

Digital Debate Forum

Debate Question: Should the British Government be blamed or praised for the Balfour Declaration?

Prep materials:

- Videos: the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict in nine chapters:
<https://www.parallelhistories.org.uk/teachingisraelpalestineconflict>
- The Complete History of the Israel-Palestine conflict:
<https://me.touchcast.com/s/qlxrnlfz86>
- Video: Should the British Government be blamed or praised for the Balfour Declaration?
<https://me.touchcast.com/s/43l8vmtqao>
- Sources: All the sources are included below

The debate:

- Each student prepares a 1-2 minute speech arguing for their side of the debate. Each student must use at least one piece of source evidence
- Students will speak alternative between the two teams
- The 4th speaker on each team will then sum up

Judging:

- Teachers will provide feedback at the end of each debate for all the speakers
- Feedback will focus on **content**, especially critical evaluation of sources, and **presentation**

Tips:

- Plan your speech as bullet points rather than a written text. Then you can speak engagingly to the camera rather than reading out
- Think about how you can add sources to make your argument more persuasive
- Think about how you can use your **tone of voice** to make your argument more persuasive
- Think about the **context and content for the source** you are talking about. For example, why has the author written this text or produced this poster? Can those reasons strengthen your argument?

‘Should the British Government be praised or blamed for the Balfour Declaration?’

Praised

1. The majority of Jews in the world lived inside the Russian Empire and from the 1880s they were heavily persecuted. The British took on the humanitarian responsibility of finding a home for them in Palestine where they had religious and cultural roots.
2. Britain had welcomed Jewish refugees after the first wave of pogroms in Russia, but by the early 1900s there was a popular backlash against immigration, a phenomenon repeated in the USA in the early 1920s. So British leaders sympathetic to the plight of the Jews began to look for other creative solutions, like a national home in Palestine.
3. The British also fulfilled their promise to Sherif Hussein to create a new Arab state, Transjordan. The RAF provided much needed protection and his descendants continue to rule Jordan today. It's true, they left some ambiguity about the future status of the land west of Jerusalem, but in the middle of a world war still in the balance, that appeared to be a minor detail.
4. The British government was careful to emphasize the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, and rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in other countries. Indeed the British Government, continued to try to be even-handed right to the end of the Mandate by limiting Jewish immigration to the 'absorptive capacity' of the country.
5. What looks today like imperial arrogance would have been judged very differently a century ago. The British Empire was fighting three other empires, the German, the Austrian-Hungarian and the Ottoman, and it was natural and prudent that it should plan ahead for the eventuality of the collapse of the Ottoman which was the weakest of the three. The British felt a sense of responsibility for filling the void left by the Ottomans and were quick to seek a legal basis from the League of Nations for their Mandate in Palestine.
6. The later events of the Holocaust proved that those who argued that the Jews needed their own homeland were incontrovertibly in the right.

The Balfour Declaration

Foreign Office,

November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Y. in
Arthur Balfour





Palestine is our unforgettable historic homeland...The Jews who will it shall achieve their State. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die. The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.

An extract of "The Jewish State" written in 1896 by the Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl

Photo of a Jewish wedding in Palestine, 1899



Source: Universal History Archive

▲ GREAT PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION

Under the auspices of
THE BRITISH BROTHERS' LEAGUE,
in favour of restricting the further immigration of
DESTITUTE FOREIGNERS
into this Country, will be held at

THE PEOPLE'S PALACE,
MILE END, E., on
TUESDAY, JAN. 14TH, 1902.

The Chair will be taken at Eight p.m. sharp, by
MAJOR EVANS-GORDON, M.P.,
who will be supported by Members of Parliament,
County and Borough Councillors, Members of
Boards of Guardians of all shades of politics, and
Ministers of Religion of all Denominations.

