

The British Mandate *High Commissioner* Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: Why were the Jews disappointed in Herbert Samuel, the first Jewish High Commissioner for Palestine?

Materials:

- High Commissioner PowerPoint
- *High Commissioner* Video
- Copies of *Documents A, B, C, D, E, F*.

Plan of Instruction:

The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.

1. Pass out Documents A, B, C, D, E, F.
2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:
 - Slide: Good Intentions: *When the British Government brings forth the Balfour Declaration on November 2nd, 1917, it does so with the best of intentions. British leaders are convinced of the justice of the Zionist cause. A great part of the credit goes to Dr. Chaim Weizmann, a brilliant chemist who tirelessly lobbies British high officials on behalf of Zionism. Also worth noting is that the majority of the members of the British Cabinet are raised with a favorable view of Jews thanks to their evangelical upbringing. These included, most importantly, the prime minister, David Lloyd George, and Arthur Balfour, the foreign secretary.*

In 1922, when Balfour publicly defends the declaration, he explains his motives: "Surely, it is in order that we may send a message to every land where the Jewish race has been scattered, a message that will tell them that Christendom is not oblivious of their faith, is not unmindful of the service they have rendered to the great religions of the world, and most of all to the religion that the majority of Your Lordships' house profess, and that we desire to the best of our ability to give them the opportunity of developing in peace and quietness under British rule, those great gifts which hitherto they have been compelled to bring to fruition in countries which know not their language and belong not to their race. That is the ideal which I desire to see accomplished, that is the aim which lay at the root of the policy I am trying to defend..."

 - Slide: Military Administration: *Unfortunately, reality on the ground does not harmonize with the high-minded motives of the British government.*

Beginning in 1918, the British military government ignores the Balfour Declaration and follows an anti-Zionist line. British military officers even encourage the Arabs to turn to violence, hoping that riots will compel the British government to abandon its pro-Zionist policy. Chief among these officers is Colonel Harry Bertie Waters-Taylor, chief of staff to Major-General Louis Bols, a prominent member of Commanding Officer Edmund Allenby's staff and for a time commander of the military government in Palestine. Waters-Taylor wants a "United Syria", with Prince Faisal, the son of Sharif of Mecca, controlling Palestine. He is in touch with Faisal and a local Arab leader Haj Amin El-Husseini. Other prominent anti-Zionist officers include Col. Ronald Storrs, military governor of Jerusalem, Col. Vivien Gabriel and General Philip Charles Palin, among many others.

- Slide: Richard Meinertzhagen: *There are a few pro-Zionists in the military administration. Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, an intelligence officer on Gen. Edmund Allenby's staff, is unusual in that he supports Zionism. If not for him, the actions of people like Waters-Taylor would likely never have come to light. Meinertzhagen reveals them in his diary which he publishes 40 years after the fact. He does report them at the time to his superiors. However, no action is taken to discipline Waters-Taylor.*
- Slide: 1920 Jerusalem Riots: *On March 31, 1920, the Wednesday before Easter, Col. Waters-Taylor urges Haj Amin El-Husseni to take advantage of the upcoming Nebi Musa Festival, an Arab celebration that falls on Easter, to demonstrate to the world that the Arabs of Palestine will never acquiesce to Jewish domination in Palestine. On Sunday, April 4th, the Arabs launch their attack. Crying "The government is with us" the Arabs pillage the Old City of Jerusalem. Five Jews are killed and more wounded.*

That the riots don't lead to a greater massacre is due to the efforts of the Haganah, founded and led by Vladimir "Ze'ev" Jabotinsky, father of the Jewish Legion. He and his men are promptly arrested, however, charged with illegal weapons possession and given extremely harsh sentences by a military court – 3 years imprisonment for the men, 15 years hard labor for Jabotinsky. The severe sentences draw an international outcry.

- Slide: A Civil Administration: *The British government, still sympathetic to Zionism, puts an end to the military administration. Demonstrating its good intentions, the government appoints British politician Herbert Samuel as the civil administration's first High Commissioner for Palestine.*

Highly unusual for an upper-class British Jew, Samuel is a Zionist. The Jews are delighted. It is said at the time, 'A Jew will once again occupy the seat of King David.' Samuel reaches Palestine on June 30, 1920.

