

Critical Education

Volume 17 Number 3

August 18, 2026

ISSN 1920-4175

In the Warmth of the Sun Black Educator Solidarity for a Free Palestine

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McMillian, R., Wilson, A., Reynolds, A. D. (2026). In the warmth of the sun: Black educator solidarity for a free Palestine. *Critical Education*, 17(3), 137-152.

<https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v17i3.187104>

Abstract

In this article we—three Black justice-centered educators fighting for Black and Palestinian freedom and liberation—share our collective experiences: unveiling solidarity between our two communities. Methodologically, we draw from critical race counterstorytelling as a "political strategy in ongoing struggles over the relations of power, knowledge, and difference in the United States and beyond." While most use critical counterstorytelling to cast light on the unique experiences of People of Color and the ways that they navigate the endemic nature of racism in the U.S., we use the methodology to highlight—and make sense of—our interconnectedness as dispossessed people's fighting for freedom and liberation. The counterstories we share reveal our experiences in developing a consciousness of our interconnectedness, while also pointing to the work that we are actively doing in and out of classrooms to work towards the freedom and liberation of all oppressed people. In sharing our counterstories, we hope that educators will be moved to both (re)member and build new movements for Black and Palestinian freedom and liberation. We share our stories not to be replicated, but rather, to be wrestled with, contextualized, and reimaged given the movements that will continue to shape our worlds.



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You may take the last strip of my land,
 Feed my youth to prison cells.
 You may plunder my heritage.
 You may burn my books, my poems
 Or feed my flesh to the dogs.
 You may spread a web of terror
 On the roofs of my village,
O enemy of the sun,
 But
 I shall not compromise
 And to the last pulse in my veins
 I shall resist.

- Samih al-Qasim, excerpted from *Enemy of the Sun*

Introduction

On August 21, 1971, just two days before the scheduled opening of his trial, George Jackson—a Black political prisoner, revolutionary, and radicalized scholar—was shot to death by a tower guard in the prison yard of San Quentin. In many ways, narratives surrounding the shooting criticized Jackson as being directly or indirectly responsible for his own death (James, 2018). Prison authorities even described the assassination of Jackson as the result of an attempted escape and—in a haste to gather evidence to support the killing—quickly raided each cell within the prison. In their move to acquit themselves, however, what they found in Jackson’s cell were mainly his writings and an extensive collection of 99 books.

These books included *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon, *The Age of Imperialism* by Harry Magdoff, *Black Rage* by William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Jackson’s own collection of letters from prison—*Soledad Brother*, and *Enemy of the Sun* (Aruri & Ghareeb, 1970). *Enemy of the Sun*—a collection of poems of Palestinian resistance—was the only book of poetry in Jackson’s collection (aside from *Some Changes* by June Jordan) and, as Samuel W. Allen powerfully states in the preface, “[*Enemy of the Sun*] is a poetry of revolution and like the poetry of the Black revolution, it means to be political, it intends to move people to purpose; it hopes really, as prayer, to change things, to sing—as bullets on a mission, to change men’s minds” (in Aruri & Ghareeb, 1970, p. ix).

A handwritten copy of the titular poem by Samih al-Qasim (in Aruri & Ghareeb, 1970) was also found in Jackson’s cell; reprinted in the September 1971, issue of the Black Panther Party’s weekly newsletter under a tribute to Jackson (Figure 1). And, for over forty years, the poem “*Enemy of the Sun*”—through what some may term a literary “mistake”—was attributed to Jackson (Thomas, 2015).