V. ZIONISTEN-CONGRESS, BASEL, 26 -29. DECEMBER 1901

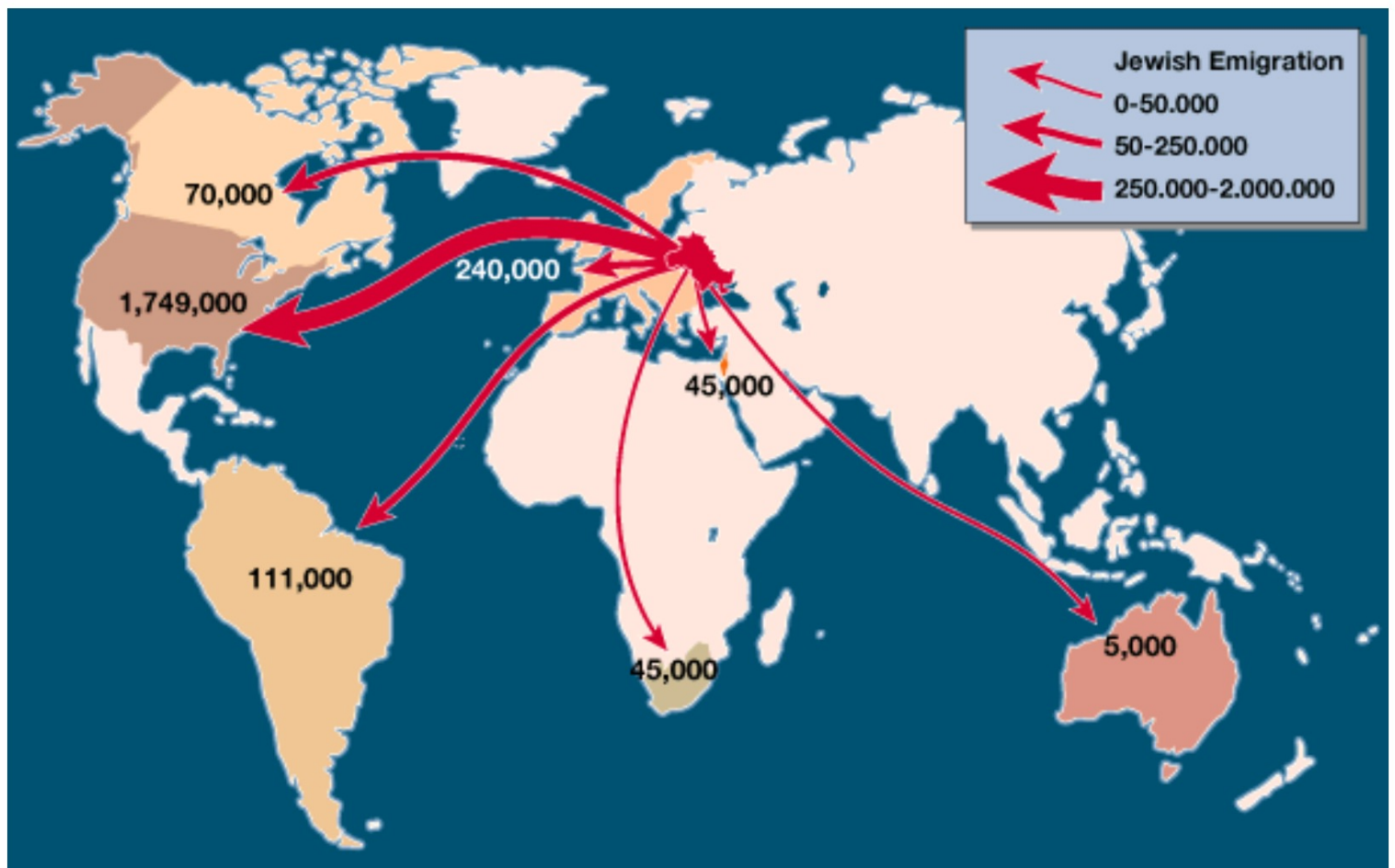


Postcard
from the
Fifth
Zionist
Congress
in Basel,
1901

E. M. LILien

DD1/5

Jewish Emigration from Russia: 1880 - 1928



The Ford International Weekly
**THE DEARBORN
INDEPENDENT**

One Dollar

Dearborn, Michigan, May 22, 1920

Five Cents

*The International Jew:
The World's Problem*

"Among the distinguishing mental and moral traits of the Jews may be mentioned: distaste for hard or violent physical labor; a strong family sense and philoprogenitiveness; a marked religious instinct; the courage of the prophet and martyr rather than of the pioneer and soldier; remarkable power to survive in adverse environments, combined with great ability to retain racial solidarity; capacity for exploitation, both individual and social; shrewdness and astuteness in speculation and money matters generally; an Oriental love of display and a full appreciation of the power and pleasure of social position; a very high average of intellectual ability."

