



## Background Essay on Harry S. Truman and the Recognition of Israel

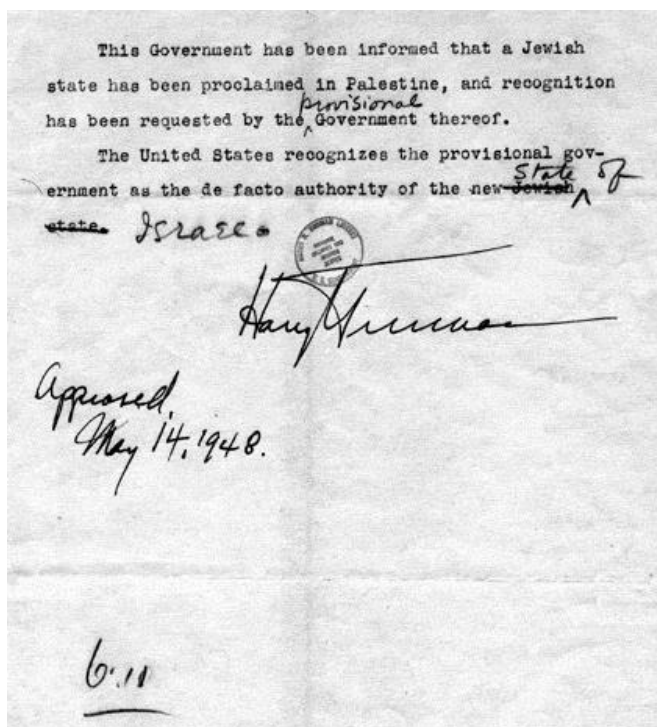
In 1917, the **Balfour Declaration** transferred rule of the middle-eastern region known as Palestine to the British Empire as a temporary national home for Jewish people. Between 1917 and 1948, Palestine was inhabited by Jewish immigrants who supported the idea of **Zionism** (the right of the Jewish people to return to the Holy Land) and Arab-speaking Muslims and Christians who had occupied the land for many centuries. Tension began to form between the Arab Palestinians and the Jewish immigrants as both groups tried to take claim over the same portions of religiously-significant land.

In 1948, the Balfour Declaration was scheduled to expire and Great Britain would no longer rule Palestine. The question over what to do with the tumultuous country was turned over to the United Nations who would eventually decide to create the new country of **Israel**, specifically as a promised homeland for Jewish people. The new country was to be located across the various holy locations in which many events of the Old Testament occurred and, according to the Bible, was promised to the Jewish people by God.

U.S. President Harry Truman was the first world leader to officially recognize Israel as a legitimate Jewish state on May 14, 1948, only eleven minutes after its creation. His decision came after much discussion and advice from the White House staff who had differing viewpoints. Some advisors felt that creating a Jewish state was the only proper response to the holocaust and would benefit American interests. Others took the opposite view, concerned about that the creation of a Jewish state would create more conflict in an already tumultuous region.



President Harry S. Truman with Israel's First President, Dr. Chaim Weizmann. May 25.



Official announcement of the United States recognition of the new government of Israel signed by President Harry S. Truman, May 14, 1948.

### Key Question

Based on the following documents, would you have recognized Israel as a new country in 1948? Why or why not?



## Maps of Palestine and Surrounding Areas, before and after 1948

Truman Presidential  
Museum & Library



Source 1

Memo to David Niles (administrative assistant to President Truman) from Hadley Cantril (researcher), "Public Opinion Toward Creation of Jewish State in Palestine," April 4, 1945 (3 pages).

MEMORANDUM

April 4, 1945.

TO: DAVID NILES

FROM: HADLEY CANTRIL

SUBJECT: PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD CREATION OF JEWISH STATE IN PALESTINE.

I must admit at the beginning that the results on the questions we asked on this subject surprise me considerably. The subject is one where variations in the wording of questions would undoubtedly produce significant differences in percentages. However, there is every reason to assume that the results reported here are reliable for the particular questions asked.

