

Engagement, Nonviolence, & the Future of Human Rights: The case of Palestine and the Implications of U.S. Civil Liberties

Palestinian human rights have consistently battled a global moral exclusion but, particularly, in the United States, where civil liberties are generally held as sacred, Palestinian humanity is frequently dismissed with disdain. Shaped by misinformation, a long-time media blackout, Israeli lobbyism, and the roller coaster of civil unrest abroad, the penchant to value Israeli life far above that of Palestinians, has habitually been the default presumption. Questions of dignity, equality, community, self-determination, and the use of nonviolent action to confront entrenched and unjust established systems, has fixed an ever-present denial of Palestinian humanity under the illegal Israeli occupation. When raised alongside the increasing recent threats to contemporary American civil liberties, there are profound implications; not only for those directly affected, but for the overall future of international peace.

This paper presents the argument that an engaged community and nonviolent action are inherent tools for advancing human rights and sustaining global peace. By examining the historical foundations of the Palestinian human rights struggle against the U.S Civil Rights Movement, and analyzing the current deterioration of American civil liberties, we can better understand how grassroots organization, ethical clarity, and collective action has impacted, and will continue to influence, the long-term shape of social change within genuine international peace.

The Palestinian human rights crisis is rooted in decades of displacement, violent military occupation, and systemwide violations of international law. Those in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem have continually faced illegal land confiscation, restrictions on movement, unfair legal systems, collective punishment, and ongoing violations of international law. (Shakir, 2021) These circumstances have endured for almost a century despite recurring international resolutions proclaiming the Palestinian right to self-determination, equality, and return.

Palestinian resistance has taken multiple forms, but strategies of nonviolence, such as labor organizing, mass protest, cultural preservation, and international advocacy, have long been a central technique. The origins of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is contested between the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (Ben-Atar & Pessin,) and the original Arab League's boycott of Zionist goods from Mandatory Palestine. (Greendorfer) Regardless, BDS was formally launched in the summer of 2005, with an alliance of over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, with refugee networks, trade unions, and women's organizations, coming together. (PCSO, 2005) The movement established a paradigm of ethical and economic pressure over armed conflict, in an attempt to advocate non-violent pressure until Israel until complied with international law. (Barghouti, 2015)

With the success of the mid-20th century African-American nonviolent community engagement against legalized segregation, voter suppression, and economic exclusion, the movement toward American Civil Rights is a formidable historical correlation. The repeal of Jim Crow and the establishment of the landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act, contributions from Martin Luther King Jr., Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer created a strong moral force of nonviolence, collaboration, and community leadership. However, their success was not inevitable—it involved sustained pressure, coalition-building, and a steadfast refusal to accept permanent injustice. (Crosby & Richardson, 2025)

However several factors continue to stand in the way of human rights in Palestine. Obstruction of justice has come alongside geopolitical power imbalances, international complicity, violent militarization, and ongoing framing in the media of Palestinian resistance as inherently illegitimate, the economic dependency, restrictions on movement, and fragmented governments have continued to further the Palestinian ability to assert their inalienable rights. At the same time, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement has benefited from powerful coordination of grassroots organization, strategic litigation, independent Black institutions, and widespread community engagement. Additionally, media exposure and moral framing has been critical in mobilizing national pressure, showcasing how rapprochement within the community can impact political realities. Both specifically relied on an ethical foundation of strategic nonviolence, with education, organization, and coalition-building proving historically key to sustaining resistance and maintaining legitimacy. Both US Civil Rights Movement and the ongoing Palestinian push toward civil liberties, have emerged not solely from top-down reform but also from comprehensive solidarity throughout the community collectively demanding their human rights.

Unfortunately, the current state of American civil rights has been substantially depleted by emerging threats from the recent Trump administration policies. With the repeal of reproductive autonomy, the significant movement against immigrant protections, the discrimination of LGBTQ+ rights, the rollback of voting rights, and the violent and deadly reactions to recent protests, Trump's rise to power and the clampdown – and, in many cases reversal, of recent progress, erosions are not isolated solely to policy shifts, but on a widespread recession of overall democratic norms. The Trump administration has specifically accelerated a fierce perpetration against American civil liberties. Alongside the actions of Stephen Miller's extremist and racist, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the expanded surveillance and policing, attacks on the press, and judicial appointments of figures hostile to civil rights, disproportionate harm has further marginalized non-white and lower-class communities, as well as those standing in solidarity with them. Simultaneously institutional safeguards, designed to protect democratic participation, have been systematically weakened.

The recent damage that the Trump administration has inflicted will affect future generations. With voting access, and regulatory institutions weakened, trust in the democratic process has, and will continue to, weaken. Entrenched inequality has set back the state of American civil rights, with a cascading negative impact across an intersection of identities, amplifying harm for multiple communities that already face systemic disparagement. The decline of U.S. civil liberties will have global repercussions. When democracy is eroded in a global power, human rights across the board suffer defeat. Already, multiple EU nations, and Canada, have issued warnings to citizens traveling the US. (Duster, 2025). Tourism revenue has substantially declined from recent international disinterest in US travel. (Hall, L., 2026) This recent damage will certainly also impact Palestine, where U.S. political alignment and diplomacy play a crucial role in sustaining the status quo. Still, renewed community engagement and a recent push toward nonviolent action, and international solidarity that has emerged since October 2023, is concurrently strengthening transnational solidarity and accountability. On September 21st, 2025, British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer announced that the UK had given formal recognition to a Palestinian State, while simultaneously, Portugal, Canada, and Australia, also officially acknowledged a legitimate Palestine. (UNRICWE 2025) These endorsements further validated the humanity of the Palestinian people. Nevertheless, the inalienable human rights of the average Palestinian still have much to be desired.

Yet addressing the increasing disintegration of American civil rights is critical, not merely as a domestic concern, but as an essential factor of global peace. When societies abandoned their internal mechanisms to equality and justice, international egalitarianism is unlikely to be a foremost component of their actions abroad. Therefore, a sustained peace depends on the defense of human dignity everywhere. Through principled, collective, and nonviolent action, grassroots movements remain among the most effective forces for challenging ongoing impunity. Unfortunately, it is incredibly challenging for the average individual to maintain a commitment to non-violence. Particularly within the environment of increased fear perpetuating throughout Trump's America, the urge to flee, retreat, fight back, or stockpile resources with a purely self-serving mindset, tends to overpower the courage to stand up with non-violence against heavily armed, and chaotic, violent counteraction. Nonetheless, the struggle toward Palestinian human rights and the restoration of U.S. civil liberties remains deeply interconnected. Both demonstrate that community engagement and nonviolent resistance are indispensable tools for confronting injustice and building lasting peace. The recent damage to American civil liberties does indeed pose a serious risk for future generations, but history has also proven that organized communities can reverse even entrenched systems of oppression.

Facilitating fortified human rights demands foresight, solidarity, and ongoing perseverance. History has provided a vital lesson that commitments to nonviolence, civic engagement, and public camaraderie does demand culpability, and can ensure a lasting humanity. Despite how distant it may currently appear, a lasting peace—for Palestine, for the US, and for the world as a while, is possible. Though it will likely require an ongoing acceptance of assaults, denials, and intolerance. Balancing that with a strong, solidarity within the community is the best, and only, pathway to endurance.

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