—The New International Encyclopedia.

THE Jew is again being singled out for critical attention throughout the world. His emergence in the financial, political and social spheres has been so complete and spectacular since the war, that his place, power and purpose in the world are being given a new scrutiny, much of it unfriendly. Persecution is not a new experience to the Jew, but intensive scrutiny of his nature and super-nationality is. He has suffered for more than 2,000 years from what may be called the instinctive anti-semitism of the other races, but this antagonism has never been intelligent nor has it been able to make itself intelligible. Nowadays, however, the Jew is being placed, as it were, under the microscope of economic observation that the reasons for his power, the reasons for his separateness, the reasons for his suffering may be defined and understood.

In Russia he is charged with being the source of Bolshevism, an accusation which is serious or not according to the circle in which it is made; we in America, hearing the fervid eloquence and perceiving the prophetic ardor of young Jewish apostles of social and industrial reform, can calmly estimate how it may be. In Germany he is charged with being the cause of the Empire's collapse and a very considerable literature has sprung up, bearing with it a mass of circumstantial evidence that gives the thinker pause. In England he is charged with being the real world ruler, who rules as a super-nation over the nations, rules by the power of gold, and who plays nation against nation for his own purposes, remaining himself discreetly in the background. In America it is pointed out to what extent the elder Jews of wealth and the younger Jews of ambition swarmed through the war organizations—principally those departments which dealt with the commercial and industrial business of war, and also the extent to which they have clung to the advantage which their experience as agents of the government gave them.

IN SIMPLE words, the question of the Jews has come to the fore, but like other questions which lend themselves to prejudice, efforts will be made to hush it up as impolitic for open discussion. If, however, experience has taught us anything it is that questions thus suppressed will sooner or later break out in undesirable and unprofitable forms.

The Jew is the world's enigma. Poor in his masses, he yet controls the world's finances. Scattered abroad without country or government, he yet presents a unity of race continuity which no other people has achieved. Living under legal disabilities in almost every land, he has become the power behind many a throne. There are

ancient prophecies to the effect that the Jew will return to his own land and from that center rule the world, though not until he has undergone an assault by the united nations of mankind.

The single description which will include a larger percentage of Jews than members of any other race is this: he is in business. It may be only gathering rags and selling them, but he is in business. From the sale of old clothes to the control of international trade and finance, the Jew is supremely gifted for business. More than any other race he exhibits a decided aversion to industrial employment, which he balances by an equally decided adaptability to trade. The Gentile boy works his way up, taking employment in the productive or technical departments; but the Jewish boy prefers to begin as messenger, salesman or clerk—anything—so long as it is connected with the commercial side of the business. An early Prussian census illustrates this characteristic: of a total population of 269,400, the Jews comprised six per cent or 16,164. Of these, 12,000 were traders and 4,164 were workmen. Of the Gentile population, the other 94 per cent, or 153,236 people, there were only 17,000 traders.