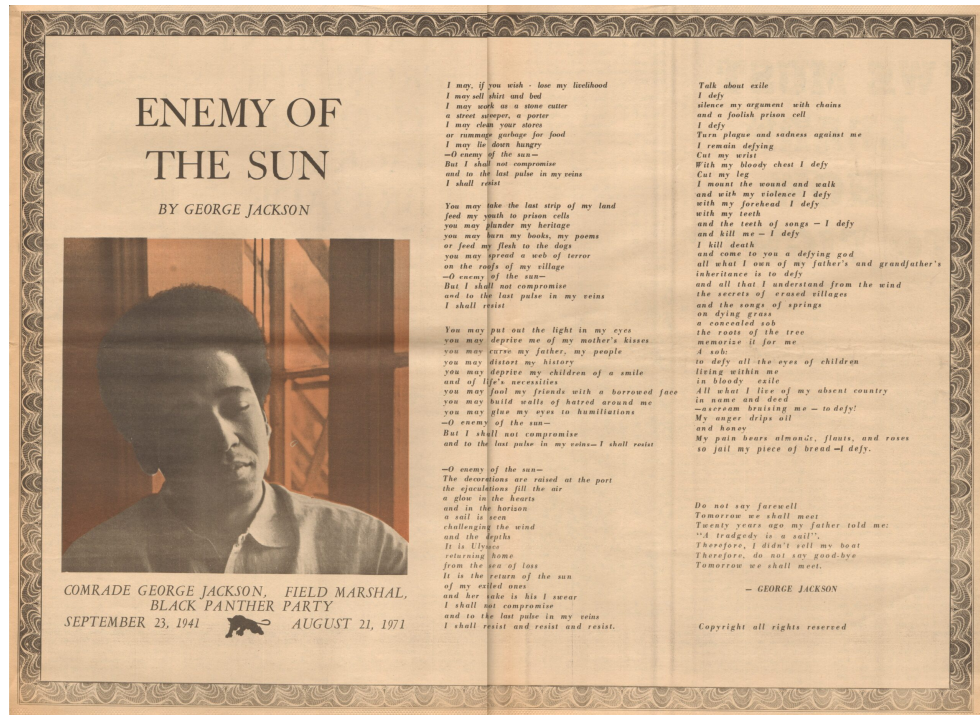


Figure 1. *Enemy of the Sun*

Note: Excerpt from “George Jackson Lives!” The Black Panther Party Community Newspaper, August 28, 1971. Accessed from freedomarchives.org

However, in “Blame It on the Sun: George Jackson and Poetry of Palestinian Resistance,” Greg Thomas (2015) asserts that attributing authorship of “Enemy of the Sun” to Jackson is no mistake, stating:

The ‘mistake’ of capitalist property and commercial copyright turns out to be a *revelation*, a sign of radical identification and uncanny connection beyond rhetorical declarations of solidarity: George Jackson touching Palestine; George Jackson’s intifada library expanding; George Jackson tracing the writing of Samih Al-Qasim—to share, commune, and communicate with fellow prisoners and other captives of the US empire. (p. 244)

Ford (2024) affirms this argument, expressing: “The fact that an anthology of radical Palestinian poetry made its way to a U.S. publishing house in 1970, was smuggled into a maximum-security prison, and studied and copied by George Jackson before his assassination is of remarkable significance” (para. 9).

We, the authors, also understand this as incredibly significant. The fact that no one questioned the poem’s authorship demonstrates a “radical kinship” that moves beyond such “rhetorical declarations of solidarity” (Thomas, 2015, p. 244); emerging from the depths of confinement and a shared oppression under white supremacy and imperialism. However, while we fully understand that solidarity can be formed under extreme oppression, Robin D. G. Kelley (2019) reminds us that “it is not the condition of captivity that is the basis of solidarity but the critique of captivity from a place of confinement, the shared dreams of liberation, and the mobilizing and planning to fulfill that dream” (p. 85). Kelley (2019), further elaborating on the

story of Jackson and Black-Palestinian solidarity in the 1970s, describes true solidarity as “worldmaking,” explaining:

Solidarity [...] is more than short-term alliances or coalitions but a sort of prefigurative politics that demands of us a deeper transformation of society and of our relationships to one another. What brought Palestinian and Black activists together in that moment was not just a recognition of parallel oppressions, humiliations, violence, and carcerality under occupation but a shared vision of liberation—a vision that extended beyond the nation-state and the transnational to the world. (p. 85)

Kelley’s definition of solidarity—a solidarity that is born out of praxes of liberation (Thomas in Kelley, 2019)—is what sustains us in this moment, in a moment of grief, solemnity, and the uncertainty of life. For, at the time of this writing, a recorded number of almost seventy thousand Palestinians have tragically lost their lives within the short span of two years¹ and we cannot even begin to grasp the magnitude of both our present situation or what lies before us. Nonetheless, we (re)member (Dillard, 2012); understanding ourselves as part of a long legacy of Black/Palestinian solidarity for liberation.

Therefore, in this article, we—three Black justice-centered educators fighting for Black and Palestinian freedom and liberation—share our collective experiences; unveiling the solidarity that exists between our two communities. Theoretically, we look to the Black Radical Tradition while also drawing from critical race counterstorytelling as a “political strategy in ongoing struggles over the relations of power, knowledge, and difference in the United States and beyond” (Baszile, 2015, p. 239). While most use critical counterstorytelling to cast light on the unique experiences of People of Color and the ways that they navigate the endemic nature of racism in the U.S., we use the methodology to highlight—and make sense of—our interconnectedness as dispossessed peoples (Fanon, 1963) fighting for freedom and liberation. The counterstories that we share reveal our experiences in developing a consciousness of our interconnectedness, while also pointing to the work that we are actively doing in and out of PreK-20 classrooms to work towards the freedom and liberation of all oppressed people.