Results

(The precise questions asked and the percentages obtained are appended.)

1. About half the total population says they have heard or read about the idea of setting up a Jewish state in Palestine.
2. Of those who have opinions as to whether or not it is a good idea to set up a Jewish state in Palestine, sentiment is about three to one in favor of establishing such a state.
3. Of those who favor the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, the great majority feel that the United States Government should use its influence in getting such a state established.
4. Over half the adults in this country say that the Jews have too much power and influence in the United States.
5. Whether or not people think Jews have too much power and influence in this country seems completely unrelated to opinion concerning the establishment of a Jewish state. In other words, there does not seem to be evidence for what I had thought might be true, that people most prejudiced against the Jews would be most in favor of a Jewish state.
6. There is no significant difference of opinion concerning the establishment of a Jewish state between those who have or have not heard of the idea previous to the explanation of the problem given on the ballot.
7. There is no significant difference between Catholics and Protestants on the idea of establishing a Jewish state. The great majority of both are in favor of it.

(Survey made the last week of March, 1945.)

N5.195



Questions

"Have you heard or read about the idea of setting up a Jewish state in Palestine?"

Yes	53%
No	47
	<u>100%</u>

"The people who are urging the creation of a Jewish state believe it is the best way to save the lives of many European Jews persecuted and made homeless by the Nazis. They say that if the Jews have a national homeland they will be better able to help themselves. People opposed to the plan point out that there are already more Arabs than Jews in Palestine; that the Arabs do not want the Jews in Palestine and that open conflict would probably break out. They say that anyway the creation of a Jewish state is not the best way to help the Jews.

How do you feel about it -- do you favor or oppose the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine?"

Favor	59%
Oppose	19
No opinion	22
	<u>100%</u>

If "Favor" ask:

"Do you think the United States Government should or should not use its influence in trying to get a Jewish state established in Palestine?"

Should	42%
Should not	14
No opinion	3
	<u>59%</u>

"Do you think the Jews have too much power and influence in this country?"

Yes	57%
No	30
No opinion	13
	<u>100%</u>

By Religion

"How do you feel about it -- do you favor or oppose the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine?"

	<u>Catholics</u>	<u>Protestants</u>
Favor	63%	57%
Oppose	21	20
No opinion	16	23
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

**Historical Thinking Questions**

**Source 1:**

<b>Sourcing:</b> Why was this document created?	
<b>Contextualization:</b> How would the results be similar/different if other groups were asked?	
<b>Corroboration:</b> How does this document support/connect to the others?	
<b>Close Reading:</b> What evidence does the author use?	

**Source 2**

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*Letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, April 5, 1945 (1 page).*

GREAT AND GOODFRIEND:

I have received the communication which Your Majesty sent me under date of March 10, 1945, in which you refer to the question of Palestine and to the continuing interest of the Arabs in current developments affecting that country.

I am gratified that Your Majesty took this occasion to bring your views on this question to my attention and I have given the most careful attention to the statements which you make in your letter. I am also mindful of the memorable conversation which we had not so long ago and in the course of which I had an opportunity to obtain so vivid an impression of Your Majesty's sentiments on this question.

Your Majesty will recall that on previous occasions I communicated to you the attitude of the American Government toward Palestine and made clear our desire that no decision be taken with respect to the basic situation in that country without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews. Your Majesty will also doubtless recall that during our recent conversation I assured you that I would take no action, in my capacity as Chief of the Executive Branch of this Government, which might prove hostile to the Arab people.

It gives me pleasure to renew to Your Majesty the assurances which you have previously received regarding the attitude of my Government and my own, as Chief Executive, with regard to the question of Palestine and to inform you that the policy of this Government in this respect is unchanged.

I desire also at this time to send you my best wishes for Your Majesty's continued good health and for the welfare of your people.

