

*A Controlled Press and a Multitude in Mental Darkness*

# **Bush's Security Barrier**

by WILLIAM A. COOK

"No nation can now shut itself up from the surrounding world, and trot round in the same old path of its fathers without interference. The time was when such could be done. Long established customs of hurtful character could formerly fence themselves in, and do their evil work with social impunity. Knowledge was then confined and enjoyed by the privileged few, and the multitude walked on in mental darkness. But a change has now come over the affairs of mankind. Walled cities and empires have become unfashionable. ... Intelligence is penetrating the darkest corners of the globe. Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together."

Frederick Douglas, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

How ironic that 150 years after Douglas proclaimed that America could no longer hide its "dirty little institution" from the prying eyes of the world, that "Walled cities" could no longer exist to hide their evil on those incarcerated behind the stone, that "intelligence" has "penetrated the darkest corners of the globe," we, resident in these United States in the new millennium, should find that we live in the darkest corner of the globe and deserve what Douglas condemned us for now as then: "Americans! Your republican politics, not less than your republican religion, are flagrantly inconsistent. You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization, and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of millions" of your sisters and brothers in Palestine (change mine).

Katrina broke through the darkness in New Orleans by forcing Americans to witness, day after day, as the TV cameras penetrated the eerie corners of the sunken city and sloshed through the garbage strewn floors of the stadium where filth, heat, and congestion enveloped thousands, the indifference that has made this nation cast 35.9% of its population into poverty, a poverty that exists in excess for African-Americans now as it did when Douglas asked "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Those cameras penetrated the darkness letting in the "intelligence" that should force America to react against its "hidden" racism brought about in this new century by the policies of an administration that excuses its responsibilities as "bureaucratic" interference even as it stuffs the pockets of the wealthy and protects them against Katrina's fury made glaringly evident as the helicopters whisked out of "harm's way" the privileged patients in the private hospital and made the sick and dying in the public wait hours upon horrendous hours for help to arrive. All of this made graphically obvious because even our TV broadcasters like Aaron Brown, Anderson Cooper, and Lou Dobbs, normally

constrained by corporate editorial control, had to confront what they saw in all its naked reality, and they reacted as any newsman with integrity would react by questioning the racist agenda that lies buried beneath the news they are allowed to print.

Bush had no choice; he had to come before the very cameras that made evident for all what he and his pathetic administration try to keep hidden by controlling the press and the media, that there are two Americas, one for the "haves" and another for the "have nots," one for those who wield the wealth to control and one for those who stand and wait for the compassion of the conservative to rise Phoenix-like from its euphemistic ashes. Americans rushed to help those caught in the throes of Katrina; that's their instinctive response. It's what Democracy demands. It's what their Christian, and Judaic and Islamic roots demand. It's what they would support if their representatives were to propose legislation to protect Americans against the inhumane conditions of poverty.

Once the light of truth penetrates the hearts of Americans, they respond as Jesus admonished when he walked the hills of Palestine two centuries ago: "Feed the hungry," "Clothe the naked," Shelter the homeless," "Care for those in need," "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This they did in wondrous fashion when they witnessed the plight of those enmeshed in Katrina's violence.

There is, however, another people suffering from our indifference, a people just as poor and deprived, indeed, a people and a culture that is being intentionally decimated by another with our blind support. Would that the cameras that lighted the darkness over New Orleans bring before us the horrors that are wrought in our name on a helpless people. Would that Aaron Brown, Anderson Cooper, and Lou Dobbs could walk the rock strewn moonscape of Palestine as Jesus did to witness the unspeakable torment inflicted on the people that have lived there for two thousand years. We would respond as Jesus did in full sympathy for the downcast and deprived. But we have been prevented from walking the hills and by ways of Palestine today; the light of truth does not penetrate that sacred and pitiful land.

Why? Why are cameras forbidden in Palestine? Why are we not taken on a sojourn through the West Bank? Why do we not see what really happens there? Why are we deaf and dumb to the catastrophic treatment afforded the Palestinians? Why do we blindly follow this administration and past administrations as they silently let one people slowly suffocate another under the guise of security, Bush's doctrine that allows for military dominance? Why would we willingly provide the means, in billions of taxpayer dollars – the resources, the weaponry, the technology, and human power – to incarcerate a people that live in abject poverty? What controls our Senators and Congressmen that they will not force Sharon to open the borders to the media, to allow UN Peacekeepers to enter and protect the Palestinians who suffer the illegal and malicious abuses imposed by the IDF in our name? Why, if they recognize the illegality of the occupation by claiming

American dollars cannot support the settlers who live in the stolen land of the Palestinians, do they support a nation that defies international law and the very agreements they make with the Israeli government?

