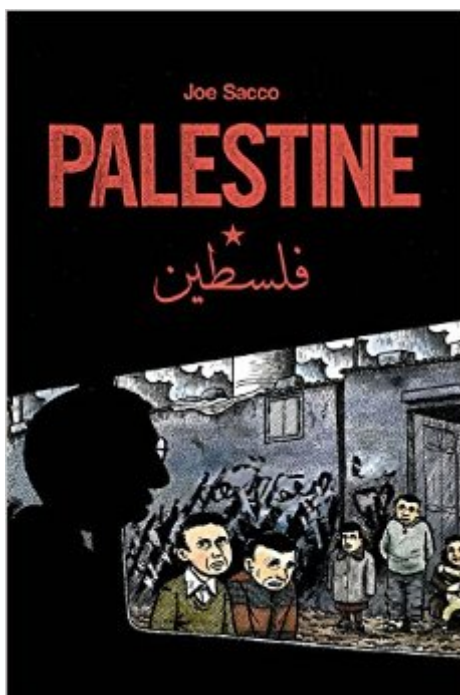


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# Palestine



## Synopsis

A landmark of journalism and the art form of comics. Based on several months of research and an extended visit to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the early 1990s, this is a major work of political and historical nonfiction. Prior to *Safe Area Gorazde: The War In Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995* • Joe Sacco's breakthrough novel of graphic journalism • the acclaimed author was best known for *Palestine*, a two-volume graphic novel that won an American Book Award in 1996. Fantagraphics Books is pleased to present the first single-volume collection of this landmark of journalism and the art form of comics. Based on several months of research and an extended visit to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the early 1990s (where he conducted over 100 interviews with Palestinians and Jews), *Palestine* was the first major comics work of political and historical nonfiction by Sacco, whose name has since become synonymous with this graphic form of New Journalism. Like *Safe Area Gorazde*, *Palestine* has been favorably compared to Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* for its ability to brilliantly navigate such socially and politically sensitive subject matter within the confines of the comic book medium. Sacco has often been called the first comic book journalist, and he is certainly the best. This edition of *Palestine* also features an introduction from renowned author, critic, and historian Edward Said (*Peace and Its Discontents* and *The Question of Palestine*), one of the world's most respected authorities on the Middle Eastern conflict. Black-and-white comics throughout

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This new one volume edition of Joe Sacco's *Palestine* comics evokes my first trip to the occupied

Palestinian territories in 1989 a couple of years before Sacco's first visit from 1991-1992. His book faithfully represents the contradictions and striking images of the conflict, and being a graphic novel/comic book renders them visually and powerfully. I couldn't think of a better medium to explain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to someone than this book, which stands out as an honest account of one man's attempt to make sense of it all, as well as a work of art in its own right. Powerfully-told stories are laced with well-researched facts, all couched in Sacco's humanity and disbelief at the people he meets and the events he sees. Particularly chilling is the account of a Palestinian father's torture experience. The book covers a wide variety of other topics, including refugees, Israeli attitudes, life inside prison, and more, introducing these issues (along with the atmosphere of a visit to Palestine) through Sacco's walk through the West Bank and Gaza, talking to people there. The second half of Sacco's book opens up more of the conflict, this time in the setting of Gaza, but should be considered as indivisible from the first half, as the two halves represent the complete collection of "Palestine" comics originally published as individual magazines, then as a two volume edition. The visual imagery is almost photographically faithful to the actual landscapes and cityscapes of Palestine, and accounts such as Sacco's taxi ride to Nablus will elicit delighted cries of recognition and wry laughter from those who have visited the country. This book is a 'must have' that you will definitely not be disappointed with if you're buying them for yourself, and should be considered a necessary part of your standard tools to explain the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to others. In the absence of a Palestinian "Cry Freedom", this is the next best thing. Nigel Parry