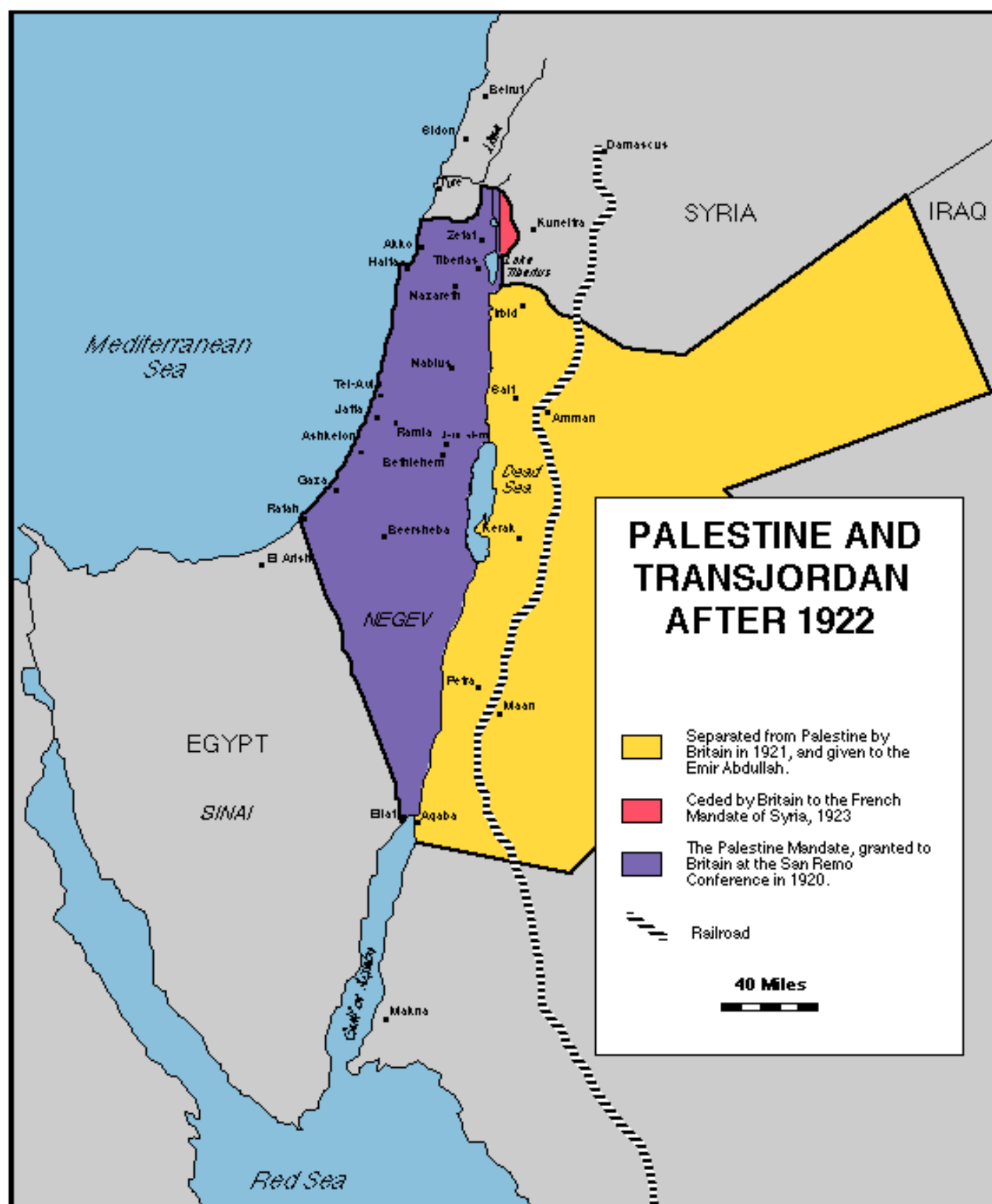
A MODERN census would show a large professional and literary class added to the traders, but no diminution of the percentage of traders and not much if any increase in the number of wage toilers. In America alone most of the big business, the trusts and the banks, the natural resources and the chief agricultural products, especially tobacco, cotton and sugar, are in the control of Jewish financiers or their agents. Jewish journalists are a large and powerful group here. "Large numbers of department stores are held by Jewish firms," says the Jewish Encyclopedia, and many if not most of them are run under Gentile names. Jews are the largest and most numerous landlords of residence property in the country. They are supreme in the theatrical world. They absolutely control the circulations of publications throughout the country. Fewer than any race whose presence among us is noticeable, they receive daily an amount of favorable publicity which would be impossible did they not have the facilities for creating and distributing it themselves. Werner Sombart, in his "Jew and Modern Capitalism" says, "If the conditions in America continue to develop along the same lines as in the last generation, if the immigration statistics and the proportion of births among all the nationalities remain the same, our imagination may picture the United States of fifty or a hundred years hence as a land inhabited only by Slavs, Negroes and Jews, wherein the Jews will naturally occupy the position of

The article that signaled the beginning of Henry Ford's seven-year hate campaign against the Jews. (COLLECTIONS OF THE HENRY FORD MUSEUM, GREENFIELD VILLAGE)

