

The British Mandate

Zionist Achievements and Arab-Jewish Conflict

investigate

- In what ways were the Zionist settlers freer than they had been in Russia and Eastern Europe?
- How might that freedom have affected their identities as Jews?
- What were the causes of growing tensions between Jews and Arabs in British-ruled Palestine?
- What impact might the changing identity of the Jew in Palestine have had on the Jews of the Diaspora?

Key Words and Places

Mandates	Technion
Haganah	Hebrew University
Old City	Fourth Aliyah
New City	Youth Aliyah
Third Aliyah	Partition Plan
<i>Halutzim</i>	White Paper
<i>Kibbutzim</i>	Irgun



The BIG Picture

On the morning of December 9, 1917, the residents of Jerusalem woke to find that their city had a new ruler. The British army, commanded by General Edmund Allenby, had defeated the Turks, and the British now controlled Jerusalem. Crowds of residents, both Jews and Arabs, flooded the streets and greeted the British as liberators.

A month earlier, Britain's Balfour Declaration had promised support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. To many Jews, Britain's victory over the Turks and its promise to establish a Jewish national homeland seemed like a modern-day Hanukkah miracle.

A time of great growth and achievement was beginning for the Zionists of Palestine, and a new identity of the Jew as a courageous and powerful pioneer and soldier was developing. But it was also a period in which the seeds of conflict between the Jews and Arabs were sown.

1912

- Henrietta Szold founds Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America

1914

- **World History:** Panama Canal opens, linking Atlantic and Pacific oceans

1917

- British army takes control of Jerusalem

1919

- Third Aliyah begins; brings 40,000 Jews to Palestine

1920

- Jews form Haganah to protect Zionist community of Palestine



The Roots of the Conflict

The Jews were not the only ones with high expectations. The Arabs, too, were filled with hope. The British had told them that they would receive an independent state in return for staging a revolt against the Turks. But the British had also signed a secret agreement with France in which each agreed to take a piece of the Ottoman Empire for itself, and jointly rule most of Palestine.

The British made these conflicting promises because they were determined to win the war with the Turks. They hoped their promises would gain the cooperation of the various groups. Their strategy worked, but when the war ended it became clear that Britain could not possibly keep all its promises.

Britain and France divided up the region much the way they had agreed. It was carved up into **mandates**, colony-like territories that Britain and France would govern until they determined that the population was ready for independence. The borders of the mandates were designed more to satisfy the interests of the British and the French than to address the needs and interests of the Arabs and Jews.

1924

- Fourth Aliyah begins; brings 80,000 Jews to Palestine

1929

- Arab riots throughout Palestine

1936

- Palestinian Arabs begin the Great Uprising

1939

- British issue White Paper, ending their commitment to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine





Hashomer (The Guard) was an organization responsible for the security of many Jewish settlements in Palestine from 1909 to 1920. All it required of the settlements was that they employ only Jewish workers.

The Arabs opposed the creation of mandates. They believed that the European powers had no right to rule over them. They also opposed the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist desire to build a Jewish nation in Palestine. Palestine, they argued, already had an Arab population and it had no desire to become a minority in a Jewish state.

The roots of the conflict over Palestine lie in the struggle between two peoples for the same small piece of land. Britain's effort to build a Jewish national home without raising Arab opposition was doomed from the start.

Violence Breaks Out

Violence between Jews and Arabs first flared in March 1920. Jews living in an isolated group of settlements in the far north of Palestine found themselves in the middle of a battle between Arab nationalists and French troops. Despite the Zionists' efforts to remain neutral, the Arabs were convinced that the Zionists were aiding the French.

Zionist leaders encouraged the settlers to leave the area. Many did, but the members of two settlements, Tel Hai and Kfar Gil'adi, chose to stay. On March 1 several hundred Arabs arrived at Tel Hai looking for hidden French soldiers. A firefight erupted. The settlers temporarily drove out the Arabs. But in the end, the settlers were forced to leave.

A month after this incident, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Jerusalem. Protesters descended on Jews with clubs, knives, and stones.

