

Israel's nonsacrifice: Land grab

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [March 22, 2005](#) issue

When historians look back on the current false peace between Israel and the Palestinians to determine what ended the Palestinian dream of a viable state, they'll find answers in a February 24 *New York Times* editorial. There they will discover that a major American newspaper endorsed a land grab of monumental proportions.

Historians will ask: Did the *Times* really not know what was happening? Or was it so biased in favor of Israel that the paper willingly distorted reality to assure Americans that the leadership of Israel was courageous and sacrificial when it announced that it would remove a small number of settlers from Gaza and the West Bank?

Critics of Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon describe his "sacrifice" of Gaza as a ploy to gain acceptance of Israel's permanent retention of the suburban population blocs that surround the cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah.

The *Times* has little inclination to criticize. The editorial writers are so eager to make their case for Sharon that they ignore what any copy editor should have told them: To "sacrifice" is to give up something that belongs to you. No part of the West Bank and not a grain of sand in the Gaza Strip "belongs" to Israel. The West Bank and Gaza are territories that have been illegally occupied by Israel for more than 38 years.

This occupation has been condemned as a violation of international law by every country in the world except the United States and perhaps a few isolated South Sea island nations. No sacrifice is being made, and yet the *Times* praises, as a move toward peace, the planned removal of 8,000 Jewish settlers from 25 separate settlements in Gaza and 650 settlers in four isolated West Bank settlements.

On a trip to Palestine in 1975, I interviewed the mother of a family of religiously motivated Jewish settlers from Chicago—one of several families living in an old British military fort near Ramallah. On a nearby hill was a tent city housing Israeli troops. I asked the mother if she felt she had a future in such a community, surrounded as it was by Palestinian villages. She said she did, and it appears she

was right.

From this beginning, Israel has developed its settlements into a massive bloc of suburban communities linked to one another and to the homeland by protected exclusive highways.

Nor is there any letup in the growth of the settlements: Reuters reports that 6,391 West Bank settler homes are planned for 2005, a sharp increase from 1,783 new units in 2004 and 1,225 in 2003.

Sharon is getting what he wants—with the blessing of George Bush, the only authority he appears to respect. That includes all of the city of Jerusalem, which is surrounded by medium-sized cities in the occupied areas that look very much like American suburbs, with homes, well manicured lawns, swimming pools and shopping malls. This is land that Sharon has no intention of ever “sacrificing” back to the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of the *Times*, “Optimism and hope is spreading throughout Israel, and that can only be a good thing.” A good thing for Israel, in the short run, because land grabs have always been popular with populations that benefit from expansion. But a “good thing” for the Palestinian people? They will continue to live in isolated pockets of land that resemble Native American reservations. Is it really a good thing for Israel to live next door to a population reduced to life in isolated bantustans?

The security wall built on Palestinian land is described by the *Times* as a “troublesome barrier,” a euphemism for a wall that, future historians will recognize, provides no security for Israel and ensures permanent Palestinian hostility. This reality was in evidence as recently as February 26, when five Israelis died in a suicide bombing outside a Tel Aviv nightclub.

The *Times* defends the wall’s construction, employing its best “both sides” manner to assure its readers—before the Tel Aviv bombing—that an Israeli court forced a revision of the path of the wall because “it imposed too many hardships on Palestinian civilians, many of whom were blocked from getting to work or visiting relatives.”

“Getting to work or visiting relatives” is another *Times* euphemism that ignores the reality of stolen land and seeks only to demonstrate the compassion of the Israeli

court, which wants to make life “easier” for a people surrounded by prison walls, as if it is a gift to the prisoners to provide a long corridor through which they can walk to visit the exercise yard.

The *Times* editorial says “Mr. Sharon has shown enormous political courage.” Future historians will see only a ploy, a shell game designed to deceive a gullible American public into accepting the version of reality that the *New York Times* has been peddling for more than four decades.