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Professor Arnon

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### Midterm Essay: Black American and Evangelical Stakeholder Communities

Prompt: Compare and contrast the mobilization of Evangelical and Black American communities discussed in class on the Israeli and/or Palestinian issues in American politics. This can include: human and civil rights issues, and others. Be to sure to include in your analysis: The forms of mobilization (protest, lobbying, think tank white-papers, op-eds, etc.), the effectiveness of the mobilization process, the role of public opinion, the institutional setting (legislatures), and the decision making process of legislators in considering their support or opposition to the mobilization campaign. (there was a discussion on altering the prompt) **(1500 words +/- 250)**

Within the scope of politics in the United States, one's perceptions of oppression within a domestic context largely impacts their views and biases towards foreign policy. There is often a victim versus victim framework in play when looking at international conflicts. The experiences of American communities determine who they define to be oppressed, and who they define to be the oppressor. One's identity is the primary determinant of their opinions. The world around individuals impacts their perceptions of the outside world. Thus, an analysis of foreign policy issues cannot be assessed without the inclination of attitudes on a domestic level. American communities' connection to domestic relationships impacts their mobilization of international concerns. When looking at key stakeholder communities in American politics, Evangelical and Black American groups have been largely tied to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Both of these groups have been defined by two main characteristics, the perception of key values and the preservation of human rights. This has impacted differences and similarities amongst these two communities on this issue. Due to the vast power that Evangelicalism holds in the diverse

religious landscape of the United States, their effectiveness on mobilization has largely outweighed that of Black American communities and lobbies. With that said, the mere influence of the Black Power movement on Palestinian interests has largely impacted public opinion and mobilization on the conflict.

The connection of Evangelical communities to the issue of Israel and Palestine is largely held together on the basis of upholding what is thought to be ‘American values,’ and the symbolic nature of religion in the United States. American Journalist Michelle Goldberg in her novel on Christian Nationalism, ‘Kingdom Coming,’ details how Evangelicals hold a general value towards the Christian right to rule, or dominionism.<sup>1</sup> This largely ties to how an Evangelical American would shape their opinions towards the Israeli/Palestinian conflict because Israel upholds Judaism. Due to the fact that Judaism and Evangelicalism share significant historical and religious ties, Israel is essentially continuing this value of a ‘Christian right to rule.’ Christian Zionism is defined as a movement within Protestant Fundamentalism, which perceives the state of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, and thus “deserving of political, financial, and religious support,” as described by Stephen Spector in his novel on Evangelicals and Israel.<sup>2</sup> Thus, based on their own identity, Evangelical communities in the United States believe the state of Israel to be upholding their definition of American values. As further discussed in lectures, Christian Nationalists believe that US laws should uphold Christian values.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Evangelical communities have mobilized their support of US intervention in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in support of Israel. Christian Zionism also deals with the rediscovering of ‘Judeo-Christian’ values and roots. There is also the deeply symbolic and religious connection that Evangelicals hold to Christian Zionism, through the introduction of

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Goldberg. “Ch 1. - Taking the Land.” Essay, n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Spector. “Ch. 1 - We Are The Jewish People.” Essay. Oxford Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Arnon, Lecture on 2.19.24.

premillennial dispensationalism. This is the belief that Jews would return to their ancient homeland as a prelude to end-times, fulfilling biblical prophecy, as detailed by Spector.<sup>4</sup> Thus, mobilization efforts on the Israel/Palestine conflict on behalf of Evangelicals has been determined by the context of religious and ‘American’ values. These values are defined on the basis of identity.

Black American communities in the United States have long been tied to the nature of Israel and Palestine on the basis of defining one side as the oppressed. Due to the nature and history of slavery and racism in the United States, Black Americans have long held a connection to the victim versus victim framework which is occurring in the middle east. Thus, similar to Evangelical communities, black individuals hold a stake in this conflict due to their definition of preserving human rights and applying their values on an international basis. A Palestinian poet related the cause of Palestinians to that of Black Americans by referring to his community as the ‘negroes of Israel,’ as mentioned by Maha Nassar in the *Journal of Palestinian Studies*.<sup>5</sup> Nassar further connects the causes of Palestinians to Black Americans by detailing how Palestinian children similarly attended segregated schools that were “overcrowded, underfunded, and dismissive of their culture.” Additionally, Palestinian intellectuals hold strong anti-colonial views and actively link the conditions of Black Americans to the colonized condition that they perceive to be occurring in Palestine. The two groups were also similarly intrigued by the leftist ideals of the Soviet Union, which largely facilitated relations between these communities through the Communist Press. As emphasized by Michael Fishbach in an article on Black Power and Palestine, Black Power advocates in America recognized Palestinians as fighting against

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<sup>4</sup> Spector, pg 7.

