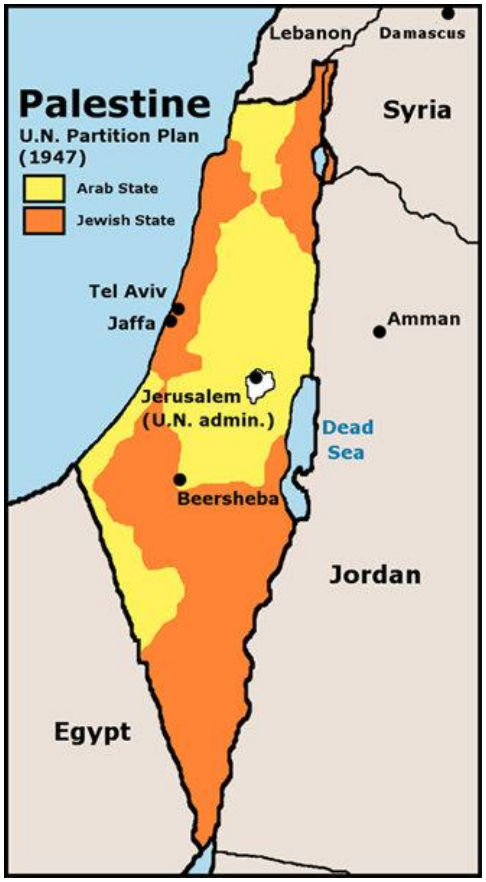
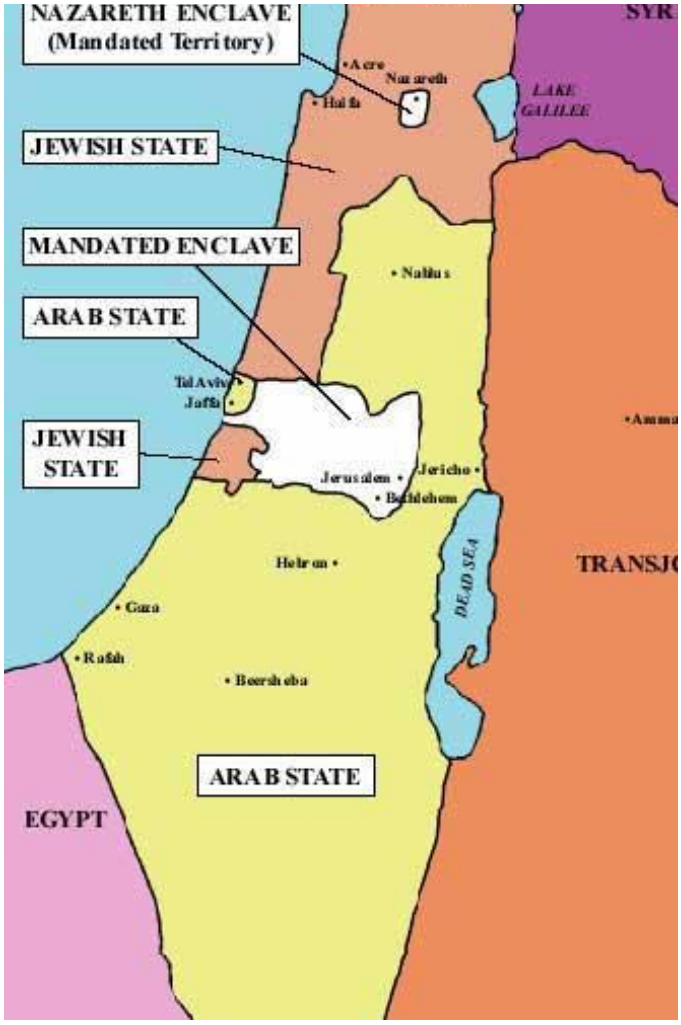
U.N. PARTITION PLAN (1947)

	Palestinians	Jews
Percentage of land awarded by the plan	44.5%	55.5%
Percentage of total population in 1947	>66.7%	<33%
Percentage of total land owned in 1947	93%	7%
Percentage of population in proposed Palestinian state	98.8%	1.2%
Percentage of population in proposed Jewish state	46.7%	53.3%
Percentage of population in proposed Jerusalem enclave	51.2%	48.8%



- The Nakba occurred primarily during 1948. In November 1947 the UN proposed a partition plan that split the land about equally between the Jewish and Arab sides. At this time Jews comprised one-third of the local population and owned about 5 percent of the land.
- According to the Partition Plan, the Jewish State would comprise fifty-five percent of Palestine, an area inhabited by 500,000 Jews and almost 400,000 Palestinians. About 700,000 people, including some 10,000 Jews, lived in the area intended for the Palestinian state. The plan intended to establish two states in the country, with a joint economy. The plan opposed forced relocation of populations, but its implementation would, in practice, have required uprooting hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Despite some opposition by the Jewish public, the Zionist leadership accepted the proposed partition because it represented the first official recognition of a Jewish state, and because it was the most generous proposal that had yet been offered.
- The leadership of the Palestinians and of the Arabs rejected the UN decision because although most of the inhabitants of the country were Palestinians, the borders of the state planned for them included less than fifty percent of the country's land, and they would lose most of the country's fertile regions. The Jews owned five percent of the land, and comprised one-third of the population; the Palestinians were being asked to relinquish most of the country's territory.

