



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

UN Partition Decision A Personal Account by Rabbi Louis I. Newman

Background:

Reform Rabbi and author, Louis Israel Newman, was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1893. Newman held several pulpits during his career, one of his first being under Stephen S. Wise at the Free Synagogue in 1917. Newman was affiliated with Wise's Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City from its establishment in 1922 and served as professor of homiletics & apologetics intermittently until 1933.

During the 1930s, Newman became identified with the Zionist revisionist movement. He believed that Zionism was primarily a political movement and that the creation of a Jewish Palestine state was essential. Newman was appointed by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR)—the rabbinical arm of the Reform movement—as an “observer” at the UN General Assembly meeting when the vote was brought forward in November 1947. His report to the CCAR is brief and succinct. His letter to his children is personal and reflective. He remarks, “It is a long journey from the day when I saw the Balfour Declaration in the green-typewriting ink of Woodrow Wilson’s own typewriter...”

General Guiding Questions:

- What type of document is this?
- Who created this document? What do I know about his/her background and position?
- When was this document created?
- What was happening during the time the text was created?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the author's point in writing this text?
- What ideas are expressed? What does the text suggest?
- What or whose perspective does this text represent?
- What feelings does this text raise? What emotions does it stir up?
- How does the perspective of this text compare with others around the same time and topic?
- What questions does this text raise? What don't we know about this source?

- How does this text impact your understanding or perspective on the historical context or event? How does this text fit into or alter your existing interpretation of the past?

Specific Guiding Questions:

- What opinions, perspectives, and observations does the writer make regarding the UN Partition Plan vote?
- Based on Rabbi Newman's letter, what was the process leading up to the UN vote in favor of the Partition Plan?
- What are the reasons Rabbi Newman gives for votes either for or against the plan?
- Describe how Rabbi Newman might have felt throughout the process he describes in his letter. What parts jump out as the most significant, interesting, upsetting, or joyful?
- Why do you think the Central Conference of American Rabbis was present for the deliberations and vote on the Partition plan? What does that indicate about the CCAR's position on Zionism?
- How does reading Rabbi Newman's personal account change or affect what you may have previously thought about the process for the establishment of the State of Israel? What questions does the letter raise or answer?

Possible Activities:

1. Pair off and assign each pair a country that was mentioned in the letter. Have each pair locate it on a historically accurate map, research its position, diplomatic relationships, and sphere of influence regarding the vote for/against partition.
2. Divide the document into sections and give each group a different section and choose 1-2 statements from that section that stand out to the group. Discuss in the small group and then present statement to the whole group. A second step could be to compile all the statements selected and discuss how these statements reflect on the writer's position, opinion, or account of the events.
3. Read through the documents for statements/comments that forecast the future in eyes of the writer. Compile and discuss the statements and compare to what has happened since the Partition plan was passed.
4. Compare/Contrast Newman's letter to his children with his official Report of Observer at United Nations.
5. Create mini-biographies of the various people who Rabbi Newman mentions in his letter. Research their roles in the process leading up to UN passage of the Partition Plan.