This article, in so many ways, cannot provide a complete historical overview of Black solidarity with Palestine. It also cannot even begin to plunge the depths of what we are feeling in this moment as Black educators who hold Palestine close. Instead, we write this in attempts to both process our collective grief and (re)member what Black radicals have taught us about solidarity as worldmaking (Kelley, 2019). From this lens, we do not seek to offer “findings” in the traditional sense in this article, as we are all processing—minute by minute—the onslaught of terror that is occurring in Palestine. Instead, we offer the following as what we have learned through the process of cultivating our stories:

- We are part of a long tradition of the struggle for Black/Palestinian freedom and liberation. We look to this legacy for both inspiration and strategy; recognizing the great deal of work that is set before us.

¹ The number of those confirmed killed is currently 67,160 (AJLabs, 2025). This number, at the time, cannot fully represent the total number of deaths.

- Black and Palestinian peoples are caught in an intricate web of anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and carcerality. Both our struggles and our liberation are forever linked.
- Black and Palestinian peoples have always found ways to survive and thrive even within the midst of imperialist, white supremacist, and anti-Black violence. Again, our struggles and our liberation are forever linked.

To conclude this article, we offer questions in the hopes that this article might serve as both curriculum and a pedagogical tool—sparking a conversation, generating even more questions, and creating spaces in which we can all continue to study and struggle until we see a liberated Palestine.

The Black Radical Tradition

We ground this article within the Black Radical Tradition because, as Cedric Robinson (2000) states in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Black Radicalism is “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality” (p. 171). Through that understanding, the Black Radical Tradition is always evolving yet always revealing the ways that we, as Black people, continue to live based on our shared history. By placing emphasis on the struggle more so than “victories” or outcomes, the Black Radical Tradition displays “the collective wisdom” (Robinson, 2000) that has emerged from our fights against human domination. This collective wisdom is also global; revealing not only our shared oppression but the ways in which our liberation is intimately connected to the liberation of other oppressed people and groups.

Counterstorytelling

Historically, stories are the way that Black people make sense of this world—the way that we tell of our experiences and “provide another version of society” (Williams, 2004, p. 166). In saying that, the practice of storytelling or counterstorytelling (Baszile, 2015; Delgado, 1989) is central to this article as we process our experiences in learning about and fighting for a free Palestine as Black educators. To collect the narratives that we share in this article, we each constructed written responses to the following guiding questions:

- What have you come to know about the links between Black and Palestinian freedom and liberation? How did you get there?
- What does it mean to you to move in solidarity with Palestinians as Black educators?
- What does it mean for other Black educators to both recognize and move towards Palestinian freedom and liberation?
- What do you imagine as the work ahead? Given the spaces and places you and your work move through, what might this mean contextually?

In the following section, we move through each of these questions; remembering critical moments within our lives that led us to Palestine and the fight for our collective liberation.

Why Should We Even Care?

*Can you tell me why
Every time I step outside I see my niggas die?*

-J. Cole, *Be Free*

“Why should we even care?!” Terrance stood—pointing at the projector screen from the back of the classroom—and continued, “He’s just another nigga!” My heart dropped and my mouth widened in shock as the piano chords from J. Cole’s *Be Free* continued to echo throughout my classroom. Every student became silent; looking towards me to see exactly how I would react. The silence didn’t last for long though as Ryland turned quickly towards Terrance and angrily shouted, “Why would you say that?” Perhaps recognizing the horror on my face, or Ryland’s tone, or maybe even their own anger—several more students soon joined Ryland’s voice in chorus. Terrance, staring at me, grabbed his books and walked out of my classroom. As I remained silent.

It was September of 2014, and this question of “why should we even care,” still rings in my head ten years later; signifying, at least in part, that I was deeply affected by that question. This story is not to sensationalize a moment in my classroom. It is not to point a critical finger at then 14-year-old Terrance—or even my younger self—for our different reactions in that particular moment. I believe that we both deserve grace. Instead, I share my story to display how I—as a Black educator—began to hold Palestine close.

At the time, I was a relatively new high school social studies teacher. In fact, it was my first year at a school within an urban district and my first year teaching a class in which all of the students were Black. It was both an exciting and healing moment for me, being able to teach a classroom of students who looked like me, especially during a year that was marked by so much continued state-sanctioned violence against Black people.

