

Ralph Bunche

the odyssey continues...

7

MODULE

The Peacemaker in Palestine

■ Synopsis



37 minutes

“The Peacemaker in Palestine” begins with the arrival in Palestine of thousands of Jewish refugees at the end of World War II. It includes a brief historical overview of the conflict between the Jewish immigrants and the Palestinians that has continued to the present day. By 1947, the increasing violence prompts Britain, which has been administering Palestine under a League of Nations mandate, to appeal to the United Nations to take over the administration of the area. The module includes:

- Ralph Bunche’s appointment to the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) and his drafting of the Committee’s recommendations to the Security Council;
- the United Nations General Assembly vote approving the partition of Palestine;
- the outbreak of war in 1948 between the new state of Israel and the surrounding states of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan;
- Bunche’s appointment as assistant to Count Folke Bernadotte, the chief U.N. mediator in Palestine;
- the assassination of Bernadotte, and the appointment of Bunche as acting chief mediator in Palestine;
- the 1949 Rhodes armistice talks between Israel and four neighboring states, chaired by Ralph Bunche;
- the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Bunche in 1950 for successfully mediating the four armistice agreements.

■ Historical Background

The rise of Zionism and of Arab nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries fueled a conflict that had been simmering for decades under the Ottomans. During World War I, the British greatly complicated matters by signing the Balfour Declaration which promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine while at the same time promising independence to the Palestinians in exchange for their support in the war against the Ottoman Empire (which had sided with Germany). After the war, the League of Nations awarded Britain a mandate to administer Palestine. At that point, Muslim Palestinians outnumbered both Christian and Jewish Palestinians by over 8 to 1. However, the number of Jewish inhabitants grew throughout the 1920s and 1930s so that by the mid-1940s, the Jews were approximately 30% of the population. After World War II, the Jewish Holocaust and the problem of the displaced European Jews created pressure for a new and massive influx of Jewish immigrants to Palestine. The most radical Zionists felt that all of Palestine belonged to the Jewish people. The non-Jewish Palestinians felt threatened and betrayed by the British and their allies.

Ralph Bunche's concerns about the consequences of a fascist victory in Europe had prompted him to take a leave of absence from Howard University and accept a job with the Office of Strategic Services where he felt his expertise on colonialism would be of greatest service in the fight against the Nazis. As the war wound down, he was recruited by the State Department to work in planning the post-war world. The future of the colonial territories was an area of particular concern to Bunche and to the United States. Bunche then moved to the newly formed United Nations where

In This Module (in order of appearance)

TERMS TO KNOW

mandate, partition, armistice, UNSCOP (United Nations Special Committee on Palestine), Nobel Peace Prize, caste system, boycott, Zionist, Irgun, the Stern Gang, Abraham, Security Council

PEOPLE REFERENCED

Ruth Bunche, Victor Hoo, Menachem Begin, Hussein al-Khalidi, Count Folke Bernadotte, Trygve Lie, André Sérot, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Harry S. Truman

PLACES REFERENCED

India, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, the Negev, (Island of) Rhodes, Paris

PEOPLE ON SCREEN

Sir Brian Urquhart, Dr. Benjamin Rivlin, Abba Eban, Abdeen Jabara, Dr. M. T. Mehdi, William Mashler, Walter Eytan, Lawrence S. Finkelstein, Jane Johnson Taylor

he worked for the next 25 years, first as director of the Trusteeship Division, supervising the administration of the Trust Territories and eventually as Undersecretary-General for Special Political Affairs, the highest position that an American citizen can hold in the world body.

■ Relevant Standards

National Council for the Social Studies Strands

Strand II. Time, Continuity, & Change

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *the ways human beings view themselves in and over time*, so that the learner can: (e) investigate, interpret, and analyze multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints within and across cultures related to important events, recurring dilemmas, and persistent issues, while employing empathy, skepticism, and critical judgement.

Strand III. People, Places, & Environments

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *people, places, and environments*, so that the learner can: (k) propose, compare, and evaluate alternative policies for the use of land and other resources in communities, regions, nations, and the world.

Strand IV. Individual Development & Identity

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *individual development and identity*, so that the learner can: (e) examine the interactions of ethnic, national, or cultural influences in specific situations or events.