PEEL COMMISSION PLAN (1937)



- Ten years prior, in 1937, Ben Gurion supported the Peel Commission plan for partition. “Addressing the Zionist Executive, he again emphasized the tactical nature of his support for partition and his assumption that ‘after the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we will abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine.’ He reiterated this position in a letter to his son (*The Birth of Israel*, Simcha Flapan) in October 1937: ‘A Jewish state is not the end but the beginning… we shall organize a sophisticated defense force—and elite army. I have no doubt that our army will be one of the best in the world. And then I am sure that we will not be prevented from settling in other parts of the country, either through mutual understanding and agreement with our neighbors, or by other means.’”

ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

- The balance of forces when the war began: At the end of 1947, the Jewish Yishuv possessed independent government and economic institutions. At this stage of the fighting its forces were composed of the Haganah (a semi-regular military organization) and forces belonging to organizations that had seceded from the Haganah – Etzel and Lehi. Together they numbered about 40,000 fighters, who gradually became organized into army divisions. The Palestinian forces confronting them were usually irregular, fragmented and locally-based. The main force was called “the Holy War Army.” Volunteers from Arab countries were organized by the Arab League as the “Arab Army of Salvation.” The total number of fighters on the Palestinian side was about 10,000, most lacking military experience. The Arab Army of Salvation refused to coordinate operations with the Holy War Army.
- The UN passed the partition plan on November 29, 1947, and until March 1948, the violence between the two sides escalated. There was total chaos in many regions of the country, and the turmoil increased as war neared. Violence between adjacent localities, Jewish and Arab, became more frequent. The British relaxed their control over the country as the date for their departure drew near, and fighting intensified. Between December 1947, and March 1948, it took the form of a civil war. The populations lived near each other, the British were still in the country, and most of the Arab and Jewish forces operated as underground units. In the urban centers, and in particular in the mixed towns, the fighting became increasingly serious. Bombs were thrown and there was continual shooting. Palestinians in rural areas often succeeded in blocking the roads connecting centers of Jewish settlement, leading to retaliation by Jews.
- But there were also attempts to limit the degree of violence. For example, there were villages that attempted to reach non-aggression pacts with the Jewish forces, or those that opposed the entry of outside fighters. However, as the violence increased, so did mutual suspicion, even between localities, which in the past had positive relationships. While there were no deliberate attempts to expel residents at this stage, the growing violence, direct attacks, fear of attacks, and confusion in the towns resulted in the flight of some 75,000 Palestinians by February-March, 1948. Most of those who fled were members of the upper- and middle-class from Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, and a few from rural areas.

ADDITIONAL READING ON THE U.N. PARTITION PLAN

Below is an excerpt from Walid Khalidi's "Revisiting the UNGA Partition Resolution" (pp. 11-14), published in the Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, Autumn 1997. Possible discussion questions are included following the excerpt.

But how fair, balanced, pragmatic, and practicable was the UN 1947 partition plan itself? In gross terms, the partition resolution awarded 55.5 percent of the total area of Palestine to the Jews (most of whom were recent immigrants) who constituted less than a third of the population and who owned less than 7 percent of the land. The Palestinians, on the other hand, who made up over two thirds of the population and who owned the vast bulk of the land, were awarded 45.5 percent of the country of which they had enjoyed continuous possession for centuries.

Looking at the situation in greater detail, Palestine was a country of 27 million dunams (4 dunams = 1 acre). Its population in December 1946 was just under 2 million (1,972,000): 1,364,000 Palestinians and 608,000 Jews.[22] The partition plan divided the country into eight sections: three Jewish, three Palestinian, an international enclave (*corpus separatum*) including municipal Jerusalem and the surrounding villages, and an enclave for Jaffa that would be part of the Palestinian state, albeit completely surrounded by the Jewish state (see map 1).

In terms of population, the proposed Palestinian state would have 818,000 Palestinians (including the 71,000 Palestinians of the Jaffa enclave) and less than 10,000 Jews. The Jerusalem enclave would have 105,000 Palestinians and 100,000 Jews. The Jewish state would have about 499,000 Jews and about 438,000 Palestinians; if the Jaffa enclave, totally encapsulated by the Jewish state, had been included, as had originally been proposed by UNSCOP, the Palestinians would have outnumbered the Jews in the Jewish state as well (see map 2).[23]

At the time, one of the arguments frequently raised by the Jews against a unitary state in Palestine had been the unfairness of Arab majoritarian rule over the Jewish minority. Commenting on this argument, the Pakistani delegate at the UN, Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, remarked: "If it is unfair that 33 percent of the population of Palestine [the Jews in the proposed unitary state] should be subject to 67 percent of the population, is it less unfair that 46 percent of the population [the Arabs in the proposed Jewish state] should be subject to 54 percent?"[24]

