



by Antwann Michael

We are engaged in a worldwide struggle for liberation. If philosopher Charles Mills has taught us anything it is that white supremacy transcends the borders of nations, that white supremacy is a worldwide system of domination which informs all aspects of society being secured by a racial contract. Beyond the often referred to examples of the US and South Africa, perhaps no place is more representative of the damage and reality of white supremacy and colonialization than Palestine. This claim, among many people, causes a gut reaction because it implicates Israel—the beloved ally of the United States. For many a question wrapped in a statement is: Jewish people are minorities, they/we are not white, so how can they/we employ White supremacy (this question has been answered by many and will not be tackled here)? Another claim that is often immediately offered is ‘Israel is our homeland and we are being attacked.’ However, revisiting history and its implications reveals otherwise and helps us to understand why the Palestinian struggle should be important to Black people in this present political moment in the United States.

In the present moment of Black Lives Matter in the US, along with a presidential campaign, Black folks are being bombarded with numerous messages: ‘a vote for anyone but Hillary is a vote for Trump,’ ‘people marched and died for you to vote,’ ‘Dr. King was peaceful and you need to be too.’ These statements in one way or another have all made their way into the hearing of Black people in some form or another. However, I want to suggest that these assertions offered to Black people (oftentimes by other Black people) are false dilemmas and serves to reinforce the structure and domination of white supremacy under which not only Black people presently struggle against, but also Palestinians, native Hawaiians and Americans, Chicano/a peoples, and many others. That is to say settler colonialism is an ongoing process and it impossible to ‘fight the power’ and vote for a US president at the same time (with the current options we are being presented with). I also wish to advance the notion that it is absurd to submit to Black people that Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others fought and died for Black people to access the right to vote—rather it is more accurate to assert that Hamer, King, and others fought and died for the recognition of Black humanity in a perverse white supremacist country and saw the vote as a way to achieve the end goal of the recognition of our humanity. The emphasis here is ‘a way,’ many other ways were also offered, considered, and carried out.

In this political moment the words of Dr. King regarding militarism come to mind: “I knew I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government.” King also stated, “God didn’t call on America to engage in a senseless, unjust war in Vietnam. And we are criminals in that War. We’ve committed more war crimes almost than any other nation in the world, and I’m going to continue to say it.” Go ahead and mark this under the King they don’t want you to know.

A simple analysis of King’s statements has significant implications for the present moment of Black Lives Matter and the 2016 Clinton/Trump presidential campaign. King knew there was a direct correlation between the experiences of the Oppressed in Baltimore, Chicago, Ferguson, Los Angeles, and other cities within the US and the international civilizing/stabilizing/imperial campaigns of the United States. King knew that the process of ensuring democracy, civility, and stability for the United States, both domestically and abroad, also meant militarism and unbridled violence—that guaranteeing the freedom of a people, necessarily meant the unfreedom of another. Moreover, King also stated “we are criminals in this war.” This is perhaps King’s most critical insight, meaning that he also understood that as Black people fight for our humanity domestically, we cannot forget those who are impacted by our fight for equality and inclusion in the US polity. In other words, what King knew was that it was (and is) possible for an oppressed people that are being presently tormented and killed by the State to also have a hand in that same State power tormenting, killing, funding, and denying human rights abroad. Enter Palestine.

When the State of Israel was created on May 14, 1948 several thousand people had already fled European persecution, namely the Holocaust. In their fleeing, historic Palestine became a place of refuge. For the sake of Jewish autonomy and agency, the United Nations via Resolution 181 (also known as the Partition Resolution), recommend the splitting of Palestine into Jewish and Arab States, as opposed to provinces which was recommended by the US. The United States, via Harry Truman, eventually came to support the creation of a Jewish State. Efforts by the United States, the United Nations, and Jewish persons did not go without resistance. However, by the end of resistance and military efforts in 1949 Israel controlled approximately 78% of historic Palestine. When Palestinians who had fled during the conflict, or were expelled, attempted to return to their homes they were prevented entry—as the new State of Israel now stood as the governing power. Palestinians who remained became second class citizens. In other words, the creation of the State of Israel protected Jewish persons, granting them rights and privileges, while simultaneously causing the same trauma Jewish people had escaped to be inflicted upon indigenous Palestinians. What is particularly important is that Israel was established as a Jewish State which resulted in Palestinians experiencing State violence and institutional discrimination—that is to say Israel in its founding was an exclusionary State.