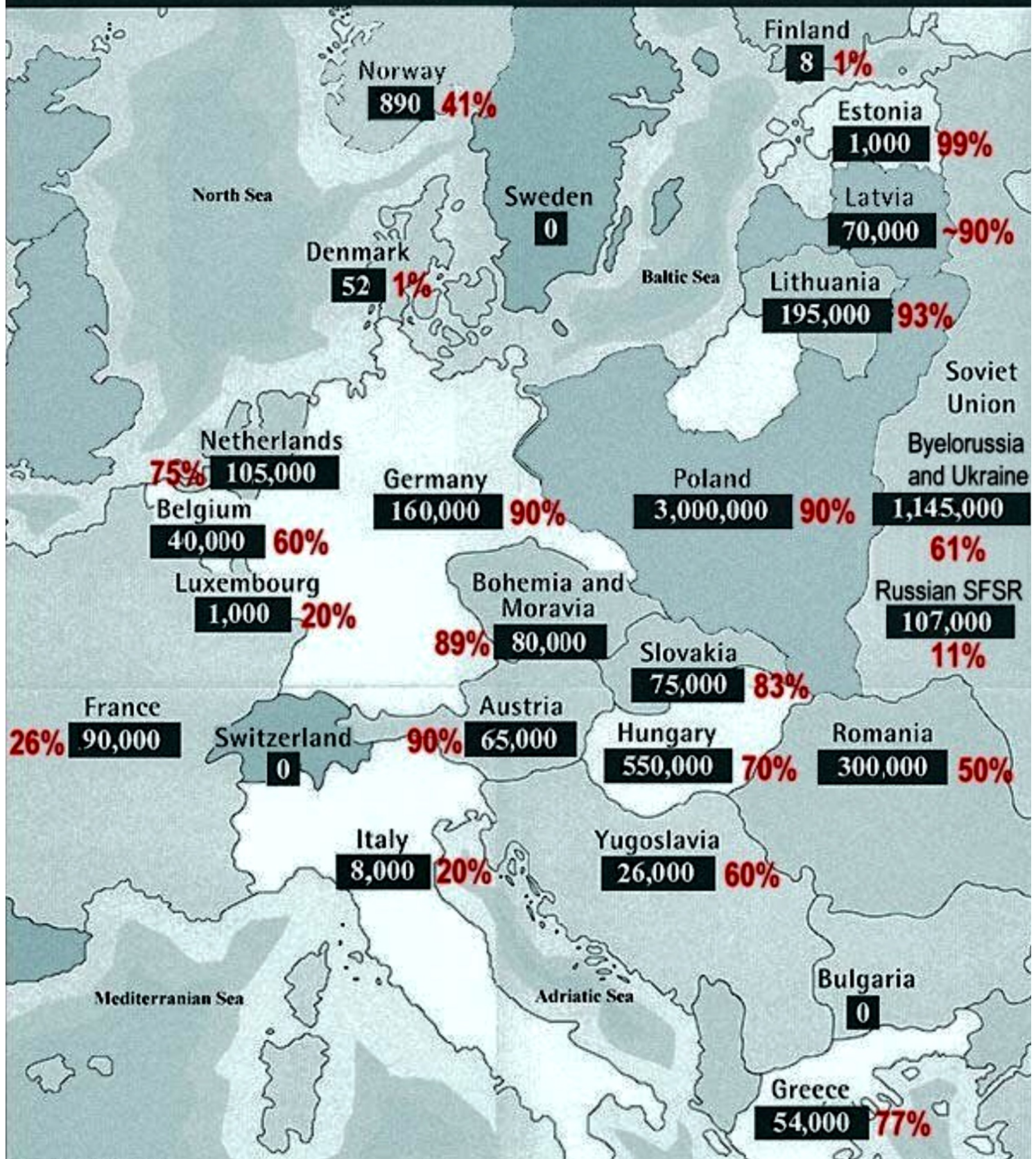
Henry Ford, the founder of The Ford Motor Company, began publishing anti-Jewish articles in his newspaper, The Dearborn Independent in 1920. This was the first article.

'With one step the Jewish cause has made a great bound forward...a new epoch for our race...Amidst all that is so dark and dismal and tragic throughout the world, there has thus arisen for the Jews a great light. It is the perceptible lifting of the cloud of centuries, the palpable sign that the Jew-condemned for two thousand years to unparalleled wrong - is at last coming to his right.'

The Jewish Chronicle, a London-based newspaper, responded to the Balfour Declaration 1917



Estimated Jewish death toll by country 1939-45



'Should the British Government be praised or blamed for the Balfour Declaration?'