Strand V. Individuals, Groups, & Institutions

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions*, so that the learner can: (a) apply concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the connections and interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions in society.

Strand VI. Power, Authority, & Governance

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance*, so that the learner can: (c) analyze and explain ideas and mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, establish order and security, and balance competing conceptions of a just society; (j) prepare a public policy paper and present and defend it before an appropriate forum in school or community.

Strand IX. Global Connections

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *global connections and interdependence*, so that the learner can: (b) explain conditions and motivations that contribute to conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies, and nations; (f) analyze or formulate policy statements demonstrating an understanding of concerns, standards, issues, and conflicts related to universal human rights; (g) describe and evaluate the role of international and multinational organizations in the global arena.

Strand X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of *the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic*, so that the learner can: (i) construct a policy statement and an action plan to achieve one or more goals related to an issue of public concern.

National Center for History in the Schools Standards**Standard 3. Historical Analysis and Interpretation**

The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation:

Therefore, the student is able to

- A. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences;
- B. Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears;
- C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation including (a) the importance of the individual in history, (b) the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs, and (c) the role of chance, the accidental and the irrational;
- D. Draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues as well as large-scale or long-term developments that transcend regional and temporal boundaries;
- E. Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses grounded in historical evidence;
- F. Compare competing historical narratives;
- J. Hypothesize the influence of the past, including both the limitations and the opportunities made possible by past decisions.

Standard 4. Historical Research Capabilities

The student conducts historical research:

Therefore, the student is able to

- A. Formulate historical questions from encounters with historical documents, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, historical sites, art, architecture, and other records from the past;
- F. Support interpretations with historical evidence in order to construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

Standard 5. Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

The student engages in historical issues-analysis and decision-making:

Therefore, the student is able to

- E. Formulate a position or course of action on an issue by identifying the nature of the problem, analyzing the underlying factors contributing to the problem, and choosing a plausible solution from a choice of carefully evaluated options.

■ Map Connections

Compare and contrast maps showing the 1948 Partition Plan for Israel and Palestine, the boundaries agreed to in the 1949 armistice, and the boundaries after the Six Day War of 1967. You can find each of these at the website for the MidEastWeb for Coexistence.

<http://www.mideastweb.org/unpartition.htm>

U.N. Partition Plan, 1947

<http://www.mideastweb.org/1949armistice.htm>

Boundaries Negotiated
in 1949

<http://www.mideastweb.org/israelafter1967.htm>

Territory Occupied by Israel
during the Six Day War

■ Before You Watch

For suggested preview strategies and activities, see page 4 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

If this is the first module screened, ask the students: Have you ever heard of Ralph Bunche? What do you know or think you know about Ralph Bunche? What do you predict you might find out about him in the video you are about to watch?

OPINION How do fights start? How do they escalate? How do you stop a fight once it has begun? If you were given the job of negotiating a peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians, what would your concerns be? How would you approach each of the parties? What would you ask them to consider?

RECALL Dr. Bunche's area of expertise was Africa and colonialism. What qualities and experiences qualified him to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT What was the Jewish Holocaust? How did England and Europe in general deal with the aftermath of the Holocaust? Why did the Palestinians feel betrayed by England? Why do the Jewish people claim the right to settle in Palestine? Is this a valid claim?

■ While You Watch (with teacher's answer key)

For suggestions on how to use these questions, see pages 4-5 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

1. What new factors add to the already tense situation in Palestine at the end of World War II?

[The arrival of thousands of displaced European Jews threatens to overwhelm the native born population.]

2. What is the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) and why does the Committee turn to Ralph Bunche for advice?

[It is set up to design the transition from British mandate to independent Arab and Israeli states. Bunche is chosen because he had written his doctoral thesis on the question of decolonization.]

3. What danger does Bunche see in the situation in Palestine?

[The danger of a caste system developing, with the Palestinians on the bottom of the social and economic ladder.]

4. What are the two plans proposed by UNSCOP?

[A partition plan, calling for two separate states with an economic union, and a federation plan calling for a single state with Jerusalem as the common capital.]

5. Which plan is favored by a majority of the Jews? Of the Arabs? Which plan is favored by a majority of the UNSCOP committee?

[The partition plan is favored by a majority of the Jews and by a majority of the UNSCOP committee. The Palestinians and the Arab states favor the federation plan which has the support of a minority of the UNSCOP committee.]

