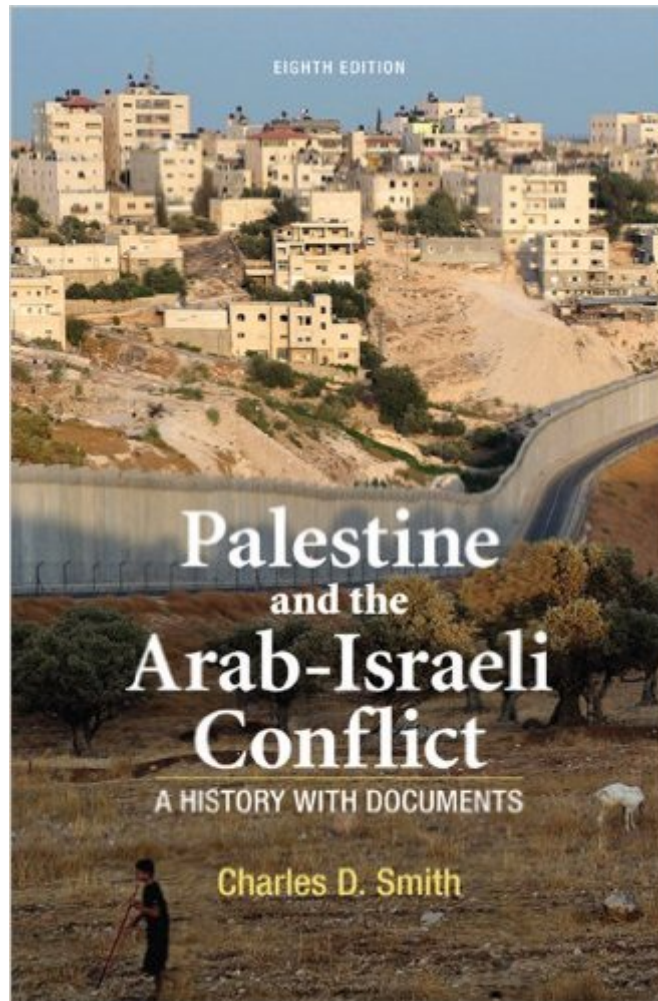


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Palestine And The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History With Documents



Synopsis

Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict provides a comprehensive, balanced, and accessible narrative of a complex historical topic. The narrative is supported by more than 40 primary documents that highlight perspectives from all sides of the struggle. Throughout the book, the author examines how underlying issues, group motives, religious and cross-cultural clashes, diplomacy and imperialism, and the arrival of the modern era shaped this volatile region. Map, photographs, chronologies, and discussion questions help facilitate student understanding. And a fully updated final chapter makes this the most current history of the topic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict" provides a concise and impartial history of Palestine, a topic which is the subject of much distortion and outright propaganda. Charles Smith, the author, relates the relevant historical facts, without judgemental commentary or extraneous information. His sources for significant facts are thoroughly documented in plentiful footnotes at the end of each chapter, which is probably why this book is often used as a text in university courses. Smith's factual and scholarly approach to such a sensitive topic contrasts sharply with that of Mitchell Bard, author of the ubiquitous, though propagandistic, "Idiot's Guide to the Middle East Conflict", which sets a new standard for one-sided apologetics. Bard has worked for AIPAC, a pro-Israel lobbying group, and one of the most effective and powerful lobbying groups in America. Some of the facts impartially reported by Smith invariably collide with popular misconceptions, which probably explains the defensive reactions reflected in some of the above polemical reviews of the book. In summary, if

you want to know what events have led to the current situation in Palestine, without judgement of either side, read Smith's book.

I had to read this book in a VERY brief time-frame (two weeks for a course I was taking), meaning that I approached it with apprehension from the start. I was relieved that this book was written in an accessible, relatively unbiased (slightly pro-Palestinian) manner. If you know absolutely nothing about the conflict itself, you have nothing to fear--people in my class who didn't know much about the conflict before still found it a good read. I also loved how many pictures there were in the book--makes it easier to see change over time.

Smith's book provides good detail on plenty of issues and benefits from attempting to be balanced even if he tends to blame Israel more for problems, especially in the last 30 years. Essentially, Smith tries to give the flavor of how each side sees events, rather than doing all the interpretation for you. While more entertaining, David Fromkin's 'A Peace to End all Peace' in no way treats the Palestinians as having legitimate interests, while Noam Chomsky's books have no empathy for the Israeli position. Another author with a fairly balanced perspective is Itamar Rabinovich.

Much ink and paper has been wasted on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by propagandists claiming to be historians, so it is a rare pleasure to actually come across a solid, objective and even-handed introductory text such as this that anyone can use to gain an insight into the root causes of this conflict. Unlike the author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Middle East Conflict", the author of this book has no personal involvement with either side, and he does not try to spin-doctor, excuse or justify the atrocities committed by either side in this long historical conflict.

I assure you that this book is nowhere near as dry as Smith's lectures, and I also assure you that he is extremely (almost insanely) knowledgeable on this topic. His lectures are unbiased and I find it hilarious that a lot of reviewers said that this book was biased against Israel. After reading this textbook, I think that only biased people would say that this book is biased (against their own side, of course) because Smith isn't afraid to point the finger at all sides. He clearly shows that the road to peace (or the lack thereof) is a two-way street. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to get into the nitty gritty of this topic (details are PLENTY in this text), as long as you're willing to consider that America (as well as others) hasn't exactly been an angel in the past.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is one that touches on so many painful emotions and biases that no book will be deemed fair or unbiased by all concerned. However, Smith's book does a very good job of attempting to be as close to unbiased as possible. It is often used as a textbook in upper-level modern Middle East history courses for just that reason. It is a good choice for someone who is new to the subject (other than the inescapable news coverage) and really wants to understand some of the issues involved throughout the history of the conflict. One of the strongest things about Smith's book is the inclusion of a number of primary sources. Other than disputing the translations, no one can deny that primary sources are as close to an honest look at history as we can get. Documents are included from many sides of the issues involved and no side comes out either squeakily clean nor as pure evil. Another strength I found, to differ with another reviewer's opinion, is that the book starts quite far back in the history of the conflict. As the mythologizing of the roots of Israel as a nation has been worked into the official stance of all sides, each for their own purposes, understanding what happened at the beginning is of utmost importance if you really want to grasp the subject. This is a good book that does its best with a difficult subject and goes into some depth in addition to excellent primary source material.

This book is an excellent, fact-filled history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. (But pity the poor undergraduate who is required to master its extensive content.) A major selling point of the book is its purported unbiased treatment of the conflict. You are free to reach that conclusion on your own, but I don't agree with it. I find the presentation noticeably biased in favor of the Palestinians. With this caveat, the book is still an important, worthwhile read.

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