Your Good Friend,

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
His Majesty  
ABDUL AZIZ IBN ABDUR RAHMAN AL FAISAL AL SAUD  
King of Saudi Arabia  
Riyadh

## Historical Thinking Questions

### Source 2:

<p><b>Sourcing:</b> What is the purpose of this document?</p>	
<p><b>Contextualization:</b> What is the significance of the date and audience?</p>	
<p><b>Corroboration:</b> Does this document support the others?</p>	
<p><b>Close Reading:</b> Identify what the author is claiming.</p>	

Circle: IN FAVOR or AGAINST?

Source 3

Memo from Edward Stettinius, Jr. (U.S. Secretary of State) to President Harry S. Truman, April 18, 1945.  
President's Secretary's Files, Truman Papers (1 page).

*Palestine*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

April 18, 1945

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

My dear Mr. President:

It is very likely that efforts will be made by some of the Zionist leaders to obtain from you at an early date some commitments in favor of the Zionist program which is pressing for unlimited Jewish immigration into Palestine and the establishment there of a Jewish state.

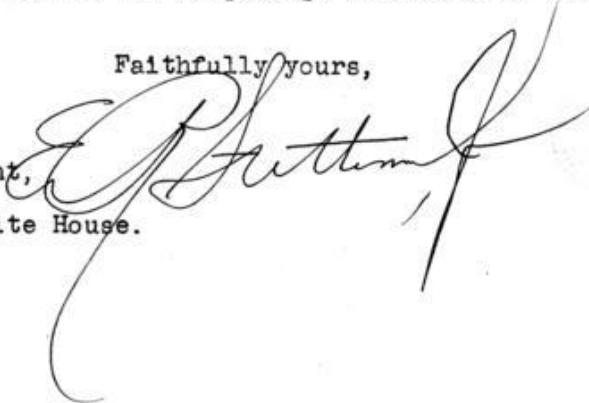
As you are aware, the Government and people of the United States have every sympathy for the persecuted Jews of Europe and are doing all in their power to relieve their suffering. The question of Palestine is, however, a highly complex one and involves questions which go far beyond the plight of the Jews of Europe. If this question shall come up, therefore, before you in the form of a request to make a public statement on the matter, I believe you would probably want to call for full and detailed information on the subject before taking any particular position in the premises. I should be very glad, therefore, to hold myself in readiness to furnish you with background information on this subject any time you may desire.

There is continual tenseness in the situation in the Near East largely as a result of the Palestine question and as we have interests in that area which are vital to the United States, we feel that this whole subject is one that should be handled with the greatest care and with a view to the long-range interests of this country.

Faithfully yours,

The President,

The White House.





## Historical Thinking Questions

### Source 3:

<b>Sourcing:</b> Why was this document written?	
<b>Contextualization:</b> When was it created?	
<b>Corroboration:</b> Does this document support the others?	
<b>Close Reading:</b> What is the author's purpose?	

**Source 4**

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*Report by Earl G. Harrison (U.S. Representative on the Intergovernmental Commission on Refugees) on Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-War Europe, August/September 1945 (1 page).*

MY DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

Pursuant to your letter of June 22, 1945, I have the honor to present to you a partial report upon my recent mission to Europe to inquire into (1) the conditions under which displaced persons and particularly those who may be stateless or non-repatriable are at present living, especially in Germany and Austria, (2) the needs of such persons, (3) how those needs are being met at present by the military authorities, the governments of residence and international and private relief bodies, and (4) the views of the possibly non-repatriable persons as to their future destinations.

My instructions were to give particular attention to the problems, needs and views of the Jewish refugees among the displaced people, especially in Germany and Austria. The report, particularly this partial report, accordingly deals in the main with that group.

...

(4) With a few notable exceptions, nothing in the way of a program of activity or organized effort toward rehabilitation has been inaugurated and the internees, for they are literally such, have little to do except to dwell upon their plight, the uncertainty of their future and, what is more unfortunate, to draw comparisons between their treatment "under the Germans" and "in liberation." Beyond knowing that they are no longer in danger of the gas chambers, torture, and other forms of violent death, they see-and there is-little change. The morale of those who are either stateless or who do not wish to return to their countries of nationality is very low.