- Slide: General Amnesty: *Samuel's first official act as High Commissioner is to amnesty Jabotinsky and his men. But, in a move that shocks the Jewish community, Samuel also pardons two Arab who are guilty of actual crimes, having taken part in the violence against Jews. Thus, Samuel makes no distinction between guilty and innocent.*
- Slide: Anti-Zionists Kept On: *Samuel's next major blunder is to keep in place members of the previous anti-Zionist military administration, including Ronald Storrs, Governor of Jerusalem. What makes this decision even more perplexing is that Samuel in 1919 had gone to the Foreign Office to complain about Storrs' anti-Jewish behavior.*

Storrs has his close friend, Ernest T. Richmond, appointed head of the administration's Political Section under Samuel in October, 1920. A professional architect, not a political officer, Richmond is violently opposed to a Jewish national home in Palestine. Samuel makes Richmond his official "channel of communication" with the Muslim community. Richmond starts to work closely with Haj Amin El-Husseini, who has returned to Jerusalem after fleeing to escape arrest by the British for his role in the Arab riots. Haj Amin had been sentenced to 10 years by the British, but Samuel amnesties him.

- Slide: Grand Mufti of Jerusalem: *Storrs and Richmond successfully lobby to have Haj Amin El-Husseini made Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921. This will prove to be Samuel's most destructive move by far.*

When Col. Meinertzhagen, who is no longer part of the Palestine administration, learns of Haj Amin's installation as the Grand Mufti, he writes: "His appointment is sheer madness. I am particularly annoyed about this as before I left Palestine in 1920 I left a memorandum with Samuel warning him of appointing the man. Haj Amin is very ambitious, quite unscrupulous and grossly dishonest; sooner or later his appointment will be bitterly regretted by us."

In 1921, Haj Amin el-Husseini is placed in charge of the Supreme Muslim Council, an institution created by the British, which exerts almost complete control over Muslim schools, religious courts and their funding. From this perch, as one historian notes, Haj Amin el-Husseini, "spearheaded the anti-Zionist agitation and organization in the Arab community, suppressing by intimidation and violence any manifestation of Arab rapprochement with Zionism, and ultimately capped his career by collaborating in Hitler's campaign for the extermination of the Jewish people."

- Slide: Jaffa Riots: *Although the Mufti promises Samuel he will be “devoted to tranquility,” he instigates Arab riots. On May, 1st, 1921, Arabs riot in Jaffa and attack Jewish villages and towns throughout the country. Ninety five are killed and 219 seriously wounded.*
- Slide: Appeasement: *Samuel’s response is virtually identical to that of the military administration during the Jerusalem riots the year before. In a sense, this is because in some ways the military administration is still in charge, with Samuel deferring to their views. As a Zionist Executive memorandum submitted to British leaders on July 22, 1921 sums up: “Every earnest effort to insure respect of public order is handicapped by a military obstruction which the highest civil authority in Palestine cannot control ... Thus, on every step, in every way, the military authorities, acting under headquarters whose tendency with regard to Palestine was implicitly repudiated by H.M. Government a year ago, obstruct and paralyze the civil administration in Palestine, render it helpless and powerless and force it into an attitude of compromise with violence and of concession to subversive propaganda.”*

The result: Jews who acted in self-defense are arrested, and the instigators of the riots go free. Samuel’s worst act is to bow to the Arab demand that Jewish immigration be halted. One historian relates: “The mourning Jewish community was horror-struck by Samuel’s decision to punish the victims: his surrender to the preeminent demand of the Arab agitators – to close the gates of Palestine to Jews.” The order is lifted the following month, but not before hundreds of Jewish immigrants are turned back at the shores of Palestine.

- Slide: The Churchill White Paper: *In response to the Jaffa riots, Winston Churchill, who is Colonial Secretary, requests a White Paper be drafted. (A White Paper is simply a term for an official government report.) Samuel is the author of what becomes the Churchill White Paper of 1922. Historian Walter Laqueur writes, “Its aim was to appease both the Arabs and the opposition in Westminster, made up largely of right-wing Tories. It stated that His Majesty’s government had no intention of Palestine becoming ‘as Jewish as England is English’ and that the special position of the Zionist executive did not entitle it to share in any degree in the government of the country.”*

The White Paper proposes limiting Jewish immigration to “whatever may be the economic capacity of the country.” ‘Economic capacity’ is a squishy term that will be used in the future as a pretext to limit Jewish immigration.