Blamed

1. The Balfour Declaration represents the height of British imperial arrogance. It takes for granted the right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory and a people as it saw fit, even before it had any practical or legal control over that territory. Neither the local Arabs in Palestine, nor the small Jewish community living among them, were consulted.
2. The Balfour Declaration only represented the wishes of part of the Jewish people. Of the two British Jews who were cabinet ministers, Herbert Samuel was for the establishment of a national homeland, and his cousin Edwin Montagu was dead against it on the grounds that it would be detrimental to the interests of Jews successfully assimilated in other countries.
3. The motivations for this supposedly pro-Jewish move in fact stem from anti-Semitic prejudice, i.e. the assumption that American Jews exercised a disproportionate influence on US government, and would persuade Woodrow Wilson to speed up the mobilization of American troops allocated for the British sector of the western front.
4. In 1916 and 1917, the British government knowingly entered three contradictory agreements about what would happen in the event of an Allied victory. General McMahon, in a series of letters to Sheik Hussein promised the Arabs self-government in return for an Arab revolt against the Ottomans, Balfour promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine, and behind everyone's backs, Mark Sykes and Georges Picot carved up the area into spheres of French and British control and influence.
5. The Balfour Declaration failed to protect the rights of the vast majority of Arab Muslims and Christians whose communities had been living in Palestine for more than a thousand years. The Arabs are not even mentioned by name, and it's notable that while the Declaration says that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine', there's no mention of political or economic rights.
6. Later events have proved the Balfour Declaration to have been a mistake; it didn't prevent the Holocaust, the creation of the state of Israel has been the cause of unrest in the Middle East, and less than half of the Jews in the world choose to live there.

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A protest by Palestinians in 1929 in Jaffa. The sign reads "Down with Balfour Declaration"

Year	Jews	Christians	Muslims	Total
Early 1st C.	Majority	–	–	~2,500
5th C.	Minority	Majority	–	>1st C
6th C.	Minority	Majority	–	
7th C.	Minority	Majority	–	
8th C.	Minority	Majority	Minority	
9th C.	Minority	Majority	Minority	
10th C.	Minority	Majority	Minority	
11th C.	Minority	Majority	Minority	
End 12th C.	Minority	Minority	Majority	>225
14th C.	Minority	Minority	Majority	150
1533–1539	5	6	145	157
1690–1691	2	11	219	232
1800	7	22	246	275
1890	43	57	432	532
1914	94	70	525	689
1922	84	71	589	752
1931	175	89	760	1,033
1947	630	143	1,181	1,970

Estimates by [Sergio DellaPergola](#) (2001), drawing on the work of Bachi (1975). Figures in thousands.

The **Demographic history of Palestine** refers to the study of the historical population of the [region of Palestine](#), which approximately corresponds to modern [Israel](#) and the [Palestinian territories](#), and in some sources also western parts of [Jordan](#).

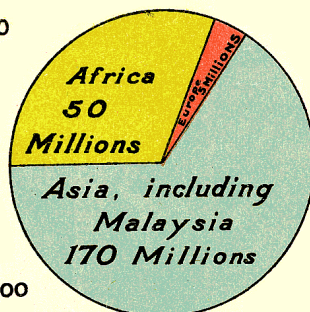
THE MOSLEM WORLD Figures Give Mohammedan Population

More than fifty per cent. Mohammedan // Less than fifty per cent. Mohammedan



COUNTRIES HAVING 2,000,000 OR MORE MOHAMMEDAN POPULATION

INDIA	62,458,077
CHINESE EMPIRE	30,000,000
JAVA	24,270,600
RUSSIA	13,906,972
TURKEY IN ASIA	12,228,800
SENEGAMBIA-NIGER	9,000,000
EGYPT	8,978,775
PERSIA	8,800,000
NIGERIA	6,000,000
MOROCCO	5,600,000
ALGERIA	4,072,080
AFGHANISTAN	3,982,448
INDEPENDENT ARABIA	3,000,000
SUMATRA	3,000,000
TURKEY IN EUROPE	2,050,000
CONGO STATE	2,000,000
KAMERUN	2,000,000



