called “perhaps Ferguson’s most famous live-streamer” by *The New York Times Magazine*. There was also an older generation of activists, such as Michael McPhearson, the 51-year-old executive director of Veterans for Peace, a national organization based in St. Louis.

The “ground was tilled,” says McPhearson, by the relationships among these activists and their organizations. In addition to the PSC, there was St. Louis Jewish Voice for Peace, a chapter of the national anti-occupation, pro-Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) organization, the Organization for Black Struggle and Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment. There were also ties with the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. After Brown’s death, he explains, these groups and dozens of other justice-oriented organizations came together to form the local Don’t Shoot Coalition.

“With that fertile ground already being there, and some new seeds being planted by Palestinians reaching out to

members of the activist community acting on behalf of Ferguson,” McPhearson says, “those seeds just sprouted.”



**FERGUSON** was where the relationship between the current black and Palestinian activist movements crystallized and where #BlackLivesMatter began to take off. But Ferguson was not where the Black Lives Matter movement got its start.

That occurred a year before, with the July 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman. The Sanford, Florida man, a neighborhood watch volunteer, had shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old high school student who was on his way home from a 7-Eleven carrying Skittles and iced tea. Martin’s death sparked widespread mourning, particularly in the black community.

In response to Zimmerman’s acquittal and the anger and grief that came with it, Alicia Garza, a 32-year-old community organizer in the Bay Area, posted on Facebook what she described as “a love note to black people.” It concluded with these words: “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” Her friend, Los Angeles-based community organizer Patrisse Cullors, attached a hashtag to create #BlackLivesMatter—a declaration that would come to link the many disparate police and extrajudicial shootings of black people across the country.

“Black lives matter” became a rallying cry, inspiring a movement composed of a diffuse world of national and local racial justice organizations—such as those in St. Louis. Black Lives Matter also became the name of a network developed by Garza, Cullors and a third friend, New York-based community organizer Opal Tometi, which now has more than 30 local chapters. Its mission is “to rebuild the Black liberation movement, this time led by women and including queer and transgender voices.





**Rajai Abukhalil**  
@Rajaiabukhalil



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Dear [#Ferguson](#). The Tear Gas used against you was probably tested on us first by Israel. No worries, Stay Strong. Love, [#Palestine](#)

RETWEETS 3,540 LIKES 1,892



10:24 PM - 13 Aug 2014



**مريم البرغوثي**  
@MariamBarghouti



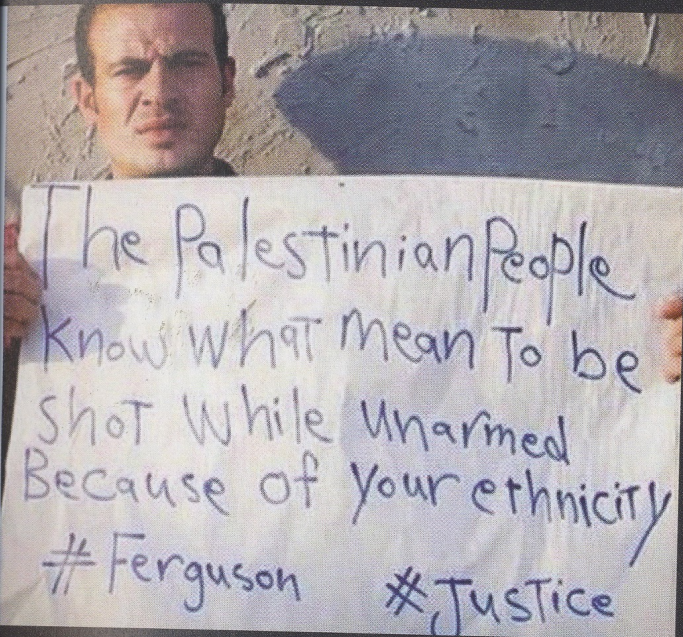
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Solidarity with [#Ferguson](#). Remember to not touch your face when teargassed or put water on it. Instead use milk or coke!

RETWEETS 862 LIKES 336



10:06 PM - 13 Aug 2014



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Milk really does work for tear gas. Thank you [#Palestine](#) for the tip [#Ferguson](#)

RETWEETS 1,704 LIKES 1,163



2:17 AM - 19 Aug 2014



**iv, Shrew Tamer**  
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"@gazawia: Where I come from, what some call "rioting" we call an uprising [#Ferguson](#) [#Gaza](#) [#Palestine](#) [#intifada](#)"

2:00 AM - 14 Aug 2014



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@xoamani



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[#Ferguson](#): "Thanks for the advice, [#Palestine](#)."