It also calls for the establishment of a Legislative Council with 10 official members appointed by the High Commissioner and 12 elected members. Since the Arabs are a majority, this would give them control of decisions relating to the future of the country.

- Slide: Understanding Samuel: *In 1925, Samuel resigns from his post. But the damage has been done. Zionist leader Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky writes: “The years of Mr. Samuel in Eretz Israel constitute one of the most difficult pages not only in the history of Zionism but in the whole of Jewish history.”*

Why did Samuel, a Jew and a Zionist, cause so much damage to his own cause? A combination of factors helps to explain Samuel’s actions. First, he is eager to show that, though a Jew, he can be fair to all sections of the population. Second, Samuel lacked strength of character. Prime Minister Lloyd George tells Weizmann: “Samuel is cowardly and weak, and I know him only too well.” Weizmann himself witnesses how fearful Samuel is of the Arabs.

- Slide: 1929 Riots: *Haj Amin El-Husseini remains Mufti. He ramps up his incitement against Jews, taking advantage of Muslim religious sentiment. As one historian put it, “The Arabs launched a campaign of propaganda within the Arab community (and throughout the Muslim world) exploiting the religious theme: they charged the Zionists with plotting to take away the Muslim Holy places.”*

Their religious fervor raised to a fever pitch, the Arabs again riot. Beginning on August 23rd, 1929, a day chosen by the Mufti, the country is swept by Arab violence for eight days. Hebron and Safed are worst hit. Pierre Van Paassen, a journalist who is in Palestine at the time, describes the scene in Hebron, where 67 Jews are murdered. “The rooms looked like a slaughterhouse ... the blood stood in a huge pool on the slightly sagging stone floor ... Clocks, crockery, tables and windows had been smashed to smithereens. ... not a single article had been left intact except a large black-and-white photograph of Dr. Theodore Herzl, the founder of political Zionism. Around the picture’s frame the murderers had draped the blood-drenched underwear of a woman.” 133 Jews are killed in total throughout the land.

- Slide: Passfield White Paper: *The Passfield White Paper is issued in October 1930 after a commission is sent to investigate. The cycle – Arab violence followed by a commission sent out to investigate followed by a White Paper punishing the Jews – is a pattern that will repeat throughout the British Mandate.*

Like the Churchill White Paper of 1922 the Passfield White Paper calls for limiting Jewish immigration with the new twist that it also limits land sales to Jews. And most dangerous to Jewish aspirations, it again recommends a Legislative Council, with the same makeup as that proposed in the Churchill White Paper – 10 official members and 12 elected ones, guaranteeing an Arab majority. Simply put, the White Paper, if implemented, will spell the end of the Jewish National Home.

In addition the Passfield White Paper is decidedly anti-Jewish in tone. Historian Howard Sachar writes, “The Passfield White Paper went much further than the Churchill White Paper of 1922, for it appeared to repudiate the very purpose of the Balfour Declaration and the terms of the San Remo award. It foreshadowed serious immigration restrictions and threatened the Jews with an embargo on additional purchases of land. More significantly yet, it commented upon the work of the Jews in Palestine in disparaging terms, omitting altogether to credit the Zionists for the benefits they had conferred upon the country and all its peoples.”

3. Play video: High Commissioner

Introduce inquiry question: Why were the Jews disappointed in Herbert Samuel, the first Jewish High Commissioner for Palestine?

4. Whole class discussion:

- The Zionist leadership and the Yishuv as a whole placed high hopes in Samuel which were shattered. Do you think they should have foreseen that a Jewish high commissioner would feel under special pressure in relation to the Arabs?
- After the 1921 Jaffa riots, Samuel agreed to the Arab demand to stop Jewish immigration. What do you think the right response would have been?
- The Zionists were embarrassed to point out publicly that Samuel was a disaster as High Commissioner because he was a Jew. Was their silence a mistake?
- What explains Britain’s steady retreat from its obligations in the Balfour Declaration and Mandate for Palestine?
- Appeasement versus confrontation seems to be a permanent difficult choice leaders face. The British chose to appease the Arabs. The Jews, under Weizmann’s leadership, chose to appease the British. What are the pros and cons of appeasement v. confrontation?

5. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

Document A: “Lone Wolf”, Shmuel Katz (1996)

Yet there were those who knew there was cause for misgivings. Samuel had after all held office as British home secretary, and something could be learned from his performance there. The weekly *Spectator* expressed doubts about his capacity as an administrator. It described him as “timid and weak-hearted.” The *Jewish Chronicle*, though it welcomed his appointment with great enthusiasm, recalled and warned Samuel against a significant failing:

So anxious was Mr. Samuel when he was Home Secretary to show that he did not favor his fellow Jews that, as it fell to our lot to point out at the time on more than one occasion ... he went out of his way where Jews were involved to act rather to their prejudice than in strict justice.

Another keen observer who did not receive the appointment with unmixed pleasure was the novelist Israel Zangwill. He knew, he later revealed, “what a weak man” Samuel was and wrote to him urgently before he went out to Palestine “that the line of least resistance was not the right line for a great people.”

Source: Lone Wolf Vol. 1, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p. 667-668.

Document B: “*Diary Entry*”, Col. Richard Meinertzhagen (April 27, 1921)

When in the Colonial Office I heard that Herbert Samuel had appointed Haj Amin al Husseini as Mufti of Jerusalem. His predecessor died last February. I had trouble with the man when I was in Jerusalem for with the connivance of Ronald Storrs [Military Governor of Jerusalem] and [Col.] Waters-Taylor [financial adviser to the Palestine administration] he was conducting violent anti-Zionist propaganda and during the Easter riots of 1920 he delivered incendiary speeches not only against the Jews but against the British, fled to Transjordan and was sentenced during his absence to ten years imprisonment, but later returned to Jerusalem on receiving an amnesty; I had much documentary evidence against Storrs and Waters-Taylor proving up to the hilt that he was receiving encouragement from these two highly placed officials, but [Military High Commissioner Edmund] Allenby declined to use it. And now he is in a position where he can do untold harm to Zionism and to the British; he hates both Jews and British. His appointment is sheer madness. I am particularly annoyed about this as before I left Palestine in 1920, I left a memorandum with Samuel warning him of appointing the man when it was obvious his predecessor was in failing health and also warning him that Storrs would press for his appointment purely on the grounds of hostility to Zionism.

Haj Amin is a strong character and if given a chance could do great harm; he is very ambitious, quite unscrupulous and grossly dishonest; sooner or later his appointment will be bitterly regretted by us.

Source: Middle East Diary 1917-1956, Col. Richard Meinertzhagen, Thomas Yoseloff Publisher, New York, 1959, p. 97.

**Document C: “*Trial and Error*”, Chaim Weizmann
(1949)**

Herbert Samuel had been High Commissioner for about a year, but there was already noticeable, in the Congress discussions, the beginnings of the disappointment, and even bitterness, which his regime was to inspire. I myself felt that he had not had a real chance yet, but three things had happened which gave rise to uneasiness.

First there had been his handling of the riots of May 1921, which I have already mentioned. Desirous of starting his work as peaceably as possible, Samuel’s reaction to the riots had been to stop immigration, and this decision had been announced at a gathering of Arab notables in Ramleh. Both the decision, and the form of its announcement, came as a severe shock to Jews everywhere. Immigrants already within sight of the shores of Palestine were not allowed to land.

Source: Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann, Chaim Weizmann, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1949, p. 275.

Document D: “Lone Wolf”, Shmuel Katz (1996)

[Herbert Samuel] needed no briefing on the known enemies of Zionism and the Balfour Declaration. He knew them all. He was certainly acutely aware of the experience of the Jewish community with those officials, and he was privy to all the information in the hands of the Zionist Organization on the subject. He himself had been so outraged by the anti-Jewish behavior of the most senior of them, Ronald Storrs, governor of Jerusalem, that already in 1919 he had gone to Sir Ronald Graham in the Foreign Office to complain about him.

Now, without even a word of admonition, he reinstated him as governor of Jerusalem – eliciting from an astonished Storrs fulsome phrases of thanks for the trust and confidence Samuel was reposing in him. Storrs, however, a resourceful and subtle man, at once exploited the advantageous relationship he was being granted by this timid Jewish chief. ...

To Storrs and indeed to all the echelons of the administration, Samuel’s acts in the first weeks of his office made it plain that he would not enforce the principle that servants of His Majesty’s Government were expected to act in harmony with the government’s policy. On the contrary, hostility to Zionism and anti-Jewish conduct would be no bar to the confidence of superiors or, presumably, to promotion. ...

A post that had to be filled was that of political advisor. The Foreign Office official recommended by [Wyndham] Deedes was found to be unavailable; whereupon Storrs instantly proposed to Samuel the appointment of one Earnest Tatham Richmond.