...

In conclusion, I wish to repeat that the main solution, in many ways the only real solution, of the problem lies in the quick evacuation of all non-repatriable Jews in Germany and Austria, who wish it, to Palestine. In order to be effective, this plan must not be long delayed. The urgency of the situation should be recognized. It is inhuman to ask people to continue to live for any length of time under their present conditions. The evacuation of the Jews of Germany and Austria to Palestine will solve

the problem of the individuals involved and will also remove a problem from the military authorities who have had to deal with it. The army's ability to move millions of people quickly and efficiently has been amply demonstrated. The evacuation of a relatively small number of Jews from Germany and Austria will present no great problem to the military. With the end of the Japanese war, the shipping situation should also become sufficiently improved to make such a move feasible. The civilized world owes it to this handful of survivors to provide them with a home where they can again settle down and begin to live as human beings.

Respectfully,

EARL G. HARRISON

***Historical Thinking Questions***  
**Source 4:**

<b><u>Sourcing</u></b> : Who wrote this and when was it written?	
<b><u>Contextualization</u></b> : Where was this document written?	
<b><u>Corroboration</u></b> : How is this document different in information?	
<b><u>Close Reading</u></b> : What is the author's purpose?	

Source 5

"Interim Report of American Jewish Conference Representatives in American Occupied Zone of Germany with Reference to Jewish Displaced Persons Centre," December 13, 1945 (Abridged, 2 pages).

13 December 1945



MEMORANDUM: To Judge Simon Rifkind, civilian advisor to the Commanding General USFET.

SUBJECT: Interim Report of American Jewish Conference Representatives in American Occupied Zone of Germany with reference to Jewish Displaced Persons Centers.

INTRODUCTION

The following is a summary of the interim observations of the representatives of the American Jewish Conference (composed of 60 national Jewish organizations - see attached sheet) who spent approximately six (6) weeks making a study of Jewish Displaced Persons Centers in the American Occupied Zone in Germany. Many communities in which Displaced Jews now reside were also observed as well as camps in the American Occupied Zone of Austria. Conditions relative to the Austrian Centers and other communities will be reserved for a later and more detailed report.

It is our desire to submit to you a summary of our recommendations to date after having visited practically all major centers housing Jewish Displaced Persons.

Details with reference to inadequate and insufficient housing, lack of proper clothing and monotonous diet in the centers are already well known to you and will not be further emphasized at this time.

...

VI. FARMS

We found little or no farm land acquired for agricultural training and for the provision of additional food, despite urgent requests on the part of the Jewish Displaced persons themselves. Instead, in some quarters actual resistance to the acquisition of such property, even though vacant and unused, was reported. Authority for available areas and schools for the practice and teaching of scientific agriculture are a vital need. They should be acquired now so that spring planting can be planned.

VII. POSTAL FACILITIES

Postal facilities, long planned and promised should be effected at once on a sufficiently practical basis so as to allow free communication between the Jews in the centers and communities and their relatives throughout the world.





We do not understand the need for the censorship of mail at this time of people who have been the longest victims of Nazi aggression. A simplified mail system will be of high morale value to these people. We received literally thousands of pitiful requests to mail letters to America and England, indicating that large numbers would like to inform their relatives that they are still alive. Relatives could be of substantial help if they could send mail and packages easily.

...

X. EMIGRATION

It is our considered judgment that these Jews do not desire to remain in Germany. They feel, and we agree, that they can never be rehabilitated in a land whose every square inch they regard as being saturated with the blood of their families.

It is therefore imperative that the major problem of removing these Jews from Germany to countries of their own choice be given major consideration by the civilized world. Consular facilities and transportation should be made available as expeditiously as possible to assist them to emigrate. The overwhelming majority have expressed their desire to go to Palestine to begin a new life as soon as possible. Others desire to go to the United States and other places, chiefly, among other reasons, because of the presence of relatives in those countries.