July 17th of 2014, Eric Garner was killed in a chokehold by New York police officers while shouting “I can’t breathe!” On August 5th of that same year, John Crawford III was shot and killed by police while holding a BB gun that was for sale in a Walmart not far from where I lived. And, on August 14th, Michael Brown was shot to death by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson.

Each of the deaths in that year shook me to my core, with the spectacle of Michael Brown’s death being particularly jarring for me. However, ten years later, it is somewhat difficult for me to collect exact memories of my emotions of the days following his death. I remember a familiar terror though as I viewed pictures of his body, uncovered, lying face down in the street for over four hours. I remember the angst that I felt as I saw the stream of blood begin to bake into the concrete in the summer heat. I remember the anger and the fear that I felt as I watched the protests in Ferguson unfold—the pictures of fire and smoke, the almost never-ending videos of police assaults on peaceful protestors, the chants of “Hands up! Don’t shoot!” I remember my own anguish as I saw the unfathomable sorrow on the face of Michael Brown’s mother, Lezley McSpadden-Head—her grief on full display for the world to see.

I remember because these are the same intense emotions that I am experiencing now as I watch what is unfolding in Palestine—as I view pictures of fire, and smoke, and blood, and terror, and unimaginable grief. I remember because it was through the life and death of Michael Brown that I truly learned about Palestine.

Ten years ago, my understanding of Palestine was minimal at best. As a 9th grade Modern World History teacher at the time, I was required to teach that “religious diversity, the end of colonial rule and rising nationalism have led to regional conflicts in the Middle East” within a unit on the Cold War. For this, I was given very few resources save for the British White Paper of 1922, a textbook titled *World History: Human Legacy* (Ramírez et al., 2008), and *A History of the Twentieth Century* (O’Callaghan, 1987) with sections titled “The Birth of Israel” and “Palestinians, Egypt and Israel, 1967-1981.”

My district’s pacing guide indicated that I should be able to teach what they termed the “Arab/Israeli conflict”² in approximately one 50-minute class period. Instructionally, I was advised to have my students create maps or graphs that detailed religious diversity within Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, or Saudi Arabia. Or, I could have students analyze data to illustrate the changes in religious demographics in the region since 1945. These were, in my mind, meaningless activities, but prior to teaching the course I had never deeply studied the effects of the birth of Israel on the Palestinian people. So, I took what my district handed me and prepared myself to follow the script.

But, watching the global impact of the protests in Ferguson caused my students and I to understand, as Angela Davis (2016) explains: “Our histories never unfold in isolation. We cannot truly tell what we consider to be our own histories without knowing the other stories. And often we discover that those other stories are actually our own stories” (Davis, 2016, p. 135). Because of this, I completely abandoned the script and created lessons that displayed the connections between Palestine and Ferguson in real time.

And it was during one such lesson, that Terrance pointed at the picture of the Ferguson protests and asked, “why should we even care?” I realize now that his question was possibly one of both frustration with me and desensitization to the amount of Black death that we were continuously being exposed to in the media. I also realize now, in hindsight, that his question was one that spurred my learning and my students—causing us to search for an answer. We searched through picture analysis of the protests in Ferguson or through pictures in which young Palestinian children in Gaza and the West Bank held signs that said “I can’t breathe! #FromPalestinetoFerguson.” We learned through music and poetry as we struggled to process our grief and exhaustion in watching Black death. We studied together, discussing the impacts of police brutality and incarceration in our own community and the various ways that it shows up both nationally and globally. We also struggled together, engaging in various forms of activism outside of the classroom and in our communities. And it was through this study and struggle that I found my answer to Terrance’s question.

It’s Actually not that Hard to Understand...

I’ve been learning about, and teaching, Palestine for nearly 15 years. In reflecting back to my adolescence, I can only remember learning about Palestine once, as a caddie when the golf course manager refused to call me by my name instead referring to me as Yasser Arafat (the former chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization). My organizing for education justice in

² quotations are placed around conflict to represent both the ways we have been taught to talk about genocide in Palestine and the inappropriateness of the term in that it doesn’t accurately capture the violence and conditions that have facilitated this onslaught.

Chicago introduced me to the liberation struggles taking place in Palestine as a pre-service teacher in college. As a result, I have come to understand that the struggle for Black liberation in the U.S. is inextricably connected to the struggle for liberation in Palestine (and elsewhere). A large part of that understanding is linked to my evolving consciousness of imperialism's global impact on endarkened peoples. I will share two of those examples here.

