

DELEGATE PERSPECTIVES ON THE RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Baltimore and the human right to resistance: rejecting the framework of the oppressor



By **Ajamu Baraka**, Member of IFPB's 2014 African Heritage Delegation
Published: April 29, 2015

Ajamu Baraka traveled to Palestine/Israel with IFPB's African Heritage Delegation last fall. He is a human rights activist, organizer, and geo-political analyst. Ajamu serves as the Public Intervenor for Human Rights as a member of the Green Shadow Cabinet and coordinates the International Affairs Committee of the Black Left Unity Network. He is also an Associate Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) in Washington, DC. This article has been excerpted from the original. Read more at ajamubaraka.com and blackagendareport.com.

Anti-Black racism, always just beneath the surface of polite racial discourse in the US, has exploded in reaction to the resistance of black youth to another brutal murder by the agents of this racist, settler-colonialist state. With the resistance, the focus shifted from the brutal murder of Freddie Gray and the systematic state violence that historically has been deployed to control and contain the black population in the colonized urban zones of North America, to the forms of resistance by African Americans to the trauma of ongoing state violence.

The narrative being advanced by corporate media spokespeople gives the impression that the resistance has no rational basis. **The impression being established is that this is just another manifestation of the irrationality of non-European people – in particular, Black people – and how they are prone to violence.** This is the classic colonial projection employed by all white supremacist settler states, from the US, to South Africa and Israel.

The accompanying narrative is that any kind of resistance that does not fit the narrow definition of “non-violent” resistance is illegitimate violence and, therefore, counter-productive because – “violence doesn’t accomplish anything.” Not only does this position falsely equates resistance to oppression as being morally equivalent to the violence of the oppressor, it also attempts to erase the role of violence as being fundamental to the US colonial project.

The history of colonial conquest saw the US settler state shoot and murdered its’ way across the land mass of what became the US in the process of stealing indigenous land to expand the racist White republic from “sea to shining sea.” And the marginalization of the role of violence certainly does not reflect the values of the Obama administration that dutifully implements the bi-partisan dictates of the US strategy of full spectrum dominance. . . . The destruction of Libya; the reinvasion of Iraq; the civil war in Syria; Obama’s continued war in Afghanistan; the pathological assault by Israel on Palestinians in Gaza and the US supported attack on Yemen by the Saudi dictatorship, are just a few of the horrific consequences of this criminal doctrine.

**INSIDE ➔ 5 QUESTIONS
WITH IFPB DELEGATES
ON THE GROUND IN
BALTIMORE, ST. LOUIS,
AND MORE!**

. . . It is only when the oppressed resist — when we decide, like Malcolm X said, that we must fight for our human rights — that we are counseled to be like Dr. King, including by war mongers like Barack Obama. However, resistance to oppression is a right that the oppressed claim for themselves. It does not matter if it is sanctioned by the oppressor state, because that state has no legitimacy. No rational person exalts violence and the loss of life. But violence is structured into the everyday institutional practices of all oppressive societies. It is the deliberate de-humanization of the person in order to turn them into a ‘thing’ — a process Dr. King called “*thing-afication*.” It is a necessary process for the oppressor in order to

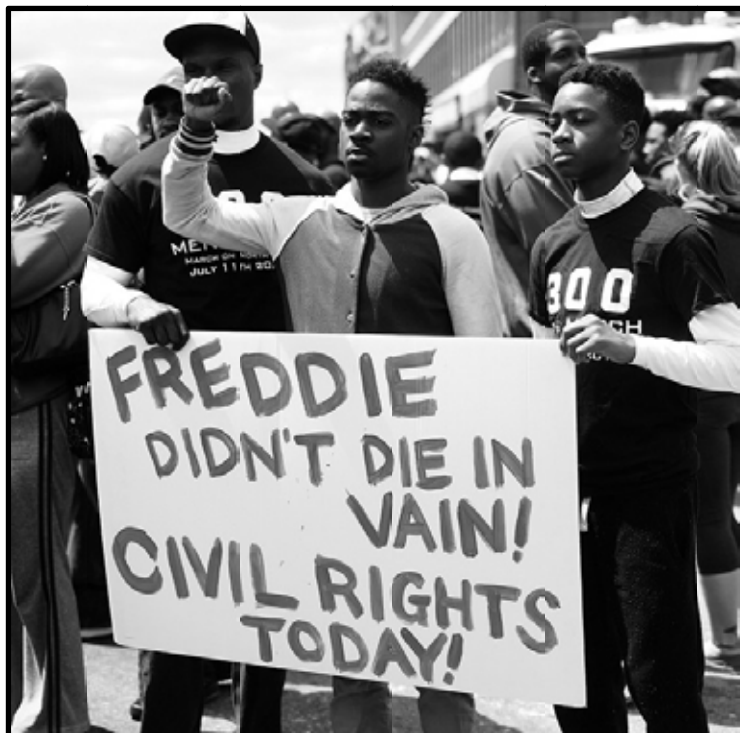


Photo: Devin Allen (on [instagram @bydvnlln](https://www.instagram.com/bydvnlln/))

more effectively control and exploit. Resistance, informed by the conscious understanding of the equal humanity of all people, reverses this process of de-humanization. Struggle and resistance are the highest expressions of the collective demand for people-centered human rights . . .

