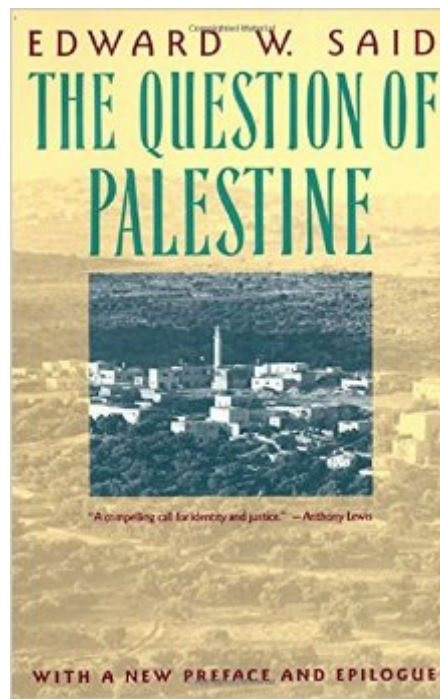


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The Question Of Palestine



Synopsis

Still a basic and indispensable account of the Palestinian question, updated to include the most recent developments in the Middle East- from the intifada to the Gulf war to the historic peace conference in Madrid.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

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Customer Reviews

The cover of my book has a quote from the NY Times that says books like this one need to be "read in the hope that understanding will provide a better chance of survival." That quote couldn't be more accurate. The Question of Palestine is a cry for understanding of Arab culture and history, and subsequently a more balanced view of the conflict today (or 1979, when it was published. But that doesn't matter because it is still applicable today). The Q of Palestine is divided into two main sections, the history of the ignorance of Araba culture and the true nature of Zionism, and how the Palestinians are mobilizing today. Said describes Zionism as both a colonial adventure with little regard for the Arab natives, and the subsequent effort to create facts to make it more acceptable. Said does a remarkable job of describing how the U.S., Israel and the rest of the western world have misperceived the entire conflict because we see the conflict through a western lens. Through this lens, the Arabs are for the most part, innocently ignored. His attempt, then, is to try and give a view that is NOT through this western lens. He shows that yes, contrary to popular opinion, the Arabs DO have a history and culture that have both been destroyed by Zionists. He shows that no, contrary to popular opinion, they will not just get up and leave after being hit on the head enough

times. They have a very strong nationalistic pride, and it will only get stronger. I highly recommend this book. It is definitely not aimed at filling the niche of "historically objective, comprehensive history of the conflict" (for that see Benny Morris's "Righteous Victims"). So if you are new to the subject, probably start with something else.

This book is a very considered and informative guide to Palestine and its colonisation. For me, though, this book perhaps spends too much time on the ideology of Zionism rather than spelling out some of the basic facts of dispossession and oppression. Still, it is salutary to be reminded of Zionism's ideological origins in European Romantic nationalism, with its notions of "People" and "Homeland" (which very much took root of course in Germany - the crucible of much Zionism). It is useful too to be reminded how the rhetoric of Zionism is uncannily similar to other colonialist rhetoric, in particular the notion of the "land without a people". That is to say, as Said points out, colonial powers have ALWAYS attempted to justify their settlements, their forcible dispossession of indigenous peoples by insisting that the target land was barren or underdeveloped, that the people currently residing there were in no fit state to look after the land - and so on and so on. We can see from Said's book that Zionism, far from being some unique self-expression of "Jewish Destiny" is wholly consistent with and emerges out of this larger intellectual tradition. Ultimately, the Zionists who settled in Palestine were European nationalists. What is also very illuminating here, is that Said reveals just how candid Zionist politicians and military leaders/ agitators were about their aims and objectives and about the dispossession of the native Palestinian population. Figures such as Moshe Dayan, the book shows, were perfectly upfront about this being an Arab country which they - the Zionists - were taking over. Said quotes Dayan as follows: "We came to this country which was already populated by Arabs, and we are establishing a Hebrew, that is Jewish state here.."

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