Examining the three components of the envisaged Jewish state, one notes that in the southern sector—the Negev—the Jews numbered 1,020 whereas the Arabs numbered 103,820. In other words, the entire sector was given to 1

percent of its population. In the northern sector—Eastern Galilee—the Palestinian population was three times greater than the Jewish population (86,200 as against 28,750). Only in the central sector—the coastal plain between Tel Aviv and Haifa and the inner plain (Esdraleon) southeast of Haifa—did Jews constitute a majority (469,259 as against 235,760 Palestinians). But even here, the majority in terms of geographic spread was more apparent than real. Out of the total Jewish population in this section, 304,000, or almost 65 percent, lived in Haifa and Tel Aviv. Thus, the Jews constituted a minority in the countryside of this sector as well.[25]

In terms of land ownership, despite over seventy years of intensive, centrally organized and internationally financed colonization since the early 1880s, Jewish-owned land on the eve of the partition resolution amounted, according to Jewish sources, to 1,820,000 dunams, or less than 7 percent of the total land area of the country.[26] Now, at the bang of his gavel confirming the partition resolution, the president of the UNGA (Trygve Lie, no friend of the Palestinians) "awarded" the Jews 15,000,000 dunams for the Jewish state. Within the borders of this state, Jewish-owned land at its most inflated estimate amounted to 1,678,000 dunams, or 11.2 percent. And of the 7,500,000 dunams within that state considered cultivable (the rest being desert), only 1,500,000 dunams were Jewish owned, while the remainder—fully 80 percent—was owned by Palestinians. Meanwhile, of the 12,000,000 dunams "awarded" to the Palestinian state, only 130,000 dunams—about 1 percent—were owned by Jews. Finally, the international enclave of Jerusalem would contain 187,000 dunams, virtually all of which would be alienated from the Palestinian state, since the Jews owned only 12,500 dunams there.[27]

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But it was not only the extent of the land allotted to the Jewish state that was at issue. The *best* lands were incorporated within it—most of the fertile coastal plains (from Jaffa to Haifa) and *all* the interior plains (from Haifa to Baysan and Tiberias). These included almost all the citrus and cereal producing areas. Half of the former and the vast bulk of the latter were owned by Palestinians. Citrus was the main export crop of the country, accounting before World War II for 80 percent of the total value of exports. As to cereals, Palestine had already been obliged to import about half its grain.[28] Thus, alienating virtually the entire existing production areas of these two principal commodities from the predominantly agricultural Palestinian state-to-be constituted by itself an economic coup de grâce. As if this were not enough, a full 40 percent of Palestinian industry[29] and the major sources of the country's electrical supply fell within the envisaged Jewish state.

Except for West Jerusalem, which fell within the *corpus separatum* and only about a quarter of which was Jewish-owned,[30] the frontiers of the Jewish state were delineated so as to accommodate not only 99 percent of the Jewish colonies but also all Jewish urban or suburban agglomerations with

plenty of surrounding areas for natural growth and expansion. Not so with regard to their Palestinian-inhabited counterparts. Of a total of about 800 Palestinian villages, at least half fell within the Jewish state. Jaffa (Palestinian population: 71,000), the historical Palestinian port and vibrant center of Palestinian cultural and social life, was not only confined within its municipal borders, with no living space for any growth or development, but was also cut off from the orange groves that bore its name and were its principal source of economic livelihood. Haifa—the main port of Palestine, the terminal of the oil pipeline from Iraq, the petroleum depot for the entire country, seat of the most active entrepreneurial sectors of Palestinian society with almost as many Palestinians as Jews (71,000 as opposed to 74,000)—fell squarely within the Jewish state. Many of the other major Arab towns included in the Palestinian state—Tulkarm and Qalqilya, Lydda and Ramla, Gaza, Majdal, and Bersheeba—were left just inside its borders but without their most fertile lands or economic hinterlands. The upper reaches of the Jordan River, and therefore control of the major source of riverine water supply to the Palestinian state, were vested in the Jewish state. The whole of Lake Tiberias and its rich fishing industry, traditionally in Palestinian hands, was incorporated within the Jewish state. The bulk of the Palestinian state, restricted to the central highlands, was landlocked with no direct access to the Red Sea southward or the Mediterranean westward. Its two other coastal towns (apart from isolated Jaffa) had no harbors or port facilities. The only airport (near Lydda) in the country with international connections went to the Jewish state, leaving the Palestinian state with no air access either. To be sure, partition was postulated on the basis of an economic union between the two states, but in the absence of a political agreement on the principles either of partition or an economic union, it was fatuous and extraordinarily irresponsible to tie the one to the other.

Questions for discussion:

- What's the relationship between partition and Nakba?
- What were the stories/histories of partition you had already heard? What kind of public relations functions did they serve?
- How did partition serve the interest of the emerging state of Israel?
- Do you agree that the plan was disproportionately favorable to the Jews?
- If so, why would the UN have created such a plan?
- Would a fairer division have worked?