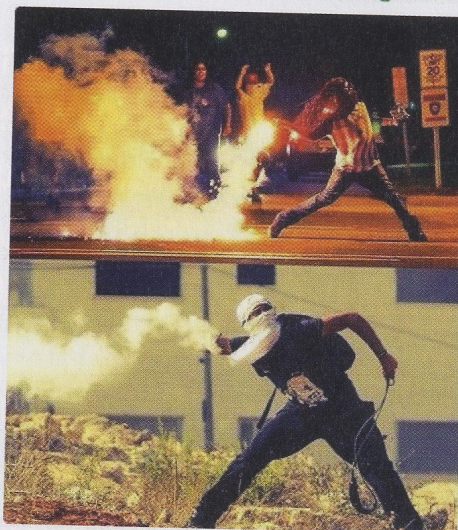
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The oppressed stands with the oppressed.

[#Palestine](#) stands with [#Ferguson](#).



RETWEETS 2,854 LIKES 1,887





More than two years before #BlackLivesMatter went viral on social media, three young male activists were pursuing their own racial justice work in Florida. Then in their 20s, Phillip Agnew (who has since changed his name to Umi Selah), Gabriel Pendas and Ahmad Abuznaid founded the Miami-based Dream Defenders in April 2012 in response to Martin's death. They organized marches and other events to fight for changes to the state's Stand Your Ground law (allowing for deadly force without first retreating from a threat) and against the school-to-prison pipeline as well as establishing campus chapters at Florida universities.

They also wanted to clarify the link between their work and the Palestinian cause. "We've always had an international vision of human rights and liberation for oppressed communities beyond borders, beyond boundaries, beyond racial identity," says Abuznaid, the group's 31-year-old legal and policy director, who was born in East Jerusalem.

"It would always dawn on me, the parallels," Abuznaid says. "After Trayvon was killed, all the news reports were showing him with his gold teeth, talking about how he smoked weed, how violent he was—it was almost like Trayvon was on trial.... It was one of those things that as a Palestinian I identified with. Once Palestinians are gunned down or killed, supposedly they're all wielding knives."

These are just the beginnings of the connections Abuznaid makes. In discussions of black-Palestinian solidarity, there is a heavy focus on state violence, police tactics and incarceration. Black and Palestinian activists have trained their ire on the British security services company G4S, which supplies technology to American and Israeli prisons. During the Ferguson protests, activists pointed to the U.S. police departments that have sent officers to train in counter-terrorism strategies with the IDF and the Israel National Police as one explanation for why they believed the streets of Ferguson resembled the West Bank that summer.

In 2013, Abuznaid and his fellow or-

ganizers began to plan a Dream Defenders trip to the West Bank for American activists. With war in Gaza and turmoil in Ferguson, the trip was postponed, and Abuznaid traveled to Ferguson to demonstrate alongside other activists, bonding with them over tear gas and arrests. On the streets, he was struck by the parallels he saw with the West Bank—"what looked like, at times, a military occupation in people's neighborhoods," he says. So he talked about it—small side conversations during pauses in marching. "I was like, yo, y'all ever heard about Palestine?" he says. "I was like, you know, what do you all think about Palestine? And they already knew about Palestine."

Abuznaid recruited for the Dream Defenders' West Bank trip, reaching out to Thompson and Tef Poe, a hip-hop artist based in St. Louis and co-founder of Hands Up United. He ran into Cherrrell Brown, an organizer from New York City and invited her, too. "We had been following each other on social media and on Twitter for years. It was just at a moment where we had stopped along the march and she said, 'Yo, I want to go to Palestine,' and I said, 'I want to take you to Palestine.'" Abuznaid also reached out to Patrisse Cullors, who had tweeted on August 14: "#ferguson #palestine both are wars aided by the u.s. [sic] government." "We've really got a special place in our hearts for Patrisse," he says. "She's a powerful leader."

In January—two months after a delegation of ten Palestinian students from the West Bank traveled to Ferguson and St. Louis—Cullors, Brown, Thompson and 11 others took part in the Dream Defenders trip, organized by the American-founded Institute for Middle East Understanding, a non-profit that provides Palestinian sources, experts and information to journalists. The group—often referred to as the Black Lives Matter delegation—included black and Latino journalists, artists and community organizers. While in Nazareth, Cullors, who did not respond to requests to be interviewed for this story, helped to choreograph a "flash mob" for the group that they recorded for a wider audience.