However, until this major solution is effected there remains the immediate problem of providing for the decent and humane care of these Displaced Jews. It is the declared policy of the United States Government and concurred in by public opinion, that Jewish Displaced Persons who were the especial victims of Nazism, should receive every possible consideration as part of their redress.

...

XI.

We feel impelled to recall that the people with whom we have been concerned are here and in their present condition solely as a result of Nazi brutality. (1) They were the first objects in the path of the Nazi war machine. (2) Being the first to be persecuted, they have suffered the longest. (3) Six million Jews have been destroyed and their worldly possessions stolen from them and made part of the present German economy, as noted above.

Only with this background in view can there be a fair and just approach to their present condition and status.

We shall submit further reports as the survey continues.

Signed: ALFRED FLEISHMAN

SAMUEL L. SAR

HANS LAMM



NS 195

## Historical Thinking Questions

### Source 5:

<p><b>Sourcing:</b> Who wrote this?</p>	
<p><b>Contextualization:</b> How might the circumstances in which the document was created affect its contents?</p>	
<p><b>Corroboration:</b> What changed between this source and Source #4?</p>	
<p><b>Close Reading:</b> What claim is the author making?</p>	

**Source 6**

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*Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, "Report to the United States Government and His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom" (Excerpt), April 20, 1946 (1 page).*

**Recommendation No. 3.** In order to dispose, once and for all, of the exclusive claims of Jews and Arabs to Palestine, we regard it as essential that a clear statement of the following principles should be made:

I. That Jew shall not dominate Arab and Arab shall not dominate Jew in Palestine. II. That Palestine shall be neither a Jewish state nor an Arab state. III. That the form of government ultimately to be established, shall, under international guarantees, fully protect and preserve the interests in the Holy Land of Christendom and of the Moslem and Jewish faiths.

Thus Palestine must ultimately become a state which guards the rights and interests of Moslems, Jews and Christians alike; and accords to the inhabitants, as a whole, the fullest measure of self-government, consistent with the three paramount principles set forth above.

Throughout the long and bloody struggle of Jew and Arab for dominance in Palestine, each crying fiercely: "This land is mine"- except for the brief reference in the Report of the Royal Commission (hereinafter referred to as the Peel Report) and the little evidence, written and oral, that we received on this point-the great interest of the Christian World in Palestine has been completely overlooked, glossed over or brushed aside.

We, therefore, emphatically declare that Palestine is a Holy Land, sacred-to Christian, to Jew and to Moslem alike; and because it is a Holy Land, Palestine is not, and can never become, a land which any race or religion can justly claim as its very own.