In the Diaspora, Jews had often seemed powerless and defenseless. Such memories troubled the "new Jews" of Palestine. They formed a militia called the **Haganah** (defense) to protect the *Yishuv*, the Zionist community in Palestine. Under the leadership of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the

A Symbol of Courage

Despite the Tel Hai and Kfar Gil'adi defeats, the heroism of the settlers has become legendary. Among the dead was Joseph Trumpeldor, who had been committed to teaching Jews self-defense. At Tel Hai, he gave his life for this principle. In death, Trumpeldor became a larger-than-life hero and a symbol of courage. It is said that his final words were: "Never mind, it is good to die for our country."

Why do you think it was important for Zionists to have symbols of courage such as Joseph Trumpeldor?

Haganah helped evacuate some Jewish families from the center of the rioting, the area in East Jerusalem known as the **Old City**. To ensure that the rioting did not spread, they also patrolled the streets of West Jerusalem, which is referred to as the **New City**.

The Pioneer Spirit

Another wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine occurred after World War I; it is known as the **Third Aliyah**. A core of these new immigrants was devoted to working the land and living Socialist ideals. They called themselves *ḥalutzim*, based on the biblical word for a frontline soldier or pioneer. In many ways, they followed in the footsteps of the Second Aliyah. They, too, were committed to “Hebrew labor,” the Hebrew language, self-defense, and social justice.

The *ḥalutzim* set up the first settlements formally known as *kibbutzim*, villages in which a group lived and worked together, owned all property together, and kept its money in a common treasury. Many *kibbutzim* had factories as well as farms. Kibbutz members prided themselves on the equal treatment of men and women. Women held jobs as diverse as cooking, child rearing, driving tractors, and harvesting fruit.

By the late 1920’s, about four thousand people lived on approximately thirty *kibbutzim*. A number were built in outlying areas to provide security and widen the borders of the growing Jewish national home. Although *kibbutzim* accounted for only a small percentage of the total Jewish population, they had a large impact on the *Yishuv*. Beyond their role in securing the land, many leading military figures, politicians, and intellectuals were drawn from *kibbutzim*.

The Labor Brigade

The pride of the Third Aliyah was the Joseph Trumpeldor Labor Brigade, named for Tel Hai’s fallen hero. Almost two thousand *ḥalutzim* were members of the brigade at one time or another. The brigade hired itself out to new settlements. Its members built roads and drained swamps, living in tent camps and braving harsh conditions.

The Growth of Urban Jewish Centers

As in earlier years, the majority of Jewish immigrants settled in cities. In Haifa an entirely Jewish community, Hadar Hacarmel, was developed. By the mid-1920’s, it had over three thousand residents and the **Technion**, an institute of technology, was opened. Both Jews and Arabs flocked to Haifa as its fortunes continued to rise in the 1930’s, when the British built a modern port and completed an oil pipeline to Iraq.

Jerusalem, too, was growing. New middle-class Jewish neighborhoods were constructed in West Jerusalem. In East Jerusalem, Mount Scopus became the site of the **Hebrew University**, a center for Jewish scholarship.

The fastest-growing city by far was Tel Aviv. Between 1914 and 1939 its population exploded from 2,000 to 160,000. With its seaside promenade, sidewalk cafés, broad avenues, public squares, and neighborhood parks, Tel Aviv felt like a European city with a Mediterranean flavor. It became known for its modernity, sophistication, and secular Jewish culture.

Henrietta Szold

Baltimore-born Henrietta Szold (1860–1945) made her first visit to Palestine in 1909. Troubled by the unhealthy living conditions of the children there, Szold returned to the United States to form Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America. For the rest of her life, she worked to improve health care and education for Palestine’s Jews and Arabs.



Henrietta Szold

Hadassah sent American-trained nurses and, later, entire medical units to Palestine to combat the primitive health conditions. It worked to improve maternity and infant care, and set up training programs for nurses, as well as health clinics, and, later, hospitals.

Hadassah Hospital opened in Jerusalem in 1939. Today it is considered one of the finest hospitals in the Middle East. It continues Szold’s commitment to providing quality medical care to Jews and Arabs.