6. What is one of the consequences of the war that breaks out immediately after the U.N. General Assembly votes to partition Palestine?

[Increased flight of Palestinians, which enlarges the Jewish-controlled area.]

7. What happens to Count Folke Bernadotte, the chief mediator for the U.N.?

[He is assassinated, probably by the Stern Gang.]

8. What were some of the factors on both sides of the conflict that Bunche had to consider in order for the Israelis and Egyptians to arrive at an agreement?

[He had to help the Egyptians save face because they had told their people they were winning the war; he had to help the Israelis "back off" even though they were determined to "fix" the Egyptians.]

9. What personal qualities help Bunche in his role as a mediator?

[Stamina, humor, the ability to put himself in the other's shoes]

10. How does Bunche use humor to break an impasse in the talks?

[He invites both delegations to his hotel room where he shows them the plates he had made to commemorate the accord that has not yet been reached, and tells the delegates he will personally break the plates over their heads if they don't move ahead to an agreement.]

11. How does Bunche respond when he learns that he has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize? What does he do that is quite unprecedented?

[He tries to turn it down, saying what he did was just part of his job as a member of the U.N. Secretariat.]

12. Why is the award significant to people of color and to the U.N.?

[Bunche is the first person of color to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; the award also recognizes the newly formed U.N.'s first major diplomatic success.]

■ After You Watch

Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

For suggestions on how to structure post-viewing discussions or activities, see page 5 of the general reference section of the *Guide*.

1. What qualities of a good mediator did Dr. Bunche demonstrate?
2. Why did the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine want Bunche to draft two plans to submit to the Security Council? Why did the Jews prefer partition and the Arabs prefer a federated state?
3. How do you think the situation in Israel/Palestine might be different today if the federated state plan had been implemented in 1949?
4. What do you think are the biggest obstacles today to a lasting resolution to the conflict in this part of the world?
5. Dr. Bunche told the Egyptians and Israelis "You cannot afford to fail, you must succeed." If you were mediating the ongoing conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians today, would you feel the same way? Why or why not? What do you think will be the consequences if no agreement to end the conflict is reached? What could be the possible consequences if an agreement were to be reached?

■ Digging Deeper—Activities and Research Projects

1. On a blank map of the world, have students color code the 1948 United Nations vote on the partition of Palestine into two states (Israel and Palestine) and analyze the results. Lead them in brainstorming questions that might be further researched in order to understand why each country voted as it did. (You will need to refer to a map of the world that predates the breakup of the former Soviet Union.) The vote was as follows:

In favor: 33

Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Byelorussian S.S.R., Canada, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Liberia, Luxemburg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Sweden, Ukrainian S.S.R., Union of South Africa, U.S.A., U.S.S.R., Uruguay, Venezuela.

Against: 13

Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen.

Abstained: 10

Argentina, Chile, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mexico, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia.

2. Have students create a montage of images on poster board that explains the current situation in Palestine. Ask them to explain their creation(s) in 500 or fewer words.
3. Have one or more students deliver Bunche's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. Have them take questions from the class and answer in character. (The speech can be found online at <http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1950/bunche-acceptance.html>.)
4. Ask students to trace the development of relations between Israelis and Palestinians and between Israel and the surrounding Arab states since the armistice agreements of 1949. Ask them to create a visual display that compares and contrasts the nations and groups involved in each outbreak of armed conflict, the specific territory disputed in each outbreak, how each conflict began, how a truce or armistice was negotiated in each case that stopped the fighting, at least temporarily, and how long each truce lasted before the next outbreak of armed conflict.

5. Have students prepare a position paper making recommendations to the Israelis and Palestinians that addresses
 - who will control which land;
 - how Jerusalem will be governed;
 - whether and, if so, how to compensate both Palestinians and Jewish settlers for losses resulting from any land redistribution plans;
 - how to protect minorities within each community (e.g., Palestinians in Israel, Israelis within Palestinian territory);
 - what consequences should be brought to bear on any party violating the agreement.

Ask them to support their recommendations with reference to historical facts and previous armistice agreements and peace accords.

6. Conduct a class debate on the question: "Shall the original terms of the U.N. partition agreement now be accepted by all parties?"

Name: _____ Date: _____

While You Watch “Peacemaker in Palestine”

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