"It was important for the Black Lives Matter movement to show up to Palestine," Cullors later said on "The Laura Flanders Show," an online interview program. "There was also this sort of kindredness that we felt with Palestinians as black people—the constant sort of battering and terrorizing by military and for us by police is eerily similar, and we thought it was important, even though we knew that it might be a huge risk for a lot of us, to show up and let Palestinians know that we are in deep solidarity with them. And, frankly, we believe that Palestine is the new South Africa."

That summer, a solidarity statement emerged as one of the most explicit links yet between black people and Palestinians. Signed by more than 1,000 activists and organizations, the Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine—featured at [blackforpalestine.com](http://blackforpalestine.com)—cites previous solidarity letters from Palestinians to protestors in Ferguson, New York and Baltimore. "We urge people of conscience to recognize the struggle for Palestinian liberation as a key matter of our time," it says. St. Louis groups outnumber other cities' representation in the list of signatories, which includes Cullors, Cornel West, Angela Davis and popular artists such as rapper Talib Kweli.

Not all of Black Lives Matter's prominent names—including cofounders Garza (who is Jewish) and Tomei—have chosen to take a public stance about solidarity with the Palestinians. The relationship, says Abuznaid, is "organic" but not official. "It's not like an edict," he says. "It's not like a concrete documented stance that Black Lives Matter has. I know that there are folks in Black Lives Matter who probably don't feel that allegiance, or people who even disagree. We might not see the day that Black Lives Matter is at every pro-Palestine rally. But there are always people at them with connections to the Black Lives Matter movement."

"I think it's a part of an overall culture shift that we're seeing right now in America," Abuznaid says. "The challenge is to make it more mainstream."





**BOTTOM LEFT FRONT:** BLACK LIVES MATTER COFOUNDER PATRISSE CULLORS  
**SECOND ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:** CARMEN PEREZ, COFOUNDER OF JUSTICE LEAGUE NYC;  
 CHARLENE CARRUTHERS, NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF CHICAGO—BASED BLACK YOUTH  
 PROJECT 100; CHERRELL BROWN, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER  
**SEATED LEFT TO RIGHT:** JOURNALIST MAYTHA ALHASSEN; DREAM DEFENDERS LEGAL  
 AND POLICY DIRECTOR AHMAD ABUZNAID  
**FOURTH ROW LEFT:** RAPPER TEF POE & TARA THOMPSON, COFOUNDERS OF HANDS UP UNITED  
**FOURTH ROW RIGHT:** DREAM DEFENDERS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UMI SELAH  
**TOP ROW:** STEVEN PARGETT, DREAM DEFENDERS COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR;  
 MARC LAMONT HILL, BET NEWS HOST; POET AJA MONET





**THE** solidarity between African Americans and Palestinians may surprise those who lived through the civil rights movement of the 20th century. African Americans found in the Jewish community some of their strongest and most vocal allies: Jews were disproportionately represented in Freedom Summer and in the fight for both the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights acts. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. embraced Jews, and the iconic image of him walking side by side with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel in the Selma-to-Montgomery marches remains a powerful reminder of that partnership. "In many ways, there was a sharing of struggles—something I often refer to as a convergence of interests," says Hilary Shelton, Washington bureau director and senior vice president for advocacy for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). "The needs merged." Andrew Baker, director of international Jewish affairs for the American Jewish Committee, notes that the Jews of that generation "were not so far removed from experiencing discrimination." He adds: "There were so many natural things that brought blacks and Jews together at that time."

This bond had roots in the themes of liberation and self-determination found in the Exodus story. According to Kelley, the biblical narrative served as "the principal political and moral compass for African Americans," dating back to slavery and manifesting in the language of Negro spirituals. In 1898, two years after Theodor Herzl published *Der Judenstaat*—the seminal pamphlet that called for the establishment of a Jewish state—Edward Wilmot Blyden, known as the father of Pan-Africanism, drew explicit parallels between black and Jewish diasporas in his own pamphlet,

*The Jewish Question*. Jews and African descendants, he wrote, were bound by "a history almost identical of sorrow and oppression." He praised "that marvelous movement called Zionism," writing: "There is hardly a man in the civilized world... who does not recognize the claim and right of the Jew to the Holy Land."