Szold is also known for other life-saving work. After Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, thousands of Jewish children from Germany were sent by their parents to Palestine. They were part of Youth Aliyah, a project directed by Szold to help young Jews escape from Germany. About five thousand teenagers arrived in Palestine before World War II, and more than fifteen thousand children came after the war.

Describe two Jewish values that may have inspired Szold’s concern for both Jews and Arabs.

1. _____
2. _____



Hadassah's food donations provided critical support to this Yemenite kindergarten in Neveh Sha'anana, Jerusalem (1920).

Separate Lives

The **Fourth Aliyah**, which lasted from 1924 to 1928, brought another eighty thousand Jewish immigrants to Palestine, including middle-class shopkeepers and craftspeople. The Palestinian Arab population was growing quickly, too, mostly because the British improved health conditions, road and rail networks, and sewage systems. The decline of the rural economy brought many peasants to the cities. Urban Arabs created a rich intellectual and cultural life, and newspapers and political parties introduced many to the ideas of Arab nationalism.

Arabs and Jews often led separate lives, even in mixed cities like Haifa and Jaffa. Zionists created their own economy and cultural institutions, organizing their own trade union and priding themselves on hiring only Jews.

The 1929 Riots

The Arabs became alarmed as Jews bought up land. The Jewish National Fund preferred to buy areas that were uninhabited. But as such territory became scarce, Jews bought land from Arabs whose property was leased to other Arabs. Many tenants had lived on and farmed

the land for generations. When the new, Jewish owners evicted them, it fueled Arab resentment.

Arab fears of a growing Jewish population buying more and more land set off a new round of riots in 1929. The worst violence took place in the cities of Safed and Hebron, where rioters attacked the Hebron yeshiva and Jewish homes. Sixty-six Jews were killed.

Jews in larger cities were better able to defend themselves. Haganah squads patrolled the streets and fired on rioters. The British army and police tried to put down the violence. Low-flying British aircraft even fired at a band of Arab villagers on their way to attack Jews in Haifa. But there were only 292 policemen and fewer than a hundred soldiers in all of Palestine. In total, 133 Jews and 116 Arabs were killed.

The riots convinced the high commissioner of Palestine that the Balfour Declaration was “a colossal blunder.” He urged the British government to back away from its promises to the Jews. In London, British officials were beginning to wonder whether the mandate in Palestine was more trouble than it was worth.

The Arab Revolt

The rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany caused yet another wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine. Between 1933 and 1936, about 165,000 immigrants arrived from Europe. By 1936 Jews made up almost one-third of the entire population of Palestine. Jewish dreams and Arab fears of a Jewish majority in Palestine seemed on the verge of becoming a reality.



Despite the difficult times Hebrew culture managed to thrive. The Habimah Theater, which was founded in Russia in 1917 and was committed to producing plays in Hebrew, moved to Palestine in 1931. In 1945 it moved into a building in the heart of Tel Aviv and thirteen years later became the National Theater of Israel.

In April 1936, an organized Arab revolt began, aimed at stopping the Zionist nation-building project and ending British rule. The Arabs declared a general strike. Shops were closed, and many Arabs refused to pay their taxes.

The Great Uprising, as the Palestinian Arabs called it, enjoyed popular support and mass participation among the Palestinian Arab population. Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, who eventually took charge of the revolt, announced that the strike would end only when Jewish immigration was halted. Arab rebels bombed the oil pipeline, railway lines, and trains, assassinated British officials, and committed acts of terrorism against Jews. The British brought in twenty thousand troops and put down the rebellion.

The Partition Plan

In November 1936, a British commission, known as the Peel Commission, arrived in



In 1936, these young pioneers waved good-bye to their friends and family as they set out from Berlin, Germany, for the long journey to Palestine and a new life.

Palestine to determine the causes of the revolt and to recommend a solution. The commission spoke with both Jewish and Arab leaders, including Ben-Gurion, Weizmann, and al-Husseini. In July 1937 it issued a 404-page report concluding that Jews and Arabs could never live peacefully in one state. The only solution was a **partition plan** that would divide Palestine into two states.