<sup>5</sup> Maha Nassar. “Palestinian Engagement with the Black Freedom Movement Prior to 1967.” *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Accessed March 24, 2024.

imperialism. Many black activists associated with Black Power visited Palestine and some of them converted to the nation of Islam.<sup>6</sup> As discussed in lectures, to Black Power advocates, Zionism was seen as a form of western imperialism. There was a question amongst many Black Americans as to whether Israel was a project of oppression or for the oppressed.<sup>7</sup> As previously mentioned, Black Americans' views on foreign policy tend to be tied to perceptions of domestic race relations.

When analyzing and comparing the effectiveness of mobilization amongst Evangelicals and Black Americans on the issue of Israel and Palestine, it is important to distinguish the very nature of how these groups have impacted the conflict. While Evangelicals hold a vast political voice in the United States, the Black Power movement largely impacted the Palestinian people becoming a stakeholder in the view of American public opinion. As brought up in class lectures, religion is a potent force in US politics. Evangelicals are extremely powerful in the competitive religious landscape.<sup>8</sup> Due to this, when there is an issue which this community perceives to hold the balance of their religious values at stake, their mobilization can be incredibly effective. This is why Christians United for Israel, which was established in 1975, has more mobilization than any other pro-Israel group, as further explained in the above lecture. As detailed by Elizabeth Oldmixon in a political journal called *Terrorism and Political Violence*, overtime, congressional support for Israel has become increasingly religiously and ideologically driven.<sup>9</sup> This can reflect the growing power and mobilization on behalf of Evangelical communities in the US.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael R. Fishbach. *Black Power and Palestine : Transnational Countries of Color*, Stanford University Press, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>7</sup> Arnon, Lecture on 2.26.24

<sup>8</sup> Arnon, Lecture on 2.19.24

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth A. Oldmixon, Beth Rosenson, and Kenneth D. Wald. "Conflict over Israel: The Role of Religion, Race, Party and Ideology in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1997–2002." Taylor and Francis, Inc. Accessed March 24, 2024.

Additionally, as discussed in class lectures, some legislators are impacted by their own religious affiliation, race, or party, rather than just in response to their constituency. This is especially applicable in cases of foreign policy because constituents often do not hold a large voice of opinions. Evangelical legislators are more likely to be in support of increasing military aid to Israel.<sup>10</sup> This also demonstrates how American communities have to work within ideological constraints of the legislature when mobilizing, as Republican legislators have grown more supportive of Israel overtime. While Black Americans do not hold the same amount of power when competing in mobilization efforts for the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as do Evangelicals, their influence on the conflict is still vast. For instance, as further detailed by Nassar, The Istiqlal party of Palestine emphasized anti-colonialism, mass politics, and the commonalities that Palestinians shared with other oppressed people, like Black Americans. In Palestine, Black Americans were framed as possessing agency to change their oppressed conditions. When Black leaders sent aid to Ethiopia, Palestinians became familiar with this community as one which expressed collective national unity.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates how the cause of Black Americans within the domestic level of the US has been able to influence Palestinians to possess their own agency. This has also influenced broad public opinion amongst Americans as viewing Palestinians as active role players in the conflict rather than a nuanced idea. The influence of Black Americans' attitudes towards the conflict can also be seen through the creation of the Israeli Black Panthers, which was made up of Jews descending from the Middle East and North Africa fighting against the unequal power balance created by Jews descending from European countries. As described by Fishbach, The founders of the Israeli Black Panthers wished to confront an imbalance of power dynamics, just as American blacks had done. Black

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<sup>10</sup> Arnon, lecture on 3.13.24

<sup>11</sup> Nassar, pg. 20.

Power advocates in America recognized Palestinians as fighting against imperialism.<sup>12</sup> Although Black Americans themselves were not directly involved in this mobilization effort, this instance is proof of their indirect efforts to mobilize on the behalf of the oppressed. With that said, a large majority of the Black American community do not hold a close enough stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to truly care or prioritize it. Struggles to mobilize arise with a lack of base support and a diversity of opinions which can be seen throughout the black community. For instance, Black Americans can also be a part of the Evangelical communities, which largely hold opposing perceptions towards the conflict. Additionally, it is also important to distinguish the Black Power movement from the Black American community in general, as the NAACP (which was more tied to the Civil Rights movement) legitimized Zionism. Thus, because of the diversity amongst Black American communities, effectiveness of mobilization towards the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has fallen behind that of Evangelical communities. With that said, the very influence of Black American leaders on Palestinians has created a mobilization of its own, as well as formatting public opinions.

The stakeholder communities of Evangelicals and Black Americans share commonalities in terms of their interest in the conflict. This is largely tied to perceptions of values and symbolic views of religion and human rights issues. Due to the long held power of Evangelicalism in the measures of US politics, it is naturally easier for this community to effectively mobilize on any issue that holds onto the attention of their values. With that being said, the fights of oppression coming from the black community are still vastly important in terms of making Palestinians a genuine actor within the conflict.

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<sup>12</sup> Fishbach, pg. 14.

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