EUROPEAN
AFRICAN

CHIEF POWERS GOVERNING ISLAM

GREAT BRITAIN	84,240,305
CHINA	30,000,000
NETHERLANDS	29,026,350
FRANCE	20,258,526
RUSSIA	15,906,972
TURKEY	15,528,800
PERSIA	8,800,000
MOROCCO	5,600,000
AFGHANISTAN	3,982,448
INDEPENDENT ARABIA	3,000,000
GERMANY	2,572,500

ASIATIC
MALAYSIAN

This map was produced in at the beginning of the 20th century.
'Mohammedan' is an old English term for Muslim

PARALLEL HISTORIES

Letter from Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner to Egypt, to Sharif Hussein of Mecca

October 24 1915

1. Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif of Mecca.

2. Great Britain will guarantee the Holy Places against all external aggression and will recognise their inviolability.

3. When the situation admits, Great Britain will give to the Arabs her advice and will assist them to establish what may appear to be the most suitable forms of government in those various territories.

I am convinced that this declaration will assure you beyond all possible doubt of the sympathy of Great Britain towards the aspirations of her friends the Arabs and will result in a firm and lasting alliance, the immediate results of which will be the expulsion of the Turks from the Arab countries and the freeing of the Arab peoples from the Turkish yoke, which for so many years has pressed heavily upon them.

A.H. McMahon

A McMahon

PARALLEL HISTORIES

"Dear readers, it seems we have done something serious in the view of the central government in warning the Palestinian nation of the danger which threatens it from the Zionist current...

We are a nation threatened with disappearance in the face of this Zionist current in this Palestinian land...

Let the central government learn that Zionism is not a mere 'ghost' or a 'bogey-man', as its supporters claim. Today it is a palpable danger...Even if they defeat Filastin in court, patriots will arise to found tens of newspapers like it to serve the same principles, and to mount the same defense of the body of this poor nation which is threatened in its very being by expulsion from its homeland.

Filastin, 'An Open Letter to Subscribers', 1914

quoted in R.Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (1997), p.155

Selections from a Memorandum of Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, to the British Cabinet, August 1917

I wish to place on record my view that the policy of His Majesty's Government is anti-Semitic and in result will prove a rallying ground for Anti-Semites in every country in the world. This view is prompted by the receipt yesterday of a correspondence between Lord Rothschild and Mr. Balfour...I lay down with emphasis four principles:

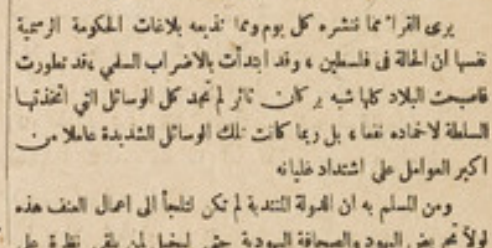
1. I assert that there is not a Jewish nation. The members of my family, for instance, who have been in this country for generations, have no sort or kind of community of view or of desire with any Jewish family in any other country beyond the fact that they profess to a greater or less degree the same religion. It is no more true to say that a Jewish Englishman and a Jewish Moor are of the same nation than it is to say that a Christian Englishman and a Christian Frenchman are of the same nation...
2. When the Jews are told that Palestine is their national home, every country will immediately desire to get rid of its Jewish citizens, and you will find a population in Palestine driving out its present inhabitants, taking all the best in the country, drawn from all quarters of the globe, speaking every language on the face of the earth, and incapable of communicating with one another except by means of an interpreter...
3. I deny that Palestine is to-day associated with the Jews or properly to be regarded as a fit place for them to live in. The Ten Commandments were delivered to the Jews on Sinai. It is quite true that Palestine plays a large part in Jewish history, but so it does in modern Mahommendan history, and, after the time of the Jews, surely it plays a larger part than any other country in Christian history...
4. ...When the Jew has a national home, surely it follows that the impetus to deprive us of the rights of British citizenship must be enormously increased. Palestine will become the world's Ghetto. Why should the Russian give the Jew equal rights? His national home is Palestine.



