



This Land is My Land!

Really?

The title of the *Rant* is a verse taken from Woody Guthrie's famous tune *This Land is Your Land*. Throughout history, people have claimed land as there's, as if having a warranty deed or a treaty has given them a God-given right to the property. Most wars are really fought over land, and the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict is just the latest manifestation of the question of who owns the land, resulting in armed conflict and the loss of thousands of lives. Since the current Israel-Hamas war dominates the news cycle, I have decided to delve into the topic, first concerning Palestine, and subsequently the broader subject of who really owns any land and by what authority.

The following historical information was gleaned from a Google search that led me to a Wikipedia comprehensive article on the history of Palestine. While the following summary timeline is far from complete, it will give you at least a feel for the dynamic afflicting this troubled land.

The area in the Middle East known as Palestine dates back to the Bronze Age, with the first references to it in 3700 BC when it was conquered by Egypt. The sovereignty over Palestine has been disputed and fought over for more than five thousand years, and at different times during that period both Jews and Arabs were persecuted. Control has passed amongst twenty major entities and countless minor entities during that time, including but not limited to (listed in chronological order):

- Egypt
- Nomadic Tribes
- Israel
- Syria
- Assyria
- Babylon
- Persia
- Greece
- Rome
- Byzantine
- Various Caliphates
- Bedouins
- Muslims
- Crusaders
- Mongols
- Ottoman

- France
- Britain
- Palestinian Authority
- Hamas

Literally hundreds of wars causing millions of deaths have been fought over Palestine.

The current situation is actually rooted in the establishment of the British Mandate in 1922 and the subsequent end of that mandate after World War II, which set the stage for the subsequent Jewish revolt that led to the formation of the Jewish State.

So, who really can claim rightful ownership of this destitute scrap of land?

Pondering this issue leads my focus to our country, especially in light of claims that Caucasians stole the land from indigenous groups.

This leads me to examine the history of land in New England, where I reside.

Starting with North America in general, this continent was originally uninhabited, as humanity is generally accepted to have begun in the cradle of civilization somewhere in Africa. Therefore, originally, no one owned the land here.

It is commonly speculated that man arrived in North America by traversing what was a land bridge that at one time existed between Asia and what is now Alaska, and eventually propagated throughout the continent. It is likely that these immigrants, commonly erroneously known as Indians, regularly fought over control of regions, although they did not call that control "ownership." Then came the Europeans, primarily the French and English, who quickly established sovereignty over their respective areas of conquest. Since the European entities were monarchies, the land belonged to the King. The King subsequently granted title to various parcels to certain subjects who then either granted or sold title to their parcels to colonists. Our war of independence from England solidified those property "rights." Since that time, property has passed via deeds to the present day owners.

In recent years, various New England Indian tribes have laid claim to vast areas of what has been considered legally obtained private land on the basis that they are the indigenous residents. However, besides being commonly called indigenous, they were also immigrants.

So be it Israelites, Palestinians, Indians or immigrant Americans, who owns the land they stand on?

Throughout history, those who own the land have obtained it and defended it by force. In fact, even today, English common law dictates that failure to defend one's property rights is considered by the courts as abandoning them.

Thus, returning to the subject of the current Israel/Palestine situation, there is no moral high ground for either party in the dispute, and hopefully successful negotiation for a two-state solution can bring an end to millennia of conflict. Unfortunately, history tells us that such a solution is likely to be fleeting, and conflict will continue.