

**Question: What about the illegal Arab immigration from 1920 of hundred thousands of Arabs to Palestine? The Balfour Declaration only spoke of the rights of the existing non-Jewish population.**

Many Arabs settled in Palestine between 1920 and 1948 – both with approval of the British Mandatory Power, and illegally. The Jewish Virtual Library (JVL) provides the following information:

In 1915, approximately 83,000 Jews lived in Palestine among 590,000 Muslim and Christian Arabs. According to the 1922 census, the Jewish population was 84,000, while the Arabs numbered 643,000. Thus, the Arab population grew exponentially while that of the Jews stagnated.

... throughout the Mandatory period, Arab immigration was unrestricted. In 1930, the [Hope Simpson Commission](#), sent from London to investigate the 1929 Arab riots, said the British practice of ignoring the uncontrolled illegal Arab immigration from Egypt, Transjordan and Syria had the effect of displacing the prospective *Jewish* immigrants.

The British Governor of the Sinai from 1922-36 observed: “This illegal immigration was not only going on from the Sinai, but also from Transjordan and Syria, and it is very difficult to make a case out for the misery of the Arabs if at the same time their compatriots from adjoining states could not be kept from going in to share that misery.”

The [Peel Commission](#) reported in 1937 that the “shortfall of land is... due less to the amount of land acquired by Jews than to the increase in the Arab population.”

The Jewish population increased by 470,000 between World War I and World War II, while the non-Jewish population rose by 588,000. In fact, the permanent Arab population increased 120 percent between 1922 and 1947.

This rapid growth was a result of several factors. One was [immigration](#) from neighboring states constituting 37 percent of the total immigration to [pre-state Israel](#) by Arabs who wanted to take advantage of the higher standard of living the Jews had made possible. The Arab population also grew because of the improved living conditions created by the Jews as they drained malarial swamps and brought improved sanitation and health care to the region. Thus, for example, the Muslim infant mortality rate fell from 201 per thousand in 1925 to 94 per thousand in 1945 and life expectancy rose from 37 years in 1926 to 49 in 1943.

The Arab population increased the most in cities where large Jewish populations had created new economic opportunities. From 1922-1947, the non-Jewish population increased 290 percent in [Haifa](#), 131 percent in [Jerusalem](#) and 158 percent in [Jaffa](#). The growth in Arab towns was more modest: 42 percent in [Nablus](#), 78 percent in Jenin and 37 percent in [Bethlehem](#).

Sources quoted by JVL include:

- Aharon Cohen, *Israel and the Arab World*, (NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1970) p. 146.

- Howard Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979) p. 146.
- Moshe Auman, "Land Ownership in Palestine 1880-1948," in Michael Curtis, et al., *The Palestinians*, (NJ: Transaction Books, 1975) p. 25.
- *Palestine Royal Commission Report* (the Peel Report), (London: 1937) p. 300.
- Arie Avneri, *The Claim of Dispossession*, (Tel Aviv: Hakefel Press, 1984) p.28.
- Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929*, (London: Frank Cass, 1974), pp. 17-18.
- Dov Friedlander and Calvin Goldscheider, *The Population of Israel*, (NY: Columbia Press, 1979), p. 30.
- Moshe Aumann, *Land Ownership in Palestine 1880-1948*, (Jerusalem: Academic Committee on the Middle East, 1976), p. 5.
- Shabtai Tevet, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 32.

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ISRAEL *and* INTERNATIONAL LAW