This poster was printed in 1917 in Canada to recruit soldiers for a Jewish regiment

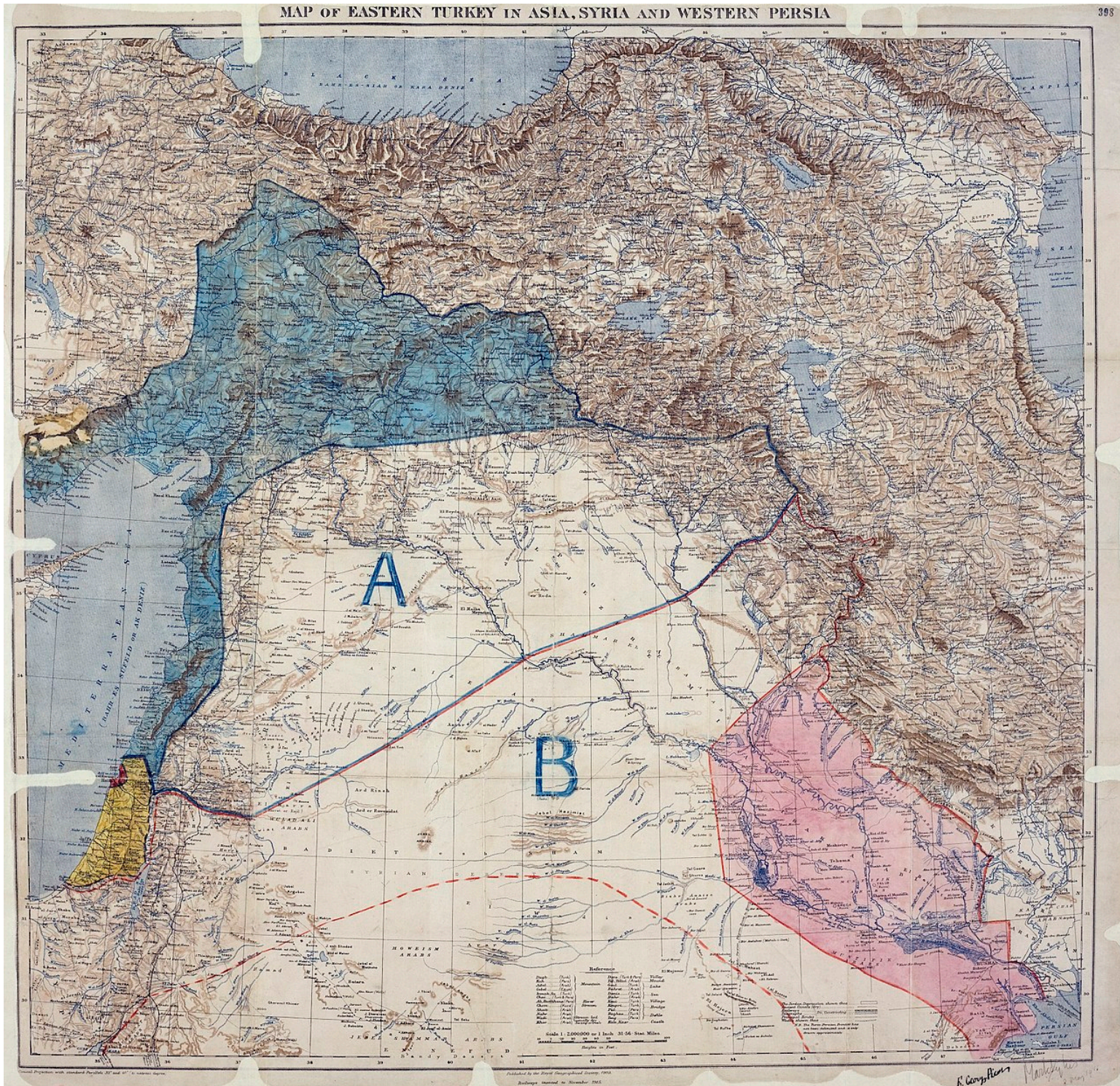
PARALLEL HISTORIES





This cartoon is taken from a Palestinian newspaper in 1936. The central figure is Lord Balfour and the cartoon presents the consequences of the Balfour Declaration, as perceived by Palestinians.

Map of the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France, 1916



Woodrow Wilson was US President 1913-1921



Self-determination is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril.

— Woodrow Wilson —

AZ QUOTES

This quote is taken from Woodrow Wilson's speech on 8 January 1918 to the US Congress. In this speech, Wilson set out his 14 points for peace