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James L. Gelvin

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THE ISRAEL–PALESTINE CONFLICT

The conflict between Israelis and their forebears, on the one hand, and Palestinians and theirs, on the other, has lasted more than a century and generated more than its share of commentaries and histories. James L. Gelvin's new account of that conflict offers a compelling, accessible, and up-to-the-moment introduction for students and general readers. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, when the inhabitants of Ottoman Palestine and the Jews of eastern Europe began to conceive of themselves as members of national communities, the book traces the evolution and interaction of these communities from their first encounters in Palestine through to the present, exploring the external pressures and internal logic that have propelled their conflict. The book, which places events in Palestine within the framework of global history, skillfully interweaves biographical sketches, eyewitness accounts, poetry, fiction, and official documentation into its narrative and includes photographs, maps, and an abundance of supplementary material.

James L. Gelvin is Associate Professor in History at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research focuses on nationalism and the social and cultural history of the modern Middle East during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He is the author of *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (1998) and *The Modern Middle East: A History* (2004).

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a book about the creation, evolution, interaction, and mutual definition of two national communities. It is about the struggle between those two communities, the inner logic that has propelled that struggle, and the historical conditions that have delimited its course. If for no other reason than its persistence and its never-ending demand for attention, the Israeli–Palestinian struggle has earned its claim to uniqueness. By most other standards, however, it might be regarded as the quintessential struggle of the modern age. Either way, it is a story worth recounting.

Sometimes the struggle between the two national communities in Palestine has been submerged in wider struggles that embroiled outside powers. There was a time when it seemingly dropped off the radar screen altogether. For the forty-five years between 1948 and 1993, most of the world chose to regard the struggle for Palestine as an Arab-Israeli conflict, as if the claims of one of the principals in the struggle could be addressed by outside powers or simply written off. With the hindsight of history, we now know better. The Arab-Israeli conflict was but a phase in a struggle that has come full circle, and no peace between Israel and its sovereign neighbors will bring the struggle to an end. Only the principals can do that.

I have written this book for students and general readers who wish to understand the broad sweep of the history of the Israeli–Palestinian struggle and situate it in its global context. The book is not, nor was it intended to be, encyclopedic. It is interpretive. It is also concise and, hopefully, engaging. If I have neglected or been too cavalier with your favorite hero, event, or peace plan, I apologize in advance. You might want to take consolation from the fact that I have honed the narrative

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you are about to read with care. You might also want to take consolation from the fact that, in return for the sacrifice of a few details, you are getting the occasional pearl. Where else are you going to find Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality slimmed down to a couple of paragraphs and written as if it were meant to be understood?

True believers on both sides of the struggle are, of course, beyond consolation. As you will soon see, I regard Zionism as a – perhaps the – prototypical nineteenth-century nationalist movement. I do not regard it as the fulfillment of Jewish history (as many of its adherents maintain), nor do I regard it as a “particularly virulent form of racism” (as its opponents have written). As a national movement, it is, to paraphrase Henry Fielding, no better than it should be. And yes, the word “Palestinian” does refer to a real nation, albeit one whose ancient lineage is as spurious as the ancient lineage of any other nation, and the word “Palestinian” can be used as a noun, not just as an adjective modifying the word “terrorist.” While it is the role of the true believer to believe, it is the role of the historian to treat the self-aggrandizing claims of any and all nationalist movements with skepticism. The same goes for the claims of their opponents. I only hope I have done so evenly and effectively.

Skeptics, like pioneers, get all the arrows. Thus, it is with a certain amount of trepidation that I list those who have contributed to my efforts. First off, there is Marigold Acland, my editor at Cambridge University Press, who suggested I write this book even though I had stiffed her on another one. This is my penance. I also wish to thank others on the editorial side of this book: Eric Crahan, Isabelle Dambricourt, Pauline Ireland, and Sue Nicholas. Then there are those friends and colleagues who have read this or earlier versions of the book, made suggestions, or contributed in other ways: Carol Bakhos, David Dean Commins, Michael Cooperson, Roya Klaidman, Ussama Makdisi, David N. Myers, A. Rantin Polemick, Manal Quota, and Jihad Turk. Finally, to this list I would like to add those undergraduates who read this book in its preliminary stages and graciously called my attention to every typo and misplaced comma, as well as those who raised questions that forced me to rewrite or rethink what I was trying to say. For the second time in as many years, I wish to dedicate a book to them.