## Historical Thinking Questions

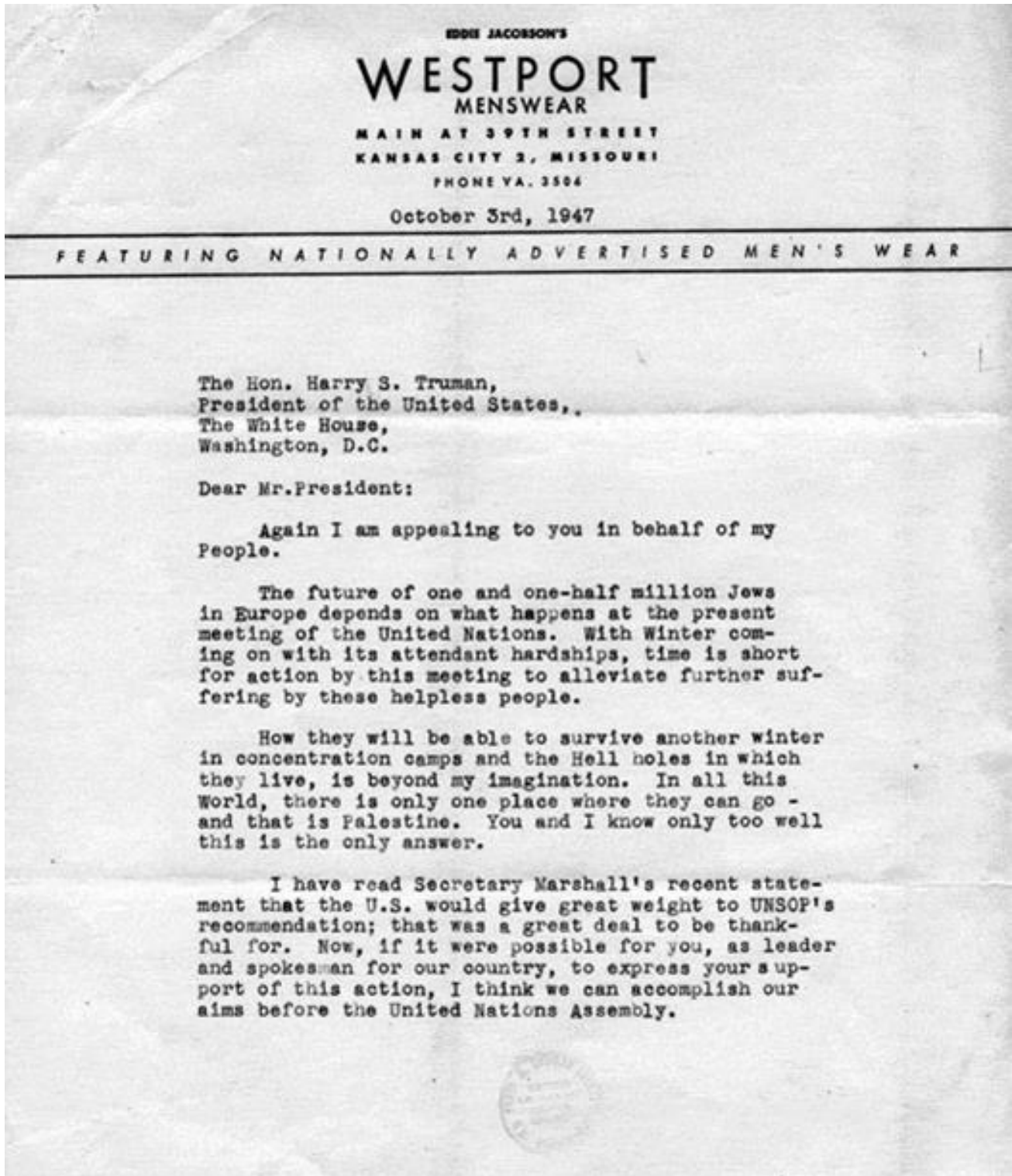
### Source 6:

<p><b>Sourcing:</b> Is this source reliable? How do you know?</p>	
<p><b>Contextualization:</b> When was the document created? What historical events might be connected to or influence the content of this source?</p>	
<p><b>Corroboration:</b> How does this source fit with the others?</p>	
<p><b>Close Reading:</b> What claim is the author making? How do you know?</p>	



Source 7

Correspondence between President Harry S. Truman and Eddie Jacobson (longtime friend and business partner), October 3-8, 1947 (3 pages).



EDDIE JACOBSON'S

# WESTPORT MENSWEAR

MAIN AT 39TH STREET  
KANSAS CITY 2, MISSOURI  
PHONE VA. 3506

FEATURING NATIONALLY ADVERTISED MEN'S WEAR

#2 The Hon. Harry S. Truman.

The lives of one and one-half million souls depend on what happens at the United Nations Meeting within the next few weeks. I trust to God that he give you strength and guidance to act immediately.

I think I am one of few who actually knows and realizes what terrible heavy burdens you are carrying on your shoulders during these hectic days. I should, therefore, be the last man to add to them; but I feel you will forgive me for doing so, because tens of thousands of lives depend on words from your mouth and heart. Harry, my people need help and I am appealing to you to help them.

Everyone at home is well and my business is keeping up fine. Just enlarged the store and am very proud of it.