At present, this modus operandi of exclusion in historic Palestine continues. Moreover, Israel’s practice of exclusion and occupation has resulted in the confiscating of land and property, the restriction of water and other vital life resources, as well as bombings against twenty-first century Palestinians. The Palestinian experience finds resonance in the lives of Black Americans when we consider the water crisis of Flint, Michigan and St. Joseph, Louisiana, twenty-first century gentrifiers (read as occupiers), the intentional restricting of government resources for

Black people, and the bombings of 16th Street Baptist Church, MOVE headquarters in Philadelphia, Black Wall Street, and countless Black homes during the 1950s and 60s.

This peculiar shared experience between Black persons in the United States and Palestinians becomes more salient when we place both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in view. Though they disagree on a number of things, Israel is a point of common agreement. Trump has advanced that the US, under his administration, will protect Israel and will continue to be a strong ally for the nation. It should not be lost on us that in 1983 the National Jewish Fund awarded Trump with the Tree of Life award—a humanitarian award for those who are supportive to the “cause of [the] American-Israeli friendship.” Trump also served as the grand marshal of the 2004 Israel Day Parade, and was recognized with the Liberty Award in 2015 from a conservative Jewish publication *Algemeiner*. Hillary Clinton is not too far from Trump when it comes to Israel. At a 2016 American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) meeting, Clinton vowed to uphold Israel’s military dominance and the US-Israeli military relationship, “America can’t ever be neutral when it comes to Israel’s security and survival...we must take our alliance to the next level, I hope a new ten year memorandum of defense is concluded as soon as possible, to me Israel security leans far into the future.”

The question I would like offer here is: what does it mean for Black people to vote for either Clinton or Trump? Continued US support for Israel, necessarily means continued State torture of Palestinian lives. Can we as Black people really herald throughout the United States, indeed the world, “Black Lives Matter” yet support (and potentially vote for) candidates who (a) do not acknowledge the full trauma of Black people in the United States, and (b) financially and militarily support the inflicting of the same State trauma we experience on others? What do we mean when we say Black Lives Matter? In addition to the obvious plea to stop killing us at will—what does the mantra really mean? Does it mean our lives matter so we too should be fully included in the polity of the US that supports the racial and ethnic terrorization of others?

This is where I want to suggest the need for a radical imagination. I strongly disavow the notion of a vote for any other candidate but Hillary is a vote Trump and vice versa. This coercive political claim prevents a radical political imagination from developing that is vitally needed in our time. For me, it is a point of conflict to demand that State forces stop killing us, yet vote for candidates who will fund similar State exclusion and State killing of another people. What does it mean for Black people to be involved in the entity that is the United States? Could it look something like the Congressional Black Caucus who eventually came to support Bill Clinton’s 1994 Crime Bill? Or does it look like the CBC Political Action Committee whose board has ties to private prison and tobacco.

Black freedom and politics can not merely look like white power in Black hands. We must imagine and enact a politics that liberates ourselves without demanding the subjugation and unfreedom of others. As we protest and demand the recognition of our lives, what we must also understand are the stakes. We are not free if our visibility makes invisible the lives of others and their suffering; in other words we cannot replicate a white understanding of freedom and power. Our complete epistemology—our knowing and knowledge—regarding liberation must be challenged and changed accordingly.

What does political resistance for Black people look like in 2016? I contend that it is not voting for Trump or Clinton, or participating in oppressive structures at all or begging for recognition or inclusion in it. Rather, it is, for me, imagining a new politics and way of life that is void of coercion and State violence and death. What does it mean for the State to stop killing us, yet continue to fund the deaths of others? Keeping Palestine in mind in this moment is important. Their lives demand a type of critical and innovative politics that cannot be located in either Trump or Clinton.

Perhaps I have offered more questions here than answers. However, I hope at minimum I have compelled you to think deeply about the implications of Black politics. When (or if) you stand in the election booth or before a screen to cast your vote what does that vote mean? Whose lives will it impact? Is your vote complicit in the international and domestic exercise of white supremacy?