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the NAACP passed a resolution supporting it, and King himself was a staunch advocate. But political fractures within the black community began to appear during the 1956 Suez Crisis, when Israel, Great Britain and France took military action to prevent Egypt from nationalizing the canal. Among Israel's critics was Malcolm X, who wrote in 1964 that Zionists merely intended to replace the "outdated European colonialism" with a version of their own. "But there were many, many, many more African-American freedom activists who identified with the creation of the State of Israel," says Alex Lubin, chair of the American Studies Department at the University of New Mexico and author of *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*, "with the European refugees, and even more historically, with the Jewish Zionist movement."

Israel's 1967 victory over its Arab neighbors was a watershed moment. "Before the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and before the Six-Day War, there was a universal sense that Israel was struggling, embattled, surrounded by hostile enemies, and it deserved support," says Baker, adding that afterward Israel lost the "vulnerable image that may have resonated with some groups." With Stokely Carmichael at the helm, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) caused a stir with a newsletter article in the summer of 1967 that threw the internal divisions into sharp relief: In "Third-World Round-up: The Palestine Problem: Test Your Knowledge," SNCC connected American imperialism with Israeli military

action. Readers were asked if they were aware "That the U.S. Government has constantly supported Israel and Zionism by sending military and financial aid to this illegal state ever since it was forced upon the Arabs in 1948?" They were also told that the Rothschild family conspired with the British to create Israel and "control much of Africa's mineral wealth."

When the A. Philip Randolph Institute published an "Appeal by Black Americans for United States Support to Israel" as an ad in *The New York Times* in 1970, it was signed by leaders like Bayard Rustin and NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins, who compared SNCC's message to that of the leader of the American Nazi Party. A few months later, a group called the Committee of Black Americans for the Truth about the Middle East fired back in an ad of its own: "An Appeal by Black Americans against United States Support of the Zionist Government of Israel" called Zionism an outpost of American imperialism, demanded an end to military aid and called for black solidarity with the Palestinian struggle to "regain all of their stolen land."

"As we get into the '70s and '80s, there's sort of a larger shift of identification—not even just support, but identifying with the Palestinian cause as more similar to black Americans' cause than, say, the formation of Israel," says Lubin. Black Power and the Black Panther Party rose to prominence while the number of black Muslims grew; international concerns about Israel's actions in the West Bank and in Gaza gained attention; and Palestinian and Arab-American scholarship came to greater prominence—notably, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which criticized Western culture's image of the Islamic world. Leaders such as Reverend Jesse Jackson openly criticized Israel while embracing—in his case, literally—Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

This era set the stage for the cur-

*Continues on page 59*





**THE REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MARCHING WITH  
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*Black Lives Matter continued from page 52*

rent solidarity effort. Intellectuals and artists such as West, Davis and Walker have served as a bridge across the decades to today's activists. West endorsed BDS in 2011, and that same year, Davis visited the West Bank with a delegation of women of color, while Walker joined a flotilla of ships attempting to break the Gaza blockade. Davis's new book is titled *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine and the Foundations of a Movement*. Clarence Page, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and senior member of the *Chicago Tribune* editorial board, says that the current solidarity with Palestinians harks back to earlier ones between the black left and supporters of the PLO cause. "We can largely trace this back to that period," he says. In his observation, this solidarity comes and goes and is "part of the very fascinating saga of black-Jewish relations," a story that has "been a remarkably effective alliance of two groups who don't have that much in common except for the ability to work together toward civil rights."

How Israel, however, is viewed has changed. Kelley says concerns about Israel "have all but disappeared from the left-wing activist scene. You can't find many activists on the ground who are fighting against institutional, structural racism now who are saying, 'We've gotta defend Israel,'" he says. Lubin adds that with increasing disagreements in the American Jewish community about Israeli policies, activists are also less concerned than the previous generation with potentially offending Jews. "It's not a disregard," he says, but rather a divorcing of Jewish identity from the State of Israel.

Still, Page, who travels the country to speak to college students about race, warns against overestimating the strength of the solidarity. "The Black Lives Matter movement has been mostly focused on the issue of police violence, and we certainly can't blame that on Israel," he says. Additionally, he says, data right now on these movements are scarce. He uses the term "flash politics" to describe movements that arise over

Twitter and other social media. "It's hard to formally talk about chapters and to pin down how many there are around the country," he adds.