The report suggested that the Jews receive the Galilee, the Jezreel Valley, and most of the coast. The Negev, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank would be given to the Arabs. Jerusalem and some of the other towns with mixed Arab and Jewish populations would remain in British hands. The proposed map gave the Jews only one-fifth of Palestine but the leadership of the *Yishuv* accepted the plan, however reluctantly. In Weizmann's words, "The Jews would be fools not to accept it even if [the Jewish State] were the size of a tablecloth." The Arabs, however, rejected the idea of partition. In their minds, the only just solution to the Palestine problem was an independent, majority Arab state.

The White Paper

After a lull while the Peel Commission met, the revolt started again. The British stepped up their actions against the Arabs; by early 1939, the revolt collapsed. But the human toll of the uprising was enormous: over five thousand Arabs, five hundred Jews, and two hundred Britons were dead. Al-Husseini fled to Germany and supported the Nazis during World War II.

What, wondered the British government, was the solution to the Palestine problem? In Europe, the threat from Germany was rising and war seemed inevitable. Keeping twenty thousand troops in Palestine was out of the question. The British decided to withdraw the promises made in the Balfour Declaration. British leaders wanted to secure Arab cooperation in the coming conflict with Germany. They knew they could count on Jewish cooperation because the Zionists would want to help defend the Jews of Europe.

In May 1939, Britain issued its long-awaited **White Paper**, or official government report. Palestine, the White Paper declared, was to become an independent state allied with the British Empire. To assure that the Arabs remained a majority in Palestine, Jewish immigration was to be limited to seventy-five thousand over the next five years. Jewish immigration would then require Arab permission. Land sales to Jews also were severely restricted.

The Zionists were outraged. All they had worked for was at risk. They also were concerned about the fate of the Jews of Europe, who were endangered by Hitler's rise to power in Germany. With other countries enforcing strict immigration quotas, unrestricted immigration to Palestine seemed the best hope for saving the Jews of Germany and Eastern Europe.

The leaders of the *Yishuv* had a dilemma: they could no longer cooperate with the British authorities in Palestine, but they understood the importance of defeating Hitler, which required that they ally themselves with Britain. They decided to act on both concerns. Their policy was summed up by Ben-Gurion who declared, "We shall fight the war as if there were no White Paper and we shall fight the White Paper as if there were no war."

Arab and Jewish Population in Palestine 1914–1946

Year	Arab Population	Jewish Population
1914	738,000	60,000
1922	730,000	85,000
1931	880,000	175,000
1939	1,070,000	460,000
1946	1,269,000	608,000

You Are There

Palestine

The Haganah and Irgun Respond to Violence

Imagine you are living in Palestine during the Arab Revolt. The violence shocks the *Yishuv*, convincing many Jews that it is impossible to live with the Arabs.

You know that Ben-Gurion and other leaders of the *Yishuv* do not want to provoke the British. That is why, at first, the leadership followed a policy of restraint. In the early months of the revolt, most of the Haganah's actions were defensive, such as patrolling settlements. Jabotinsky's followers opposed the policy of restraint but their underground militia, the Irgun Tz'vei Leumi, known simply as the Irgun and headed by Menahem Begin, went along with that policy.

As Arab violence increases, many who had resisted taking up arms now believe that there is no alternative but to fight for the community's survival. Their rallying cry is "*Ein breirah!*" "There is no choice!" The British army and Haganah organize joint night squads, which ambush Arab fighters and attack the villages they use as bases. Irgun fighters conduct scores of attacks on Arab civilians in marketplaces, cafés, and buses, killing more than 250 people.

Do you agree or disagree with the decision to move away from the policy of restraint? Explain your reasons.

Flyer printed to raise support and funds for forty-three members of the Haganah who were arrested by the British in 1939





then & NOW

Israel's Declaration of Independence proclaims that the values of the State of Israel are to be based on the lessons of "liberty, justice, and peace that were taught by the Jewish prophets." Today, Israel's armed forces have an ethical code that permits soldiers to defend themselves but forbids them from needlessly injuring another person. The code requires soldiers to honor the Jewish value of the holiness of human life.

1. Do you think Israeli soldiers should be held to a higher ethical standard than other soldiers? Why or why not?

2. List the three characteristics you think are most important for a Jewish soldier to have. Explain why each is important.

A.

B.

C.