In 2008, I was a first-year middle school social studies at a K-8 school on the West Side of Chicago. Each day we met, we read (or watched or listened to) a news article detailing something current happening in their community or elsewhere. One of those days we read about Palestine in a news article I brought in. Part of that reading included a video of a time lapsed map that detailed how Palestine decreased in size as Israel increased in size from 1948 to 2008. Almost immediately, and without much complex knowledge, my students made connections to enclosures through their lived experiences of school privatization, police violence, and the systematic removal of resources (to name a few) present in their lives and communities. They also felt moved to do something and, after sharing ideas, they all agreed to engage in a letter writing campaign to elected officials on their learnings.

The connections my students were able to make in that moment to their own lives as Black youth navigating the contours of anti-Blackness in Chicago were as author Ta-Nehisi Coates shared of his visit to the occupied territory of Palestine in 2023, "uncomplicated" (Democracy Now, 2023). Coates words echo my students':

the way this is reported in the Western media is as though one needs a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern studies to understand the basic morality of holding a people in a situation in which they don't have basic rights, including the right that we treasure most, the franchise, the right to vote, and then declaring that state a democracy. It's actually not that hard to understand. It's actually quite familiar to those of us with a familiarity to African American history. (Democracy Now, 2023).

In the summer of 2024, I was fortunate enough to spend time with educators and organizers dedicated to teaching Palestine. Throughout the six weeks we built community with each other, listening to storied lives of people in the U.S. and in Palestine, mapping out the contours of violence and resistance in the U.S. and in Palestine, engaging in political analysis that helped us define and articulate imperialism's impact on Black life in the U.S. and life in Palestine, and creating curricular and pedagogical tools that linked a struggle for Black liberation in the U.S. to Palestinian liberation abroad. This experience, like my students in 2008, revealed the clear and uncomplicated links between the domination and liberation movements of Black folks in the U.S. *and* the domination and liberation movements calling for a free and liberated Palestine. In both spaces, and cultures, there are certainly differences (and certainly different relationships to power and privilege here in the U.S.), but the similarities are significant. The systematic mechanisms that take Black and Palestinian lives, that surveil our lives, that contain our lives, and that punish our lives are one in the same. For me, I have found strength in this point of analysis.

Following Black Revolutionaries to Palestine

I did not realize how controversial saying "Free Palestine" was until I witnessed how even social justice organizers or scholar-activists tiptoed to publicly take a stance. I saw how quickly attacks from Zionist supporters erupted online against those who stood with Palestine. Then, as a university professor, I would walk into my undergraduate class the next day and look into the eyes

of Palestinian and Arab American students who are often forced to embrace American patriotism even as our army continues to drop bombs on their homes and call them terrorists. I knew that I had a responsibility to be just as courageous as I encouraged my students to hold the hard conversations about white supremacy, oppression, and justice. In navigating how I would make room to talk about what was happening in Gaza, I wanted to be sure to make space for folks to reflect on their emotions, while also facilitating dialogue in ways that demonstrated that Palestinian students did not have to defend their humanity and that students could bow out of the dialogue. Additionally, I wanted to provide critical resources for students to foster more learning from Palestinian people and allies. I began with students reflecting on the questions below as part of their reflective activity:

- How are we moving through the world while witnessing genocide?
- What do you wish you understood better about the conflict between Israel/Palestine?
- What would conversations of abolition look like in the context of the “open air prison”?
- Is it possible for peace to exist without justice?

My learning began in 2010 when I met my proud Palestinian roommate, Ayah. It was through her own studies about Black revolutionaries and liberation movements that she was able to make connections to our struggles as oppressed people caught in between white supremacist, colonial, imperialistic projects. Often, through experimenting with making cultural dishes, we discussed stories of liberation, struggle, and justice. We shared in our love for Angela Davis who is an abolitionist and longtime supporter of a free Palestine. And, as I became more embedded in the organizing community in Chicago, I became more attuned to Black and Palestinian solidarity in abolitionist spaces. It was imperative that we learned those legacies and embraced those praxes in our current organizing so that it expanded our global notions about the relationship between carceral systems domestically and abroad.

Black revolutionaries continue to lead me to Palestinian voices and, sometimes, they remind me that even our heroes/heroines do not get it right as well. I found myself at this crossroad when asked to keynote a Martin Luther King Jr. Day event this year. I wanted the message to be a conversation with Dr. King, myself, and the audience as we reflected on his legacy while Israel commits genocide against Palestinian people. I was disappointed by the delight that he found in Israel, and then relieved when he declined another visit; taking a stand against the violence imposed on Palestinian people after pressure from people like Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael). From a pedagogical perspective, I recognized an opportunity to confront this tension through facilitating a safe space for dialogue while pushing one another to speak back to the archives.