No one can pass through the checkpoints from West Jerusalem to East Jerusalem without emotionally retching at the sight of humans being forced to file like livestock through alleys of chain link fence, corrugated tin roofing, dirt paths, garbage and debris in the smoldering heat just beneath the shadow of that barbarous wall as they stumble toward IDF soldiers in military fatigues and drawn weapons, forced to pull out their "identity" cards to prove that they exist before they can enter the area where cabs wait to take them to the Old City to their jobs, losing precious shekels in the process since they cannot drive into the city. As they pass like cattle, the "real" citizens of Jerusalem drive by in their air-conditioned cars unobstructed by the IDF. We've seen this control imposed before in Prague, Poland and Austria when those other people, the non-Germans, had to carry their identity on their sleeve and in their pocket. Americans fought to free these people.

That checkpoint is only one of 217, not counting the "flying" checkpoints that arrive without notice, that interrupt the comings and goings of the Palestinians day in and day out. The same humiliation, the same groveling before the occupier, the same frightful scene done over and over again in front of children who witness their mother scorned, their father debased as the occupying force imposes its dominance on the hapless poor who serve as props for some ancient Medieval morality play. And like the morality play, there's a moral to be drawn: "man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained by G-d; and this horrible blasphemy is palmed off upon the world (by the Zionist zealots and our evangelical brethren in the Cathedral of TV) as Christianity." (Douglas, "Fourth of July"). My tax dollars pay for this; your tax dollars pay for this. 217 checkpoints scattered throughout the West Bank, scars on a truncated landscape of humanity, possessed illegally by the occupying forces, and paid for in our name. This is calculated psychological water torture that drips day after day into the consciousness of the Palestinians, a corrosive toxic mixture that guarantees submissiveness or vengeance, neither a result that brings peace. Bring in the cameras. Let us witness such malevolence; it is done in our name.

Let the cameras pan the landscape outside of West Jerusalem, let it show the enormity of the contrast between the two sectors, that under the absolute jurisdiction of the Israeli government, luxurious in the spread of new suburban town homes, clustered within a lush garden like landscape of flowering trees and bushes, streets clean, cars moving freely without hindrance of IDF soldiers demanding identity cards or holding traffic to a standstill for hours at a time, and the curved streets in East Jerusalem, where the white dust blows over everything casting a ghostly pall upon all, where the air is so

thick with grime and dust it sticks in the mouth, suffocating in its rancid smell the very belief that humans could live here, where thousands are stuffed into congested areas, piled on top of each other in cement houses stacked like cinder blocks one upon the other unable to expand their homes or build new ones because Israel provides no building permits to Palestinians, reserving the right, in spiteful maliciousness, to demolish homes built without a permit. Bring in the cameras. Let us witness such malevolence; it is done in our name.

Here, even in this uninhabitable place, the Israeli government sends its goon squads, euphemistically called "settlers," to take possession of Palestinian homes at gun point declaring that they exist in the "Valley of David," an historical archeological area of infinite value to the Jews as the site of their ancient King, thus giving them license to demolish these homes or possess them for Israel. It matters not that no scientific evidence exists that a King named David ruled in these regions; it's enough to say that the Bible says it is so. International law be damned; Israeli law supersedes all other even when it is applied to land illegally obtained against the UN Charter and the UN Conventions that strictly prohibit such abuse. Theft in the name of archeological treasures, agricultural use, or military need hides the crime. Needless to say, the owners receive no compensation for their lost home, no relocation money from the US government that endorses this barbarity though we will look the other way when these "squatters" take possession and provide relocation support for them. Let us witness such malevolence; it is done in our name.

Now move the cameras north to the little town of Jayyus; take them to the rooftop of the school that overlooks the sweeping valley with a distant view of the Mediterranean when the dust clears. Pan the cameras left with a view over the roofs of houses clustered on the rise that overlooks the olive trees below. Move the camera's lens slowly to the right; look carefully for the dirt road that leaves the town down the hill to the trees; but wait, there's an obstruction between the town's road and the olive trees. A ribbon of road and steel appears beyond the furthest hill and curls toward the town slicing through the dirt road that runs headlong now into a wall of chain link fence topped with rolls of barbed wire, inside of which runs a road used by the IDF only as they travel north and east over miles of land that used to be part of the town of Jayyus, and then another fence, this one electrified and guarded by distant towers that capture pictures of anything touching it, and on the other side another road for the IDF to go in the opposite direction, protected by yet another chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, all using approximately 60 yards of land for miles on end as far as the eye can see.

Townpeople, the farmers who have cultivated and made their livelihood from these olive trees for generations on end, can no longer get to their fields in the ten minutes it used to take; now they must go miles out of their way to go through a single checkpoint,

opened at select times by the IDF, no equipment allowed, walk two hours to their trees, and carry out what they harvest on their backs. Should they fail to harvest the crop, the Israeli government confiscates the land as no longer in use by "absentee" landowners. This is but one example of thousands that illustrate the economic strangulation Sharon uses to force the Palestinians to leave their land. The entire sweep of that insidious fence, provided for the sole purpose of encircling acres of land used for "settlements," protection of those squatters that sit on stolen land, masks the theft of the land under the guise of security. Yet no "suicide bomber" ever came out of Jayyus; but the resulting anger wrought by Sharon's strangulation will surely create the wrath that might turn the next generation into warriors against the occupying force. Let us see the malevolence; it is done in our name.