You have to read Palestine carefully, especially if you are either strongly sympathetic or hostile to Israel. It would be easy to see the book as condemning Israel. It is not, but since Sacco's intention was to get to know the community that we in the US don't know well, the Palestinians, the book shows mainly their experiences and interpretations of them. (It would have been a good idea to include a timeline of the historical events related to the Israel/Palestine tragedy, so that people who do not know the facts could put into perspective the versions of history that Sacco's Palestinian interviewees have.) I emphasize that this is not the book to turn to in order to figure out whether to side with the Israelis or the Palestinians. It does not give that kind of information, and there are other books for that (Thomas Friedman's *From Beirut to Jerusalem* is a good one). For the most part there are no terrorists or major political figures interviewed and there is no survey of the historical background, the mistakes and crimes that have left both peoples in this mess. What I saw in this brilliant piece of comic journalism is an on the ground look at what is going on with people caught in the storm. Palestine is about the human spirit, often humorous and courageous. It is also about the

tragedy that is what happens when people suffer at each other's hands, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, as well as physically, and lose the ability to see the human face. Victims turn into villains. The scenes of the settlers attacking the Arab villages at night reminded me chillingly of Kristalnacht. A 16 year old Palestinian terrorist-in-training is chilling as he describes his recruitment at 13, his loss of interest in anything but the violence, and the version of history that he believes in. Sixteen year old settlers strutting through town with their Uzis are just as chilling. You are appalled by them all, and by the societies that have turned children into murderers. And you are touched by the crowd scenes, where you see tiny figures of men and women in the background, hurrying their children away, keeping them away from the stone throwing crowds. You see the mythologies that both sides, though mainly (because of the nature of the book) the Palestinians, have created in order to give themselves pride and explain all the pain. You see that these mythologies are not going to save anyone. Sacco does not idolize his Palestinian subjects, though he is very sympathetic to most of them. He shows the irrational hatred, the elevation of victimhood to almost divine status, and the self-destructiveness of some of the people he interviewed. He really likes the children, especially inquisitive little girls, but he shows that there are some nasty kids too. I emphasize that he likes these people, despite their human failings. Their errors do not mean they are to be dismissed, just as their suffering does not mean that the lines on which Arab politicians have chosen to explain the situation are right. It was Sacco's irony, actually, that allowed me to trust his observations of life in an occupied region, with all that "occupied" implies. The most troubling part to the book, therefore, was the portrayal of the Israeli soldiers. I wish that he had interviewed Israeli soldiers, since they (and settlers) are the only Israelis present in the Palestinian refugee camps, and the soldiers come off looking brutal much of the time. But in looking through the book a second time, I noticed that many of the soldiers looked terrified. This terror coupled with the brutality throws another light on the tragedy afflicting both Israelis and Palestinians. I've been left haunted by one particular image, the depressed face of his last guide, an educated, unemployed volunteer with a school for the handicapped. It is not a dramatic, self dramatizing depression. Sacco's skill is impressive here, as he shows the man's face change, subtly, according to what is going on (sad tales, checkpoints, the charming chatter of a 10 year old girl)--he has other feelings, but his hopelessness has smothered the intensity.

Sacco's second book (the first book of the two is called "Palestine Book 1: 'A Nation Occupied'") opens up more of the conflict, this time in the setting of Gaza, but should be considered as indivisible from the first book, as both represent the complete collection of "Palestine" comics which

were originally published as individual issues. In both books, powerfully-told stories are laced with well-researched facts, all couched in Sacco's humanity and disbelief at the people he meets and the events he sees. The visual imagery is almost photographically faithful to the actual landscapes and cityscapes of Palestine (where I lived from 1994-1998). Both books together cover a wide variety of topics, including life for refugees, Israeli attitudes to the conflict, daily life inside prison, and more. Accounts such as Sacco's taxi ride to Nablus will elicit delighted cries of recognition and laughter from those who have visited the country, as well as being funny in themselves even if you haven't. Both books are a 'must have' that you will definitely not be disappointed with if you're buying them for yourself, and which should be considered a necessary part of your standard tools to explain the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to others. In the absence of a Palestinian "Cry Freedom", these two books are the next best thing. A faithful representation of the atmosphere of a visit to Palestine, and a well-conceived articulation of the conflict. Highly recommended.

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