Richmond was not a political officer; he was an architect by profession, and his only experience in public service was in the field of restoration of ancient buildings. He was, however, an old friend of Storrs; they had shared an apartment in Egypt, and in Jerusalem they again shared a house. Samuel promptly recommended Richmond’s appointment to the Foreign Office, and by October 1920, he was installed in the post.

Richmond lost no time in promoting his ideas ...

The year after his appointment, Richmond was involved in a quarrel with the Colonial Office over his status; and the Colonial Office officials reacted brusquely by urging that this was an excellent opportunity of getting rid of him – on the grounds both of professional inadequacy and of his hostility to Zionism, to the Balfour Declaration and to Jews in general. Samuel, however, defended him stoutly as being of great value in his relations with the Arab community; and it was only late in 1923 that he finally admitted, after reading a characteristically virulent memorandum composed by Richmond, that he found it “difficult for Richmond to remain in the administration.”

When Richmond finally resigned, after playing a major role, together with Storrs, in shaping Samuel’s policy during the first three-and-a-half crucial years of the mandate, he wrote Samuel a letter in which he declared defiantly that the Zionist Commission, the Middle Eastern Department of the Colonial Office and Samuel’s administration were “dominated and inspired by a spirit which I can only regard as evil” and that his opposition to these policies was “not merely political, but moral or even religious.”

Source: Lone Wolf Vol. 1, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p. 716-718.

Document E: “A History of Zionism”, Walter Laqueur (1972)

But there was another aspect to the 1922 White Paper. While not explicitly opposing the idea of a Jewish state, it ‘redeemed the Balfour promise in depreciated currency’, to quote a contemporary British source. Its aim was to appease both the Arabs and the opposition in Westminster, made up largely of right-wing Tories. It stated that His Majesty’s government had no intention of Palestine becoming ‘as Jewish as England is English’ and that the special position of the Zionist executive did not entitle it to share in any degree in the government of the country. Immigration, moreover, was not to exceed the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals. Churchill promised that the mandatory government would move towards representative institutions and self-government. A legislative council with a majority of elected members was to be set up immediately, but full self-government was a long way off; ‘Our children’s children will have passed away before this is completed.’ Lastly, and almost unnoticed at the time, Transjordan was separated from Palestine and became a semi-independent state under Emir Abdullah.

The White Paper placated the opposition at home, but the Arabs were not appeased, and continued to refuse to cooperate with the mandatory authorities.

Source: A History of Zionism, Walter Laqueur, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1972, p. 454-455.

Document F: “A History of Israel”, Howard M. Sachar (1976)

“It must be realized once and for all,” declared the [Passfield] White Paper, “that it is useless for Jewish leaders ... to press His Majesty’s Government to conform to their policy in regard ... to immigration and land, to the aspirations of the more uncompromising sections of Zionist opinion. That would be to ignore the equally important duty of the Mandatory Power towards the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine.” While observing that “it is equally useless for Arab leaders to maintain their demands for [majority rule],” the document proceeded to skewer virtually every Zionist hope for the future. “There remains no margin of land available for agricultural settlement by the new immigrants,” it asserted, “with the exception of such undeveloped lands as the various Jewish agencies hold in reserve.” Jewish immigration must be suspended, too, as long as extensive unemployment in Palestine continued.

The Passfield White Paper went much further than the Churchill White Paper of 1922, for it appeared to repudiate the very purpose of the Balfour Declaration and the terms of the San Remo award. It foreshadowed serious immigration restrictions and threatened the Jews with an embargo on additional purchases of land. More significantly yet, it commented upon the work of the Jews in Palestine in disparaging terms, omitting altogether to credit the Zionists for the benefits they had conferred upon the country and all its peoples.

Vocabulary

San Remo: The San Remo Conference where Allied Powers agreed to put Palestine under British Mandatory rule during discussions held in San Remo, Italy in April 1920.

Source: A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time, Howard M. Sachar, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1976, p. 176-177.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

1. Why are the Jews at first hopeful when Herbert Samuel is named the High Commissioner of Palestine?
2. What is Samuel's response to the 1921 Jaffa riots?
3. What were the similarities and what were the differences between the Churchill White Paper and the Passfield White Paper?

In the space below answer the following: *Why were the Jews disappointed in Herbert Samuel, the first Jewish High Commissioner for Palestine?*