Discussion

Each of our stories demonstrates the varied ways that we, as Black educators, developed a consciousness of our interconnectedness with the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Whether through the Ferguson protests of 2014, police violence and enclosures in the city of Chicago, or abolitionist organizing spaces, our understandings of our interconnectedness with Palestine grew *only* as we began to engage in radical study. It was through this radical study, that we began to understand that we are part of a long tradition of the struggle for Black/Palestinian freedom and

liberation. Such radical study also showed us the complex (albeit uncomplicated) nexus of anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and carcerality. It also reminded us of the ways that Black and Palestinian peoples have always found ways to survive and thrive in and through these systems of oppressions. Most importantly though, our radical study in the classroom—both personally and alongside our students—displayed that our struggles and our liberation are forever linked. In the following sections we illustrate this; demonstrating what we have learned from each of our counterstories as we continue to engage in radical study and struggle for Black and Palestinian liberation.

The Legacy of Black/Palestinian Solidarity

Solidarity between Black power movements in the United States and liberation struggles in Palestine date back to the 1960s as anti-war and anti-apartheid movements aided Black activists and organizations in understanding the systematic connections between their oppression and the oppression of other people groups worldwide (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Davis, 2016; Feldman, 2015; Fishbach, 2023; Jordan, 2007; Klug, 2021; Naber, 2017). Given the confines of this article, we highlight two important cases of this long-standing relationship here that were critical in our learning as Black educators: anti-imperialist (student) movements of the late-sixties and Black feminists rooted in Black Radical Traditions in the U.S. that made explicit the links between U.S. Imperialism worldwide and collective movements for freedom and liberation.

Black social movements—and notable Black activists—began to shift their understandings of the events unfolding in occupied Palestine during the Naksa³, and the associated Palestinian struggle(s) for freedom that both led to and evolved from it (Feldman, 2015; Fishbach, 2023; Klug, 2021; SNCC, 1967). For example, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) published a two-page article in their newsletter (1967) in which they described “the Palestinian problem” as an imperial project of “white western colonial governments” (SNCC, 1967).

The Black Panther Party (BPP), and its members who were largely young adults, were also outspoken in their analyses linking Black oppression in the United States to Palestinian oppression in the Middle East through systems of U.S. (backed) imperialist forces (Figure 2) that harmed both communities through the same mechanisms (Bailey, 2015; Erakat & Hill, 2019). In 1966, the Minister of Defense and co-founder of the BPP, Huey Newton was clear that U.S. Imperialism held an important link in the oppression of Black and Palestinians saying, “Israel was created by Western imperialism and is maintained by Western firepower” (cited in Thomas, 2021). The party went on to issue at least three official statements in support of Palestine (Fishbach, 2023; Thomas, 2021). It’s also important to mention that the relationships between Palestinians and Black organizers were symbiotic as both groups were learning from each other—sharing movement stories that provided political clarity, methods of resistance and refusal, and unity in the face of systematic global power (Bailey, 2015; Erakat & Hill, 2019; Feldman, 2015; Fishbach, 2023; Klug, 2021).

³ Naksa is the Arabic word for “setback” following the Nakba of 1948. During the Naksa in 1967, Israeli aggression in the West Bank and Gaza displaced between 280,000-325,000 Palestinians and brought more than one million Palestinians under direct Israeli rule (Tahhan, 2018).



Figure 2. The Black Panther Black Community News Service Issue

Note: March 21, 1970, front page, article, and image on U.S. Imperialism and Palestine. *The Black Panther*, vol. 4, no. 16:1-24 (March 21, 1970) (1970). Black Panthers. Accessed from Alexander Street.

Black feminists in the U.S. have also played an important role in illuminating the connections between Black and Palestinian struggles for freedom and liberation. In the 1980s, when other remained silent during repeated attacks against Palestinians by Israeli forces, it was scholars and activists like Angela Davis (2016; 2024) and June Jordan (1989; 2007) who stood against false claims of injustice to make tangible connections between Black life in the U.S. and Palestinian's lives in their occupied homeland. After Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, June Jordan wrote out against the thousands of Palestinian refugees massacred. In an open letter (which was never published) dated 1982, Jordan wrote, "I claim responsibility for the Israeli crimes against humanity because I am an American and American monies made these atrocities possible" (Magloire, 2024). Jordan went on to write and speak about Palestinian liberation from the lens of a queer Black woman until her death in 2002. Black feminist articulations of the interconnections between Palestinian and Black struggles are important for two reasons. One, they add to the burgeoning literature related to Black and Palestinian solidarity. Second, and related, they bring an important gender analysis to Black and Palestinian solidarity struggles not very present in the student movements the preceded them (Davis, 2016; Davis et al., Fischbach, 2023).