That resistance may look chaotic at this point – spontaneous resistance almost always looks like that. But since the internal logic of neoliberal capital is incapable of resolving the contradiction that it created, expect more repression and more resistance that will eventually take a higher form of organization and permanence. In the meantime, we are watching to see who aligns with us or the racist state.

. . . What we are witnessing in the US is a confirmation that neoliberal capitalism has created what Chris Hedges called “sacrificial zones” in which large numbers of black and Latino people have been confined and written off as disposable by the system. It is in those zones that we find the escalation of repressive violence by the militarized police forces. And it is in those zones where the people are deciding to fight back and take control of their communities and lives.

These are defining times for all those who give verbal support to anti-racist struggles and transformative politics. For many of our young white comrades, people of color and even some black ones who were too young to have lived through the last period of intensified struggle in the 1960s and ‘70s and have not understood the centrality of African American resistance to the historical social struggles in the US, it may be a little disconcerting to see the emergence of resistance that is not dependent on and validated by white folks or anyone else. The repression will continue, and so will the resistance. . . The battle lines are being drawn; the only question people must ask themselves is which side they’ll be on.

5 questions with Reverend Heber Brown, III

Reverend Dr. Heber Brown, III is a clergy-activist and pastor of Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in Baltimore and works with the Baltimore United for Change coalition, among other local groups. Heber sits on the board of the Real News Network and joined an IFPB delegation in 2010. Follow Heber on Twitter @HeberBrown.

We have heard the events of the past few weeks in Baltimore called a “riot”, and “uprising”, and a “movement.” How would you describe what has happened and is currently occurring? I would describe it as an uprising that helped to refuel the existing movement. The movement has been in place long before the last couple of weeks here in Baltimore, but the uprising helped to fill the tank again.

What is the current situation in Baltimore? We are rebounding, rebuilding and rethinking how we move forward in light of the recent uprising. The uprising - despite what corporate media was showing – charged the atmosphere with optimism and constructive energy. We learned - and are still learning - that as a community we have the capacity to take care of ourselves. When it became clear that the system of government does not have the wherewithal to care for black and brown communities, and the repression of the police was laid bare, people here were put in a position where we had to take care of ourselves. That created a certain optimism and an energy that is continuing.

The officers who assaulted Freddie Gray have been charged with murder. If they are found guilty, what will that mean for Baltimore? It will be a step in the direction of balancing the scales of justice in Baltimore. By no means will it be a total victory, but it will be a step in the right direction. It will also be a validation particularly for those individuals and communities who often suffer abuse and who are often ignored when they call attention to government and police misconduct.

Are there other characteristics which you feel Baltimore shares with Palestinian communities you visited with IFPB? In both Baltimore and Palestine, the powerful are privileged. In both places, there is a creative and liberating resilience. Over the past couple weeks in Baltimore we have found ways to strike back against the system. For example, the police curfew was being selectively applied. In black and poor neighborhoods, you had to be in the house by 10 PM and the police strictly enforced the curfew with tear gas and other weapons. Many people were arrested in those communities simply for being on the street at night. The same tactics were not used to enforce the curfew in white and affluent neighborhoods. Like in Palestine, what the authorities said was the law for all was really only the law for some.

What is the next step for Black youth in Baltimore, and for youth in similar situations around the United States?

I really can’t say enough about the bravery and the



Photo: Brian Schneider

leadership of youth. Baltimore would not be a story at all if young people had not organized and taken to the streets. It was the youth who literally put their bodies on the line to challenge racial injustice. Today we are continuing to organize. We are building economic power. We are building social power. We are building political power. We are building an alternative food system. We are exploring what a sustainable security plan looks like without authorities. Instead of calling 911, we are calling out to our neighbors for support. We see that in Palestine also, and other places where it is clear that wholly relying on the same system that oppresses you to also provide for you is not an equation for justice, liberation, and empowerment.

I would ask of the nation – of the world, in fact – how do we continue to organize in such a way that we challenge the gross and mass power differentials and put more power in the hands of organized people, with organized resources around a common agenda? These are the questions for which our communities are beginning to find answers.

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5 questions with Sandra Tamari

Sandra Tamari is a Palestinian-American and a member of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation Steering Committee. Sandra joined an IFPB delegation in 2012 but was denied entry by Israel. As an organizer with the St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee, she works in solidarity with activists on the ground in Ferguson and St. Louis.

As we approach the 1 year anniversary of Darren Wilson's killing of Michael Brown, what is the current situation in Ferguson and St. Louis? The people's movement to end militarized policing, debtor prisons and corrupt government continues. There have been victories. The Ferguson police chief resigned and in the city of St. Louis, a civilian oversight board for the police was voted in. There is a long way to go. Pressure will continue.

