

Einstein on Israel and Zionism

His provocative ideas about the Middle East

Fred Jerome

St. Martin's Press (2009)

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Flyleaf

"Though everybody knows me, there are very few people who really know me," Albert Einstein said toward the end of his life. In disentangling himself from his look-alike media myth, Einstein—the real Einstein—spoke and wrote frequently and eloquently to explain and advocate his views on what he considered the critical issues in society as well as in science—including hundreds of pages of letters, articles, essays, and interviews, both published and unpublished, 011 Zionism and Israel.

Those who have heard or read anything at all about Einstein's politics probably know that Einstein was asked to become president of Israel in 1952 after the death of Chaim Weizmann, the country's first president. Israel's offer was widely publicized then—and since. But very few people know that when Einstein turned down the presidency, he called it "a difficult situation that would create a conflict with my conscience." Nor have they heard this statement by Israeli prime minister Ben Gurion: "Tell me what to do if he says yes! I've had to offer him the post because it was impossible not to, but if he accepts we are in for trouble."

Einstein on Israel and Zionism focuses on correcting a widely accepted story that Einstein was a major supporter, a "champion," of the state of Israel—a story told and retold primarily by the mainstream media.

While Einstein was a secular Jew, had mixed feelings about Zionism, and supported the goal of a Jewish "homeland" within Palestine, he never wavered from arguing forcefully for equal rights and equal power for the Arabs—whom he called "kinfolk" of the Jews. His nationalism had no room for any kind of aggressiveness or chauvinism. For him, the domination of Jew over Arab in Palestine, or the perpetuation of a state of mutual hostility between the two peoples, would mean the failure of Zionism.

Some of these essays and letters, covering the years from 1919 to 1955, have never been translated or published. Fred Jerome takes a close look at these materials, presents them objectively, and puts some of the more obscure references into context. This is an important historical document, one that is sure to stimulate discussion. It is surprising, timely, and brings one of the greatest men of the twentieth century brilliantly to life.

FRED JEROME is also the author of *The Einstein File* and the coauthor of *Einstein on Race and Racism*. A veteran journalist and science writer, he has written articles and op-ed pieces for dozens of publications, including *Newsweek* and *The New York Times*. As a reporter in the South during the early 1960s, he covered the exploding civil rights movement, and, more recently, has taught at Columbia Journalism School, NYU, and numerous other New York-area universities. Jerome lives in New York City.

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Back cover

"*Einstein on Israel and Zionism* is a welcome and necessary contribution to the discussions about the Middle East crisis. You do not have to be a genius in order to understand the gravity of the situation, but it is essential to listen to one, especially if his name is Einstein. His thoughts make for fascinating reading, allow us new insights into the mind of one of the twentieth century's greatest thinkers, and remind us that it is never too late."

- Avraham Burg, author of *The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise From Its Ashes*

"Fred Jerome's *Einstein on Israel and Zionism* is a valuable and timely contribution. Einstein's views of Zionism were prescient. His actions regarding the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and his passionate beliefs regarding what that homeland should represent call for reconsideration by all Israelis and Palestinians and by all Jews and Muslims."

— Silvan S. Schweber, author of *Einstein and Oppenheimer* and *In the Shadow of the Bomb*

"Reading the newly revealed correspondence in Fred Jerome's book makes it clear that Einstein was a social commentator and humanitarian with a worldview worthy of his scientific genius. It's a pity that the Zionist movement as embodied in the State of Israel took a direction so divergent from the path advocated by the Jewish people's greatest intellect."

—Michael Palumbo, author of *The Palestinian Catastrophe* and *Imperial Israel*

"*Einstein on Israel and Zionism* makes a great contribution to the history of Jewish engagement with Israel. Reading Einstein's letters makes it clear that there has never been a Jewish consensus on the critical questions of Zionism and a Jewish state. While sadly it seems Einstein's fear that Israel would become a "captive of narrow nationalism" has been realized, his humanism and call for equal rights and equal power between Jews and Palestinians in Israel/Palestine remain an inspiration, and model, today." —Adam Horowitz, coeditor of Mondoweiss.net