At the Nexus of Anti-Blackness, Settler Colonialism, and Carcerality

In considering each of our stories, we understand that our connection to Palestine begs an analysis of what Noura Erakat (2016) describes as, “the collusion of state powers, the asymmetric capacities between industrialized and developing nations, the unyielding sway of nationalism, and [the] remarkable expendability of certain human life” (para.1). The case of Palestine, in many ways, is an *unexceptional* case (Erakat, 2016)—reflecting so many other cases throughout time and space that are anchored in settler-colonialism, state-sanctioned violence, and the centrality of race in “the programmatic and hierarchical organization of life and death” (Rodríguez, 2006, p. 140). Because of this, Erakat (2016) then asks, “If, indeed, there is no Palestinian exception, what does that freedom from anecdotal particularity afford us in the way of understanding the conflict and its possible solutions?” (para. 2). In attempting to answer that question, one way of understanding the *unexceptional* case of Palestine is through the framework of anti-Blackness and the complicated ways that it operates globally (Davis, 2016; Erakat, 2016). The Palestinian question then, ultimately becomes a global question of who is considered Human at the death-dealing nexus of anti-Blackness, settler-colonialism, and carcerality.

Understanding anti-Blackness and the ways that it collides, moves through, and upholds settler colonialism and carcerality is critical in understanding not only our stories, but the current humanitarian crisis and, more importantly, the genocide that is occurring in Palestine. For, anti-Blackness as a framework, cannot be thought of as simply racism against Black people (ross, 2020). Instead, as Ebony Coletu (in Anti-Blackness Roundtable, 2015) states, “anti-Blackness reframes the question of how we die.”

The theory of anti-Blackness stems from the field of Afro-pessimism and the work of such scholars as Orlando Patterson (1982) and Frank Wilderson (2010). Centering analysis on the anti-Black foundations of race and racism, scholars of Afro-pessimism note that *the Black* is “socially and culturally positioned as a slave dispossessed of human agency, desire and freedom” (Dumas, 2016, p. 13). This notion is explored by Orlando Patterson (1982) in *Slavery and Social Death*, in which he argues that *the Black* became a “nonperson” —stripped of all civil rights and dignity—“without power except through another” (Patterson, 1982, p. 10). Similarly, Wilderson (2010) notes that the condition of being owned did not end with the abolishment of slavery, but that it continues to be an ontological positioning of Blackness. Wilderson (2010) further argues that structural violence is “not a Black experience but a condition of ‘Black life’; [remaining] constant, paradigmatically, despite changes in its ‘performance’ over time—slave ship, Middle Passage, Slave estate, Jim Crow, the ghetto or prison industrial complex” (p. 75). It is this denial of personhood—this “condition of Black life”—that results in premature death.

In like manner, Saidiya Hartman (2016) argues in the article “The Dead Book Revisited” that it was from within the holds of the slave ships of the Middle Passage that “a new social formation emerged; [and] the inception of Blackness was tied to this terror” (p. 211). Hartman (2016) states:

The intimacy with death that was first experienced in the hold continues to determine Black existence. The matrix of our dispossession encompasses the fungible and disposable life of the captive/slave; the uneven distribution of death and harm that produces a caesura in human populations and yields a huge pile of corpses; the accumulation, expropriated capacity, and extracted surplus constitutive

of racial capitalism and modernity; and the premature death, social precarity, and incarceration that characterize the present. Our dispossession is ongoing. (p. 208)

This intimacy with death is exactly what legitimizes both settler colonialism and the carceral logics of mass incarceration, police militarization, and racial genocide (Murch in Anti-Blackness Roundtable, 2015). And this is especially evident in the case of Palestine. As Sarah Ihmoud (in Anti-Blackness Roundtable, 2015) states:

Anti-Blackness is formative of the Israeli settler colonial state and consequently, the structural position of the Palestinian native is shaped by anti-Black animus. The settler colonial regime's inscription of terror against the Palestinian native's body and home space has been the precondition for the life and 'safety' of the Jewish settler polity since the Nakba. It is thus that Palestinian suffering and death, in both its "exceptional" and mundane forms, must not be seen as an aberration to, but rather formative of the settler colonial state.