How has the movement in St. Louis grown in the past year? Young, black leadership is at the forefront. They have no fear. They are setting the bar high and will settle for nothing less than absolute equality and freedom.

How was the recent uprising in Baltimore viewed on the streets of Ferguson, and how have events there affected the way folks in your community are viewing their role? Activists in St. Louis know that Mike Brown's murder is part of a nation-wide, systemic problem of racism. Many individuals traveled to Baltimore to support the movement there.

Are there attributes which you feel places like Ferguson or Baltimore share with Palestine/ Israel? When we talk about apartheid in Israel, we are describing laws and practices that treat people differently based on their identity. We also have apartheid in the US where race defines what options are available to a person. Both systems are corrupt from their foundations. They were built on the suffering of another people.



Photo: Natalie Jo Martinez

As a Palestinian activist, how have you worked with the community in Ferguson and what would you tell others who would like to support the racial justice movement that has grown under the slogan of #blacklivesmatter?

The St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee showed up in Ferguson last August because it was the right thing to do. No mother should witness her son bleed out on the street. The love we received from the people of Ferguson defied all the media portrayals of a broken community there. What we witnessed was a community in great mourning. We are comforting and learning from each other. It is the most important organizing experience of my life. Anyone concerned about freedom for Palestinians is obligated to work for change in America. The end of racism here is key for Palestinian freedom.

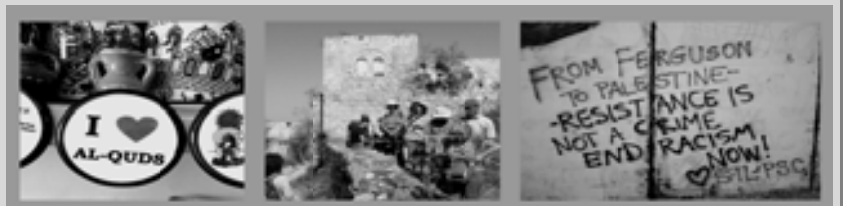
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5 questions with Nunu Kidane

Nunu Kidane is founder and Director of Priority Africa Network, providing advocacy on Africa and working directly with diverse grassroots African communities. She is also a member of the Black Immigration Network and has recently become a monthly donor to IFPB.

The past 9 months has seen the racial justice movement in the US grow quickly. As someone who has been active in that work for a number of years, how do you characterize the current moment?

It's incredibly encouraging to see the current level of activism on racial justice, the emergence of newer, younger and more courageous activists who are not willing to compromise in their relentless pursuit for justice. They have not only set into motion a vibrant movement but are sustaining through ongoing planning and strategizing and making lineages with different issues and building alliances globally. This is phenomenal and reminiscent of past historic struggles for justice. I fear that demands may be for short term changes – changes measured by legal and policy reform. We need also changes that examine deeply held ideologies and racist attitudes and cultures – these are more difficult to change.

Your work has touched many communities and spanned many issues. How do you make the connections and identify priorities for your activism?

Identifying with different causes is not difficult when one realized the common threads that have existed historically. As a Black African woman living in the US, I identify and belong to many struggles for gender and racial equality – in the US and globally. It is entirely based on the realization that there are connections (and a common target) and a deep belief that we are strengthened through collaboration and mutual support, that no cause can go it alone towards achieving their goal.

How has your work and activism brought you in contact with the Palestine solidarity movement? Growing up in Ethiopia, I was fed on a regular diet of Jewish novels with heroes that defeated the “evil Arabs” to establish the homeland Israel. It took me years to relearn the true history, the double tragedy of the crime against the Palestinian people. Not only in the loss of their land but the intentional wiping out of their history. Engaging in re-education of the Palestinian “people’s history” for me was initially through the South African anti-apartheid movement and subsequently learning about and supporting many other struggles for self-determination around the world.

From the perspective of your own activism, what lessons should the Palestine solidarity movement draw from the racial justice movement currently growing around the United States? There's a tendency in many groups to work in silos, to have a clear target and plan in order to achieve their goal. It may even be viewed as a detraction to invest time and energy in so many causes and issues. Only groups that see the connections between different struggles and build broad alliances gain in the long run. The militarized police that are killing young black men in cities across the US today are similar to the Israeli military police that are suppressing, harassing and killing Palestinians daily – albeit using different tactics and numbers. Both are morally reprehensible and have the same imperialistic agenda and historic foundation of supremacy.

You have just become a monthly donor to IFPB. Why do you feel our work is worthy of sustained and continuing support? I have known of IFPB's work and learned about the delegations through friends who've made the trip. I hope to do so someday. In the meantime, I do what I can in small ways. It is impossible to donate to so many deserving causes but we also know without financial support, the work of building and sustaining movements cannot be done. I'm proud to be a donor of IFPB and am confident that my support is translated to more than financial gain. It serves as a message of solidarity to give confidence and encouragement to those who're in the frontlines of the struggle in Palestine, facing dangers and losing their lives on a daily basis.



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