Large swaths of black Americans, including members of the civil rights generation and religious Christians, remain staunch allies of Jews and supporters of Israel—though there are notable exceptions, including the Reverends Hagler and Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., the controversial former pastor of a church attended by President Barack Obama. Jews were significant early supporters of the nation's first black president, who received nearly three-quarters of the Jewish vote in 2008. "There is still a very strong gravitational pull," Baker says. "Even if tensions exist in the black-Jewish relationship, it still seems to be a relationship that matters to many Jews and not an insignificant number of black leaders, and it may have more strength today than people imagine it to have, even if it doesn't live up to the idealized picture from the past."

Says the NAACP's Shelton: "Even as our nation has grown and evolved, those relationships are very much there. It's almost like close relatives. We don't agree on everything, but no matter whether you agree or disagree, you always express a strong agreement that we must work together."



**SUSAN** Talve, the Reform rabbi of the only synagogue inside St. Louis city limits, was a visible presence during the protests in Ferguson; on the anniversary of Brown's death, she was arrested while participating in a demonstration. Despite her long history of fighting for racial justice, she became a focal point of criticism because of her activities relating to Israel. Although Talve is critical of the Israeli occupation in the West

*Continues on page 67*



*Black Lives Matter continued from page 59*

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Bank, she has connections with the pro-Israel lobby group, American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), whose representatives she hosted at her synagogue and under whose auspices she has traveled to Israel. These affiliations make Talve a member of a particular political demographic activists have dubbed "PEPs," or "Progressive Except for Palestine."

In November, that criticism came to a head when Hands Up United circulated a photo of Talve on social media with the hashtag "#realterrorist," calling her "a supporter of Genocide [sic] and international apartheid." Days later, in an open letter, St. Louis Jewish Voice for Peace accused Talve of bringing "Zionist oppression into this beautiful movement" and "demonizing Palestinians and whitewashing Israel...turning what should be safe spaces for all people of color into contradictory ones, drawing wedges where there were none."

Talve attributes the criticism to a small "fringe" group. By and large, she says, the local Black Lives Matter activists "have always made a place for me as a rabbi at the table." And while she doesn't think the campaign against her was "intentionally anti-Semitic," she's concerned that "there are people who are anti-Semitic out there who will attach themselves to irresponsible speech, irresponsible attacks."

Talve insists that she does not have to—and will not—choose between Israel and racial justice in America, but she is not the only Jewish activist who has found herself in that position. Students and others who are interested in supporting the Black Lives Matter movement have described similar experiences. Some progressive youth-oriented Jewish groups, such as Bend the Arc and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, focus on justice issues at home, leaving Israel out of the discussion to concentrate their efforts on local issues. Bend the Arc CEO Stosh Cotler recently moderated a panel called "Why #BlackLivesMatter is a Jewish Issue" that included BLM co-

founder Tometi.

The Anti-Defamation League views the new black-Palestinian solidarity as a public relations tactic—albeit a relatively successful one—to give BDS traction. In January, ADL Deputy National Director Kenneth Jacobson called it a "cynical strategy" in a scathing op-ed run by the Jewish news service JTA. There is "no rational connection between the challenge of racism in America and the situation facing the Palestinians," he wrote. While there can be criticism of Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, he argues, it is not a question of institutionalized racism, and conflating these two issues won't help solve either one.

Susan Talve shares a similar concern. She worries that oversimplification will detract from real efforts to find solutions to two inherently different problems. She says that injecting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into Black Lives Matter could "sabotage the movement" by discouraging natural allies, such as progressive Zionists, from participating.

H. Patrick Swygert, the former president of Howard University, agrees. "One hopes that Black Lives Matter stays focused," says Swygert, a member of the Academic Engagement Network, a group of influential academics who have organized to support pro-Israel faculty members. "No matter how important those issues might be, issues surrounding blacks and people of color are the first order or business."

One of Susan Talve's congregants is K.B. Frazier, an African American Jew in St. Louis who has been active in the Black Lives Matter movement. While Frazier doesn't personally object to the black-Palestinian alliance, he believes it's important to ensure that Jews who support Israel aren't sidelined from the social justice issues they care about—and that other causes don't distract from the issue at hand. "What I object to is creating divisions in a movement that has been built on solidarity," he says. "This is how movements die." □