Ihmoud's assertion points to the necessity of Black and Palestinian solidarity in this present moment; the need to engage in true solidarity that is founded not on our shared oppression, but on our shared principle of liberation.

Understanding Black and Palestinian Transnational Solidarity as Worldmaking

Susan Abulhawa (2013) argues that the Palestinian struggle is both "spiritually and politically Black because there is no equivalent to the savagery inflicted on the Black body over centuries by white supremacy" (para. 6). Continuing, Abulhawa (2013) describes descendants of Africa, including Black Americans, as "natural allies" to Palestinians—as "people who know, viscerally, what it means to be regarded as vermin by most of the world. Those who know what it is to be the 'wretched of the earth'" (para. 11).

This definition of Black/Palestinian solidarity, however, continues to stem from our shared oppression instead of what Aja Monet (in Anti-Blackness Roundtable, 2015) defines as "a unified force to combat hatred and anti-Blackness" (para. 44). While we understand the definition that Abulhawa posits, we also understand that a solidarity that is born out of violent oppression cannot be sustained. Additionally, any form of "solidarity" that is commodified or requires reciprocation is no form of solidarity at all (Kelley, 2019). Instead, as we conclude this article, we return to Robin D. G. Kelley's (2019) earlier definition of solidarity as "a shared vision of liberation—a vision that extends beyond the nation-state and the transnational to the world" (p. 85).

Kelley (2019) argues that it is a vision of worldmaking rather than identity politics that has sustained Black and Palestinian transnational solidarity since 1967. Worldmaking, in this sense, is envisioning a world free of all forms of violent, systemic oppression—it is "looking ahead in order to produce a radically different future" (Kelley, 2019, p. 85). While not explicitly stated within our narratives, our understandings of Black and Palestinian solidarity grew even greater as we engaged in the practice worldmaking and, more specifically, abolition. As Dylan Rodriguez (2019) posits:

Abolition is and was a practice, an analytical method, a present-tense visioning, an infrastructure in the making, a creative project, a performance, a counterwar, an ideological struggle, a pedagogy and curriculum, an alleged impossibility that is furtively present, pulsing, produced in the persistent insurgencies of human being

that undermine the totalizing logics of empire, chattel, occupation, heteropatriarchy, racial-colonial genocide, and Civilization as a juridical-narrative epoch. (p. 1578)

Black and Palestinian solidarity as worldmaking and abolition helps us to construct alternative forms of reality and stand in direct opposition to anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and carceral and genocidal logics.

Our own stories do not model perfect paths to becoming allies or co-conspirators but instead reveal the tensions and struggle to do so within educational institutions that are in service to the global anti-Black, carceral, imperialist project. Even within the messiness of being in solidarity, our counterstories demonstrate how we moved from the place of “our oppression is similar” to a place where we recognize that “our struggle for freedom is interconnected.” It is in this place that we actively witness and struggle through radical love for the sake of humanity. It is here where we not only imagine the end of oppression, but that we envision that freedom belongs to all of us. It is here that we begin to demonstrate being free as if it is already so and how we engage in collective world-making in the *warmth of the sun*.

Study and Struggle for a Free Palestine

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, we are continually processing as the world watches daily occurrences of violence and torture towards Palestinian people. Because of the ongoing nature of this genocide, we find it extremely important that we aim not to theorize or draw conclusions in this moment. Instead, we hope that this article can be utilized within classrooms to further encourage Black educators to engage in both radical study and solidarity movements for Palestinian liberation. Through that understanding, we conclude by offering questions for both educators and students to consider:

- How can we, as Black teacher educators, “use the practice of Palestinian struggle and resistance as a platform for addressing liberation not just for a nation, but, more broadly, for humanity’s expendable populations” (Erakat, 2016, para. 12)?
- How do we center the relational part of teaching and learning in this moment of violent oppression?
- What are the Palestinian and Black texts that we can center in our learning and teaching about genocidal terror?
- How can we create safe spaces to ask questions and acknowledge uncertainty in this moment?
- The struggle for liberation is long. How do we maintain and sustain our commitment to this work while also engaging in our own healing practices?
- What should Black educators—all educators—be doing in this moment?
- How do we both study and struggle in this moment of collective grief?

In offering these questions, we hope to not only continue this conversation, but sustain it, recognizing the long road ahead of us for both Black and Palestinian liberation.

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Critical Education

criticaleducation.org

ISSN 1920-4175

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