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Israel/Palestine as Flashpoint

Although the political relationships between African Americans and Jewish Americans have been largely focused on domestic issues like civil rights and ending discrimination, questions about Israel and the situation of the Palestinian community in that country and in the Occupied Territories have generated tension and anger between the two since Partition and the establishment of the state of Israel. My paper argues that debates over Israel are rooted in the contested whiteness of Euro-American Jews (largely the face of the organized Jewish community). Are Jews white, and imposing and defending settler-colonialism on the indigenous people of color? Or are Jews not-white, rejected by white supremacists and an internationally and historically persecuted minority, whose right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland is being challenged? Or is it, somehow, both? Looking at whiteness, identity, the limitations of liberalism, class, varied understandings of Zionism, and intergenerational trauma can illuminate tensions running, sometimes invisibly, beneath the long-standing mutual political engagement.