Let the cameras scan the steel electric towers provided by the French as aid to help develop Jayyus. They lie in stacks on the ground unused because the Israelis will not allow their installation. Without cameras, without an eye inside the West Bank, Americans cannot see what their tax dollars pay for nor the pain and suffering it inflicts on these impoverished people. No one saw the 40 peaceful demonstrations attended by townspeople, international observers from the International Solidarity Movement and Israeli peaceniks as they confronted the IDF at the installation of the wall that protects the thieves and destroys the people who lived in this town for generations. Let us see the malevolence; it is done in our name.

Now put the cameras back in the van and travel south to Hebrun, the old city that stands as it did centuries ago, its bedraggled alleys cluttered with weather beaten and torn boxes, crumpled soda cans, rumpled newspapers, empty containers faded by the bright sun, cracked by the heat, an ancient castle like landscape of stained stone, worn pavements, rusted steel doors and dust; dust everywhere blown by the ever present wind that picks up fragments of the debris and swirls it through the air forcing you to look down at the grimy stones beneath your feet. The smell of rancid garbage is everywhere. Poverty beyond belief.

Let the cameras roll through the arches and stretches of tunnel like passages until the alley breaks into two parts; turn left and wander up this narrow path with corrugated tin overhangs just above the head on either side, then look up and see low-slung chicken wire notched beneath the overhangs, its belly filled with garbage and waste beneath which you must walk, garbage thrown by "Settlers" who commandeered the upper stories of these ancient buildings at gun point, protected by IDF military installations on the rooftops and in strategic locations within the walls, providing them with the opportunity to cast their refuse on the residents who walk below. Children above throw stones at the passersby and spit on them knowing they can do so with impunity. Consider the calculated reaction of those who lost their homes, the neighbors who felt

their loss, the sense of humiliation that wanders these streets, the anger that wells in the gut till it ripens and tears open the soul. Calculated psychological control that drives despair deep into the mind and heart and rips the fabric of personal worth destroying dreams and desires leaving only the detritus of human depression. Can the cameras capture this pain? Why should we not see the malevolence that is done in our name?

These are scenes that recur day after day throughout Palestine. This is the behavior our 3 billion in tax dollars pays for year after year unbeknownst to the American people, in excess of \$134,000,000,000 (billion), costing each and every American in excess of \$23,240 dollars for every Israeli (and that figure was calculated for tax dollars expended up to 2000). Why? Why do our representatives continue to use our money to support the citizens of the 16th wealthiest nation on the planet, one third of our foreign aid budget, to .001 percent of the world's population? Why do we provide less support to sub-Saharan Africa than we do to Israel when its population exceeds 570 million and Israel's is 5.8 million? Does race have anything to do with this?

Why do we expend this money and not use it for the poor and deprived in America? Why can a natural catastrophe like Katrina, and now Rita, devastate our people whose homes are not subsidized by our tax dollars as are those of the squatters? Why do we pay for the strangulation of the Palestinians? Why do we see only the deaths caused by "suicide bombers" and few deaths caused by Israeli terror that has killed three times as many Palestinians as Israelis? Why do we pay to have the IDF kill 652 Palestinian children since Sharon desecrated the Al Aqsa Mosque with his 1000 IDF troops and hide that number from the American people while we report in detail that 117 Israeli children have been killed? Is this racism as well?

Hidden in the silence of those ancient hills Christ knew so well walks a truth that begs to be told. We are gagged and blindfolded by our leaders who dare not show what they have wrought in our name. They would have us back within the walls of ancient cities where multitudes walked in darkness and slavery existed because it was made invisible by those in power. But slaves like Frederick Douglas broke through the walls by making visible in their narratives the horror of racism used for economic gain; now it is our turn to break down the walls of silence our representatives have created to further their own positions even as they protect those in positions of power and wealth that shovel dollars into their political coffers.

Let the cameras scan the poverty that Katrina exposed, let the talking heads face the questions we shove out of sight, the rampant neglect of our own, the latent racism that rises like the waters over the levees, to reveal a nation that has not cared and does not care for those who have no voice, no money to feed their political war chests, and no political power that can be used to feather the politicians nest. And let those same cameras focus attention on our brothers and sisters who are being strangled in Palestine

where actual walls are being built to hide the devastation our money causes on yet another people as poor and deprived as our former slaves. Their plight exists because we let it happen as surely as our silent forefathers let slavery exist. We cannot let Bush rest secure behind a wall of silence. We must not be the multitude that walks in mental darkness oblivious to the suffering and the pain that is caused in our name.

William Cook is a professor of English at the University of La Verne in southern California. His book, **Psalm for the 21st Century**, was published by Mellen Press. His newest book, **Tracking Deception**, will be released in October. He can be reached at: [cookb@ULV.EDU](mailto:cookb@ULV.EDU)