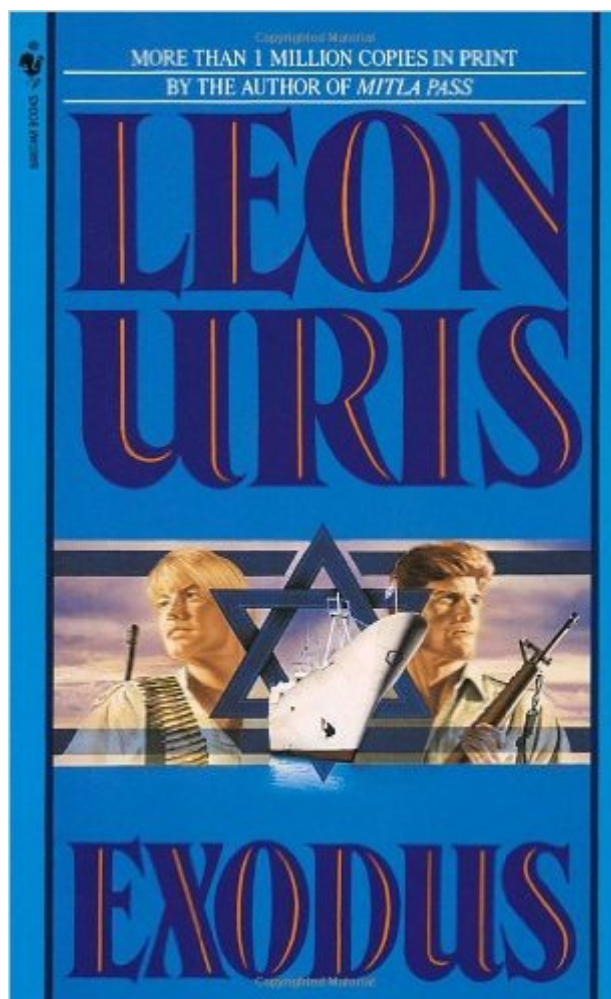


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Exodus



Synopsis

Exodus is an international publishing phenomenon--the towering novel of the twentieth century's most dramatic geopolitical event. Leon Uris magnificently portrays the birth of a new nation in the midst of enemies--the beginning of an earthshaking struggle for power. Here is the tale that swept the world with its fury: the story of an American nurse, an Israeli freedom fighter caught up in a glorious, heartbreaking, triumphant era. Here is Exodus --one of the great best-selling novels of all time.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (763 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

While at work this morning, I was shown an original birth certificate issued in Israel in 1950. I actually felt something of a thrill of pride (even though I've never been there, and I've long since forgotten Hebrew letters). That's mostly due to my having finished "Exodus" last night. "Exodus" isn't the kind of book you read for literary merit. The third word in the book is "plip-plopped", which isn't a word at all. If you're deconstructing page 1, you'll get annoyed the random shifts in the narrative voice. The book begins with a couple of plodding middle-American characters with silly names like "Kitty", and "Mark Parker". However, Uris knows what he's doing. He's constructing an argument in favor of the state of Israel, laid out against 70 years' worth rampant European anti-Semitism. It's no coincidence that the first segment recounts the Holocaust (first, in the eyes of a girl who escaped to relative peace in Jew-friendly Denmark, and then in the eyes of an Auschwitz survivor), and then the second shows the seeds of modern Israel through a pair of mythic-quality Russian shtetl refugees who enter Palestine in the 1880s and begin transforming the soil. The balance of the book shows

Palestine's struggles under the suffocating British mandate, and nascent Israel's miraculous victory over the various Arab states seeking to "push Israel into the sea". Played out over the epic history is a storyline involving the Ben Canaan family, Kitty the American nurse, her surrogate Israeli daughter Karen, and Karen's sullen, rebellious, Sal Mineo-type boyfriend Dov. The body count rises and the deaths become more personal, more tragic, as the story builds its way slowly to several shattering conclusions. A lot has changed since 1948. Israel was then associated with the political left; not anymore. The plight of the Palestine Arabs who were induced out of their land by the warring Arab states, however, has not been resolved. Those refugees are still right there, crammed along the Israeli borders in the same makeshift cities. Pages 551-554 of the book present a summary of this unconscionable situation, and just about every word is still true, 50 years later. The joyously pro-Israel strains of "Exodus" will probably now draw more cynicism than solidarity, in this brave new world of the New York Times headlines and Saudi peace proposals. However, I wouldn't change a word. Except "plip-plopped".

Leon Uris (1924-2003) was a well-respected novelist and the author of several screenplays--but it was not until the 1958 publication of EXODUS that he became one of America's most popular writers. Sales in the United States were phenomenal, and by the early 1960s EXODUS had been translated into some fifty languages. It would become one of the most widely published and widely read novels of the 20th Century. The novel was extremely topical, for it dealt with the creation of modern-day Israel, a highly controversial event--and one well within the memory of most adult readers of the late 1950s and early 1960s. But Uris did more than this: he also painted a general history of European anti-Semitism with an emphasis on the Holocaust. For many readers, EXODUS would be their first encounter with such material, and Uris took nothing for granted in his descriptions and accounts. The great strength of the novel is its narrative power. The primary action follows a group of post-war European Jews held by the British for their illegal attempt to enter British-dominated Palestine--and their determination to break British policy--but it also flashes back to tell the histories of the characters involved. These histories, which reveal both Nazi atrocity and the long history of anti-Semitism, are often even more compelling than the primary story line itself. It is very much a page-turner from start to finish. Even so, EXODUS doesn't quite manage to make the leap from 1950s pop fiction to the level of masterpiece, and it remains very much of its time. Uris is an extremely literal writer, and he is less interested in creating plot and character than he is in using both to present a sort of "headline" history of anti-Semitism and the birth of Israel. Consequently, both his style and his characters--although we certainly learn a tremendous amount

about their experiences--read as rather flat. The novel is also somewhat controversial, for it is written from an extremely Zionist position, and for Uris this position is fundamental to all else. Half a century later, however, it is very evident that the matter was never as simple as Uris would have us believe. There are more than a few passages that will cause modern readers to think "But it didn't turn out that way, did it?" And some readers may consider the novel as anti-British and anti-Arabian as the anti-Semitism the book so loudly decries. Even with these issues, EXODUS is a powerful novel--and in a historical sense a very important work, for it would influence American thinking on the subject of Zionism and Israel for decades to come. And when all is said and done, it's still one helluva read. Recommended. GFT, Reviewer In Memory of Bob Zeidler, Reviewer Greatly Missed and Not Forgotten

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