Wishing you and your family the best of everything, I am

Sincerely,

Your Friend

EJ-b



Eddie Jacobson

October 8, 1947

Dear Eddie:

I appreciated very much your letter of the third in regard to the Jewish situation.

The matter is now pending before the General Assembly of the United Nations and I don't think it would be right or proper for me to interfere at this stage, particularly as it requires a two-third vote to accomplish the purpose sought.

General Marshall is handling the thing, I think, as it should be and I hope it will work out all right.

I don't want to be quoted on the subject at all. When I see you I'll tell you just what the difficulties are.

Sincerely yours,

*Harry*

Mr. Edward Jacobson  
Main at 39th Street  
Kansas City 2, Missouri

## Historical Thinking Questions

### Source 7:

<p><b>Sourcing:</b> What is the significance of the author of this source?</p>	
<p><b>Contextualization:</b> How does the date of this source play a role in its importance?</p>	
<p><b>Corroboration:</b> Which other sources does this letter support? Why?</p>	
<p><b>Close Reading:</b> What is Jacobson's claim? What evidence does he use to support his claim?</p>	





## Evidence Log

**Key Question:** *Based on the documents, would you have recognized Israel as a new country in 1948? Why or why not?*

### What's the main argument you can find from each of these sources?

<i>IN FAVOR OF RECOGNITION</i>	<i>AGAINST RECOGNITION</i>
Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?	Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?
Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?	Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?
Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?	Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?
Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?	Source #____ Name of Document:  Why?



## Write a Letter to President Truman

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It is 1948 and you have read over evidence on the issue of recognizing Israel. You will now need to decide if you are going to attempt to persuade the President either for or against the recognition of Israel. Make sure to include at least three pieces of information from the documents that will help the President understand why you are convincing him to go with your opinion. Choose from either an expert on the topic, a news reporter, a concerned citizen, a Jew or a close friend.

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Role- Expert on the topic, a news reporter, a concerned citizen, a Jew or a close friend

Audience- Harry Truman

Format- Choose a format relevant to your role

Task- Try to convince Harry Truman to recognize or not recognize Israel

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Option: Write a letter to Bess and explain both sides of the controversy. Use evidence from at least four documents as support. Ask her for her advice knowing that you will probably take it.



	0	1- Below Basic	2- Basic	3- Proficient	4- Advanced
<b>History Tools: Historical Thinking Questions</b>	I cannot demonstrate any part of this task.	I need help to understand the historical significance of each document.	I understand the historical significance of some of the documents, but I need help with the others.	I can explain the historical significance of each source within historical context by thoroughly answering the Historical Thinking Questions with each source.	In addition to the requirements for a 3, I can also explain the arguments from both perspectives of the conflict.
<b>Using Sources: Evidence Log</b>	I cannot demonstrate any part of this task.	I can complete my Evidence Log and write the arguments of the sources with help.	I can identify the argument within some of the sources on my own, but not the harder ones.	I can compare the perspective a source by organizing the information into my Evidence Log and explaining the argument in my own words.	In addition to the requirements for a 3, I can examine outside sources and add them as additional evidence to my Evidence Log. The sources must be in addition to those provided by the teacher.
<b>Communicating Conclusions: Letter to President Truman</b>	I cannot demonstrate any part of this task.	Claim is not stated Lack of support for claim or irrelevant details Source-based evidence is not cited Plagiarism No alternative claim or view acknowledged.	Claim is weak or not maintained Limited support of claim using sources, facts and details Source-based evidence is cited inaccurately or incompletely Plagiarism Alternative or opposing claims inaccurate, irrelevant or weak.	Claim is clearly stated and maintained Convincing support of claim using sources, facts and details Source-based evidence is cited accurately to avoid plagiarism Alternative or opposing claims are clearly addressed	Claim is powerful with strong support showing unique insight into the topic Compelling support is credible, relevant and accurate Use of sources, facts and details goes beyond obvious Source-based evidence is cited accurately to avoid plagiarism Alternative or opposing claims are fairly and objectively addressed.